Deaf-ining Literacy:
Teacher Perspectives on Issues in Secondary Deaf Literacy Education

By
Matine Sedaghat

A research project submitted in conformity with the requirements for the Degree of Master of Teaching
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 Canada License

© Copyright by Matine Sedaghat, April 2015
ABSTRACT

This study examines ways in which the beliefs, attitudes, and values of Teachers of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing shape deaf literacy education in Ontario. This qualitative study takes a phenomenology approach, highlighting perspectives of Ontario teachers working with deaf students in both the oral/aural and American Sign Language streams, in order to extract beliefs and instructional approaches that shape the deaf classrooms. Three participants were interviewed and their experiences and practices demonstrate the engagement (and disengagement) of deaf/hard-of-hearing students with reading, writing, and literacy, what roles teacher values play in the field, and the teaching strategies and resources that they implement in their classrooms.

The theoretical framework of the study encompasses critical disability theory and literacy theory. Specifically, the study distinguishes between the clinical and cultural models of disability, viewing deafness as a cultural difference rather than an “impairment.” Also, the framework of New Literacy Studies is a foundation of the study, which views literacy not as a skills-based conception, but a variety of social practices which are always ideological, and only have meaning as they are taken hold of by individuals for particular purposes (Street, 1995).

This study has extensive significance, as there is limited awareness of the issues in Deaf education and the need for educational reform. Findings suggest a need to eliminate the paternalism observed in the field of deaf education, as well as a need for educators to view deafness outside of the clinical-medical model. This study has implications for understanding deafness, redefining literacy and literacy practices, and finding academic supports to build learning environments that foster deaf students’ growth and success.

Keywords: Deaf education, literacy education, special education, language, New Literacy Studies
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The past two years have been an incredible chapter of my life. Throughout this research process, as well as my practical teaching experience in the field I am most passionate about, I am blessed to have learned so much about Deaf education and I will always look for opportunities that allow me to continue learning as a life-long learner. To have the chance to contribute to the field has been a tremendous experience. Thank you to all my participants; without taking the time to share your perspectives and experiences, this project could not have been pursued.

I would like to recognize all the individuals who made this research project successful. First and foremost, my sincerest gratitude goes out to my family. Maman and Baba, you both have supported me endlessly throughout this entire chapter (and all others!) of my life. Without your love, generosity, and encouragement, I would never be where I am today. That includes the very first push you gave me to pursue Sign Language classes. To my little sister, Nikki: you will always be my best friend, confidant, and role model, and of course, I will always look up to you as our family’s Einstein. You are a brilliant inspiration. Your determination and strength would make any teacher wish their students were just like you (but seriously, remember to give yourself a break).

An everlasting thank you goes to my incredible professor and research supervisor, Dr. Rob Simon, for his prudent guidance. You were the first professor I met throughout my academic career who truly showed his appreciation for his students and valued the way our individual experiences shape the classroom. None of us ever wanted to leave your classes and I believe I can speak for everyone when I say that you are a true inspiration to any aspiring teacher and I hope to build such strong connections with my students as you have with yours.
I would also like to thank my professor, David Montemurro, for his continuous support. You will always be known as our cohort’s miracle worker who constantly respected our needs and did everything in your power to meet them. You took time out of your personal schedule to address any concern that arose, which will never be forgotten. I will be forever grateful for the wisdom you shared and the magic you made happen with our experience in our last little while at OISE. My teaching goals would be accomplished if I could grow to be half the teacher you are.

Thank you to Shelley Guinn and Regent Gendron. You have both been such wonderful mentors throughout my learning journey. Thank you for your dedication, patience, and willingness to educate and inform me about Deaf history, experience, and culture.

Finally, a huge shout-out goes to all my friends, loved ones, and all you wonderful people in the 2013-2015 MT Intermediate-Senior cohort with whom I shared the same laughs, frustrations, struggles, and various successes throughout our two years together – we survived! You are all phenomenal educators and beautiful human beings who have shared your wisdom, talents, and experiences with me and taught me more than I could ever imagine. Thank you for all your support throughout these past couple of years. I will sincerely miss our time together.

Thank you.
If you asked me what I would consider to be the most important thing for deaf children, I would say literacy. I know the choice of communication and education methods come first for a newly diagnosed deaf child because that choice will affect his or her life ahead. But then, regardless of the communication choice, a deaf child should learn to read and write... I strongly believe that literacy tremendously helps a deaf child become aware of the world, even if he or she is in the Deaf community, which has its own language and culture.

