



The  
University  
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The Signs of Silence: A cultural-linguistic Critical-  
Constructivist Grounded Theory for understanding  
collective belonging for D/deaf students.

Sarah Grimble

230108257

Supervised by Lynne Mackey and Professor Claudine Bowyer-Crane

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School of Education, The University of Sheffield

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## Abstract

Belonging is a multi-faceted phenomenon with implications across personal, social and academic areas. Existing research conducted predominantly outside the UK provides insight into identity construction, social inclusion and academic progress for D/deaf children and young people. Yet, offers limited insight into *how* D/deaf children and young people understand, negotiate and embody a sense of belonging at school. For D/deaf young people, belonging is particularly vital because their access to communication, social interaction and identity-affirming environments is often shaped by systems that were not designed with them in mind.

Through the lens of Social Constructionism and Deaf Critical Theory, this research adopts a cultural-linguistic model of Deafness, considering Deafness to be a cultural identity rather than an audiological deficit. These lenses consider the role of power, privilege and language in constructing meaning of D/deaf young people's experiences of belonging at school.

Using Critical-Constructivist Grounded Theory as a means of exploratory study, nine Deaf participant-researchers shared their experiences of belonging through in-person interviews, conducted alongside a British Sign Language interpreter. Through constant comparative analysis, the resulting Grounded Theory documents a journey of how Deaf young people embody collective belonging in the face of oppression. The individual components of this journey, accessible language, identity development, shared experiences and Deaf pride, lead to Deaf Consciousness, in which solidarity with other D/deaf peers strengthens and empowers individuals to advocate and challenge acts of oppression in a hearing-dominant society.

Implications for practice and wider policy are provided, alongside nine tenets of Deaf Consciousness, designed to guide the Hearing world towards allyship with Deaf communities.

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## List of Abbreviations

BSL – British Sign Language

CCGT – Critical Constructivist Grounded Theory

CoP – Code of Practice

CRIDE – Consortium for Research in Deaf Education

CRPD – Convention on the Rights of Peoples with Disabilities

CYP – Children and/or Young People

DeafCrit – Deaf Critical Theory

DfE – Department for Education

EHCP – Education, Health and Care Plan

EP(s) – Educational Psychologist (s)

GT – Grounded Theory

NDCS – National Deaf Children's Society

NHS – National Health Service

OFSTED – Office for Standards in Education

RNID - Royal National Institute for Deaf People

SEND - Special Educational Needs and Disability

SEN Plan – Special Educational Needs Plan

TEP(s) – Trainee Educational Psychologist (s)

UK – United Kingdom

UNCRC – United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

# Chapter 1: Introduction

*“No Man is an island”*

*John Donne, 1624*

## 1.1 Defining Belonging

The concept of belonging has become an increasing area of interest within social sciences research, in an attempt to gain theoretical and psychological clarity. Multiple definitions of belonging exist, and there is not one universally considered term, with words such as inclusion, relatedness, and connection often being used interchangeably (Allen & Bowles, 2012; Allen et al., 2016). The need to belong is considered a fundamental human motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) that has significant implications for development and human behaviour across a lifetime (Osterman, 2000; Slaten et al., 2016). Often defined as a subjective feeling of being valued and an integral part of something (Hagerty et al., 1992), the desire to belong involves positive interpersonal relationships with others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Furthermore, belonging is defined as a multi-faceted phenomenon, impacted by intra and inter personal factors, societal and environmental aspects (Cartmell & Bond, 2015), a process of ‘inter-being’ in which *“we do not exist on our own, but because of and in connection with the systems in which we reside”* (Kern et al., 2020, p.709).

Schools play a central role throughout childhood and adolescence, providing a daily social environment to learn, form relationships and navigate their evolving identity. It is therefore plausible that much of the research on belonging has specifically focused on the school environment. Despite the lack of a universal definition, educational belonging is often attributed to the work of Goodenow & Grady, who define school belonging as *“the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected,*

*included and supported by others in the school social environment”* (1993, p.60-61).

This definition is repeatedly cited, as it is said to capture the multifaceted and complex nature of belonging (Allen et al., 2018).

More recently, school belonging has been described as a student’s sense of membership or connection to their school community (Gentzke, 2024). The ever-increasing body of literature is recognition of the growing consensus that children and young people’s (CYP) wellbeing and inclusion are shaped by their experiences of connection within their social worlds. Alongside social development, school belonging has been found to positively impact children’s overall school experience, influencing pupils’ engagement and attainment levels (Allen et al., 2016; Christenson & Thurlow, 2004), motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985; 1991), classroom participation (Osterman, 2000) and pro-social behaviour (Roffey, 2013). A secure sense of school belonging can impact academic success, personal growth and overall well-being (Anderman, 2002; Goodenow, 1993; Lester & Cross, 2015).

St-Amand et al. (2017) conducted a comprehensive review of the literature on school belonging and found four defining attributes for belonging;

1. Positive emotions – feelings of attachment, usefulness, support and pride.
2. Positive social relations – with peers and school staff built from acceptance, encouragement, warmth and respect.
3. Involvement – willingness and desire to meaningfully participate with the group.
4. Harmonisation – through coordinating with the group, including adapting to different situations or people, aligning themselves with others.

These key attributes confirm the multi-dimensional nature of school belonging, as affective (experienced through positive feelings and emotional safety), relational (through connection and trusting relationships with others), active (through participation and involvement) and adaptive (through shared experiences and identity). Belonging, therefore, is not passive; it requires active involvement from self and others.

## 1.2 The prevalence of D/deafness in England

According to the latest data from the Consortium for Research in Deaf Education (CRIDE, 2025), there are approximately 46,000 D/deaf CYP in England. Of these, around 5,100 live in the county where this research was conducted, accounting for roughly 11% of the national total. D/deafness can be described from mild through to profound, with an estimated 53% having a level of D/deafness at a moderate level or higher (CRIDE, 2025). Congenital D/deafness is routinely identified at birth, thanks to the implementation of the Universal Newborn Hearing Screening programme. Since 2009, every child identified as having a severe or profound hearing loss is entitled to treatment under the NHS. Most commonly, this treatment involves fitting a cochlear implant<sup>1</sup> (Raine, 2013). For many, cochlear implants have a positive impact by improving sound perception, enabling access to spoken language. Research suggests that D/deaf CYP who have accessible language (either spoken or signed) at the start of compulsory school age develop their oral language skills within the range of typical development of hearing children (Edwards & Crocker, 2008; Hratinski & Wilbur, 2016). However, cochlear implants do not turn D/deaf children into hearing children (Archbold & Mayer, 2012), and there has been increased critique from the Deaf community that

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<sup>1</sup> Cochlear implants are surgically fitted devices that provide a sensation of hearing through the use of electrical signals to stimulate the auditory nerve. They increase access to sound but do not restore hearing. (RNID, 2025)

assimilation devices such as hearing aids or cochlear implants are being positioned as a cure, designed to eradicate D/deafness (Archbold & O'Donoghue, 2009; Lane, 1999; Padden & Humphries, 2005). A full ethical debate regarding cochlear implants and other forms of technological aids is beyond the scope of this thesis; however, the reader is signposted to Owoc et al., 2018; Melissourgou & Nikolopoulos, 2022; Harris, Hemer & Chur-Hansen, 2023; and Lo et al., 2024 for more detailed exploration of this debate.

In England, 78% of D/deaf CYP attend a mainstream school, with a further 6% educated in enhanced resources provisions in mainstream settings (also referred to as Hearing Impairment or Deaf Hubs). Only 2% attend a special school specifically for D/deaf CYP, commonly referred to as Deaf schools (CRIDE, 2025). In terms of support, 63% receive support for D/deafness (either as a primary or secondary need) through a special educational needs plan (SEN plan) or Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). This means around 37% of D/deaf CYP in England are not identified as requiring any additional support related to their hearing or communication requirements (CRIDE, 2025).

When looking at language, the same report highlights that spoken English is the predominant language used and taught in 88% of schools, with only 2% of schools predominantly teaching in sign language (CRIDE, 2025). Whilst the report did not specify, it could be assumed that this 2% accounts for the teaching within Deaf schools. In the UK, the most commonly used signed languages are British Sign Language (BSL) or Irish Sign Language (ISL). This thesis only refers to the use of BSL.

An estimated 8,000 CYP have severe or profound D/deafness (and are therefore most likely to communicate via BSL), suggesting that only 10% of CYP with severe to profound hearing loss have access to BSL in school (CRIDE, 2025). It can therefore be determined that for the majority of D/deaf CYP, their experience of school is predominantly within mainstream education, with a significant proportion receiving no adjustments or additional support and around 90% being expected to learn and form social connections, using a communication method that is largely inaccessible to them. Given the extensive research highlighting the importance of school belonging and recognising that schools are inherently language-rich environments, it is crucial to consider what impact this has on D/deaf CYP's sense of belonging.

### 1.3 A (brief) history of D/deafness and D/deaf education

Historically, D/deaf people have been considered to be outcasts of society, placed into institutions or asylums and denied the same access to language and education as their hearing counterparts (Lane, 1999). Labels such as “deaf-mute”, “deaf and dumb” were often placed upon them, reinforcing positions of power held by the Hearing world (Nelson, 2011). In the UK, the first school for the Deaf was founded in 1760, an institution which focused on oralist approaches. Oralism<sup>2</sup> gained popularity in the education system, emphasising the use of speech and lip reading, under the assumption that lack of speech was the main barrier to the D/deaf assimilating into society (Lane, 1999).

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<sup>2</sup> Oralism is the system of teaching D/deaf people to communicate by the use of speech and lip-reading rather than sign language, which sought to remove Deaf community and sign language from the Deaf education system (Ladd, 2003)

The history of D/deaf education is marked by shifts in ideology over time. Parallels can be drawn between the evolution of D/deaf education and the numerous reconstructions of inclusive education (also referred to as inclusion). Researchers have argued that inclusion is a political process rather than an educational one (Hodkinson, 2024; Imray & Colley, 2017), suggesting that inclusive education is constructed by policy. Arguably, this can also be applied to D/deaf education. In the UK, as policy direction is determined by the Government in power at the time, differing political agendas promote different inclusive ideas (Haug, 2017). The table below provides a brief history of key educational policies relevant to inclusive and D/deaf education.

*Table 1: Summary of Key Educational Policy*

| Policy / Key dates                                                                                                                             | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| International Congress on the Education of the Deaf (ICED, 1880)<br><br>"The Milan Conference"                                                 | The International Congress on the Education of the Deaf (ICED), held by hearing leaders, banned the use of sign language in education. Instead, adopting an oral-only approach for teaching D/deaf children. This led to the marginalisation of BSL and loss of employment for large numbers of D/deaf adults, many of whom worked as Deaf educators. |
| Elementary Education (Blind and Deaf Children) Act, 1893                                                                                       | First UK legislation requiring the education of D/deaf children. Continued to reinforce oralist approaches.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| The Warnock Report (1978)                                                                                                                      | Introduction of the term 'special educational needs' and 'integrative education', which focused on all CYP belonging in mainstream settings regardless of need.                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 1980                                                                                                                                           | Ban on use of sign language lifted after 100 years.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| The Education Act (1981)                                                                                                                       | Statutory guidance that was built on Warnock's (1978) recommendations. Introduced statements of special educational need. Greater focus on integration in mainstream settings for CYP, regardless of need, although special school placements were still used.                                                                                        |
| The Education Act (1993) and The SEN Code of Practice (1994)                                                                                   | Statutory guidance that informed the first Code of Practice, which gave guidance for schools on their responsibilities for children with SEN                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994)                                                                                                         | Issued by the United Nations and signed by UN countries, including the UK. International policy that pushed the 'right to education for all'. It is regarded as the first conceptualisation of 'inclusion'.                                                                                                                                           |
| Disability Discrimination Act (1995)                                                                                                           | The first anti-discrimination law for disabled people also included educational discrimination.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (Department for Education and Skills, 2001) and Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001) | Strengthened the rights of children with SEN to mainstream education and made educational discrimination unlawful.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

|                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2003                                                                                 | BSL is recognised as a language in its own right in the UK. Non-statutory at this stage, meaning no legal protection, but an important milestone.                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Special Educational Needs: A New Look (Warnock, 2005)                                | Warnock responded to her 1978 report in which she called for a radical review of the SEND system and the issues that have arisen as a result of treating all 'the same'.                                                                                                                                                            |
| The Equality Act (2010)                                                              | Increases rights for protected characteristics to increase equality, requiring schools not to discriminate against a protected characteristic.                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| International Congress on the Education of the Deaf (ICED, 2010)                     | ICED formally rejected the statements and actions resulting from the 1880 Milan Conference and acknowledged the harm that had been caused to the Deaf community as a result.                                                                                                                                                        |
| The Education Act (2011)                                                             | Focused on inequality in education with a change to the notion of inclusion - no longer about mainstream education.                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Children and Families Act (2014) and SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015)         | Biggest revamp of SEN system since Warnock Report (1978). Introduced disability alongside SEN, to become SEND. Led to the revision of the 2001 Code of Practice. Moved from statements to EHCPs and increased the age range eligible for support to 25 years. Recognises use of sign language as a communication preference.        |
| BSL GCSE (DfE, 2023)                                                                 | Proposals to implement BSL at GCSE in schools. Initially expected to be taught from 2025, but not yet in place.                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| British Sign Language Act (Pyper & Loft, 2022)                                       | Legal recognition of BSL as an official language, establishing a BSL Advisory Board and requiring the government to promote and report on the use of BSL and to ensure deaf people have access to information in BSL.                                                                                                               |
| The SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan (Department for Education, 2023) | Proposed reforms to the SEND system. Building of additional special schools and development of local inclusion plans                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| "Every Child Achieving and Thriving" White Paper (Department for Education, 2026) *  | Built on the SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan, but a change in government refocused some of the planned SEND reforms with an aim of reverting to prioritising mainstream education for all and placing greater emphasis on inclusion through the implementation of 'enhanced provisions' within mainstream settings. |

\*Note: At the time of submission, the White Paper was still in the consultation period.

Within D/deaf education, the International Congress on the Education of the Deaf (ICED, 1880) held in Milan in 1880 (herein, referred to as 'The Milan Conference') was a significant moment in its history. The conference, attended by hearing educators, declared that sign language should be banned in all schools, in favour of oralism, as it was believed that the use of sign, even alongside speech, would reduce lip-reading ability and speech production. This ban lasted for 100 years, until it was lifted in 1980. It was not until 2010 that the ICED issued a formal apology, rejecting the statements of The Milan Conference, acknowledging the ramifications of the ban as an act of discrimination and a violation of human rights (ICED, 2010).

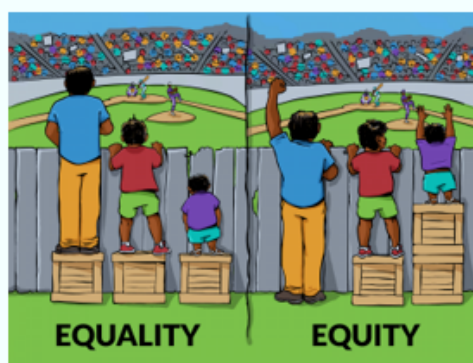
During the century-long ban, D/deafness was perceived by society as something shameful or in need of curing, resulting in the teaching of sign language and Deaf history almost being eradicated (Ladd, 2003). Despite the ban being lifted nearly 50 years ago, there continue to be attitudes and practices that still position D/deafness as something to treat or cure. This will be revisited in [2.3](#), [2.4.1](#).

Within inclusive education, the Warnock Report (DES, 1978) was highly influential to UK educational policy, with modern day policy still tracing back to Warnock (Lindsay, Wedell & Dockrell, 2020). The report recognised the purpose of education should be the same for all children, but that the support each child needs will be different in order to achieve (DES, 1978). This laid the groundwork for early inclusion in the UK. The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) is considered one of the most significant documents catapulting inclusive education into the spotlight of international policy (Ainscow et al., 2019). The statement argued that to achieve inclusion, all schools needed to accommodate all children irrespective of needs and emphasised the inclusion of children identified as having SEND within mainstream schools (UNESCO, 1994). Since then, numerous policy and legislative changes have created a spectrum of perspectives on inclusion (Hornby, 2015) from those who believe inclusion is treating everyone the same (e.g., Katz et al., 2012; Boyle & Topping, 2012; Lacey & Scull, 2015) through to placement in a special school undertaking a fully differentiated curriculum (e.g., Hornby, 2015; Kauffman & Bader, 2014; Thomas & Loxley, 2007). It is necessary to point out that within current policy, D/deafness is considered a disability under the SEND Code of Practice, categorised as a physical and sensory impairment (DfE & DoH, 2015). This is important as the positioning of D/deafness has educational consequences.

As outlined in [1.2](#), the majority of D/deaf CYP are currently educated in mainstream schools. This reflects the national emphasis of ‘mainstreaming’, which has contributed to the closure or reduction of places in Deaf schools. However, this shift has often achieved integration; the physical placement of learners with SEND in mainstream settings (Farrell, 2004; Hick et al., 2009; Lambert & Frederickson, 2015), rather than genuine inclusion. The distinction between the two remains contested, with some arguing that inclusion cannot exist whilst special schools continue to be a dominant part of the education system (Lauchlan & Greig, 2015; Norwich, 2013). Whereas others perceive that interpreting inclusion to mean ‘the same’ is fundamentally non-inclusive (Imray & Colley, 2017) as it risks imprisoning CYP in environments unsuited to needs and is reductionist to individual differences (Thomas & Whitburn, 2019). Furthermore, within D/deaf education, advocates argue that although oralism is no longer the dominant pedagogical stance, its ideology has been absorbed into inclusion instead; by placing D/deaf CYP in mainstream schools under the banner of inclusion, this actually isolates them, leading to long-term educational and psychological harm (Ladd, 2003).

**MEMO EXCERPT: 22/11/24**

I have been reflecting on the idea of a continuum of inclusion (Cigman, 2007), the issue with achieving inclusion appears to be a lack of consensus on what inclusion is? If nobody can agree on what it should look like, then how can it ever be achieved? The debate around whether the existence of special schools means there cannot be inclusion is interesting. Prior to working with educational psychology, I taught for 5 years in a special school. Reflecting on this experience, I can recall many students sharing how it was the first time they had made friends, felt understood by staff, achieved qualifications. For me, those are all aspects of inclusion. This reminded me of the equality vs. equity image.



When I think of inclusion, it is not about everyone having the exact same, but about everyone getting what they need so that their opportunities and experiences can be equal. With that in mind, my previous experiences working in a special school has shown me that for some CYP, the environment special schools can provide is the closest they have been to inclusion. This is important for me to acknowledge and this prior experience may impact on how I view or construct the research.

## 1.4 The Inclusion illusion

Imray & Colley (2017) controversially stated that 'educational inclusion is dead'. Whilst likely intended to be provocative, inclusion is clearly a complex and controversial issue, particularly when it comes to the education of those with SEND, or perceived as having SEND (Farrell, 2010; Slee, 2011). Inclusion is plagued by contradictions and disagreement around its implementation; even the SEND Code of Practice (DoE & DoH, 2015) promotes inclusion only if it is not incompatible or to the detriment of the efficient education of others, suggesting inclusion is inclusive, until it's not. Ultimately, the current education system favours achievement and attainment (Ainscow et al., 2012), and its goal is not always aligned with what is meaningful for its learners (Imray & Colley, 2017). Within D/deaf education, this is particularly relevant, as the historical legacy of oralism means inclusive D/deaf education remains largely aspirational for many CYP, reflecting long-standing conflicting views on what participation in school life should look like. Implications for future policy are further considered in [5.3.2](#).

## 1.5 Discourses of D/deafness

There is growing diversity within the D/deaf population, due to differences in levels of auditory D/deafness, use of assistive technology, and language acquisition, including spoken English and BSL. This results in multiple constructions of D/deafness and what it means to be D/deaf. These are considered below;

**The Medical Model (of disability)** defines a problem as being within the individual, a diagnosable deficit, disorder or disability in need of treatment or fixing. The medical model pathologises D/deafness as a biological deficit categorised by a lack of, or loss of, hearing. Emphasis is on an audiological definition, decided by hearing 'norms' (Lane, 1995), placing a hierarchy on hearing being the desired position. This hierarchy is something Ladd (2003) describes as *phonocentric value*,

which assumes that a person who cannot hear or speak is less intelligent or inferior by placing a higher value on those who can hear and speak. Focus is therefore placed on the need for technology and compensatory measures, with the aim of integrating the D/deaf person to be part of a Hearing-dominant world. Policy and legislation could be said to adopt a medical model perspective, frequently defining D/deafness as a disability (e.g. Convention on the Rights of Peoples with Disabilities (CRPD. 2006); The Equality Act, 2010; The SEND Code of Practice, 2015).

**The Social Model (of disability)**, in contrast, defines a problem as being the result of societal or environmental barriers rather than a problem within the individual (Oliver, 2013). Within this model, D/deafness is acknowledged as a physical impairment (in line with policy constructions), but D/deafness is not seen as the cause of disability. Instead, D/deafness becomes disabling when communication approaches are restrictive or not accessible. The Social Model also accounts for varying degrees of D/deafness and the impact of wider factors, such as access to sign language, with focus placed on adjustments being made to societal attitudes and structures.

**The Cultural-Linguistic Model** rejects the positioning of Deafness as a disability; instead, it considers Deaf people to be members of a cultural and linguistic minority group. Within this model, Deafness is an identity, not a disability or a deficit. It is considered that the unique experiences of a Deaf person cannot be fully considered by an umbrella term of disability (Ladd, 2005). There appears to be no universal definition of 'Deaf Identity' or its origins, Ladd & Lane (2013) suggest that Deaf cultures have long been embedded within majority cultures (i.e. Hearing world). It is important to acknowledge that D/deafness is unique to the individual, and multiple constructions of D/deaf ways of being exist. Whilst there is a growing move towards a cultural identity, there are some who feel separating from a disability label risk

minimising the disadvantages and difficulties faced by many D/deaf people (Young & Temple, 2014). This is also often positioned as an attempt at increased social inclusion, believing that society may view them more favourably if they are not disabled (Lane, 1995).

In the context of inclusion, the move towards inclusive education being recognised as a fundamental human right signals a possible shift from medicalised views towards a social model within educational discourse (Hodkinson, 2024). Certainly, within educational psychology, the social model is widely accepted, and a move towards a critical educational psychology reflects efforts to challenge pathologisation of SEND (e.g. Corcoran, Goodley & Billington, 2015). However, the social model has been critiqued for oversimplifying disability and risking treating disabled people as a homogenous group. While others argue that not all barriers to disability are environmentally created, and some aspects of disability, are by their very nature a consequence of that disability (Shakespeare & Watson, 2001). From this perspective, the assumption that all societal barriers can be removed is considered unrealistic (Oliver & Barnes, 2012).

The cultural-linguistic model also receives similar review in terms of being an oversimplification, and for assuming a commonality of experience based on being D/deaf or the use of BSL. For example, a D/deaf BSL user may perceive themselves as disabled within a hearing-centric society, while another individual who uses speech as a result of assistive technology may identify as culturally Deaf. These complexities mirror wider identity debates, such as those within the autistic community regarding person-first versus identity-first language.

This research adopts a cultural-linguistic model, reflecting how the participant-researchers self-identified [\(1.8\)](#), whilst recognising that this perspective does not represent all D/deaf people.

## 1.6 Defining D/deaf terminology

Alongside models of D/deafness, it is important to note different terminology in existence. Whilst historical, derogatory terms have been abolished, replacements in regular vernacular today still risk offence to those they are designed to describe. Terms such as hearing loss, hearing impaired/impairment are widely considered offensive within the Deaf community as it implies they are lacking in something or are not a fully-formed individual as a result of their hearing level. These terms appear throughout legislation, policy and in a wide variety of settings, providing further examples of the impact of policy decisions.

The following provides an outline of distinctions in terminology used within this study;

- deaf (lowercase d) – refers to those who view their deafness as a primarily audiological condition.
- Deaf (capital D) – refers to those who perceive their Deafness as part of their cultural identity.
- D/deaf – to cover both perspectives, used when a clear distinction is not known/understood/required.
- D/deaf and Hard-of-hearing (D/HH) – widely accepted terminology to cover the broader population. D/HH formed part of the initial inclusion criteria [\(3.5.1\)](#), however this term is not adopted throughout the research, as participant-researchers self-identified as either Deaf or deaf, rather than HH.
- hearing (lowercase h) – to define a non D/deaf person. An individual with the ability to hear, who communicates through spoken language.

- Hearing (capital H) – used to make a distinction when the word is used as an entity in itself, e.g., the ‘Hearing world’, the ‘Hearing way’.

## 1.7 Researcher interest and prior knowledge

This reflective piece was written in October 2024 at a time I was beginning to piece together the early ideas for this research. It documents my ‘position’ within the research at that time and what initially influenced the direction the research took;

*Looking back, I can see that my relationship with hearing and communication has been more complex than I previously acknowledged. Growing up, I experienced frequent pain in my ears and recurring infections. I can recall countless nights unable to sleep, with my parents trying everything they could in the hope the pain would subside. I had several operations through childhood intended to improve my hearing and reduce blockages. Audiology assessments placed me within the ‘mild hearing impairment’ range, meaning I am unable to hear certain sound frequencies. I learnt to lip read as a child, and I remember my mum teaching me to fingerspell the alphabet and basic signs. Even as a child I was fascinated that you could use your hands to communicate instead of using your voice – although I did not have the words to articulate those thoughts yet - I can distinctly remember being excited to be able to sign my name and go into school to show my friends!*

*As I got older, I learnt how to manage triggers to ear pain and my hearing did not form part of my identity. I did not consider myself to have hearing loss; in fact, the only reminders I had would be from infrequent audiology tests. Most people that know me now, are likely to be unaware of this part of my childhood history. I came to understand what helped and hindered my communication, such as difficulty separating foreground from background noise, finding it harder to follow a conversation if I could not see*

*someone's face, or simply smiling and nodding if I was not 100% sure what someone had just said but did not have the confidence to ask them to repeat it.*

*But these were simply a part of me. I lived, and still live, within the Hearing world and consider myself to be hearing.*

*It was only during the Covid-19 Pandemic, a time when the wearing of masks was mandatory, that I realised how much I relied on lip reading far more than I thought. The inability to see someone's full face during conversation, paired with speech sounding muffled when heard through a mask, made me aware of the habits and strategies I had relied on for years.*

*Prior to, and during the pandemic, I was working as a tutor at a specialist college, teaching young people with a range of communication differences, including D/deaf students. I began learning BSL during this time and found myself increasingly around D/deaf students and staff. I still remember walking into my first BSL class, on a quiet Monday afternoon after the students had gone home. There was a large poster on the wall that read;*

***"Deaf people can do anything that hearing people can do, except hear."***

*At the time, I remember thinking, quite dismissively, "well obviously!". It seemed an unnecessary statement to have as a piece of wall art. What I did not yet realise was that for much of wider society, it is in fact not 'obvious' at all. The quote, coined by Dr I. King Jordan (I later found out) emerged from the 1988 "Deaf President Now!" protests at Gallaudet University; an important moment in the education of D/deaf and hard of hearing students that resulted in the appointment of Dr I. King Jordan as the university's first D/deaf president.*

*As I spent more time at the college and continued to learn BSL, I heard stories from D/deaf colleagues who had attended Deaf institutes as children - stories of how they were treated as outsiders to society, placed in confinement and isolated, forced to conform to hearing expectations. Students spoke about how college had been their first opportunity to meet other D/deaf people, make friends and achieve qualifications. Through this, I became more aware of the value and importance of Deaf culture and Deaf identity and I came to see that quote differently. What had once seemed obvious, now felt more powerful; a source of strength and empowerment addressing societal misconceptions that to lack hearing equates to a lack of wider ability.*

*Upon starting the doctorate, having space to reflect and consider past experiences including my own childhood and my time working with the Deaf community has made me more aware of the assumptions I've held but also of wider societal beliefs. One university session in particular stands out – during a Social Graces (Burnham, 2012) 'line of privilege' exercise, I found myself at the 'least privileged' end of the line within my cohort for the social grace of 'Ability'. A situation that surprised me at the time, given that I have never equated my hearing level to a lack of ability. This experience, although not comparable to experiences felt within the Deaf community, gave further insight into societal perceptions towards difference.*

### **1.7.1 Positionality as a hearing researcher**

When working with marginalised groups, it is important to recognise power dynamics in play, particularly as these groups often do not have equal weighting in society (Fraser, 2000). In traditional research, participants often play a passive role, with the researcher (s) interpreting and informing all decisions. This research attempts to disrupt those power structures and traditional perceptions on knowledge production. The first step in doing this is to acknowledge what those structures are. As outlined in

my reflective statement, I identify as hearing and align myself with the Hearing world. I am also an adult researcher meeting with CYP in their educational setting, where there is potential for an unsaid hierarchy, particularly given the education system typically positions CYP as having less knowledge, voice or agency than the adults around them (Flynn & Hayes, 2021; Greene & Hill, 2005). Alongside this, my personal and professional experiences working with members of the Deaf community has given me insight and some prior knowledge such as working with interpreters and some communication through sign language.

The chosen methodology (Critical-Constructivist Grounded Theory (CCGT, Charmaz, 2024)) and specifically, the co-constructed research design is intended to balance some of these power dynamics and recognise potential biases. CCGT enables participant voice to shape and inform the research direction based on what is considered to be of most importance to them and their living<sup>3</sup> experiences. CCGT also acknowledges that researchers bring their own experiences to research. These methodological decisions are revisited in [3.2](#), [3.3](#), and [3.4](#).

When reflecting on potential biases prior to commencing interviews, I made the decision to not reference my own childhood experiences as I recognise that they are not comparable to the experiences of being D/deaf and did not want to influence or direct what was chosen to focus on as a result of my disclosure. I did however, disclose that I had previously worked with D/deaf CYP and knew some basic sign language (Level 1), this was disclosed via a brief presentation I gave to potential participant-researchers during which I introduced myself, gave an overview of the research and

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<sup>3</sup> The term 'living experience' is used throughout in place of 'lived experience' in recognition that D/deafness is ongoing and lifelong.

opportunities for questions ([Appendix 1](#)). For further transparency, I will outline below some initial assumptions or potential biases I held at the start of the research.

1. D/deafness is an individual experience; it can be both a disability and a cultural identity. For individuals whose Deafness is part of their cultural identity, it is often something to be celebrated and proud of rather than something to be fixed. For individuals whose D/deafness is focused on their audiological hearing loss, it can be disabling and significantly impact their access and engagement with the world around them. All perspectives are equally valid.
2. There are differing and often contentious opinions about the use of assistive aids and technological devices such as cochlear implants, radio and hearing aids, use of speech as a primary method of communication. Whilst not directly related to the focus of this research, this awareness is acknowledged.
3. To me, belonging is a feeling, a 'felt sense' influenced by the environment you are in and the people around you.

These initial assumptions are revisited and reflected on in [5.7](#), at the end of the research process to consider how my thinking has changed and evolved since the beginning of the process.

## 1.8 Participant-researchers

CYP's participation in research cannot be considered without considering the impact of power (Hart, 1992). Within traditional research, there are connotations of power. The researcher is the authority figure, in which those involved are participating (as the researched group) in the researchers' study. Their experiences are 'data' that is collected and interpreted and presented to the world by the researcher (Boylorn & King, 2008). This perpetuates a hierarchy, in which those involved are serving as a representation of the community or topic being researched, for the duration of the

study. The use of the word 'participant' does not align with the ethical, philosophical and methodological position adopted in this research (this is outlined further in [3.2](#), [3.3](#) and [3.4](#)). This research adopts a co-research approach, in which knowledge production is a collaborative process with all involved having a role in aspects such as knowledge collection and analysis (Clark et al., 2022). In that sense, those involved in this research are not merely passive subjects and to define them as 'participants' is methodologically and ethically inaccurate.

There are however limitations in the language of research, when considering alternative terminology that more accurately defines the positioning of this research. Co-researcher is an alternative term used within participatory research methods. Co-researchers are considered equal partners helping to design the research, collect and analyse the data and interpret findings (Boylorn & King, 2008). This collaborative process enables researcher and co-researchers to share knowledge and responsibility for the research output. This collaborative nature aligns more closely with the positionality and design of this research, however, there are different levels of co-research participation and co-construction. Within this research, this should not be confused or interpreted as equal contribution or decision-making. Participants have made equitable contributions, at a level they are able to actively participate (i.e. through being the experts of their own living experiences, influencing the research direction and reviewing the knowledge constructed in relation to those experiences). The participants however do not have the same level of academic or theoretical knowledge and have not engaged in the wider reading underpinning this research (nor should they be expected to). Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that as this research is conducted as partial fulfilment of my Doctorate in Child and Educational Psychology, it cannot be ignored that there is significant personal and professional benefit to me. Some decisions have been made that are dictated by course

parameters/logistics of completion such as working to expected timeframes and ensuring original authorship. As such, the entirety of the thesis has been written by me and not in collaboration with the participants. Whilst co-researcher is more aligned with the approach undertaken in this research, it is acknowledged that for the reasons outlined above, they are not co-researchers in the ‘purest’ sense.

Returning to the literature to explore further alternatives led to ‘participant-researcher’, in which “*actionable insights and solutions for pressing social issues*” are prioritised (Onwuegbuzie & Abrams, 2025, p. 4). In that sense there is an advocacy-focus in which the research aims to instigate change or advance understanding on a social justice issue by also considering the power structures in place within the research design itself and the role and position of the participants within that (Onwuegbuzie & Abrams, 2025). As outlined in [1.7](#), I identify as a hearing researcher, therefore consideration is needed as to how knowledge is constructed alongside D/deaf participants to ensure that I am not speaking for them or doing research to them. The relationship between researcher and participant-researcher is something Roller & Lavrakas (2015) describe as the ‘research space’, in which the collaborative relationship between both parties influences the research direction and interpretation. This research space, links to earlier work by Kvale (2006) who explored the role of power dynamics in research and considered that the research environment created provides differing levels of control and participation for those involved, and at different stages (e.g. the researcher may dictate the initial questions asked, but the participant-researcher decides how it is answered, what is shared or not shared and the direction the interview takes from that initial question, through how they answer it).

The concept of ‘space’ is a recurring theme throughout this research alongside considerations of social grouping and ‘insider/outsider’ positioning. This is explored in

greater depth within the context of the research findings in [2.4](#) and [2.7](#). However, it also has relevance to the research design as;

*“The intimacy of qualitative research no longer allows us to remain true outsiders to the experience under study and, because of our role as researchers, it does not qualify us as complete insiders. We occupy the space between...”* (Corbin-Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 61)

In this research, those involved are participants, in that they have actively provided the ‘data’ for the research, but they are also researchers as they have been involved in making decisions relating to the research direction. The co-constructed research design gave differing levels of control to each party at different stages. This can be considered as adopting a both/and perspective which rejects the notion of an either/or position. In line with the constructivist epistemology outlined in [3.2](#), knowledge is co-constructed between all involved in the research, with participants occupying a shifting dual role throughout, initially sharing their living experiences (role of participant), before actively shaping findings through ranking and prioritising emerging findings and providing feedback (role of researcher).

For transparency, this is outlined in further detail in the table below.

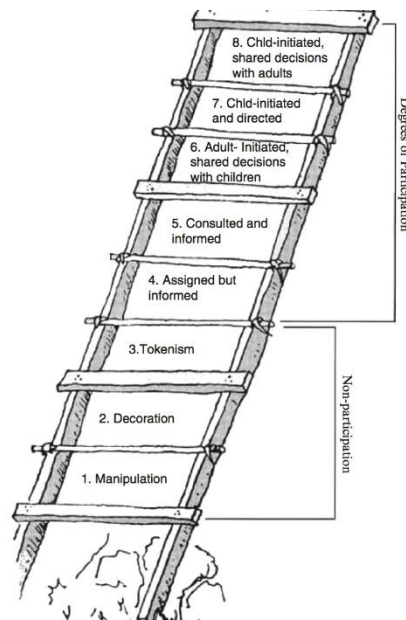
*Table 2: Participant-researcher participation*

| Research Stage                                                                          | Involvement                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Early research design and ethics approval process including initial research questions. | Sarah.                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Development of phase 1 interview questions                                              | Sarah in collaboration with a Deaf adult at the setting in which participant-researchers were recruited. <i>(This was due to time constraints as the participant-researchers had not been recruited at that stage).</i> |
| Phase 1 interviews                                                                      | Participant-researchers were all asked the same initial questions but had agency over what they chose to focus on and share in relation to their own experiences. (See <a href="#">3.6</a> for further details).        |
| Initial and focused coding and building of tentative categories.                        | Sarah.                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Generation of phase 2 questions (based on tentative categories)                         | Sarah, informed by what participant-researchers had shared during phase 1 interviews.                                                                                                                                   |

|                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Phase 2 interviews                                                 | Participant-researchers were given statements relating to the analysis process so far and were asked to prioritise what was most important to them, they also were asked if they felt anything needed to be added or changed. I.e. they reviewed the analysis process so far. (See <a href="#">3.7</a> for further details). |
| Remainder of analysis process/Theoretical coding/Theory generation | Sarah, the direction this took was directly informed by the priority areas identified by the participant-researchers in phase 2.                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Final Theory                                                       | This was presented to participant-researchers for their feedback and review.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Full Thesis write up                                               | Sarah.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |

To explore this further, the role of those involved in the research is considered in relation to the Ladder of Participation (Hart, 1992), shown in Figure 1.

*Figure 1: The Ladder of Participation. As depicted in Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship (Hart, 1992).*



This research sits within *level 6: Adult-initiated, shared decisions with CYP*. The early implementation and design were initiated by me, with the research designed so that participants shared the decision-making process by reviewing and prioritising the research direction at different stages. This research positions those involved in it as the knowledge holders and meaning makers, aligning with a 'guided qualitative inquiry' (Clark et al., 2022) where the CYP are collaborators in the sense making processes, rather than being direct designers of the output itself.

For the reasons outlined above, this research adopts the term participant-researcher as they have actively shaped the research process rather than being merely passive subjects within it. This was an intentional methodological and ethical consideration made throughout the research process, emphasising the importance of agency, voice and co-production within this research. In that sense, the research has been conducted *with* and *for* the participant-researchers, rather than *on* or *to* the participants (Bodén, 2021).

The table below introduces each of the participant-researchers;

*Table 3: Participant-researcher information*

| Name*     | Use of technological devices (e.g. Cochlear implant, hearing/radio aids) | Brief background                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Charlotte | Yes                                                                      | Charlotte identifies as Deaf. She attended a mainstream school before moving to a Deaf school. She uses BSL alongside some speech and lip-reading.                                                                    |
| Archie    | Yes                                                                      | Archie identifies as Deaf. He attended several mainstream schools before moving to a medical school. He uses BSL alongside some speech and lip-reading.                                                               |
| Hannah    | Yes                                                                      | Hannah identifies as Deaf; this is a recent shift in identity from increased access to the Deaf community. She attended a Deaf hub within a mainstream school. She uses a mix of BSL, speech and lip-reading.         |
| Jasmine   | Yes                                                                      | Jasmine identifies as Deaf. She attended a mainstream school before moving to a Deaf school in Year 9. She uses a mix of BSL, speech and lip-reading.                                                                 |
| Alek      | Yes                                                                      | Alek identifies as Deaf. He went to school outside of the UK, before moving to a UK Deaf school for secondary school. He communicates through two sign languages (BSL and home language sign).                        |
| Mario     | Yes                                                                      | Mario identifies as Deaf. He attended a mainstream school before moving to a Deaf school. He communicates in BSL.                                                                                                     |
| Tom       | Yes                                                                      | Tom identifies as Deaf. He attended a Deaf school for the entirety of his education. He communicates in BSL.                                                                                                          |
| Holly     | Yes                                                                      | Holly identifies as Deaf. She attended a Deaf school for the entirety of her education. She communicates in BSL.                                                                                                      |
| Nadia     | Yes                                                                      | Nadia identifies as deaf. She uses speech alongside some sign-supported English. She attended a special school. Nadia did not begin to learn BSL until she started college. She is in her first year of learning BSL. |

\*Pseudonym's

## 1.9 Research aims and initial research questions

Despite extensive research into school belonging, its relevance for D/deaf CYP remains underexplored. D/deaf CYP experience unique differences and challenges compared to CYP with disabilities/from marginalised groups, most noticeably, communication barriers, varied language options, level of auditory D/deafness, use of assisted technology, and access to other D/deaf people. This research aims to contribute to the arena of D/deaf experiences of belonging by increasing understanding of how D/deaf CYP construct belonging. This study positions nine D/deaf participant-researchers at the forefront, seeking to generate a theory grounded in their living experiences.

In line with CCGT methodology, the research direction was informed by what was felt to be of most importance to the participant-researchers, however, to begin phase 1, three initial research questions were constructed;

1. What does it mean to belong to a school community for CYP who are D/deaf?
2. What factors support and hinder CYP who are D/deaf to feel a sense of belonging within their community?
3. Do the spaces inhabited by D/deaf CYP make a difference to feelings of belongingness?

These initial questions are revisited in [5.2.1](#), [5.2.2](#), [5.2.3](#), in relation to the findings from the research.

### 1.9.1 Chapter Summary and Thesis Overview

Critical-Constructivist Grounded Theory (CCGT) is an inherently iterative process that moves between data collection, coding, reviewing the literature, memo-ing and category development until the final CCGT is constructed (Charmaz, 2024). However, the linear structure of the thesis can make it difficult to demonstrate this cyclical nature.

To support coherence, the following thesis overview signposts the reader to how each stage/chapter of the thesis connects to the evolving process. Alongside this, signpost links are threaded throughout the thesis which allow the reader to jump to sections where concepts explored are revisited.

Chapter one establishes the foundation for the thesis by introducing the research through an initial scoping review undertaken prior to data collection. This early review explored broader conceptualisations of belonging, including definitions and defining attributes and provides a conceptual starting point that is revisited in the main literature review ([chapter two](#)), and when considering this in relation to the research findings (chapters [four](#) and [five](#)). This chapter also outlined the prevalence of D/deafness in England, access to language, educational settings and a brief history of D/deaf education. In addition, the evolution of inclusion and D/deafness in educational policy is introduced. Collectively these aspects detail the contextual backdrop that this research is situated in. I return to policy and societal discourses in both [chapter two](#) and [chapter five](#), when reviewing the literature and integrating the CCGT within existing knowledge and wider implications.

Key decisions central to the research process are signposted, including the adoption of a cultural-linguistic model of Deafness, the use of terminology and the introduction of the participant-researchers. In line with CCGT, I also acknowledge ethical and methodological decisions relating to my positionality as a hearing researcher, recognising pre-existing knowledge for transparency and reflexivity. Decisions that are explained in greater depth in [chapter three](#). The chapter concludes by outlining the research aims and questions which guide the decisions made throughout.

Chapter two builds on the foundational decisions introduced in chapter 1, particularly exploration of systems and ideologies of oppression, identity as a social construct, spaces of belonging and the political nature of belonging. Although positioned early in the thesis as a standalone chapter (in line with traditional thesis structures), the literature review was undertaken alongside and throughout the data analysis process, reflecting the iterative nature of Grounded Theory. The chapter develops the core concepts that underpin this research - systems of oppression, personal and collective identity formation, allyship, transitional and liminal spaces, and the politics of belonging. These concepts deepen the theoretical landscape within which the interpretive findings in chapter four were constructed. All literature included within this chapter has direct relevance to the CCGT presented in [chapter four](#).

While this chapter precedes the methodological discussion in [chapter three](#), it is grounded in the critical-constructivist stance detailed there, particularly the examination and critique of how political structures, laws and policies shape everyday experiences. Finally, chapter two establishes the conceptual foundations for understanding Deaf consciousness and collective belonging, both of which are central to the interpretive findings that follow in [4.1](#).

