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A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE ON THE EXPERIENCES OF DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING INDIVIDUALS AS STUDENTS AT MAINSTREAM AND SPECIAL SCHOOLS

INTegration of individuals categorized as having special educational needs in mainstream schools has become a dominant policy in many countries. Changes in recent years in the field traditionally called “special education” have significantly influenced the education of deaf and hard of hearing individuals. The movements against segregation and toward integration and, more recently, inclusion, have created the conditions for educational changes, not only in mainstreaming but in special education. The article brings to light the views and experiences of deaf and hard of hearing people as students at special schools and mainstream schools, in order to compare the two systems from the viewpoints of those involved and to explore the possible implications of these views and experiences for the development of the educational system in Cyprus regarding inclusive education. Particular attention is given to improvement of the education of deaf and hard of hearing children.

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The integration of individuals categorized as having special educational needs in mainstream schools has been established as a dominant policy in many countries. (Despite the fact that our philosophy is that all children should study in the same school—the school in their neighborhood—because of the nature of the theme of the present article we use the terms “mainstream” and “special school” as they have been traditionally used.) Changes that have occurred in the last few years in the field traditionally called “special education” have significantly influenced the education of deaf and hard of hearing individuals. The movements against segregation and

toward, first, integration, and more recently, inclusion, have created the conditions for educational changes, not only in mainstream education but in special education (Lambropoulou, Hadjikakou, & Vlachou, 2003).

The issue of deaf and hard of hearing children attending mainstream or special schools has created many intense confrontations among specialists, parents, and deaf and hard of hearing individuals themselves (Lambropoulou, 1997). (In the present article, by “special schools” we mean those schools that are often called “schools for the deaf.”) The views of many authors vary on this issue (e.g., Foster, 2003; Jarvis, 2002; Moores &

Kluwin, 1986). However, as a result of certain financial pressures, parental expectations, and technological developments, the integration of deaf and hard of hearing children into mainstream schools appears to be on the increase (Powers, 2001). In Cyprus (where the present study took place), this state of affairs has been reinforced since the Education Act for Children With Special Needs was enacted in 1999. This law gives all children the right to be educated in their neighborhood school together with their peers.

The supporters of integration believe that in mainstream schools deaf and hard of hearing students have more chances for social interaction with their (hearing) classmates and teachers, and that, in this way, they acquire the necessary skills for social inclusion (Lynas, 1999; Powers, 2001). According to Harrison (1988), the natural linguistic environment of mainstream schools helps deaf and hard of hearing children to better develop their oral language, which in turn gradually helps them to acquire more knowledge. In addition, Harrison argues that the environment of mainstream schools has higher goals, more requirements, and a richer curriculum than that in special schools, and that it provides deaf and hard of hearing students with more stimulus and greater opportunities for learning. Further evidence, presented by Hadjikakou (2002), reveals that the majority of deaf and hard of hearing children integrated into mainstream schools have very promising results regarding their emotional and social adaptation, as well as in regard to their self-esteem. On the other hand, Foster (1989) argues that although students in mainstream schools gain academic advantages, they miss the opportunities for social interactions they would have in special schools.

A number of researchers have pointed out that in mainstream schools deaf and hard of hearing students tend to have higher levels of academic achievement than their peers who attend special schools (e.g., Allen & Osborn, 1984; Lynas, 1999; Moores & Kluwin, 1986; Powers, 2001). In Greece, Lambropoulou (1997) conducted a study that recorded the experiences of graduates from special and mainstream schools, and made a first effort at comparing these two systems of education from the viewpoints of the deaf and hard of hearing individuals themselves. The results of this research were mainly negative regarding the experiences of deaf and hard of hearing children from mainstream schools. Lambropoulou, in particular, points out that there was very little help for deaf and hard of hearing children, there was no differentiation within the curriculum for helping to include these students in the learning process, and generally, they had little participation in the classroom. Through this research, a positive finding emerged as well: The challenges and requirements of mainstream schools acted as a stimulus for many students, and thus, they were obliged to invent new methods and to try different means in order to survive in a place that was dominated by hearing students.