- Bainy B. Cyrus, *All Eyes*
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESEARCH QUESTION</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RATIONALE</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCHER</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIGNIFICANCE</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OVERVIEW</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEAFNESS: DEAF, DEAF, AND HARD OF HEARING</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCIO-CULTURAL MODEL</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLINICAL-PATHOLOGICAL/MEDICAL-DEFICIT MODEL</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUDISM, THE MEDICAL-DEFICIT MODEL OF DEAFNESS, AND COCHLEAR IMPLANTS</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LANGUAGE AND GRAMMAR: AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE VS. ENGLISH</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE AND ENGLISH</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERPRETATION VS. TRANSLATION</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LITERACY</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SKILLS-BASED CONCEPTIONS OF LITERACY</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCIAL LITERACY</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENGLISH LITERACY DEVELOPMENT FOR DEAF CHILDREN</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEW LITERACY STUDIES AND APPLICATIONS TO EDUCATION</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A BRIEF HISTORY OF DEAF EDUCATION AND ATTITUDES ON ASL</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELEMENTARY EDUCATION: EMERGENT LITERACY ENVIRONMENT</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERMEDIATE AND SECONDARY EDUCATION: METACOGNITION, MOTIVATION, AND IDENTITY</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACHES</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BILINGUAL EDUCATION APPROACH</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GUIDED READING APPROACH</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CURRENT DEAF EDUCATION IN ONTARIO</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BILINGUAL EDUCATION APPROACH</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ONTARIO CURRICULUM EXPECTATIONS</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE CURRICULUM</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENERAL ONTARIO LANGUAGE CURRICULUM (ENGLISH)</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES OF THE ONTARIO CURRICULUM</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>METACOGNITIVE LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MANIPULATIVE VISUAL LANGUAGE</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CROSS-LINGUISTIC TRANSFER STRATEGIES</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE ONTARIO SPOKEN ENGLISH PROGRAM</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RATIONALE</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Research Question

The main research question for this study is: In what ways do the beliefs, attitudes, and values of Teachers of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing shape deaf literacy education in Ontario?

This study examines perspectives of teachers working with deaf students in Ontario and the different beliefs and instructional approaches they have and use in secondary classrooms. As a result, the experiences and practices of the participants are examined to discuss the way literacy is defined, how to engage deaf students in literacy practices, and what role teacher values play in shaping secondary deaf literacy classrooms. Analysis of the data is followed by a discussion of future implications for practice in deaf education.

Sub-questions include: What counts as literacy in deaf education? Are literacy events in deaf education based on text-based skills or cultural and social practices of literacy? How do educators of the deaf best frame their practices to support students’ involvement with literacy? How do educators of the deaf support their students’ literacy development?

Rationale

Both English and ASL follow a set of grammatical rules, similar to every unique language’s grammar and syntax. However, signed ASL grammar follows different rules from that of spoken and written English. When we speak English, we are aware of its grammatical and syntactic rules and express them in our speech as well as in written literature. However, the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community follows a specific grammar when using ASL that differs from the English grammar with which they are required to read and write.

Not only is this an immediate sign of potential academic struggles beyond deaf students’ reading and writing, there could also be personal and social effects on the students that develop
from this academic deficiency. In terms of personal effects, students can develop internal confidence issues when dealing with academics, if they compare themselves to the hearing population when it comes to literacy proficiency. The external social effects could range from exclusion from academic possibilities when deaf students are older or being denied access to job opportunities due to lack of reading and writing proficiency.

This phenomenological study explores the experiences and practices of ASL-English bilingual educators with teaching English to deaf secondary students. The data was collected through three interviews highlighting aspects of ASL-English bilingual education and personal experiences and perspectives of each educator in a variety of settings involving teaching literacy.

**Background of the Researcher**

My interest in this topic developed from my experience in American Sign Language courses. I have trained in ASL for two years at the Canadian Hearing Society and have continued my training at George Brown College (expected certification in 2016). When I began, I noticed that my ASL instructors, who were Deaf or Hard of Hearing, would struggle with writing grammatically correct sentences in English. Specifically, when emailing students and writing instructions or quick communications on the class board, they would tend to use incorrect English grammar and spelling. After noticing the patterns of English grammar my instructors had, it made me wonder if this was commonly seen within the Deaf community.