Chapter three builds directly on earlier decisions explored regarding the role of participants as participant-researchers and the researcher's hearing positionality. It outlines the ethical and methodological considerations that shaped the study, including issues of voice and representation and the use of BSL interpreters and the potential influence on data construction, analysis and interpretation. The chapter establishes the methodological foundation of the thesis through the adoption and

justification of Critical-Constructivist Grounded Theory embedding this within the philosophical positioning of the research and researcher.

In addition, this chapter details the methods used and the analytical processes undertaken, including the coding phases, memo writing and theoretical integration. Although many of these decisions were made early in the research process, they are presented as the third chapter to align with traditional academic structuring.

Chapter four presents the interpretive findings and the CCGT constructed through the iterative research process. It details the core theoretical categories of the thesis, positioning BSL as a cornerstone from which to build towards Deaf consciousness and collective belonging. These categories extended from the methodological commitments outlined in chapter three and the theoretical landscape established in chapters one and two. Specifically, they address navigating oppression ([1.3](#), [2.3](#), [3.4.1](#), [3.4.2](#)), representation and 'space' between worlds ([1.4](#), [2.4.2](#), [2.7](#), [3.5](#)), Deaf consciousness and the power of voice and advocacy ([1.5](#), [2.5](#), [2.4.2](#), [2.4.3](#)) and collective belonging ([1.1](#), [2.4.4](#), [2.6](#)). Together, these categories form the interpretive framework through which participant-researchers' experiences are understood.

This chapter also prepares for the synthesis and theoretical contribution developed in chapter five. In particular, the category of Deaf consciousness is advanced as a key theoretical outcome of the research, with implications for practice, policy and allyship.

Chapter five synthesises and extends the work of the preceding chapters, with emphasis on the theoretical foundations established in [chapter two](#) and the interpretive findings presented in [chapter four](#). It offers a critical, integrative discussion of the

research outcomes, in line with the critical-constructivist stance detailed in [3.4.4](#), in relation to the wider literature, placing Deaf consciousness as a central theoretical contribution and positioning belonging as a relational, collective experience shaped by social, cultural and political forces. The chapter revisits the researchers' positionality, reflecting on how this influenced decision making, interpretation, and the co-construction of knowledge throughout the thesis. In doing so, it draws together the core concepts of the thesis in direct relation to the research questions outlined in [1.9](#), demonstrating how each conceptual strand contributes to the overarching theoretical framework.

The practical and policy implications of the research are examined, culminating in the presentation of Nine Tenets for Deaf Consciousness. These tenets, grounded in both the interpretive findings and relevant literature, offer guiding principles for hearing professionals engaging with Deaf communities and provide a foundation for more inclusive, cultural-linguistical responsive practice. The chapter also addresses research quality, limitations, and learning points, identifying areas for future inquiry. Implications for Educational Psychology practice, wider educational professions, and inclusive educational policy are explored, highlighting the broader significance of the research. The chapter concludes with final reflections on the thesis journey, drawing together its conceptual, methodological, and interpretive contributions.

Finally, this research has an emancipatory/activist stance, and the process of questioning, challenging, unlearning and relearning assumptions is an ongoing journey. It is recognised, that the reader, along with the researcher, will be at different points on that journey. This thesis, therefore, invites the reader to remain open to perspectives that attempt to move beyond mainstream discourse, and to engage with ideas that may prompt new reflections, considerations or further questions.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter outlines the Grounded Theory (GT) approach to reviewing the literature, alongside presenting the main literature review exploring the conceptualisations of belonging, systemic oppression and identity development relevant to the Critical-Constructivist Grounded Theory (CCGT) outlined in [4.1](#).

### 2.2 The Grounded Theory approach to the literature review

Given the inductive<sup>4</sup> nature of GT, it's important to clarify the role of the literature review within it (Glaser, 1998; Holton & Walsh, 2017). In GT, core concepts are constructed based on what is significant to the participant-researchers; therefore, unlike in traditional research methods, a comprehensive literature review is not conducted in the initial stages. Holding the literature in abeyance enables the researcher to approach the data without preconceptions (Holton & Walsh, 2017), particularly as, prior to the core concepts being constructed, it is impossible to know whether the literature will be relevant to the developing theory (Glaser, 1998). By conducting the literature review once the core category has emerged, this enables the literature to form part of the data by supporting relationship development between core concepts and developing theory (Holton & Walsh, 2017). That said, "*no potential researcher is an empty vessel*" (Cutcliffe, 2000, p. 1480), and to assume researchers enter the process without preconceptions is both naive and unrealistic (Charmaz, 2024). Considerations as to the pre-existing knowledge I bring to the research are covered in [1.7](#).

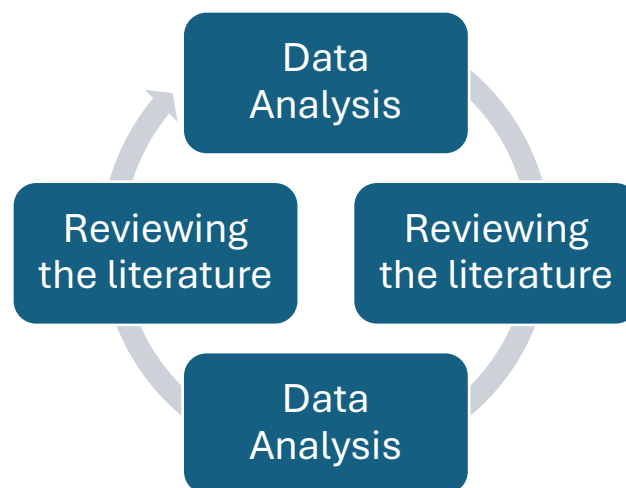
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<sup>4</sup> Induction is "a type of reasoning that begins with study of a range of individual cases and extrapolates patterns from them to form a conceptual category" (Charmaz, 2024, p.340)

Additionally, in line with CCGT, I conducted a preliminary literature review before data collection, linked to the broader area of interest; belonging, inclusion and D/deafness. Literature explored as part of this preliminary literature review can be found in [1.1 Conceptualisations of Belonging](#), [1.2 D/deafness](#), [1.3 History of inclusion and D/deaf policy](#), [1.4 Inclusion](#).

The literature review is presented in its entirety in this chapter to provide a coherent structure to guide the reader. However, it should be understood as an iterative, cyclical process beginning at the data analysis stage, using existing literature to shape and refine my thinking as developing codes took shape within the analysis. This process continued throughout the analysis stage until the generation of the CCGT, this took place between August 2025 and March 2026. The figure below shows this cyclical process.

*Figure 2: Visual representation of the cyclical process.*



Engagement with existing literature was shaped by the tentative categories being constructed at the various stages of the data collection and analysis process. The aim was to use the existing literature to develop the findings being constructed within the research findings, drawing on the most relevant literature connected to the concepts

within the developing theory. The literature review outlined in this chapter prioritises sources based on their relevance to, and influence on, the increased understanding of belonging for D/deaf students constructed through this research. In line with GT methodology (Glaser, 1998; Holton & Walsh, 2017), the research findings are integrated with the existing literature, informing the development of codes, and the final CCGT constructed.

The literature included in this chapter has been selected for its direct relevance and contribution to the theoretical insights presented in chapter four. It is therefore not an exhaustive account of all sources reviewed during the duration of this research.

Literature was sought using Google Scholar and online databases (StarPlus, Scopus). Literature searches conducted used each of the following key terms;

1. “deaf” OR “hearing impair” OR “hard of hearing” OR “DHH” AND “school” OR “setting” OR “child” OR “adolescent” OR “youth” OR “teen”

Additional search terms were added at different stages of the analysis process, in response to the categories being constructed in the findings. An example of this is shown in the table below;

*Table 4: Literature review process*

| Category                   | Search Terms Added                                                                                                  | Literature Examples                                                                                                                            |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| “Deaf Identity”            | “identity”<br>“deaf identity”<br>“representation”<br>“social identity”                                              | Baker & Padden, 1978; Bat-Chava, 2000; Hardy, 2010; Ladd & Lane, 2013; McIlroy & Storbeck, 2011; Sekoto & Hlayisi, 2023; Tajfel & Turner, 1979 |
| “Navigating Oppression”    | “oppress”<br>“audism OR audist”<br>“ableism OR ableist”<br>“oralism OR oralist”<br>“discriminate OR discrimination” | Freire, 1970; Humphries, 1977; Ladd, 2003; Lane, 1992; Rezvani et al., 2025; Tomaszewski et al., 2025                                          |
| “Space between two worlds” | “belong AND space”<br>“belong AND place”                                                                            | Gentzke, 2024; Ladd, 2003; McGuire & Tokunaga, 2020; Merry, 2013; Tokunaga, 2018;                                                              |

Only articles published in English were considered (although the origin of the research could be worldwide). No restrictions were imposed in terms of date range. Snowballing was also used by checking references and citations in literature already selected based on their relevance.

## 2.3 Systems of Oppression

*To the oppressed, and to those who suffer with them and fight at their side – Paulo Freire, 1970*

Individuals with any perceived difference to the majority group (e.g. race, gender, religion, disability), alongside facing potential physical or accessibility challenges, are often most impacted by the oppression, bias and prejudice they experience throughout their lives (Goodley, Lawthom, Liddiard & Runswick-Cole, 2023). Oppression is defined as one group having more privilege and power over another (Tomaszewski et al., 2025). These privileges and power imbalances serve to maintain dominance over the minority<sup>5</sup> group by preserving the means by which the inequality has been derived. Systems of oppression operate on multiple levels, from the individual to societal and occur through both conscious and unconscious beliefs and actions designed to exploit or marginalise some, at the benefit of others (Edwards, 2006). Oppression can be likened to ideological thinking. An ideology is defined as a set of beliefs embedded in everyday society which groups interpret and organise society (Collins English Dictionary, n.d.). These beliefs and assumptions have a significant impact on the

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<sup>5</sup> The term minority does not necessarily mean numerical minority, instead referring to the minority in terms of power, privilege or consideration, e.g. the term ethnic minority has come to refer to those whose ethnicity is not white. However, numerically, white people do not form the majority population, rather they have the majority power and privilege.

minority group and often go largely unnoticed or unquestioned by the dominant ideological group.

Oppression cannot be considered without acknowledging the role privilege and power play in maintaining this. Within the context of D/deafness, it is acknowledged that there are distinct benefits for the hearing within everyday society, most noticeably the ability to enter any environment and be able to communicate with others within it. This is a system of privilege afforded to the dominant population. These privileges are largely unearned; that is to say, they have not been granted as a result of effort or talent, they merely exist due to the inequitable systems in place (Edwards, 2006). Whilst these privileges certainly benefit those, they are designed to serve, Freire (1970) argues that they also harm the privileged group through loss of authenticity brought about by their unearned and dominant position in society.

### 2.3.1 Ideologies of D/deaf oppression

Well-known scholars of D/deaf education (e.g., Humphries, 1975; 1977; Ladd, 2003; Lane, 1992) have long argued the persistent and embedded discrimination and authority assumed over D/deaf communities by Hearing communities (Greene-Woods et al., 2020). In a world predominantly built by hearing people, for hearing people, D/deaf people experience unique systemic and societal barriers navigating a world that is not readily accessible to them. These can be split into three ideological concepts that privilege hearing, speech and spoken language;

1. Audism – The ideology of hearing/sound. Defined as *“The notion that one is superior based on one’s ability to hear or behave in the manner of one who hears”* (Humphries, 1977, p.12)

2. Oralism – The ideology of speech. Suppression of signed languages in favour of prioritising oral communication through teaching D/deaf to communicate via speech (Ladd, 2003).
3. Linguicism – The ideology of language. The perception that a minority language is inferior to a dominant language, in this case, British Sign Language being perceived as inferior to spoken English (Nguyen & Hajek, 2022).

Audism can be understood as *“the bias and prejudice of hearing people against D/deaf people”* (Humphries 1977, p. 13) that is systemically embedded and often hidden behind justifications of best interests that result in pressure and expectation to adopt hearing norms (Humphries, 1975). Systemic audism can be defined as *“a system of advantage based on hearing ability”* (Bauman, 2004). Systemic audism highlights how different forms of oppression are not just at an individual level but embedded within policy and practice (Ladd, 2003; Greene-Woods et al., 2020).

*“There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the practice of freedom. The means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world” – Shaul, 1970, p.30*

Conformity to the system can be considered in relation to capitalism, with the education system sitting within that (Althusser, 1971). Marxism highlights how capitalist society organises the means of production in a material sense, alongside the organisation of society (Kelsh, Hill & Macrine, 2009). Although typically considered in terms of class hierarchies, this framework can be extended to wider structures of oppression. If education is understood as an ideology designed to preserve a capitalist

society, then the oppression of Deaf communities can be considered as the consequence of the organisation of society (Althusser, 1971). Deaf history highlights ways in which the dominant hearing group maintains social hierarchy; banning of sign language, oralist approaches, and keeping D/deaf children separate from their peers. These all serve to weaken the knowledge and power of the Deaf community, in turn, maintaining the societal status quo.

*“The school teaches ‘know-how’, but in forms which ensure subjection to the ruling ideology or the mastery of its ‘practice’”. (Althusser, 1971, p. 132).*

However, when marginalised groups of society come together, a process of ‘class consciousness’ can occur in which the collective group starts to recognise they have shared solidarity with each other, rather than with the dominant group (Harvey, 2005). This solidarity can disrupt that status quo and has the potential to bring about change.

Whilst research exists into the impact of oppression for marginalised groups, this is most commonly linked to race. There are limited studies into the impact of oppression for D/deaf CYP, none of which are UK-based. Furthermore, literature predominantly adopts the position of D/deafness as a disability and considers the impact of ableist oppressions rather than adopting a cultural-linguistic position as applied to this research. A recent Iranian study explored the impact of ableism in education for 14 Deaf and Hard-of-hearing (D/HH) undergraduate students (Rezvani, Ghanbar & Pourhemat Khanshir, 2025). The study applied critical disability studies and Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to explore participants' experiences.

They found three key themes;

1. lack of awareness of disability and ableism – appearing through frequent comparison to hearing peers, and perceptions from others that D/HH students were less capable, as a result of their D/deafness. This was found to impact on their self-perception as well as how hearing peers and staff treated them.
2. a sense of ‘otherness’ through experiences of both covert and overt ableism – this included pressure to conform and feeling a need to ‘try harder’ to combat their D/deafness. At times, this was more covert through personal questioning, such as asking about the hearing level of family members and highlighting D/deafness as being ‘different to the norm’.
3. The need for increased advocacy and inclusive environments for D/HH students – the frequency of oppression experienced highlighted a need for greater awareness and understanding of the challenges D/HH students face. This included the need to change wider systemic perceptions of D/deafness, alongside environmental considerations to support accessibility. Participants also shared that they did not know how to advocate for themselves.

The impact of oppression on self-perception was the focus of a Polish study, which explored the effect internalised oppression had on D/deaf people’s mental health (Tomaszewski et al., 2025). The quantitative study, conducted with 134 D/deaf adults, involved completion of an author-created Deaf Oppression Scale comprising a 54-item questionnaire with subscales for Ableism, Audism and Linguicism. The study reported that internalised ableism predicted greater characteristics of depression, with internalised ableism, audism and linguicism predicting a greater probability of anxiety. Whilst findings suggest that D/deaf-specific oppressions have a lasting impact on psychological well-being, this study is the first of its kind to use the Deaf Oppression Scale, meaning findings have not yet been tested/replicated.

## 2.4 Identity as a social construct

*“Identity is neither an individualistic concern nor something that is determined by external affairs” (Ohna, 2004, p.21)*

As Ohna (2004) describes, identity is multifaceted. It is shaped through relationships with others, cultural narratives, exposure and access to language and shared meanings. Identity is not something inherently within us but evolves through our interactions and experiences. Identity, therefore, can be considered a social construct. Identity has been likened to a narrative, a story that people tell themselves and others about who they are, who they are not, or who they would like to be (Martin, 1995). These stories are constructions and are often fluid, changing or evolving depending on context, experiences or personal growth. Furthermore, identity constructions can be both self-given and allocated by others. These allocations, in the case of marginalised or oppressed groups, are often constructions of self that are forced upon them.

### 2.4.1 Constructions of D/deaf identities

*“What is Deaf culture? Am I Deaf or deaf? Deaf people ask these pointed questions of each other, of scholars, and of themselves. There are no answers, of course, because the questions themselves are born of evolving images of self and self-representation. (Humphries, 1996, p.100)*

Historically, D/deafness has been largely understood as a disability; however, for many D/deaf people, this does not reflect their personal identity. Literature on D/deaf identity has differentiated a multitude of identity constructions; e.g. Deafnicity (Eckert, 2010), Deafhood (Ladd, 2003), bi-cultural (Bat-Chava, 2000), DeaF (McIlroy, 2010), with many of these constructions rejecting any association between D/deafness and disability.

Culture is not separate from the individual. By viewing Deafness as a cultural identity, this positions it as both a personal and a collective experience (Padden & Humphries, 2005). Whilst there is no universally accepted definition of Deaf culture, the following explanation of the Deaf community could be applied;

*“Those D/deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals who share a common language, common experiences and values, and a common way of interacting with each other, and with hearing people” (Baker & Padden, 1978, p.4)*

Unlike medicalised constructions of D/deafness, membership to the Deaf community is not determined by audiological diagnosis, but through shared characteristics, with the use of sign language considered to be an integral part alongside socialisation between D/deaf people (Chapman & Dammeyer, 2017; Nikolarazi & Hadjidakou, 2006). It is argued that social inclusion is increased through access to other D/deaf people, as it can serve as a source of teaching about Deaf history alongside providing social representation (Ladd & Lane, 2013). This links to research relating to racism, in which learning about systemic racism alongside being with peers of the same race was found to be an important part of developing a cultural identity (Wilton et al., 2024).

In Deaf culture, this process of learning and socialising has been termed *Deafhood* (Ladd, 2003), conceptualising Deafness as culturally grounded through shared language, history and community. Deafhood is considered to be an ongoing journey, in which individuals explore and affirm what D/deafness means for them. This is negotiated in relation to what it means to be D/deaf in both D/deaf and hearing environments and is intended to include all possible ways of D/deaf being (Ladd, 2003; Humphries, 2008). Whilst in many ways, Deafhood can be considered an emancipatory reclaiming of Deafness (De Clerck, 2016). It has received critique for being exclusionary, particularly as cultural Deafness often rejects anything considered

to be the consequence of oppression, such as the use of cochlear implants and speech alongside sign, which may influence individual choice by way of assimilating to Deaf culture (Kusters & De Meulder, 2013).

For D/deaf CYP, exploring their cultural identity, they have considerations to make that are unique to them; their audiological level itself, access to or use of technological aids, linguistic preferences and the overall influence D/deafness will have on their identity (Brice & Strauss, 2016). These decisions are further influenced by wider societal factors such as awareness and access to the Deaf community, family context, educational setting, and level of hearing. For D/deaf people, experiences of oppression and marginalisation can significantly impact the construction of a secure identity, which has been found to have long-term implications for quality of life (Sekoto & Hlayisi, 2023). This same paper, conducted in South Africa, explored the process of identity construction for D/deaf adolescents within medical audiology care. Findings showed that D/deaf individuals have to navigate perceptions of disability, social relationships and assimilation into their community, all of which impacts self-perception (Sekoto & Hlayisi, 2023). Further to this, the research found that D/deaf identity construction occurs on multiple levels; self-conceived ideas, group interactions and in society through navigating perceptions of them as a D/deaf person. It was also argued that D/deaf adolescents consider their identity much earlier than hearing peers given the added complexity D/deafness has, it could therefore be said that identity construction as a D/deaf person holds a more central role.

For D/deaf people who have not had opportunities to interact with D/deaf peers, (and for many hearing people), understand of D/deafness is likely shaped via indirect means, such as the media or societal discourses (Nelson, 2011). Foss's (2014) analysis of American television and media representations of D/deafness found that whilst representation had increased in the past 20 years, it predominantly used

discriminatory or pathologising language, portraying D/deaf people as less capable than their hearing counterparts. D/deaf characters were typically confined to guest roles, centred on specific, often inaccurate storylines, reinforcing the idea of D/deafness being a novelty. This finding is supported by wider literature that found minority groups are frequently underrepresented and misrepresented in mainstream media, which influences and reinforces dominant stereotypes in societal discourse (Saleem & Ramasubramanian, 2017). In the UK, recent figures such as Rose Ayling-Ellis (a D/deaf English actress) and Jodie Ounsley (a D/deaf English Rugby player/Fury on Gladiators) have increased visibility of D/deaf people in mainstream media. Whilst representation is important, it is how that representation is constructed that matters, as media portrayals serve as a key source of public knowledge on diversity (Brand, 2018). Media narratives, therefore, play a significant role in shaping societal attitudes, with misrepresentation serving to reinforce social marginalisation and prejudice (Bleich et al., 2015; Habes, Elareshi & Ali, 2025). Humphries & Humphries (2011) argue that Deaf identity is heavily influenced by cultural colonialism (which includes media), that for many, Deaf identity reflects years of oppression and dominance by the Hearing world. As with other minority groups, e.g. Black Rights movements, Deaf identity and associated Deaf culture may have served as a reclaiming of D/deafness and learning about historic oppression and systemic constructions of D/deafness empowers the Deaf community to challenge those beliefs.

### 1.4.2 “Deaf in my own way”

*“Deaf identity is not a static concept but a complex ongoing quest for belonging”*

*McIlroy & Storbeck, 2011*

D/deaf ontologies and epistemologies consider the multiple ways of being D/deaf and knowing D/deafness (Paul & Moores, 2012). This aligns with a social constructionist lens, recognising that ‘being’ is not fixed or singular. Since the work of Bat-Chava (2000), there has been increased focus on ways to define and understand what it means to be D/deaf. Bat-Chava’s contribution to D/deaf identity development proposed four main identities: hearing, immersion (culturally Deaf), bicultural and negative (to signify where individuals struggled to feel identification to any group). This was followed up by Ohna (2004), who broke down identity development into four phases: taken for granted, alienation, affiliation and deaf in my own way. These studies have laid the groundwork for identity exploration within D/deaf populations. A rare UK paper explored identity development in mainstream schools for 11 D/deaf pupils aged between 13-16years (Hardy, 2010). This paper utilised GT methodology to create a theory based on the core category of group alignment. This paper is the only one found that was conducted in the UK and uses GT methodology. Hardy’s (2010) research found that D/deaf pupils identified with three possible groups: deaf aligned, hearing aligned or ‘the bridge between two worlds’, with alignment being influenced by communication choice and experiences of friendships. The concept of ‘between two worlds’ was likely influenced by the concept of ‘inbetweenity’ proposed by Brueggemann (2009) which described how D/deaf identity development involves navigating the in-between; in terms of D/deaf and hearing, but also in the wider sense of D/deafness and disability. In society then, D/deafness is often perceived as occupying ‘the space between’, rather than holding space in its own right.

Identity development was also the focus of an ethnographic study in South Africa with 9 D/deaf adults (McIlroy & Storbeck, 2011). The authors proposed a bicultural identity, termed DeaF (Capital 'D' to denote cultural Deafness and capital 'F' to represent fluidity between the Deaf and Hearing world; McIlroy, 2010) which they describe as;

*“The cultural space from which they transition within and between the Deaf community and the hearing community” (McIlroy & Storbeck, 2011, p.497)*

Once again, space is a consideration. The conceptualisation of D/deafness and hearing being opposites is interesting, and each paper (despite using different descriptive terms) emphasises a gap between, suggesting that the possibility of a 'coming together' or 'meeting in the middle' does not exist. Alongside this notion of fluidity, one of the sub-themes was 'communication options' which highlighted the impact learning sign had on developing identity with some participants noting that a move from a mainstream school to a Deaf school also strengthened their D/deaf identity.

More recently, a Swedish study into experiences of social identity and group membership for 16 adults who identified as hard-of-hearing (HH) found that hearing level interfered with their identity due to difficulties with interacting with others and the associated stigma of D/deafness. Despite that, (hard-of-) hearing status formed a significant part of their identity (Olsson & Gustafsson, 2022). Once again, the idea of space was apparent, this time primarily linked to communication, describing how full membership to any group was difficult as a result of being HH, perceiving they were not inherently hearing or D/deaf. This builds on findings by McIlroy & Storbeck (2011), of the role communication plays in identity development as social exclusion was found to be heavily correlated with barriers to communication.

These studies, spanning across twenty years, all sought to critique and extend a binary view of identity, in which an individual aligns themselves with one group. This restricted view builds on the arguments made about D/deaf oppression, as a focus on differences risks perpetuating exclusionary perceptions. This is likely to maintain distance between the two groups, through making clear distinctions between hearing vs deaf, speech vs signing (Brueggemann, 2009; Fernandes & Myers, 2010).

It can, however, not be ignored that for many D/deaf people their experiences span 'worlds'; the Deaf world and the Hearing world. Therefore, it should be plausible to consider that multiple identities may exist depending on the 'world' being navigated. Furthermore, despite attempts at challenging and extending fixed perceptions of D/deafness, the findings of the most recent study (Olsson & Gustafsson, 2022) echo the findings of Bat-Chava (2000), suggesting that limited progress has been made to dominant discourses.

### 2.4.3 Constructing a personal identity

Whilst identity development is best considered as a lifelong process (Valeras, 2010), adolescence in particular, is a time of identity exploration and formation, categorised by a shift away from a familial identity to a social one (Erikson, 1968). Erikson's psychoanalytic theory of psychosocial development details eight stages from birth into adulthood, positioning adolescence as a focused period for identity development (Erikson, 1959; 1968). Erikson argues that at each stage, a person faces a crisis, which supports or hinders development of an aspect of identity. The outcome of which, has significant impact on future psycho-social development (Orenstein & Lewis, 2021). Each stage is summarised briefly in the table below;

Table 5: Summary of Erikson's psychosocial model

| Stage                                | Psychosocial Conflict/Crisis                                                                | Age Range            |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1 Trust vs. Mistrust                 | Developing trust in primary caregivers.                                                     | 0-1 year             |
| 2 Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt       | Exploration and free will to make choices.                                                  | 1-3 years            |
| 3 Initiative vs. Guilt               | Increased independence through play skills.                                                 | 3 - 6 years          |
| 4 Industry vs. Inferiority           | Increased involvement in education and exploration.                                         | 6 – 12 years         |
| <b>5 Identity vs. Role confusion</b> | <b>Exploration of sense of self, different identity roles and their place in the world.</b> | <b>12 – 18 years</b> |
| 6 Intimacy vs. Isolation             | Development of more intimate relationships/partnerships with others.                        | 18 – 40 years        |
| 7 Generativity vs. Stagnation        | Finding ways to leave an impression on the world, give back or contribute to society.       | 40 -65 years         |
| 8 Integrity vs. Despair              | Sense of fulfilment and purpose from life.                                                  | 65 years +           |

Stage 5 (12 – 18 years) is of primary relevance. This stage is a period where a sense of self is developed through exploring different roles. A successful navigation of this stage requires positive role models, a safe, supportive environment, increased independence, freedom of expression and authentic communication (Erikson, 1963). Erikson defines that positive development in this stage improves both interpersonal relationships and self-esteem. In contrast, a lack of those aspects can impact the future sense of direction and purpose and ability to form meaningful connections with others. This model has relevance to D/deaf experience as a relational process, recognising the influence of social factors and being cumulative over a lifetime. The concept of 'role confusion' also has an increased impact on D/deaf CYP as they face additional confusion in their role as a result of accessibility requirements and language differences. This role confusion also has relevance to the literature explored in relation to navigating between worlds (e.g. Olsson & Gustafsson, 2022). However, aspects of this model are limiting when considering D/deaf experiences. The rigidity of the linear process suggests an assumption that individuals experience and navigate the same types of conflicts and overcome them within similar timeframes. This is overly

simplistic. Certainly, there is criticism of the model having a western-centric focus that cannot be universally applied across cultures (Hoare, 2024). Additionally, whilst the model recognises the social impact on identity development, it is primarily an individual process. This emphasis on the individual risks minimising the impact of external or systemic factors, out of individual control, such as access to communication and acts of oppression. Lastly, despite recognising that identity evolves over time, it implies one evolving identity, rather than considering that multiple identities can co-exist simultaneously.

#### 2.4.4 Constructing a collective identity

Human beings are inherently social. Alongside development of our self-concept and individuality, we understand ourselves as members of multiple social groups. These group memberships provide a sense of collective identity, which can generate a powerful sense of belonging. This collective identity can become so dominant that maintaining membership within the group can shape, or even take precedence over, aspects of personal identity. Social Identity Theory (SIT) provides one way of understanding how membership to a social group can develop both self-concept and collective identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). A central component of SIT is the concept of in-groups and out-groups, in which social identification influences how we perceive ourselves and others. This social categorisation provides a way for people to make sense of their social world, with grouping often being dependent on markers linked to aspects of identity, such as gender, culture, and language. Group membership involves having greater identification with those we perceive as similar to ourselves, impacting sense of self-worth through group cohesion (Turner & Reynolds, 2012).

Belonging is central to SIT, as group membership can provide a sense of connection and community through being part of something bigger than ourselves. This often generates positive bias or affiliation towards the group and other members within it.

An 'in-group' can be defined as the group an individual feels they belong to. The 'in-group' serves as an extension of the self by representing a collection of shared attributes or characteristics to that individual (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In contrast, the 'out-group' is the opposing group. Members of this group are often perceived as the 'other', based on having differing characteristics to that of the 'in-group'. Social comparison between groups drives behaviour to maintain or enhance the social standing of the 'in-group', prioritising this over the 'out-group' (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This can lead to conflict or tensions, and at its most powerful, influence wider societal perceptions relating to value and worth, which can perpetuate marginalisation, prejudice and stereotyping.

At a systemic level, SIT provides a theoretical lens for considering historic and ongoing discrimination of Deaf communities. In this context, the Hearing world would be the 'in-group' defined by shared characteristics of hearing ability and spoken language, with the Deaf community being the 'out-group', by comparison of D/deafness and signed language. The dominant 'in-group' defines policies that govern society and holds the majority decision-making power. The consequence of this is that characteristics of D/deafness and signed languages are minoritised and devalued. In Chapter 1, an exploration of policy and legislation was undertaken, which highlighted the impact of 'in-group' and 'out-group', as legislation had led to the suppression of sign language (e.g., the Milan Conference), deficit framing of D/deafness and an ongoing struggle for recognition of BSL (BSL Act, 2022). Hearing people as the numerical majority 'in-group' have defined and socially constructed the norms, expectations and values placed on individuals in society. Deaf communities, positioned as the 'out-group', have been subjected to these constructions, leading to power imbalances that have wide-reaching implications.

Alongside the discriminatory implications, SIT also helps explain how people develop a sense of who they are through the group they belong to. Whilst policy and wider society are governed by the dominant 'in-group', membership to the minority 'out-group' can still have a positive impact on an individual's sense of self and identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). It is important to note that members of the 'out-group' do not consider themselves to be so. This distinction is made to demonstrate which group dominates in terms of power and privilege. Within SIT, identity is said to be stronger when there is an emotional connection to the group. Group membership can generate increased self-esteem, psychological safety, and an overall sense of belonging (Turner & Reynolds, 2012). For the Deaf community, being around others with a shared language and understanding of Deaf history can create cohesion as an 'in-group', referred to as Deaf culture.

## 2.5 Deaf Allyship

It is important to acknowledge that, as a hearing researcher, I am positioned within the 'in-group', in terms of my privilege and power within society compared to my D/deaf participant-researchers. The participant-researchers mostly identify as belonging to a minority cultural-linguistic group, who have collectively and individually experienced acts of oppression by the Hearing majority. Therefore, I recognise that culturally, I am an outsider to the participant-researchers. Methodological considerations and decisions relating to this are outlined in [1.7.1](#), [3.2.2](#).

Alongside this, I consider my researcher position as working towards allyship. Ladd (2003) recognised that the Deaf community needs hearing allies who can advocate for Deaf culture and promote change. Allyship has been defined as a member of a dominant group working to end prejudice and relinquish privileges by way of their group status (Brown & Ostrove, 2013).

Furthermore, Edwards (2006) defines allyship as an ongoing, continual process of accountability and action rather than a destination or identity label. By definition, an ally is part of a dominant social group; however, as this is not a destination or something to be self-defined, I do not declare myself as an ally, as it is not for me, as a member of the dominant group, to determine that. Instead, my aim and intentions are to continue on the journey of allyship in solidarity with the Deaf community. To support this, I have aimed to follow five principles, as outlined by the Guiding Principles for Hearing Allyship (n.d), summarised in the table below.

*Table 6: Guiding principles for Hearing Allyship*

|                                                                            |                                                                                                                                         |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Listen to us.                                                           | The Deaf Community's collectivist needs take priority over personal feelings, views or opinions.                                        |
| 2. Nothing about us, without us.                                           | Establish an equal, or minority, partnership with members of the Deaf community in any undertaking that pertains to the Deaf community. |
| 3. Create, protect, value, foster, and embrace Deaf spaces.                | Recognition that not everyone has access to sound and visual communication should be the default within Deaf spaces.                    |
| 4. Keep resources, opportunities and political power within the community. | Deaf people should have priority in Deaf-related fields.                                                                                |
| 5. Take your allyship on the road.                                         | Use your voice, your power, and your privilege to elevate the Deaf community.                                                           |

True allyship is about recognising that the focus of the problem is the wider systems at play and not individual perpetrators (Edwards, 2006). This concept of allyship has direct links with the EP role, where advocacy and issues of social justice are becoming increasingly integral. Social justice is an important consideration when considering allyship. Allies for Social Justice (Edwards, 2006) recognise that all of society is harmed through systems of oppression, whilst also acknowledging that harm is not comparable or equal to that experienced by the minority group. This generates a dual liberation in which seeking freedom for the 'oppressed' also frees the 'oppressors' from their role (Freire, 1970). Further principles of allyship grounded in this research are outlined in [5.3.1](#).

## 2.6 Politics of belonging

Whilst a sense of belonging is considered to be a lifelong need (Frederickson & Dunsmuir, 2009), there is an increased focus during adolescence, defined as the transition period from childhood into adulthood (Erikson, 1959; 1968). Allen (2021) describes how belonging is attributed to the strength of connections with others, rather than the number of connections. Therefore, how an individual feels about a place, person, event or environment and the meaning given to that connection is what strengthens the sense of belonging. It is not, therefore, simply about being 'with others', or 'fitting in'.

If belonging involves an interplay between the individual and their social environment, then wider factors such as culture and societal norms also influence the tendency for belonging. For marginalised groups - whether through ethnicity, language, disability, or gender – they face additional barriers to school belonging as educational expectations are more aligned with those of the dominant group. Whilst it cannot and should not be assumed that all individuals who fall within a marginalised group have the same experiences, research suggests that minority groups likely face similar barriers and challenges in terms of sense of belonging (Anderson, 2013). For these students, these additional barriers are what Yuval-Davis (2006) calls *"the politics of belonging"* (p. 197). Yuval-Davis (2006) proposes an analytical framework for belonging in which she differentiates between belonging as a natural emotional connection, a *"feeling of home"* (Antonsich, 2010) and belonging as a politicised concept. The political angle is interesting, given that individuals, in an attempt to belong, can feel a need to conform to the dominant groups by way of avoiding social exclusion (Lewin, 1948). Furthermore, SIT posits that social connections are impacted by their membership to a particular group (Tajfel, 1982).

Students from marginalised groups, must navigate the “*grids of power relations in society*” (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p.199). As the political agendas within society infiltrate everyday life, these grids of power are historically and contextually embedded. As Yuval-Davis (2006) explains, social categories are not just a grouping exercise; they are a statement of positionality, power and privilege. Intersectionality plays a role here, as the power relations separate people into distinct groups based on similarities and differences. Whilst as individuals, we may choose to identify with one predominant group or category; to be human is to have multiple aspects of our identity, and each of these has a socially constructed hierarchy. This creates inclusion criteria and exclusionary discourses, which can result in people prioritising or neglecting aspects of their identity in order to assimilate into the dominant culture or group. In terms of intersectionality, this may include experiencing multiple belongings depending on the social context (Healy, 2020). For D/deaf CYP, these multiple belongings can lead to an overall struggle for societal recognition as they may be identified societally as belonging to one group, yet personally feel affiliation to another (Healy, 2020). This process, Yuval-Davis (2006) explains, involves making decisions upon meeting people as to whether they are an ‘us’ or a ‘them’. Bringing this back to the wider topic of inclusion, the overriding rhetoric of social categorisation and grouping creates an environment that can never truly be inclusive for all, as repeated focus on the identification of people based on similarities and differences will always generate an ‘in-group’ and an ‘out-group’ (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

### 2.6.1 Deafness and belonging

Educational discourse is designed with the ‘typical’ student in mind, with deviations from the dominant being seen as different (Nieminen, 2020). This has led to attempts at assimilation for D/deaf CYP; e.g. through the removal of hearing aids in an attempt to conceal their differences and be perceived more favourably (McGuire, 2020).

For her doctoral research, Ginn (2021) explored the sense of belonging in secondary school for pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds. She argued that our conceptualisation of belonging is influenced by our ethnicity, adopting the term ethnic belonging (Kiang & Fuligni, 2009) to describe this experience. This aligns with a recent study by Butler (2026), who highlighted that belonging can be a cultural extension of an individual's wider community. As previously outlined, this research recognises Deafness as a cultural identity (1.5). Whilst it should be made clear that culture and ethnicity are not one and the same, the concept of ethnic belonging could be applied to the Deaf community as their cultural identity is derived from shared characteristics (e.g. signed language) and they experience inequalities in society, albeit different inequalities to those experienced by racial minority groups.

## 2.7 Spaces of belonging

*“When young people feel they belong, school becomes a place for them”*

*(Riley, 2017, p. ix)*

In Japanese culture, there is the concept of *‘ibasho’*, defined as;

*“Any place, space, and community where one feels comfortable, relaxed, calm, and feels accepted by surrounding people” (Tokunaga, 2018, p.8).*

Ibasho, therefore, could be considered a Japanese conceptualisation of belonging. McGuire & Tokunaga (2020) conducted research in Japan around ibasho in relation to two marginalised groups within their education system: D/deaf and ethnic minority students (defined as Filipino immigrants in the study). The study states that to be without ibasho is to be *“without a place or space where one feels comfortable and at home”* (Allison, 2013, p. 47, as cited in McGuire & Tokunaga, 2020). For many, home is the place you feel most comfortable. It is likely the others ‘at home’ are some of your

strongest relationships. Certainly, for many minority groups, the physical place of 'home' provides a place for shared cultural or identity-affirming connection with family members, and it is the wider society where differences are felt. Yet, as 90% of D/deaf CYP have hearing parents (Hardy, 2010), their experiences of difference may also be felt in the home as well as in wider society. This is particularly significant as a lower sense of home belonging further increases feelings of difference and otherness in school (McGuire & Tokunaga, 2020). This makes the need for connection with other D/deaf peers all the more important.

Echoing the UK, D/deafness in Japan is largely considered to be a disability, positioning Deaf communities in a similar way as UK policy. Despite being conducted in Japan, McGuire & Tokunaga's (2020) research has relevance and overlap to the UK; reporting that groups marginalised in society are more likely to be without *ibasho* (McGuire & Tokunaga, 2020). These separate spaces were the focus of the research, exploring whether *ibasho* can be achieved in unlikely places. This is an interesting concept, as historically, the original purpose of separate spaces was to segregate children from those deemed to be educatable, with capacity to contribute to future society, and those who were deemed not (Ladd, 2003). As explored in [1.3](#), the history of D/deaf education in the UK has meant, for parts of history, Deaf schools have been places of rebellion (Ladd, 2003), in which the covert teaching of sign language was undertaken, in direct violation to the oralist approaches in law at that time. As outlined in [1.3](#) and [1.4](#), UK policy is currently going through a period of change where the focus for inclusive education is reverting back to 'mainstream for all', yet what impact does this have for D/deaf pupils? There is critique to the 'inclusion for all' rhetoric, with critics arguing that Deaf culture in particular originates in places such as D/deaf schools and therefore serve as important places for the teaching of Deaf identity, and the continuation of Deaf culture (e.g. Lane, Hoffmeister & Bahan, 1996).

Given 90% of D/deaf babies are born to hearing families (Hardy, 2010), Deaf spaces may be the only place D/deaf pupils can interact with other D/deaf peers. Through this lens, it can be argued that the removal or reduction of these spaces poses a direct threat to identity formation and the longevity of Deaf culture (Ladd, 2003). Certainly, in schools that use sign language, research suggests that D/deaf CYP have more positive perceptions of social inclusion (Marschark et al., 2012). Alongside a stronger D/deaf identity when attending a Deaf school (Bat-Chava, 2000; Nikolarazi & Hadjidakou, 2006).

Research conducted by McGuire & Tokunaga, (2020) highlight those separate spaces, even in mainstream schools can have a positive impact on D/deaf pupils through affirming Deaf identity, arguing that;

*“Belonging is co-constructed in these physically and metaphorically separate spaces rather than in mainstream ones in which they are academically integrated but socially isolated” (p. 291)*

**MEMO EXCERPT: 14/09/25**

I am noticing a pattern – when co-researchers had access to a ‘Deaf hub’ – this appeared to increase their sense of belonging as they were around peers they could relate to, even if the hub was within a mainstream school. This is interesting as typically, inclusion focuses on an ‘all-together’ approach, rather than separation. Yet, co-researchers appear to value having their own space. I wonder if this is because, for the (hearing) majority, we do not have to consider accessibility of spaces in the same way? I have the luxury of walking into any space, even for the first time, and pretty much being guaranteed that I will be able to communicate with somebody else in that space; a first step in building a connection with them. As a D/deaf person, accessibility of communication is not guaranteed, in fact, it is more likely to be inaccessible. I wonder, is it the separate space that is the primary factor? Or, what that separate space represents?

It has been suggested that these separate spaces can be reimagined by those using them, creating a ‘safe space’ that can foster a sense of belonging and inclusion (McGuire & Tokunaga, 2020). These spaces provide a support network that can build

self-esteem and offer reconstruction of who they are and their place in the world. Parallels can be drawn here with St Amand et al., (2017) description of attributes of belonging; feelings of support, acceptance and harmonisation, in which peer's co-ordinate themselves to align themselves with others. These separate spaces provide opportunity to escape the pressures of forced assimilation and social exclusion (Merry, 2013).

### 2.7.1 Separation not segregation

It is important to differentiate between forced segregation and voluntary separation. Arguably, insisting that everyone is educated in the same space, under the assumption that integration automatically brings about inclusion is inherently flawed. For marginalised groups, experiences of integration may have been unsuccessful, or even harmful, therefore a separate space can become a way to mitigate stigma, prejudice and negative experiences (Merry, 2013). That said, the favourability of separate spaces for marginalised groups, is not intended to idealise or promote segregation (McGuire & Tokunaga, 2020). Instead, the desire for voluntary separation is born out of a desire to reconstruct and reclaim segregation (Merry, 2013). Links can be made here to other social rights movements (e.g. black rights) that have increasingly taken steps to reclaim culture, places and spaces of meaning to them that have previously been used against them.

As D/deaf CYP are more likely to be socially isolated or struggle to build meaningful connection particularly with hearing peers, these separate spaces can provide a 'safe space' where social inclusion is largely unavailable to them. This is supported in wider literature that suggests D/deaf pupils' sense of belonging is greatly influenced by their school setting, with communication barriers in environments leading to isolation and disconnect, particularly with hearing peers (Gentzke, 2024).

