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**The support provided for and methods used by professionals involved in
the educating of deaf children in mainstream schools.**

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of
MA by Research

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

A gap in the literature surrounding deaf education in mainstream schools is that there is little to no acknowledgement of the opinions and experiences of the professional responsible for the education of the deaf children. Therefore, this thesis approaches the topic of deaf education with a pedagogic approach and aims to evaluate the methods used by and support provided for mainstream teachers, teaching assistants and teachers of the deaf, from the perspective of the named professionals.

The method of semi-structured interviews was selected for the research to allow for elaboration by participants on topics they wished to discuss regarding their experiences.

Three groups of participants were used (teachers, teaching assistants and teachers of the deaf) and three participants were included in each group to gain a range of experiences for evaluation. Interviews were carried out over Microsoft Teams and transcribed for use in a deductive thematic analysis. The themes explored in this thesis are:

- a mainstream classroom's ability to accommodate deafness
- the classification of deafness as a disability
- speech vs sign
- the National Curriculum
- support between professionals
- the role of the teaching assistant
- online learning and the role of technology in deaf education
- relationships with parents
- suggestions for improvement

Analysis of results revealed that areas that participants felt needed improvement included the defining of deafness as a disability, the implementation of BSL and deaf studies in the national curriculum and the use of other professionals to benefit the understanding and appreciation of deaf education.

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Introduction

According to the most recent survey published by the Consortium for Research in Deaf Education (CRIDE) in (2020), of 37,340 deaf children in England, with the term children referring to those of up to age 19, 6% attend special schools specifically for deaf children and 5% attend special schools not tailored for deaf children. 2% of deaf children attend mainstream schools with resource provisions to support deaf education, whilst 87% are enrolled in mainstream schools with no specialist provisions. The large percentage of students enrolled in mainstream school would suggest a high success rate; however, the National Deaf Children's Society (2021) reported that only one third of deaf students achieve two A levels compared to 55% of hearing pupils, suggesting that there are improvements to be made. This thesis aims to explore the modifications to a mainstream classroom in England for these deaf children, without specialist provision, from the perspective of the professionals responsible for their education to explore how they provide access to the children in their classrooms. The main research question for the research was – “How can the support provided for professionals involved in the educating of deaf children in mainstream schools be improved?”

The professionals selected for involvement in the research via a series of semi-structured interviews were mainstream teachers, teaching assistants and teachers of the deaf. These roles were chosen to identify a range of involvement in the child's education in the classroom, and the external support provided by a teacher of the deaf. All professionals involved were discussing their experiences specifically in mainstream primary schools; additionally, all participants were between the ages of 24 and 58. A main focus of the literature surrounding this subject is the experiences of the child, and of policy surrounding the decisions around their educational provisions in the classroom. There is far less literature focussing on the

experiences of the teachers or support workers who put these policy decisions into practice. Therefore, this paper explores the perspective of the professionals themselves and aims to gain an understanding of the ways in which different educational roles work together to adapt a mainstream classroom for a deaf child. A pedagogic approach will be taken to understand the activities in the classroom itself and the reasons behind them, meaning that concentration will centre on the teaching itself as opposed to the policy behind the educational decisions. Cole (2019) describes pedagogy as more than education itself but rather as the study of methods of teaching and having more of a focus on the reality of the way a classroom is managed. A qualitative approach was used, utilising semi-structured interviews to gather in depth personal data from each participant about their roles and experiences in each classroom. A series of themes were selected to inform the line of analysis, including:

- a mainstream classroom's ability to accommodate deafness
- the classification of deafness as a disability
- speech vs sign
- the National Curriculum
- support between professionals
- the role of the teaching assistant
- online learning and the role of technology in deaf education
- relationships with parents
- suggestions for improvement

These themes outline the format of this thesis.

A series of decisions were made throughout the process of this research, including the terms to be used throughout the paper. Something to consider when referring to deaf children is the correct terminology to use, as some terms are preferred by the deaf community than others. The British Deaf Association (no date) reported about different terms deemed appropriate to refer to deaf people. It is found that deaf people would prefer the terms ‘deaf’ or ‘hearing impaired’ as opposed to ‘hearing loss’ when referencing their deafness. This is related to the idea that deaf people do not feel that they have ‘lost’ anything due to their deafness, but instead see it as a part of their identity that allows them to connect with others and form deaf communities to support one another. Therefore, throughout this paper, the term ‘deaf’ will be used to refer to children with any hearing impairment, up to and including full deafness.

Another exploration of the terms to be used to reference deaf people is the capitalisation of the letter ‘D’ as a sign of recognition of the deaf community and culture. O’Neill (2003) explores the terms and their meanings, describing ‘deaf’ as a term to fit someone into the medical definition of deafness and relating less to the idea of a deaf community. Therefore, the term ‘Deaf’ refers more to the identity of a deaf person and how they choose to place themselves in society. Most often, the capitalisation will reference a person that identifies entirely with the community of deaf people and uses a signed language as their preferred method of communication, whereas someone who does not use the capitalisation to refer to themselves may use lip reading and spoken language for communication. Kusters et al (2017) also discussed the use of the d/Deaf distinction and the implications of its use. The intended meaning of the use of ‘d/Deaf’ is to be inclusive of both terms, however a deaf person may be ‘deaf’ and ‘Deaf’, and not have to make a distinction between the two. The d/Deaf distinction can be seen to separate the terms too much and create them as opposing, which is not intended in this thesis. Kusters et al (2017) also notes that it feels more appropriate for

scholars to use 'deaf' in deaf studies, rather than using 'Deaf' or 'd/Deaf' which deaf people may not use themselves.

I do not attempt to resolve any of these terminology issues in this thesis, but it is important to acknowledge that the label used is not apolitical or without consequence. Instead, I have decided to use the term deaf because it suits the theme of the thesis and its intentions to remove focus from political discussion, and I also believe it is important to be consistent with terminology throughout.

Provisions had to be made for this research due to the pandemic and the government guidelines on social distancing and safety. Therefore, interviews had to be conducted over Microsoft Teams which would have been conducted in person in different circumstances. It is important to recognise that this may have an influence on the research as an online interview may not be as personal and allow participants to have a true experience of the interview process. As part of the recognition of the influence of the pandemic on the research, online learning was included as a key theme for consideration and questioning. An interesting outcome of this decision was that participants seemed to not take the opportunity to discuss online learning as expected. Due to the conditions in education during the pandemic and the transition in and out of online learning, a concern was that this topic would overshadow the research. However, participants instead seemed to stray from the topic and use the opportunity to discuss other factors in more depth and use the platform almost as an opportunity to discuss something other than the pandemic.

Literature Review

A mainstream classroom's ability to accommodate deafness

A mainstream classroom, whether primary or secondary, must be adaptable to different learners, as children of all ages learn at different rates and have different requirements. As of 2018, there was an average of 21.7 children in a mainstream secondary classroom and this number has been increasing. Over half of Key Stage 1 (KS1) classrooms have either 29 or 30 children in them (Department for Education, 2019). The difficulty of taking each individual child and their needs into account when educating classes of this size is a challenge to the mainstream teacher, who is responsible for planning lessons to accommodate all as there are 29 or 30 individual sets of needs to account for (Department for Education, 2019).

Special educational needs must be taken into account for each child as only 9.3% of children with Special Educational Needs were reported to attend special schools in 2018 (Mencap, no date). This data is generalised for all children falling under the term of disability with Special Educational Needs, a difference from the figures reported in the CRIDE report (2020) that 6% of deaf children attend special schools specifically for deaf children, and 5% of deaf children attend generalised special schools. As deaf students require provisions in a mainstream classroom, and their needs are related to communication, they are classified as a child with special educational needs (Gov.uk, 2016). Therefore, steps must be taken to accommodate their learning needs in a mainstream classroom. Edmondson and Howe (2019) discuss the influence of the class teacher themselves on the inclusion of a mainstream school for deaf pupils. They suggest that the teacher's role is to monitor the behaviour of hearing students in the classroom in relation to the deaf child as well as to create an environment that supports the exploration of deaf communities to promote acceptance and inclusion whilst maintaining a positive learning environment for all children. This attempt to introduce

aspects of deaf culture to a mainstream classroom is assumed to increase awareness for hearing pupils and pride for deaf pupils. There are other ways to support deaf children, from within and outside the school. Jarvis (2002) discussed a case study surrounding a deaf child, focussing heavily on the support provided by the mainstream teacher and teaching assistants in the classroom. The support for this child was tailored to assist them with their way of accessing instruction, which was through lipreading, and although the role of the teacher of the deaf is mentioned, there is not a lot of focus on their influence on the education of the child. This thesis takes a closer look at the relationships between these professionals and examines more closely the potential areas for improvement to support deaf children in mainstream schools. CRIDE (2017) discusses the decline in availability of support staff to assist deaf children, reporting that the number of teachers of the deaf has decreased by 14%, alongside an increase of 31% in children requiring support in the last ten years. These statistics are likely to become increasingly desperate as more recent statistics from the CRIDE report (2020) as 41% of services providing a teacher of the deaf had seen a decrease, as well as 30% reporting difficulties in recruitment.

Preparation of teachers in their training is vital to ensure they are able to support a range of children with differing levels of ability in a classroom. McCracken (2014) explored the position of trainee teachers of deaf children and their experiences of learning ways to manage and educate deaf children in mainstream settings. A key part of this research was the implementation of self critique measures when planning lessons for the inclusion of deaf children, suggesting that an essential component of deaf education is awareness of the role held by mainstream teachers and the adaptations and support required by the deaf child to support their education. Additionally, this report highlights the importance of relationships between professionals as the dependence upon the teaching assistants and their role in the

classroom for support, both for the teacher and the child, is a key component in the education provisions.

Humphries and Allen (2008) reported on the need for more focus on teacher training to support deaf children in schools, this support was discussed through a method of preparing those who wish to work with deaf children to take a bilingual education approach. Despite this research being based in the USA, the concepts can still be applied to research in the UK as there is little to no literature regarding the implementation of deaf education in any format into teacher training. This lack of training to prepare teachers to educate deaf children in mainstream classrooms is concerning as it leaves the responsibility of research to the teacher, whose responsibilities are already considerable for an entire mainstream class.

The agency of the child themselves in their education and the responsibilities that can be taken on by a child is a concept discussed by Evans (2008). Personal agency is described by Zimmerman and Cleary (2006) as an individual's ability to take initiative and direct their own actions and behaviours towards the achieving of goals they have set. Especially as a child gets older and progresses in the education system, they must take some responsibility for their learning to achieve their intended goals such as progressing to further education. This concept of agency gives the child some power over the choices in their learning. The way in which this could be applied to a deaf child in mainstream schooling is that they will gain an understanding of the methods for learning or communication that suit them and be able to apply them to their education, working with professionals involved in the process to improve experiences. Whilst the term of 'agency' was not used by participants, there was still reference to the preferences of the child and decision making in their own education.

The classification of deafness as a disability

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are defined as factors or conditions that can impact a child's ability to learn effectively, including a wide range of influences on their capability for communication or understanding; deafness falls under this blanket term of disability (Gov.uk, 2016). The SEND code of Practice (2015) defines disability as '...a physical or mental impairment which has a long-term and substantial adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities' Classifying deaf children in a term of disability has not been widely discussed from the perspective of teachers implementing the changes for SEND. As the individuality of deafness and the specific care it requires cannot be explored properly, when considered under the blanket assumption of disability. The National Deaf Children's Society (2012) reported that around 40% of deaf children had other educational, health or social needs to be accommodated for in education also.