My educational background in linguistics, psycholinguistics, language, and literacy also heightened my interest in this topic. I completed my undergrad in English, psychology, and physiology, with a variety of courses in languages, linguistics, and development, focusing on the field of speech-language pathology. I then spent a summer internship working at ErinoakKids Centre for Treatment and Development, working with children who had communication or
language acquisition delays. These included delays in reading and writing English, and especially, spoken linguistic development. I have been passionate about researching this topic in hopes of contributing to the field of education, specifically within the secondary deaf community. There is a lack of awareness about deaf and hard of hearing education in Ontario and I hope to expand the research so that Teachers of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing are provided with the best instructional practices that may support students’ literacy, rather than continuing the marginalization of this population within our society.

**Significance**

Deaf literacy education is a very significant topic because literacy is important for success in today’s society, whether in academics, career, or simply progressing through daily events (court hearings, writing letters, reading newspapers, etc.). There has been some research done on deaf students’ struggles with developing their reading skills (Cannon and Kirby, 2013), showing that most deaf individuals plateau at about a fourth-grade reading level (Freel et al., 2011; Allen, 2002; Musselman, 2000; Marschark & Harris, 1996; Conrad, 1979). This is a serious problem, because it can prevent deaf individuals from being successful in their academic paths or with finding career opportunities if they do not develop proficient English literacy skills in Ontario, an English-dominant society. Additionally, literacy is required not only in language classrooms, but in subjects such as science, social studies, and media, where students are required to build decoding and inferring skills in order to make meaning of what they are studying. Despite this notion, this paper focuses on English literacy education.

It is important to understand the possible effects on language and literacy performance due to the difference in educational practices in order to understand the ways in which we can better the curriculum of ASL-English classrooms and provide our deaf students with more
opportunities to succeed. ASL-English educators can be more informed about better ways to instruct and support deaf and hard of hearing students in order to advance their literacy and language development, in English and/or ASL. There is a gap in the literature regarding secondary deaf education. Most of the research is rather dated and highlights issues in emergent literacy education with a lack of research on secondary deaf education programs. There has been some research done on the phonological instruction in ASL-English classrooms and the ways it helps to maximize information processing (Crume, 2012), but with the additional study of the perspectives and practices of teachers, who spend the majority of time with deaf students, we can further understand the issues surrounding deaf education and ways to develop a well-rounded form of pedagogy to provide these students with safe and helpful learning environments that will help them succeed.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview

I begin this chapter by highlighting the definitions of *Deaf* and *deaf* for the purpose of focusing the study. I then address the theoretical frameworks of the study by which the discussion of deafness is guided, including the socio-cultural and medical-deficit models, including the explanation of *audism*. I continue to describe the differences between ASL and English grammar in order to clarify some of the common misunderstandings and attitudes about the nature of ASL as a “real” language. Following, I draw upon previous research that highlights the immense difficulties deaf students face with literacy development, particularly focusing on reading and writing skills, but I also provide a socio-cultural perspective on languages, including the power dynamics between dominant and minority languages and the notion of New Literacy Studies.

Additionally, I discuss a brief history of Deaf education to provide a better background to the reader and discuss current educational programs and approaches in the Canadian deaf education system that shape deaf students’ learning environments and literacy practices. I conclude the chapter by discussing the significance of this research and awareness for deaf students’ literacy development. Consequently, I highlight the importance of developing teaching practices for Teachers of the Deaf to apply in their classroom that enhance the learning environment of their students in hopes to develop literacy skills above the standards at which they currently rest.

**Deafness: Deaf, deaf, and Hard of Hearing**

In order to clarify the semantics of deafness, I will draw upon the ASL University resource website (www.lifeprint.com) to discuss the different meanings behind the terms *Deaf*,
and *deaf*:

*[Deaf]* refers to embracing the cultural norms, beliefs, and values of the Deaf Community. The term "Deaf" should be capitalized when it is used as a shortened reference to being a member of the Deaf Community… *[deaf]* is [the condition of partially or completely lacking in the sense of hearing to the extent that one cannot understand speech for everyday communication purposes. (d/Deaf, ASL University, n.d.)