### 2.7.2 Transitional Spaces

Alongside the potential impact of physical spaces, parallels can be drawn to metaphorical space too. Winnicott's (1971) notion of transitional space offers a way of understanding how children negotiate and move between inner experiences and the external world. Most commonly associated with early life attachment and identity development, a transitional space is "*a separate and autonomous subjective space*" (Elliott, 2002, p.72) in which babies and young children begin to explore constructs of self, comparing them to those around them. Winnicott stated that self-concept emerges through interpersonal relationships, a process that starts in infancy between primary care giver and child (Winnicott, 1971). A transitional space is a co-created space that depends on the presence and responsiveness of the care giver that enables the child to feel safe enough to explore their surroundings, consider their internal feelings and build connection and autonomy - all of which develops a sense of self. To Winnicott, if transitional space is not created, this has implications for identity development, future relationships and connection with others (1971). Given the social, intra and interpersonal aspects of belonging, belonging could be understood as a transitional space. Drawing on the notion of an 'in-between' zone where inner experience meets external factors, belonging can be seen to be constructed when the environment offers enough safety and responsiveness enabling the individual to explore. Whilst space in this context is meant figuratively, it can be applied to physical space too. In this sense, the environment and people within them function as a 'holding space', one of safety, where questions of self and other can be negotiated and affirmed. For D/deaf CYP, this transitional space (both figurative and physical) provides opportunity to explore and interpret their experiences through shared understanding with others, alongside cultural and linguistic affirmation. The impact of space is revisited in relation to the research findings in [5.2.3](#).

## 2.8 Chapter Summary

From literature explored in this chapter, overlaps between oppressive experiences, identity development and belonging can be made. Belonging is a multi-faceted concept, however for D/deaf CYP, unique linguistic challenges make the journey to belonging a complex undertaking. Limited UK research exists on how this journey takes shape for D/deaf CYP and from wider literature, research typically focuses on one aspect of D/deaf experience, such as identity development, social inclusion or impact of oppression. Therefore, there is a need to examine these elements collectively, as overlapping commonalities suggest that they may each have a role in how belonging is embodied as a D/deaf CYP navigating a Hearing world. As outlined in [1.9.1](#), literature included in this chapter has direct relevance to the interpretive findings outlined in [chapter four](#) and this is revisited and synthesised in [chapter five](#).

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### 3.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter outlines the philosophical and methodological approaches underpinning the research. This includes a brief exploration of differing Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) approaches and why Critical Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2024; Levitt, 2021) was chosen. It details the research design, data collection and analysis processes. Ethical considerations are also explored.

### 3.2 Philosophical Underpinnings

Consideration of philosophical assumptions is important for all researchers as assumptions about the nature of reality and how knowledge is acquired influence the research direction, analysis and outcome. Ontology, described as the science of being, and epistemology, concerned with how we come to know or acquire knowledge, are philosophical ideas that underpin how we see the world (Willig, 2013). These philosophical positions sit on a continuum, from realist through to relativist. Realists believe in a single objective truth, that, as researchers, we can observe, investigate and interrogate. In contrast, relativists reject the notion of an absolute truth, assuming a subjective position in which knowledge, truth and reality can never be truly known (Pring, 2004). Instead, truth and reality are dependent on individual experience and multiple truths exist simultaneously. Reality and truth can be considered an interaction between the objective and the subjective, my values shaped through my personal experiences, my role as a (trainee) Educational Psychologist and as a researcher draw me to the subjective, in understanding human experience, listening to voices and hearing stories. This informed my decision to adopt a qualitative approach and a relativist position for this research.

### 3.2.1 Constructivism vs. Constructionism

Constructivism is defined as an individualistic understanding, or, the sense making of the individual mind (Crotty, 1998). Therefore, making the notion of truth and reality a matter of perspective with multiple mental constructions (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011). Constructivism values understanding human experiences through inquiry (Charmaz, 2024). To constructivists, realities are multiple, potentially infinite.

Constructionism is a term often used interchangeably with constructivism. For clarity, I define constructionism as our understanding of the world being dependent on how it is represented to us, through the language used, the interactions we experience and the social and cultural context of the time (Burr, 2015). As with constructivism, there is a recognition of multiple truths but also an acknowledgement that these are subject to change over time. As societal norms and expectations change, so do the meanings people attach to those experiences. In short, what is considered 'true' in one historical moment in time will shift as collective understandings evolve.

Constructionists and constructivists perceive that understanding of the world does not exist separate from us. We interpret the world through consciousness – the world and its objects are physically there, but they are meaningless; it is conscious, active engagement with that world and its objects that constructs meaning (Burr, 2015). The objective and the subjective are therefore brought together through this process of social interaction and collective agreement. Within this subject-object interplay, the researcher uses reflexivity to reflect on their own thought processes to engage with the world and consider different possibilities. The research cannot be described in isolation from the conscious experiencing of it, in the same way, the experience cannot be isolated from the wider area of research. This aligns with my perception of the world; I acknowledge that my prior understanding comes from my interactions with the D/deaf CYP and adults I worked with. However, this is context-specific as my

experiences link to one education setting in one local authority may not be generalisable to other settings or areas. Also, I acknowledge that through the research process, my understanding and views may change as meaning is co-constructed and as such, is likely to shape alternative understandings.

### 3.2.2 Research(er) Positionality

This research adopts a cultural-linguistic model of Deafness ([1.5](#)). Participant-researchers position themselves as members of a minority group, defined by unique cultural characteristics (e.g. British sign language) with Deafness being a part of their identity rather than a medical deficit. Ontologically speaking, this research sits within a constructivist/constructionist paradigm, where multiple realities co-exist and are context-dependent. Within this, the living experiences of the participant-researchers create a reality that is socially constructed and shaped by cultural and linguistic factors through individual experience and dialogue with others.

Epistemologically, this research adopts an interpretivist stance, 'knowledge' gained through this research is co-constructed between myself as the researcher and the D/deaf participant-researchers. By engaging with D/deaf narratives, knowledge and meaning is understood collectively within this context. D/deaf students are experts of their own living experience of D/deafness, as such their voices are central to the research and not secondary to it. Whilst the aim is to produce a grounded theory, it is acknowledged that the resulting theory is an interpretation grounded in the living experiences and cultural context of the participant-researchers and my own experiences I bring as the researcher.

Clarification on terminology is warranted here, as much of the 'language' of research has ableist connotations as it is associated with the spoken word, e.g. talk, speak, dialogue rather than through alternative means.

Given much of academia is shaped and dominated by hearing researchers, it is perhaps unsurprising that language associated with speech is privileged. Certainly, within the English language, there is a lack of more inclusive alternative constructs that I am aware of that convey a none-spoken way to communicate, that still hold academic rigor and meaning to the reader. This highlights wider structural issues in which D/deaf people are excluded from processes of knowledge production, collective language and meaning-making – of which, a thorough examination goes beyond the scope of this research. However, the reader is requested to be mindful that the use of language associated with the spoken word is used throughout this thesis due to limitations in alternative inclusive terminology and is not intended to be hierarchical to spoken over signed.

This same principle can be extended to ‘voice’, which has connotations of sound. The notion of voice in research is a complex undertaking, particularly as voice has a key role in defining power relations; what it means to have a voice, who is seen as deserving of voice, whose voice is prioritised (Foss, 2014). This is especially important when working with CYP or marginalised groups as it is argued that many research methodologies fail to privilege the voice of minority groups (Jalkhi & Rowley, 2024). Certainly, for D/deaf CYP, their *voices* are marginalised within education with regards to privilege and power (Sewell, 2022; Jalkhi & Rowley, 2024), with communication acting as a symbol of difference (Cashman, 2005). Within this research, the word voice is used to mean one’s ability to engage in and contribute to the conversation, and not voice in the spoken sense.

### 3.3 Grounded Theory Approaches

Born out of a desire to offer an alternative to the dominant positivist discourse in research (Charmaz, 2024; Holton & Walsh, 2017), Grounded Theory (GT) is an iterative, systematic, and flexible methodology involving the construction of theory through the analysis of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Holton & Walsh, 2017). Glaser & Strauss (1967) are considered the founding fathers of GT, offering a distinctive approach to research that allows theory to be conceptualised through data collection rather than from a preconceived hypothesis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, Charmaz 2024). GT aims to explore a substantive area of interest, to establish a primary concern, as constructed by the participant-researchers themselves (Holton & Walsh, 2017). A variety of methods can be used in GT, as “*all is data*” (Glaser, 2007, p.1), which is then coded and categorised to identify codes and a core category. Core categories have been described as latent patterns of behaviour (Walsh et al., 2015) that relate to other concepts identified in the research. Relationships are explored between this category and other emerging concepts to develop a substantive GT (Glaser, 1998; Holton & Walsh, 2017). Data collection and analysis happen simultaneously, and coding starts as soon as the data is collected (detailed further in [2.2](#)). The goal is to remain open to emerging data, allowing the theory to develop naturally from the observations.

Since its inception, GT has gone through several iterations, which can broadly be categorised into three main perspectives, Classic (Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998), Straussian (Corbin & Strauss, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and Constructivist (Charmaz, 2024). This is summarised in Table 7.

Table 7: Iterations of Grounded Theory (as depicted in Sebastian, 2019, p. 4)

|                               | <b>Classic Grounded Theory</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <b>Straussian Grounded Theory</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <b>Constructivist Grounded Theory</b>                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Philosophical Position</b> | (Attempts to be) free from influence                                                                                                                                                                                              | Interpretivism                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Constructivism and Pragmatism                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Role of the Researcher</b> | The researcher is objective and detached from the data                                                                                                                                                                            | The researcher has active engagement in interpreting the data.                                                                                                                                                                              | The researcher constructs the data rather than discovers it.                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Prior knowledge</b>        | The researcher is neutral. Prior knowledge can negatively impact on research direction. Therefore, only information provided by the data collected should influence the research.                                                 | Prior knowledge can strengthen data collection and the overall research.                                                                                                                                                                    | Prior knowledge cannot be ignored or escaped. The researcher needs to acknowledge and understand the influences this may have on the research.                                                                |
| <b>Literature Review</b>      | Engagement with the literature is conducted after the data analysis.                                                                                                                                                              | Can be used to enhance sensitivity to the data to support understanding. This can occur prior and during the data collection process.                                                                                                       | Placement is not fixed, with the researcher deciding when it is needed. If engaged with early, it should be revisited and revised to ensure relevance to the final theory.                                    |
| <b>Research Questions</b>     | Questions should become clear during the process. There are no pre-determined questions.                                                                                                                                          | Questions are vague and intended to be flexible, with additional questions added in response to the data.                                                                                                                                   | Questions influence the way data is collected. Questions can be added, removed or altered in response to the data.                                                                                            |
| <b>Data Analysis</b>          | Coding looks for patterns in the data through substantive and theoretic coding. Theoretical codes are merged to produce a single core category that forms the substantive theory.                                                 | Open, axial and selective coding enables analysis of single incidents in the data. Breaking down and reconstructing codes generates increasingly meaningful codes and a core category that supports the generation of a substantive theory. | Analysis is flexible, everything is codes (initial coding) before being grouped into more focused codes. These become theoretical codes that lead to the final theory. There can be multiple core categories. |
| <b>Theory Generation</b>      | A distinction is made between theory generation as the primary aim and verification as a secondary process. The substantive theory is central to completing the research, requiring further analysis afterwards for verification. | The substantive theory is central to completing the research. Verification is achieved by different perspectives confirming the same viewpoint in the data.                                                                                 | The constructed theory is considered an interpretation of the data rather than an exact representation. The researcher is central to the theories interpretation.                                             |

There is much debate and division between those who view classic GT as a ‘full package’ methodology, arguing that newer approaches have lost the essence of classic GT (Glaser, 1998; Holton & Walsh, 2017; Walsh et al., 2015) and those that advocate for its place within a qualitative paradigm with more ontological and epistemological constraints (Charmaz, 2024; Holton & Walsh, 2017). Alongside this, there is criticism that classic GT remains positivist in nature, through positioning the researcher as a detached observer (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). However, as Foucault (1995, p. 27) theorised “*power and knowledge directly imply one another*”, that is to say that knowledge production is largely biased towards those in power and as such, cannot be objective. The ontological and epistemological positioning in this research does not align with the notion of objectivity, therefore classic GT was ruled out as a methodological choice for this research.

### 3.3.1 Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT)

Developed by Kathy Charmaz, a student of both Glaser & Strauss, CGT emphasises the role of the researcher in constructing meaning and the resulting theory (Charmaz, 2024). Unlike classic GT, which aims to uncover an objective reality, CGT acknowledges that researchers bring their own perspectives, experiences, and biases to the research process (Charmaz, 2000). This approach views knowledge as co-created by the researcher and participant-researchers, rather than discovered (Clarke, 2005). This perspective allows for a more flexible and nuanced exploration of the social processes under study (Charmaz, 2024). In CGT, researchers engage in an iterative process of data collection and analysis, like other GT methods, but with an increased focus on reflexivity. Reflexivity involves the researcher continuously reflecting on their assumptions, biases, and interactions with the participant-researchers and data. This ongoing self-awareness helps to ensure that the research findings are grounded in the participant-researchers’ perspectives and the context in

which they arise (Charmaz, 2024). Additionally, CGT encourages the use of rich, descriptive narratives to present the findings, which helps to convey the complexity and depth of the participant-researchers' experiences. It aims for abstract understanding rather than explanation or prediction (Charmaz, 2024).

### 3.3.2 Rationale of the chosen methodology

GT is especially valuable in exploratory research where little is known about a phenomenon. Whilst the concept of belonging is not without a wealth of existing research, the ambiguity around definitions and the lack of understanding of what belonging means for D/deaf CYP means this is an exploratory piece of research. In line with the philosophical positioning outlined, CGT has been chosen over other iterations as this research privileges the voices of the participant-researchers (Farragher & Coogan, 2020) to co-construct knowledge rather than seeking the discovery of a single truth. The social processes occurring through the research create the story between those co-constructing it (Hallberg, 2006). The approach used in CGT generates a rich, detailed theory that is grounded in the data, providing valuable insights into complex social phenomena and the interplay between them (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007).

It is important to recognise, consistent with my ontological and epistemological stance, that I am not separate from the data. While steps will be taken to minimise researcher bias, such as constant comparison and reflexivity, it cannot be eliminated, and my prior knowledge and values will inevitably influence the research. When considering generalisability, Charmaz (2024) suggests CGT does not aim for broad generalisability, describing it as a possibility rather than a research aim. However, Charmaz (2024) acknowledges that CGT theory generation often carries relevance to other areas with similar contextual aspects.

In line with this, it is important to acknowledge that if this research were repeated, the result would likely differ (Parker, 1994). As we understand the world from our own subjective experience of it, this research will not stand alone without me (and the participant-researchers) in it.

## 3.4 Further Philosophical Considerations

### 3.4.1 Critical Theory

Following [phase 1](#) of data collection, I noticed participant-researchers were sharing experiences of oppression (e.g. being denied access to sign language, expectations to speak, being used as a commodity), voicing a desire for change through gaining confidence to advocate for themselves. In line with CGT methodology, I responded to the participant-researchers' main concern, which led to consideration of the role of Critical Theory within this research.

Critical Theory originates from the Frankfurt School of thinking (e.g. Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Habermas), although this research draws more on Freire's seminal text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). Freire's (1970) emancipatory research in Brazil critiqued the Brazilian education system, calling for a need to counter dominant narratives to bring about change. Freire's thinking critiques social systems that shape and impact people's realities (Hense & McFerran, 2016), which can be directly applied to the long history of oppression experienced by D/deaf people (Ladd, 2003). Hense & McFerran (2016) describe how even in co-construction, dominant discourses remain prioritised, as the status quo is embedded in the very functioning of society. If reality is socially constructed, then it can be expected that the dominant ideology will become embedded in policy, directing human behaviour and giving meaning to experiences. Without a critical lens, these embedded assumptions are accepted or ignored.

Freire (1970) proposes critical consciousness to empower individuals to challenge social injustice and oppression, arguing that we have the ability to change our reality by becoming conscious of it. This is revisited in [5.2.2](#).

### 3.4.2 Deaf Critical Theory

Deaf Critical Theory, often referred to as DeafCrit, is a framework informed by Critical Theory that views society as structured around hearing ontology/ways of being (Gertz, 2003). It considers that the structures, policies and processes that make up the world are designed to privilege hearing norms and as such, marginalise the Deaf community (Wright, 2017; Garcia-Fernández, 2014; Gertz, 2003). Deaf crit therefore examines how language, audism and power operate at a systemic level alongside how D/deaf ways of being shape the lives and experiences of D/deaf people. DeafCrit can also be considered an epistemology (Clerck, 2018; Hauser et al., 2010; Holcomb, 2010; Ladd, 2003) as it argues that Deaf people have unique ways of knowing and experiencing the world through the use of signed language and adopting the view that D/deaf people do not view themselves as disabled (Ladd, 2003; Valente, 2011). This approach can be likened to similar movements seen in other marginalised groups such as black rights, women's rights, LGBTQIA, representing a reclaiming of cultural identity (Gertz, 2003).

Gertz (2003) is a Deaf researcher; and her work provides a Deaf-focused approach created by Deaf people, for Deaf people, based on their living experiences. This is important as I acknowledge that, as a hearing researcher, I am interpreting participant-researchers' experiences from my own living experience. Applying a DeafCrit lens aims to centre D/deaf ways of knowing whilst also recognising that knowledge is socially constructed in the Deaf community by D/deaf people (Holcomb, 2010; Paul & Moores, 2012). This is a further reason why a co-constructed approach is so important.

### 3.4.3 Critical Constructivism/Constructionism

Critical constructivism/constructionism is a theoretical framework that merges constructivist/constructionism principles with Critical Theory. This emphasises our understanding of the world as influenced by power. There has long been a relationship between knowledge and power, with certain groups (oppressors) dominating knowledge production to maintain their position of authority by the marginalisation of different groups (Freire, 1970). Having a critical awareness of how knowledge is used to reinforce these social hierarchies and how this contributes to continued oppression is vital when aiming to bring about change.

Critical Constructivism/Constructionism and DeafCrit provide useful frameworks for understanding the complexities of knowledge production and the implication for social and educational change as both centre power, knowledge and language as being contextually produced. This is important for this research particularly when considering the role of culture, as two distinct cultures are adopted within this research, my own as a hearing person and my participant-researchers as Deaf.

Artiles (2015) describes how differences are often perpetuated by policy and law, despite often being aimed at providing resources to minimise inequalities, they can actually further spread assumptions about difference. DeafCrit is useful here as it moves beyond recognition of multiple truths, by also recognising that not all 'truths' are equal or valid. This feels relevant to my participant-researchers' experiences of marginalisation by the dominant society (i.e. The Hearing world) as they spoke of educational policy that was oppressive despite being designed to support them.

### 3.4.4 Critical Constructivist Grounded Theory (CCGT)

Following the introduction of a DeafCrit lens, the methodology was adjusted during phase 1 to Critical-Constructivist Grounded Theory - CCGT (Levitt, 2021). Levitt et al., (2025) explains that in CCGT individuals experience many different meanings and these meanings take shape in specific contexts. Whilst meaning is co-created, it also recognises that meaning is constructed through culture, relationships and the power dynamics within them. As the authors state, *“The impact of privilege, oppression, social structures, stigma and resistance are all of interest throughout”* the research process (Levitt et al., 2025 p.3). This aligns with the participant-researchers’ views and supports an emancipatory stance within the research. Furthermore, EPs are well placed to advocate and promote social justice as outlined in the Code of Ethics, through collaboration, intervention and voice gathering (British Psychological Society, 2018) making this addition beneficial to advancing EP practice.

### 3.4.5 Alternative methodologies considered

Through the process of selecting a suitable method for this research, I considered several alternative methods before deciding on CCGT as the most suitable approach. Alternatives are briefly considered below.

**Reflexive Thematic Analysis – (RTA)** (Braun & Clarke, 2021) – The reflexive nature of RTA appealed to me. Also, I have prior research experience using RTA which would have made RTA an obvious choice. However, in line with my research aims and initial research questions, I did not feel that RTA would have provided the level of depth I was looking for. Whilst I would have found themes and patterns within the data, I wanted to go further in providing potential understanding around experiences for D/deaf CYP.

**Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)** (Smith et al., 2022) – In IPA, a step-by-step process is followed involving the researcher making decisions on what the participant (rather than participant-researcher) is saying. Whilst reflexivity is intended to counter potential bias, this felt uncomfortable, as my position as a hearing researcher interpreting D/deaf experience did not feel authentic. I recognise, that being hearing, I can never truly understand what it is like to be D/deaf.

Similarly, whilst IPA would have privileged the phenomenological experiences, IPA's idiographic focus (Smith, Harré, & Van Langenhove, 1995) would have led to in depth analysis of individual experience whereas I aimed to understand the broader factors that affect human experience (Charmaz, 2024). Furthermore, D/deaf people should be considered as a heterogenous group, rather than homogenous due to differences in D/deaf identity i.e. audiological or cultural (Young & Temple, 2014).

## 3.5 Methods

### 3.5.1 Participant-researchers

Participant-researchers were recruited on a first come-first served basis using purposive sampling, based on having living experience relevant to the initial research questions. Participant-researchers were identified through the following inclusion criteria;

1. Participant-researchers were at least 16-year-old at the time of giving consent to participate in the research.
2. Participant-researchers were currently accessing post-16 education (equivalent to year 12 onwards). This could be at a mainstream or special school sixth form or college setting.

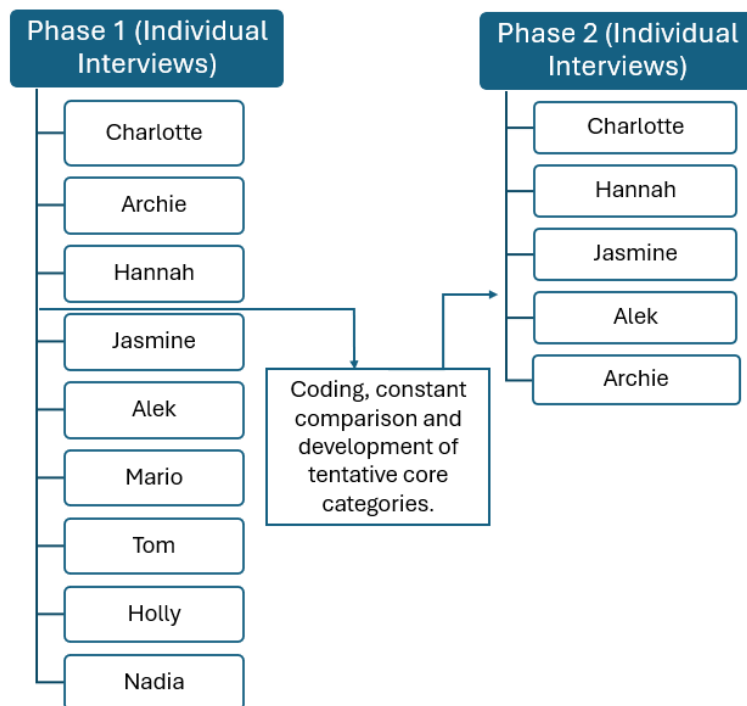
3. Participant-researchers had previously accessed secondary education at a school setting in England (i.e. Not electively home educated).
4. Participant-researchers identified as D/deaf or hard-of-hearing (D/HH). The use of assistive technology (e.g. hearing aids, cochlear implants) to support some level of hearing ability did not affect participation. Note: Whilst inclusion criteria included those who viewed their identity as being hard-of-hearing, all participant-researchers who opted to be a part of the research identified as Deaf or deaf, therefore the terminology D/deaf is used throughout this research instead of D/HH in recognition of their self-identification.

Participant-researchers from phase 1 were invited to take part in phase 2. They were asked at the end of their interviews in phase 1, whether they would be happy to take part in the second phase. For phase 2, participant-researchers were chosen using theoretical sampling<sup>6</sup>, guided by the emerging categories, to provide a variety of experiences for exploration. A total of nine participant-researchers were recruited to take part in the study; all nine participant-researchers took part in phase 1 and five participant-researchers returned to take part in phase 2. This is shown in Figure 3.

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<sup>6</sup> Theoretical sampling is where decisions around collection of additional data is determined based on the theory being generated and categories that are emerging (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Data collected is with the aim of extending or challenging the emerging categories (Willig, 2013).

Figure 3: Breakdown of participant-researcher recruitment



Participant-researchers were recruited from one post-16 provider; a college located within one Local Authority. Despite all attending the same setting at the time of participation, they had varied secondary school experiences, outlined in [1.8](#). Participant-researchers were all assigned a ‘name’ pseudonym rather than a letter or number so as not to dehumanise them through the need to preserve anonymity.

### 3.5.2 Role of interpreter

As outlined, all participant-researchers opted to have a BSL interpreter join the interview. This adds an additional level of interpretation, as the interpreter was relaying information between the participant-researchers and I. Whilst briefing information was provided with instructions such as translating verbatim, it’s likely that at times, the interpreter reflected their own understanding of the participant-researchers’ experiences during the process of interpreting. This process, can be likened to double hermeneutics, in which the participant-researcher is interpreting their own experience through the process of sharing, and the researcher is then interpreting those

interpretations (Smith & Osborn, 2003). This leads to two layers of interpretation. Whilst typically associated with IPA, it has relevance to CCGT because it acknowledges that narratives contain mediation through the process of sense-making. When adding an interpreter, this potential for an additional interpretive layer could be considered triple hermeneutics. At times, the interpreter was required to alter wording to aid understanding and construction of meaning, such as using the sign 'included' to represent 'belonging' as in BSL there is not a direct sign translation for belonging. This was raised in the moment, and to my knowledge, no other replacements were undertaken without my awareness.

### 3.5.3 Early preparation stages

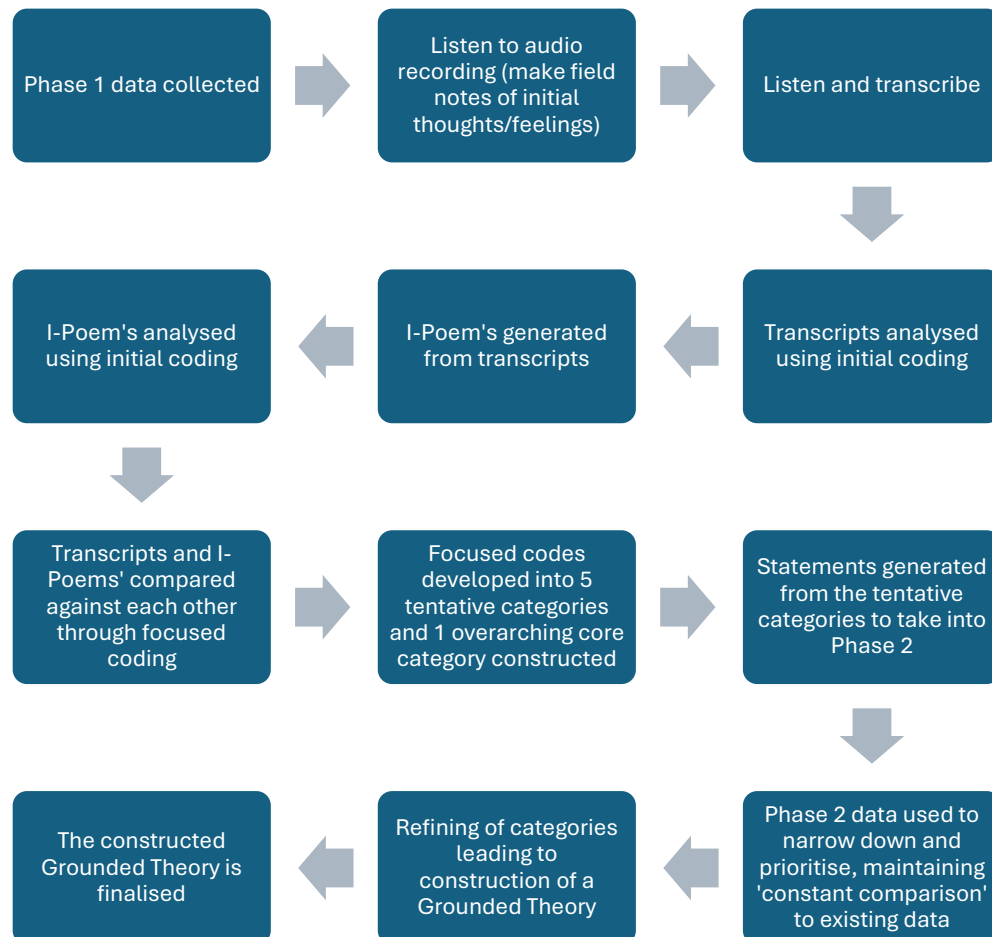
Prior to recruitment, I met with the Manager of the Hearing Impairment (HI) team within the Local Authority and the Principal and Manager of the Deaf Centre at the Post-16 setting, to discuss my research. Following this, I generated ten questions relating to the initial research questions. The questions were sent to a Deaf staff member at the setting for feedback (due to logistics and time frames, a Deaf adult was consulted instead of the participant-researchers as they had not been recruited at that stage). The ten questions were provided in an easy-read D/deaf friendly format ([Appendix 2](#)).

To recruit, I presented my research to the settings cohort of D/deaf students and invited them to take part. I explained what they would be asked to do and gave them a chance to ask any questions ([Appendix 1](#)). A BSL interpreter from the setting supported with signing the presentation and relaying questions. Participant-researchers who expressed interest in taking part were given the consent form to sign ([Appendix 3](#)).

### 3.5.4 Data Construction and Analysis

The data construction and analysis process followed the iterative stages of CCGT: initial coding, focused coding and theoretical coding (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Step-by-step process of data analysis.



This process will be explained in more detail in the following sections.

## 3.6 Phase 1

During phase 1, participant-researchers took part in a face-to-face individual interview at their setting. All participant-researchers during phase 1 opted to have a BSL Interpreter in the interview. The interpreter was known to the participant-researchers and the same interpreter was used for all nine interviews in phase 1. The interpreter was given briefing information to support the process ([Appendix 4](#)). Each participant-researcher was asked the same ten questions, although they were given the choice

whether they wanted to answer them and how they wished to answer. The interviews were audio recorded using Google Meet and then transcribed afterwards.

Individual interviews were chosen over alternative methods such as focus groups, to enable participant-researchers to feel more able to share personal experiences. Logistically, this also aided ease of transcribing as the interpreter would be required to interpret multiple voices, making it difficult to accurately determine which participant-researchers voice was being relayed each time.

During the first interview, the first question asked was “*what does belonging mean to you?*”, the interviewee (Charlotte) responded that she didn’t understand the word belonging. A definition was provided to support this;

*“The extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others in the school social environment”* (Goodenow & Grady, 1993, p.60-61).

The interpreter explained that in BSL, there is not a sign for ‘belonging’ and the closest equivalent would be “feeling included/to feel included”. I made the decision to use the terminology/BSL sign “feeling included/to feel included” for the remainder of that interview in place of belonging. Following the interview, I reflected on the need to change the terminology.

**MEMO EXCERPT: 12/07/25**

I find it so interesting that ‘belonging’ does not appear within BSL. When switched to ‘feeling included’, participants were able to give a response suggesting it is an understood concept, but that the word belonging is not widely used. I have been reflecting on whether this difference in terminology impacts on how the concept is known or understood within D/deaf communities.

**UPDATE: 14/07/25**

I have made the decision to stick with the terminology ‘feeling included’ to explain the concept of belonging for all interviews when the term belonging is not understood as this appears to better reflect how participants view and understand the concept.

The decision to adjust the terminology reflects the reflexive methodological stance of this research. Instead of imposing academic or socially-expected terminology that risks confusion for some participant-researchers, the research has prioritised accessible language throughout, aligning with their everyday living experiences. This ensures that the research continues to be grounded in their experiences, maintaining methodological integrity, in line with GT. This is important for qualitative research where reflexivity is essential in ensuring the research remains participant-centred rather than being solely drive by theoretical abstraction regardless of accessibility. Further considerations as to the potential impact or limitation of changing the terminology is explored in [5.6](#).

### 3.6.1 Initial Coding

Initial coding is the process of “*engaging with and defining data*” (Charmaz 2024, p. 340). This involves exploring fragments within the data; this can be individual words, line-by-line, sentence-by-sentence or a larger segment linked to a single incident and assigning associated words, short phrases, often ‘in-vivo’ (where participant-researchers’ own words are used). These assigned words/phrases are defined as codes. This initial stage is more descriptive and by working through the transcripts in this way, it helps draw potential avenues for further analysis whilst remaining close to the data.

*“A code sets up a relationship with your data, and with your respondents” (Star, 2010, p. 80 as cited in Charmaz, 2024, p. 110)*

Initial coding was originally done using NVIVO software; however, partway through phase 1, I found the codes were difficult to see in the software’s format, so I made the decision to move initial coding into Microsoft Word.

The figure below provides an example of initial coding; quotation marks are used to indicate an in-vivo code.

Figure 5: Example of Initial Coding

| Original Transcript                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Initial Coding                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Hannah:</b> Went to mainstream classes yeah, but if you had a problem, you would go down to the deaf group. We had a classroom. No, not an actual classroom, but, like, we'd have a classroom, but for break time and lunch times. You know? If you had a problem during the day, with your hearing aid, or can't find your class. If you were having problems, you'd have your signing class, you could normally go down there and talk to somebody. But it's always difficult.</p> <p><b>Sarah:</b> Difficult in what way?</p> <p><b>Hannah:</b> Because I don't understand. And they don't understand what we would talk about and how we we're feeling.</p> <p><b>Sarah:</b> Can you think of a time at secondary school when you didn't feel included?</p> <p><b>Hannah:</b> I am deaf, but I have other problems. Umm and being in the mainstream school, there was a few times, like, my signing wasn't good and I had some deaf friends, like, full deaf, and they're looking at a teacher, and then they keep looking at me. And, it's like, "oh, dear, I've got to sign!", and that made me feel pressured. And I felt a bit annoyed because I couldn't focus myself because I kept getting people looking at me. And I'm like, "I'll try signing, but I'm not fantastic". I'm the only deaf in my family, I don't know, growing up, I've only been deaf. And they're just looking at me, and I've got to sign to them. I'm deaf, but because I can speak, and I did work with my speech therapist for a long time. I feel like they want to put more pressure on me to sign for them. I did try to. And then when it finally came (signing), I was like...phew! And I had to catch up on all my work.</p> | <p>Attended mainstream classes<br/>Deaf space to access support<br/>Separate space<br/>Space for social times<br/>Using space for support<br/>Needing help<br/>"Always difficult"</p> <p>Barriers to understanding<br/>They? The 'Hearing'?<br/>Distinction between 'they' and 'we'</p> <p>Intersectionality<br/>Difficulties signing<br/>Distinction between deaf and "full deaf"<br/>Feeling pressure to sign<br/>Annoyed by expectations<br/>Feeling watched<br/>Only deaf in the family<br/>Pressure<br/>Only one who can sign.<br/>Expectation to sign<br/>SALT intervention<br/>Feeling relief when able to sign<br/>Being behind on school work</p> |

Following initial coding, I struggled with the quantity of data and felt there was a 'sense' I was getting from the interviews that I was struggling to articulate.

**MEMO EXCERPT: 27/09/25**

I'm struggling with the quantity of data and narrowing it down to be able to understand the 'story' within it. I feel there is an essence within co-researchers' narratives and there is something important to draw out but I am struggling to name/articulate exactly what it is. I find the conversation break down in the transcript (when the co-researcher stops sharing and I ask a question) sometimes breaks the flow. I have decided to try turning a transcript into an I-Poem (Gilligan, 2015) to see if reducing the quantity of text and removing my 'voice' from the narrative helps. By focusing on just their voice, their 'I', I hope this will help me to be able to clearly see their voice and what is being said within that.

I-Poems typically feature within the Listening Guide (Gilligan, 2015); they are designed to enable researchers to stay close to participant-researchers' voices by focusing on the use of 'I' when sharing stories. This helps identify changes in how the participant-researcher speaks, thinks or feels about themselves over the course of the interview (Gilligan, 2015). To create the I-poem, I highlighted each use of 'I' followed by the accompanying text to create an 'I statement'. Due to grammatical differences between BSL and English, I made the decision to include use of 'I', 'We', 'Me'. Each 'I statement' was then placed on a separate line in the same sequence it appeared in the original transcript. The table below provides an example;

*Table 8: Example of I Statements*

| <b>Example transcript extract</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <b>Example of I Statement</b>                                                                         |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| "To have people to talk too. Don't want to be alone. Don't want to be on my own. Want to get involved with my friends. "                                                                                                                         | I don't want to be alone.<br>I don't want to be on my own.<br>I want to get involved with my friends. |
| "I felt like everyone was laughing. If a group of friends are laughing and I don't know what they're talking about and the staff have to tell them to stop laughing, to be nice to your friends and let me get involved. It's confusing for me." | I felt like everyone was laughing.<br>I don't know what they're talking about.<br>I'm confused.       |

**MEMO EXCERPT: 03/10/25**

I have turned Charlotte's transcript into an I-Poem;

*I don't want to be alone.  
I don't want to be on my own.  
I want to get involved with my friends.  
I felt like everyone was laughing.  
I don't know what they're talking about.  
I'm confused.*

*I moved to a deaf school.  
I'm with my friends.  
I used sign.  
I don't want to change anything.  
I was happy at school.*

This feels so powerful! It is only 11 lines long but it is really moving. I have broken it into two clear stanzas as the shift in tone/message of each one captures the change in their experience.

Stanza 1 = A story of isolation, feeling left out, confused and wanting connection.

Stanza 2 = A story of the impact of 'place', communication and friendship.

I like how the I-poem emphasises the story/narrative and removes the more formalised interview style that is in the original transcripts. **I have made the decision to turn all transcripts into an I-poem and to add these to the data set alongside the original transcripts.**

Once I had generated I-poems for all phase 1 interviews, the I-poems were initial line coded, using the same process outlined above for the original transcripts. Further examples of Interview and I-Poem transcripts and initial coding can be found in Appendix [5](#) and [6](#).

### 3.6.2 Focused Coding

As Charmaz (2024) outlines, initial codes provide possible paths for further exploration, but the next step is to decide which paths to take. This decision process involves sorting and refining initial codes, merging ones of similarity and renaming when new connections were made. This stage is defined as focused coding and involved more in-depth scrutiny of the data, referring back to their relevance to the

initial research questions. The aim is to elevate initial descriptive codes to analytical focused codes. The figure below provides an example of how initial codes became focused codes.

Figure 7 Example of Focused Coding

| Original Transcript                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Initial Coding                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Focused Coding                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Hannah:</b> Went to mainstream classes yeah, but if you had a problem, you would go down to the deaf group. We had a classroom. No, not an actual classroom, but, like, we'd have a classroom, but for break time and lunch times. You know? If you had a problem during the day, with your hearing aid, or can't find your class. If you were having problems, you'd have your signing class, you could normally go down there and talk to somebody. But it's always difficult.</p> <p><b>Sarah:</b> Difficult in what way?</p> <p><b>Hannah:</b> Because I don't understand. And they don't understand what we would talk about and how we we're feeling.</p> <p><b>Sarah:</b> Can you think of a time at secondary school when you didn't feel included?</p> <p><b>Hannah:</b> I am deaf, but I have other problems. Umm and being in the mainstream school, there was a few times, like, my signing wasn't good and I had some deaf friends, like, full deaf, and they're looking at a teacher, and then they keep looking at me. And, it's like, "oh, dear, I've got to sign!", and that made me feel pressured. And I felt a bit annoyed because I couldn't focus myself because I kept getting people looking at me. And I'm like, "I'll try signing, but I'm not fantastic". I'm the only deaf in my family, I don't know, growing up, I've only been deaf. And they're just looking at me, and I've got to sign to them. I'm deaf, but because I can speak, and I did work with my speech therapist for a long time. I feel like they want to put more pressure on me to sign for them. I did try to. And then when it finally came (signing), I was like...phew! And I had to catch up on all my work.</p> | <p>Attended mainstream classes</p> <p>Deaf space to access support</p> <p>Separate space</p> <p>Space for social times</p> <p>Using space for support</p> <p>Needing help</p> <p>"Always difficult"</p><br><p>Barriers to understanding</p> <p>They? The 'Hearing'?</p> <p>Distinction between 'they' and 'we'</p><br><p>Intersectionality</p> <p>Difficulties signing</p> <p>Distinction between deaf and "full deaf"</p> <p>Feeling pressure to sign</p> <p>Annoyed by expectations</p> <p>Feeling watched</p> <p>Only deaf in the family</p> <p>Pressure</p> <p>Only one who can sign.</p> <p>Expectation to sign</p> <p>SALT intervention</p> <p>Feeling relief when able to sign</p> <p>Being behind on school work</p> | <p>Mainstream barriers</p> <p>Seeking other Deaf people for support</p> <p>Deaf 'Safe' spaces</p><br><p>Communication barriers</p> <p>Acknowledging difference – a gap between the two</p><br><p>Navigating pressure and expectations</p> <p>Being used as a commodity</p> <p>Impact of communication barriers</p> |

The decision over which codes to prioritise is down to each individual researcher, based on what is considered the most 'useful' for further testing (Charmaz, 2024). This felt a little ambiguous so to start with I began with the codes that were most frequently occurring in the data. Alongside frequently occurring codes, I noted anything that stood out to me as interesting, conflicting or that warranted further reflection. In line with

CCGT methodology (Charmaz, 2024; Levitt, 2021), as this involves the researcher making decisions on what to focus on, it is recognised that if someone else reviewed the data, they may be drawn to a different path. This is acknowledged and accepted, as multiple paths (truths) can co-exist. The findings presented in this thesis are the result of decisions made by myself, guided by the participant-researchers' throughout the process based on what stood out/was felt to be of greater importance but do not present the only possible path that could have been taken (Charmaz, 2024).

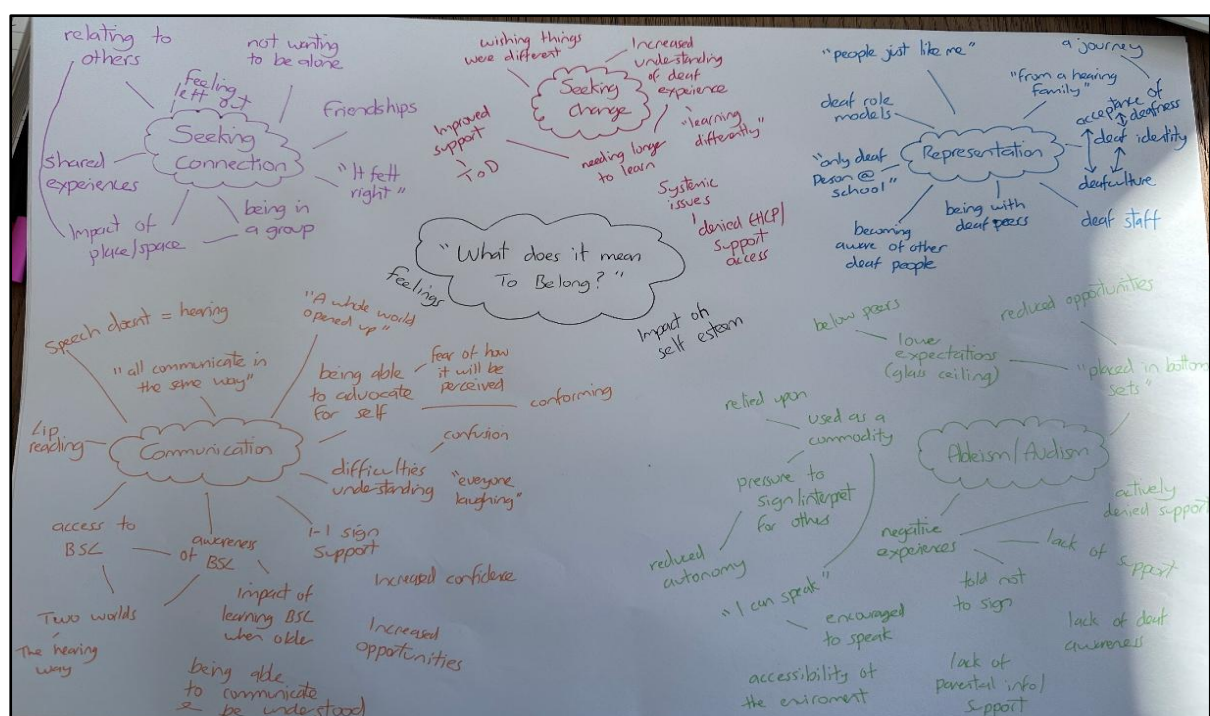
Once I had done this for all nine interviews, I reviewed all focused codes to see if these could be grouped further. From this, I constructed five tentative conceptual categories shown in the table below;

Table 9: Tentative Conceptual Categories at end of phase 1

|                    |
|--------------------|
| Seeking Connection |
| Seeking Change     |
| Representation     |
| Communication      |
| Audism             |

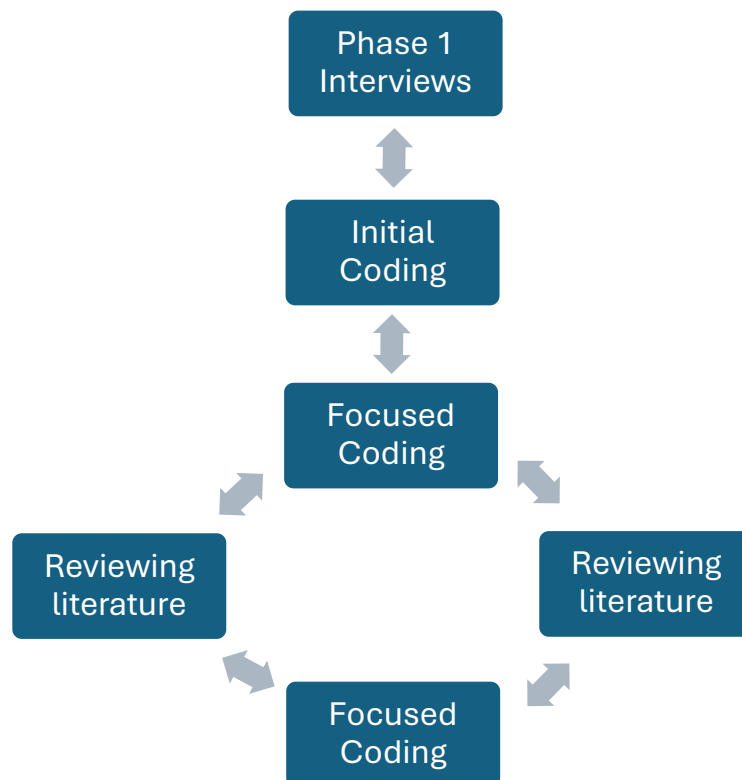
I plotted each of the tentative categories and associated codes onto a mind map to help visualise (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Visual representation of tentative categories at the end of phase 1.