Those who are against the integration of deaf and hard of hearing children base their arguments mainly on findings from qualitative research indicating that integration causes these children to feel excluded. Stewart and Kluwin (2001), for example, though not against integration, support the argument that integration can influence the identity and self-esteem of students with hearing loss and that it isolates them from their society and culture. Furthermore, those who disagree with integration believe that the

education of deaf and hard of hearing students should take place in special schools, and point out that their hearing problems severely limit their participation in mainstream classes. As a result, deaf and hard of hearing students are isolated from the school environment, and this can have implications for their psychosocial development (Jarvis, Sinka, & Iantaffi, 2003; Mertens, 1989; Sinka, Iantaffi, & Jarvis, 2002). Based on this view, the attendance of students with hearing loss in mainstream schools does not lead to their social inclusion since they are naturally set apart due to their difficulties when communicating, which in turn result in very limited participation in classroom discussions (Jarvis, 2002). On the basis of different studies, as well as the descriptions of deaf and hard of hearing students that are presented in these studies, it seems that students who attend integration programs very often refer to experiences of loneliness, rejection, and social isolation. Finally, many researchers have expressed fears that, in mainstream schools, students do not have the necessary provisions to be properly educated (e.g., Jarvis, 2002; McCartney, 1994; Powers, 2001). These researchers refer to provisions such as specialist teachers, technological aids, and access to the community of deaf and hard of hearing people and their culture.

There is also the argument that it is difficult to attribute any difference in academic achievement to the programs themselves (Karchmer & Mitchell, 2003; Kluwin, 1994). Karchmer and Mitchell argue that "student placement dynamics are sensitive to student performance differences, where options exist, thereby increasing the likelihood that program settings reflect sorting and selecting decisions more strongly than instructional efficacy" (p. 33). This state

of affairs has given rise to several questions:

- How different is deaf and hard of hearing graduates' experience in special schools from that in mainstream schools?
- How did these graduates feel as deaf and hard of hearing students in mainstream schools, and how did they feel in special schools?
- What sorts of relationships did they have with their teachers and classmates?
- What opportunities, if any, were they provided with, and what opportunities, if any, were they denied due to their attendance in mainstream schools?

In the present article, we try to answer these questions by analyzing the views and experiences of deaf and hard of hearing people who graduated from special or mainstream schools or who attended both types of schools. Our purpose is to bring to light the views and experiences of deaf and hard of hearing people from special and mainstream schools, to compare the two systems from the viewpoints of those involved, and to consider the possible implications for the development of the educational system of Cyprus regarding inclusive education, paying particular attention to the improvement of the education of deaf and hard of hearing children.

Education of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children in Cyprus

Traditionally, deaf and hard of hearing children have been educated in segregated settings apart from their age mates. Since the early 1950s in Cyprus, there has been a special school for deaf and hard of hearing children (or school for the deaf). Until the end of

the 1980s, large numbers of children attended this school, since deaf and hard of hearing children were not encouraged to attend mainstream schools. However, because of the demands of parents, some children studied in mainstream schools, but without any official provision for individualized programs or for academic or psychological support (Thoma, Hadjikakou, Petridou, & Stylianou, 2004). During the academic year 2003–2004 only 17 children attended the school for the deaf, including children of preprimary age, and the trend was toward even smaller attendance.

Thoma and colleagues (2004) state that the new philosophical streams in support of integration that were dominant in other countries over the last few decades have influenced educational policy in Cyprus. In the late 1980s, organized parent groups asked that their children be integrated into mainstream schools, arguing that special schools were places of isolation that provided low-quality education. Thus, in the late 1980s the first deaf and hard of hearing children were integrated into primary schools. A few years later, as these children progressed through the grades, this integration carried over into secondary schools. The number of deaf and hard of hearing children in mainstream schools has increased, especially since enactment of the Education Act for Children With Special Needs in 1999. However, even today there are complaints that, despite the fact that deaf and hard of hearing children and children considered as having special needs in general are integrated into mainstream schools, they do not receive equal learning opportunities, and some of them are marginalized (Angelides & Charalambous, 2005).