Holt (2003) discusses the idea of inclusion within mainstream schools and the idea that the illusion of an inclusive learning environment without proper measures taken to adapt learning to all individuals can be damaging for children. This could be the case for deaf children as they are being placed into a predominantly hearing environment with little to no recognition of the deaf culture, perhaps harming their view of their deafness and creating a negative view of it. A reason for this view could be the lack of regard for signed languages, as a deaf person in a predominantly hearing classroom with no access to signed languages, there could be an element of social exclusion as discussed by Holt (2003) in that a deaf child would attend a mainstream school as it is posed as inclusive and able to support their education without any measures in place to support this. A further problem with this is the reduced access to communication methods with peers as a consequence. Another issue associated with the lack of regard for the deaf community in mainstream schools is that the hearing children in the class also have no exposure to it and therefore lack understanding, potentially leading to a

negative impact on the social relationships between hearing and deaf children in the classroom as explored by Nunes, Pretzlik and Olsson (2001). Nunes, Pretzlik and Olsson (2001) discussed the importance of social relationships for both hearing and deaf children at school in order to create and maintain a positive learning environment for all. Uncovered in this research was the idea that there was not enough done by the schools themselves to promote acceptance and understanding of deaf communities by hearing children. A gap in the research is that there is no information from the perspective of teachers on efforts made, or that could be made, to include education about deaf issues into mainstream teaching. The inclusion of this information would benefit all and remove deafness from the blanket term of disability and instead raise awareness and acceptance of the deaf community. The idea can be constructed that too much mainstreaming for deaf children at school age can lead to a loss of identity and ability to fit into and align ideas with the deaf community, perhaps damaging their ability to feel accepted within it; similar to the ideas discussed by Calderon and Greenberg (2010) that a range of approaches should be taken in mainstream schools to ensure the recognition and inclusion of the deaf community.

Scott-Hill (2003) contextualises the definition of deafness as a disability and the political conflicts this causes. Despite the idea that the aims of this paper are not to focus on the political side of deafness but to take a pedagogic approach, it is still important to understand and recognise the political impact of certain topics. Scott-Hill discussed that the placement of deafness within the bracket of disability can cause conflict between the deaf community and disabled people. The inclusion of deaf people into the term 'disabled' removes the individuality and pride that is raised by deaf communities and deaf culture. Deafness can be viewed by hearing people as hearing loss, which is problematic as deaf people are not losing anything, and instead communicate in different ways. The tension is highlighted by the separation between the two in works and research by deaf and disabled groups, as well as the

development of cultures that do not seem to include one other. This takes the use of the term disabled for deafness out of an educational context and instead gives an insight to the wider discussions that arise from this labelling.

The National Curriculum and BSL in schools

The speech vs signing debate relates to ways in which deaf and hearing people should communicate with each other, whether there should be more focus on the use of spoken language or on British Sign Language (BSL). Around 90% of deaf children are born to hearing parents with minimal or no knowledge of deaf culture and BSL reducing the child's opportunity to learn BSL at home (DesGeorges, 2016). A child's chance to learn and develop language skills, for both deaf and hearing children, comes from a young age and is supported both at home and in the classroom. For a deaf child, there should be provisions in place that allow them to access signed languages, however in a mainstream classroom the focus is on the development of spoken language with learning heavily influenced by the national curriculum.

Gibb (2016) describes the benefits of a national curriculum, which include allowing equal learning for children to fit into society and allow them to explore their history and culture. However, for deaf children in mainstream schools there is not the allowance in the curriculum to study elements of deaf communities, deaf history or deaf culture such as the learning of BSL or the exploration of other parts of the deaf community that would benefit them in life. This could be detrimental to pupils as they may therefore consider their deafness to make them inferior or abnormal and create a lack of identity surrounding it as they are classed as disabled in a mainstream setting, whereas deafness would be celebrated and appreciated with the correct awareness, to be further explored in the work of Harpur (2009) with the discussion of ableism. Harpur (2009) discusses the history of discrimination towards

those with disabilities in education, despite the idea that mainstream education is designed to create inclusion and promote integration of those with special educational needs. Harpur links the idea of this discrimination to the concept of ableism, the idea of assuming that all people should conform to an idea of the 'norm' considered to be without impairments. Mainstream education aims to provide a service of education for all, by ensuring all children receive the same experience of learning, however, it should be considered that not all those enrolled in mainstream education may wish to be included in the 'norm'. The desire to fit children into one system and educate to a 'norm' removes the celebration of individuality and uniqueness that comes with deafness or disabilities. With the little exploration of deaf communities that are included in mainstream schools as well as the preference to develop spoken language as opposed to BSL, deaf children, whilst being included in the mainstream, may not be allowed to discover, and understand their place in deaf communities.

Further harm caused by the National Curriculum was explored by Jones (2010) who showed that the testing for the National Curriculum had a negative effect on the education of primary school children and their thinking skills. The tests used are to ensure that the standards of the curriculum are upheld by mainstream schools, which seems as though it is a positive, however the pressure on teachers to ensure children are educated to a standard ready to test may impact the quality of the education itself. Additionally, having standardised tests to ensure the effectiveness of education, cannot be assumed to be a successful method when the variety of learners is so vast. Ball (2004) discussed the idea of a cookie cutter curriculum, meaning that students are almost forced into a one size fits all version of education, as a curriculum is in place to provide the equal opportunities for all learners. However, this style of providing education does not factor in different educational needs and abilities.

The Scottish Government (2017) set out a BSL national plan to increase the recognition of BSL as a language and implement more recognition of the deaf community and its place in

society by allowing children and others who wish to learn BSL the environment and support to do so in the curriculum as required by the BSL Scotland Act (2015). Additionally, in this plan there is support provided for teachers of students that use BSL to offer guidance and provisions to assist learning for deaf students who wish to use BSL in a mainstream classroom. Charities such as the British Deaf Association (2019b) work to provide support for deaf pupils and those involved in their education as well as working for campaigns to bring BSL into the national curriculum for all, and to have recognition of BSL for the rest of the UK. This implementation of BSL into the national curriculum in England would allow for more recognition of deaf culture for hearing pupils and be beneficial in increasing awareness and acceptance from a young age; additionally, the communication opportunities for deaf pupils with their hearing peers would improve. Gilbert (2011) reflects on their experience of being a teacher and having a mainstream class with a combination of deaf and hearing students and the difficulties faced of having a style of learning based around spoken language with BSL users present. The solution reached was for the teacher to take initiative and attend BSL classes in order to support learning, this however shows a gap in training for teachers as this support is not provided when they are required to teach deaf students that wish to develop their language skills through the use of BSL, and therefore the teachers must take steps in their own initiative to expand their own language skills. Any knowledge of BSL must be sought out and obtained by the teacher themselves, which is sometimes supported by charities that provide resources and online training sessions for professionals assisting deaf children in their education rather than the teacher's schools; however, this further reveals the gap in training for teachers to prepare them for the challenges of including deaf pupils in mainstream settings (National Deaf Children's Society, 2019). It is not only training for learning BSL that is provided by these charities, but resources and support systems to assist them in other aspects of including a deaf child into a mainstream classroom are available.

However, a disadvantage of this is that the teachers must pursue these additional provisions on their own, adding to their list of duties within their role. This may not be possible for teachers who have a large class with many learning needs to cater for as they would need to undergo training in many different areas to include all children with any special educational needs.

According to the CRIDE survey (2020), in school settings, only 9% of deaf children use British Sign Language, 22% use a combination of signed support and spoken English and 63% communicate using only spoken English. Sutton-Spence and Ramsey (2013) explored the methods of deaf teachers educating deaf children and found that mostly signed language was used. The term “creative signing” was used to describe this method of using sign in storytelling and it was reported to be a success. This study was carried out in the UK, USA and Mexico, and similar results were found in the different locations, exemplifying that the benefits of using sign are recognised across cultures. It is discussed that deaf children learn best when fully engaged and involved, and using signed language is an effective way to ensure these conditions are met. Participants involved in this research, whilst not using the term ‘creative signing’ themselves, discussed their individual experiences of different methods of implementing BSL or forms of signed language into the mainstream classroom.

McKee (2008) explored the implementation of New Zealand Sign Language into the curriculum by carrying out research in New Zealand, and despite the research not being based in the UK, the discussions are still relevant to this thesis. The implementation of sign into schools would increase the awareness and use of British Sign Language and increase its cultural capital. Additionally, the implementation of signed languages in other countries would encourage discussions about signed languages in curriculums where it is not currently included. The education system is designed to favour spoken language and promote spoken language acquisition as there is no BSL in the national curriculum, however, this

marginalises and somewhat ignores the call for deaf pupils to have the opportunity to learn British Sign Language as a gateway to the deaf community and benefit their identity as a deaf person. Not only this, but as mainstream education is tailored towards hearing pupils through the curriculum at the moment, the implementation of British Sign Language as a subject would allow deaf children access through signed language, not just spoken language. Having BSL as a school subject, even offered as optional, would allow an opportunity for pupils to use the skill as a communication method, for both hearing and deaf students. Galatro (2018) reports that due to the brain's plasticity as a child, it is much easier to learn languages, even a second language, at a young age. This promotes the idea that children should have the opportunity to experience languages and have the chance to learn them at school age, the inclusion of British Sign Language in this assumption would benefit, accept and acknowledge the deaf community.

If deaf children have access to signed language and use it themselves, the inclusion of BSL into classrooms would give a direct accessibility to the curriculum for deaf children (Sutton Spence and Ramsey, 2013). This improvement for deaf children's education in mainstream classrooms could come directly from the teacher's themselves signing; although this would require the teachers themselves becoming trained and qualified in BSL. There could instead be the addition of a BSL/ English interpreter to give access to the curriculum through signed language without the added pressure on teachers. A boundary in the way of this is the added pressure on already strained school budgets. Adding BSL into the curriculum would allow this access to deaf communities for deaf pupils, but would also introduce signed languages to hearing pupils, raising awareness and also allowing them the opportunity to learn some BSL for future use. It is not the intention of this thesis to focus heavily on the speech vs signing debate, however it is important to recognise the points raised to place the research into context and benefit understanding.

Robinson (1997) conducted a study within which hearing and deaf pupils were educated using BSL with the support of a deaf teacher who used no spoken language for communication and a hearing teacher who had no knowledge of BSL themselves. The hearing teacher had low expectations for the study and expected to find difficulty in communicating with BSL, particularly in maths lessons. However, the results found that the experiment had been successful and the hearing teacher reported that she was pleasantly surprised with the outcome of the experiment and was comfortable to use BSL, even in maths. The children involved with the research were a combination of hearing and deaf children and conclusions showed that both groups of children enjoyed attending once a week for a period of 14 months and had ease accessing the curriculum via BSL.

Another way to make the curriculum accessible to deaf children through BSL would be to implement the use of BSL/ English educational interpreters in the classroom. Thoutenhoofd (2014) discussed the use of educational sign language in mainstream classrooms to provide an inclusive education that is accessible through signed language. The benefits of this use are also noted as the effective use of interpreters to produce accessibility in a mainstream classroom would improve the inclusion of mainstream education for those with special educational needs. Although interpreters were not interviewed for the research in this thesis, their influence should not be ignored as it is still relevant to the thesis; additionally, participants discussed BSL/ English interpreters and so the inclusion of this literature is important for context.

Support between professionals

Support for mainstream teachers in the educating of deaf pupils in a mainstream classroom can come from other professionals in the classroom itself or from external supporting specialists. Teachers of the deaf are involved with many aspects of a deaf student's education,

especially in mainstream settings as they are required to provide training and advice to the child themselves, the parents, the mainstream teacher and additional support staff (Simpson, 2017). One form of this support can be a direct method where the teacher of the deaf works directly one on one with the deaf child to give them advice and methods of working independently in the mainstream classroom. The indirect support involves the mainstream teacher and in-class support, such as teaching assistants, receiving training from the teacher of the deaf in how to assist the child with their learning, creating a chain of support (Powers, 2002). There is little discussion in the academic literature on a preferred method for the professionals involved, however it could be assumed that an indirect approach would allow the mainstream staff to develop transferable skills and methods to assist other deaf children. This training and support between professionals would require collaborative relationships to be established between different educational support staff in order to have beneficial results for the child as a lack of communication and understanding between professionals could hinder their education (Roux, 1996). A factor to consider for this collaboration is the understanding of the different roles involved in order to support one another and work together effectively. Redmond (2017) describes the experience of being a Speech and Language Therapist involved in assisting deaf children in schools and the confusion for communication support professionals with the lack of clarity of the differences between their roles. Rather than this being framed as ignorance from professionals and an unwillingness to learn and assist one another, it is seen as a further gap in the field of training as awareness is not raised for the importance and usefulness of networking with other professionals and the support this can provide for the staff and the deaf child.