Throughout the focused coding stage, I conducted the literature review concurrently, using existing literature to aid my understanding on the developing codes (Figure 8). This cyclical process continued until I felt the coding supported explanation of the data set so far. At this stage, I moved into phase 2.

*Figure 8: Cyclical process of data analysis and reviewing literature*



### 3.7 Phase 2

Following initial and focused coding, five tentative categories were constructed. As the analysis had been conducted solely by myself, I was mindful the categories had not been co-constructed with the participant-researchers. Phase 2 was designed to maintain co-construction between participant-researchers' and I, without compromising on original authorship as primary researcher.

For each of the five tentative categories, I made nine statements for each one, representing the focused codes within them. An example is shown in Figure 9, which details the nine statements for the tentative category ‘communication’.

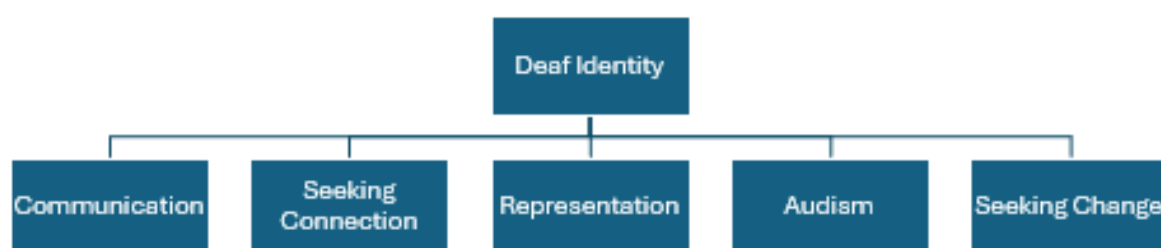
Figure 9: Example of phase 2 statements

|                                            |  |
|--------------------------------------------|--|
| Lip reading                                |  |
| Having sign support                        |  |
| Access to BSL                              |  |
| For everyone to know BSL                   |  |
| Being able to understand what is happening |  |
| Doing things for yourself, without help    |  |
| Everyone communicating in the same way     |  |
| Knowing I've been understood               |  |
| Feeling I'm the odd one out/different      |  |

Five grids of nine statements were created to represent aspects of the focused codes within each tentative category. These can be found in [Appendix 7](#). Participant-researchers were asked to read the statements and rate each one using a ‘diamond 9’ approach, with 1 being the statement they felt was the most important to them and 9, being the least.

At the start of phase 2, Deaf Identity was constructed as the core category linking each tentative category together (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Depiction of core category and tentative categories at end of phase 1.



The reflective memo extract below outlines some of my reflections during this process.

**Reflective Memo: Category construction 06/10/25**

I am struggling to categorise some codes, many of them overlap e.g. I originally placed "Deaf 'safe' spaces" and "seeking other Deaf people for support" within the category of 'Representation', as I felt this was about the value of being with other Deaf people. However, this could also be about 'seeking connection' with others and 'communication'. Looking into this more theoretically, those codes also link to wider societal 'audism' that they are needing to seek support in separate spaces and away from hearing people. How do I decide which code they most fit with?

**Update 08/10/25**

I think I may be thinking about this in the wrong way. I'm trying to fit codes into neat boxes (categories) but this isn't going to work, research on belonging highlights it's multi-faceted nature so it makes sense that codes do not neatly fit into a perfectly named category. I need to look at what connects them all together, an overarching issue/area of focus that the categories are linked by.

**Update 10/10/25**

Is the overarching commonality about 'identity' or more specifically 'Deaf identity'?

*Seeking Connection* - The impact of connection with other Deaf peers, also the impact of connection to a Deaf-only space. This ties in with *Representation* through being around others like 'me' and having access to role models. Experiences of *Audism* impact on this and how co-researchers view themselves, particularly when they don't have access to Deaf spaces or Deaf peers. This links with the Deaf/deaf distinction too and how individuals identify themselves, especially as BSL (*communication*) is a significant part of Deaf culture and Deaf identity. Deaf identity therefore can link 4/5 categories together.

The final category *Seeking Change* is a little different as this doesn't appear to be present for all co-researcher. Yet, there is something about it that I feel is important and cannot be left out. Looking at the co-researchers that contributed to this category, and specifically looking for aspects of identity within it, those who were more comfortable/confident in their Deaf identity were the ones voicing a desire for change or a wish for things to have been different. These co-researchers have a strong sense of self advocacy than the others.

To further explore the core category of Deaf Identity, participant-researchers were asked "*What does being Deaf mean to you?*" alongside completing the ranking activity. The purpose of this stage was to refine tentative categories by identifying those the participant-researchers considered most important to them. This focused their main concerns and ensured the developing theory remained co-constructed by prioritising what they deemed most relevant, rather than my own assumptions of importance.

As with phase 1, interviews were conducted in person with an interpreter present for each one. The same interpreter was used for all phase 2 interviews. This was a different interpreter to the one used in phase 1.

All interviews were audio recorded using Google Meet and transcribed immediately afterwards. Participant-researchers were asked if they thought anything was missing from the tentative categories that was important to their school experiences. The first participant-researcher provided an additional response, the remaining four participant-researchers considered nothing was missing.

The ranked scores from each participant-researcher were recorded in a table and total scores added together. The three lowest scores for each category were highlighted as areas of most importance across all participant-researchers. For two categories, four statements were selected due to two statements having the same total score, i.e. being equally important (Table 9). All scoring can be found in [Appendix 8](#).

*Table 10: Example of scoring for phase 2 statements*

|                                                           | <b>Total</b> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Having deaf staff to support me                           | 24           |
| Working with people that understand the deaf community    | 21           |
| Socialising with deaf students                            | 18           |
| Socialising with hearing students                         | 37           |
| Having hearing staff to support me                        | 28           |
| Feeling proud of my Deaf culture                          | 20           |
| Having family and friends understand me                   | 21           |
| Having family who are deaf aware                          | 22           |
| My understanding of the differences in the deaf community | 34           |
|                                                           |              |
|                                                           | <b>Total</b> |
| Lip reading                                               | 26           |
| Having sign support                                       | 11           |
| Access to BSL                                             | 10           |
| For everyone to know BSL                                  | 17           |
| Being able to understand what is happening                | 20           |
| Doing things for yourself, without help                   | 30           |
| Everyone communicating in the same way                    | 37           |
| Knowing I've been understood                              | 32           |
| Feeling I'm the odd one out/different                     | 42           |

### 3.7.1 Theoretical Coding

As the final four interviews had yielded no additional avenues of exploration, it was at this point I decided to stop data collection. At this stage, I moved into theoretical coding. Theoretical coding considered *how* codes and categories relate to each other (Glaser, 1978). It is this process of establishing the relationships between codes that results in the Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2024).

To do this, I used the highest priority statements to go back through the data, refining it based on its importance to the areas of priority outlined by the participant-researchers. Participant-researcher responses to the question “*what does being Deaf mean to you?*” was also added to the data set. The literature review was ongoing throughout, comparing literature to the developing theory to aid understanding. This combined process is known as constant comparative analysis (Glaser, 1978; Charmaz, 2024). The figure below provides an example of how focused codes became the final conceptual categories (outlined in [4.1](#)), through the theoretical coding process.

Figure 11: Example of Theoretical Coding

| Initial Coding                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Focused Coding                                                                                    | Conceptual Category (through Theoretical Coding)                                                                                                         |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Attended mainstream classes<br/>Deaf space to access support<br/>Separate space<br/>Space for social times<br/>Using space for support<br/>Needing help<br/>"Always difficult"</p>                                                                                  | <p>Mainstream barriers</p> <p>Seeking other Deaf people for support</p> <p>Deaf 'Safe' spaces</p> | <p>Navigating Oppression</p> <p>Deaf Consciousness/Establishing a Collective Belonging</p> <p>Deaf Consciousness/Establishing a Collective Belonging</p> |
| <p>Barriers to understanding<br/>They? The 'Hearing'?<br/>Distinction between 'they' and 'we'</p>                                                                                                                                                                      | <p>Communication barriers</p> <p>Acknowledging difference – a gap between the two</p>             | <p>Navigating Oppression/Deaf Consciousness</p> <p>Reclaiming Voice/Deaf Consciousness</p>                                                               |
| <p>Intersectionality</p> <p>Difficulties signing</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <p>Navigating pressure and expectations</p>                                                       | <p>Navigating Oppression</p>                                                                                                                             |
| <p>Distinction between deaf and "full deaf"</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <p>Being used as a commodity</p>                                                                  | <p>Navigating Oppression</p>                                                                                                                             |
| <p>Feeling pressure to sign<br/>Annoyed by expectations<br/>Feeling watched<br/>Only deaf in the family<br/>Pressure<br/>Only one who can sign.<br/>Expectation to sign<br/>SALT intervention<br/>Feeling relief when able to sign<br/>Being behind on school work</p> | <p>Impact of Communication barriers</p>                                                           | <p>Navigating Oppression/Deaf Consciousness</p>                                                                                                          |

Some codes continued to overlap across categories, this supports their integration into the interpretive Grounded Theory as it recognises relationships between categories.

### 3.7.2 Sufficiency not Saturation

Knowing when to stop data collection is debated within GT methodology; classic GT dictates that data collection ends at the point of theoretical saturation<sup>7</sup>. As saturation is based on the researcher's judgement, there is a critique of how different researchers apply this term. It is argued that researchers' interpretations have detached saturation from the original theoretical underpinning outlined by Glaser & Strauss (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013; Charmaz, 2024). These are often decided in consideration of wider factors such as time or cost rather than through critical exploration of the data (Wiener, 2007). Charmaz (2024) explains that theoretical saturation is not to be confused with the repetition of events or stories within participant-researcher experiences. Instead, it is the conceptualisation of comparisons between those similar stories until no new patterns emerge (Glaser 2001).

An alternative to saturation is proposed by Dey (1999; 2003), who posits that a better term is 'theoretical sufficiency' in which data collection ceases when the researcher achieves a sufficient depth of understanding that allows theory construction. This concept of sufficiency aligns with the philosophical position outlined in this chapter. Attempting to achieve saturation suggests a single truth can be obtained through gathering enough data, and there is a point where no new information can be known. This does not align with a constructionist approach, which accepts multiple truths and that complete knowledge is unattainable. As already outlined ([3.2.1](#)), truth and meaning are not 'discovered' but actively constructed through the research process. As such it is fluid, with interpretation evolving in light of new data and new understandings, the notion of 'sufficiency' aligns with this perspective. Therefore, data

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<sup>7</sup> Theoretical saturation refers to the point at which gathering more data reveals no new properties or any further theoretical insights about the emerging grounded theory (Charmaz, 2024 p.342)

collection ceased when it was judged that theoretical sufficiency had been achieved and not saturation.

### 3.7.3 Memo writing/Field Notes

Typically, field notes are recorded during the interview itself, to record the researchers' thoughts, feelings and in-action reflections (Schön, 1983). However, after the first interview, it became clear that this was difficult to do due to needing my hands available to sign and the need to be looking at the participant-researcher to aid lip reading and ease of communication. Therefore, I made the decision not to record field notes during interviews. Instead, I made notes of any immediate thoughts/reflections during the first audio playthrough following the interview.

Memo writing is an integral part of the data analysis process, enabling the researcher to record their thoughts and ideas throughout. This aids critical reflection on positionality, expectations and procedures (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This reflexivity, known as 'methodological self-consciousness' (Charmaz, 2017) and involves taking a reflective gaze to become self-aware of our influence and highlight potential bias. The purpose of this is not to remove researcher influence, but to bring it to the forefront as it is acknowledged that the researcher is not separate to the research process and my subjectivity will be present within the research (Levy, 2016; Charmaz, 2019). Memos were recorded throughout the research process, beginning at the early stages of the research journey, through to completion. Memo excerpts are included in this thesis. Further examples can be found in [Appendix 7](#).

## 3.8 Ethics

Ethical Approval for this research was granted by the University of Sheffield Ethics Panel in June 2025 ([Appendix 9](#)).

### 3.8.1 Ethical Considerations

Through the ethics process, considerations were given to obtaining informed consent, the participant-researchers' right to withdraw and potential benefits and risks to participating. The consent form, information sheet and research poster can be found in [Appendix 3](#). When designing the research, the co-constructed nature was of most importance to me, particularly given my position as a hearing researcher, producing research with D/deaf participant-researchers. I was mindful that they were not used to 'bridge the gap' between the D/deaf world and hearing knowledge of that world as this risks D/deaf people losing their voice when hearing people speak on their behalf (Lane, 1999; Padden & Humphries, 2005). It is for that reason the methodological choices outlined earlier in this chapter were selected, with the aim of centring D/deaf voice. The addition of the I-poems in particular provided a way of removing my voice from the data, ensuring that it was the Deaf voice which was prioritised.

Further ethical considerations are also outlined in [1.7.1: Positionality as a hearing researcher](#), [1.8: Participant-researchers](#), and [2.5 Deaf Allyship](#).

## Chapter 4: Interpretive Findings

### 4.1 Presenting the CCGT

This chapter presents the interpretive findings and the resulting Critical-Constructivist Grounded Theory (CCGT). Data analysis applies a critical-constructionist lens, recognising that people's experiences are shaped through power, privilege and language, and that meaning is produced within social, political and historical contexts.

The term *interpretive findings* are used because, in line with CCGT, the data is "*constructed rather than discovered*" (Charmaz, 2009, p.131). The analysis therefore reflects my interpretation, developed through the theoretical codes co-constructed through the participant-researchers' in phases 1 and 2, rather than as an objective or singular truth.

The findings are presented as a process rather than static codes and categories, following the participant-researchers' journey as they experience, interpret, respond to and reshape their social world. This journey tells the story of the participant-researchers' identified main concern.

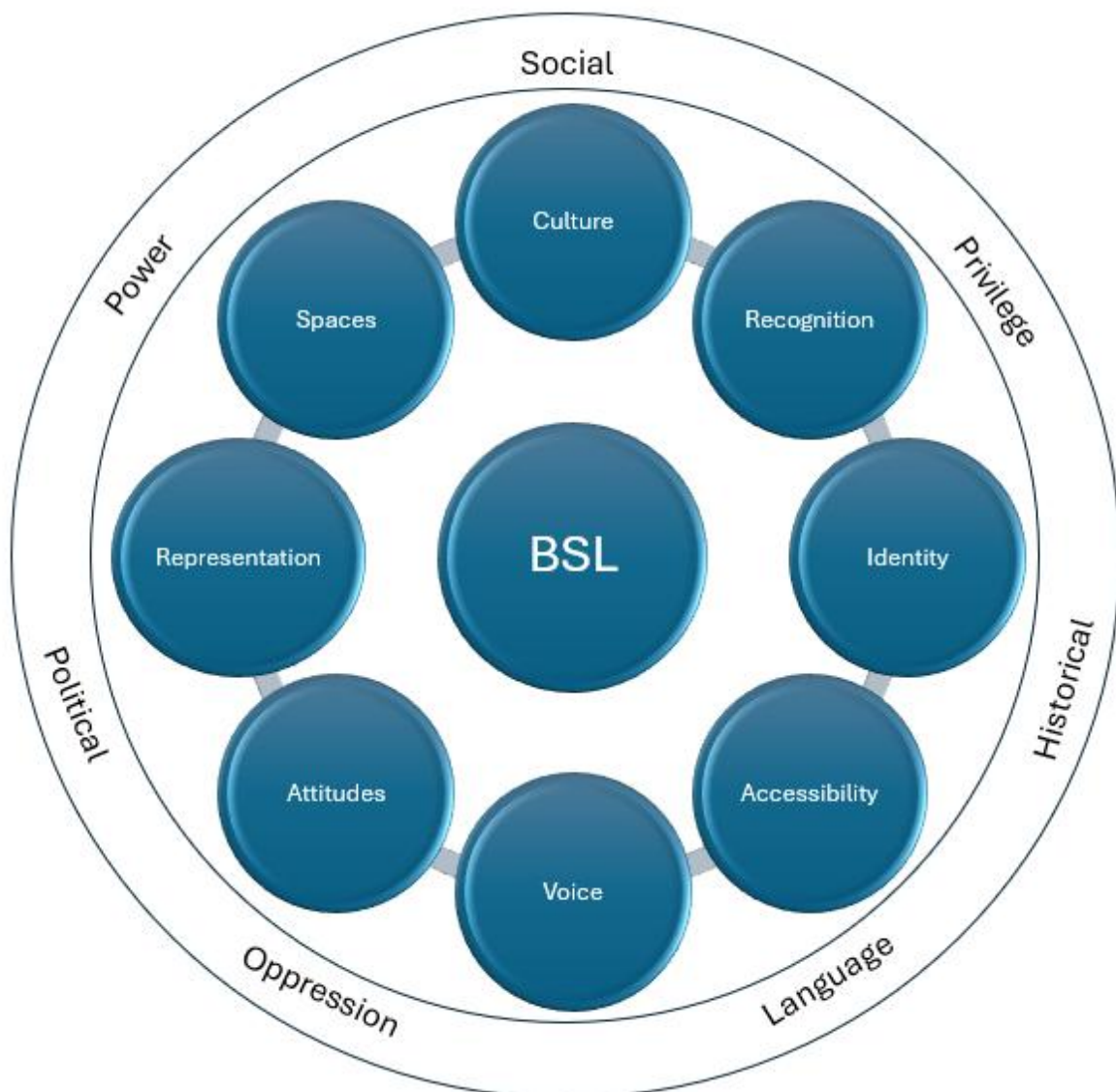
*"How do I experience belonging in the face of oppression?"*

The core category and central organising concept is "*BSL as a cornerstone*" through which four theoretical categories are explored.

1. *"Navigating Oppression: Experiences of self and other"*
2. *"Reclaiming voice: Representation and the space between two worlds"*
3. *"Deaf consciousness: Reauthoring of self and other"*
4. *"Establishing a collective belonging"*

The figure below illustrates how D/deaf CYP experience belonging in the face of oppression. BSL is central to this process, surrounded by eight key terms that reflect elements of the four theoretical categories. In line with critical-constructionism, the outer rings represent the external, influencing factors shaping these experiences; power, privilege, language and oppression. While acknowledging their social, political and historical context. The eight internal elements act as protective or contributory factors that serve to shield and counter the influence of these external factors.

*Figure 12 A Cultural-Linguistic CCGT for understanding collective belonging for Deaf CYP through the process of constructing Deaf consciousness.*



### 4.1.1 Theoretical Framework

The below statement provides a theoretical framework for the CCGT presented in this chapter.

The participant-researchers' journey towards collective belonging begins with access to BSL, initially serving as a communication tool and a means of accessing environments that had previously silenced and rejected them. Before this, participant-researchers experienced a sense of loss, shaped by inaccessible communication, absent, inconsistent or inadequate support and by frequent externalised oppression that was often internalised as shame or a rejection of Deafness. This internalisation further diminished their sense of agency and deepened feelings of isolation. As participant-researchers gained access to BSL, they formed friendships with other BSL users (predominantly Deaf peers), increasing exposure to Deaf representation and enabling them to build a stronger, more confident Deaf identity. This stage is often marked by confusion and conflict - a sense of being caught "*between two worlds*" as they negotiate shifting identities and expectations across both a Hearing and a Deaf world. Over time, some participant-researchers describe a gradual emergence of *Deaf consciousness* in which they reclaim their voice – initially for themselves, recognising their prior experiences as discriminatory, and then moving into advocacy for self and others. This ultimately supports the development of a *collective belonging* grounded in shared experience, Deaf pride, and social connection.

## 4.2 BSL as a cornerstone

The rest of this chapter will take the reader through each stage of the participant-researchers' journey to collective belonging, by exploring each theoretical category in greater depth. The table below documents which participant-researchers contributed to each category. The first five participant-researchers also took part in phase 2; this has been coloured coded to highlight their second interview.

Table 11: Participant-researcher contribution to each category

|           |  | Category                |                          |                     |                       |                                        |
|-----------|--|-------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Phase 1   |  | BSL as a<br>cornerstone | Navigating<br>oppression | Reclaiming<br>voice | Deaf<br>consciousness | Establishing a<br>collective belonging |
| Charlotte |  |                         |                          |                     |                       |                                        |
| Archie    |  |                         |                          |                     |                       |                                        |
| Hannah    |  |                         |                          |                     |                       |                                        |
| Jasmine   |  |                         |                          |                     |                       |                                        |
| Alek      |  |                         |                          |                     |                       |                                        |
| Mario     |  |                         |                          |                     |                       |                                        |
| Tom       |  |                         |                          |                     |                       |                                        |
| Holly     |  |                         |                          |                     |                       |                                        |
| Nadia     |  |                         |                          |                     |                       |                                        |
| Phase 2   |  |                         |                          |                     |                       |                                        |
| Charlotte |  |                         |                          |                     |                       |                                        |
| Hannah    |  |                         |                          |                     |                       |                                        |
| Jasmine   |  |                         |                          |                     |                       |                                        |
| Alek      |  |                         |                          |                     |                       |                                        |
| Archie    |  |                         |                          |                     |                       |                                        |

D/deaf CYP experiences of belonging initially depend on accessibility of BSL as a tool through which they can begin to regain their voice. This enabled them to navigate and challenge their experiences of oppression.<sup>8</sup> The participant-researchers' journeys are documented in the remainder of the chapter.

All participant-researchers spoke of BSL and the impact and value this had for them. BSL is foundational to participant-researchers' journeys. During the ranking activity in

<sup>8</sup> Oppression is defined as one group having more privilege and power over another (Tomaszewski et al., 2025). In this context, the Hearing-dominant world having power and privilege over the Deaf community.

phase 2, combined scores across the five interviews highlighted the Top 5 ‘Most Important’ statements to the participant-researchers were directly linked to BSL, with three of them from the tentative category (at that time) of ‘Communication’ shown in the table below;

*Table 12: Top 5 ranked statements*

| Tentative Category (At the start phase 2) | Ranked Statement                |
|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Communication                             | Access to BSL                   |
| Communication                             | Having sign-support             |
| Audism                                    | Sign support always being there |
| Seeking Change                            | Always having sign support      |
| Communication                             | Everyone to know BSL            |

Participant-researchers shared how BSL served as both a functional communication tool and a symbol of their evolving identity as a D/deaf person, influencing how interactions were interpreted, how environments were accessed and provided a ‘voice’ to later challenge constraints and discrimination they faced in a hearing-dominant world.

Archie didn’t learn to sign until he was 14. He reflected on what this was like;

*“My family are hearing, the doctors actually told my mum when they found out that I was Deaf not to teach me sign language, otherwise I wouldn’t be able to access the world, and I would be at a disadvantage for learning and being able to get a job in the future and things. So, my mum kind of went astray a little bit because we did, we made up a few signs ourselves at home.” – Archie: interview 1*

He went on to share;

*“When I figured out that there was sign language, it did exist and that I was allowed to use it! Me and my mum kind of learnt together and that meant that I had a different way to be able to express my emotions. If I had a day where I didn’t want to wear my hearing aids because they were painful or whatever, it allowed my mum the ability to*

*be able to sign to me and understand what I'm trying to say... It was like a whole world was opening up, and I didn't realise just how much I was missing out on."* –

*Archie: interview 1*

The above quote contains 'language of permission', suggesting belonging and communication is something they have to request and is not guaranteed. This is in contrast to hearing people, where the ability to communicate with others is often taken for granted, something naturally available to everyone, a birthright even. For Archie, his 'birthright' was actively removed through the instruction to not be taught sign language. These restrictions placed on access to language form part of a wider experience of oppression felt by the participant-researchers. Not only that, this restriction suggests wider systems of power, dictating communication rights and expectations.

## 4.3 Navigating Oppression: Experiences of self and other

Oppression was a core element that emerged during analysis, this was further broken down into externalised oppression and internalised oppression which this section will explore in more detail. The table below shows the varied ages at which participant-researchers came to access and experience BSL.

*Table 13: Age participant-researchers learnt BSL*

| Participant-researcher        | Approximate stage learnt to sign |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Tom, Holly                    | Early Years                      |
| Charlotte, Mario              | Primary                          |
| Archie, Hannah, Jasmine, Alek | Secondary                        |
| Nadia                         | College                          |

Only two of the nine participant-researchers had access to BSL during early childhood (a critical period for language acquisition). This appeared to shape their developing

identities in relation to Deafness. Nadia was the only participant-researcher to identify as hard-of-hearing rather than culturally Deaf, and she had the latest exposure to BSL; at the time of the interview, she was in her first year of learning BSL.

Participant-researchers' interactions with the world around them depended on the meaning they assigned to these interactions. This section explores how externalised oppression is experienced, interpreted and internalised. Each section of the findings will begin with an I-poem constructed across multiple participant-researchers (each text colour relates to a different participant-researcher's voice). This is to ensure the participant-researchers' voices lead the analysis and aims to provide a powerful summarising of their experiences, which will then be considered in more depth.

#### 4.3.1 Externalised Oppression: Experience of the other

*I was the only Deaf one.*

*I was told not to sign.*

*I was told to speak.*

*I moved to a school with a Deaf unit.*

*I wasn't allowed in.*

*I had to lip-read.*

*I couldn't pick things up.*

*I couldn't understand.*

*I was always on my own.*

*I was the only Deaf one.*

The use of "I" followed by an act of oppression or systemic barrier highlights how participant-researchers were frequently discriminated against or controlled.

Participant-researchers spoke of overt discrimination, oralist assumptions and underlying societal narratives of D/deafness. From three words alone, we get a sense of the lack of agency participant-researchers experienced: *“I was told...”*. Participant-researchers were instructed on how they should communicate, what they could access and who they could be around. Ironically, the insistence on speech served to silence participant-researchers, reflecting a system more attuned to the comfort of others. The first and last line tell a story of loneliness and isolation, *“I was the only Deaf one”*, sandwiched between statements of an educational experience filled with being ‘the other’.

Participant-researchers were actively denied the same opportunities as their hearing peers, with lower expectations placed on them as a result of their Deafness;

*“...they would put me in all the bottom sets for everything. It was very, very basic maths and English and things.” – Archie: interview 1*

*“I was always in the low classes.” – Hannah: interview 1*

The process of talking about their experiences enabled participant-researchers to reflect on them and consider why that might have been. During phase 1, Hannah described being in the low classes but when I met her again, her thinking had evolved;

*“I go to the low classes but my brothers and sisters can be in the higher classes because they aren’t Deaf. I’m not dumb! Because people still think it’s ‘Deaf and dumb!’” – Hannah: interview 2*

I considered this a powerful moment, not only in giving space to share her experience, but being able to recognise that experience as exclusion and discrimination based on people’s perceptions of her. This was also recognised by Archie.

*“We are smart, just in different ways than expected.” – Archie: interview 2*

Again, the word “expected” is telling here. It implies there is a right way to be in which deviations from this way of being led to marginalisation or exclusion.

It makes acceptance, value and belonging conditional on meeting this expectation, with opportunities denied if you do not;

*“When they’d have visitors come in and do talks at universities and things like that to try and help improve our goals in the future, they would take me out and they would put me in extra maths and English because they said I didn’t have the capacity to be able to understand what was happening.” – Archie: interview 1*

It was not just opportunities that were reduced, participant-researchers’ also spoke of an absence of BSL or inconsistent availability of support. This lack of attempt to remove communication barriers suggests that it is not considered or prioritised, possibly as societal norms do not perceive this as a natural part of school life. The consequence of this is an act of silencing, perpetuating the idea that they are not valued. This reinforces a narrative that D/deaf people must conform to hearing norms.

*“Sometimes I had hearing teachers that couldn’t sign. If the sign support was awful, or the sign staff was poorly and there was no cover. I felt like it was difficult to communicate. I felt left out and didn’t understand what was happening.”*

*– Jasmine: interview 1*

*“I had no advice or support when I first started. I think that’s quite bad, isn’t it?”*

*– Mario: interview 1*

*“They’d never experienced anything to do with hearing aids or different types of communication. They encouraged me to not sign and just speak because I’m at a school where I’m the only Deaf one...I wasn’t allowed access to any equipment to help me. I wasn’t allowed access to any Deaf peers, nothing...and there was no*

*Deaf culture whatsoever because it was just a normal mainstream school.”*

*– Archie: interview 1*

What stands out here, is a sense of resignation to the fact that being “*the only Deaf one*” meant it was expected that they wouldn’t be accommodated for, considered or accepted for who they are “*because it was just a normal mainstream school.*”

Alongside a lack of BSL, participant-researchers were expected to lip-read as a replacement for sign support, this often carried a weight of emotional or mental ‘heavy-lifting’ to undertake;

*“Everybody was hearing. I was the only one that was Deaf, and I hadn’t any speech and had no sign. I was just disappointed, because I was lip reading and it was really difficult!” – Alek: interview 1*

*“I wasn’t allowed to use it [sign], I had to lip read. But lip reading made me really tired...I couldn’t pick things up properly, I couldn’t understand, things went straight over my head, I wasn’t understanding it...I felt discriminated against. I could sign but I wasn’t allowed to sign. It was like signing was banned! I got kicked out in year 8 – for signing!” – Jasmine: interview 2*

*“They didn’t pick up on the signs because I can speak and lipread well. I fell under the radar; they apologised but the damage was done and I hated being Deaf!”*  
*– Archie: interview 2*

Other participant-researchers reflected on the impact learning BSL had for them;

*“There was no signing at all [at school]. Just talking. I would have liked signing...I learnt BSL when I started college. It’s better, I can communicate more with lots of people and make friends.” – Nadia: interview 1*

*“Having access to sign has meant that I’ve got different ways to be able to express myself and communicate and it’s been fantastic!” – Archie: interview 1*

Mario initially attended a mainstream school before moving to a Deaf school, he described;

*“When I was at the hearing school, the level of signing was much less, so I didn’t know as much or understand.” – Mario: interview 1*

When comparing this to his experiences at the Deaf school he shared;

*“I never felt left out ever. I always felt included. I always had people to talk to, always knew what was going on...everybody was always chatting, but they’re signing so I could understand everything that’s happening. I’d always feel like I’d got those connections.” – Mario: interview 1*

Whether BSL was available for participant-researchers made a huge difference to their sense of belonging with them describing;

*“It helped me be more included as I got more support and staff could encourage me so I felt more positive and could build my skills.” – Jasmine: interview 1*

*“I started to learn sign and things improved...I felt a lot more included, because we were in a group and we could all communicate and have a laugh. It helped my school work too.” – Alek: interview 1*

Alongside overt acts of oppression, participant-researchers experienced subtler microaggressions, involving assumptions about the nature of their Deafness and an assumed understanding of their Deaf experience. These often positioned the participant-researchers as being ‘*not really Deaf*’ or ‘*hearing enough*’. Therefore, not requiring support, particularly when using technological aids or speech as these were perceived as equating to understanding/hearing. This places an overall assumption that technological aids equate to the hearing experience and therefore, eliminate the D/deaf one, further oppressing what it means to be Deaf.

*“Because I can hear, well not hear, but I can hear a little because I have radio...They’d just look at me and think I can understand everything.”  
– Hannah: interview 1*

*“I feel like a lot of my teachers didn’t understand and they heard my speech and was like “Oh, Fantastic! It’ll be fine!”. But actually, I struggled through a lot of that.”*

*– Archie: interview 1*

As Archie summarises;

*“I think, especially for Deaf students like myself who have grown up in hearing families, who do have fantastic speech thanks to speech and language therapy. Don’t think that my speech can show how much I can understand or I can hear because actually my hearing doesn’t match my speech. My speech has been developed, but my hearing is still the same!” – Archie: interview 1*

The assumption that speech production equates to hearing, understanding or somehow mitigates communication barriers once again undermines the participant-researchers’ communication needs or preferences. Speech makes it easier for the hearing person to understand what the Deaf person is saying. This creates a subconscious shift in mindset, in which the struggle is a personal deficit. The hearing person can now understand, it is the Deaf person who cannot. This systemic othering, further projects the message that ‘speech is better’ or ‘signing is unnecessary’. It places the burden of adaptation on the Deaf person, serving to privilege hearing norms. This burden had a significant impact on participant-researchers and how they viewed themselves, their Deafness and the perception from others.

#### 4.3.2 Internalised Oppression: Experience of the self

*I said to myself...*

*I must be terrible if I’m in bottom set.*

*I was terrified to be Deaf.*

*I felt left out.*

*It was hard.*

*I used to take my hearing aids out.*

*I just didn’t want it.*

*I hated it.*

I'm Deaf. But I can hear!

I refused to be Deaf.

The I-Poem demonstrates how experiences of externalised oppression over time were internalised by the participant-researchers, appearing as feelings of fear, shame or a desire to reject their Deafness. The language used is evocative and powerful, “*terrible*”, “*terrified*”, “*hated*”, “*refused*”. What stands out is the shift in emotional expression. Externalised experiences were articulated with more emotional detachment, whereas reflections that focused on self, evoked far more emotionally charged vocabulary. The emotional labour participant-researchers felt through making sense of their experiences had a lasting impression on their identity, sense of self and connection to the world around them.

The line “*I must be terrible...*” shows how instead of questioning the system, the participant-researcher has a belief that they are the problem, going on to describe being “*terrified to be Deaf*”. This reflection suggesting that Deafness has been portrayed as something to fear. Although not explicitly said it begs us to consider if that fear comes from the social constructions of Deafness and the implications this has for the Deaf self, rather than fear of Deafness, itself.

During the second interviews, when talking about what good support looks like, participant-researchers described;

*“Someone not afraid of Deaf people but will adapt” – Archie: interview 2*

*“Hearing people, they don’t know what to say or don’t know what to do...People need to know what they do when they see Deaf people.” – Hannah: interview 2*

Once again, portraying Deafness as something to fear.

The remainder of the I-Poem speaks of a rejection of their Deaf identity. Interestingly in many ways Deafness can be considered a hidden difference, except for the use of communicative devices such as hearing aids. Removal of these can be seen as both a literal and metaphorical way of detaching themselves from this visible marker, potentially out of fear of stigma or judgement. Given the participant-researcher goes on to say *“I’m Deaf. But I can hear!”*. This sentence captures the tension participant-researchers felt, in one way accepting and acknowledging their Deaf Identity *“I’m Deaf”* but then in the next sentence, appearing to contradict it *“But I can hear!”*. Initially these contradictions appeared to suggest that mixed messages and tensions experienced in daily life are mirrored in their own identity. However, reflecting further, the signifier *‘But’*, could also suggest that Deaf identity does not directly correlate with hearing level, given the participant-researcher self identifies as Deaf whilst also clarifying she has some functional hearing level.

**MEMO EXCERPT: 02/04/26**

Initially I felt that the co-researchers appeared confused or in conflict with their own identity, due to what I had interpreted as contradictory statements, e.g. *“I’m Deaf. But I can hear!”*. Whilst this may well be the case, reflecting further I wondered whether this was potential bias on my part; that I had made an assumption that you cannot be Deaf and hearing at the same time. From an audiological/medical perspective that may be the case, however from the cultural model of Deafness, Deaf is an identity characterised by shared language and experiences, not by audiology. This has highlighted to me the power of embedded systemic oppression, as I had initially made a judgement tied to embedded hearing norms.

This conflict was something participant-researchers experienced in multiple different ways;

*“I didn’t understand being Deaf, when I used to go out with my family, I was embarrassed! I used to take my hearing aids out so people didn’t know I was Deaf.”*

*– Hannah: interview 2*

*“Being Deaf is needing some help from others. But being Deaf actually means me helping others, me helping the hearing to sign.” – Charlotte: interview 2*

*“...I had some Deaf friends, like, full Deaf, and they’re looking at a teacher then looking at me. And it’s like,” Oh dear, I’ve got to sign!” And that made me feel pressured.” – Hannah: interview 1*

The above is interesting as the distinction of ‘full Deaf’ suggests she doesn’t perceive herself this way, possibly due to her speech or use of a radio aid. This provides another example of the power of discourses that are embedded in dominant narratives. These dominant narratives often link to measures of D/deafness (e.g. moderate, severe, profound) which push medical understandings of what it is to be D/deaf rather than cultural ones.

Participant-researchers appeared to attempt to make sense of these experiences. Their experiences can be understood as socially constructed messages that communicate who is valued, who is considered and who is accepted. All of which have a significant impact on belonging.

Throughout, participant-researchers communicated a sense of loss; not only a loss of ‘voice’ but relational loss as a result of exclusion and isolation.

*“I felt like everyone was laughing [at me]. If a group of friends are laughing and I don’t know what they’re talking about...Don’t want to be alone. Don’t want to be on my own. Want to get involved with my friends.” – Charlotte: interview 1*

*“I can feel nervous about it [being Deaf] sometimes, I didn’t know signing...it was hard!” – Alek: interview 2*

*“I felt a bit more isolated before... I was in a class on my own. I’d be a bit sad...Nobody to talk too, because in class, I wasn’t allowed to talk anyway, but I was separate.” – Alek: interview 1*

This had a significant impact on confidence and self-acceptance as participant-researchers internalised the narratives they heard about themselves;

*“After school, you just want to crash on the sofa and fall asleep. And just take your hearing aids out, because you have a headache and you kind of forgotten to actually look after yourself during school.” – Hannah: interview 1*

*“I went along for so long with what they were telling me I had to do and how I was supposed to learn and that I was below my peers.” – Archie: interview 1*

**MEMO EXCERPT – 16/01/26**

I've noticed that two co-researchers (Tom & Holly) did not appear to experience oppression during their school life or at least, did not speak of negative experiences. They also appeared to struggle to give additional information, often just confirming they were happy, felt included or wouldn't change anything. I have been struggling with how to include this as they stand apart from the rest of the co-researchers.

Looking more closely at each one, I realised that these co-researchers schooling was different to the others. These co-researchers had attended a Deaf School for the entirety of their education. Their map of the world was in a place that was designed for them. They did not speak of experiencing loss or audism because they had likely not experienced it in those settings – these co-researchers spoke of belonging at school, of having accessible communication, feeling represented and having a secure Deaf identity.

Comparing this to other interviews, in answer to *“What does it mean to belong?”*, most co-researchers spoke about *“What does it mean to not belong?”*. This links to research by Healy (2020) who described that belonging can only be understood in the context of understanding what 'unbelonging' is.

When comparing experiences directly linked to attending a Deaf school, participant-researchers spoke more positively;

*“It [BSL] made me feel confident, because I could learn more. I could do my GCSE's, because before I lost my confidence.” – Jasmine: interview 1*

*“It was good because we were all Deaf, and everyone could communicate, and you could just look around and see everybody talking...We were always together and having a laugh. Everything was visual...you could see each other talking” – p6*

*“I was happy with everything.” – Tom: interview 1*

*“I always felt included. I went there from when I was very small. Until I was 17.*

*Same school...I felt like I was always part of a group.” – Holly: interview 1*

Earlier in the data analysis process, I wondered whether this was due to impact of setting. However, I realised that it was not the educational setting that was the significant factor. Their experiences of belonging were not necessarily more positive because they went to a Deaf school compared to a mainstream school. It was the result of consistent access to accessible communication, consideration and validation of Deaf experience, and opportunity to connect and have a shared understanding.

*“It’s not like in the Hearing World; they are just sat chatting and I’ve got no idea what’s happening. But when you’re at a Deaf school, everyone was Deaf, everybody’s signing...I can understand everything because people are signing.”*

*– Mario: interview 1*

I wondered if this sense of belonging was attributed to the setting, as it provided a place to be their authentic selves. However, to minimise this to ‘because they went to a Deaf school’, risks fuelling dominant discourses that Deafness is something that should be segregated or separated. The notion of belonging as a place will be revisited later in this chapter.

## 4.4 Reclaiming Voice: Representation and the ‘space’ between two worlds

This aspect of the participant-researchers’ journey marks a turning point, with BSL playing a pivotal role in enabling them to reclaim their voice.

#### 4.4.1 BSL as a cornerstone

*I wish everybody knew BSL.*

*I wish I learnt BSL.*

*I wish I learnt it early.*

*I wish I didn't let anyone rely on me.*

*I wish I spoke up sooner.*

*I want that little kid to not go through what I went through.*

*I didn't want to be that person that causes a problem.*

*I wish I didn't make myself small.*

*I think things would have been different.*

*(if) I had given myself that voice.*

The repetition of “I wish...” throughout the I-Poem shows the participant-researchers desire and aspiration for their experiences to have been different. Once again, there is a sense of loss in the participant-researchers’ words: lost opportunities, lost agency, loss of voice, loss of self. The first and last two lines tell a story of the power of communication. For the participant-researchers, BSL gave them their voice, through which there was potential for things to be different.

What is striking is that despite the participant-researchers' experience of discrimination and oppression, there remains a sense of ownership and responsibility to have self-advocated – *"I wish I spoke up"*, *"I wish I didn't let anyone..."*. This highlights how deeply those experiences and embedded narratives have shaped the participant-researchers. Not only was oppression internalised but an internalised responsibility for themselves and others within their social group was also felt by the participant-researchers. Whilst they have started the journey to reclaiming their voice, there remains a lasting impression – *"I wish I..."* rather than *"I wish they..."*.

**MEMO EXCERPT: 06/02/26**

Some co-researchers appear to assume responsibility for their experiences, statements such as *"I wish I spoke up..."* place emphasis on themselves to have done more to advocate rather than perceiving that those around them should have done more to advocate on their behalf. I've been reflecting on why this might be? On one hand, it suggests oppressive views have been internalised but I also wonder if taking personal responsibility feels safer than trying to challenge the wider systems – a focus on self rather than other? At this stage in the co-researchers' journey, they have had limited opportunity to consider Deaf rights or Deafness as a social change movement as this goes against the dominant narratives within education, it is perhaps unsurprising then that there is a sense that they need to change things for themselves, as society has frequently let them down.