Teachers in Cyprus are mainly educated at the University of Cyprus, but there are small numbers who are edu-

cated in Greece. There are special requirements neither for the teachers who teach at the school for the deaf nor for mainstream teachers. The teachers at the school for the deaf are regular teachers, and some of them have a specialization in special education. There are also a few special deaf teachers who, because of their specialty, act as liaison officers between the Ministry of Education and the schools (including the school for the deaf). At the beginning of each academic year, the liaison officers give seminars regarding the needs of deaf and hard of hearing children to the mainstream teachers who will have deaf and hard of hearing children in their classes. As of September 2005, the curriculum at the school for the deaf was officially the same as that of the mainstream schools. Previously, the school for the deaf had the right to use an easier curriculum.

Research Design

The theoretical and epistemological background to the present study followed the interpretive model of research based on the three basic premises of symbolic interactionism, as developed by Blumer (1969). The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings the things have for them. The second premise is that the meanings of such things derive from, or arise out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with things he or she encounters.

The collection of our data followed two stages. In the first, we approached 20 deaf and hard of hearing people and talked generally about their experiences as students at the school for the deaf, or at mainstream schools, or at

both. The second author of the present article is a deaf interpreter; thus, all interviews and discussions with the deaf and hard of hearing people occurred in sign language. Each interview lasted about 15 minutes. Notes were taken during and immediately after each interview. These interviews followed an unstructured form, and we mainly tried to discuss certain themes (see Appendix A).

The 20 participants were members of the Association of the Deaf and were selected because they had comparable educational experiences. They were all 30 years old or younger. Many of the younger participants had had the experience of studying at the school for the deaf in its current form. The older participants had had a different experience, since previously the school for the deaf had functioned as a closed residential institution. In Table 1, we provide further information on the 20 participants.

After the first five or six interviews, some themes arose repeatedly (e.g., marginalization, exclusion, opportunities for communication, interpersonal relations). For these themes, the second author tried to collect further data by asking the participants related questions. From this perspective, during this stage we had the opportunity to focus the themes of our study and to frame our research questions accordingly. For example, when the issue of marginalization in mainstream schools arose in the second stage of interviews, we asked particular questions regarding the participants' relations with peers and teachers, their feelings, and the teaching methods their teachers followed. We also asked questions regarding their participation in learning.

In the second stage, we selected four people and had in-depth interviews with them. The criteria for selecting them were based on their interest in participating in our research and the

Table 1
Characteristics of the Participants: First Stage of Research

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Age (years)</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Years in the school for the deaf</i>	<i>Years in mainstream schools</i>	<i>Employed</i>
1	19	Male	0	14	Student
2 ^a	20	Male	0	16	Student
3	21	Female	0	12	Student
4	21	Male	1	11	Yes
5	22	Female	3	6	Yes
6	23	Female	3	7	Yes
7 ^a	24	Female	8	0	No
8	24	Male	1	12	Yes
9	25	Female	5	3	Yes
10	25	Male	4	4	Yes
11	26	Male	7	3	Yes
12 ^a	26	Female	7	9	Yes
13	27	Female	7	5	No
14	28	Female	7	3	Yes
15	28	Male	6	0	Yes
16 ^a	28	Female	6	0	No
17	28	Female	6	2	No
18	29	Female	6	1	Yes
19	30	Female	5	0	No
20	30	Male	5	0	Yes

^aParticipated in the second stage of research.

rich experience they seemed to have (from the first stage of research) regarding their attendance in primary and secondary school. In particular, these four people were willing to participate in our research and offer detailed examples to support their stories and their school experiences. In contrast, other participants from the first stage did not seem very willing to provide details about their school experiences. At no time, however, did they state that they were unwilling to participate. They mainly answered our questions very briefly and often stated that they did not remember many details about their attendance in school. We gave the four people we selected the pseudonyms Costas, Athina, Chryso, and Maria.