One can be Deaf without being deaf; for example, hearing children of deaf individuals are often considered culturally Deaf. When the terms are capitalized, it signifies the association to a culturally Deaf group. The terms *deaf* and *hard of hearing* represent two different groups of individuals with hearing loss, and there is a difference in the needs between the two groups. For the purpose of this paper, a deaf person is defined as one whose inability to hear prevents successful processing of audiological linguistics. In contrast, hard of hearing identifies a person who is able to sufficiently enable processing of audiological linguistics, often with the use of amplification and hearing aids (Rodda & Eleweke, 2000). Throughout this paper, I will alternate between the use of *deaf* or *Deaf*, depending on the context in which their differing uses are appropriate.

It was Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) who first introduced the term *intersectionality* as representing a spectrum of intersecting identities that make up an individual. These include a person’s race, class, and gender, but also their various abilities and the communities to which they belong. It is important to note that d/Deafness is made up of an intersectional spectrum of identities, ranging from hearing children of deaf parents to individuals with various levels of hearing loss and/or hearing through the use of hearing aids or cochlear implants. Although the
study of Deaf culture and evolution is certainly significant and necessary to pursue in education, research, and society, it is beyond the focus of this study.

**Disability Studies**

The current conflict in deaf education is between the clinical-pathological or medical-deficit model and the socio-cultural model. This section identifies and explains each model in relation to the previous research done in the field of deafness and deaf education.

_Socio-Cultural Model_

The socio-cultural model is similar to critical disability theory as it views deafness as a difference rather than a disability. The conceptual framework of this model draws upon the notion of cultural differentiation in that Deaf people have a unique identity, which encompasses a unique language, history, and social organization (Drasgow, 1998; Ladd, 2003). The socio-cultural model constitutes the beliefs of many Deaf communities in that the impacts of deafness are based on the social, linguistic, anthropological, and cultural aspects of ‘deafness experience’ (Reagan, 1990). The difference in linguistic construct is an important feature in the discussion of culture. According to Matsumoto, “Culture and language share an intimate relationship. Culture influences the structure and functional use of language, and as such, language can be thought of as the result or manifestation of culture” (p. 265). Therefore, the use of ASL in the deaf community is the language that influences Deaf culture, which in turn develops signing conventions.

_Clinical-Pathological/Medical-Deficit Model_

Research suggests most deafness investigations have implemented a deficit model (Gail et al., 1992). Whereas the socio-cultural model considers that deaf people have a culture and language different from hearing people, in contrast, since English is an auditory-based language,
the medical-deficit model emphasizes the important role of normal hearing for the
development of literacy skills (Rodda & Eleweke, 2000). The medical-deficit model takes focus
on the effects of sensory deprivation where deafness leads to cognitive deprivation (Rodda &
Eleweke, 2000), and view Deaf people as ‘disabled’ (Ladd, 2003). This is the view in which
deafness is branded as a disability and a biological deficit caused by the inability to hear
(Drasgow, 1998). This view also reinforces the term “hearing impaired,” which is not accepted
by the Deaf community; either Deaf or Hard of Hearing is to be used.

Reagan (1990) described this model as “the hearing view of deafness,” and recognizes
that it is concerned almost entirely with the audiological features of deafness; as a result, this
model emphasizes what the deaf person cannot do compared to what a hearing person could do.
Therefore, this model sees deafness as an impairment or disability by concentrating on the
believed that this model sees all parts of deaf individuals’ lives as consequences of their inability
to hear and are therefore treated as medical cases rather than a different cultural community.

Furthermore, Siebers (2008) discussed the distinction between the social construction and
medical models of disability:

The medical model situates disability exclusively in individual bodies and strives to cure
them by particular treatment, isolating the patient as diseased or defective, while social
constructionism makes it possible to see disability as the effect of an environment hostile
to some bodies and not to others, requiring advances in social justice rather than
medicine. (p. 56)

The Deaf community is the minority culture, lingering in the margins of our society. The focus
of this study is on deaf and hard of hearing students and teacher practices and perspectives on
students’ literacy development throughout their academic years. Bochel and Bochel (1994) recognized that the socio-cultural model considers that deaf individuals are disadvantaged, as a result of their sensory differences, by unfavourable societal factors in the community. Similarly, Simon and Campano (2013) also challenged the stigmatization of difference through social practices and work against the “deficit notions of student identities and literacy practices” (p. 23). In sum, the cause of students’ developmental difficulties, including limited English literacy proficiency, is due to the deprivation of necessary services needed to foster that development.