Ofsted (2012) published a report regarding the services provided for deaf children and directly examined the relationships between professionals. This report identified that there were some cases of positive multi-agency work to provide education for a deaf child in

mainstream schools, despite decreases in funding and/ or staffing. The main beneficial outcome of this support network was regular meetings to discuss the progress of the deaf child and update any provisions being made for them to ensure high standards were maintained. However, a gap in this report is that it is not from the perspectives of the deaf children themselves, therefore it may be difficult for professionals to identify their learners specific needs.

The role of the teaching assistant

Internal support, from the school within the classroom itself, for the mainstream classroom teacher most often comes from a teaching assistant, as they are present on a daily basis and are actively involved in most if not all classroom activities. Groom (2006) discusses the ever-changing role of the teaching assistant and the ways in which they play a more personal role in a child's learning experience as they tend to have more one-on-one interactions with children with SEND or children with individual learning needs. Therefore, one way in which teaching assistants can support teachers is by having a closer relationship with the deaf child and improving their learning experience, making sure they have a full understanding of discussions surrounding the topic. McVittie (2007) explores the effectiveness of the ways in which teaching assistants work to support individual pupils, specifically those with SEND, and concludes that the experience of the child can be negatively impacted by the other responsibilities that the teaching assistant also has to complete around the classroom, such as assisting other children, marking books or displays. Further exploration of the position and effectiveness of teaching assistants, for deaf pupils comes from Salter, Swanwick and Pearson (2017) who describe the collaboration between professionals from the point of view of the teaching assistants themselves. A main finding of the research was that teaching assistants gain more of an understanding of the needs of deaf children through their close working relationships with the pupils. This led to a somewhat negative view of the

involvement of the mainstream teachers by the teaching assistants because they did not see the struggles faced on the more personal level that the teaching assistants did. Education was found to be most productive when there were positive relationships between all involved and good communication. The results show that there is potential for the overall education of deaf pupils to be improved with the provision of support for staff in communicating with one another and more discussion about the struggles faced in the classroom.

The use of technology in deaf education

Something considered to improve the experience of deaf children in mainstream schools is the use of technology such as hearing aids, radio aids and cochlear implants. Although it is the mainstream teachers that make use of a radio aid or other devices in the classroom daily, it is one of the responsibilities of the teacher of the deaf to maintain the function and carry out regular check-ups. There seems to be a lack of research into the experiences of teachers when using assistive technology such as radio aids, and not a lot of discussion about the impact on a teacher when using one in the mainstream classroom. Iantaffi, Jarvis and Sinka (2003) carried out a study in which they interviewed deaf pupils about the experience of using a radio aid in a classroom. Some negative feedback was received as a result, with stories of the connection being removed by other students and even the teacher themselves without an apology, due to the fact they did not understand the technology. Additionally, students had a negative reaction to overwhelming sounds from the classroom environment but reported being reprimanded by teachers for voicing their discomfort as opposed to understood or helped. If teachers do not fully understand the technology that they are using to assist learning then it could lead to miscommunications such as described in the research. This outlines another area where more training must be provided in order to allow comfort for the deaf student when learning and understanding for the teacher on how to support the student in its use and manage the effects in a classroom.

The theme of a negative influence of a mainstream teacher on a deaf child's experience in a mainstream classroom is continued in the research of Edmondson and Howe (2019) with focus on a lack of understanding of the child's specific needs in the classroom. The misuse of audiological equipment is also described and the idea that mistakes in the setting up or use of any technology intended for support in the classroom could single out the deaf child and cause embarrassment as attention is being drawn to their additional needs. These issues outline various issues in deaf education in mainstream settings and outline the need for supplementary support and training for staff in order to be able to assist deaf children in learning without causing unintentional negative impacts. However, in the research surrounding the subject, there is also the lack of explanation from the perspective of the teachers, allowing an imbalanced view and negative opinion to be formed of their involvement. This thesis concentrates on the different perspectives of teachers, teaching assistants and teachers of the deaf to allow each to voice their opinions on their experiences and fill the gap in the literature.

Online learning

Online learning has become increasingly topical due to the impact of Coronavirus and the requirement for children to be educated from home if possible. Gautam (2020) evaluates some of the advantages and limitations of online learning, for hearing pupils; however the findings can be considered in relation to the role of online learning for deaf learners. A main positive is expressed as the extended accessibility as students can attend classes on a video call from different locations and if recorded then the content can be accessed at any time. The limitations however do not discuss the idea that perhaps online learning is not accessible to all; if a teacher shares video with a class then a deaf child may be at a disadvantage for

understanding, particularly if they would ordinarily work with a teaching assistant for one-on-one support or use of a radio aid in the classroom. Spagnola (2020) provided advice for teachers on how to improve the experience of deaf students in online classes. These suggestions include a method of testing out the video settings for the pupil and finding the best app or function for assisting understanding, asking students their preferred communication method online and using software that enables the use of captions. This provision however, requires additional input from both the teacher and the deaf pupil, as well as the additional effort from both. Durkin and Venturi (2020) assessed effectiveness of working with Irish Sign Language interpreters for students when attending online classes to ensure that lessons were still accessible for those wishing to have an interpreter present. However, some struggles were faced by this as the transition to online was described as difficult by some of the interpreters involved due to technical problems. An additional factor mentioned was broadband issues which would be an issue for all students, however, could be a much larger problem for deaf pupils as lagging internet connection would be difficult in understanding the interpreters because of grainy or frozen videos. Much of the research and articles concerning the idea of online learning published recently are reacting to the enforced move to online learning over the course of the pandemic, and as such there is not much in-depth research specifically about this issue and the long-term effects it could have on a deaf child's education.

Online learning can also be considered outside the context of the pandemic, as the use of computers for educating deaf pupils can also be a useful tool. Some creative use of online and interactive learning was explored by Mich et al (2013), using interactive graphics to educate and tell stories to deaf children who had difficulty with written text because of their limited access to spoken language in youth. The children found the use of graphics and interaction

helpful in assisting them to understand the stories themselves, promoting the use of visual aids for the online education of deaf children.

Relationship with parents

Although this research is primarily focussed upon the relationships between teachers, teaching assistants and teachers of the deaf, we also need to understand the other influences on these professionals and their decisions in educating deaf children in mainstream schools. A lot of decisions surrounding a deaf child's education, once they are enrolled in a school, are made by the professionals, however, they must also take the parents and their preferences into account, especially when the child is at a young age. The parental choice of which school a child goes to is somewhat limited by the provisions that can be offered by their local authority in England as well as if/ how much they are willing to pay for their child's education. The National Deaf Children's Society (2020) gives parents advice on how to best select a school for their deaf child and describes how each child maintains a right to attend a mainstream school. It is only in cases where the school has evidence that they do not have the appropriate resources to accommodate a deaf child, such as enough support staff, that the child would not be allowed to attend. Therefore, parents select the school that they believe will provide the best education benefits for their deaf child and the best support network for them. Parents have a predetermined relationship with the teacher of the deaf as these can be appointed very shortly after the child has been diagnosed as deaf, which will support the transition between teachers at school as the consistency of the teacher of the deaf will support parents as well as the deaf child (National Deaf Children's Society, 2020).

Calderon and Greenberg (2010) discuss the importance of collaboration between a deaf child's home and school environment for their learning and development. It is important that professionals and parents have a relationship with one another to communicate regarding the

deaf child's needs and to ensure that development is supported both in the classroom and at home. As previously discussed, the parents have the choice over the school in which they enrol their deaf child and a secure communication with those involved in the educating of their child will reassure parents that their child is receiving the best standard of learning and that the provisions in place are sufficient to support their child's development.

Suggestions for improvement

Education is always changing, and there are new methods uncovered to help improve the experience of those in the education system. Cawthorn (2001) used methods of observations and interviews to gain an understanding of the teaching and social interaction of a deaf child within a mainstream classroom with a deaf student and the ways that the environment could be improved to benefit learning. Some of these improvements suggested included reducing class sizes, openness to and more recognition of deaf culture and an individual approach to teaching to allow a more personalised experience and more effective learning. However, it is important to remember that with large class sizes it is not always possible to take an individual approach for each child as the demand on a teacher's time must be taken into account. This research is a contrast to the majority of research surrounding deaf education in mainstream schools, as deafness is considered under the term of disability or SEND in education, therefore, a lot of focus lands on policy and does not take a pedagogic approach. This style of approach to research is very important when considering deaf education in mainstream schools as the reality of the way education is managed and the resources available can be different to the way it is described in policy (Rein, 2017). For example, Ofsted (2012) reported the positivity of relationships between professionals involved in the educating of deaf children, and the benefits that have come from these well-established connections and communication networks. However, some of the research studies mentioned and the findings as a result have shown gaps in the field in this area as the reality of the in-

class experience of the government policy can be quite different to what is reported. This thesis will fill some of the gaps in what we know of the contradictions between policy and practice, and how professionals in the classroom work to resolve these.

Methodology

Introduction to methodology and Epistemology

When building a framework of ideas, it is important to consider epistemology, a term widely used in philosophy, relating to a theory of knowledge and truth, whilst questioning the value and validity of evidence used to support knowledge presented (Fumerton, 2009).

Epistemology has a great impact on the way in which research is structured, as an outlook must be chosen of positivism or constructivism. Research with a positivist mindset seeks to find scientific truth, and believes knowledge to be external and factual, unaffected by opinion; whereas constructivism suggests that a wide range of facts about a topic can be true, and are dependent on an individual's experience of it (Gray, 2014).

The school of thought chosen for this research was constructivism, as individuals from different groups (mainstream teachers, teaching assistants and Teachers of the Deaf) were asked about the same topic (the education of deaf children in mainstream schools) and could be assumed to have differing opinions due to a variety of reasons, including different job roles. Therefore, the experiences of each individual may change their view of the topic and create variation in results, even within groups, however this would not mean that one viewpoint would be proven to be correct in comparison to the others. Different experiences can be expected to produce opinions that differ from one another, and so the research sought to find examples of different opinions with a constructivist viewpoint. The recognition of the influence of perspective on disclosed truth is highlighted throughout this paper as it is important to understand and accommodate the effects on a participant's perceived truth (Gash, 2014). It is important to understand that the results of this research could therefore be considered to be co-constructed between myself and participants, as there is undoubtedly

some influence from my world view on their answers through the structuring of questions and conversational manner of interviews.

Semi-structured interviews

The method of data collection selected, to best support this constructivist view, was semi-structured interviews in order to collect qualitative data for analysis. Dearnley (2005) reflects on the advantages of this style of interview as its flexibility allows a wide range of participants to be questioned about a topic with the opportunity to tailor each interview to the individual. It is important to have a basic layout for the questions and areas for discussion however, to allow effective analysis of all interviews. A method for research must align with the aims of the study, therefore, semi-structured interviews are ideal for allowing participants to elaborate on their individual experiences and have the chance to explain their meaning for third party understanding (Rabionet, 2011).

The participants for this study were to be in three groups; mainstream teachers, teaching assistants and teachers of the deaf. These groups did not know one another, but were all based in the North West of England. Three of each group were interviewed to give a fair understanding of a range of experiences from each. The method of sampling used for this research was snowball sampling in order to gain the number of participants with the required experience. Johnson (2014) describes the advantages of snowball sampling as it is very efficient in finding participants through the participants already gathered for the research. This was convenient for this study as the participants were in a network of communication with one other, perhaps from working together in the context of the study or from within one school.

McIntosh and Morse (2015) detail a guide for a procedure that should be followed when constructing semi-structured interviews in order to have a systematic line of inquiry for

participants, focussing mainly on the production of categories with items and questions stemming from these categories. Categories created for this research informed the questioning for the interviews from the structure of the literature review, from gaps in the literature, these included: training, the classroom environment, relationships, technology and the impact of Coronavirus. Following this, each was dissected further, to establish items of interest; using relationships as an example, it would be required to receive information regarding the relationships with the deaf child themselves, with the parents of the child, other staff in the classroom and external support staff involved in deaf education in the mainstream classroom. A few suggested questions were then formed, to support the researcher throughout the interview and as a guide to lead the participant through each item to ensure that details concerning each were covered. Notes containing the detailed breakdown of each category are included in the appendix, with examples of the guidance questions for each item that directed the interviews.