As we have noted, all interviews and discussions with the deaf and hard of hearing people were in sign language. The interviews of the second stage

were videorecorded and then transcribed. With the four people, we did interviews individually and in pairs (for a total of six interviews). At the end, we had 12 hours of videorecorded interviews. The individual interviews followed a semistructured form. We had a list of questions and themes that we tried to cover with the participants (see Appendix B). Of course, these questions were modified on the basis of the educational background of the participant. During the discussion of each question or theme, we asked further questions for clarification.

The interviews mainly revolved around issues related to the experiences of the people involved in the schools they attended. Particular attention was paid to their experiences resulting from their involvement in school processes, to their relationships and the way they were treated by their teachers and classmates, to their par-

ticipation in school activities, and to the emotions they encountered during this period of their lives. Generally, they were asked to present and criticize their experiences in primary and secondary school.

In paired interviews, Costas was paired with Athina because they both had experiences in mainstream schools, and Chryso with Maria because they both had only experiences in the school for the deaf. The interviews in pairs gave us very rich data because the experiences of the one participant helped the other to remember and comment on more events and experiences from his or her school attendance. Paired interviews actually helped us go deeper into the experiences of the participants.

Costas had a hearing loss of 100 dB. He attended mainstream schools from 4 to 20 years of age, and he is now a student at a higher education institution. During his attendance in primary and secondary schools, he received support from a teacher of the deaf and a special teacher. In mainstream schools, Costas used the oral method for communication. Chryso had a hearing loss of 85 dB; Maria's was 90 dB. Chryso and Maria had only attended the school for the deaf, Chryso for 5 years and Maria for 8 years, and they are both currently unemployed. In the school for the deaf, they used Total Communication. Finally, Athina had a hearing loss of 90 dB. She attended the school for the deaf for 7 years and a mainstream school for another 9 years. She now works as a teaching assistant in a school that, among others, some deaf and hard of hearing students attend. In mainstream schools she used oral communication because, as she said, nobody knew sign language. Chryso, Maria, and Athina attended the same school, the school for the deaf. All four participants prefer using sign lan-

guage for their everyday communication because they do not speak clearly when they use oral communication.

When analyzing our data, we followed the two stages suggested by Erickson (1986): inductive and deductive. When we organized our data, we read them three times in order to better understand the phenomenon and the social context we were studying. We used codes and different-colored markers to code and categorize our data. We then formulated certain assertions that stated relations and observations from the studied data. We then examined our data in detail in order to find certain indications that supported or rejected the assertions we had formulated.

A Comparative Perspective on the School Experiences of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Study Participants

In this section we present the assertions that emerged from our analysis, and substantiate them with data.

Higher Academic Level in Mainstream Schools

Analysis of our data seemed to indicate that the impression prevails among deaf and hard of hearing graduates that mainstream schools have a higher academic level and provide more opportunities for learning. Athina, who had experiences in both types of schools, declared that the lessons in the school for the deaf were very easy, and that very often the curriculum was repeated:

Despite the fact that our teachers were good and helpful, the lessons were very easy. I remember that we had a test for a lesson and after a period of time we would have the same test again.

She also made comments about the age appropriateness of the curriculum:

Our curriculum was for younger children. When I was in the fourth grade, they gave us notes from the books of the second grade. . . . Because I was a good student, my teachers suggested to my parents to send me to a mainstream school. . . . At the mainstream school I had many difficulties because, as I said earlier, in the school for the deaf the curriculum was very easy. Fortunately, I orientated myself very quickly.