**Audism, the Medical-Deficit Model of Deafness, and Cochlear Implants**

*Audism* is a term first introduced by Tom Humphries (1977). He defined audism as “the notion that one is superior based on one's ability to hear or to behave in the manner of one who hears” (Humphries, 1977, p.12). Audism ranges over various forms, including individual, institutional, and metaphysical audism. *Individual* audism is the audiocentric ideologies and behaviours that develop hegemonic privilege; *institutional* audism is the system of advantage of hearing ability; *metaphysical* audism is the linkage of human identity to spoken linguistic abilities (Eckert & Rowly, 2013).

Many professionals accept the medical-deficit model and refer to deafness as “an impairment” while adopting practices that attempt to compensate for the lack of hearing (Bochel & Bochel, 1994). The most common example of the medical-deficit model is the surgical procedure of cochlear implants and most of the debate around cochlear implants has been from the perspective of hearing individuals (Lee, 2012).

On the other hand, many people in the Deaf (i.e. culturally Deaf) community feel as if these medical procedures are intended to “fix” or “cure” their identity, so they can function in a “nondisabled” and “normal” world; the deficit model considers the Deaf as “abnormal” and
“inferior” to those who have the ability to acquire a spoken language (Lee, 2012, p. 821; Pray & Jordan, 2010, p. 174). The procedure of cochlear implants has mostly appealed to hearing parents because it was an opportunity for their child to become more like a hearing one (Pray & Jordan, 2010). The medical-deficit model is seen as a way to assimilate Deaf individuals in the hearing-majority world, whereas “the Deaf view themselves as a linguistic minority, no different from those foreign-born who use English as their second language” (Lee, 2012, p. 822).

Despite the risks of cochlear implant surgery, there has been success observed. However, this paper supports the socio-cultural model of deafness in its attempt to further emphasize the importance of recognizing deafness as a cultural difference rather than a disability, the Deaf community as a culture in our society, and the necessity for educational practices that serve the needs of our Deaf students.

**Language and Grammar: American Sign Language vs. English**

American Sign Language grammar follows different rules than that of spoken and written English. ASL is its own language, with no written form. When Canadians speak English, they are aware of its grammatical and syntactic rules and express them in speech as well as written texts. However, people using ASL follow a specific grammar and that differs from the English grammar with which they are required to read and write. The following example demonstrates some of the grammatical and syntactic differences between ASL and English:

**ASL (signed only):** Past-week, my car, I wash.

**English (spoken and written):** Last week, I washed my car.

It is evident that there is a discrepancy between the ASL and English grammar – yet, being on the margins of society as a language minority, the Deaf community is expected to acquire English literacy in order to succeed in our English-speaking community.
In ASL, the verb tense is constant (I wash), while an adjective is used to explicitly describe the time and therefore, the tense (past). In English, the past tense is generally identified by the “-ed” suffix placed after the verb. This is only a small example of the grammatical differences between the two languages, but both the word order and the tense rules change with respect to the language.

Traditionally, deaf and hard of hearing students have had difficulty in lexical (vocabulary), morphological (word forms), and syntactic (word order) areas (Cannon & Kirby, 2013). Above this, the main educational difficulty that deaf or hard of hearing students face is the acquisition of the linguistic system of the majority language in their society, which can be attributed to the phonemic alphabet of the English language, consisting of phonology (sounds), to which deaf and hard of hearing students have limited or no access (Swisher, 1989; Cannon & Kirby, 2013).

**Language Acquisition: American Sign Language and English**

Research has found that the development of language of both deaf and hearing children is similar, as long as the child has full access to their native language (Marschark, 2001; Petitto, 2000; Spencer & Marschark, 2010). In other words, a deaf or hard of hearing child will learn ASL in the same way as a hearing child would acquire English as long as they are born into an ASL-using home or allowed the opportunity to be exposed to ASL at an early age. Cannon and Kirby (2013) stated:

When deaf and hard of hearing children are raised by native signers, and thus have full access to a signed language from birth, these children show a similar developmental trajectory to that of hearing children acquiring a spoken language, and reach linguistic
milestones (babbling, first words, word combinations, etc.) at approximately the same ages as hearing children. (p. 292-293)

However, this is not always the case. Most deaf children are born into hearing families who do not know or use a natural sign language (Swisher, 1989), and consequently, these children may not have full access to either ASL nor English (Cannon & Kirby, 2013). Therefore, the children acquire limited linguistic input and, in many cases, that input is fragmentary (lip-reading, hearing aids, etc.) (Swisher, 1989).