Despite this, there remains recognition of a need for change, *"I want that little kid to not go through what I went through"*. This gets to the heart of the research. There is intent in this one line, whilst I have been on my own journey throughout this research, more importantly, so have the participant-researchers. Through reclaiming their voice, that voice has become more powerful - rooted in living experience and a desire for change.

When reflecting on times she was used as an interpreter for others in school, Hannah shared; *“I think, now I’ve grown up more, thinking about my secondary school, thinking, God, I think I did more work than the signing staff there (laughs)...I just want the new kids to know that they’re not alone. And young kids like me, I wish I spoke up sooner, not later. I wish I hadn’t gone through that myself and had focused on myself rather than other people. I just want them young kids to speak up and go, No! I don’t want to sign for you! Where’s the sign teacher? They get paid for this! They shouldn’t be late! I wish I had said that.”* – Hannah: interview 1

During phase 2, Hannah revisited this to consider her hopes for the future;

*“My dad always mentions that I could help other young kids...volunteer and help the young kids that may feel the same. I’d like to do that, like to help young kids.”*

– Hannah: interview 2

This desire for change was echoed by others.

*“Questions like this are important because it means that those who are older can share their experiences and change things for those who are younger and may feel like they don’t like being deaf or that being deaf is terrible or that it’s not fair or whatever.”* – Archie: interview 1

*“There needs to be better communication for Deaf students. Because if there’s a problem or whatever, it takes a long time to sort out, we can’t sort it out very fast.”*

– Mario: interview 1

#### 4.4.2 The power of representation

I was around other Deaf children at school.

I always felt included.

I went to a Deaf school.

I just always felt included.

I had more communication with Deaf people.

I had a community.

I never felt like I was left out.

Ever.

I always felt included.

This I-Poem provides a stark contrast to previous poems, the repetition of “*always felt included*” provides a counter-narrative - that belonging can be achieved when the environment and systems are designed to support it. These statements are not tentative; “*I always...*”, which is different from the others that carry a sense of loss, responsibility or shame. Of note, all participant-researchers who voiced feeling included attended a Deaf School for at least some of their education. Participant-researchers who only attended a mainstream school or a special school did not share experiences of feeling included in the same way.

One significant difference between Deaf schools and other settings is the increased representation of Deafness, both through other Deaf peers and Deaf staff. Fully embedded access to BSL and a focus on Deaf Culture provided participant-researchers with an increased awareness of societal role models. The I-Poem gives a sense of connection through representation, providing a “*community*” as one participant-researcher describes.

This sense of community was echoed by other participant-researchers;

*“I’m from a hearing family. I’m the only Deaf one in my family. So, seeing other Deaf people that were just like me made me feel a lot more confident in my Deaf identity.”*

*– Archie: interview 1*

*“We actually joined a Deaf signing choir and that kind of added a little bit extra like, “yeah, I know this is right!”*

*– Archie: interview 1*

*“I felt a bit left out and lonely. When I moved to [Deaf school], it made me feel happy and involved. I had more communication through Deaf people. It felt more like a community.”*

*– Jasmine: interview 1*

*“When I started going to, like, Deaf groups, it was a bit hard. I was like, “wow! There’s Deaf people in this world!” And it’s like, you know, everyone’s signing. And I was like what’s signing mean? Why you signing? Why you all slapping your hands around me? I’m sitting here thinking, I’ve got to speak!”*

*– Hannah: interview 1*

Representation and belonging were not always about other people, though, a focus on Deaf education and ensuring Deaf experience was validated was also important.

*“When I was in [school name] they had a separate classroom just for the Deaf. So, there was originally four of us, but then eventually it was just me. Erm, but they didn’t want me to feel isolated or alone and stuff, so they’d invite lots of Deaf people to come and do talks to me... I really felt included there because they made sure that I had other Deaf role models, even though I wasn’t in class with them and I was the only student. But they made an active effort to bring Deaf people in to talk to me and share their experiences. It helped me understand that I wasn’t alone in how I felt.”*

*– Archie: interview 1*

The term “active effort” is key here. It suggests a holding in mind, considering Archie’s experience. This is important when considering the role, the environment plays in a sense of belonging. Much of the participant-researchers’ experiences so far have required constant negotiation or an emphasis on self to make the adaptations – yet this shows what can be achieved when others (in this case, the Hearing majority) take

on some responsibility for those considerations. However, access to Deaf spaces (within this research predominantly found in Deaf schools) appears to serve as a protective factor for Deaf CYP.

#### 4.4.3 The space between two worlds

*It's the Hearing way.*

*I have to do it their way.*

*I'm talking to the hearing.*

*I'm signing to the Deaf.*

*I realised...*

*I'm in a different world!*

*You guys are in the hearing world.*

*I'm in the Deaf world!*

This I-Poem encapsulates the ongoing role negotiation participant-researchers are required to do to navigate their social worlds. The opening line shows how a lack of awareness, accessibility and accommodations results in Deaf people constantly needing to adjust and adapt to their environment. There is recognition that to be Deaf means to belong to a minority group. One that requires more consideration and understanding, yet currently, these two worlds are not equal; *"It's the hearing way...I have to do it their way"*.

The second half of the I-Poem symbolises a conscious awareness of difference; *"I realised..."*. This is poignant as it highlights the journey participant-researchers have been on both through their education experiences and through the process of participating in this research.

The line, *“I’m in a different world!”* documents a shift in mindset from the participant-researcher. Whilst they recognise a divide between the two, this is no longer internalised. Instead, they acknowledge the two can co-exist. Furthermore, the development of their own Deaf identity enables participant-researchers to confidently align themselves to one; *“I’m in the Deaf World!”*. This is further emphasised by the distinction that *“you guys are in the Hearing World”*, sending the message the Deaf World is *my* world and the hearing world is *your* world.

For the majority of participant-researchers, increased access and exposure to the *“Deaf World”* was their first experience of being around others like them. Participant-researchers predominantly lived in hearing families with varied exposure to BSL at home. Participant-researchers that were *“the only deaf in my family”* (Jasmine: interview 2), described an ongoing negotiation between a *“Deaf World”* and a *“Hearing World”*. This code-switching involved navigating different methods of communication and expectations;

*“My family still can’t sign well and that’s hard. If I have a day that’s bad and I just want to sign and be without aids. I can’t as they don’t understand.”*

– Archie: interview 2

*“Theres not enough Deaf awareness in my house so I feel a lot lonelier but when I come here, I feel I’m not as isolated anymore, I feel like I’m included and I feel like,*

*“Yeah, I should belong somewhere!” – Hannah: interview 2*

*“The hearing needs to understand that communication and things are different. We describe people...and hearing people are like “Oh no, that’s rude!” But it’s not. They need to understand that’s just the Deaf way.” – Mario: interview 6*

Belonging was continually negotiated depending on the social context and led participant-researchers to feel that they needed to ‘bridge the gap’ or did not truly fit in

either world, describing being between the two. This further impacted their sense of self.

*“Being Deaf meant being different. Too hearing for the Deaf community but too Deaf for the Hearing World...I was the only Deaf person in my school so teachers treated me like I was fragile. It really destroyed my confidence...It wasn’t my fault the education system wasn’t set up right for me!” – Archie: interview 2*

*“So, making that bridge, that gap between the hearing and Deaf...I feel responsible for that. It should be equal responsibility between hearing and Deaf.”  
– Charlotte: interview 2*

*“Everyone in my home is hearing. Even my [family member] said that they are rather lazy when it comes to learning sign language...At home, I speak and lip read, but sometimes it’s just really frustrating, my family don’t understand that sometimes...I’ll be trying to have a conversation with them, but they don’t understand me and they keep speaking, but me, I’ve learnt BSL and now I’m getting more into using BSL, it just feels a bit different for me now.” – Hannah: interview 2*

For some participant-researchers, they describe a sense of responsibility and a pressure to be the ‘bridge’. They describe how they were used as a commodity or resource for staff and peers;

*“They’re just looking at me, and I’ve got to sign to them...because I can hear a little bit, everyone was looking at me, thinking I can help them...help them sign, help them to interpret one at a time. It was really annoying!” – Hannah: interview 2*

This navigation of worlds and frequent revisiting of place and space has been complex to articulate as the researcher. Thus, reflecting the increased complexity it was for the participant-researchers to experience. There feels a real paradox to this process, participant-researchers suddenly find themselves *holding space* between a world (system) that oppresses them and one that provides community. Furthermore, the

concept of bridging a gap could also be defined as ‘filling a space’. Despite the world previously communicating that they are not valued enough to be given any space.

This creates a deep uncomfortable contradiction showing two sides of representation, particularly when you’re asked to represent the same world that has misrepresented and created barriers for you. Despite these difficulties, experiences of both worlds give unique insight into what each world does not see about the other – offering potential for change from this in-between position. There is something empowering about that.

## 4.5 Deaf consciousness: Reauthoring of Self and Other

This stage of the participant-researchers’ journey explores the process where participant-researchers begin to rewrite the narratives they have heard and inherited about themselves, their Deaf identity and their perceived place in the world. Once again, BSL is central to enabling participant-researchers to reshape those narratives. Whilst not all participant-researchers appeared to reach this stage (or chose not to focus on it), the exceptions to this category also support its construction as those participant-researchers had not voiced experiences that required re-authoring (e.g. Tom & Holly), or, we’re not as far along in their journey as other participant-researchers. The participant-researchers’ reflections were often emotional ones, with these feelings serving as motivation, prompting a reconstruction of meaning for both self and other.

### 4.5.1 BSL as a cornerstone

*I feel more confident.*

*I feel happier.*

*I feel proud of myself.*

*I think being Deaf means learning to be proud.*

*I'm trying to learn how to be proud to be Deaf.*

*I'm more confident now.*

*I'm proud to be Deaf!*

This I-Poem captures the identity shift that occurs for the participant-researchers when enabled to see Deafness as a part of who they are, rather than a deficit to hide or be fixed. The participant-researchers' evolving Deaf identity supports them to make a positive shift in how they see themselves. The journey to overcome oppression, stigma and societal norms is replaced with confidence and pride grounded in their cultural Deaf identity. The frequent repetition of *"I feel..."* symbolises the emotional transformation the participant-researchers have experienced.

*"So, for me, what I think it means to be Deaf, is about learning to be proud, like I was younger, I didn't understand being Deaf, I wasn't proud enough to be Deaf...But now, I'm trying to learn, learn how to be proud to be Deaf. When I come here (college), I feel proud...I feel I'm not isolated anymore, I feel like I'm included."* –

*Hannah: interview 2*

The above is an example of how, whilst these feelings come from within, it is the wider environment and systemic factors that are required to affirm their sense of self. Showing that belonging is not something that can be achieved in isolation.

Affiliation and connection with others are necessary to support a true sense of belonging. Participant-researchers shared the importance of friendship had in this process;

*"I felt happy. I was with my friends" – Nadia: interview 1*

*"I think belonging is school, being in a group... It means being happy at school."*

*– Holly: interview 1*

*"It makes me feel more confident, I feel happier that I can make more friends."*

*– Jasmine: interview 1*

*"It's important to have more communication and understanding for people to be included and make friends." – Alek: interview 1*

## 4.6 Establishing collective belonging

*I think it's Hearing and Deaf together.*

*I have a friend.*

*I feel like an equal now I've met him.*

*I understand what he's gone through.*

*I've gone through it too.*

*I have people to talk to.*

*I have friends at school.*

*I'm with my friends.*

*I don't want to change anything.*

*I've got a whole group of people just like me.*

*I can relate to them.*

*I belong here.*

This I-Poem symbolises the transition process from othered to feeling *"like an equal"*. Shared experiences and mutual understanding create a collective understanding of Deaf identity as an individual but also a group social identity. Alongside facilitating communication, BSL ties the Deaf community together and is an integral part of Deaf culture and Deaf identity, necessary aspects on the journey to belonging.

Repeated references to friendship show how belonging is embodied through those shared experiences and a collective identity, made possible through access to a shared language.

The closing line *“I belong here”* is deliberate. This is the final line in the presented I-poems throughout this chapter, it symbolises the culmination of the participant-researchers’ journeys. From oppression to liberation, acts of silencing to empowerment, isolation to connection. It’s an I-Poem about finding self, whilst also finding others.

When considering collective belonging, I frequently revisiting two quotes;

*“I had a community at school.” – Alek: interview 2*

*“I was always included...but I didn’t have a community.” – Jasmine: interview 2*

Due to the word ‘belonging’ not having a direct BSL sign, the BSL sign for ‘being included’ was used. Yet, what stood out in the above quotes is that ‘being included’ is not necessarily the same as ‘belonging’. This is where the framing of a collective belonging came from. Collective belonging is not about ‘fitting in’, it goes beyond that to signify a sense of community with others who have a shared understanding and shared identity.

Belonging is more than an internal feeling; it’s a co-constructed process. Connection with Deaf peers enabled a powerful process in which participant-researchers were affirmed in their identity.

*“Being Deaf, it’s just my identity...Being Deaf. It’s me. It’s who I am.”*

*– Alek: interview 2*

*“Belonging is about friends. Having someone to talk to and laugh with. Being included in the group. Friendships are important.” – Charlotte: interview 1*

*“To have a place to go where you’re the same and can communicate, can belong.”*

*– Hannah: interview 2*

Belonging is not a destination. It is a continuous evolving multi-faceted process in which a sense of collective belonging empowers participant-researchers to challenge deficit and pathologising narratives constructed about them.

*“Belonging means everyone can be welcome...Everyone should be welcome, should be involved, should belong to a place.” – Hannah: interview 1*

*“Belonging means that I don’t have to feel anxious or worried about how I communicate...it means that everybody accepts and understands that I might learn and understand differently...there are other people that are Deaf like me, who I can relate to, and they can understand my struggles and things... So, I belong here, but I didn’t necessarily belong before.” – Archie: interview 1*

## 4.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the CCGT alongside the theoretical framework, visual model and an in-depth account of the participant-researchers’ journey towards collective belonging. The analysis demonstrates that collective belonging is not dependant on one thing. It is a multi-layered, dynamic phenomenon that is linguistically, culturally, relationally, and systemically produced. It emerges through the interplay of communication, identity negotiation, relationships and wider structural influences that shape D/deaf CYP’s daily lives. This chapter shows how these elements converge to form a process in which belonging is continually constructed and re-constructed within the social worlds navigated.

## Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

### 5.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter interprets the Critical-constructivist Grounded Theory (CCGT) presented in Chapter 4 in relation to the research questions and existing literature. It explores the contribution this research makes alongside consideration of dissemination and implications for Educational Psychology practice and wider educational professionals. Issues of quality, transferability, research limitations and future directions are also discussed.

### 5.2 The Critical-Constructivist Grounded Theory

The primary aim of this research was to use CCGT methodology to increase understanding of the experiences of D/deaf CYP and how constructions of belonging are embodied. The research began by exploring school belonging through three research questions ([1.9](#));

1. What does it mean to belong to a school community for CYP who are D/deaf?
2. What factors support and hinder CYP who are D/deaf to feel a sense of belonging within their community?
3. Do the spaces inhabited by D/deaf CYP make a difference to feelings of belongingness?

During the research process, I noticed constructions of belonging were interwoven with experiences of oppression, identity development, shared experiences and language serving as protective and empowering factors towards establishing a collective belonging. This led to the construction of the participant-researchers' main concern;

*"How do I experience belonging in the face of oppression?"*

To explore the participant-researchers' main concern, a critical constructionist lens was adopted, combining social constructionism (Burr, 2015) with DeafCrit theory (Gertz, 2003), detailed further in [3.4.3](#). To support the reader's understanding, this position asks the following questions of the data: where is the power? How is meaning built through language?

Additionally, this research assumes a cultural-linguistic model of Deafness ([1.5](#)), in which Deafness is a cultural identity and not a deficit or disability (Ladd, 2003). Through these lenses, acknowledgement of and critique of power and privilege are at the forefront. This situates the CCGT within the context that societal hearing norms dominate policy and practice, often at the detriment and marginalisation of the Deaf community (Ladd, 2003; Lane, 1999). From this position, we can better understand the circumstances in which belonging is constructed for D/deaf CYP and why collective belonging is so important, providing solidarity which has the potential to serve as a movement for change.

The CCGT will be discussed further in relation to each of the three research questions, considering this alongside existing literature.

### 5.2.1 Research Question 1

In line with existing definitions, this research confirms belonging as a multi-faceted and complex process (e.g. Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Cartmell & Bond, 2015; Goodenow & Grady, 1993 – as explored in [1.1](#)). However, this research goes beyond definition to consider unique aspects relevant to the experiences of D/deaf CYP. Primarily, this requires accessible language (in this context, BSL). Communication is essential for social interaction and relationship building, and the ability to communicate with those around us is taken for granted by much of the Hearing world. However, this is not the case for the participant-researchers who were often actively denied accessible

language. As existing literature shows, the ability to communicate is closely linked to social identity, with identity being influenced by those social interactions (Davidsson & Petersson, 2018; Tajfel & Turner, 1979 – explored in [2.4](#)). Furthermore, social inclusion is closely tied to a sense of belonging (St-Amand et al., 2017; Gentzke, 2024 – [1.1](#) & [2.7.1](#)). For D/deaf CYP, then, a fundamental part of belonging is communication. Within this research, belonging is considered a collective experience, built initially on shared language. This collective belonging follows a process in which shared language is a means to voice experiences of oppression. This voice provides a building block for identity exploration, strengthened through increased understanding of Deaf culture, through representation and recognition that there is an alternative to the Hearing-dominant narratives within society. Increased social inclusion, shared language and finding solidarity with others empower participant-researchers to analyse and challenge prior experiences. This solidarity provides collective belonging. This combination of contributory factors of collective belonging can be categorised as a development of Deaf consciousness.

Looking specifically at the literature on D/deaf experience, much of this centres on D/deaf identity. The findings in this research are closely linked to much of the findings by Sekoto & Hlaysi (2023), despite being conducted in South Africa and focused on medical audiological rehab care. The paper found identity construction occurs on multiple levels (personal, social, societal), a concept that is extended by this research to the wider process of belonging, of which the multiple levels of identity construction play a key part ([2.4.1](#)). Parallels can be drawn from this research and aspects of identity development within D/deaf populations from across the world ([2.4.1](#), [2.4.2](#)): Japan (McGuire & Tokunaga, 2020); America (Olsson & Gustafsson, 2022); South Africa (McIlroy & Storbeck, 2011); The Netherlands (Kunnen, 2014). This supports the notion of cultural Deafness, as education, policy and practice are likely significantly

different across those countries, yet similarities in D/deaf experience exist on an international level.

Furthermore, as those papers focused on D/deaf identity construction, in contrast to this research which was primarily looking at belonging. This suggests that identity and belonging are closely correlated concepts. Whilst this is not to be mistaken as a causal link, it suggests that future research looking at either belonging or identity in Deaf communities should consider the role of both aspects and not conduct research in isolation from each other.

This research reaffirms that the need to belong is as fundamental to D/deaf CYP as it is to any individual. Yet the process of belonging within disabling systems is distinctly more complex for D/deaf CYP. Whilst the importance of relational elements mirrors much of the existing literature drawn on in education, as explored in [1.1](#) (e.g. Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1943; Bowlby, 1969, 1978; Rogers, 1951). Communication is a key area of difference compared to other groups and this shapes how relationships are formed and maintained (Cashman, 2005). Communication barriers make belonging a linguistic and accessibility challenge as well as a social one due to the reduction in opportunity for naturally occurring interactions, as a result of largely inaccessible environments.

In that sense, the theoretical conceptualisation of D/deaf CYP experiences of belonging can be understood as an ongoing, active process. This journey moves towards '*collective belonging*', encapsulating belonging as produced within and against oppressive societal conditions. Collective belonging conveys the ongoing tension within the social process alongside the importance of self and group identity. In that sense, collective belonging should be understood as linguistically, culturally, relationally and systemically produced.

## 5.2.2 Research Question 2

The combination of factors, collectively presented as Deaf consciousness draws on existing literature on critical consciousness (Freire, 1970) and class consciousness (Harvey, 2005). In which individuals gain awareness of discrimination and oppressive acts, through conversations about power, knowledge and privilege, and through solidarity with others (Freire, 1970), outlined in greater detail in [2.3](#) and [3.4.1](#). Deaf consciousness extends this by applying this idea to the D/deaf experience. In much the same way as class/critical consciousness can be considered a social movement, Deaf consciousness is presented in the same way. Participant-researchers showed how access to language (BSL), Deaf representation and understanding of Deaf culture increased feelings of solidarity which positively impacted on their Deaf identity, confidence and overall self-acceptance. This demonstrates the importance of Deaf knowledge as a stepping stone towards countering and challenging audist beliefs and narratives. This process is what is defined as Deaf consciousness. A key aspect of Deaf consciousness is the notion of understanding who you are, where you fit and how you are positioned by others. This closely links to sense of self and social identity development explored in [2.4](#) (e.g. Erikson, 1968; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, 1999). Once participant-researchers had developed a stronger sense of their Deaf identity, they began a process of reclaiming their voice and advocating for themselves and others. Voice can be considered a symbol of power and authority; as previously explored there is a hierarchy and dominance towards the spoken word in society. This reclaiming of 'voice' for the participant-researchers can be considered a shift in that dominance, through the use of sign to challenge the authority of the spoken word.

For conversation, you need language. Within Deaf consciousness, access to language and to other D/deaf peers enables young people to share their experiences. Through these shared conversations, the socially constructed perceptions and attitudes towards D/deafness become conscious. Once '*in the consciousness*', this opens up the possibility of alternative narratives. The collective solidarity of other D/deaf people is further empowering. Considering this specifically within social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1969), this supports the explanation of why interactions between D/deaf CYP plays a central role in identity formation. As outlined in [2.4.4](#), D/deaf CYP are often positioned as an 'out-group', which affects their sense of self and belonging because they frequently receive societal messages that position them as different/outside. When they have opportunities to be around other D/deaf peers (people who share their language and similar experiences), they can develop their own 'in-group', one which affirms their ways of being. This shift in social identification shows what it is to be valued and part of something. It enables redistribution of power.

Across Deaf history and education, the separation and marginalisation of D/deaf people, through oralist laws, the suppression of sign language and minimising of Deaf culture have served to maintain hearing dominance. The CCGT in this research shows that solidarity through Deaf consciousness can challenge those structures and systems that have historically sought to keep D/deaf people apart.

Each of these individual aspects can be considered as supportive or hindering factors depending on whether they are available to the D/deaf CYP. Throughout the participant-researchers' narratives, there is an overall sense of a lack of knowledge on D/deafness, D/deaf teaching and D/deaf ways of being, not only for the participant-researchers' but for their families and adults around them. This is documented through being denied access to support, being expected to speak, positioning assistive technology as a 'cure' for D/deafness.

Drawing on literature explored in [1.3](#), knowledge is power, by denying, or not prioritising the teaching of Deaf history, D/deaf education and Deaf culture, the concept of Deafhood<sup>9</sup> (Ladd, 2003) is kept in the shadows. Without knowledge, there is an increased likelihood of ‘false Deaf consciousness’ in which the status quo will be maintained, enabling the societal structures in place to continue to be so.

### 5.2.3 Research Question 3

The concept of ‘ibasho’ was explored in [2.7](#), a Japanese term to explain a place where you belong/feel at home (Antonsich, 2010; McGuire & Tokunaga, 2020). When applied to educational places, these spaces can impact on feelings of belonging. In McGuire & Tokunaga’s (2020) paper, they found that separate spaces were places to escape the mainstream setting and the expectations and pressure of hearing conformity and assimilation ([2.7](#)). This research offers a different perspective on the value of Deaf spaces, with friendship and opportunity to be around other D/deaf people a primary motivation for separation. These spaces create opportunities to build a D/deaf coalition. This difference may be impacted by age/stage of the participant-researchers in this research as adolescence is a time of increased social focus (Erikson, 1968 – [2.4.3](#)). This social motivation may have prompted participant-researchers to reimagine the spaces for their own purposes rather than the intended one (i.e. to segregate D/deaf people). This aligns more with the findings of Merry (2013), who described the concept of voluntary separation as a way to reclaim segregation and exclusion.

Another consideration is the impact of setting, rather than individual spaces. McGuire & Tokunaga (2020) explored spaces within mainstream settings, whereas much of the

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<sup>9</sup> Deafhood is defined as the process of learning and socialising, where individuals explore what Deafness means for them (Ladd, 2003).

participant-researchers' narratives on spaces centred on 'Deaf school vs mainstream school'.

This may in part account for the differences, as arguably, there is not the same need to escape assimilation within a Deaf school as the environment, staff and peers are already aligned to D/deaf ways of being. This is supported by McGuire & Tokunaga's (2020) findings. Their participants did not consider spaces as a source of community or social inclusion because they were educated in mainstream settings and likely had not been introduced to the idea of themselves as a member of a Deaf community. This highlights that Deaf CYP need to be actively informed about Deaf identity and Deaf culture in order to recognise that this is something available to them.

#### 5.2.3.1 Potential Space

Winnicott argued the importance of transitional space for the development of self (1971). This research suggests that self-development is a vital part of collective belonging. It could therefore be argued that 'space', whether physical or metaphorical, has an impact on belonging. This is an important consideration for D/deaf CYP, as for many D/deaf people, growing up in hearing families, school may be the first experience of a shared understanding/representation. This makes these spaces one of great importance. Given experiences were significantly more positive for participant-researchers who attended a Deaf school; these settings can be seen as a transitional space, a place to learn about Deaf culture and histories and build Deaf identity when the rest of their environments are hearing-centred. In contrast, participant-researchers who only attended mainstream settings shared repeated negative experiences of exclusion, denial of language and outright discrimination. These experiences had a significant impact on sense of self and well-being, leading participant-researchers to feel shame or a desire to reject D/deafness. In this sense, for D/deaf CYP, mainstream schools could be said to be lacking in 'ibasho' ([2.7](#)).

## 5.3 Implications for practice

The importance of Deaf consciousness for D/deaf CYP was highlighted earlier in this chapter. Yet, this should not be misinterpreted to mean that the responsibility for change falls on the Deaf community. This research highlights the need for society to move beyond perceiving D/deaf people as individuals lacking in linguistic skills, and move towards embracing the diversity that linguistic and cultural Deafness would bring to whole communities (McGuire & Tokunaga, 2020). To explore this further, the reader is reminded of this quote, referenced in [2.3.1](#);

*“There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the practice of freedom. The means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.” – Shaul, 1970, p. 30*

Arguably, the education system is designed to *“facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system”*, with policy and practice promoting conformity and assimilation to the dominant power. These sit within a wider capitalist ideology that continues to shape public perceptions towards difference. In solidarity with the Deaf community, this research is concerned with *“the practice of freedom”*. As explored in the literature on allyship, it is not enough to simply recognise or even be appalled by acts of oppression, one must show *“active, consistent and reflective practice of using privilege to challenge oppression”* (Brown & Ostrove, 2013). This research argues that the insight from those with living experience of what it is, and what it means to be D/deaf provides a way for hearing people to consider *“the practice of freedom (Shaul, 1970, p.30)”*, as greater knowledge and understanding supports a sharing of power. To further develop this, and guided by the CCGT, nine tenets of

Deaf Consciousness are outlined below, designed to support EP's and other educational professionals to work in allyship with Deaf communities.

### 5.3.1 The Nine Tenets for Deaf Consciousness

The conditions of collective belonging are active and shaped by power, accessibility and affirmation. Drawing each of these strands together, are nine core tenets for Deaf Consciousness. Whilst each one represents the combined co-construction process, they also serve to represent one for each of the nine participant-researchers, empowering their role in this research. These tenets should be considered as a set of guiding principles for those working with D/deaf CYP to be mindful of and work towards, grounded in the findings of this research (Table 14).

*Table 14: Nine Tenets of Deaf Consciousness*

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. | D/deaf CYP deserve access to language. Whilst it should not be assumed that all D/deaf CYP will want to communicate via BSL, this needs to be provided as an option, from the very start of language acquisition.                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 2. | Lip-reading, sign-supported English (SSE), speech and language therapy and technological devices can support communication, and have a positive impact for some D/deaf CYP. However, they are not a replacement to a complete language and they do not turn a D/deaf person into a hearing person.                                                                                                                         |
| 3. | There is a need for everyone to recognise that systemic audism is entrenched in the fabric of society. Hearing hierarchies are deeply embedded in everyday societal norms, through to the policies and laws that govern daily life. This continues to create a pattern of repeated and accepted discrimination and marginalisation of Deaf communities. The first step in challenging this is to recognise that it exists. |
| 4. | Deaf culture and Deaf histories should be taught early, given its importance to identity development for D/deaf CYP. This should not be delayed until they are 'old enough' to look for themselves. They need access from the start.                                                                                                                                                                                       |

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5. | D/deaf identity should not be assumed or assigned to one 'world'. Identity can change and develop over time. D/deaf CYP should have the chance to explore what D/deafness means for them. To do this, they need knowledge about D/deafness and Deaf culture.                                                                        |
| 6. | D/deaf people have a voice, and a right to <i>"express their views freely in all matters affecting them"</i> (Article 12, United Nations, 1989). D/deaf people are the experts on their living experience of D/deafness.                                                                                                            |
| 7. | Societal attitudes toward D/deafness need to change. The very nature of being a hearing person means you are afforded power and privilege that is not readily available as a D/deaf person. Use that power and privilege in allyship to elevate the voice of Deaf communities.                                                      |
| 8. | Belonging is as important to D/deaf CYP as to any other individual. However, belonging often stems from ableist/audist assumptions. Collective belonging for D/deaf CYP involves meaningful opportunities for social interaction with other D/deaf peers, as social inclusion is centred on shared language and shared experiences. |
| 9. | Voluntary spaces of belonging are important for D/deaf CYP, especially when they are surrounded by a predominantly hearing environment. These spaces provide safety and sanctuary from the Hearing world. This may require rethinking what 'inclusion' means and how it looks in practice.                                          |

To maintain co-construction, the above tenets alongside the visual of the CCGT presented in [4.1](#), were presented to the participant-researchers, alongside a bigger group of D/deaf CYP and adults at the setting, where the participant-researchers' are currently attending. Whilst the tenets are designed as principles for the Hearing world, rather than advice for Deaf communities, the purpose of gaining feedback from the Deaf community was to ensure any recommendations put forward by this research honoured their views, wishes and was felt to be important to and for them. It was also ethically important to ensure that I was not purely 'speaking on their behalf', as outlined in [3.8.1](#).

Due to the need to make this accessible for the audience, I wrote a script summarising the theory/tenets, simplifying the language to consider a range of communication styles and levels of understanding. This script was then placed as subtitles within an 8-minute video comprising a range of supporting visuals including the visual representation of the CCGT ([4.1](#)). The video itself was produced by an external person to the thesis, in which they generated accompanying visuals to the script I provided to them. This external person saw no other data relating to this research other than the script I provided to them and the visual of the CCGT. A copy of the script and a link to watch the video can be found in [Appendix 10](#). Following the video, four questions were asked to gather feedback, this was collected anonymously as I felt this would support individuals to give honest reflections. A brief summary of feedback for each question is provided in the table below. A full copy of all feedback received can be found in [Appendix 11](#).

Table 15: Feedback responses

|                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Did the nine tenets connect with your living experiences of being D/deaf? | Anonymous participant-researcher/student responses:<br><br><i>"It felt like someone's put into words what it's like in school"</i><br><br><i>"Living between worlds is a real thing"</i><br><br><i>"It made me emotional"</i> |
|                                                                           | Anonymous staff responses:<br><br><i>"Yes, systemic barriers"</i><br><br><i>"It takes a lot of work to find belonging in Hearing world when Deaf"</i>                                                                         |
| Was there any part that felt most important to you?                       | Anonymous participant-researcher/student responses:<br><br><i>"Belonging to a group that I'm the same as"</i><br><br><i>"Identity bit"</i><br><br><i>"BSL from the start"</i>                                                 |
|                                                                           | Anonymous staff responses:                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

|                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                            | <p><i>"Culture recognition. Not seeing anyone talk about that before in link to classroom."</i></p> <p><i>"Language, identity and belonging all very important and not talked about"</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Do you think these suggestions could support D/deaf CYP in school/everyday life?           | <p>Anonymous participant-researcher/student responses:</p> <p><i>"It would help younger Deaf kids, I think"</i></p> <p><i>"Yeah, because there's nothing else happening"</i></p> <p><i>"Only if it's used, most places don't bother trying"</i></p> <p>Anonymous staff responses:</p> <p><i>"Could genuinely shift practice"</i></p> <p><i>"Policy impact"</i></p> |
| Do you think this theory could help people better understand and support Deaf communities? | <p>Anonymous participant-researcher/student responses:</p> <p><i>"Think it's useful if schools use it"</i></p> <p><i>"Helpful, it was nice to watch"</i></p> <p>Anonymous staff responses:</p> <p><i>"Important work, I hope I see more about this"</i></p> <p><i>"I felt human and important; I would support this in my class"</i></p>                           |

Looking specifically at the EP role. This has direct relevance in terms of social justice, advocacy and challenging inequality. EPs are well placed to work with schools, other professionals and local communities to advocate towards Deaf consciousness in allyship with D/deaf CYP. Parallels can be drawn here between other social movements (e.g. women's rights, civil rights) as to bring about change and redistribute power; there is strength in numbers. Social justice issues, after all, are issues for all, not just those they directly impact. This is particularly important considering that in schools, perceptions of D/deafness often come from a deficit/disability framing in which to be D/deaf is to need additional support, rather than as a cultural identity in the same way different ethnicities may be perceived. The tenets outlined can therefore be useful discussion points, or aspects to reflect on when considering how we write

about, think about, or speak about D/deaf CYP (Billington, 2006). In our work with D/deaf CYP, these tenets can also be used to consider provision, particularly ensuring that we are not reinforcing audist/oralist approaches to D/deafness in our work.

Whilst this research focuses on D/deaf experience, the findings offer insight into broader patterns of marginalisation and oppression. Many of the systemic processes that shape D/deaf experiences also operate across other minoritised groups, albeit in different forms;

- Linguistic marginalisation – The exclusion and devaluing of signed languages reflect wider practice affecting other minoritised language groups, particularly those who communicate in languages other than English. However, similar processes are also evident for neurodivergent individuals, whose communication styles are often pathologised for being different to the dominant (neuro-typical) norms.
- Segregation – The ongoing segregation of D/deaf learners is part of a wider pattern in which education systems have separated groups based on perceived differences. Racial segregation and separation of disabled students both provide examples as to how institutional structures have long been used to contain or control minority groups.
- Acts of oppression – Whilst this research focuses predominantly on audism, it sits within a wider scale of oppression. Terms such as racism, sexism, and ableism draw parallels as to how dominant groups have maintained power by defining the minority group as being inferior.
- Reclaiming spaces of belonging – The transformative power of being around others with shared experiences mirrors that seen in other communities. For example, the emergence of ‘queer spaces’ in the LGBTQIA community, defined

as a collective space for non-heterosexual people as an alternative to heteronormative environments (Oswin, 2008 as cited in Stella, 2015).

These processes reflect broader patterns that shape the experiences of many marginalised groups. Whilst this research is grounded in D/deaf experience, the findings have wider relevance and point to potential avenues for future research across minority communities.

### 5.3.2 Implications for policy

To consider implications for policy, it is necessary to consider the current education system in the UK. The SEND white paper (DfE, 2026) proposes educational reforms that suggest a focus on a return to ‘main-streaming’ for all. Yet, literature explored in [1.3](#), [1.4](#) and [2.3](#) alongside the participant-researchers’ voices suggest that for the Deaf community, this is a divisive issue. Mainstreaming of D/deaf CYP raises concerns as to the cultural threat posed to Deaf culture and signed languages. Alongside issues of assimilation and the value of Deaf representation for collective belonging. Drawing on principles of allyship ([2.5](#)), the notion of *‘nothing about us, without us’* creates a tension with educational and political policy. If we are to increase collective belonging for D/deaf CYP and truly aim for authentic inclusion for all, then the voices of those minimised by society need to be listened to. The CCGT highlights that the current ideology around inclusion is not aligned with the communities its designed for. In part, due to the underlying assumptions that everybody wants to be assimilated *“into the logic of the present system”* (Shaull, 1970, p. 30). This is not the case. This research argues that there is a need for policy makers to redefine and reconsider what is meant by inclusion and ‘inclusive spaces’. To do this, the voices of those impacted by such policies need to be listened to. This research contributes to increased representation of D/deaf voice.

Alongside issues of inclusion, the importance of Deaf education, culture and history for D/deaf CYP is paramount. The findings in this research point to the need for Deaf histories to be embedded in the curriculum and taught to all pupils. There have been government plans to introduce a G.C.S.E in BSL since 2017, which has been repeatedly postponed, suggesting that it is not considered a priority ([1.3](#)). However, following The BSL Act (2022) which is intended to foster greater inclusion and equality for Deaf communities, policy makers have a duty to uphold their own laws. Deaf history could be incorporated as part of the G.C.S.E programme, increasing awareness and understanding of D/deaf experience alongside increased breadth of accessible language. Thus, moving policy closer towards Deaf Consciousness.

## 5.4 Dissemination

Knowledge exchange is ethically important for research, particularly involving marginalised groups, because it ensures that the Deaf participant-researchers' contributions to knowledge through the sharing of their living experiences are not used purely for academic gain. These experiences, (as highlighted in [2.3](#)) have historically been overlooked or ignored in society. Considerations of how to ensure this research does not do the same is therefore also important to the integrity of the overall research design as it helps to redistribute power in the research(er) relationship. Some steps towards dissemination have already been taken, such as the accessible video shared with a group of Deaf students and staff and the production of the CCGT/nine tenets as an artifact to be used to support wider dissemination. Locally, this research will also be shared with the EP service I am working in, alongside the Hearing Impairment (HI) team. I hope this will promote collaborative working across both teams around how 'D/deaf ways of being' can be considered systemically. I also hope to explore sharing the '*tenets of Deaf Consciousness*' with the schools and wider services in the Local

Authority, I intend to discuss with the EP service leadership team on how this may be achieved.

Thinking on a wider scale, much of the published research into D/deaf experiences (e.g. literature documented in Chapter 2) have been published in Deaf specific journals (e.g. The journal of Deaf studies and Deaf education) rather than more 'mainstream' research publications. As such, the reach is limited as it can be assumed that the primary readers of those journals are individuals with interest in the field of D/deafness and D/deaf education. Arguably, those individuals are not where the research needs to reach. If true change is to occur then the voices and experiences of D/deaf people need to be acknowledged, understood and valued on a much wider scale. For this reason, I intend to explore publishing this research in D/deaf specific journals and wider academic journals linked to EP practice or education. I also intend to contact Deaf charities/groups to discuss this research and explore whether there is interest or potential for collaborative working, either through the dissemination of this research or future research avenues.

## 5.5 Evaluating Research Quality

In academia, there is often critique that qualitative research lacks academic rigor, with quantitative methodologies being perceived more favourably (Rubin et al., 2018). However, quality across the two research paradigms should not be judged against the same markers, as they are designed with different intentions (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). In line with the CCGT methodology, Charmaz (2024) outlined four-stage criteria for quality consideration. Each one is considered in relation to this research.

### 5.5.1 Credibility

Credibility can be considered as ensuring enough data is collected to enable questions and comparisons to be asked of that data (Charmaz, 2024).

Given those questions are asked by the researcher, through the analysis process, it can be considered that the researcher plays a vital role in research credibility. Within CCGT, aspects relating to credibility are considered within the reflexivity embedded within the process (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). As outlined in [3.7.3](#), memo-ing has been incorporated into the reflection process throughout alongside consideration of ‘methodological self-consciousness’ (Charmaz, 2017) to support recognition and acknowledgement of potential assumptions or bias made during the process. The co-constructed approach to this research in which the participant-researchers’ led the focus of direction (particularly the ranking activity in [phase 2](#)) has also supported credibility as data analysis has been informed by the main concern identified by the participant-researchers. Prior to beginning data collection, I outlined my prior knowledge and assumptions linked to the broader area of interest ([1.7](#), [1.7.1](#)) for additional transparency, which is also revisited in [5.7](#).

### 5.5.2 Originality

Originality considers whether the present research provides new insight or offers a fresh perspective (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). Existing literature into the experiences of D/deaf CYP is limited, particularly in terms of the UK education system, with much of the literature being from across the world. Additionally, I could find only one UK study that explored D/deaf CYP experiences using GT methodology (Hardy, 2010). No study was found that used Critical-constructivist GT. Alongside this, the aim of GT is to provide new understanding grounded in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As such, I believe this research has achieved originality as the mix of philosophical positioning (Social constructionism/DeafCrit – [3.4.3](#)), participant-researcher design and CCGT methodology mean this research provides a fresh perspective into the field of D/deaf experiences.

Furthermore, the resulting theory presented in [chapter four](#) extends existing literature on D/deaf experience by proposing a process of collective belonging undertaken by D/deaf CYP. The specifics of this are outlined earlier in this chapter ([5.2](#)).

### 5.5.3 Resonance

Resonance refers to whether categories constructed in the research illuminate the participant-researchers' experiences by providing insight to increase other's understanding of those experiences (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). I believe this has been achieved through the co-constructed, participant-researcher approach utilised. Phase 2 of data collection involved participant-researchers prioritising tentative codes and being given an opportunity to add or change what had been constructed in the data at that time. This provided a way of checking that my interpretation of their stories matched theirs. Thus, increasing insight and understanding of those experiences and maintaining the participant-researchers' voices as central to the research.

### 5.5.4 Usefulness

There are a range of factors to consider when reviewing usefulness; new avenues for future research, increased understanding of experiences, contribution to policy or practice (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). Increased understanding of experience has already been explored in the previous section alongside matters relating to the implications of the research for the EP profession and further afield. These both support an argument in favour of this research being useful. Furthermore, as highlighted in chapter four, at times during the process, participant-researchers were able to reflect and expand on aspects of their experiences, particularly those who returned for a second interview and the increased reflection in their responses suggest it was a useful and worthwhile process for the participant-researchers themselves in having space to share their experience and reclaim their voice.

Dissemination considerations also covered in this chapter further strengthen the usefulness of the research through increases the range and reach of the research impact.

### 5.5.5 Transferability

Generalisability is concerned with whether research findings can be applied to everyone/all contexts. This is most commonly applied to quantitative research and statistical probabilities. In contrast, transferability is the extent to which findings can apply to other similar contexts (Tracy, 2010). As this is qualitative research, I have not set out to achieve generalisability. The aim of the research was to further understanding whilst acknowledging its contextual situation. Therefore, this research will consider transferability, not generalisability. As explored in [3.2.2](#) as the researcher I am not separate from the research (Holloway, 1997). The resulting theory is therefore open to interpretation, modification or further inquiry by future researchers (Breckenridge et al., 2012) as I recognise that I have brought my own values, experience and knowledge to the research, as have the participant-researchers. That said, I believe transferability has been achieved that is worthy of consideration for educational settings, policy and professionals (outlined in the [implications](#) section).

The similarities echoed in this research, to world-wide research conducted in South Africa (Sekoto & Hlayisi, 2023), America (Foss, 2014), Japan (McGuire & Tokunaga, 2020) show transferable aspects despite each of these educational systems and cultural considerations being vastly different from those of this research. Additionally, D/deaf people are not a homogenous group due to differences in perceptions of Deafness i.e. audiological or cultural (Young & temple, 2014). Therefore, these findings cannot be generalised as it cannot be said at this stage, whether they apply to the whole population of D/deaf people.

## 5.6 Limitations and future research

Whilst the role of intersectionality is briefly considered in this research, it was not a specific focus area and as such, the full impact of intersectional differences between participant-researchers in this study has not been thoroughly explored. Furthermore, it is recognised that this research is relatively small scale and considers the experiences of nine Deaf participant-researchers in one Local Authority only. It would be worthwhile for future research to explore these findings in different contexts to widen understanding, this could include; different models of D/deafness (e.g. how does D/deaf belonging differ for those who consider their deafness in auditory terms rather than cultural), different age ranges or focus specifically on intersectionality and consider D/deaf experience alongside factors such as race, gender or SEND.