Furthermore, Athina compared the two types of schools in which she had studied and noted that in mainstream schools the level of lessons was higher, and as a result, students had the chance to learn more things and made greater progress:

As we grew up the lessons were more difficult, but that was good because we learned more things. At the beginning I was surprised because I learned all the time and I wasn't used to it, to learn so many things and so quickly [smiles]. . . . I believe that I was helped very much in mainstream schools; I was always under pressure to search for something new. . . . It was one of the reasons that I went overseas and studied, and I am very happy about it. . . . I believe that in mainstream schools children learn more . . . [and] the level is higher, while in the school for the deaf the level is low and you do not learn new things, you repeat the same.

This point is highlighted by Holt and Allen (1989), who emphasize that when deaf and hard of hearing people are placed in difficult programs and receive more curriculum, or are placed in higher-level programs, then their progress is increased. Harrison (1988) reached a similar conclusion and argued that the environment of mainstream schools, having higher goals

and requirements and richer curriculum than that of special schools, provides deaf and hard of hearing students with more opportunities for learning.

The position that mainstream schools provide more opportunities for learning to deaf and hard of hearing people is reinforced by Costas's observations:

Sometimes when I was with friends and we discussed school issues, if I said, for example, that I was stressed because I had a difficult test, my friends, who studied at the school for the deaf, were surprised and said that they didn't do such difficult tests. . . . The lessons I did in mainstream schools were the same [as those done by] the rest of the children . . . even the tests. I believe that it is much better that my parents sent me to a mainstream school because there was a higher level, and I believe I learned more things than at the school for the deaf.

Costas added that his attendance in mainstream schools gave him the chance to continue his studies in higher education, a fact that makes him happy:

Now, I go to university and I am very happy. I believe that what I learned in the mainstream high school helped me very much, and I do not face any academic problems. If I was in the school for the deaf it would be difficult for me to continue my studies, or I would face many problems because the level of lessons there is very low.

Chryso and Maria, who only studied in the school for the deaf, had similar viewpoints. Despite her lack of personal experience but based on the comments of her friends who studied in mainstream schools, Chryso said she felt that a mainstream school

would have offered her more than what the school for the deaf offered her. The following comment is very characteristic:

In the school for the deaf we didn't learn many things; we all the time had the same curriculum and it was very easy. We were children, but we felt angry because we had the same lessons although we moved to higher grades.

Then, in a more intense tone, she added,

We didn't learn many things. I believe that a mainstream school would have been better for me . . . but my mother wanted me to go there. My younger brother, who has a hearing loss, went for a short time to the school for the deaf and then he went to a mainstream school. . . . Now he knows more things than me. . . . The school for the deaf didn't help me, and it is now difficult for me to find a job. . . . Where can I find one?

Even though she remembered the nice time she had at the school for the deaf, Maria emphasized the level difference between the two types of schools:

Generally, I had a nice time at the school for the deaf. What was bad, though, is that we didn't have many books. They always gave us photocopies and we copied all the time from the blackboard. I see my daughter's book, and it is completely different. . . . She studies all the time. . . . In our case, everything was easy. . . . If I had the chance to go to such a school today, I wouldn't have such a problem to understand what my daughter does in the school.

Research has shown that the environment of mainstream schools has

higher goals and requirements and a richer curriculum than that of special schools, and thus it provides students with more opportunities for learning. In particular, many researchers have found that deaf and hard of hearing students in mainstream schools tend to have higher levels of academic achievement than their age mates in special schools (Allen & Osborn, 1984; Garay, 2003; Moores & Kluwin, 1986). These researchers add that when deaf and hard of hearing children are placed in more difficult programs with a more demanding curriculum, or in higher-level programs, their achievement increases.

More Opportunities for Communication and Interpersonal Relations in Special Schools

A second theme that emerged from our data analysis is that in special schools the deaf and hard of hearing graduates had more opportunities to develop interpersonal relations. In particular, the graduates of the school for the deaf pointed out that they had very good and friendly relations with their teachers and schoolmates, in contrast to the graduates of mainstream schools, who appeared to be isolated from their environment. The graduates of the school for the deaf emphasized that during their stay there they had many friends and many opportunities for communication. In contrast, the graduates of mainstream schools noted that although they had very good experiences during their schooling, the fact that their communication with their teachers and classmates was not easy created a feeling of discomfort. This comment by Athina is characteristic:

In high school I very rarely made friends who had no hearing problems, since we could not communicate. . . .