Furthermore, the distinction between learning and acquisition must be made in order to continue with the discussion of ASL and English language development. Pinker (1994, 1989) explained:

Acquisition is a process of acquiring something (usually, subconsciously) by exposure to models, a process of trial and error, and practice within social groups, without formal teaching. It happens in natural settings which are meaningful and functional in the sense that acquirers know that they need to acquire the thing they are exposed to in order to function and they in fact want to so function. This is how people come to control their first language.

Learning is a process that involves conscious knowledge gained through teaching (though not necessarily from someone officially designated a teacher) or through certain life experiences that trigger conscious reflection. This teaching or reflection involves explanation and analysis, that is, breaking down the thing to be learned into its analytic parts. It inherently involves attaining, along with the matter being taught, some degree of meta-knowledge about the matter. (As cited in Gee, 2008, p. 169)
Consequently, Gee (2008) stated that learning occurs in secondary institutions, like schools and work, where acquisition occurs in primary institutions (e.g. the home, with family).

In some cases, while acquiring ASL, deaf children are also learning English as their second language. Whereas hearing children naturally learn to identify written words by matching letters to a spoken phonological system, deaf children have little to no spoken phonological representations of letters and words, and have to consciously learn the linguistics; therefore, English print is not equivalent to the phonemes of ASL signs and hand-shapes, making it more difficult for these students to acquire text-based English literacy skills (Lederberg & Schick, 2013).

**Interpretation vs. Translation**

Many people use the terms *interpreter* and *translator* interchangeably. However, they are two distinct professions that have varying expertise. A *translator* converts written material and documents from one language to another, whereas an *interpreter* transfers meaning between languages that are spoken or between signed and spoken languages. Deaf interpreters can transfer meaning between different signed languages. There is a spectrum of interpretation settings that is beyond the scope of this paper, however these are the major distinctions between translating and interpreting services.

**Literacy**

*Skills-Based Conceptions of Literacy*

Generally speaking, *literacy* refers to text-based literacy skills and the ability to read and write proficiently in a given language. For the purposes of this study, the focus is on English literacy.
Reading is considered a highly complex, flexible, and sophisticated cognitive activity involving many component skills including letter identification, word recognition, and access to semantic and syntactic information (Rodda et al., 1993). Schirmer (1994) believed that reading involves an interaction between the reader and the text; the reader applies previous knowledge and experiences that shape his or her expectations for content and structure of a given text in order to construct meaning from it. The reader’s prior knowledge and experiences include general world knowledge, specific knowledge of the topic, past experiences with the written genre, ability to understand the syntax and lexicon (vocabulary), and skill in decoding the words (Schirmer, 1994).

McCormick et al. (1992) considered writing to be a goal-directed thinking process that is guided by the writer’s own growing knowledge of goals. According to these authors, there are four types of mental processes a writer engages in to create a written sample or text, including planning, translating mental images into words, reviewing what has been written, and monitoring the entire writing process.

Referring back to the medical-deficit model of deafness, the skills-based conception of literacy reflects the fixed set of standards that one must reach in order to be considered “literate.” There is a tension between the skills-based conception of literacy and what is known as literacy in the field of New Literacy Studies, which understands literacy as “a social practice, not simply a technical and neutral skill” (Street, 2003, p. 77). Although the discussion around Ontario literacy education constantly focuses on the standards of text-based English, there are a variety of literacies alive in human culture, especially in a multicultural society like Ontario.

With this theory, literacy is embedded in social and cultural practices and ways in which people use language and literacy in various contexts involving “knowledge, identity, and being”
Literacy and language (including reading and writing) only acquire meaning in cultural contexts, and what specific individuals bring to language and literacy and how they do or perform reading and writing are what give literacy meaning (Street, 2003). Therefore, literacy has no meaning outside of social contexts.