The co-construction/participant-researcher design of this research can be considered both a strength and a limitation. As outlined in [1.8](#), constraints and requirements of the Doctorate placed restrictions in terms of the co-construction process, such as set timeframes, logistics, original authorship. Whilst these have been recognised and attempts made to mitigate for them; it remains a limitation in terms of the extent that true co-construction could be achieved. I maintain that those involved in the research are participant-researchers and not merely participants, despite these limitations as even partial co-construction leads to positive co-production of knowledge (Clark et al., 2022) and the hope was transformative participation would occur through active involvement in the research process. I believe this has been achieved, as participant-researchers were able to reflect on their experiences with some being empowered to want to challenge their earlier experiences and recognising them as oppressive. This is outlined in the final CCGT which documents that journey towards empowerment (collective belonging) through becoming aware of their experiences (Deaf Consciousness). Ideally, however, participant-researchers could have had a more

active role in co-designing the research in the earlier stages such as defining the initial questions or co-analysing data. When considering this in relation to Hart's Ladder of Participation (1992), this would have elevated participation from a level 6 (as outlined in [1.8](#)) to level 7 or 8, in which the research was initiated from the start by the participant-researchers. Future research that is not confined by such restrictions should further extend the co-production process including the option of co-authoring published research.

Another limitation relates to the use of interpreters who were already known to the participant-researchers ([3.5.2](#)). Whilst, in some ways, this familiarity may have supported participant-researchers to feel comfortable meeting with me as an unfamiliar person. It may also have created some role confusion, as the interpreters were known to the participant-researchers as a staff member or BSL support within their educational setting. This familiarity could have influenced how participant-researchers answered or what they focused on, such as wanting to talk about aspects they felt were of interest to the interpreter or not wanting to disclose certain personal aspects of their experiences. Due to not having a funding budget for this research, it was not possible to outsource for external interpreters. Participant-researchers were given the option to request a different interpreter or to participate without one, although it is acknowledged that they may not have felt entirely comfortable to share that.

As outlined in [3.6](#), during data collection, the first participant-researcher expressed their uncertainty around the term 'belonging'. In response, I adopted the more accessible and understood phrase of 'feeling included' to explain the concept, alongside a definition. This change supported clearer communication and accessibility for participant-researchers. During the course of all interviews, whilst I kept this approach consistent, some participant-researchers appeared to use or understand the term 'belonging' or 'to belong', whereas others understood it as 'feeling included'. This

shift has potential implications as to the clarity of belonging as a construct and how this may align with existing literature. Conceptually both concepts are often used interchangeably, although definitions of belonging are typically understood on a deeper level, e.g. definitions around acceptance, connectedness, psychological safety (e.g. Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Gentzke, 2024). Whereas to feel included is often associated with participation or feeling welcome (E.g. inclusion). However, as outlined elsewhere in this thesis (e.g. [2.6.1](#), [3.2](#)) the concept of belonging is recognised as a social construct, and as such multiple constructions of what it means to belong/feel included can exist simultaneously. The CCGT presented in this thesis is a combination of all experiences and perspectives shared by the participant-researchers involved in this research and therefore encapsulated both conceptualisations of the word. I consider that it would be unethical to dismiss or give less weight to a living experience based on the word they use to conceptualise it. Furthermore, the adaptation is in line with GT methodology as it reflects the reflexive co-constructed approach adopted in this research of responding to the participant-researchers views and understanding. Changing the terminology ultimately prioritised meaningful engagement and accessibility for those involved in the research over strict adherence to a set criterion of terminology.

Much of the existing literature on D/deaf experiences uses IPA methodology, findings from this research have highlighted the need for further research that is emancipatory and participatory. This would enable D/deaf voices and the researcher to be fully immersed in those experiences. Therefore, it is recommended that future research has a participatory/action-based research design, with the aim of pushing for further change, which this research has highlighted is necessary.

## 5.7 Reflections on the research process

I have found the process of producing this research incredibly rewarding and also incredibly challenging at times. Overall, the chosen methodology CCGT, has been a good fit for this research and has enabled me to respond to the participant-researchers' insight through the methodological flexibility it offers. One example of this is through what I consider to be one of the strongest elements of the research – the inclusion of the I-Poems. By focusing on 'I' and physically removing my contributions to the conversation (through asking questions), it has ensured that the participant-researchers remain central and integral to the research and the resulting CCGT. The I-Poems capture the essence of each of the categories, in a far more powerful way than my words ever could. I had not initially intended to use I-Poems, the flexibility of GT has enabled me to have the option to adapt the methods deemed most valuable to the data being constructed which has strengthened the final research overall.

At times, this flexibility has been challenging due to the multiple directions the research could be taken. As a researcher new to CCGT this often felt overwhelming and left me questioning whether I was 'doing it right'. Although I read multiple books and articles on GT methodology prior to and during the research process, it is only through undertaking this research that I feel I have developed a deeper understanding of what those texts were conveying. I have also learned about myself through this, recognising that I learn more effectively through doing. There were points in this research that felt like I had made a mistake at the time, such as needing to redo my initial coding after struggling with NVivo software. Although this was frustrating at the time, repeating the coding developed my understanding of the data and helped me to refine my initial codes.

There are also some aspects I would approach differently, if I was repeating the research. The main change I would make relates to the questions in [phase 1](#).

I would begin with one broad, open question such as “what does belonging mean to you?” as I believe this would allow the conversation to unfold more naturally than me interjecting with further questions. This reflection, however, comes from having experienced the full process and reflects my increasing confidence in the methodology and my ability to ‘trust the process’.

Given the research focus on areas such as identity, belonging, power and privilege, I have naturally found myself reflecting on these in relation to my own identity and my professional identity as an EP. This research journey has hugely increased my criticality and I find myself naturally considering the role of power in consultations with schools, or when working with young people and thinking how I can work to redistribute or elevate the voices not being heard or listened to. Aside from being able to apply and use this research when working with Deaf communities, it is these transferable skills and knowledge areas that I am already noticing are influencing my daily practice.

As highlighted in my reflective piece ([1.7](#)), I brought prior knowledge, experience and interest in this area which led to me wanting to increase understanding of D/deaf experiences. The table below briefly explores these initial preconceptions;

Table 16: Reflections on initial preconceptions

| Preconceptions at start of research (1.7.1)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Reflections at the end of the research                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| D/deafness is an individual experience; it can be both a disability and a cultural identity. For individuals whose Deafness is part of their cultural identity, it is often something to be celebrated and proud of rather than something to be fixed. For individuals whose D/deafness is focused on their audiological hearing loss, it can be disabling and significantly impact their access and engagement with the world around them. All perspectives are equally valid. | My beliefs around D/deafness being an individual experience have not changed, however through this process, I have developed greater understanding and appreciation of what it means to be Deaf and the importance of cultural identity and validation for the Deaf community. Whilst it should be acknowledged that this research does not speak for all Deaf people, the participant-researchers' insights have highlighted just how important Deaf epistemologies are for Deaf experience.                                                                                                                                                                               |
| There are differing and often contentious opinions about the use of assistive aids and technological devices such as cochlear implants, radio and hearing aids, use of speech as a primary method of communication. While not directly related to the focus of this research, this awareness is acknowledged.                                                                                                                                                                   | I originally thought the debate regarding assistive technology may come up through this research, in terms of participant-researchers own views or perceptions of it. This was not the case. It was unexpected that this debate featured in the research in the way it did, through the acts of oppression experienced by the participant-researchers and Hearing perceptions on D/deafness itself.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| To me, belonging is a feeling, a 'felt sense' influenced by the environment you are in and the people around you.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | I recognise now that this was an overly simplistic view of belonging. While a 'felt sense' forms one aspect, this research has shown that belonging occurs within a far more complex interplay of factors and conditions (e.g. language, culture, relational, systemic). When considering belonging, it cannot be based on one isolated factor, as there is not one single aspect that accounts for its complex multi-faceted nature. In fact, to only focus on one risk doing further harm by minimising people's experiences by not considering the wider contextual and influencing factors. Belonging therefore, can only be understood in combination of each element. |

Finally, ethical practice is a core value of mine which has shaped this research. It was always of great importance to me, that my role in the research was to use my voice, to elevate that of the participant-researchers, rather than using theirs to elevate mine. Reflecting on the completed research, I am proud of the decisions I have made along the way and feel I have achieved my aim in producing a thesis that elevates the voice

of Deaf communities and challenges the dominant discourses in society, in which I am a part of. Feedback so far from the CCGT/Tenets has been positive, with one participant-researcher sharing *“It felt like you had listened to us” – Student 7*. This comment means so much to me in knowing that I have remained ethical to the process and done the voices of the participant-researchers’ justice. In that sense, I believe the final CCGT and Nine Tenets have honoured the participant-researchers and achieved what I hoped.

## 5.8 Concluding remarks

This final chapter has linked existing theory with the new theory constructed through this research. I am mindful that it is the voices of the participant-researchers’ that are central to this research and the knowledge constructed is because of their time and willingness to share their stories with me. Their insights and living experiences are central to how the findings should be read and understood. The I-poems elevated the participant-researchers’ voices, placing them at the forefront of the research. It is therefore important that this chapter, and the thesis as a whole concludes not with my words, but with theirs, through a final collective I-poem as a reminder to the reader that the CCGT is grounded in their living realities.

I think we need to do more.

I think it’s important to feel part of school.

I think it’s being happy at school.

I feel happy when I’m included.

I’m with my friends.

I've got people to talk too.

I'm proud to be Deaf.

I have a community.

I belong here.

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# List of Appendices

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Appendix 7: Examples Memos including phase 2 statement process

Appendix 8: Phase 2 Scoring

Appendix 9: Ethical Approval Letter

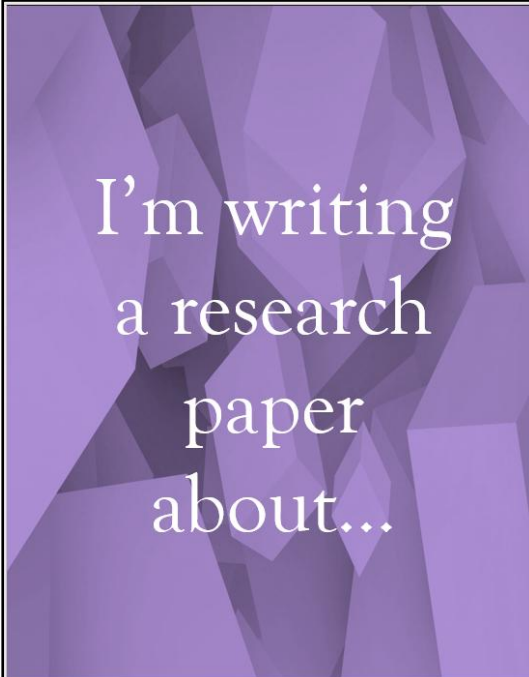
Appendix 10: Script for video

Appendix 11: Video Feedback

## Appendix 1: Recruitment Presentation Slides

The below show the slides used to present to prospective participant-researchers to introduce the research to them. The presentation was used for phase 1 recruitment and adapted for phase 2.

|                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  <p>Hello...</p> <p>I'm Sarah</p> | <p>About Me</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Worked at the [redacted] for 5 years</li><li>• Now at Sheffield University training to be an Educational Psychologist<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Work with adults in schools and with young people.</li><li>• Make recommendations to help children and young people at school</li><li>• Research and training to schools/colleges and staff</li></ul></li></ul> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

|                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  <p>I'm writing<br/>a research<br/>paper<br/>about...</p> | <p>A study into experiences of belonging<br/>(feeling included)<br/>in secondary school for Young People<br/>who are Deaf.</p> <p>I want to help understand ways that<br/>Deaf students can feel more included<br/>during their time at school.</p> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

## What and Why?

- I'm Interested in understanding more about what its like at secondary school for Deaf students.
- I think there should be more support at school for Deaf students.
- There is very little research about life at school for Deaf children – or how it feels to be at school when you're Deaf. I want to change that!
- I hope to improve understanding of experiences for Deaf students at school for future generations. With your help!

**Take part in RESEARCH**

**01 What is the study about?**

This study is exploring the views of young people who identify as Deaf or have hearing loss and their experiences of feeling a sense of belonging at secondary school. You will be invited to attend a short interview with me to discuss your experiences.

**02 Why take part?**

- So that your voice, views and opinions can be heard.
- Your experiences could contribute to better understanding and support in school for children who are Deaf/have hearing loss.

**03 Who can take part?**

If the answer to the below questions are yes, you can take part:

- Are you 16 years or over?
- Do you identify as Deaf or as having a hearing loss?
- Did you previously attend secondary school in England?
- Do you currently attend a school or college in England?

Will you  
help me?

1. Meet with me and an interpreter during [redacted]
  2. I'll ask 10 short questions about your time at school (not college).
  3. It will take 20 - 25minutes. That's it!
- 
- I record the answers on my laptop – so I can look back and not forget anything.
  - I write up all my findings into a report.
  - You'll all be anonymous – nobody will know it was you, so you can be as honest as you want.
  - I will share my report with schools to help improve support for Deaf students.



The same presentation was used for phase 2, but the below slide edited to reflect what they would be asked to do;

Will you  
help me?

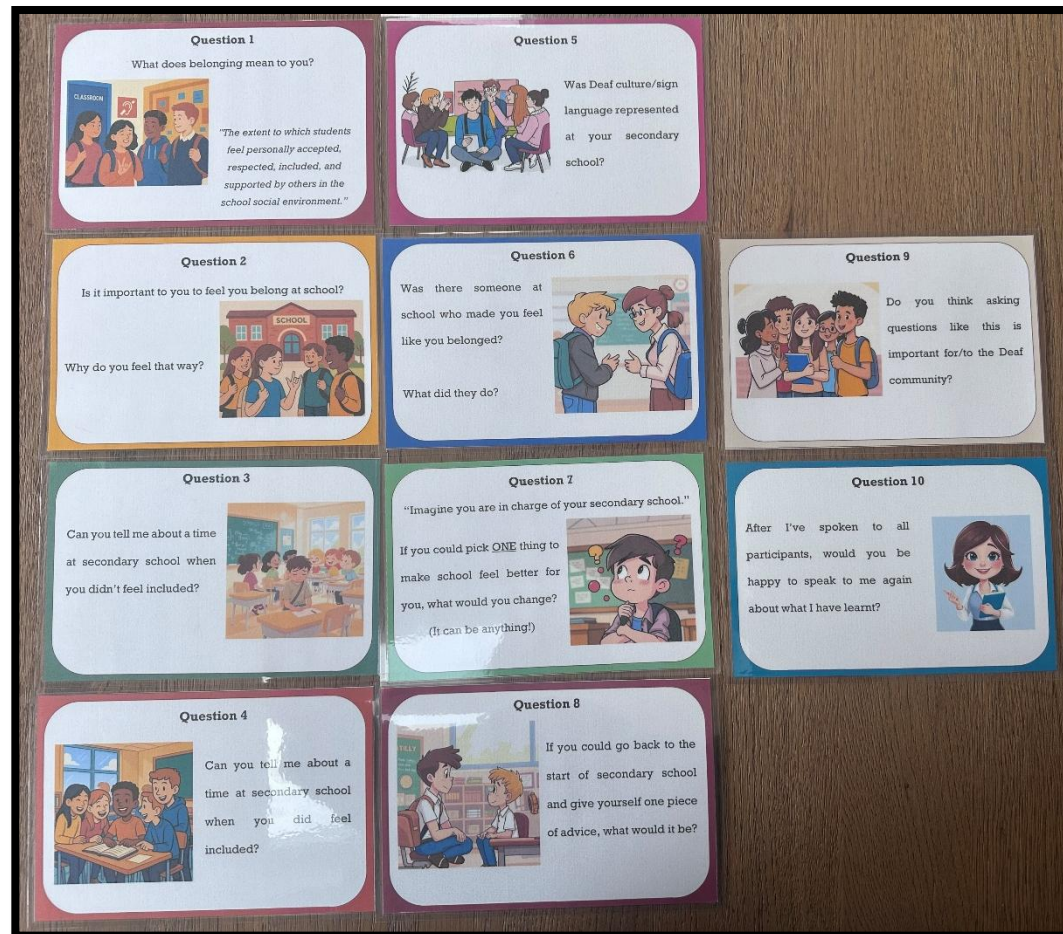
1. Meet with me and an interpreter.
2. I'll ask for your thoughts on what students have shared about their experiences at school so far. You will be asked to rate which ones you think are most important.
3. It will take 15 - 20minutes. That's it!

---

- I will record the answers on my laptop – so I can look back and not forget anything.
- I write up all my findings into a report.
- You'll all be anonymous – nobody will know it was you, so you can be as honest as you want.
- I will share my report with schools to help improve support for Deaf students.

## Appendix 2: Phase 1 Questions

These are the questions used in phase 1, they were printed out A5 size and laminated, Participant-researchers were able to read the questions themselves or have the interpreter sign them.



## Appendix 3: Consent Form, Information Sheet and Research Poster



### A Study into experiences of belonging in secondary school for Young People who are Deaf/hard of hearing.

#### Participant Consent Form

Please read before ticking the appropriate boxes;

| Taking Part in the Research                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Yes | No |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----|
| I have read and understood the participant information sheet dated 05/06/2025 or the research has been fully explained to me by an adult. (If you answer No to this question, please do not fill out the rest of the form until you understand what taking part in the research will mean). |     |    |
| I have been given the chance to ask questions about the research.                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |     |    |
| I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |     |    |
| I agree to take part in the research.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |     |    |
| I understand that taking part in the research will involve taking part in an Individual Interview.                                                                                                                                                                                          |     |    |
| I understand I may be asked if I want to take part in a second interview. I understand that I can change my mind if I do not wish to take part in future stages of this research.                                                                                                           |     |    |
| I agree for the interview to be audio recorded so that my responses can be referred back to. I understand only the Researcher will have access to the recording.                                                                                                                            |     |    |
| I agree that during the Interview, notes may be made, and I may be asked to complete a handout that will be used in the research.                                                                                                                                                           |     |    |
| I understand that by choosing to participate as a volunteer in this research, this does not create a legally binding agreement nor is it intended to create an employment relationship with the University of Sheffield.                                                                    |     |    |
| I understand that taking part in this research is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time until <u>24 hours</u> after my participation. I do not have to give any reason why and there will be no negative consequences if I choose to withdraw.                       |     |    |
| I understand I can withdraw from further participation in the research at any time. I understand that after <u>24 hours</u> , any information I have already provided will remain in the research.                                                                                          |     |    |

| How my information will be used during and after the project                                                                                                                                                      | Yes | No |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----|
| I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be seen by anyone outside the research.                                                                      |     |    |
| I understand and agree that my contributions may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages and other research outputs. I understand I will not be named and will remain anonymous.                            |     |    |
| I give permission for information I provide for this research to be saved securely on Google Drive, managed by the University of Sheffield. I understand this will be destroyed after the research has completed. |     |    |
| I agree to assign the copyright of any materials I generate as part of this research to the University of Sheffield.                                                                                              |     |    |

Name of participant [printed]

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher [printed]

Signature

Date

Project contact details for further information:

Lead Researcher:

Sarah Grimble

Trainee Educational Psychologist

University Supervisors:

Lynne Mackey

DEdCPsy University Tutor

Professor Claudine Bowyer-Crane

Professor of Education

If you wish to speak to someone outside of the research team, in the event of a complaint please contact:

Professor Rebecca Lawthorn

Head of School

School of Education, The University of Sheffield, The Wave, 2 Whitham Road, Sheffield, S10 2AH



To help me to arrange the interview, please can you answer the following questions;

Please give yourself a false name (pseudonym) to be known as throughout the research (this must not be any part of your real name or a nickname/sign name that could identify you to others. (If you leave this blank, I will randomly assign you one.)

What is your age?

Which of the below best describes the secondary school you attended?

Mainstream School      Special School      Independent/Private School  
Alternative Provision/Pupil Referral Unit      Other

Which word best explains how you would identify yourself?

Deaf      Hard of Hearing      Hearing Impaired      Other (space to type in)

How would you describe your level of hearing loss?

Mild      Moderate      Severe      Profound      Other (space to type in)

Do you wear any of the following;

Hearing Aid      Cochlear Implant

How would you describe your main form of communication?

British Sign Language      Sign Supported English      Lip Reading      Speech      Other  
(space to type in)

Would you like a BSL interpreter to attend the interview?

Yes      No

I would like the individual interview to take place;

In person      Online

## A STUDY INTO EXPERIENCES OF BELONGING AT SECONDARY SCHOOL FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE DEAF/HARD OF HEARING.

### Participant Information Sheet

| Who am I?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | What is this research about?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>I am Sarah, a Trainee Educational Psychologist studying at the university of Sheffield</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <p>I want to understand how young people who are Deaf or hard of hearing feel about belonging and inclusion at secondary school. I aim to create a theory to explain what it means to belong at school.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Who can take part?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Do I have to take part?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <p>You can take part if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You are 16 or older and in college or sixth form.</li> <li>• You went to secondary school in England (not home-schooled).</li> <li>• You are Deaf or hard of hearing (any level, with or without hearing aids or cochlear implants).</li> </ul> | <p>No, it's your choice. If you decide to, you will sign a consent form.</p> <p>If you change your mind, you can stop, you do not have to give a reason. If you withdraw within 24 hours, your answers will be removed. <a href="#">Email me</a> if you no longer want to take part.</p> <p>If you need help deciding, you can talk to a parent or another adult for advice. If you have questions, <a href="#">email me</a> or ask someone to email for you.</p> |

| What will happen?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | What will the research involve?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>You can <b>choose</b> to meet <b>in person</b> at your school/college or <b>online</b> on Google Meet. If needed, a <b>British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter</b> can join the meeting. You will <b>be asked questions</b> about your <b>experiences</b> at secondary school.</p> <p>If you want to take part, you must <b>sign a consent form</b>. Taking part is <b>voluntary</b>, and you can <b>change your mind</b>. You will choose a <b>new name</b> (pseudonym) for the research. This means <b>your real name won't be shared</b> (you will be anonymous). The interview will last around <b>30 minutes</b>. The research will take place over several rounds, you will be offered the chance to do <b>more than one interview</b>, you do not have to do this and you can change your mind.</p> | <p>You will <b>be asked questions</b> about your <b>experiences</b> at secondary school. Questions you may be asked are;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Why</b> did you choose to take part?</li> <li>• Was <b>Deaf culture</b>/Sign language present at secondary school?</li> <li>• <b>What advice</b> would you give to a Deaf student just starting secondary school?</li> <li>• Is there anything that would have made <b>communication with others easier</b> for you?</li> <li>• How <b>important</b> do you think it is to <b>feel included</b>/like you 'belong' as secondary school?</li> </ul> <p>You may also be shown some different pictures and asked what stands out when you think about 'Belonging?'</p> |

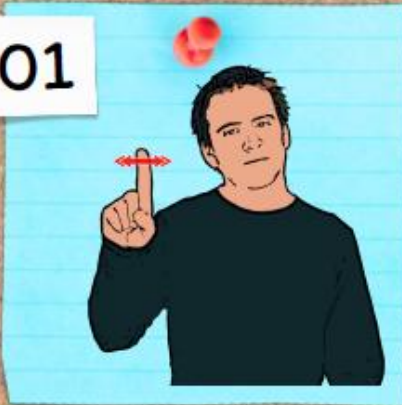
| What are the benefits and what might be difficult?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>I hope you will <b>enjoy taking part</b> and sharing your experiences. The research aims to gain <b>more understanding</b> so that schools can be <b>more inclusive</b> for young people who are <b>Deaf or hard of hearing</b>.</p> <p>Some questions might <b>remind you of negative feelings</b> or experiences. You can <b>take a break</b> or <b>skip questions</b> if you need to. If you need support, I can <b>talk to you</b> a few days later to see how you are or you can access online support, like the <a href="#">Deaf Health Charity SignHealth</a>.</p> |

| How will my answers be used?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | What will happen to the findings?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>The interview will be <b>audio recorded</b> and <b>notes will be taken</b>. You may also be asked to <b>fill in a grid</b>, listing things in order of importance. Only I will listen to the recording and write it into text (transcription). All information will be <b>kept safe</b> and <b>deleted</b> after the research ends. The written transcript may be included in my research but you will not be identifiable through this.</p>                                                                                                                                                                               | <p>I will write a <b>research paper</b> (thesis) that I will submit to the University of Sheffield. This will also be <b>available online</b>. The findings will be <b>shared with you</b> once the research is finished. It may also be shared with <b>schools and people who work in education</b> to help them understand more about experiences of Young People who are <b>Deaf or hard of hearing</b>. The research may also be <b>published</b> in a journal.</p>          |
| The Legal Bit                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | What if I have questions or a complaint?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <p>I am required to tell you that the legal basis I am applying to processing your personal data is "processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest" (Article 6(1)(e)).</p> <p>This means <b>personal information</b> will only be collected if it is <b>important for the research</b>. The University of Sheffield is <b>responsible</b> for making sure your information is looked after. Further information can be found <a href="#">here</a></p> <p>This research has been <b>granted ethical approval</b> by The University of Sheffield. Ethics Approval Number XXXXXX.</p> | <p>You can <a href="#">email me</a> if you have <b>any questions</b> or are worried about anything to do with this research.</p> <p>If you are not happy about any part of this research and wish to <b>make a complaint</b>, you can contact my research supervisors <a href="#">Lynne Mackey</a> or <a href="#">Professor Claudine Bowyer-Crane</a>. If you are unhappy with the response, you can contact the Head of School, <a href="#">Professor Rebecca Lawthorn</a>.</p> |



# Take part in **RESEARCH**

01



## What is the study about?

This study is exploring the views of young people who identify as Deaf or hard of hearing and their experiences of feeling a sense of belonging at secondary school. You will be invited to attend a short interview with me to discuss your experiences.

## Why take part?

- So that your voice, views and opinions can be heard.
- Your experiences could contribute to better understanding and support in school for children who are Deaf/hard of hearing.

02



## Who can take part?

If the answer to the below questions are yes, you can take part;

- Are you 16 years or over?
- Do you identify as Deaf or hard of hearing?
- Did you previously attend secondary school in England?
- Do you currently attend a school or college in England?

03



## I'm Interested!

Please contact me for more information  
Sarah Grimbly - Trainee Educational Psychologist  
Email - [REDACTED]



## Appendix 4: Interpreter Information Sheet



**A Constructivist Grounded Theory Study into experiences of belonging within a school/college community for Young People who are Deaf/hard of hearing.**

### **Participant Information Sheet: Using a British Sign Language Interpreter during the interview**

#### **Why will an interpreter be present?**

As this research involves communication in both spoken and written English and you identified as using British Sign Language (BSL) as your primary form of communication, a qualified BSL interpreter can be present during the interview. I have previously worked with Deaf children, young people and adults and know some BSL, however it is important to me that your thoughts and feelings are accurately conveyed and understood, the interpreter is there to make sure that we can understand each other clearly and have a conversation between us that we can both equally contribute to.

#### **What is the interpreter's role?**

The interpreter will translate everything I say into BSL for you to understand. They will also translate everything you sign into spoken English for me. They will not take part in the interview itself, this means they will not ask anything I have not asked, offer their own opinions or change anything you sign to me. Anything discussed in the interview will remain private and confidential. The interpreter will be a trained professional and they will not share anything from the interview with anyone else.



### **What will happen during the interview?**

Prior to the interview you will be given the choice between meeting in person (this will likely be in a quiet room at your current school/college) or meeting online via Google Meet. If in person, I will ensure I am sitting facing you so that you can see my facial expressions, mouth movements clearly. I will speak directly to you and the BSL interpreter will sign what I say. I will make sure I speak clearly in short sentences giving the interpreter time to sign each sentence. If online, captions will be added and you will be able to use the 'chat' function to type any answers you wish.

You can ask for anything to be repeated or explained in a different way. You will be able to take breaks, ask questions or stop the interview at any point. You will not need to give a reason why. The interview will last around 30 minutes.

### **Will the interview be recorded?**

You will be asked to consent to the interview being audio recorded, this will capture anything you say verbally and what the BSL interpreter translates from your signed answers. This is so that I can refer back to your responses later and ensure I have understood them correctly. The audio recording will only be seen by myself and my research supervisors. The BSL interpreter will not have access to the recording.

### **Do I have to have an interpreter?**

It is up to you, whether you would like an interpreter to join the interview. If you do decide you would like an interpreter, you can make any specific requests linked to the interpreter used (such as gender). If you change your mind during the interview and no longer wish to



have an interpreter present, you can request that they leave. You will not need to give a reason why.

### **Who do I contact if I have any questions?**

If you have any questions or are worried about anything to do with this research, you (or an adult you know) can contact me at [REDACTED] If you wish to raise a complaint please contact my research supervisors, Lynne Mackey [REDACTED] or Professor Claudine Bowyer-Crane [REDACTED] If you are unhappy with the response, you can contact the Head of School, Professor Rebecca Lawthorn [REDACTED]

## Appendix 5: Sample Interview Transcripts (Interview 3,4 and 12) and All I-Poems

### Interview 3 – Full Transcript

**Sarah:** Belonging, what does it mean to you?

**Hannah:** That everyone can be welcome, no matter if you're deaf, or disabled, a disability or are different, you're part of it, whether LGBTQ+, race, age. So, everyone should be welcome, should be involved in everything, should belong to a place. Like, for example, you should feel like you belong to your school.

**Sarah:** Yeah. So, everyone, regardless of their differences, should all belong together?

**Hannah:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Sarah:** Thinking about secondary school, was it important to you to feel like you belonged?

**Hannah:** I think so, yeah. I hadn't really thought much about it before. Umm...Yeah, I feel like everyone should belong.

(pause)

**Hannah:** I think it was quite hard. It was quite hard at my secondary school. I am Deaf, but (pause), I am Deaf, but there's other people that are Deaf there, but it's a mainstream school.

**Sarah:** Your secondary school was a mainstream secondary school?

**Hannah:** Yeah, it was a mainstream school, and it had a deaf space.

**Sarah:** Can you tell me about that?

**Hannah:** There were a couple of Deaf. Erm, a couple of them. I don't feel like there was a lot of them, not a lot, but a small group. It was nice, a nice group. And they were all different years, and it depends what year you were in. If you're, year seven, there was only two deaf in year seven. If you're, like, year nine, there were three or four deaf in year nine. You know what mean? Like, a group, but all different ages. All the ages, all grouped together. But we didn't have classes together. So, we always went to different places.

**Sarah:** Can you tell me about the mainstream classes or deaf hub?

**Hannah:** Went to mainstream classes yeah, but if you had a problem, you would go down to the deaf group. We had a classroom. No, not an actual classroom, but, like, we'd have a

classroom, but for break time and lunch times. You know? If you had a problem during the day, with your hearing aid, or can't find your class. If you were having problems, you'd have your signing class, you could normally go down there and talk to somebody. But it's always difficult.

**Sarah:** Difficult in what way?

**Hannah:** Because I don't understand. And they don't understand what we would talk about and how we we're feeling.

**Sarah:** Can you think of a time at secondary school when you didn't feel included?

**Hannah:** I am deaf, but I have other problems. Umm and being in the mainstream school, there was a few times, like, my signing wasn't good and I had some deaf friends, like, full deaf, and they're looking at a teacher, and then they keep looking at me. And, it's like, "oh, dear, I've got to sign!", and that made me feel pressured. And I felt a bit annoyed because I couldn't focus myself because I kept getting people looking at me. And I'm like, "I'll try signing, but I'm not fantastic". I'm the only deaf in my family, I don't know, growing up, I've only been deaf. And they're just looking at me, and I've got to sign to them. I'm deaf, but because I can speak, and I did work with my speech therapist for a long time. I feel like they want to put more pressure on me to sign for them. I did try to. And then when it finally came (signing), I was like... phew! And I had to catch up on all my work.

**Sarah:** Can you tell me more about that pressure?

**Hannah:** Yeah, because I can hear, well not hear but, I can hear a little because I have radio, and we are all connected, but they can be a bit hard to understand. And they'd just look at me and think I can understand everything, even though I've got learning difficulties. I can speak quite clearly. I can speak without signing. Because, I've grown up with hearing family. I'm the only deaf in my family. So, they are also learning, and I'm learning. So, when I went to that school, like, when I started going to, like, deaf groups, it was a bit hard. I was like, wow, there's deaf people in this world. And it's like, you know, like, everyone's signing. And I was like, what's signing mean? Like, why you're signing? Why you're all slapping your hands around me? I'm sitting there thinking, I've got to speak. And I learned sign, but I still like it, because at home, no one else signs for me. And, you know, just, to me, it's like a different world, but, obviously, I am deaf, but I have, like, learning difficulties in my life. And I've got a lot of problems, so I've never really focused on being deaf. I've focused on the other things in my life.

**Sarah:** Thank you for sharing that. At secondary school, can you explain a time when you did feel included?

**Hannah:** Um, maybe it was, like, not the beginning. Like, maybe, I don't know, like, at first, it's hard to feel included. But, like, I did feel included. But when, I think, when, like, when the teacher started coming round and signing and signing for everyone and getting more supported. I feel, like, towards the end of my last year. Because, obviously, my last year was the biggest year. And I got more supported. And I started to get in my English, because I did my GCSE English. Because I was in,

not the deaf space but like a high-needs learning space. So, like, there was a mixture of, like, not being deaf. Kinda of like what we have here (college), they have a mix of autism, difficulties learning, or low learning. So, they just put us in the one space. So, they can, teachers can, teach us different. Not teach us different, but, a different way to teach us. Because we don't understand the main parts. They still trying to teach us the main parts, still taught the same things. But it's taught a different way. But then, they started putting me in GCSE English for my last year. And they had one-to-one signing. And that's the time I felt more included. Because that's when I felt more, like, more confident. So, I had to sign it. And a fantastic English teacher. But he left in the middle of the year. And then my confidence got down when he'd gone. And they were just trying to sign for me. Or we we're just sitting together trying to do English work. But it was a difficult, that moment.

**Sarah:** Could you access it more because you had that one-to-one to sign for you?

**Hannah:** It was the first time. It was probably the first times I had one-to-one. Um, I'd had one-to-one before. But I felt like, for Year 11, it was just for me. There were no other deaf people there. I think it was just mainly for me. And it helped. Like, it helped not only the signing. It helped me to understand English, too.

**Sarah:** Yeah. Thank you.

**Hannah:** I knew sign language in secondary school. We all signed. Even those in the mainstream school that wanted to get involved with sign language. But it was just, a few people did a few people didn't. Depends, like, if you speak to the deaf people much.

**Sarah:** The other students, you mean?

**Hannah:** Yeah, like, students who are not deaf. They might want to get included in sign language so they can talk to deaf people. But I'd be like, me and my brother and my sister had a go. Because, obviously, they knew I was deaf. So, my sister tried a bit. And, yeah, we had sign language (at school), It was fantastic. There were high and low levels. Depends on how you've grown up. I've never been fast, but I could sign in sign language. But I watched my friends sign all the time. And I watched the interpreter and everything. And I learned from them the most. Sitting down for hours and learning that way.

**Sarah:** Yeah. You learned through, like, conversation?

**Hannah:** Yeah, conversation. My primary school was a bit difficult. I did sign in primary school. But obviously, when I was home, I felt the odd one. So, I didn't sign. So, I just went, blah, blah, blah. So, I just didn't want to sign at home. I refused to be Deaf; I refused to wear my glasses or everything like that. After school, I used to take my hearing aids out. And I got told off in school.

**Sarah:** told off?

**Hannah:** For taking them out. Because I should wear them.

**Sarah:** Do you still take them out at home now?

**Hannah:** No. When I was younger, I just didn't want it. I hated it and everything. But now, I'm more confident. I'm more Deaf.

**Sarah:** Yeah, thank you. Do you think the sign language helped to have, like, a Deaf culture within secondary school or not?

**Hannah:** Yeah, kind of. I'm not really sure, to be honest. Yeah, we did have signing. And I would sign every day and still wouldn't understand. But I think, like, I learned, like, a big thing for me was signing. I wouldn't really focus on signing and focused on other things in my life.

**Sarah:** Yeah, thank you. When you were at school, was there one person that made you feel like you belonged?

**Hannah:** Oh, no. I don't think so. I mean, there was probably, one student or two students who were probably the same as me, just don't sign much and go to hearing friends and talk. Maybe we understand each other, but I felt like, I was always in the low classes. So like, some of the more, full deaf people were in those classes. So, I felt like, and they knew I can speak. They knew I can speak.

They knew I can hear, not clearly, but I can hear someone talk and understand a bit more than them. They didn't include me, but I felt like they relied on me and everything.

**Sarah:** They relied on you?

**Hannah:** Yeah. To hear people for them. So, like, they would rely on me for what the deaf person was saying. Like, hearing people were like, what did they say? And then the deaf person would be like, say what? And I felt like I was in the middle.

**Sarah:** You were interpreting for them?

**Hannah:** Yeah, interpreting. Even though I didn't want to be interpreting, I wasn't fantastic at interpreting. I just got to the point where I just kind of walked away or something.

**Sarah:** What would you have liked them to have done instead?

**Hannah:** Maybe don't put that pressure on me. Because I felt like I didn't understand it much when I was in school because, obviously, I didn't really think much about it when I was in school. I didn't understand it. I just did it anyway because it was me. I just did it anyway. But I think, like, now I've grown up more, thinking about my secondary school, thinking, God, I think I did more work than the signing staff there (laughs).

**Sarah:** It sounds like they put a lot of pressure on you?

**Hannah:** Yes, like, at break time, at lunch time. If someone, comes from hearing to start talking to me, and then the deaf want to know what they're saying, and I'm like, oh, now I'm signing. I mean, they sometimes understood what they were saying, but they'd look at me. And then I would just tend to go along with it. I don't know, I heard what he's saying, but I don't understand, like, the phrase or the word.

**Sarah:** Thank you. So, your secondary school, imagine you're the boss. And you can change one thing. What would you change?

**Hannah:** Maybe, not for me but for other students who might experience that like me, do not put pressure on deaf people. Even though they can speak, and they have a hearing aid in all the time. Not to rely on that person more. They should rely on the staff more than the students. If they have a problem, go to staff. Do not rely on that student, because they're probably having problems themselves, and they can't sort it out all the time. Because they might be feeling stressed, annoyed, can't catch up with their work. And they're just trying to learn at the same time as them.

**Sarah:** That sounds really tiring for you as well.

**Hannah:** Yeah, and then I also had to lip read, because they knew I was really, really good at lip reading. Because I've grown up looking at lip reading, and there like, lip read for me, just one time. And I'm like oh god, just hiding, because I got to do it again. Then I'd look at my work and thinking, oh, God, I had to copy someone next to me. I'm like, sorry, I'm not cheating. I'm just far behind.

I just normally asked the teacher, can you repeat again? But they get a bit, not annoyed, but like \*sighs\*, you know, but I can't help it. I mean, where's the sign teacher? Why she always late? Then she arrives and she's all. Sorry I was with other students. But, what about us? I have a problem now. I didn't really understand much, so I just didn't talk about it much. I

think when I left school, and came to college, I learned more about it. It happened to other students too. It happened to one of my friends (name). It happened to him. So, I was like, oh, I felt like an equal now when I met him. Like, phew. We had similar experiences. So, when we meet and talk, I understand what he's going through as I've gone through it. And now if it happened again, we would just go, right, I'm not doing it. I'm not doing it. We'd be cheeky. We'd be like, oh, we should get paid for this! We'd go to staff and go no; I'm not doing it. I'm doing my own work right now. We'd just be like, we're students now. I think because we understand more, and we're more forceful. Because we're doing our own work because it's college and we want to focus on our future. It's happened a few times in English.

Because honestly, it's not their fault, it's just they have one-to-one and they're always late and other one-to-one, you know, there are problems out there and everything and in English you're always being late and it's a bit different to before because we would have deaf English and English and I had this one deaf boy in the same English class and we used to sit one-to-one and sometimes I would sign to him and sometimes I would ask, do you understand?

**Sarah:** Thank you for sharing that. What advice would you give to someone starting secondary school?

**Hannah:** Maybe don't let anyone rely on you and be more forceful. Say, yes, I'm deaf but it doesn't mean that you can rely on me all the time. I remember a few times I'm like, you're signing, why am I signing. I don't even understand that signing word!

**Sarah:** Do you think questions like this are important to ask, for the deaf community?

**Hannah:** Yes, for all the deaf community, no matter where you come from, what country, what school you've been to. You can also have questions and you can understand what they're going through. You might find a friend that's deaf and you can understand what's going on, like someone's story. Like me and (name), I know his experience was a bit different to mine, but everyone was relying on us and we had kind of nobody to rely on because they would all rely on us or be late and we just didn't speak up enough.

**Sarah:** So, my hope is through this, by learning about your experience's things can be different hopefully in the future.

**Hannah:** I would very much like that. I want, I want that little kid to not go through what I went through because it wasn't easy and you just do, you just do it, but after school, you just want to crash on the sofa and fall asleep. And just take your hearing aids out, because you have a headache and you kind of forgotten to actually look after yourself during school. People don't understand, they don't understand how it feels, how I'm feeling dealing with

deafness. I wouldn't say I was proud deaf, like, I wouldn't confidently go out and go like, oh yeah, I'm deaf. But when someone asked me if I'm deaf, I'd go, yeah, yeah, I am. That's pretty much it. I'd just leave the story there, I think. But now I'll go out and go, yep, I am deaf. I'm proud to be deaf. When I was younger, I didn't really speak to much other people who were deaf. Like, they asked me about my hearing aids. And I'd be like, oh, hearing aids, I'm deaf, but I can hear. But I got there, now I just talk about other stories, like, yeah, I'm deaf, and when I was born, what caused my deafness.

**Sarah:** Thank you. Once I've spoken to the other students about their experiences, would you be happy to talk to me again about what they've said or what I found?

**Hannah:** Yeah. I'd agree to that, yeah.

**Sarah:** Thank you so much. That's my last question. Is there anything else that you would like to say or ask or you think would be useful for me to know?

**Hannah:** I just want the new kids to know that they're not alone. And young kids like me, I wish I spoke up sooner, not later. I wish I hadn't gone through that myself and had focused on myself rather than other people. I just want them young kids to speak up and go, no I don't want to sign for you. Where's the sign teacher, they get paid for this. They shouldn't be late! I wish I had said that. And parents as well, like, my parents did get some information with signing and stuff. But I feel like they didn't get much deaf awareness. They didn't get enough deaf awareness because, like, at one point, they were trying to wake me up in a nightmare. They're just shouting, shouting, shouting. And thinking, why's she not getting up? But then, my dad, my dad would just grab me off the bed, really, because I can't hear him. But before, he'd like be 25 times shouting my name. So, they had to learn different ways, like tapping my shoulder or waving.

**Sarah:** That was really interesting. Thank you so much for sharing your experiences.

## **Interview 4 – Full Transcript (Phase 1 Interview)**

*Note: Jasmine communicated through BSL rather than speech, therefore her answers were spoken by the interpreter. However, this is shown as 'Jasmine' on the transcript to maintain her voice)*

**Sarah:** Belonging, what does it mean to you?

(Long pause)

**Sarah:** If you think about being included in school, secondary school. What was that like?

**Jasmine:** I felt a bit left out and lonely. When I moved to (school name). It made me feel happy and involved. I had more communication through deaf people. It felt more like a community, I could learn more, feel more confident in myself.

**Sarah:** Yeah, having people that you can talk to and connect with?

**Jasmine:** Yeah

**Sarah:** Thank you. Do you think it's important to feel you belong at school?

**Jasmine:** Yeah, because it made me feel confident, because I could learn more, I could do my GCSEs, so I could improve. Because before I lost my confidence. It helped me more being included as I got more support, and (staff) could encourage me so I felt more positive and could build my skills.