What would we say? Thus, I didn't have many friends. I remember that with some guys who had no hearing problems, whenever we met we always said the same things since we could not communicate. For this reason, my friends were only other deaf and hard of hearing children. . . . When I was in the school for the deaf, I had many friends and we could communicate perfectly. If that special school had had a higher academic level, like mainstream schools, I would have preferred to go there because I would have had more friends.

Athina continued:

In the lessons I had difficulties participating because of communication problems. . . . Only in math I participated because I solved the exercises on the blackboard. I didn't like participating orally because I couldn't speak clearly. When I was at the high school, I asked for an interpreter during language lessons. During those lessons, I participated a lot through my interpreter.

The words of the deaf and hard of hearing graduates seem to support the position that students at mainstream schools often experience marginalization because of their difficulties in communicating with their teachers and classmates, which is something that did not happen at the school for the deaf. This point is supported by Martens (1989), who noted that hearing loss prevents deaf and hard of hearing students from communicating with students with no hearing problems, and leads to marginalization. Nunes, Pretzlik, and Olsson (2001) have argued that the attendance of deaf and hard of hearing children at mainstream schools inhibits their social relationships and

that this gradually isolates them from their classmates.

Costas's experience of mainstream schools was mixed regarding communication with teachers and classmates:

At the beginning of each year it was difficult for me because my classmates didn't know the way I communicated, that is, I required them to speak slowly and in front of me in order to see their lips. The same happened with my teachers, and there were times that I was bored in the classroom because they talked very quickly and I couldn't understand them. It was very bad. . . . After a couple of months, when I got to know my classmates and they learned how to make themselves understood, we could communicate a little bit. . . . The teacher for the deaf informed the other teachers about my situation, and it helped the whole situation. They changed the way they talked; they asked me sometimes if I understood what they said, and thus I could participate a little bit more. Better than nothing!

Thoma and colleagues (2004) point out that negative experiences result from attendance in mainstream schools because of the inability of deaf and hard of hearing children to have complete and direct access to the educational and social experiences of mainstream schools, and the environment of their classes in particular.

In contrast, the graduates of the school for the deaf stated that they had many friends, and communication was very easy. These comments from the graduates of the school for the deaf are characteristic:

In the school for the deaf, I had a nice time because I had many friends. I met many individuals that are still friends and with whom I

meet quite often. We communicated very easily. . . . It was the same with our teachers, although some of them didn't know sign language. . . . We had no problem. [Chryso]

I believe that it is better for deaf and hard of hearing children to go to the school for the deaf because there they can communicate, they can discuss in sign language . . . while in mainstream schools, how are you going to communicate? . . . In the school for the deaf, I had no communication problem. . . . I had so many friends, and we still meet. It was very nice that we were so many children together. [Maria]

It seems, therefore, that the deaf and hard of hearing students in mainstream schools did not have good interpersonal relations with their schoolmates, unlike their counterparts who attended the special school.

Marginalization and Exclusion in Mainstream Schools

A third theme that seemed to emerge from our data analysis was the marginalization and exclusion that the deaf and hard of hearing graduates we studied seemed to suffer in mainstream schools. This situation, however, did not seem to result directly from the behavior of the other children or teachers, but rather from the level of self-esteem of the deaf and hard of hearing individuals themselves. In the discussions with Costas, a graduate of a mainstream school, he said that he felt too ashamed to participate in lessons because he talked very weirdly. His comments are characteristic:

In the beginning, I didn't want to talk in the class. . . . The other children said that I didn't read well. When they understood that that was my

way of reading they didn't say anything; they were very good guys and always helped me. . . . I, though, didn't feel well. . . . Most of the time I didn't participate in the group; I wanted to be alone.