Due to the collection of data for this study being based upon interviews with participants, it is possible that there is a level of influence from the researcher on the information disclosed.

Allen (2017) discusses the impact of demand characteristics on qualitative data collected from interviews, particularly those with a semi-structured format, as there can be a tendency for participants to align themselves to what they believe the researcher's goal to be. This factor is part of social desirability bias and can have an impact on the responses from participants, particularly when the research is regarding political topics or other socially sensitive data (Chung and Monroe, 2003). Due to the level of conversational nature of these interviews, researchers can unintentionally sway the answers an individual gives, even by the phrasing of questions. Therefore, the few questions prepared were carefully constructed as to not be leading questions and to not include any terms or phrases that could manipulate the opinions or responses of the participants.

Participants were given a participant information sheet prior to the interview detailing the main objectives of the research and given an introduction as to what their participation would involve and how the information would be used. The interviews were conducted over Microsoft Teams and recorded to make transcripts for the analysis. In different circumstances, the interviews would have been conducted face to face, however, due to the pandemic and the government restrictions in place, this was not feasible at the time. There were some benefits to this, as it made the recording of the interviews much easier with the technology used to conduct interviews. However, there could have been some influence on the interviews due to this screen time experience. There is not much academic literature regarding this influence or its effects on research.

Before these interviews, a verbal agreement was made of consent from the participants for their data to be used, this was recorded at the beginning of each interview. Participants were also required to sign their name on a digital consent form, however were reassured that all information provided would be anonymised by making transcripts from the video recordings of their interviews. Only the researcher would see the original videos as the transcripts would be used in data analysis and presentation. This ensured the confidentiality of the participants. Additionally, it was confirmed that individuals would be given the right to withdraw at any point during the interview should they decide they no longer wished to partake, at which point any and all contribution to the research would not be included; furthermore, any recordings taken of the interview up to that point would be deleted.

Some of the potential ethical issues have been previously addressed on page 32, however it is important to recognise the limitations of the research and ways in which they have been combatted. Consensual participation in the research was obtained from participants through both the digital consent form and the verbal agreement of consent before the interview. This was fully informed by the participant information sheet and the allowance for any questions

about the research to be answered beforehand. Confidentiality is an important part of the research, as participants identities must be protected in order to ensure the contribution to the research is without risk for participants, therefore they can participate without fears of any repercussions. The potential for negative impacts from the research for participants is from a professional viewpoint as the different groups were required to describe parts of their job role including offering some critique if necessary, which would not be favourable if observed by an employer. Additionally, due to the sampling method, some participants may know one another or work with each other. The anonymisation of data is to protect from any potential recognition between participant leading to conflicts if undesirable opinions are shared. Due to the inability for face-to-face interviews, Microsoft Teams was used to conduct the interviews and video recordings were taken.

Following each interview, the video recordings were used to create transcripts for the analysis and presentation of data. As only the researcher viewed the videos through this process, the confidentiality of the participants was protected. All video recordings, transcripts and notes from the interviews were stored on a password protected hard drive, to ensure security of the data and further support the confidentiality of participants. Additionally, the confidentiality of the participants was solidified by the anonymisation of data when stored on the hard drive so as to protect identity. The transcriptions were created with the assistance of Otter.ai as a tool, this helped to create a rough transcript which was followed along with and edits made as necessary. It was very important to ensure that the transcripts were anonymised for inclusion in the thesis, therefore, once a true transcript was created, there were edits made to remove any data that could be used to identify any participants or any persons discussed in the interviews such as the deaf children or other professionals. These references to certain people were changed to non-specific pronouns, additionally, any named establishments were changed to “the school” to remove further risk of identification.

There were nine participants in total, three in each group, and initials were then used to refer to each participant, the teachers were referred to as T1, T 2 and T 3; teaching assistants were referred to as TA 1, TA 2 and TA 3; and teachers of the deaf were referred to as TOD 1, TOD 2 and TOD 3.

It is also important to consider some of the potential negatives of the research. The participants, whilst not knowing one another, were all based in the North West of England and their experiences had all taken place in this area. Participants were all discussing their experiences specifically in mainstream primary schools, therefore it is important to consider that some other themes may be apparent for those professionals working in secondary schools or other educational settings. Additionally, due to the small sample size of this research, it is possible that the findings may not be representative of all professionals involved, but instead aims to give a detailed account of the profes

Thematic analysis

The method used for analysis of the transcripts was a thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2014). The themes selected from the reading of literature and observing gaps in the field were used to inform the structuring of the analysis. A deductive approach was taken in the thematic which will be detailed below. These initial themes were:

- training
- the classroom environment
- relationships
- technology
- the impact of coronavirus.

The transcripts were used to create new themes for discussion, by highlighting common topics discussed by each participant in their interview and making links between them. This process was included in the transcription process of the thesis, as common themes started to become apparent, they were highlighted and compared to other sections. There are many theories behind thematic analysis, but researchers can adapt the model of analysis to suit themselves, their data and the particular research. An inductive approach to coding the themes means allowing the data to form themes itself without initial ideas or input from the researcher; whereas a deductive approach includes entering the analysis process with some themes in mind to guide the coding (Nowell et al, 2017). The literature was used to form the themes above and these themes were developed through the analysis, meaning a deductive approach was selected. This allowed for more focus to be made on filling the gaps in literature and produced a structure to begin finding themes in the transcripts. The themes changed somewhat, and additional themes were observed and noted through the interviews as participants were asked similar questions through semi structured interviews. New themes appeared through tangents in the interviews, revealing further lines of enquiry and more themes for analysis. The themes selected from this process were:

- a mainstream classroom's ability to accommodate deafness
- the classification of deafness as a disability
- speech vs Signing debate
- the National Curriculum
- support between professionals
- the role of the teaching assistant
- online learning and the role of technology in deaf education

- relationships with parents
- suggestions for improvement

The transcripts were studied and highlighted according to emerging themes and predetermined themes, allowing data to be grouped for analysis as patterns became clear. The aim was to gain an understanding of the opinions of teachers, teaching assistants and teachers of deaf children in each theme.

Results and discussion

The results of the interviews will be described in sections, adhering to the themes selected for discussion from the thematic analysis. Discussion of these results and relating them to previous research and literature will be included throughout.

Accommodating deafness in the mainstream classroom

When questioned about how prepared a mainstream classroom is to educate a deaf child, the groups of participants had similar answers to others with the same job role. Mainstream teachers themselves shared concerns over the individuality of children when learning and the ability to have flexibility for a class with a large number of learners. T1 noted that “a certain pace needs to be kept to fit everything in and I think with any educational needs, there comes the risk of being left behind.” This reflects an acknowledgement that there is a risk to having learners with additional needs in a mainstream classroom and that a set teaching style cannot suit every learner. This response also relates to the readings in literature regarding large class sizes (Department of Education, 2019) and the risks involved for all children to not receive adequate support, especially deaf children.

Additionally, there was an opposition to the idea of deaf children attending special schools as T3 commented “... if a child can be in a mainstream classroom and can manage with the provisions in place, I don’t see why they shouldn’t.” The desire for teachers to provide an education for all is displayed in this opinion as the mainstream classroom is preferable to a special school, showing that making provisions and steps to create an ideal learning environment is ideal for teachers who wish to include all learners in mainstream education. This opinion was shared by TOD1 who stated that there are “...provisions in place to provide the inclusion that comes with being in the mainstream” mentioning a preference to allow deaf children to experience the mainstream school throughout their education, with the correct

support systems in place to ensure there is no negative impact on learning. This opinion is widely shared for deaf education, reflected in the fact that 78% of deaf children in England attend mainstream schools, suggesting that there has been success in the implementation of deaf education in the mainstream. However, the results of the Deaf Children's Society (2021), showing that only a third of deaf students achieve two A levels, questions the long term success. It is a seemingly positive result from this research that professionals share the idea that mainstream education is the ideal route for deaf children, it is also important to note however, that this case does seem to be the norm and expectation when considering deaf education. On surface level, the placing of deaf children in mainstream education with the provisions in place, is successful from the viewpoint of professionals, however, these long term results would suggest otherwise and imply that improvements must be made; a topic discussed on page 65 of the results.

The participants mentioned throughout that the methods used in classrooms are transferrable for many individuals. Participants talked about the way in which children learned methods for their education and communication which were particularly successful for them. The children were then able to apply these in different classrooms. This showed that the child themselves played an important role in accessing their own education. Despite changing classroom teacher each year, the child will usually remain with the same Teacher of the Deaf for a significant amount of time, allowing for the relationship and methods used to be developed and strengthened. This was supported by TOD2 who stated that "the child also knows what works for them, and can have some input with that, you can't just dictate to a deaf child how they should be learning". This places some of the responsibility for their education with the child themselves, which displays an example of independence and agency in the classroom from enabling the child to have influence over their own education. This idea could strengthen the pride that a deaf child feels in their identity as they may have some control

over their mainstream education. This shows a potential for future research in this area as the perspective of the deaf children is not widely reported.

The idea of a child having this responsibility over their learning and gaining an understanding of methods that work for them in communication and learning relates to agency as discussed by Evans (2008). The personal agency of the child assists the work of the professionals involved as the child can directly influence their own education and can work with them to benefit their own learning and communication methods. If a deaf child knows the outcomes they wish to have from their education, they may apply techniques that they deem to be most successful for them, aligning with the definitions raised by Zimmerman and Cleary (2006).

T2 discussed the responsibility for the preparation of the mainstream classroom and spoke of the control being in the hand of the teacher themselves, noting that it is up to them how prepared a classroom is. When discussing the stresses of the additional responsibility, they commented “it comes with the job. It’s maybe not exactly what you sign up for but it’s a part of it. Having a class with no special needs wouldn’t be easy.” This gave recognition to the extra work required to accommodate special educational needs in a mainstream classroom, not just in reference to deaf children but in a wider context; and whilst this was an understanding of the added responsibility for the teacher, it was accepted that that was an expectation of the role. There was mention of the need for “research into individual needs”, suggesting that the preparation does not come from teacher training but comes from personal decisions to look into methods and different ways to support a child in a teacher’s own time. This point makes it clear that there is a gap in the support for teachers in their preparation to accommodate a deaf child in their class, as there is not additional time allocated for planning or research, it must be done in their own time, without support. There was little to no mention of any official teacher training in deaf education, only the mention of resources sought out by the professionals themselves and provided by the other support staff. Research by McCracken

(2014) is very relevant here as there has been the call through research for implementation of training for deaf education in the mainstream into the standard training that teachers receive. Although McCracken's work was published in 2014, it remains relevant, and the issue still remains that there is not adequate training for teachers to prepare them to educate a deaf child in their classrooms. McCracken's findings from this research included the importance of the support staff in a classroom to the education of deaf children. This has been reflected in this thesis as between the professionals themselves, there is recognition of the important roles they each take.

When discussing the influence of staff members on how prepared a mainstream classroom is, TOD2 shared a positive experience with teachers, noting that "Teachers are eager to provide a positive learning environment." This was commented whilst acknowledging that the level of preparation comes from the staff themselves and their willingness to make provisions to support a deaf child. The relationship between internal and external support in a mainstream classroom was noted here as the teacher of the deaf was reflecting on a positive overall experience of supporting teachers in their planning and preparation. When referencing internal support, this means the in classroom professionals: the teacher and teaching assistants; whereas external support relates to the teachers of the deaf. The direct relationships between the professionals, whilst mentioned here, will be explored in more detail throughout the thesis. This example was deemed as a positive account as TOD2 was expressing a complimentary point about the attitudes of teachers. Edmondson and Howe (2019) had also discussed the responsibility of the mainstream teacher, and placed similar emphasis on the positive influence that a teacher can have depending on their approach to education in the mainstream classroom. It is clearly recognised by teachers and teachers of the deaf that a main part of the responsibility for the preparation of the mainstream classroom to accommodate a deaf child comes from the teacher themselves, and their attitude to deaf

education. As Edmondson and Howe (2019) discuss, the attitude of the teacher plays an important role in the application of education to the deaf child, positive accounts and attitudes from the participants are reported as well as complimentary comments on other professionals' attitudes to deaf education. There was, however, no direct evidence that a negative attitude would have the opposite effect as no participant reported experience with other professionals having an unwillingness to participate in accommodating deafness in the classroom.