**Sarah:** Can you think of a time you didn't feel included at school?

**Jasmine:** Sometimes I had some hearing teachers that couldn't sign. If the sign support was awful or the sign staff was poorly and there was no cover, I felt like it was difficult to communicate. I felt left out and I didn't understand what was happening, so it was hard to do my work.

**Sarah:** Was there a time that you did feel included?

**Jasmine:** When I was with friends or making new friends. When I could communicate.

**Sarah:** Can you tell me more about that?

**Jasmine:** It makes me feel more confident. I feel happier that I can make more friends.

**Sarah:** Thank you. Was their sign language or deaf culture at school?

**Jasmine:** Yeah, both. Because before at previous school, I didn't use BSL. At the (deaf school), teachers did have BSL and they taught me it. Teachers used BSL and they would

talk to me so I could improve. It made me feel better that I could communicate and make new friends. And meet more deaf people.

**Sarah:** Yeah, yeah. Thank you. Was there someone in particular at school who made you feel like you belonged?

**Jasmine:** Yes, there was one person. Miss (name). She taught English and PSHE. She was really good. She was deaf and she had speech and signed as well. She was a really good support for me. When I had a difficult situation, she was a good support, she helped me. I could express how I felt and she could understand and help me. She also helped to polish up my English and things. I felt happy with her.

**Sarah:** Is there anything about secondary school that you would like to have changed? That would have been better for you?

**Jasmine:** No. I was happy at secondary school.

**Sarah:** That's really good. If you could go back to the start of secondary school and give yourself one piece of advice, what would it be?

**Jasmine:** To feel proud of yourself. To be confident. To support people, help them and be kind.

**Sarah:** Great, Thank you. Do you think it's important to the deaf community to ask questions like this?

**Jasmine:** I think so.

**Sarah:** That's my last question, but would you be happy to talk to me again after I've spoken to other students?

**Jasmine:** Yeah

**Sarah:** Great, thank you. That's all my questions. But do you have any questions for me or anything else you would like to share about secondary school that you think would be helpful to know?

**Jasmine:** No.

**Sarah:** Okay. Great. Thank you so much.

## Interview 12 Full Transcript (Phase 2 Interview)

Sarah: Hello again, so if you remember before, we talked about your experiences of secondary school. I've put together what everyone shared and put them into different categories and I'd like you to look at them and rate them on the grid from 1 to 9. 1 being the most important to you and 9 least important to you. Does that make sense?

Jasmine: Yes

Sarah: Great, we have a practice one first, about rating different types of food so you can have a practice of what you need to do. I won't keep this, it's just so you can practice.

*\*Completing practice\**

Sarah: Thank you, did it make sense?

Jasmine: Yeah

Sarah: Great, thank you. So real ones now. I have 5 different ones to do, but linked to different themes about school experiences this time. So, the first one, is about what it was like being Deaf at school. There are 9 statements and I want you to rate them from 1 being most important to you to 9 least important. Do you want to read the statements or (interpreter) sign them?

Jasmine: I'll read them.

*\*Completes grid\**

Sarah: Thank you. *(looking at responses)*

Jasmine: My family are hearing. I'm the only Deaf in my family.

Sarah: Can you tell me a little about that?

Jasmine: My dad and step mum are Deaf aware. My dad learnt to sign when I was a baby. So, at home, my dad signs to me.

*\*Moves on to next grid\**

Sarah: *(Looking at responses)* Did you feel like you were always included?

Jasmine: Yeah, yeah.

*\*Moves on to next grid\**

Sarah: This one is about being with others at school, so other students and staff.

Jasmine: (pointing to statement *'feeling part of a community at school'*). No, but I would have liked to. It would have helped.

*\*Moves on to next grid\**

Sarah: This is the last one, this one focus' more on aspects you wished you could have changed/or would like to change about school.

*\*Completes grid\**

Sarah: Thank you, do you feel like there was anything missing from the grids? Anything you feel was or would have been really important to help you feel included at school?

Jasmine: No. I think that's everything.

Sarah: That's great, thank you. I have one final question, what does being Deaf mean to you?

Jasmine: Being deaf was difficult, trying to use SSE (sign supported English). It sometimes helped sometimes not. I grew up in a hearing school, but I moved to a Deaf school in year 9. Before that, I was in hearing schools. It was easier in the Deaf school; lessons were all in sign.

Sarah: How did you communicate before? In the hearing schools?

Jasmine: There was no signing at those schools. I was lip reading the whole time until year 9. Then I moved.

Sarah: Wow. How did that feel for you?

Jasmine: I felt discriminated against. I could sign but I wasn't allowed to sign. It was like signing was banned! I got kicked out in year 8, for signing.

Sarah: for signing? That's awful!

Jasmine: I wasn't allowed to use it; I had to lip read. But lip reading made me really tired, I couldn't pick things up properly, I couldn't understand, things went straight over my head, I wasn't understanding it.

Sarah: That's awful you experienced that. What difference did it make moving to the deaf school?

Jasmine: It was much better! I could sign!

Sarah: I'm sorry you had that experience, part of why I'm wanting to do this research is to increase understanding of Deaf experiences, so in the future, experiences like what you've just shared don't happen.

Jasmine: Yeah. Yeah.

Sarah: Do you think there is anything missing from those grids? Or anything else you want to share?

Jasmine: No, thanks!

### **Charlotte's I-Poem**

I don't want to be alone.  
I don't want to be on my own.  
I want to get involved with my friends.  
I felt like everyone was laughing.  
I don't know what they're talking about.  
I'm confused.

I moved to a deaf school.  
I'm with my friends.  
I used sign.  
I don't want to change anything.  
I was happy at school.

### **Archie's I-Poem**

I can relate to them.  
I don't have to feel anxious or worried.  
I need it explained in a different way.  
I learn differently.

I was the only deaf student.  
I was the only deaf one.  
I was told not to sign.  
I was told to speak.  
I'm the only deaf one.

I moved schools.  
I moved to a school with a deaf unit.  
I wasn't allowed in.  
I didn't have an EHCP.  
I was refused an EHCP.  
I left school in year 10.  
I never really fitted in.

I wasn't allowed access to equipment.  
I wasn't allowed access to deaf peers.  
I was allowed nothing.

I've started college.  
I've got a whole group of people just like me.  
I can communicate in the same way.  
I can understand.  
I belong here.  
I didn't belong before.

I went to a hospital school.  
I went to BSL rallies in London.  
I felt included.  
I had deaf role models.  
I was the only student.  
I wasn't alone though.

I'm from a hearing family.  
I'm the only deaf one in my family  
I learnt how to sign at 14.  
I saw lots of signs being used.  
I wasn't allowed to access it.  
I know they taught it.  
I wasn't taught it.

I made up signs at home.  
I figured out sign language existed.  
I was allowed to use it!  
I joined a deaf signing choir.  
I didn't realise how much I was missing out on.

I have support staff.  
I have access to sign language.  
I had one teacher.  
I was her first deaf student.  
I was supported.

I grew up in a hearing family.  
I have fantastic speech.  
My hearing doesn't match my speech.  
I've had my speech developed.  
My hearing is still the same.  
I'm lip reading you.  
I still can't understand.

I wish I didn't go along with what they told me.  
I wish I didn't make myself small.  
If I had spoken up...  
I don't think things would have been the same.  
I went along for so long with what they said I had to do.  
I was below my peers.  
I know I'm below my peers!  
I'm deaf, it takes me longer to learn.

I said to myself...  
I must be terrible if I'm in bottom set.  
I must be terrible if they're taking me out of class.  
I wish I spoke up.  
I wish.  
I think things would have been different.  
(if) I had given myself that voice.

I was terrified to be deaf.  
I had some terrible experiences.

### **Hannah's I-Poem**

I feel everyone should belong.

I am deaf.

I was at a mainstream school with a deaf space.

I had a small group of peers.

I found it difficult.

I don't understand.

I didn't feel included.

I am deaf.

I wasn't very good at signing.

I had some deaf friends.

I feel pressured.

I felt a bit annoyed.

I couldn't focus.

I kept getting people looking at me.

"I'll try signing but I'm not fantastic".

I'm the only deaf in my family.

I've only been deaf.

I've got to sign to them.

I can speak.

I did work with my speech therapist.

I feel they want to put pressure on me to sign for them.

I did try!

I learnt to sign.

I was relieved.

I can hear.

I have a radio aid.

I still find it hard to understand.

I can speak quite clearly.  
I can speak without signing.  
I've grown up in a hearing family.  
I'm the only deaf in my family.

I started going to deaf groups.  
I didn't know what signing was.  
I'm sitting here thinking...  
I've got to speak!  
I learned sign.  
I like it.

I started to get support.  
I did my GCSE English.  
I was in a high needs learning space.  
I had one-to-one signing.  
I started to feel more included.  
I felt more confident.

I had a fantastic English teacher.  
He left.  
I lost my confidence.  
I found it difficult, that moment.

I knew sign language in secondary school.  
I've never been fast but I could sign.  
I watched my friend's.  
I watched the interpreters.  
I learned from them the most.  
I sat for hours learning that way.

I felt the odd one...  
I didn't sign.

I didn't want to sign at home.  
I refused to be deaf.  
I used to take my hearing aids out.  
I got told off in school.  
I should wear them.

I was younger.  
I just didn't want it.  
I hated it.  
I'm more confident now.  
I'm more deaf.

I was always in the low classes.  
I felt like they knew I could speak.  
I can hear someone talk.  
I was relied on to hear for them.  
I was in the middle.  
I didn't want to be interpreting.

I wish they didn't put that pressure on me.  
I felt like I didn't understand it as much.  
I didn't think about it when I was at school.  
I didn't understand it.  
I just did it.  
I think now I've grown up more.  
I think I did more work than the signing staff!

I'm talking to the hearing.  
I'm signing to the deaf.  
I just went along with it.  
I heard what he's saying but I don't understand it.  
I wish they didn't put pressure on deaf people.

I had to lip read.  
I was really, really good at lip reading.  
I've grown up lip reading.

I didn't really understand much.  
I just didn't talk about it much.  
I left school.  
I came to college.  
I learned more about it.  
I have a friend; it happened to him too.  
I feel like an equal now I've met him.  
I understand what he's gone through.  
I've gone through it too.  
I understand more now.  
I'd be more forceful.  
I want to focus on my future.

I had nobody to rely on.  
They all relied on me.  
I didn't speak up enough.  
I want that little kid to not go through what I went through.  
I just did it.  
I would crash after school on the sofa.  
I would fall asleep.  
I took my hearing aids out.  
I had a headache.  
I had forgotten to actually look after myself during school.

I wouldn't say I was proud deaf.  
I'd say I was deaf...if they asked  
I'd just leave the story there.  
But now...  
I'll go out and say "Yep! I'm deaf!"  
I'm proud to be deaf!

I didn't really speak to other people who were deaf.

I'd say I'm deaf, but I can hear.

I got there.

I'm deaf.

I was born deaf.

I talk about my deafness.

I just want the new kids to know that they're not alone.

I wish I spoke up sooner.

I wish I hadn't gone through that myself.

I wish I had focused on myself rather than other people.

I just want them young kids to speak up.

I want them to say "No! I don't want to sign for you".

I wish I had said that!

### **Jasmine's I-Poem**

I felt a bit left out and lonely.

I moved to a deaf school.

I felt happy and involved.

I had more communication with deaf people.

I had a community.

I could learn.

I feel more confident in myself.

I could do my GCSE's.

I could improve.

I felt more included.

I got more support.

I felt more positive.

I could build my skills.

I had hearing teachers that couldn't sign.

It was difficult to communicate.

I felt left out.

I didn't understand.

It was hard.

I was with friends.

I made new friends.

I could communicate.

I feel more confident.

I feel happier.

I can make more friends.

I didn't use BSL before.

I went to a deaf school.

I was taught BSL.

I could communicate.

I could make friends.

I met more deaf people.

I had one teacher.

I could express how I felt and she could understand me.

I felt happy with her.

I was happy at that school.

I feel proud of myself.

### **Alek's I-Poem**

I felt more isolated before.

I was on my own.

I'd be on my own.

I spent 5 years in {country}.

I went to school there.

I was always on my own.

I was the only deaf one.

I didn't have any speech.

I had no sign.

I was disappointed.

I was lip reading.

It was really difficult.

I moved to the UK.

I started to learn sign.

Things improved.

I have people to talk to.

I have friends at school.

I was in a group.

I could improve.

I worked hard.

I think it's important to feel part of school.

I was in a class on my own.

I'd be a bit sad.

I had nobody to talk to.

I wasn't allowed to talk anyway.

I was separate.

I felt a lot more included in a group.

I could communicate.

I had a laugh.

I moved here.

I was new.

I couldn't sign.

I didn't understand.

I had a friend; she taught me sign.

I think we need more communication and understanding.

### **Mario's I-Poem**

I think it's hearing and deaf together.

It's the hearing way.

I have to do it their way.

I went to one hearing school.

I moved to a deaf school.

I did one year at a hearing school.

I went to a deaf school from there.

I run out of ways to communicate.

It's harder to communicate with the hearing.

We were all deaf.

I could communicate.

I could look around and see everybody talking.

I can learn more.

I can understand everything.

I didn't know as much.

I didn't understand.

I was having a laugh.

I could see each other talking, but their signing.

I could understand everything.

I'd always feel like I'd got those connections.

I never felt like I was left out.

Ever.

I always felt included.

I always had people to talk to.

I always knew what was going on.

I had a friend, she helped me.

I had a good relationship with her.

I built a relationship with staff.  
I could go and ask them if I didn't understand.  
I was happy at school.

I had no advice or support when I first started.  
I think that's bad, isn't it?  
I couldn't sign.  
I had to be taught.  
I improved.

I first moved here.  
I saw everybody signing.  
I picked it up quickly.  
I learnt much more at the deaf school.  
I'd like to see everyone signing.

I think we need to do more.  
I describe people.  
I'm not being rude!  
That's just the deaf way!  
I use visuals!

I think there needs to be better communication for deaf students.  
I don't understand a lot in English.  
I just switch off.  
I just say "Yeah!"

### **Tom's I-Poem**

I think it's important.  
I feel happy when I'm included.  
I went to a deaf school.  
I'd have felt sad if I didn't feel included.  
I felt happy.  
I just always felt included.

I was happy with everything.

### **Holly's I-Poem**

I went to a deaf school.

I think it's being happy at school.

I think it's important.

I was around other deaf children at school.

I went there since I was a small child.

I went there for a long time.

I was always part of a group.

I always felt included.

I went there from when I was very small.

I left at 17.

I used sign language at school.

I experienced deaf culture.

I liked it.

I had lots of teachers to help me.

I had help with signing.

I had help in every subject.

### **Nadia's I-Poem**

I think it's friends.

I've got friends.

I've got people to talk to.

I can talk to them.

I can have a laugh.

I felt happy when I was included.

I was with my friends.

I felt included.

I didn't use sign at all.  
I just used talking.  
I would have liked signing.  
I had no sign in my classes.  
I wish everybody knew BSL.  
I think everyone should be taught it.

I wish I learnt BSL.  
I wish I learnt it early.  
I learnt when I started college.  
I can communicate more.  
I can make friends.

I think we should all communicate better.  
I think everyone should be doing BSL in class.  
I could have learnt before I came to college.  
I would have been able to communicate.

### **Hannah's I-Poem (Interview 2)**

I think being deaf means learning to be proud.  
I didn't understand being deaf.  
I wasn't proud enough to be deaf.  
I used to go out with my family.  
I was embarrassed to be with my family.  
I used to take my hearing aids out.  
I refused to wear my hearing aids.  
I refused to be deaf.  
I'm trying to learn how to be proud to be deaf.

I've learnt BSL  
I'm getting more into using BSL now.  
I realised...  
I'm in a different world.  
You guys are in the hearing world!

I'm in the deaf world!

### **Jasmine's I-Poem (Interview 2)**

I felt discriminated against.

I could sign.

I wasn't allowed to sign.

It was like signing was banned!

I got kicked out in year 8 – for signing!

I wasn't allowed to use it.

I had to lip read.

I couldn't pick things up properly.

I couldn't understand.

### **Alek's I-Poem (Interview 2)**

I can feel nervous about it sometimes.

I didn't know signing

It was hard.

But being deaf,

It's just my identity!

I did feel nervous about it.

### **Archie's I-Poem (Interview 2)**

I was only deaf person in my school.

I was left behind with no way of accessing.

I was refused an EHCP on the grounds that I can speak.

I didn't have an EHCP.

I didn't make friends.

I didn't communicate.

I struggled to lipread.

I fell behind.

I didn't connect with anyone.

I should have had an EHCP sooner.

I can speak and lip read well.

I fell under the radar.

I hated being deaf.

I have a bad day.

I just want to sign.

I can't as they don't understand.

## Appendix 6: Interview 2 Full Coding Example

| Interview 2 – Original Transcript                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Interview 2 – Initial Coding<br>(line-by-line)                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Interview 2 – Focused<br>Coding                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Sarah:</b> Belonging, what does it mean to you?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Archie:</b> There are other people that are Deaf like me, who I can relate to, and they can understand my struggles and things. But also, belonging means that I don't have to feel anxious or worried about how I communicate, and if I'm slow to understand something or I need it explained in a different way, it means that everybody accepts and understands that I might learn and understand differently.                                                                                        | <p>"Deaf like me"</p> <p>Relating to others</p> <p>Feeling comfortable to communicate how you want to.</p> <p>Being able to go at own pace.</p> <p>Acceptance</p> <p>Understanding of difference</p>                                                               | <p>"Deaf like me"</p> <p>"Deaf like me"</p> <p>"Deaf like me"</p> <p>"Deaf like me"</p> <p>"Deaf like me"</p> <p>"Deaf like me"</p>                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Sarah:</b> That's an amazing answer, thank you. Was it important to you to feel you belonged at school?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Archie:</b> I got sent round lots of different schools. I started off at a normal mainstream secondary school. I was the only Deaf student there, and they didn't know how to manage me. Manage is probably not the right word, but they didn't know how to manage me because I was the only Deaf one. They'd never experienced anything to do with hearing aids or different types of communication. They encouraged me to not sign and just speak because I'm at a school where I'm the only Deaf one. | <p>Moving schools a lot.</p> <p>Mainstream secondary.</p> <p>Only Deaf student.</p> <p>Staff not knowing how to support</p> <p>"only Deaf one"</p> <p>Lack of Deaf awareness</p> <p>Discouraged from signing.</p> <p>Pressure to speak.</p> <p>"Only Deaf one"</p> | <p>Experiencing isolation</p> <p>Impact of setting</p> <p>Experiencing isolation</p> <p>Lack of Deaf awareness</p> <p>Experiencing isolation</p> <p>Lack of Deaf awareness</p> <p>Pressure and conformity</p> <p>Pressure and conformity</p> <p>Experiencing isolation</p> |
| When I was in year eight, I moved to what we hoped was a mainstream secondary school with                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Mainstream with Deaf hub.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

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| <p>a Deaf unit, but the council actually refused to give me the EHCP. They refused my EHCP in primary school, refused it when we were in the normal mainstream secondary school, and then when I moved to the school with the Deaf unit, they wouldn't let me use the Deaf unit because I didn't have an EHCP. They refused to let me have it, and I left school in year 10 because I never really fitted into the school.</p> <p>I wasn't allowed access to any equipment to help me. I wasn't allowed access to any other Deaf peers, nothing. So, it's important to me now I've started at college because I've got a whole group of people that are just like me, who understand me. We communicate in the same way, and obviously having the (staff), having the signers has helped and improved massively because it means now I'm able to understand what class work that I'm doing and understand and do a higher-level qualification than what I thought was possible because I've had access to that information. So, I belong here, but I didn't necessarily belong before.</p> <p><b>Sarah:</b> Thank you for sharing that. How many different schools do you go to?</p> <p><b>Archie:</b> I did 1 mainstream school, mainstream with a Deaf unit, and then I actually ended up in a hospital home tuition service. So that was three in total.</p> <p><b>Sarah:</b> When you were at secondary school, can you tell me about a time when you didn't feel included?</p> | <p>Denied EHCP multiple times.</p> <p>Denied access to support</p> <p>"Never really fitted in"</p> <p>Denied access to support<br/>Denied access to Deaf peers.</p> <p>"people just like me"</p> <p>Being able to be communicate and relate to others.</p> <p>Gaining access to support and<br/>BSL Increased understanding and access to learning</p> <p>Improved outcomes<br/>Access to support and BSL increased belonging.</p> <p>Moved school a lot.</p> <p>Placed in bottom sets</p> | <p>Impact of setting</p> <p>Systemic barriers</p> <p>Systemic barriers</p> <p>Experiencing isolation</p> <p>Systemic Barriers<br/>Systemic Barriers</p> <p>"Deaf like me"<br/>"Deaf like me"</p> <p>Access to language<br/>Impact of support</p> <p>Access to language<br/>Impact of support</p> <p>Impact of setting</p> |
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| <p><b>Archie:</b> The first school I didn't feel included, they would put me in all the bottom sets for everything. So, I was bottom set for maths. It was very, very basic maths and English and things.</p> <p>And then when they'd have visitors come in and do talks at universities and things like that to try and help improve our goals in the future, they would take me out and they would put me in extra maths and English because they said I didn't have the capacity to be able to understand what was happening. And then in the second school, obviously not being allowed to access any of the provisions they told me I was allowed to access to be able to help me. I didn't really feel included there, but that's about it. College has been fantastic.</p> <p><b>Sarah:</b> Thank you. Can you tell me about a time at secondary school when you did feel included?</p> <p><b>Archie:</b> That was when I was in the hospital home tuition service because they had a separate classroom just for the Deaf. So there originally was four of us, but then eventually it was just me. Erm, but they didn't want me to feel isolated or alone and stuff, so they'd invite lots of Deaf people to come and do talks to me. We went to the BSL rallies in London as part of the school. I really felt included there because they made sure that I had other Deaf role models to be able to, even though I wasn't in class with them and I was the only student, but they made an active effort to bring Deaf people in to talk to me and share their experiences. It helped me understand that I wasn't alone in how I felt. I'm</p> | <p>Poor academic opportunities.</p> <p>Denied same opportunities</p> <p>Judgements and assumptions made on ability level</p> <p>Denied access to support</p> <p>Impacted on sense of belonging</p> <p>Positive experience at college</p> <p>Separate Deaf space</p> <p>Small group of Deaf peers</p> <p>Made effort to reduce feelings of isolation</p> <p>Inclusion of Deaf culture/history</p> <p>Access to Deaf role models</p> <p>Only student but not alone</p> <p>Deaf role models</p> <p>Shared experiences</p> <p>"From a hearing family"</p> <p>"Only Deaf one in family"</p> | <p>Judgements and assumptions</p> <p>Systemic barriers</p> <p>Systemic barriers</p> <p>Judgements and assumptions</p> <p>Systemic barriers</p> <p>Impact of space</p> <p>"Deaf like me"</p> <p>Deaf awareness</p> <p>Deaf representation</p> <p>"Deaf like me"</p> <p>Experiencing isolation</p> <p>Connection with others</p> |
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| <p>from a hearing family. I'm the only Deaf one in my family. So, seeing other Deaf people that were just like me made me feel a lot more confident in my Deaf identity.</p> <p><b>Sarah:</b> Thank you. Can you tell me more about your access to sign language and Deaf culture?</p> <p><b>Archie:</b> First school, they encouraged me not to use sign language and there was no Deaf culture whatsoever because it was just a normal mainstream school that the council agreed that I should never have been put in in the first place. The second school, because it had a Deaf unit, I did have some access to sign language. My parents were told not to teach me sign language when I was a baby, so I learnt how to sign when I was 14 when I was at that school. So I did see a lot of sign language being used and they had interpreters and support staff in their unit, but because I wasn't allowed to access it, I didn't have a very wide access to sign language or any Deaf culture, but I know they taught it because I knew people that were in the unit. I knew they were taught it, but they didn't teach it to me.</p> <p>But when I went to the hospital school, it was very big. Everybody signed. There was a big emphasis on Deaf culture and learning about way back, like the Milan conference, and learning about the Warnock reports and things like that. So, they did make sure that Deaf culture and sign was embedded in maths, English, every single class that I did, and that really helped.</p> | <p>Having people to relate to increased confidence in identity</p> <p>Discouraged from using BSL.</p> <p>"Just a normal mainstream"</p> <p>Some access to BSL</p> <p>Told not to teach sign as a baby.</p> <p>Learnt BSL at 14.</p> <p>Aware of BSL but denied access to it.</p> <p>denied access to the support.</p> <p>Being aware of support others get that you are denied.</p> <p>"Everybody signed"</p> <p>Embedded Deaf culture/history</p> <p>BSL support available in all classes.</p> | <p>Pressure and conformity</p> <p>Impact of setting</p> <p>Access to language</p> <p>Lack of Deaf awareness</p> <p>Systemic barriers</p> <p>Systemic barriers</p> <p>Access to language</p> <p>Deaf representation</p> <p>Access to language</p> |
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| <p><b>Sarah:</b> Thank you. Could you tell me a little bit more about when you were starting to learn sign at 14, what difference that made to you?</p> <p><b>Archie:</b> My family are hearing, the doctors actually told my mum when they found out that I was Deaf not to teach me sign language, otherwise I wouldn't be able to access the world and I would be at a disadvantage for learning and being able to get a job in the future and things like that. So, my mum kind of went astray a little bit because we did, we made up a few signs ourselves at home. But when I figured out that there was sign language, it did exist and that I was allowed to use it and things, me and my mum kind of learned together and that meant that I had a different way to be able to express my emotions, upset.</p> <p>If I didn't, if I had a day where I didn't want to wear my hearing aids because they were painful or whatever, it allowed my mum the ability to be able to sign to me and understand what I'm trying to say. We actually joined a Deaf signing choir and that kind of added a little bit of an extra like, yeah, I know this is right. But it was like a whole world was opening up and I didn't realise just how much I was missing out on. And now when information is signed to me, obviously I have support staff and have access to sign language at home. My sign has improved massively whereas unfortunately, my mum's is still a little bit lower than what I am. So, I can get a bit frustrated sometimes if I'm wanting to sign and my mum's like, I can't understand what you're saying and then I can get a bit frustrated. But having access to sign has meant that I'm</p> | <p>Hearing family.<br/>Family told not to teach sign</p> <p>"be at a disadvantage"</p> <p>Created own language at home.<br/>Discovered BSL existed.<br/>"Allowed to use it".<br/>Learnt BSL as a family</p> <p>BSL increased ability to communicate feelings.</p> <p>Communicating wants/needs/feelings</p> <p>Increased access to Deaf community<br/>Felt right. Validating<br/>"Whole world was opening up"<br/>Realising what has been denied</p> <p>Increased communication.</p> <p>Frustration at communication barriers</p> | <p>Pressure and conformity</p> <p>Lack of Deaf awareness</p> <p>Created own language<br/>Awareness of sign</p> <p>Connection through language</p> <p>Access to language</p> <p>"Deaf like me"</p> <p>Empowering</p> <p>Impact of language</p> <p>Impact of language</p> <p>Impact of language</p> <p>Empowering</p> |
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| <p>able to do a level three extended diploma now and it's meant that I've got different ways to be able to express myself and communicate and it's been fantastic.</p> <p><b>Sarah:</b> Thank you. When you were at school, was there one person that you think helped you feel like you belonged?</p> <p><b>Archie:</b> I could go on and on when I was at the Hospital School but I'm not going to do that one because we already know that they were fantastic and they helped me feel like I belonged. But in my second secondary school, the one with the Deaf unit, there was one teacher there who was my drama teacher and she knew, she knew she had a Deaf student in her class and she'd never had a Deaf student before. So, she actually did some research before I started to figure out how to help me. Drama studios are massive and they echo and it's terrible in there. But she tried to figure out a way that I could access drama and get my qualification as well as being able to hear and understand and she placed a lot of pressure on the Deaf unit to basically be like, he needs a radio aid. He is entitled to a radio aid and I know he is because I've seen the documentation but you're refusing to give him one and she put a lot of pressure. Unfortunately, it didn't work but she tried to adapt the qualification to mean that I could and I did actually get a 9, so I got an A*. So, it didn't work because the council and Deaf unit refused to help me. But all the research she did was not wasted, she tried to help.</p> | <p>BSL increased academic outcomes.</p> <p>Being able to express myself "it's been fantastic"</p> <p>Not to focusing on positive school experience.</p> <p>Staff researching how to support</p> <p>Environmental factors, acoustics</p> <p>Explored options to increase accessibility.</p> <p>Advocated on student's behalf</p> <p>Challenged status quo.</p> <p>Adapting curriculum</p> <p>Achieved high qualification despite barriers.</p> <p>Lack of wider systemic support</p> | <p>Advocacy</p> <p>Deaf awareness</p> <p>Deaf awareness</p> <p>Advocacy</p> <p>Advocacy</p> <p>Deaf awareness</p> <p>Impact of support</p> <p>Systemic barriers</p> <p>Impact of advocacy/support</p> <p>Validation</p> |
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| <p><b>Sarah:</b> Sounds like she advocated for you?</p> <p><b>Archie:</b> Yeah, I mean, yeah, it didn't work but she was fantastic and even though I hated that school so much, she was one of the teachers that I knew could understand me and tried to help and it gave her a new perspective, because she got another Deaf student in her class after I left, it gave her the ability to understand, okay, well, I've worked with (name) so this might work with this different student and she's still using those things now, I've got friends that are still in that school and she's still using the same things that I taught her today to teach other Deaf students.</p> <p><b>Sarah:</b> Is there one thing that you would have changed about school? It could be in any of the schools.</p> <p><b>Archie:</b> More Deaf awareness. Through them all. More Deaf awareness. I mean, yes, you've got the whole basic things of make sure they see your face, turn the lights on, don't be in the light kind of thing, but more awareness to know exactly how a Deaf person feels every day because I feel a lot of people don't understand that we do miss up to 70% of the information and a lot of time with lip-reading you might pick first word up and the end word up, but you're making the middle words up and I think, especially with Deaf students like myself who have grown up in hearing families, who do have fantastic speech thanks to speech and language therapy, don't think that my speech can show how much I can understand or I can hear because actually my hearing doesn't match my</p> | <p>Acknowledging individual effort despite systemic barriers</p> <p>Feeling understood.</p> <p>Increased Deaf awareness</p> <p>Applying Deaf awareness to improve future practice</p> <p>A need for increased Deaf awareness</p> <p>Need for greater understanding of Deaf experience</p> <p>Desire for greater understanding</p> <p>Lip-reading</p> <p>Gaps in understanding</p> <p>Being Deaf in a hearing family</p> | <p>Deaf awareness</p> <p>Deaf awareness</p> <p>Deaf awareness</p> <p>Deaf awareness</p> <p>Recognition of deaf experience</p> <p>Assumptions</p> <p>Deaf awareness</p> <p>Lack of deaf awareness</p> |
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| <p>speech. My speech has been developed, but my hearing is still the same. So even though I'm lip-reading you, I still can't understand what you're saying, so maybe more kind of lived experience from a Deaf student. And I know it's not possible, but you know how when they do blind training and things, they have, like they show goggles and things to be able to show what a blind person can see. Unfortunately, there's not anything like that for Deaf, apart from putting noise-cancelling headphones in, but that will never match up how we exactly feel. But maybe something, trying to do something physical to show exactly how a Deaf person feels. Maybe lip-reading exercises or something where it's all jumbled up just so they can understand a bit better because I feel like a lot of my teachers didn't understand and they heard my speech and was like, "oh, fantastic, it'll be fine". But actually, I struggled through a lot of that.</p> <p><b>Sarah:</b> Thank you for sharing that. If you could go back to when you started at secondary school and give yourself any advice, what would it be?</p> <p><b>Archie:</b> Don't go along with what they're telling you. Don't like, make yourself small and don't shrink in on yourself because you don't want to be that person that causes a problem. Speak up for how you felt because if I'd have spoken up in Year 7, I don't think things would have been the same. I mean, yes, I would have probably been seen as bossy or demanding or whatever, but I went along for so long with what they were telling me I had to do and how I was supposed to learn and that I was below my peers, because</p> | <p>Assumptions around speech equating to hearing</p> <p>Greater understanding of Deaf experience needed</p> <p>Recognising lack of ways to understand Deafness</p> <p>Wanting increased staff understanding of Deaf experience</p> <p>Misconceptions about Deafness</p> <p>Emotional/hidden toll of lack of understanding/support</p> <p>Wanting to advocate for self "don't shrink in on yourself"</p> <p>"Speak up"</p> <p>Reflecting on not speaking up previously.</p> <p>Self-advocacy perceived as demanding</p> <p>Pressure to conform/comply</p> | <p>Seeking great understanding</p> <p>Prejudice and assumptions</p> <p>Impact of self</p> <p>Advocating</p> <p>Empowering</p> <p>Seeking advocacy</p> <p>Others' perceptions</p> <p>Pressure and conformity</p> <p>Internalising perceptions</p> <p>Impact on self</p> <p>Loss of voice</p> |
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| <p>I know I'm below my peers because I am Deaf and it takes me a lot longer to learn. That doesn't mean it's the same for every Deaf person, but I went along with what they said and I said to myself, well, I must be terrible if they're putting me in bottom set or I must be terrible if they're taking me out of this class and putting me in extra English. Speak up and say, you know what, actually, you could do this better or I need this changing because that's how I need to learn and I think maybe things would have been different if I had given myself that voice.</p> <p><b>Sarah:</b> Thank you. Do you think it's important to ask these sorts of questions for the Deaf community?</p> <p><b>Archie:</b> Yeah, it is because there's a lot more, I say there's a lot more Deaf people now, but there's a lot more people who are proud of their Deaf identity and will tell everybody that they're Deaf. But there's also, thinking back from when I was younger, I was terrified to be Deaf. So, questions like this are important because it means that those who are older can share their experiences and change things for those who are younger and may feel like they don't like being Deaf or being Deaf is terrible or that it's not fair or whatever. So, asking questions like this will improve things for them when they get to my age. And even beyond, like, the introduction of the BSL Act and things like that, there has been a lot of fighting for change and that will help those who are a lot younger as they're growing into secondary school and things.</p> | <p>Acknowledging variation between Deaf experiences</p> <p>Internalising others' perceptions</p> <p>Impacted confidence and self esteem</p> <p>Reflecting on lack of voice when younger</p> <p>Expressing regret at not advocating sooner</p> <p>Increase in Deafness as an identity</p> <p>Contrast between Deaf pride and past fear of being Deaf.</p> <p>Importance of sharing experiences and understanding</p> <p>Sharing lived experience helps things change</p> <p>History of needing to fight for change.</p> <p>Legislation changes have an impact</p> | <p>Wanting to advocate for self</p> <p>Deaf identity</p> <p>Evolving deaf identity</p> <p>"Deaf like me"</p> <p>Impact of representation</p> <p>Systemic barriers</p> |
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| <p><b>Sarah:</b> Thank you. So my hope is by increasing understanding of your experiences, it might help the experiences of future Deaf children.</p> <p><b>Archie:</b> Yeah. It's a good idea.</p> <p><b>Sarah:</b> Thank you. When I've finished and spoken with other students, would you be happy to talk again? About what I found and your thoughts?</p> <p><b>Archie:</b> Yeah. Yeah.</p> <p><b>Sarah:</b> Thank you. That's all my questions, but is there anything else you would like to share or haven't had chance to talk about?</p> <p><b>Archie:</b> Um...(pause) In mainstream secondary schools, you have a teacher of the Deaf. And, being the only Deaf in my school, in the first one, my teacher of the Deaf would come once a term, if that, maybe once every two terms, if I was lucky, and my teacher of the Deaf would change constantly. And they'd feed back to the SEN person at my school and they'd say, oh, this needs to change or that needs to change. But there was never a big emphasis on this needs to change because or that needs to change because the student can't do this in that way. Like, there was never a big emphasis. It was just kind of a simple, like, you might need extra help in this and maybe we could try this, but I don't know, you can see maybe if you want to kind of thing. And it left that kind of question of, if you want to, you could do that if you felt like it. But it was never like, No this student needs this!</p> | <p>Teachers of the Deaf (ToD)<br/>"only Deaf in my school"</p> <p>Inconsistent staff support</p> <p>Lack of explaining the 'why'</p> <p>Support framed as optional not a necessity.</p> <p>Lack of strong advocacy from staff.</p> <p>Discriminatory experiences.</p> | <p>Experiencing isolation</p> <p>Inconsistent support</p> <p>Communication barriers</p> <p>Prejudice/assumptions<br/>Lack of awareness</p> <p>Lack of advocacy</p> <p>Prejudice/assumptions<br/>Systemic barriers</p> <p>Lack of support/systemic barriers</p> |
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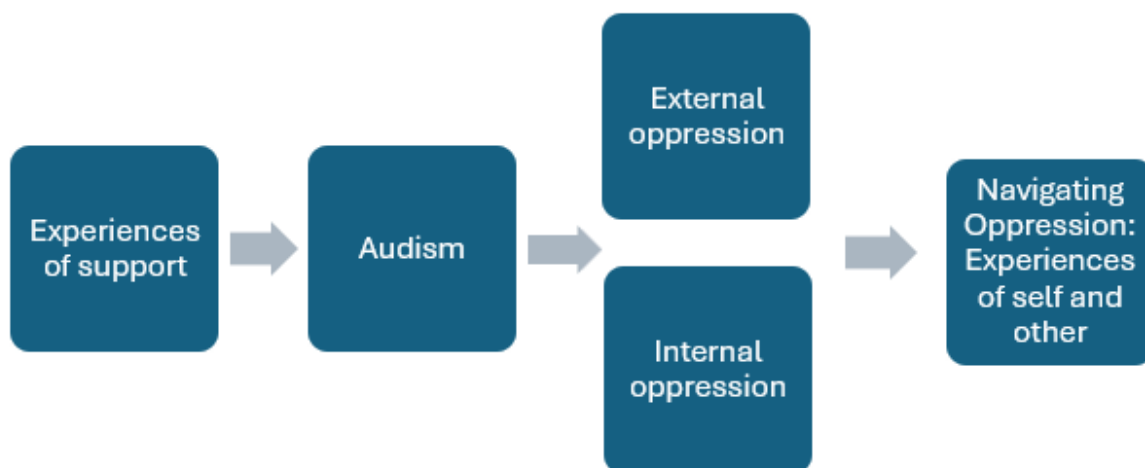
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| <p>And so, that was very difficult because I had some terrible experiences from teachers taking my hearing aids thinking they were earphones and that I was listening to music, teachers taking my hearing aids and literally screaming and whatever, and I told my teacher of the Deaf that and she had told SEN and said, oh, this needs to change or whatever, but you can if you want. And there was never a big emphasis on they need to do that. But luckily, I had a better experience when I did move to the hospital school and here (college) as well. But, yeah, teachers of the Deaf are definitely things that do need a lot of work.</p> <p><b>Sarah:</b> It almost sounds, umm, tokenistic maybe....</p> <p><b>Archie:</b> Yeah. I mean, six weeks of family sign language was the only thing that really came out of being with my teacher of the Deaf, which was quite difficult because obviously family sign for six weeks doesn't teach you what you need to know about having a Deaf child. Same with, when they found out that I was Deaf when I was a baby, there was no information given to my parents about what it's like to have a Deaf child. They had to learn as they went. They didn't tell us about NDCS, nothing like that. It was just, oh, well, your child's Deaf. I'll give them hearing aids maybe in eight weeks. See you later. That kinda thing. I think that probably would have helped. But, yeah, it wasn't helpful really.</p> <p><b>Sarah:</b> Thank you so much for sharing. I think what you've said is really powerful. Thank you so much.</p> | <p>Being let down/failed by staff</p> <p>Lack of strong advocacy and support from others</p> <p>Lack of family support.</p> <p>Limited access to learning BSL</p> <p>Lack of information given at birth.</p> <p>Feeling unsupported.</p> | <p>Lack of advocacy/support</p> <p>Lack of access to language</p> <p>Systemic barriers</p> <p>Impact on self</p> |
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| Focused Codes from Interview 2                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Tentative Categories (that went into phase 2) | Final Theoretical Categories (after phase 2) |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impact of space</li> <li>• Impact of setting</li> <li>• Connection with others</li> <li>• Experiencing isolation</li> <li>• Connection through language</li> </ul>                                                                                      | Seeking Connection                            | Collective Belonging                         |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deaf identity</li> <li>• Recognition of deaf experience</li> <li>• Deaf representation</li> <li>• “Deaf like me”</li> <li>• Deaf awareness</li> </ul>                                                                                                   | Representation                                | Reclaiming Voice/Deaf Consciousness          |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to language</li> <li>• Created own language</li> <li>• Impact of language</li> <li>• Communication barriers</li> <li>• Loss of voice</li> <li>• Awareness of sign</li> </ul>                                                                     | Communication                                 | BSL as a Cornerstone                         |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Systemic barriers</li> <li>• Judgements and assumptions</li> <li>• Pressure and conformity</li> <li>• Impact of self</li> <li>• Others’ perceptions</li> <li>• Internalising perceptions</li> <li>• Assumptions</li> <li>• Impact of support</li> </ul> | Audism                                        | Navigating Oppression                        |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empowering</li> <li>• Validation</li> <li>• Seeking great understanding</li> <li>• Advocacy</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                  | Seeking Change                                | Reclaiming Voice/Deaf Consciousness          |

## Appendix 7: Example Memos

Due to the quantity of data and number of initial codes, it felt overwhelming knowing where to begin with the focused coding process. To support me to do this, I made the decision to begin by selecting patterns or points of interest that I had noticed whilst doing the initial coding. I then went back through the transcripts, just looking for codes that linked to that area, comparing codes and merging them when I found wider connections. I then repeated this process for a different pattern/point of interest I had found. This provided a way for me to focus my thinking on the data, whilst ensuring that it felt manageable. It also helped me to get to know my data as I revisited each transcript multiple times. For each pattern I looked at, I wrote a separate memo.

The collection of memos below documents how the final theoretical category of 'Navigating Oppression', evolved through the data analysis process. The first memo was written following completion of the initial coding stage, and was intended to support the direction of the focused coding process by selecting an area for further exploration I had noted through the initial coding stage. Development of this category is summarised in the below figure. The supporting memos are then provided.



### Throughout September 2025 – 'Experiences of Support'

During initial coding, I've noticed that participant-researchers reference varied experiences of support during their schooling. These experiences appeared to impact in a range of ways; confidence, friendships, learning outcomes. I have decided this warrants further exploration.

#### **Tentative Category: Experiences of support**

##### **Early Properties of Category:**

- Impact of staff support
- Impact of peer support
- Being denied support
- Advocacy

## Impact of staff support

Jasmine spoke about staff support and the impact this had, *“Sometimes I had hearing teachers that couldn’t sign. If the sign support was awful or the sign staff was poorly and there was no cover, I felt like it was difficult to communicate. I felt left out and I didn’t understand what was happening, so it was hard to do my work”*. This inconsistent support or poor-quality support had a significant impact academically and in being able to communicate. (This also links with Access to BSL memo). Jasmine describes a specific teacher who was Deaf and used speech and sign, *“I could express how I felt and she could understand and help me.”*

*Jasmine’s I-Poem Statements;*

*I got more support.*

*I felt more positive.*

*I could build my skills.*

*I had hearing teachers that couldn’t sign.*

*It was hard to do my work.*

In contrast, Tom shared he felt supported by staff at school, although he struggled to expand on this, to describe what helped him to feel supported. Holly also described having staff support and that this was consistent.

*Holly’s I-Poem statements;*

*I had lots of teachers to help me.*

*I had help with signing.*

*I had help in every subject.*

Despite much of Archie’s experiences being negative, he was able to consider the impact a positive staff relationship had for him, in them trying to understand his experience, *“There was one teacher, my drama teacher, she knew she had a deaf student in her class and she’d never had a deaf student before. So, she actually did some research before I started to figure out how to help me”*. He went on to explain *“she was fantastic and even though I hated that school so much, she was one of the teachers that I knew could understand me and tried to help”*. This highlights the importance of having someone to advocate for you.