Moreover, he added,

Once in the high school a teacher asked me to recite a poem during a celebration, but I refused. I was ashamed to talk "like that" in front of the whole school. . . . I didn't sit with my classmates during the celebration. I sat elsewhere. They all had something to do or to say during the celebration.

Athina, who had experiences in both types of schools, had similar views. Although her general experiences in mainstream schools were positive, she emphasized that often she preferred to stay alone:

In the school for the deaf I was an athlete, and I was also in the theater group. When I went to the mainstream high school, I was not involved in any activities. . . . I did not want to participate, and my teachers did not even ask me if I wanted to get involved. . . . During breaks, I preferred to stay alone. . . . We could not communicate. . . . It bothered me that I didn't have friends with no hearing problems.

Then she added,

In the school for the deaf I liked participating in the school celebrations, because all the children were the same. Afterward, when I was in mainstream high schools, I did not want to participate because I felt bad that I was different. . . . I spoke weirdly and I wanted to be alone. . . . Nobody made fun of me; I simply wanted to

have the company of other deaf and hard of hearing children.

The experiences of the deaf and hard of hearing graduates of mainstream schools seem to indicate that during their attendance in these schools they encountered feelings of marginalization and isolation because they could not communicate easily with their classmates. In addition, from their comments it seems that their identity and self-esteem were influenced negatively. This finding is supported by those of Jarvis and colleagues (2003), who present the views of deaf and hard of hearing children regarding their integration into mainstream schools.

The marginalization of deaf and hard of hearing children in mainstream schools seemed to happen during lessons as well. Both graduates from mainstream schools noted that they were obliged to study for many hours at home in order to cope with the school program, because they did not have the necessary help to enable them to understand the lessons. To keep up, they were obliged to have extra lessons at home in the afternoons. For example, Costas stressed,

The teachers in my schools said things once for everybody and those who understood were OK. I, however, was obliged to study a lot at home in order to understand the lessons. . . . Fortunately, the teacher who taught me extra lessons in the afternoons was very good, so I wasn't left with any gaps.

Athina added,

At home I studied with my parents, but I also had a special teacher who came to my house and gave me extra lessons. She explained to me whatever I didn't understand in the class-

room in order for me to be able to follow the lessons the next day.

It seems, therefore, that the deaf and hard of hearing students were marginalized by the practice of their teachers as well. This is a fact that is very often pointed out in the literature, not only for deaf and hard of hearing children but also, and more generally, for children who experience learning difficulties (Ainscow, 1999; Allan, 1998; Angelides & Charalambous, 2005; Messiou, 2002). Despite the talk in favor of inclusive education in which all children receive equal opportunities to learn, the reality seems to be different. Children who, for whatever reason, have learning difficulties, and deaf and hard of hearing children in particular, seem to be marginalized because teachers do not adapt their teaching to address the needs of all of their students.

Conclusions

Summarizing our results, we could say that the comparison of the two "choices" (mainstream and special school) seems to be dominated by the view that attendance in mainstream schools has the power to provide greater advantages than attendance in special schools. The views and experiences not only of the graduates of mainstream schools but also the graduates of the special school lead to the conclusion that attendance in mainstream schools appears to be more fruitful because it provides more opportunities for learning. Those who attended both types of schools pointed out that the level in mainstream schools is higher and provides more opportunities for learning, while the graduates of the special school complained about the quality of education they received.

Despite the fact that the deaf and hard of hearing graduates highlighted

the higher level of mainstream schools, they pointed to some problems as well. These problems could be said to center on two basic issues: communication and alienation. These problems do not seem to appear in the special school. Our findings seem to replicate those of other researchers working with bigger samples in the United States (e.g., Foster, 1989).

To return to the questions we raised at the beginning of the present study, it seems that the deaf and hard of hearing graduates consider mainstream schools as the place where students like themselves should be educated, despite the fact that, in analyzing their attendance in such schools, we spotted many factors that reinforce marginalization. When we compare attendance in mainstream schools with attendance at special schools, it seems that the level of teaching is higher in mainstream schools, while in the special school the students experience better interpersonal relations. In other words, there is a trade-off between academic advantage and social advantage in mainstream schools (Foster, 1989).