The most negative responses to any lines of questioning regarding a classroom's ability to accommodate a deaf child, came from the group of teaching assistants, who voiced more concerns regarding the numbers of staff involved in the educating of deaf children and the expectations of those involved. TA1 commented that "classrooms are only so equipped to handle different needs" as the resources available are somewhat limited and mentioned the difficulty when in a classroom that has use of limited staff to provide provisions for support. In this case, the experience had been of a classroom with a teacher and one permanent teaching assistant and only an additional member of staff on some days during the week or for certain lessons. TA1 expanded that "we can't predict when a deaf child will need more direct, one on one support". Suggesting that having an additional staff member would be beneficial at all times to ensure there is always the availability for close support, and that the deaf child had insufficient support at the moment. TA2 reported similar experiences and commented on the difficulty to provide one on one support in a classroom with many children and limited staff numbers. The risk with fewer staff in a classroom is that the support will not be available to all students as they require it, particularly deaf children who may need additional support for their learning needs more frequently because communication support is an ongoing need, not something that can be 'fixed' with a one time intervention. The reports from teaching assistants were not overly surprising as they aligned with the ideas that teaching assistants maintain a closer working relationship with children in the classroom,

particularly those with additional learning needs, perhaps giving a more accurate, realistic view of the experiences and needs for improvement. This idea aligns with the concepts discussed by Groom (2006) regarding the closer, personal relationship between teaching assistants and children in classrooms. Therefore, this consolidates that the input of teaching assistants is essential to this thesis and to discussions regarding provisions for deaf education in mainstream schools.

TA3 discussed the need for “support staff with experience”, noting that a mainstream classroom attempting to adapt to additional learning needs such as those of a deaf child with the same number of staff as any other classroom is not feasible. TA3 commented that they felt in a better position to support a deaf learner now, having experienced it before, however beforehand they felt that they had little to no preparation to support the deaf child – “it’s very new at first, obviously, and a bit scary to approach in a way, but I don’t think that I’d feel that way again in a similar position”. TA3 also commented that they wished there was more training available to prepare them – “it would be better to have some kind of official training I think”. This requirement for assistance from experienced staff is supported by the reports by Teachers of the Deaf, TOD3 spoke of the work that goes into the preparation of a mainstream classroom, commenting on the work that it takes but the benefits of gaining experience in the field, for all staff involved. This connects to the work of Groom (2006), who spoke of the correlation between positive attitudes from staff and successful education, suggesting that these positive experiences for staff would also benefit the deaf child. The support between teachers, teaching assistants and teachers of the deaf is essential for the most positive education of deaf children in mainstream schools, and the TOD3 comments that assistance is what they are “there to help with. Preparing the classroom, the staff and the child for the mainstream.” This gives recognition to the idea that the preparation of the classroom to be able to educate a deaf child is the responsibility of all professionals involved and a combined

effort is the best way to achieve an appropriate level of education and support. These responses highlighted the importance of the teacher of the deaf and their vital role to the education of deaf children in a mainstream school from the perspective of teachers of the deaf.

There was acknowledgment of the influence of the teachers of the deaf on the provisions in the classroom by T2 who mentioned the shared responsibility – “of course there’s the teacher of the deaf that takes on a lot of responsibility for them [the deaf child], both in the classroom and at home”. This highlights the importance of the role of the teacher of the deaf, from the perspective of the mainstream teachers as the responsibility that they feel for the deaf child’s education is somewhat shared with the teacher of the deaf. TA2 supported the idea of recognition of the role of the teacher of the deaf – “it’s a shame they [the teacher of the deaf] can’t spend more time with them [the deaf child], the work they do supports them perhaps in better ways because they do have that extra training”. This is acknowledgement of the work that teachers of the deaf do to benefit the deaf child, however there was no mention of the teacher of the deaf having the chance to work directly with the teaching assistant to support them.

This raises concerns however from the statistics discussed by CRIDE (2017) regarding the declining numbers of teachers of the deaf and their availability; in some areas, there is only one teacher of the deaf per every hundred deaf children. As this research with professionals has highlighted how essential teachers of the deaf are in preparing a mainstream classroom for a deaf child, more training and recruitment of the professionals needs to be done in order to continue the benefits they provide for both the deaf child themselves and the other professionals they are supporting.

The classification of deafness as a disability

There were mixed opinions when asked about the consideration of deafness as a disability, due to its nature as a speech, language and communication need, as all interviewees had similar responses considering the positives and negatives. There was general agreement that disability is not a negative term and so the limitations from labelling deafness as a disability are not intended to imply any detriment to disabilities, but more a reference to how deafness could be seen as a stand alone term. This need for independence with the term of deafness gives note to the wider deaf communities that are seemingly not recognised when deafness is labelled as a disability. T2 speaks of the importance of “having an identity for deafness, there is such a deaf community with a lot of pride” outlining the importance of the recognition of the wider community that comes with deafness. The recognition of the wider community and their opinions on the classification of disability relates to the discussions by Scott-Hill (2003) that there are certain conflicts for the deaf community and disabled people when placed under one term, as it does not recognise the differentiation between terms that they desire. This individuality is very important to the deaf community and should therefore be encouraged from a young age to promote pride in their deafness.

The Teachers of the Deaf shared strong opinions that, although the term is acceptable for use in education, the individuality of deafness can be somewhat overlooked when simply referred to as a disability. ToD1 reflected “it’s almost too generic, and takes away some of the individuality, which is something that deaf people as a community are really proud of”, making reference to the wider community that surrounds and supports deaf individuals. TOD3 repeated the term “generic” and noted that disability “doesn’t give enough uniqueness, not just for deafness but for any disability” showing that perhaps disability is a blanket term used to refer to too many types of learning needs, without considering the range of differences. This shows a desire from professionals to give credit to the community that a

deaf child is a part of and wishes to allow them the chance to identify with their deafness and be proud of it. It also suggests that the term 'disability' can hide the specific needs of each child. Holt (2003) described the damage that can be done by a seemingly inclusive school environment for all, my research has found that professionals are aware of the influence of the school environment on a deaf child and the identity they then consider for themselves and their deafness.

The idea that deafness wasn't entirely considered as a disability was also explored as TOD2 mentioned "I wouldn't say deafness is something that first comes to mind when people think 'what is a disability?'", recognising that despite the blanket term being used in the context of education, disability is not the only term used in reference to deafness. This gives recognition that although disability is a term that encompasses deafness, there is still the potential for deafness to be considered as its own term. This supports the idea that deafness is mostly considered as a disability for educational purposes for making provisions, not just for labelling. The difference between the two would be that the child would receive disability provisions but not be referred to as a disabled child, only as a deaf child. Nunes, Pretzlik and Olsson (2001) discussed the idea that there was maybe not enough done by the schools themselves to promote the deaf community for both hearing and deaf children alike. However, it is clear that the professionals involved in this research had a good idea of the reasoning behind the labelling of deafness as a disability and do not see it as a final description of deaf children as disabled but instead as a tool in order to provide support in the classroom, this is further discussed in the following paragraph.

TA1 discusses the "range of disabilities" that all fall under this term and makes reference to the individuality of each disability, emphasising that many learning difficulties and additional needs can be placed under this term but there is recognition between professionals that the broad term can refer to many individuals – "I don't think it makes a distinction between

children, not just in terms of deafness, but there's such a range of disabilities that perhaps it's not fair". The teaching assistants shared the view that referring to deafness as a disability was appropriate in educational contexts to ensure support can be provided and provisions are in place, TA3 described that there are "a lot of needs to be accounted for, and just because they're all labelled under disability, doesn't mean they're all treated the same". TA2's responses agreed with the others, but also made reference to the potential for deafness to be "misunderstood" under a blanket term, highlighting the importance of the deaf culture and ensuring it is recognised from an early age. Gov.uk (2016) describes the wide range of learning difficulties that fit into Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, as all additional needs are placed together in one term.

However, certain benefits to the consideration of deafness as a disability can relate to policy as T3 commented "I think it's probably a lot more to do with funding than labelling" and described that having deafness under a clear definition with others that require provisions for their learning needs in a mainstream classroom can be beneficial. Similarly to the responses of the teaching assistants, it was acknowledged by teachers that this term of disability can refer to a "wide range of different needs" (T1), however, it was clear that measures are in place for different levels of disability. A clear example of this for deafness is the inclusion of the Teachers of the Deaf in provisions for learning, as they are not applicable for all disabilities but are available due to the fact that deafness is so widely recognised as a need for support in mainstream classrooms. There comes the risk that without this blanket term, there may not be enough recognition of deafness and the inability for funding or policy to make sure the necessary provisions are in place to support a deaf child in a mainstream classroom.

British Sign Language in schools

The practicality of using British Sign Language in mainstream schools was discussed with similar opinions that it could be made feasible but there would have to be extra provisions in place to allow that to happen. TA2 commented that the idea of BSL being used in schools would be a good idea to introduce children to signed languages and also noted that “it would take a bit of input though, they’d probably have to get someone in to teach it [BSL] or to have an interpreter, it depends on the level”. This would mean additional staff were needed to implement BSL into a mainstream classroom, as there is no training in BSL for in classroom staff provided by the school. T1, T3 and TA1 were the in class professionals that reported either knowing some sign language or having worked directly with another professional with some knowledge of sign. T1 commented “I do have some BSL knowledge, but we’re talking the alphabet and not too much more” reflecting the reports from the National Deaf Children’s Society that support for learning BSL comes from the teacher themselves and that it is not provided training for staff working in a mainstream school with a deaf child enrolled. TA1 noted that they could fingerspell their “name and other words, it does take a while to do though because I’ve always got to think” showing in these cases that the exposure to BSL is limited, when courses are not provided to assist learning. This limited knowledge due to no training means that the experience that deaf children receive from these staff members is also limited, hindering their ability to have an introduction to signed language in school. There is also rarely the opportunity to learn BSL in the home as 90% of deaf children are born to hearing parents with no experience of BSL themselves (DeGeorges, 2016).

Teachers of the deaf commented that signed languages should be as encouraged as spoken languages in schools. TOD2 reported that BSL is “essential for so many reasons. BSL is a way for deaf people to access the hearing world, and I don’t see why that shouldn’t start in school”. This shows the gap exposed by Harpur (2009), describing the ableism of mainstream

education, as it is designed to encourage the development of spoken language, without regard for the communication needs, or preferences, of deaf children who may wish to sign; showing a preference for spoken language in the mainstream.

TOD3 mentioned that “children are learning spoken language in schools at young ages, why shouldn’t they be allowed to learn signed language too?” referencing both hearing and deaf children. Galatro (2018) noted the benefits of learning language at young ages due to brain elasticity and described the easier learning because of this. If BSL were introduced in mainstream schools to all pupils, there would be an increase in the knowledge of BSL for all. T1 commented on the anxiety attached to learning and teaching a new language – “I don’t know how good I’d be at learning it [BSL], and then teaching it to kids [deaf and hearing]. I suppose it’s the same as anything in that sense though, it’s just a bit more intimidating when it’s a whole other language”. This account further highlights the lack of support for teachers learning BSL, as the pressure of learning and teaching BSL would be lessened by experience and support in learning. Gilbert (2011) reports the experience of a teacher that sought out their own BSL lessons in order to support a deaf child, similarly to the experience that other teachers would have to go through if they wished to provide an education of BSL for deaf students, as it is not a requirement in the curriculum; meaning there is no training provided.

Additional staff were mentioned in the discussions of the possible adaptations that could be made to a mainstream classroom to ensure the curriculum was accessible to deaf pupils as well, TOD1 mentioned that if a child were to be “in a classroom using sign themselves, there would need to be an interpreter if it were their only communication method”. However, Sutton-Spence and Ramsey (2013) discussed the desire for the curriculum to be made accessible by sign, should the child choose to communicate in this way, and give the deaf child the option of which to use, which a BSL/ English interpreter would give them. T2 commented on their level of understanding of the child’s ways of learning BSL, “they learn

some with their teacher of the deaf. I suppose having an interpreter would be the easiest way but I don't have any experience of that. I don't know if that something used more in later education". Implementing BSL/ English interpreters in mainstream classrooms with deaf students from an early age would benefit their communicational development, and would also introduce other, hearing, children to sign. Thoutenhoofd (2014) commented on the benefits of creating a mainstream classroom with accessibility for special educational needs. This inclusive education benefits children as it allows them to have an introduction to deaf communities in early years, as BSL in schools would give both hearing and deaf children introductions to deaf cultures (McKee, 2008).