Hannah spoke about the impact of having sign support in lessons and the impact this had for her; *“They started putting me in GCSE English for my last year. And they had 1-2-1 signing. That’s the time I felt more included. Because that’s when I felt more confident. It was the first time, probably the first time I had one-to-one (sign support)”*. What has stood out is this was only implemented during GCSEs, whilst in one way this is good that support was put in place, I wonder what the difference was that meant it was put in place at that moment? It could be argued that as exam results impact on school rankings, whether there were motivation and incentive for the school itself to implement, as a contributory factor in this being put in place.

## Impact of peer support

Mario spoke about support from other student's, *"we had a good relationship, if the teacher said she wasn't allowed to help, I'd have to learn on my own, if they wouldn't let me work with her. But she helped me"*. When asked about staff support, he said *"I had no advice or support when I first started. I think that's quite bad, isn't it?"*

*Mario's I-Poem statements;*

*I had a friend, she helped me.*

*I had to learn on my own if the teacher wouldn't let me work with her.*

*I had no advice or support when I first started*

*I think that's bad, isn't it?*

Alek didn't focus explicitly on support; however, he did speak of having a friend who helped him. He does not mention staff support during school. I wonder if this is because he lacked that support, or whether it felt supported so has not felt a need to discuss it?

*Alek's I-Poem statements:*

*I had to focus on my work.*

*I had a friend; she taught me sign.*

*She helped me communicate.*

In contrast to other participant-researchers, Archie predominantly focuses on staff support or wider factors of being denied support, he does not explicitly talk about peer support in the same way.

Hannah's experiences of feeling relied upon by others, involved by staff and peers and interestingly this was from both the hearing community but also from the Deaf community who would rely on her to speak/listen for them and relay it back into sign. Describing how she often felt in the middle, as she defines two camps - Deaf and Hearing, yet appears to suggest she does not feel like she fully belongs to either? She goes on to share about the pressure she felt about this, *"I didn't want to be interpreting. I wasn't fantastic at interpreting. I just got to the point where I kind of walked away or something"*.

## Being denied support

Archie spoke about being actively encouraged not to sign;

*"They encouraged me to not sign, and just speak because I'm at a school where I'm the only deaf one."*

He went on to describe wider systemic issues that affected his school experience; being denied an EHCP, being denied access to the Deaf hub and the impact this had;

*"I left school in Year 10 because I never really fitted into the school"*

This shows the impact on wellbeing and sense of belonging battling against systems and processes. He goes further, sharing *“I wasn’t allowed access to any equipment to help me, I wasn’t allowed access to any other deaf peers, nothing”*.

Archie spoke about being viewed as less able due to their Deafness, going on to describe being denied opportunities and support that his hearing peers were given. Alongside being actively encouraged not to sign, later in the interview, they speak about having speech therapy. I wonder what impact this had and whether it fuels a narrative, of out-teaching Deafness through encouraging speech. I further wonder who the speech therapy is actually for? Is it for the benefit of others to aid understanding if speech is clear? Rather than to aid his understanding and accessibility of the world?

*“I feel like a lot of my teachers didn’t understand and they heard my speech and was like “Oh Fantastic, it’ll be fine!”. But actually, I struggled through a lot”* Again these touch on the comfort and accessibility for the staff and not considering the individual experience. Denying their reality, impacting on confidence and sense of identity.

Hannah also spoke about denial of support, but in a different way. With expectation placed on her to sign or interpret for others, I got a sense of her being used as a commodity for the ease and comfort of others. *“They keep looking at me. And it’s like, “Oh, dear! I’ve got to sign!” and that made me feel pressured...Because I can hear, well not hear, but I can hear a little because I have a radio, but they can be a bit hard to understand. They’d just look at me and think I can understand everything”*. This links to aspects of Archie’s experience and misunderstanding or making assumptions as to what support is needed or not needed.

## Advocacy

Archie spoke of a wish for things to be different, looking back and wishing he advocated for himself more, *“Don’t go along with what they’re telling you. Don’t make yourself small and don’t shrink in on yourself because you don’t want to be that person that causes a problem.”*

This was followed by recognising how this advocacy might have been perceived;

*“ would have probably been seen as bossy or demanding or whatever, but I went along for so long with what they were telling me I had to do and how I was supposed to learn and that I was below my peers....I went along with what they said and I said to myself, “well I must be terrible if they’re putting me in bottom set” or “I must be terrible if they’re taking me out of this class and putting me in extra English”*

Archie highlights that he did not feel there was a strong emphasis on needing to make changes and put support in place and this felt like it was optional, rather than a requirement. This lack of advocacy on his behalf appeared to impact on how he felt able to advocate for himself in return.

*Archie’s I-poem statements;*

*I don’t think things would have been the same.*

*I wish I spoke up.*

*I wish.*

*I think things would have been different.*

This desire for things to be different was echoed by Hannah;

*“I wish I had spoken up sooner, not later. I wish I hadn’t gone through that myself and had focused on myself rather than other people.”*

She shares how there is too much pressure placed on Deaf people to make sure hearing people understand, rather than support being offered for the Deaf person themselves.

### **Reflective Summary of Memo**

Reading through the memo, I’ve noticed overlap between the different aspects and also the role of BSL in the support that was available or not available. This overlaps with memo 1 **‘Access to BSL’**. How do I decide which category is a ‘best fit?’ Or do I need to merge them? Merging completely does not seem appropriate as aspects of this category move beyond purely having access to BSL and that feels too simplistic. Whilst on the surface, participant-researchers are sharing experiences of support, looking deeper, much of this appears to be impacted by wider perceptions or assumptions as to what support is (or isn’t) required and this had significant impact on the participant-researchers’ experiences as a result. Considering this in relation to the research question *‘What does it mean to belong?’*. I need to explore the literature around belonging and varied experiences of support.

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### **06/10/25 - UPDATED CATEGORY NAME: AUDISM**

I have made the decision to change this category to ‘Audism’ as I feel that through sharing their experiences of support, much of what participant-researchers share focuses on negative experiences or a lack of understanding of Deaf experience. Looking to the literature, this could be attributed to audist assumptions and prejudices which influences how participant-researchers have been perceived or the level of support they have been given as a result. Therefore Audism (*“The notion that one is superior based on one’s ability to hear or behave in the manner of one who hears” Humphries, 1977, p.12*) seems a more accurate fit and moves the analysis from initially being around experiences of support, to considering the contributing factors underpinning those experiences.

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### **MEMO UPDATE: AUDISM**

#### **Update 08/10/25**

I am struggling to categorise some codes, many of them overlap e.g. I originally placed “Deaf ‘safe’ spaces” and “seeking other Deaf people for support” within the category of ‘Representation’, as I felt this was about the value of being with other Deaf people. However, this could also be about ‘seeking connection’ with others and ‘communication’. Looking into this more theoretically, those codes also link to wider

societal 'audism' that they are needing to seek support in separate spaces and away from hearing people. How do I decide which code they most fit with?

### **Update 10/10/25**

I think I may be thinking about this in the wrong way. I'm trying to fit codes into neat boxes (categories) but this isn't going to work, research on belonging highlights it's multi-faceted nature so it makes sense that codes do not neatly fit into a perfectly named category. I need to look at what connects them all together, an overarching issue/area of focus that the categories are linked by.

### **Update 13/10/25**

Is the overarching commonality about 'identity' or more specifically 'Deaf identity'?

*Seeking Connection* - The impact of connection with other Deaf peers, also the impact of connection to a Deaf-only space. This ties in with *Representation* through being around others like 'me' and having access to role models. Experiences of *Audism* impact on this and how participant-researchers view themselves, particularly when they don't have access to Deaf spaces or Deaf peers. This links with the Deaf/deaf distinction too and how individuals identify themselves, especially as BSL (*communication*) is a significant part of Deaf culture and Deaf identity. Deaf identity therefore can link 4/5 categories together.

The final category *Seeking Change* is a little different as this doesn't appear to be present for all participant-researchers. Yet, there is something about it that I feel is important and cannot be left out. Looking at the participant-researchers that contributed to this category, and specifically looking for aspects of identity within it, those who were more comfortable/confident in their Deaf identity were the ones voicing a desire for change or a wish for things to have been different. These participant-researchers have a strong sense of self advocacy than the others.

I'm wondering if *Seeking Connection* and *Representation* can be merged, into *Affirmation* possibly or something similar. Something that encompasses validation of evolving Deaf identity and their experiences through connection and social interaction with others, alongside representation in your environment/school community?

### **Update 14/10/25**

I have decided not to merge them at this time, instead for Phase 2, I will ask participant-researcher's a question around their identity, to explore this further;

*What does being Deaf mean to you?*

This links to Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978); "*that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership*" (pg. 63). This quote appears to tie multiple aspects together, belonging to a group, perceptions of each group, how you may fit in each group, or even sit somewhere in the middle. It also encompasses the emotional aspects touched upon, e.g. isolation, confidence.

Alongside this, given the overlap between codes and difficulty with determining where each code should be placed or merged. I am conscious of maintaining the co-construction of the research and conscious that the analysis process so far has been undertaken by me. Phase 2 was designed for participant-researcher involvement in the ongoing analysis process, therefore before amending anything further, I have decided to begin Phase 2, to support with further focusing of the research direction. I will generate example statements that cover the range of codes within each category for participant-researchers to rank in priority/importance order. This will enable me to more confidently make decisions on where to focus the analysis.

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### October 2025 MEMO: AUDISM

I have plotted key features of codes under 'Audism' onto a mind map for ease of visualising it. From this, I have developed statements that I feel encompass the tentative category. Given the quantity of data and the need to streamline information for ease of interpreting and relaying back to participant-researchers, I have made the decision to show one example statement that covers an issue or insight shared by the participant-researchers.



| <b>Tentative Category Properties<br/>(defined at start of memo)</b>          | <b>Codes drawn upon<br/>(from the mind map)</b>                                                                                                 | <b>Phase 2 Statement</b>                                              |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Advocacy/Being denied support                                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of family info/support</li> </ul>                                                                 | Collaboration between school and home                                 |
| Impact of peer support/Impact of staff support/Advocacy                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pressure to sign/interpret for others</li> <li>• Used as a commodity</li> <li>• Relied upon</li> </ul> | Not being used as an interpreter myself                               |
| Impact of peer support/Impact of staff support/Advocacy/Being denied support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced autonomy</li> <li>• "Expected to speak</li> <li>• Told not to sign</li> </ul>                  | Being able to choose how I communicate                                |
| Being denied support                                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Below peers</li> <li>• "Placed in bottom sets"</li> <li>• Lower expectations</li> </ul>                | Not having class 'sets' – i.e. bottom/top sets.                       |
| Impact of staff support/Impact of peer support/Being denied support          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of support</li> <li>• No sign support</li> </ul>                                                  | Sign support always being there                                       |
| Advocacy                                                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of Deaf awareness</li> <li>• Misunderstanding Deaf experiences</li> </ul>                         | Preparing me for a Deaf world                                         |
| Advocacy                                                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I can speak"</li> <li>• Told not to sign</li> </ul>                                                   | Preparing me for a Hearing world                                      |
| Impact of staff support/ Impact of peer support/Being denied support         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessibility of environment</li> </ul>                                                                | A deaf - accessible classroom (e.g. visuals, not busy or distracting) |
| Being denied support/Advocacy                                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced opportunities</li> <li>• Educated alone</li> </ul>                                             | Being given the same opportunities as hearing students                |

### 17/11/26 - MEMO UPDATE: AUDISM

I have scored statements across the five interviews in phase 2. The three lowest statements highlight aspects the participant-researchers consider to be most important (highlighted in yellow).

Accessibility of BSL support, autonomy of communication choices and preparation and awareness of Deaf culture is most important to participant-researchers. Considering this in relation to the tentative category; 'Audism', this enables me to focus the analysis direction on aspects of Audism that link to those three areas.

|                                                                       | <b>Total</b> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Collaboration between school and home                                 | 21           |
| Not being used as an interpreter myself                               | 32           |
| Being able to choose how I communicate                                | 19           |
| Not having class 'sets' – i.e. bottom/top sets for learning.          | 41           |
| Sign support always being there                                       | 15           |
| Preparing me for a Deaf world                                         | 18           |
| Preparing me for a Hearing world                                      | 30           |
| A deaf - accessible classroom (e.g. visuals, not busy or distracting) | 24           |
| Being given the same opportunities as hearing students                | 25           |

## Refined Properties of Category:

- ~~Impact of staff support~~      Availability and impact of BSL support
- ~~Impact of peer support~~      Access to Deaf culture
- ~~Being denied support~~      Advocacy and Autonomy over communication
- ~~Advocacy~~

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*(Note: The gap in Memo's between November 2025 and January 2026 is because I made the decision to leave the data analysis for a while. Following discussion with my supervisors, it was felt that some time away from the data would be beneficial to 'let thoughts, ideas and reflections settle' and to give myself space to process what was being constructed in the data, without being 'too close to it'. I therefore used this time to do early drafts of the thesis write up, alongside intermittent reading of the literature, before returning 'fresh' to the data in January 2026).*

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## 26/01/26 - MEMO UPDATE: AUDISM EXTERNALISED AND INTERNALISED OPPRESSION

When reading around Audism, I found a recent paper by Tomaszewski, Krzysztofiak, Kowalska & Hauser (2025) which looked at Internalised Oppression and Deaf people's mental health. Considering this paper in relation to the participant-researchers' experiences, I realised that they were sharing experiences of both internalised and externalised oppression but I had only explicitly categorised the externalised examples (in the form of Audism). Whilst I had identified internalised examples, I had coded this in different ways such as 'representation', 'acceptance' and 'confidence' and linked this to their evolving Deaf identity, but actually, that evolving process has a direct link to their experiences of internalised oppression and overcoming that. The advocacy section of this memo could be considered part of the process of the participant-researchers beginning to question those internalised messages. If I look at coding within 'Representation', does increased Deaf representation (through BSL access, Deaf peers etc) provide a means to fight back against internalised oppression, in which participant-researchers can begin to take back ownership of their experiences (similar to other minority cultures taking back language or aspects of their culture that has previously been used against them/to oppress). This ties in with the participant-researchers' priorities (Availability and impact of BSL support, Access to Deaf culture, Advocacy and Autonomy over communication).

The concept of belonging therefore feels intertwined with oppression. External oppression manifesting as a lack of belonging to a group or community, leading to feelings of isolation and disconnection. Whereas internal oppression can affect self-image and sense of belonging. Internalised feelings risk reducing self-worth. Both could also risk attributing belonging to a group they do not truly feel they connect with, lacking authenticity or giving a false sense of belonging. This reminds me of the notion of critical consciousness and the impact of not being aware you are oppressed, compared with becoming aware.

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## 02/02/26 - MEMO UPDATE: EXTERNALISED AND INTERNALISED OPPRESSION

I have gone back through the transcripts and noted examples of externalised and internalised oppression for each one;

Externalised – Charlotte, Archie, Hannah, Alek, Jasmine, Nadia

Internalised – Archie, Hannah, Jasmine, Alek, Mario,

Linked to the idea of becoming ‘aware’, I also looked for examples of ‘finding voice’ in relation to oppression.

Finding Voice – All participant-researchers except Tom and Holly shared aspects linked to voice/advocating to some degree. Interestingly, Tom and Holly are the only participant-researchers who also did not share experiences of oppression.

Combining the above together and considering this in relation to the research questions on belonging. The main concern for the participant-researchers’ could be linked to the impact oppressive experiences have on their sense of belonging.

The two participant-researchers who did not share examples of negative experiences, also did not share examples of ‘un-belonging’, and their interviews consisted of positive experiences of school. This is not the case for the remaining participant-researchers who did experience forms of oppression.

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## February 2026 - MEMO UPDATE

Splitting the experiences of oppression into external and internal has enabled me to consider more deeply the impact that repeated experiences of oppression impacts on the participant-researchers. However, I have struggled to link this to the research questions as participant-researchers’ do not always explicitly talk about belonging. Therefore, I am looking at what experiences of oppression tell me about belonging. It is through the lens of oppression.

Applying a critical lens, instead of belonging being a feeling or an emotional connection, it is actually actively negotiated both socially and contextually. There is societal power associated with it. It has occurred to me that the acts of oppression effectively create the conditions in which belonging becomes possible, or in fact, impossible for participant-researchers.

*Belonging is shaped by power, not just relationships!*

This links to the role of politics and institutional messages explored in the literature. As the environments the participant-researchers are in are a representation of those wider systemic factors. External oppression therefore manifests as a lack of group belonging which leads to feelings of isolation and disconnection from others. The role of group membership appears to be relevant here – most participant-researchers spoke of positive experiences of group membership with Deaf communities, but less so with hearing communities. This is further compounded when access to other Deaf

people is restricted or actively denied in some cases. There is overlaps here with much of the research on social/group identity and assimilation to dominant groups.

I have noticed that feelings of solidarity increase feelings of belonging, particularly when around others they perceive as similar to them/who have shared experiences.

### **Over Arching Central concept – BSL as a cornerstone**

I've been struggling with structuring the findings/pulling the developing theory together and I have realised I have been looking at it wrong, much of the difficulty is because of the overlap between categories, therefore I need to consider what single factor links those categories together. A central organising concept. Reminding myself of Charmaz, 2024 – it is not about finding the most frequently occurring category and calling it the 'core category'. It is about finding a common thread across all concepts and categories developed – something that ties everything together. The central explanatory pattern of the whole research.

I have realised it is BSL! BSL is the foundation from which everything else is built. There is no belonging for Deaf people without access to BSL. Across all memos, BSL has consistently been referenced and considered as fundamental to Deaf experience. This makes sense given the importance of communication in forming connection with others. The ongoing differences and debate around use of speech, lip reading or BSL results in a lack of cohesion and continues to create division between hearing and Deaf communities. The lack of a universal communication across the hearing and the Deaf appears to be the biggest barrier to inclusion and belongingness. Communication therefore is central to belonging for Deaf people, particularly given much of their environments do not routinely contain or consider accessible communication.

This reminded me of the concept of cultural cornerstones, something so central to a culture that it helps hold the whole thing together. I like this as it ties with the cultural model of Deafness. I looked up defining features of a cornerstone and it was split into four aspects;

- shapes how people in a group think, behave and relate to each other.
- Most people in that culture see it as an important factor
- lasts over time and is not a passing interest
- helps define 'who we are'

I feel that the above can be applied to the importance of BSL to Deaf belonging, I have therefore made the decision to add '*BSL as a cornerstone*' as the core category that links all other categories together;

BSL as linguistic – access to BSL for self and to be around others using it enables communication to take place. It offers accessibility and gives Deaf people a means to express themselves. This is the first step.

BSL as cultural – BSL enables and affirms Deaf identity and representation which in turn also develops voice and advocacy.

BSL as relational – BSL provides means for connection and social interaction with others. Social factors greatly support feelings of belonging.

**BSL as systemic – Systemic factors and views on BSL/Deafness impact on the possibility of belonging. Experiences of oppression reduce sense of belonging. Positive experiences were primarily in ‘deaf schools’ where oppressive experiences were not evident and BSL was prioritised. This also supported a sense of ‘belonging to a place/space’**

This final aspect encompasses the experiences that have been coded within this section.

Considering this in relation to the developing theory, I feel that the process of negotiating experiences of oppression is a fundamental aspect of belonging for the participant-researchers. If the main concern is “how do I manage and challenge experiences of oppression”, then the answer to ‘how’ is through their interactions with the social world around them.

What that looks like however, depends on a multitude of factors including access to BSL, deaf representation, social interactions, systemic factors (oppression).

Erickson 1986 poses two methodological questions;

1. What is happening here?
2. What do these happenings mean to people engaged in them?

To answer this;

1. Participant-researchers are sharing experiences of oppression and inconsistent access to BSL despite it being their primary communication method.
2. This means that it directly impacts on their voice and ability to interact with the world around them. This leads to a ‘loss of voice’ as they do not have the means for effective communication with others.

### **Final Theoretical Category: Navigating Oppression: Experiences of self and other**

I have further refined this category, and defined the contributing properties for it. This centres around the role of BSL linked to oppressive experiences; the impact those experiences have on communication options and choices, the impact on how Deafness is perceived and how support is offered or denied. This links to the prioritised statements outlined by participant-researchers in phase 2, so I believe this has supported the co-construction as the below has been led by what participant-researchers’ felt was most important.

#### **Refined Properties of Category:**

- Externalised Oppression = Experience of the other
  - Systemic Audism
    - Being denied access to BSL
    - Denied BSL support
    - Expectation of speech/lip reading instead of sign

- Internalised Oppression = Experience of the self
  - Impact on sense of self/identity
    - Feelings of shame
    - Rejection of Deafness
    - Loss of confidence/ability to advocate for self
    - Isolation

Experiences of oppression expose the barriers to belonging, which in turns also considers the conditions needed for belonging. It is these aspects that need to be negotiated by the participant-researchers in an attempt to find a sense of belonging in their environments. Externalised oppression (audism, deficit-focus, exclusionary approaches) directly impacts on participant-researchers' experience of school and how supported, valued or welcomed they feel. This has direct implications given the research on belonging around being seen, heard, valued. When the messages received (both overt and covert) do not focus on those things, the impact is that they internalise those messages, which impacts on confidence, sense of self, identity and how connected they feel to the world around them. This is clearly significant!

## Appendix 8: Phase 2 Scoring

|                                                           | Charlotte | Hannah | Jasmine | Alek | Archie | Total |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----------|--------|---------|------|--------|-------|
| Having Deaf staff to support me                           | 3         | 8      | 6       | 3    | 4      | 24    |
| Working with people that understand the Deaf community    | 4         | 2      | 7       | 6    | 2      | 21    |
| Socialising with Deaf students                            | 5         | 1      | 8       | 1    | 3      | 18    |
| Socialising with hearing students                         | 8         | 9      | 9       | 2    | 9      | 37    |
| Having hearing staff to support me                        | 9         | 3      | 3       | 5    | 8      | 28    |
| Feeling proud of my Deaf culture                          | 6         | 4      | 5       | 4    | 1      | 20    |
| Having family and friends understand me                   | 1         | 6      | 2       | 7    | 5      | 21    |
| Having family who are Deaf aware                          | 2         | 5      | 1       | 8    | 6      | 22    |
| My understanding of the differences in the Deaf community | 7         | 7      | 4       | 9    | 7      | 34    |

|                                            | Charlotte | Hannah | Jasmine | Alek | Archie | Total |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------|--------|---------|------|--------|-------|
| Lip reading                                | 9         | 4      | 6       | 2    | 5      | 26    |
| Having sign support                        | 1         | 3      | 2       | 3    | 2      | 11    |
| Access to BSL                              | 4         | 1      | 3       | 1    | 1      | 10    |
| For everyone to know BSL                   | 3         | 2      | 1       | 4    | 7      | 17    |
| Being able to understand what is happening | 2         | 5      | 4       | 6    | 3      | 20    |
| Doing things for yourself, without help    | 5         | 7      | 7       | 5    | 6      | 30    |
| Everyone communicating in the same way     | 7         | 6      | 8       | 8    | 8      | 37    |
| Knowing I've been understood               | 8         | 8      | 5       | 7    | 4      | 32    |
| Feeling I'm the odd one out/different      | 6         | 9      | 9       | 9    | 9      | 42    |

|                                                       | Charlotte | Hannah | Jasmine | Alek | Archie | Total |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-----------|--------|---------|------|--------|-------|
| Having a Deaf only space to go                        | 4         | 5      | 4       | 3    | 3      | 19    |
| Having a mixed hearing/Deaf space to go to            | 9         | 8      | 7       | 6    | 5      | 35    |
| Getting to know the staff who help me                 | 5         | 3      | 5       | 5    | 7      | 25    |
| Making friends                                        | 1         | 6      | 2       | 2    | 6      | 17    |
| Being in a group with people like me                  | 3         | 4      | 6       | 4    | 2      | 19    |
| Being on my own                                       | 2         | 9      | 3       | 7    | 9      | 30    |
| Sharing my experiences with others                    | 7         | 7      | 8       | 9    | 4      | 35    |
| Being with people who have experienced the same as me | 8         | 2      | 9       | 8    | 1      | 28    |
| Feeling part of a community at school                 | 6         | 1      | 1       | 1    | 8      | 17    |

|                                                                       | Charlotte | Hannah | Jasmine | Alek | Archie | Total |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|--------|---------|------|--------|-------|
| Collaboration between school and home                                 | 1         | 5      | 7       | 6    | 2      | 21    |
| Not being used as an interpreter myself                               | 6         | 8      | 2       | 7    | 9      | 32    |
| Being able to choose how I communicate                                | 2         | 3      | 8       | 5    | 1      | 19    |
| Not having class 'sets' – i.e. bottom/top sets for learning.          | 9         | 9      | 9       | 8    | 6      | 41    |
| Sign support always being there                                       | 3         | 1      | 6       | 1    | 4      | 15    |
| Preparing me for a Deaf world                                         | 4         | 2      | 3       | 2    | 7      | 18    |
| Preparing me for a Hearing world                                      | 8         | 6      | 5       | 3    | 8      | 30    |
| A Deaf - accessible classroom (e.g. visuals, not busy or distracting) | 5         | 4      | 1       | 9    | 5      | 24    |
| Being given the same opportunities as hearing students                | 7         | 7      | 4       | 4    | 3      | 25    |

|                                                | Charlotte | Hannah | Jasmine | Alek | Archie | Total |
|------------------------------------------------|-----------|--------|---------|------|--------|-------|
| Being given longer to learn/understand         | 8         | 4      | 7       | 1    | 3      | 23    |
| Technology that supports communication         | 9         | 8      | 6       | 9    | 7      | 39    |
| Always having sign support                     | 1         | 1      | 1       | 4    | 8      | 15    |
| Being able to learn how I need to learn        | 4         | 7      | 9       | 5    | 5      | 30    |
| Others understanding what it's like to be deaf | 6         | 5      | 8       | 6    | 1      | 26    |
| Including BSL/Deaf culture in lessons          | 2         | 3      | 2       | 8    | 6      | 21    |
| A classroom that feels safe/accessible to me   | 5         | 2      | 3       | 3    | 9      | 22    |
| Teachers who are confident working with me     | 7         | 6      | 5       | 2    | 4      | 24    |
| Access to more visuals (pictures, less words)  | 3         | 9      | 4       | 7    | 2      | 25    |

The below table shows just the priority area statements, in priority order (based on the lowest combined score). The top 5 statements are all directly related to BSL – highlighting the significance of this for the Deaf participant-researchers and providing further justification for this being the central organising concept (BSL as a cornerstone).

|                                                        | Charlotte | Hannah | Jasmine | Alek | Archie | Total |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------|--------|---------|------|--------|-------|
| Access to BSL                                          | 4         | 1      | 3       | 1    | 1      | 10    |
| Having sign support                                    | 1         | 3      | 2       | 3    | 2      | 11    |
| Sign support always being there                        | 3         | 1      | 6       | 1    | 4      | 15    |
| Always having sign support                             | 1         | 1      | 1       | 4    | 8      | 15    |
| For everyone to know BSL                               | 3         | 2      | 1       | 4    | 7      | 17    |
| Making friends                                         | 1         | 6      | 2       | 2    | 6      | 17    |
| Feeling part of a community at school                  | 6         | 1      | 1       | 1    | 8      | 17    |
| Socialising with Deaf students                         | 5         | 1      | 8       | 1    | 3      | 18    |
| Preparing me for a Deaf world                          | 4         | 2      | 3       | 2    | 7      | 18    |
| Having a Deaf only space to go                         | 4         | 5      | 4       | 3    | 3      | 19    |
| Being in a group with people like me                   | 3         | 4      | 6       | 4    | 2      | 19    |
| Being able to choose how I communicate                 | 2         | 3      | 8       | 5    | 1      | 19    |
| Feeling proud of my Deaf culture                       | 6         | 4      | 5       | 4    | 1      | 20    |
| Working with people that understand the Deaf community | 4         | 2      | 7       | 6    | 2      | 21    |
| Having family and friends understand me                | 1         | 6      | 2       | 7    | 5      | 21    |
| Including BSL/Deaf culture in lessons                  | 2         | 3      | 2       | 8    | 6      | 21    |
| A classroom that feels safe/accessible to me           | 5         | 2      | 3       | 3    | 9      | 22    |

For further explanation, the table below shows how each statement links to the final theoretical categories outlined in the final theory, alongside the Nine Tenets outlined in Chapter 5. Whilst the table places each statement into neat categories, this is done to support understanding of the process undertaken. As outlined in Chapter 4, the CCGT presents a journey in which participant-researchers can move back and forth between stages in response to different contextual factors. Therefore, in reality, aspects of each category overlaps with other categories creating a more fluid process.

| <b>Phase 2 Statements</b>                              | <b>Theoretical Category</b>       | <b>Nine Tenets</b>              |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Access to BSL                                          | BSL as a cornerstone              | All                             |
| Having sign support                                    | BSL as a cornerstone              | All                             |
| Sign support always being there                        | BSL as a cornerstone              | All                             |
| Always having sign support                             | BSL as a cornerstone              | All                             |
| For everyone to know BSL                               | Reclaiming Voice                  | All                             |
| Making friends                                         | Establishing collective belonging | Representation/Culture/Identity |
| Feeling part of a community at school                  | Establishing collective belonging | Culture/Spaces/Identity         |
| Socialising with Deaf students                         | Establishing collective belonging | Representation/Culture/Identity |
| Preparing me for a Deaf world                          | Deaf Consciousness                | Culture/Identity                |
| Having a Deaf only space to go                         | Reclaiming Voice                  | Spaces/Representation           |
| Being in a group with people like me                   | Establishing collective belonging | Representation/Culture/Identity |
| Being able to choose how I communicate                 | Deaf Consciousness                | Identity/Voice                  |
| Feeling proud of my Deaf culture                       | Deaf Consciousness                | Identity/Culture                |
| Working with people that understand the Deaf community | Establishing collective belonging | Recognition/Attitudes           |
| Having family and friends understand me                | Reclaiming Voice                  | Recognition/Attitudes           |
| Including BSL/Deaf culture in lessons                  | Deaf Consciousness                | Culture/Recognition/Attitudes   |
| A classroom that feels safe/accessible to me           | Deaf Consciousness                | Attitudes/Accessibility         |

## Appendix 9: Ethical Approval Letter



Downloaded: 24/04/2026

Approved: 10/06/2025

Sarah Louise Grimble

Registration number: 230108257

School of Education

Programme: Doctorate of Child and Educational Psychology

Dear Sarah Louise

**PROJECT TITLE:** A Constructivist Grounded Theory Study into experiences of belonging within a school community for Young People who are Deaf/hard of hearing.

**APPLICATION:** Reference Number 066848

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 10/06/2025 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 066848 (form submission date: 05/06/2025); (expected project end date: 31/07/2026).
- Participant information sheet 1152778 version 3 (05/06/2025).
- Participant consent form 1152779 version 2 (18/05/2025).

If during the course of the project you need to [deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation](#) please inform me since written approval will be required.

Your responsibilities in delivering this research project are set out at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely

Joseph Hargreaves

Ethics Admin

School of Education

Please note the following responsibilities of the researcher in delivering the research project:

- The project must abide by the University's Research Ethics Policy: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/research-services/ethics-integrity/policy>
- The project must abide by the University's Good Research & Innovation Practices Policy: [https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly\\_fs/1.6710661/file/GRIPPpolicy.pdf](https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.6710661/file/GRIPPpolicy.pdf)
- The researcher must inform their supervisor (in the case of a student) or Ethics Admin (in the case of a member of staff) of any significant changes to the project or the approved documentation.
- The researcher must comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data.
- The researcher is responsible for effectively managing the data collected both during and after the end of the project in line with best practice, and any relevant legislative, regulatory or contractual requirements.

## Appendix 10: Script for video

Below is the script that was used as subtitles for an 8-minute to present the research findings (CCGT and Nine Tenets of Deaf Consciousness) to a Deaf audience for feedback.

The Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID) estimate that one in three adults in the UK are Deaf, hard of hearing or experienced tinnitus, with England being home to 46,000 Deaf children. In fact, England has been providing Deaf education since 1783, yet since the first school for the Deaf opened 233 years ago, existing research into academic progress, social inclusion and how young people develop Deaf identity comes mainly from outside of the UK, and offers little insight into how Deaf children understand, navigate and find their sense of belonging at school and ultimately in their wider world.

So many of the systems used to develop communication, social interactions, and environments that support identity in school are still not designed with the Deaf in mind.

In 2022 the BSL Act gave legal acknowledgment of BSL as a recognised language, which requires the government to promote and report on the use of BSL and to ensure Deaf people have access to information in BSL.

This research considers Deafness to be a cultural identity rather than an audiological deficit. It explored the journey of young members of the Deaf community to understand how their experience in secondary school shaped their identity, understanding of language, communication skills and their access to BSL. Ultimately how their sense of belonging grew in the face of oppressive barriers of a dominant Hearing world, which is still not set up to support their growth or recognise Deaf needs.

This research found that for belonging to occur, more than just communication is needed. The voice, culture, and identity of Deaf learners need to be considered and embedded into how practitioners, peers, and the environments include Deaf learners. Promoting improved school practice, wider policies, and experiences, need to be developed into a form that supports hearing staff to improve their interactions and understanding of the Deaf community.

To support achieving these outcomes, this research has generated a theory and 'Nine Tenets of Deaf Consciousness'. The research findings showed that the first step to feeling you belong as a Deaf child is through access to BSL. This means you can communicate with others and understand what is happening in the environment. Without BSL, Deaf children can feel lost and excluded due to not having a way to communicate, not having access to support, or support not being available when it should be. These experiences often made them feel embarrassed, ashamed or wanting to hide being Deaf. This can lead to Deaf children feeling lonely and isolated from those around them.

Learning BSL helps them to make friends with other Deaf people and find others who experience the world as they do. This helps them to feel more confident about being Deaf and who they are. This can also be confusing, sometimes feeling like you are in two worlds, the Hearing world and the Deaf world and feeling unsure which one you belong to.

As Deaf children spend more time with other Deaf people and learn about Deaf culture, they start to see that their past experiences were discriminatory towards them, and they slowly feel more confident to challenge this and stand up for themselves and other Deaf people. This creates a sense of belonging with others who communicate in the same way with similar experiences and learn to understand what it is like to be Deaf.

So, what can we do to support Deaf children to feel understood and promote their belonging?

Introducing the Nine Tenets for Deaf Consciousness.

These should be considered as a set of nine principles for those working with Deaf children and young people to be mindful of and work towards utilising within everyday practice. At the centre we have BSL, but as we have learnt, this alone is not enough.

To enable total communication and inclusion, we need to surround BSL with the supportive tenets of;

Deaf culture. Recognition. Identity. Accessibility. Voice. Attitudes. Representation and Spaces.

Our research shows that these elements are all needed to wrap around BSL, to form a protective barrier to the difficulties of the outside world. Barriers including social, privilege, historical, language, oppression, political and power dynamics. That go beyond the idea that Deafness is simply a practical hearing disability.

Let's take a look at each of the nine tenets to understand how they can be used to support the classroom and wider experience of the world for our Deaf learners.

The Nine Tenets for Deaf Consciousness.

These should be considered as a set of principles for those working with Deaf children and young people to be mindful of and work towards.

1. Deaf children and young people have the right to a full language. Not all Deaf people will choose to use BSL, but BSL must be available as an option from the very beginning of their language development.

2. Lip-reading, sign-supported English (SSE), speech and language therapy, and technology can help some Deaf children and young people communicate. But these supports are not the same as having access to a complete language. They also do not make a Deaf person into a hearing person.

3. People need to recognise that audism is built into society. Ideas that prioritise the hearing are part of everyday life, and they also shape the policies and laws that affect us. This creates ongoing, repeated discrimination and marginalisation of Deaf communities. The first step in challenging this is to acknowledge that audism exists.

4. Deaf culture and Deaf histories should be taught early. They are important for how Deaf children and young people build their identity. This should not be delayed until they are old enough to look for it themselves. They need access from the start.

5. Deaf identity should not be assumed. Identity can change and develop over time. Deaf children and young people should have the chance to explore what Deafness means for them. To do this, they need information and knowledge about Deafness and Deaf culture.

6. Deaf people have a voice and a right to be heard. Deaf children and young people have the right to share their views in all decisions that affect them. Deaf people are the experts on their own lives and their own experience of Deafness.

7. Society's attitudes toward Deafness need to change. Hearing people are given power and privilege that Deaf people are often denied. Hearing people should use that power in allyship to support, stand with, and amplify the voices of Deaf communities.

8. Belonging matters for Deaf children and young people. It is just as important for them as for anyone else. But ideas about belonging are often shaped by ableist and audist assumptions. For Deaf children and young people, belonging often comes from having meaningful chances to connect with other Deaf peers. Social inclusion grows from shared language and shared experiences.

9. Separate voluntary spaces are important for Deaf children and young people. When they spend most of their time in hearing environments, these Deaf-centred spaces offer safety, comfort, and a break from the hearing world. Supporting these spaces may mean rethinking what inclusion means and how it looks in practice.

Through these tenets, schools, teachers, support staff, members of the hearing and Deaf communities can help to support and promote our understanding to allow all young learners to feel they are represented and belong within our classrooms and communities.

## Appendix 11: Video Feedback

This document brings together qualitative feedback from a Deaf audience consisting of participant-researchers, other Deaf students at the setting, Deaf college staff including a Deaf advocate/ senior Deaf education professional. The responses reflect a range of communication styles, levels of understanding, and living experiences of Deafness, following the viewing of an 8-minute video which introduced the *Nine Tenets of Deaf Consciousness*.

The video presents the CCGT using a combination of visuals, subtitles and spoken audio to support accessibility for a mixed audience. It outlined the nine tenets in an intentionally simplistic way to aid understanding of the concepts of Deaf identity, collective belonging, communication, and inclusion within education and wider society.

Following the video, feedback was collected from the group that included a mix of original participant-researchers, plus additional Deaf peers, Deaf staff, a Level 6 BSL hearing interpreter and the Manager of the Deaf Education Centre. The manager is also a Deaf advocate with national experience in BSL interpretation and involvement with a historic Deaf foundation.

Four feedback questions were asked:

1. **Did the Nine Tenets connect with your living experience of being D/deaf?**
2. **Was there any part that felt most important to you?**
3. **Do you think these suggestions could support D/deaf children and young people in school/everyday life?**
4. **Do you think this theory could help people better understand and support Deaf communities?**

### Student 1

**Match with experience.**

*Yeah, pretty much. It felt like someone's put into words what it's like in school.*

**Most important part?**

*The bit about belonging is more than just chatting.*

**Future impact?**

*Yeah, I think it would help.*

**Overall value?**

*It's good. Could be proper useful.*

## Student 2

### **Match with experience.**

*Yeah. I've felt left out loads.*

### **Most important part.**

*BSL. Without it I'm just guessing stuff in class.*

### **Future impact.**

*Yeah, it would help younger Deaf kids, I think.*

### **Overall value.**

*It makes sense I like the circle thing.*

## Student 3

### **Match with experience.**

*Some of it yeah, like feeling between Deaf and hearing worlds.*

### **Most important part.**

*Identity bit.*

### **Future impact**

*Maybe yeah.*

### **Overall value.**

*It's alright.*

## Student 4

### **Match with experience.**

*Yeah, it made me think about how bad school was.*

### **Most important part.**

*Finding other Deaf people, who I feel the same as.*

### **Future impact.**

*Yeah, it could stop feeling lonely, I hate that.*

### **Overall value.**

*Think it's useful if schools use it.*

## Student 5

### **Match with experience**

*Yeah, especially support not always working.*

### **Most important part**

*BSL from the start.*

### **Future impact.**

*Yeah, it would help colleges.*

### **Overall value.**

*Useful.*

## Student 6

### **Match with experience.**

*Yeah, a bit. The stuff about not knowing what's going on and being alone in a full room.*

### **Most important part.**

*BSL and friends.*

### **Future impact.**

*Yeah maybe.*

### **Overall value.**

*Good, I think.*

## Student 7

### **Match with experience.**

*Yeah, it made me emotional.*

### **Most important part.**

*Belonging to a group that I'm the same as.*

### **Future impact.**

*Yeah, because there's nothing else happening.*

### **Overall value.**

*It felt like you had listened to us.*

## Student 8

### **Match with experience.**

*Mostly yeah but could include more tech, I like my phone to help me, not many schools let you do that though.*

### **Most important part.**

*Deaf culture, not feeling stuff I do is weird.*

### **Future impact.**

*Only if it's used, most places don't bother trying.*

### **Overall value.**

*Good if they tried it.*

## Student 9

### **Match with experience**

*Yeah, living between worlds is a real thing.*

### **Most important part.**

*BSL helped my confidence but it's no good if other people don't know it too.*

### **Future impact.**

*Yes, go tell them to learn more sign please.*

### **Overall value.**

*Helpful, it was nice to watch.*

## Student 10

### **Match with experience.**

*Some of it, but it was confusing.*

### **Most important part.**

*BSL maybe, not sure what lots of it mean?*

### **Future impact.**

*Not sure, everything is nice if it helps people.*

### **Overall value.**

*It okay.*

## Student 11

**Match with experience.**

*A bit.*

**Most important part.**

*Not sure, but you do need to sign first.*

**Future impact.**

*Maybe.*

**Overall value.**

*Fine.*

## Student 12

**Match with experience.**

*Not sure, I always been in deaf school so everyone same.*

**Most important part.**

*I don't know.*

**Future impact.**

*Maybe, why not everyone just go to deaf school if deaf?*

**Overall value.**

*Confusing.*

## Staff 1

### **Match with experience.**

*Yes, very much, reminds me of a lot of difficulties*

### **Most important part.**

*Language, identity, belonging all very important and not talked about.*

### **Future impact.**

*Could help with training.*

### **Overall value.**

*Solid idea.*

## Staff 2

### **Match with experience.**

*Yeah, I see this problem all the time.*

### **Most important part.**

*Early BSL, linked to the person, so you get to know them when learning the language.*

### **Future impact.**

*It would help with planning.*

### **Overall value**

*Useful I'd like to see it used.*

## Staff 3

### **Match with experience.**

*Yeah, very much.*

### **Most important part.**

*Belonging defiantly, can't focus on work if you feel alone.*

### **Future impact**

*Could stop isolation and bad behaviours from loneliness and frustration.*

### **Overall value.**

*Important work, I hope I see more about this.*

## Staff 4

### **Match with experience.**

*Yes, systemic barriers.*

### **Most important part.**

*Structure and environment.*

### **Future impact.**

*Policy impact.*

### **Overall value.**

*A strong idea, but will school take it on board quickly enough?*

## Staff 5

### **Match with experience.**

*Yes, classroom practice.*

### **Most important part.**

*Communication access.*

### **Future impact.**

*Support plans.*

### **Overall value.**

*Useful.*

## Staff 6

### **Match with experience.**

*Yes, long experience of this behaviour, felt very left out even when started working in teaching too, it takes lot of work to find belonging in hearing world when deaf.*

### **Most important part.**

*Culture recognition. Not seeing anyone talk about that before in link to classroom.*

### **Future impact.**

*Could improve wellbeing and staff confidence.*

### **Overall value.**

*I felt human and important; I would support this in my class.*

## Staff 7

### **Match with experience.**

*Yes... it hit quite close to my own experience at times. The problem is still there even after all these years and why so few people in UK looking into this make our job harder than it already is.*

### **Most important part.**

*Belonging beyond access. The work does not end in the classroom.*

### **Future impact.**

*Could genuinely shift practice. But I imagine it would be hard to get mainstream hearing world to promote it.*

### **Overall value.**

*It feels like relief to know people are thinking about this and it could be a good place to make corrections for deaf learners not feeling alone. Because that feeling never really leaves you even when you grow up, thank you for showing me this.*