Similarly, James Paul Gee (2008) identified the notion of a large-D Discourse as beyond just language: “Discourses are ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing, that are accepted as instantiations of particular identities” (p. 3). Therefore, Discourses encompass social interactions and social linguistics beyond the syntactic and grammatical language we use, but inclusive of how and when we use it, since we adopt various styles of language appropriate for certain situations (pragmatics). For example, Gee (2008) differentiated between the language of the home and language of school, and displays through several anecdotes how our understanding and use of language and literacy alters with the change of social context.

**Social Literacy**

In contrast to the generally accepted conception of skills-based literacy, David Bloome (1985) described reading as a social process involving relationships between individuals. These relationships range from those among students, between students and teachers, between parents and children, and among authors and readers. Bloome (1985) described three social dimensions of reading:

First, all reading events involve a social context. Social interaction surrounds and influences interaction with a written text. Second, reading is a cultural activity. That is, reading has social uses which are an extension of people’s day-to-day cultural doings. And third, reading is a socio-cognitive process. Through learning to read and through
reading itself, children learn culturally appropriate information, activities, values, and ways of thinking and problem solving. (p. 134)

Literacy encompasses more than just reading and writing texts. It also involves structuring social interactions and culturally appropriate behavior.

**English Literacy Development for Deaf Children**

According to Luckner (1996), individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing must acquire writing skills if they want to meet the demands of life in the twenty-first century. These skills are necessary for every individual to succeed in our information-based society, whether independently in communities, in higher education, in the job market, and in communication with other members of the society, including all deaf, hard of hearing, or hearing and speaking individuals.

In the case of hearing individuals and literacy learning, a major premise is that there is a close connection between language acquisition and successful literacy development: “children who begin schooling with stronger language abilities have a relatively easier time making the move to text-based literacy” (Mayer, 2007, p. 412). There is increasing evidence that suggests large acquisition of language skills, including vocabulary, syntax, phonemic awareness, and discourse, is necessary for both early and long-term literacy proficiency (Dickinson et al., 2006).

Four phases of linguistic development have been highlighted for literacy proficiency: (a) adequate exposure in quality and quantity (face-to-face communication), (b) access to linguistic input, (c) exposure to meaningful interactions, (d) interaction with proficient users of the language (Mayer & Wells, 1996). If these conditions are met, language acquisition at an early age occurs relatively effortlessly as children use language as a tool to facilitate environmental interactions (Mayer, 2007). However, as I discussed previously that most deaf children are born
to hearing parents. Unlike the situation for most hearing children, there are challenges deaf children face with respect to meeting the necessary language- and literacy-learning conditions and as a result, many deaf children do not obtain complete access to linguistic input and do not secure a completely fluent language; therefore, deaf children often do not have the required language exposure needed for age-appropriate cognitive and literacy development before beginning their school years (Mayer, 2007).

However, research shows that the environment in which deaf children are raised has a significant influence on their linguistic ability. Deaf children who have some foundational exposure to American Sign Language are better able to acquire English language skills (Baker, 2011; Strong & Prinz, 1997; Baker-Shenk & Cokely, 1980). However, it must also be emphasized that any difficulty with developing English language does not negate deaf students’ communication skills in ASL. Therefore, I argue that we should look beyond skills-based conceptions of literacy and focus on early exposure to a foundational language (in the home, school, or through external programs) and providing opportunities for deaf children to develop effective communication through manualism (ASL) rather than deny a child the right to learn ASL as an infant.

New Literacy Studies and Applications to Education

OSSLT does not test literacy as a whole but a certain *practice* or performance of literacy. New Literacy Studies widens the spectrum of literacy. As previously stated, James Paul (2008) identified the notion of a large-D Discourse as beyond just language: “Discourses are ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing, that are accepted as instantiations of particular identities” (p. 3). Therefore, Discourses encompass social interactions and social linguistics beyond the syntactic and grammatical language we use,
but inclusive of how and when we use it, since we adopt various styles of language appropriate for certain situations (pragmatics).