T2 recalled that they "have used sign in the classroom, for simple things like good morning, good afternoon, please and thank you, just some simple bits". Even these simple terms being used in a mainstream classroom for the deaf child and their hearing peers, gives an introduction to BSL and provides a recognition of deaf communities and cultures. Whilst not commenting on the use of BSL, T3 mentioned that "we try to use gesture with all children, with actions to songs and things like that. I could just be guessing but it seems like a type of introduction to sign". This, whilst not introducing BSL itself, raised an interesting idea that even without the adequate provisions in place, there is still some awareness from teachers of their responsibility to create recognition for children of signed languages and an attempt in place to do so with simple gestures. This could link to the idea of creative sign as discussed by Sutton-Spence and Ramsey (2013) if used with correct signs to support storytelling, to also introduce some simple BSL to children in familiar contexts such as popular stories.

TA3 raised an issue with the implementation of BSL in a mainstream classroom and seemed to favour the development of spoken language – "you come to mainstream school for a reason" – highlighting the points made by Harpur (2009) that mainstream education is tailored to the norm and therefore favours spoken language development. The teaching

assistant(3) also commented that BSL “being used would be a good thing for deaf children, give them some practice and some exposure to sign language”, reflecting that the concept of BSL used in classrooms is a good idea, it was the practicality of implementing it that caused a conflict in their opinion.

The National Curriculum

Participants were asked about the National Curriculum and how well suited the design is to provide an education for a deaf child, and whether there was enough recognition for deaf children in the education system. Despite this thesis straying from the political discussions behind education, it was important to include this section to allow participants to voice their opinions on the policies in place and their effectiveness.

A benefit of having the National Curriculum was outlined in literature by Gibb (2016) who stated that the ideas behind the curriculum design were to create a system for education that enabled each child equal access to opportunities. This was recognised by some of the participants, T1 commented “the reasons behind it make sense in theory, having a set structure for learning to make sure that children are getting the same education”. TA3 agreed with the concept of a National Curriculum and noted that they “don’t see how you would be able to teach such a volume of children in mainstream schools without it”; aligning with the ideas presented by Gibb that equal opportunities for learners with the same methods for their education is the most fair system to have in place.

Although it was somewhat recognised that the aims of a National Curriculum seem fair, when applied to special educational needs, participants shared opinions on the ineffectiveness of policy. T1 reflected that “not all children learn the same way or are able to at the same pace so there needs to be some flexibility and I don’t think there really is” showing a contrast to their previous agreement with Gibb’s comments about a fair system. The opinion showed

that, although the theory of one system for all seems appropriate on the surface, when put into practice there are issues uncovered. T2 stated “I don’t know that you’ll find a teacher who will love the curriculum, it’s quite, well, restrictive in a way. And especially in this context where there are additional needs”; showing a reference to Harpur’s (2009) points about the ableism in education, and that the National Curriculum and systems in place are suited to a typical learner without factoring in any variation in educational styles or needs. There was recognition that the curriculum is not suited to all, not just in the context of deaf students, as T3 commented “it’s inclusive to a point, but it can be quite fast paced, and that doesn’t suit everyone”. TOD1 commented on the National Curriculum to state – “it’s a system in place with an assumption that learners are the same, when that’s not the case. You can have a class with a range of abilities, different learning speeds and educational provisions needed”, agreeing with the points raised by other professionals regarding the suitability of a National Curriculum to educate the masses. TOD1 then continued to question “Where does a deaf child fit into that?” This questioning of the National Curriculum produced a further discussion into the suggestions for improvement, explored further on page 65.

T2 had knowledge of terminology regarding this area and commented on the idea of a ‘cookie cutter’ system – “the cookie cutter idea, not all learners fit into one mould though, and the curriculum doesn’t always have room to accommodate everyone”. This expanded on the idea that the National Curriculum is a ‘one size fits all’ model and that children that do not fit in to this idea of education may get left behind in their learning.

The reasons behind the fast paced nature of the curriculum were also explored as T3 commented on the “pressure to get children up to a certain level which can be stressful enough, and you’ve got to find ways to keep everyone in the class engaged and up to speed”, showing the pressure on teachers to ensure learners are at a “certain level” for assessment. This relates to the ideas by Jones (2010) who explored the negative effects of testing for the

curriculum and the way that these tests can be detrimental to the education of children, specifically at a young age. Testing was also mentioned by TA1 – “it’s all about politics isn’t it really? Working pupils to the test, but it’s all the same test and their not all the same learner so it’s unfair really to expect that system to work”, showing an awareness from in class support that the testing alongside the National Curriculum adds unnecessary pressure to the learners as well as themselves. This pressure in a classroom can only be detrimental to all learners, especially those with educational needs, as they are being expected to keep up with a system that is not designed for them. The impact of a National Curriculum that is not designed for accessibility for deaf students will be explored in the following paragraph.

T1 discussed the accessibility of a National Curriculum for deaf students directly, stating “a deaf child can’t access the curriculum in the same ways as other children, and I can imagine that having a long term effect on their education”. The results found by the National Deaf Children’s Society (2021) that only one third of deaf students achieve two A levels, support this assumption by the teacher that there is potential for long term negative effects without proper provisions in place. There is no evidence that it is a direct link between a lack of accessibility and performance, however, there will be suggestions for improvement on page 65 to explore ways in which outcomes for deaf children can be improved. TA2 also shared opinions on the accessibility of the curriculum for deaf pupils – “provisions are made for deaf pupils to make the curriculum accessible, but it relates back to the communication barriers again, if a deaf student can’t partake in the curriculum, then they’re at a disadvantage in accessing it”. The recognition that applying more work into the communication methods used for deaf students would improve accessibility relate to the results discussed previously regarding the implementation of BSL in schools. The British Deaf Association (2019) campaign to allow BSL to be brought into mainstream schools to be recognised and used as an option for communication for deaf students. The BSL Scotland Act (2015) has introduced

the use of BSL into mainstream schools in Scotland and a further benefit of this has been the awareness of deaf history and culture in schools too, for both deaf and hearing children.

McKee (2008) discussed the further benefits of implementing sign language into the mainstream classrooms in New Zealand, as respect for signed languages would be built as well as an appreciation for deaf culture. The ideas of educating all students on deaf education, history, and culture in mainstream education to give students the experience and knowledge of deaf communities was also discussed by participants. TA2 commented “it would be nice for deaf pupils to feel recognised and acknowledged and to maybe take part in activities or lessons for deaf awareness week or something”, this reflects a desire to celebrate deafness in the mainstream classroom to benefit the identity of deaf pupils and bring more awareness of deaf communities to hearing students. TOD3 made similar points regarding the benefit for hearing and deaf students if more deaf awareness was brought into a mainstream classroom, with such methods as BSL introduced – “the exposure to elements of deafness for all pupils, like with learning some sign language, would create wider accessibility for deaf students in the future with more acceptance and knowledge of communication methods”.

TOD2 spoke of some experience of implementing deaf culture experience into a mainstream classroom – “I’ve worked with small groups from classes and helped teach them some signs and talked a little bit about what I do and why, as well as about BSL and deaf culture, but it would be so much better to have that recognition in the mainstream classroom for all”. This is an example of a step taken to improve the experience of deaf students by providing education for all about deaf culture, the desire from the teacher of the deaf is to have this education as a part of the curriculum to benefit awareness.

Support between professionals

This section concentrates on the relationships between the groups of professionals involved in the research, the relationships described are not necessarily referring to the specific individuals involved in the research. There is also discussion of the experiences of support by each participant, a further exploration into the role of the teaching assistant and the support they provide is offered in the following section of the results as this was an additional, separate theme selected for analysis.

Meetings between professionals involved in the educating of the deaf child in mainstream school were described by Ofsted (2012) with the aim to maintain a high standard of education for the child. Participants discussed these meetings and their effectiveness. T2 described the meetings as an opportunity to “catch up and have a conversation about how the deaf child is doing and coping in class”. This was a rather brief discussion regarding the meetings compared to the response of T3 who stated they experienced the “meetings to discuss the education plan for the deaf child and their additional needs, which parents were involved with as well as the staff which was a benefit to have all of the components working together to identify what was going well and if anything needed to be changed”. This account of the reviewing nature of the meetings supports the descriptions by Ofsted (2012) and the aims of the meetings to maintain levels of communications for the professionals involved. This collaboration for the benefit of the deaf child has been a common topic of discussion throughout and is proven to be successful in the cases discussed by participants.

TOD3 also commented on the benefits of meetings and stated that they were a “good system”, continuing to comment “the communication is there when we have check ins on how the child is doing, which is the most important thing, and it shows how the staff are working together”. This shows the benefit for both the professionals and the deaf child of

having the meetings in place to have updates on progress, as Roux (1996) stated that poor communication between staff would lead to negative impacts on the deaf child's education. However, the experiences stated by participants showed that the measures in place to support communication were beneficial in allowing this communication. This was further consolidated by TOD1 who commented "we have meetings with any supporting staff, some management staff and parents to keep updated with how the deaf child is doing with the provisions in place. It's a good way to keep everyone in the loop and I suppose a good way to support one another". There has been mention in this section regarding the involvement of parents in the education of the deaf child; this will be further explored later in the results.

For some participants, the discussion of the support between professionals was a topic they hadn't particularly considered before the interviews, TOD2 stated "the different job roles are there to support each other, but you mainly worry about how well the child is supported, instead of how the staff are supporting each other". Redmond (2017) had evaluated the idea that a poor understanding between professionals of the responsibilities held by each role could lead to an ignorance between different roles and have a negative impact on how they worked together. Participants showed some awareness of the responsibilities held by other professionals; TOD2 stated "the teacher of the deaf provides the external support and handles the technology side of things for the deaf child, and the teacher and teaching assistant handle the day to day parts in the classroom", reflecting the differentiation of in class and external support.

The ideas of direct and indirect support in the classroom was explored by Powers (2002), examining the role of the teacher of the deaf with the classroom staff. T2 commented on the direct support provided for the child from the teacher of the deaf "I spend a lot of time with the teaching assistants but hardly any time really with the teacher of the deaf, they take the child out during class time so I'm busy for most of their session". This teacher displayed a

desire for more involvement with the sessions that the teacher of the deaf had with the child themselves, and for more of a direct approach to support each staff member in understanding the roles in place. T3 reported a positive experience of the support provided – “support is offered in different ways, and I think between us [the teacher, teaching assistant and the teacher of the deaf] it’s quite good. We [teachers] have a close relationship with the teaching assistant, and it makes it a lot easier to have that constant support in the classroom”. T3 also reported experiences of support from the teacher of the deaf – “they’re clear that they’re always happy to answer questions and to be in contact which is great. It’s just different with external support, you don’t have the same day to day experience with them, but the support is still there”. These experiences reflect the work of Simpson (2017) who shared the difference of the external role of the teacher of the deaf, as they offer advice and support in a different style to the constant support from in class support staff.

TA1 showed an appreciation for the different styles of support provided – “the more obvious support is in the classroom, because it’s constant, but maybe the more important support is from the teacher of the deaf, because they tailor the support we provide and have the expertise in deaf education that we don’t have”. This exemplifies the benefits of multi-agency support as described by Ofsted (2012) as the different perspectives offer a range of support. However, participants in this research seemed to have an idea of different levels of support, some appearing more important than others. TA1 seemed to diminish the importance of the in class support that they, as a teaching assistant, provide, due to the expertise of the teacher of the deaf. Similarly, T1 gave a teacher’s perspective that the roles of the teaching assistant and teacher of the deaf are more beneficial to the child’s learning – “I feel like they [teaching assistants and teachers of the deaf] do a lot more than we [mainstream teachers] do, especially for the deaf child themselves. The one on one work is a life saver and reassures you that the child is getting the best education possible with the time and attention that they

need for the correct support”. These results show an appreciation between professionals for the different roles held and responsibilities and eliminates the potential for ignorance that was described by Redmond (2017). Despite some lack of clarity for some professionals in the responsibilities held by other job roles, there is clear evidence of appreciation for the support provided.