What we want to emphasize, however, is that both types of schools, in one way or another, function as places of marginalization for deaf and hard of hearing children. On the one hand there are mainstream schools, where deaf and hard of hearing children are marginalized because there is a lack of communication with their teachers and classmates and because teachers are not sufficiently qualified to deal with deaf and hard of hearing children in their classrooms. These students are also marginalized because of the curriculum. Though the fact that mainstream schools have a higher academic level is partly positive, such schools marginalize deaf and hard of hearing students because teachers neither differentiate their curriculum nor use teaching techniques that facil-

itate understanding by these students. On the other hand there is the special school, which, quite apart from the fact that its very name stigmatizes its students with the term "special," further marginalizes by virtue of its low-level curriculum, hindering the academic development of its students. It is noteworthy that the two graduates of the special school in the present study are unemployed, in contrast to the other two participants in the research, who attended a mainstream school, who seem not to have any problems regarding employment.

The present study has some limitations. First, the research sample was limited. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to all deaf and hard of hearing individuals who graduated from mainstream or special schools. Second, the retrospective nature of the data means that perceptions may have been influenced by the passage of time. However, the members of this small, nonrepresentative sample of deaf individuals in Cyprus expressed similar perceptions about schooling, as have the members of larger samples of deaf individuals in the United States (e.g., Foster, 1989; Leigh, 1999). This fact reinforces our conclusions.

Over the last few years, many countries have adopted the philosophy of inclusive education in their educational systems, and Cyprus needs to do the same. It is necessary, however, to make a distinction between the terms *inclusion* and *integration*. Although these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, and while their distinction is not immediately obvious, they in fact mean different things. "Integration" implies something done to disabled people by nondisabled people according to their standards and conditions—an assimilation model" (Rustemier, 2002, p. 2). It also implies that the goal is to integrate someone who has been excluded from the mainstream back

into it. "Inclusion" better conveys a right to belong to the mainstream and a joint undertaking to end discrimination and to work towards equal opportunities for all pupils" (Rustemier, 2002, p. 2). The focus in inclusive schools is on how to build a system that includes all pupils and which is structured to meet everyone's needs.

Based on this distinction, therefore, the educational system in Cyprus should escape from the integration practices that seem to prevail there and to move to inclusive practices under which all children, including those who are deaf or hard of hearing, will receive equal opportunities in how they are taught and how they learn (Antia, Stinson, & Gaustad, 2002; Powers, 2002; Stinson & Antia, 1999). The educational system of Cyprus should be restructured in order to serve the needs of all children, and the needs of deaf and hard of hearing children in particular (Foster et al., 2003). The role of the school for the deaf and its way of functioning should also be reconsidered, since, from whichever angle it is viewed, its methods are divisive and it marginalizes its students.

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Appendix A

First-Stage Interviews

The participants were asked to provide information on five themes:

- their education (mainstreaming, school for the deaf)
- school experiences (feelings, emotions, general comments, reflections, etc.)
- relationships (teachers, peers, etc.)
- practices of teachers
- participation in teaching, learning, and school activities

Appendix B

Second-Stage Interviews

The participants were asked 12 questions. (The questions were not necessarily asked in the same order every time. Also, modifications to the questions were made based on the educational background of the participant).

- Can you talk generally about your experiences in school (primary and secondary)?
- Can you describe the way that your school(s) functioned?
- How would you assess it now, in hindsight?
- Was it beneficial to you? Why?
- What was your relationship with your teachers/peers?
- Can you tell us about your participation in learning and school activities?
- Can you tell us about your friends in school?
- Did your teachers make any modifications to their lessons in order to facilitate your learning?
- Did you receive any extra support? If yes, what?
- What feelings arose as a result of your attendance in this school?
- Did you ever feel marginalized?
- Can you make a comparison between the school for the deaf and mainstream schools?