The role of the teaching assistant

The literature discussed made reference to the specific feelings of teaching assistants in their experiences of providing education for deaf children in mainstream schools and the differences between how their roles were perceived by themselves and the other professionals. Therefore, the choice was made to identify this as a theme for separate discussion.

Despite not spending time in the classroom itself to see the day to day activities, the teachers of the deaf still had an understanding of the role of the teaching assistants and the importance of their input to providing education for deaf children. TOD1 noted that “a lot of the children I see have quite close relationships with the teaching assistant, they do tend to spend a lot of time working with them, so it’s natural”, recognising how essential the teaching assistant is for the child as they provide one on one support in the classroom itself. TOD2 also acknowledged the vital role of the teaching assistant – “[they] have a big impact on a child, they’re in a classroom on a daily basis and providing a closer level of support typically than the teacher, especially for children with additional needs”. The amount of responsibility on the teaching assistants was recognised by TOD3 who commented “[they] take on a lot, there’s a lot of children in a classroom and as the second support for them after the teacher, they have a lot to manage, and a deaf child needs a lot of support in a mainstream classroom, it can be a lot of work”. The noting here of the responsibility and expectations of the teaching

assistants relates to the ideas raised by Groom (2006) who described the more personal role held in a child's education by a teaching assistant as they have a closer working relationship with the child and therefore a great influence on their experience of mainstream education.

TA1 also discussed the stresses of their job role as "it can be stressful but it's definitely worth it. You understand that the child needs your help. The main problem is that there can also be another 30 children who need your help at the same time, and they don't always understand that one child can need your attention more, that makes it a struggle at times". This idea of additional responsibilities affecting the experience of the deaf child is explored by McVittie (2007) who noted the possibility of a negative influence on the education of the deaf child due to the other duties of the teaching assistant around the classroom and in support of other children. TA2 also made reference to this issue by stating "obviously it's not just a one to one with a single child and there are a lot of other children to support". Showing that there are many requirements for the attention of the teaching assistant. TA2 did continue to state that "with a deaf child, you feel obligated to be with them and supporting them, making sure they're understanding everything and not getting left behind". The more personal involvement mentioned by Groom (2006) is reflected here as the teaching assistant is concerned for the education of the deaf child and clearly makes it a priority in the classroom. TA2 also mentioned the extra responsibility of being not just a support for the deaf child but also for the teacher themselves, a further responsibility of a teaching assistant – "its pretty much a balance between supporting the children that need you and the teacher's needs too". Salter, Swanwick and Pearson (2017) conducted research from the perspective of teaching assistants in relation to deaf education and found feelings of almost frustration at the lack of understanding that teachers had for the goings on in the classroom. The findings in this thesis did not reflect similar results, as no direct comments were made regarding the feeling that their role in the classroom, nor the experiences of the child were not accounted for, however,

it was made clear in responses that the teaching assistants noted their close relationship with the children and the negative impacts that their additional responsibilities had on this relationship as other children need their support too.

The teachers, when asked to comment on the role of the teaching assistants and their roles in the classroom, were very complimentary and appreciative; T1 described teaching assistants as “vital” and mentioned that they “don’t know how any teacher could get through a day without one, even in a classroom of fully able learners, you still need that extra bit of support”. The close relationship between the teaching assistant and deaf child was recognised particularly by T3 who stated “you see such a connection between a child and a teaching assistant, especially when they’re working on such a one to one basis with them, it just builds a closer relationship. Meaning that they understand the needs of the child so well, it’s reassuring to have that presence in a classroom”

Online learning and the role of technology in deaf education

The advantages of online learning as a tool for education are discussed by Gautam (2020), and the main idea is the accessibility of online learning as ideally, anyone with an internet connection and software to use the online programmes can access lessons, regardless of location. However, when applied to the education of deaf children, problems were identified by the participants, T3 commented “I don’t know how a deaf child could get the support they need in a Zoom or Teams call” due to the need to be engaged in the classroom for supported learning and their needs being communicational. T3 continued – “I’m sure something could be done in terms of subtitles, although I’m not sure how they would work on a live video feed. I know you can have shared screen on these calls, like with visual aids such as a PowerPoint which could help by having most content on it” – giving an idea of possible modifications to the typical online learning to accommodate the deaf child. This relates to the

ideas raised by Spagnola (2020) of ways to improve the methods used for online education to assist deaf learners. One of these suggestions was the experimentation with applications that could produce captions to support their communication and understanding. Additionally, with online video conference applications such as Zoom or Teams, Spagnola suggested prior testing with the teacher and the deaf child to set up a system to support learning and see which platform would work best for their needs. Mich et al (2013) had explored the usefulness of visual aids in deaf education to assist deaf learners in their comprehension skills, showing some benefit of the use of computers and online education with visual stimulus for supporting deaf students.

Durkin and Venturi (2020) discussed the use of BSL/ English interpreters on video call online lessons to provide accessibility for deaf students choosing to communicate through BSL, also discussed was the issues faced by poor connection which would be faced by any online classroom but having an interpreter is dependent on a secure video connection in order to adequately sign. TA2 discussed the idea of BSL/ English interpreters being included in online learning – “I imagine there are some adaptations that can be made to online learning to make it more accessible. If the changes were made like we’d discussed about sign language, maybe having an interpreter on the call could be arranged”.

TOD2 discussed issues that had arisen from the transition to online learning through the pandemic that were unrelated to the problems of the practice of online learning but more related to the wider implications. They are therefore important to include in the results of this thesis. TOD2 noted that “a vital part of our jobs is working one to one with the deaf child, so we’ve had to work around the social distancing guidelines and rules from the government to maintain the service” they also discussed the benefit of relationships with parents and the assistance this has had on maintaining their role - “real benefit of having that relationship with parents too. It’s made keeping up with things a lot easier”. The details of relationships

with the parents of the deaf child for all professionals will be discussed in the following section of results.

When discussing the technology used in the classroom to support a deaf child and their communication methods, there seemed to be an wide understanding of the role of the teacher of the deaf and the knowledge that they provided the service for technology for the use of the deaf child and the other professionals. The teacher and teaching assistant reflected this understanding in their discussions; T1 stated “[technology] is more the area of expertise for the teacher of the deaf. The child used hearing aids and was under their [the teacher of the deaf] supervision for them. Thankfully, there’s never been a real issue with them not working, because I don’t know how much I’d be able to do, but we would contact the teacher of the deaf”. This response shows the reliance of the teacher on the teacher of the deaf for their input with the essential use of technology and its upkeep. TA3 commented on the role of the teacher of the deaf in this context – “it’s a good example of the network because that’s the teacher of the deaf’s specialty and it’s put into the classroom and we’re shown how to use it and supported if needed. It’s a system that works well”. This further displays an understanding of the job roles and the beneficial support provided between professionals.

Iantaffi, Jarvis and Sinka (2003) discussed the potential for embarrassment in the classroom for the deaf child if attention was brought to their need for technology for help with their communication by a lack of understanding or misuse in the classroom. No professionals gave a personal experience of any issues with the technology, however T2 mentioned “I knew another teacher who had used a radio aid with a deaf child and had left it on when they were in the staff room... but I can’t say I’ve had any issues myself”. This shows that the potential is present for issues experienced by teachers when using in classroom technology to support learning, but it does not appear to be very common. The smaller scale sample size of this

study may not accurately represent the issues faced by all teachers using technology in the classrooms for deaf education, however.

The ideas of embarrassment for the deaf child surrounding their use of technology in the classroom as discussed by Iantaffi, Jarvis and Sinka (2003) was discussed by participants. Additionally important for reference in this section of discussion was the comments from Edmondson and Howe (2019) who suggested the potential for a negative influence on a deaf child's education from the teachers if certain responsibilities were not met for support. A reason for embarrassment was suggested to be the hearing peers in a classroom and their reaction to differences in the learning environment. These issues were addressed by participants in the interviews. TA2 discussed the reasons that deaf children did not seem to feel embarrassed of their use of technology to support their communication – “typically students are in similar sets of classes as they move through school so they grow with these things together... I don't think there is any ‘standing out’ or embarrassment from it because of that, they're used to each other and support each other”. This awareness of the feelings and experiences of the deaf child by a teaching assistant further exemplifies the benefits of having their input with discussions of deaf education in mainstream schools as their closer personal relationship allows them a deeper insight.

Whilst teaching assistants have shown to have the closer relationship with the deaf children in the classroom and therefore the ability to discuss the in class feelings around the technology used to support their education, teachers of the deaf work closely on a one to one basis with the child and gain an understanding of their feelings about the technology itself. TOD1 commented – “I think the sense of being different because of hearing aids is something that is only experienced at a younger age, that I've seen anyway. Because the deaf child can have hearing aids from a couple of months after diagnosis, so it's only really when they notice that their friends don't have them, but they're accepted very quickly”. This range of viewpoints is

essential for gaining a true understanding of deaf education in mainstream schools as different professionals see different sides of the deaf child's experience. Ways in which the professionals feel the support between themselves could be improved to benefit deaf education will be discussed on page 65.

TOD3 commented on the work between professionals in the implementation of technology to the classroom for the communication of the deaf child, specifically hearing aids. When discussing the teacher's involvement with the technology, TOD3 commented "I don't think they [the hearing aids] particularly bother anyone. I've never experienced a teacher who was against using any technology in the classroom, or against learning about it. It's one of the provisions in place to make everyone's lives easier". Further displaying the awareness of the co-operation required between teachers, teaching assistants and teachers of the deaf, in order to provide the best possible standard of education for deaf children in mainstream schools.

Relationships with parents

A deaf child's development is supported in the mainstream classroom but also at home, as with hearing children. However, the additional support available for the deaf child is essential for learning and the methods in school must be transferable to the home environment also. Professionals shared their experience of communicating with the parents of deaf students and the benefits this presented for the deaf child themselves as well as the extended support from the parents.

Participants reflected on the involvement of parents of deaf children and reported that communication between the school and home was very consistent. T2 commented that "the relationship with parents is very good, it tends to be with parents of any child with additional needs because you do keep them updated with their progress, perhaps more than other [hearing] children", showing that a relationship between the teacher and parents is important

to inform parents of the child's progress daily. A particular interest is taken by parents to know how their child is managing in the mainstream classroom with the provisions in place; T1 commented that parents "want to know that the right choices are being made for their child and that they're being supported properly and as the teacher you want to show that that is the case". Reflecting a desire for the reassurance of parents that the care provided in schools is adequate and the child is progressing well. The reference to reassuring the parents' choices for their child relates to the works of the National Deaf Children's Society (2020) that discuss the choices for and offer support to parents in selecting a school for their deaf child. As both the parents and the professionals are working together with a common goal to ensure that the deaf child is receiving the correct provisions, these relationships are very important to maintain.

A common concern for participants was the desire to reassure parents of the progress of their child to settle the anxieties raised by parents. TA2 mentioned "parents will always have concerns for their children, and it's completely understandable. Especially in the case of a deaf child because it is a worry that they will be left behind or won't be able to keep up with their classmates but we get to see them most days when they pick their child up and offer that comfort". Calderon and Greenberg (2010) reported the importance of harmonious relationships between a deaf child's school and home environments to benefit learning but also to ensure the child is developing socially.

TA1 shared an experience of parents having particular concerns about a deaf child being educated in the school – "the parents of the deaf child I was supporting were very concerned about them [the deaf child] for a few reasons. The child seemed naturally very quiet and reserved and they [the parents] were worried about them [the deaf child] socially at school". This is an example of collaboration between the school and home environment to identify potential issues in the child's development and share concerns to reach solutions for the child.

TA1 added that the same deaf child “also lip read, and the parents would say that the child would be very tired when they got home from school. I think they were worried about any negative effects on the child’s interactions with other [hearing] children”. The teaching assistant then described that the issues were raised with the other supporting professionals and the decision was made to include more regular breaks for the child in an attempt to allow them some resting time and encourage more social development. This was successful as TA1 reported that the deaf child showed an improvement in their social relationships with other children and the parents had been happy with the outcome. This experience further supports the ideas of Calderon and Greenberg (2010) as the social development of the child was supported at home and by professionals in order to see an improvement.

The National Deaf Children’s Society (2020) offers advice for parents with deaf children in mainstream schools and describes the benefit of the teacher of the deaf for the development of the deaf child themselves and to offer advice and support to the parents. There is acknowledgement of the benefits of the relationship between the parents of the deaf child and the teacher of the deaf from the perspective of the other professionals involved. T3 commented that “the parents of the deaf child had a very good relationship with the school but were also supported by the teacher of the deaf way before they started school”; giving acknowledgement of the network of support provided by the teacher of the deaf who supports the family from the diagnosis of the child. TA3 also gave recognition of the importance of the predetermined relationship between the teacher of the deaf and the parents – “parents have a relationship with the teacher of the deaf before the child comes to school and I think that’s really good because it makes the transition easier and helps settle their mind that even in the mainstream classroom, their child is going to have some specialised support from a teacher of the deaf that’s going to be consistent”. A common benefit mentioned by participants was the consistency for parents of a relationship with a teacher of the deaf as it created a reliable

figure for them to feel reassured by and allowed the deaf child to build a strong relationship with their teacher of the deaf.

The teachers of the deaf recognised the important role they held in connecting the support systems for the child, whilst also acknowledging the support offered back to them by these positive relationships with parents. TOD3 commented that “the support at home is as important, if not more so than the support in school and I think the teachers of the deaf are quite important to that are they’re almost a bridge between the two to ensure that the support is consistent and effective in both settings”.

TOD2 further described the benefits of relationships with parents of deaf students – “you do become quite close with the parents as you can see how much they appreciate everything you do to support their child and it’s great to see that support reflected in the home too. Most parents are very willing to learn how to help to support their child’s learning at home, which is reflected in the child’s progress”. There is acknowledgement of the need for parents to show a commitment to their child’s education as 90% of deaf children are born to hearing parents (DeGeorges, 2016). This acknowledgement is consolidated by TOD1 – “the parents are very important in a deaf child’s education, most deaf children are born to hearing parents and it can be scary, they’ll have a lot of questions and need a lot of advice, but that’s what we’re [teachers of the deaf] there for”.

The supported offered to parents by all professionals involved was reported to be mostly based on reassurance that their child was managing well in a mainstream classroom. In return this support was offered back to the professionals as the learning was supported in the home and reflected in the child’s success in the classroom, particularly in social settings. Despite these accounts showing positive results in the child’s development, it was still reported that only one third of deaf children achieved two A levels as opposed to 55% of their hearing

peers, suggesting that there is still the requirement for improvement to improve the educational outcomes for deaf children from mainstream schools (National Deaf Children's Society, 2021).

Suggestions for improvement

The format of this section of results will go through each participant in turn and explore the suggestions they had for improvements, due to the desire to make suggestions for future research and also to allow a voice to those involved for the changes they would like to see to improve their experience of educating deaf children in mainstream schools.

T1 discussed the need for more teacher training in the field of deaf education as they noted – “I did my degree and yet still didn't feel completely prepared to have a deaf child in my class”. They gave acknowledgement of the unpredictable nature of classrooms and the inability to be prepared for every scenario in a classroom but felt that commented that deaf education in particular “seems very important as it's actually very common”. This awareness of the volume of deaf students in mainstream education is supported by the findings of the CRIDE survey (2020) that of a reported 37,340 deaf children in the United Kingdom, 78% are enrolled in mainstream schools. Humphries and Allen (2008) outlined the need for the inclusion of deaf education in teacher training in America. This is similar in the UK as stated by the teacher that there is the desire from educators themselves to receive more training to increase their knowledge and understanding of deaf education and therefore increase the effectiveness of deaf education in practice in mainstream schools.

T2 noted that the discussions regarding the implementation of BSL in schools had made them understand and recognise the need for the inclusion of BSL in the curriculum. “I think the things that we've discussed about BSL have been really interesting and made me wonder why it's not more of a focus in schools, even for classes that don't have deaf children in”. The

work by Robinson (1997) to explore the possibilities in the implementation of BSL into classrooms with hearing and deaf children and find success in its use, gives the potential for further research to be conducted to encourage changes in the curriculum to recognise BSL and encourage its use.

T3 reflected on their lack of knowledge regarding the technology used for supporting deaf children in mainstream schools – “I’d like to know more about the technology side of things, as what I do know is very limited and I feel like it would benefit me and any deaf child I were to teach, if I knew more about it and different options”. When questioned about the source of this information, it was suggested by T3 that there was potential for further collaboration with teachers of the deaf to assist learning about technology. This transfer of knowledge would be beneficial to the teachers who would gain experience in the use of different assistive technology, whilst also strengthening the relationship between professionals.

TA1 commented that it had been “interesting to think about things a different way than you usually would” and how the process of discussing elements of deaf education in mainstream schools in the context of their own support and the support of other professionals could be useful between the professionals themselves. TA1 also commented “it would be nice to explain, you know, this is what’s working for me. And then maybe explain parts that feel a little more strained to the other people it affects. And to hear first hand about ways I could improve to help and support them”. Ofsted (2012) had reported positive experiences of professionals educating deaf pupils in mainstream education, however it could be beneficial to have more literature sharing experiences and suggesting improvements from a personal perspective of those directly involved.

TA2 suggested that improvements could be made from the inclusion of more staff in the classroom to provide additional support – “it can already be a strain on a classroom to have

just one teaching assistant with such a number of children to support, and with a deaf child in the classroom, I think it would be better to have additional staff to allow one teaching assistant to focus mostly on the needs of the deaf child whilst the other can be spread a little more thinly to support the other children. There could be a swap between those roles throughout the week also”. This suggestion is clear that the strains of a mainstream classroom can be difficult to manage without adequate staff numbers in the room. A potential solution for this relates to the work of Cawthorn (2001) who concluded after observations of mainstream classes with deaf children in, that a reduction of class sizes would benefit the learning of both the deaf child and the other hearing children. This reduction of numbers of students in classes would also lessen the strain on teaching assistants.

TA3 felt that their suggestions for improvement had been explored throughout the interview and did not have any further suggestions that they wished to express.

TOD1 suggested, similarly to T2, that the implementation of BSL in mainstream classrooms is something that should be a priority – “there would be such a benefit from teaching children sign at school age”. As Galatro (2018) reported, the key ages for learning languages are in childhood and so this should be taken advantage of to promote the teaching of signed languages to both hearing and deaf children in schools, also benefitting communication methods.

TOD2 suggested more integration of deaf awareness into the national curriculum to encourage learning for deaf and hearing children as well as increase the knowledge about deaf culture, history and BSL – “it’s something that could very easily be introduced to classes, even by teachers of the deaf on our sessions with the deaf child”. There had been reference to workings with small groups of hearing students to educate them and increase

their deaf awareness by T2 in the results section, and they expressed the desire for a larger scale of this education for pupils in school, provided by teachers of the deaf themselves.

TOD3 also reflected on the topics discussed in the interviews and, similarly to TA1 and TA2 wished to explore options for improving deaf education in mainstream schools – “it’s clear that there are things that could be done to reduce the strain on professionals, support staff should be listened to in their needs, and supported in seeking change”. This also relates to the work of Cawthorn, who called for more awareness of the struggles faced by professionals educating deaf students and for steps to be taken to reduce them, therefore benefitting deaf education in mainstream schools.

Conclusion

The results from interviews were placed into the context of the literature previously reviewed in the thesis, however it must be then considered what these results reveal about the education of deaf pupils in mainstream schools. As well as addressing the effectiveness of the support provided for the professionals responsible for the educating of these deaf children; these results also make suggestions of potential future research to strengthen the literature surrounding deaf education in mainstream schools.

Participants agreed that there should be more promotion of deaf culture in mainstream schools, to both deaf and hearing students, and a way to increase this recognition for deafness would be the inclusion of BSL and deaf studies to the national curriculum. This inclusion would benefit deaf communities as the awareness of deafness and deaf history would increase, as well as awareness of deafness as an individualistic characteristic, rather than a disability where something is lost. The defining of deafness as a disability has been shown in the data to be unfavourable by participants as they explored the connotations of the term and the implications of labelling deafness under the blanket term of disability. Encouraging the use of deafness as a stand alone term, away from disability, would benefit the idea of deaf identity and communities. This recognition of the individuality of deafness would also benefit deaf children in mainstream schools as they would have an idea of the rich and diverse opportunities available to them. As opposed to being placed into the 'norm' by being in mainstream schools, deaf children would be allowed the opportunity to celebrate and explore their deafness without the fear of feeling alienated.

Professionals seemed to have a sufficient understanding of the different roles involved in educating deaf children in mainstream schools and reported success in their interactions with each other. A potential area for improvement would be further exploration into these roles,

and more of an understanding of the actual experiences of other professionals. Some participants expressed the desire to learn more about different areas of deaf education, and additional study could unveil ways in which professionals could make use of each other's expertise in different areas to benefit the application of deaf education.

The implications that the findings of this research could have on policies in place for deaf education in mainstream schools in England could be for the integration of BSL into the National Curriculum, to support the use of BSL by deaf and hearing students alike and to raise awareness. Additionally, there could be changes made to the training provided for these professionals to further enhance their understanding of one another's role and the ways they can support one another.

Further investigation could be made into the inclusion of deaf education into teacher training, to explore whether there would be an impact on educational outcomes for deaf students with the added support. These extra elements of training could benefit both the professionals and the deaf students as teachers would feel prepared to educate a deaf child and may find additional methods to support their students. This training for teachers would be applied to mainstream classrooms and improve the confidence of mainstream teachers in their involvement with deaf education. As teaching assistants and teachers of the deaf reported closer personal relationships with the deaf students due to them working more directly with deaf students, they appeared to have more of an understanding of the experiences and specific needs of deaf pupils in the classroom. Therefore, the inclusion of deaf education into teacher training may allow teachers the deeper insight into the support required by a deaf student and have a positive influence on the learning environment for deaf children in mainstream schools.

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Appendix

Sample interview format

This is a list of suggested questions to assist with the semi-structured interviews in the event that questions, and prompts did not naturally arise. Not all questions were used, and not all questions were used for all participants. Lines of questioning were influenced by the interviews and the participants themselves depending on their experiences.

Any training concerning deaf education that they have received.

- What, if any, types of training have you had in deaf education?
- Do you think there is enough training for staff in mainstream schools to assist deaf children?

How deaf education works in a mainstream classroom.

- How prepared do you think a mainstream classroom is to accommodate a deaf child?
- What adaptations are made, if any, in the classroom when a deaf child is present?

Deafness and disability

- Should deafness be labelled as a disability? Why/ why not?
- What are the benefits/ limitations of deafness being considered a disability?

British Sign Language

- Do you have any knowledge of BSL?
- Does the deaf child you supported have any knowledge of BSL?

-What are your opinions on including BSL in the classroom as part of a curriculum?

Their relationship with the deaf child they have assisted.

- How closely have you worked with a deaf child?

- What changes did you have to make to support them?

- Do you feel that you have enough support to be able to assist them?

Their relationship with other professionals involved.

- Which other professionals were involved in the educating of the deaf child?

- How successful do you feel the network of communication between yourself and these professionals was?

- What improvements could be made, if any, on the support between professionals when educating a deaf child?

Their relationships with the parents of deaf children.

-How much of a relationship did you have with the parents of the deaf child?

-How much influence did the parents have over yourself and the other professionals involved?

-How much collaboration with the parents did you have in comparison to the other professionals?

Their experiences/ opinions of technology used to assist deaf education.

- Have you had any experience of technology used to assist deaf children? If so, what?
- How helpful would you say technology is for yourself and the deaf child in a mainstream classroom?
- Have you experienced any problems with using technology in this setting?

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic

- How have you found that the pandemic has affected your ability to educate deaf children in mainstream schools? If at all.
- How well suited to deaf children do you think online learning is?
- Could you suggest any improvements to online learning that would make it more accessible for deaf children?

Any improvements they think should be made to improve mainstream teaching for deaf children.

- Looking back on things we have discussed; can you think of any improvements that you think should be made to the process of educating deaf children in mainstream schools?
- Would you like any improvements to be made to the support you receive?