Gee (2008) stated, “If one wanted to be rather pedantic and literalistic, then we could define “literacy” as: Mastery of a secondary Discourse involving print (which is almost all of them in a modern society)” (p. 176). However, he continues to discuss the unnecessary inclusion of the phrase “involving print”:

But I see no gain from the addition of the phrase “involving print,” other than to assuage the feelings of people committed (as I am not) to reading and writing as decontextualized and isolable skills. In addition, it is clear that many so-called nonliterate cultures have secondary Discourses which, while they do not involve print, involve a great many of the same skills, behaviors, and ways of thinking that we associate with literacy—for example, the many and diverse practices that have gone under the label “oral literature.” (p. 176)

Gee (2008) also discussed what it means to be literate and believes “Language makes no sense outside of Discourses, and the same is true for literacy” (p. 3). If we only define literacy in terms of text-based reading and writing, then we limit other forms of literacy that do not use print. As a current example, American Sign Language is a visual language that uses hand shapes and space to convey information, one type of “oral literature” with no written counterpart. ASL poetry, lyrics, and literature may not be represented through print formats, but is it right to say that Deaf culture is a nonliterate one?

This idea brings us back to the oppressive nature of audism. If a society carries a system of oppression involving deaf and hard of hearing individuals based on the belief that hearing people are superior, audist practices are upheld. This notion can be related to the belief that
printed texts and text-based literacy skills are ranked above oral literacy, which marginalizes cultural practices of groups of people who do not adopt print forms of literature.

**A Brief History of Deaf Education and Attitudes on ASL**

There is much to say about the history and development of Deaf education, but for the purposes of this paper, the focus will be on literacy education. I highlight both the psychological arguments of literacy education but also the socio-cultural perspectives on language and literacy development.

Baker-Shenk and Cokely (1980) described English education in schools for Deaf students and why students traditionally have difficulty gaining proficiency in English:

First, those involved in educating deaf students have traditionally had very monolingual attitudes. That is, teachers and those in positions of power and decision-making have judged any and all student communication in terms of one language – English. This attitude is fostered, directly or indirectly, by teacher training programs which do not offer any courses in ASL (skill or structure) or which offer courses called “language development” that focus only on the development of English, not both on language development. (p. 63)

Monolingual attitudes, whether in a bilingual education program or not, have negative effects on students psychological, social, and academic success (Saville-Troike, 1973).

In a documentary called *Audism Unveiled*, various Deaf individuals discuss their experiences throughout their schooling. Oral education was imposed by oralist views. Deaf students would be reprimanded (physically and emotionally) for using any sort of gesture to communicate with their peers, whether that was communicating by American Sign Language or a personal signing system (Ladd, 2003; Bahan et al., 2008). Oral practices would be strictly
enforced, as students were required to learn to use their voices and speak, and simultaneously “learn to hear” through the reliance on lip-reading in order to decipher what was being said around them (Cyrus, 2010).

Attitudes toward ASL are complicated by its identification as a minority language in a majority culture, whose standard language influences it to some extent. Attitudes toward English are complicated by the fact that English language learning is imposed by an educational establishment run by hearing people and that ASL is not always used as a language of instruction (Swisher, 1989). The Deaf community is considered a linguistic minority for whom the learning of English skills must be considered a second language learning procedure (Rodda & Eleweke, 2000), rather than an addition to their prior acquisition of ASL. Thus, our educational tools must recognize deaf students as English Language Learners (ELL). Now, deaf students have more options in education, but generally have their paths chosen for them. Awareness still needs to be built for the discriminatory practice of oralist/audistic education and the significant value of developing ASL skills at an early age in order to be able to better learn a second language.

As Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) argued:

When different languages have different political rights, this has nothing to do with any inherent linguistic characteristics, but power relationships… There is an unequal division of power and resources whereby speakers of some languages have had (grabbed) more resources at their disposal for the development of ‘their’ languages. On linguistic grounds all languages could have the same rights, the same possibility of being learned fully, developed and used in all situations by their speakers. This also applies to sign languages.

(p. 221)
Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) recognized that any language beyond the dominant ones could be developed for official use as long as the necessary resources are accessible. Therefore, “no languages are inherently deficient; some are more complex phonologically, some morphologically, some syntactically, but all are in principle capable of expressing everything in the world in complex, abstract ways” (p. 219). This includes American Sign Language.

John-Steiner et al. (1994) also advocated for minority languages in marginalized communities. Specifically regarding American Sign Language and the Deaf community, the editors stated: “ASL must play a much more active role in Deaf education. Students should be receiving formal classroom instruction not only in ASL but also about ASL. Students and teachers together must explore and discuss the languages of the community” (p. 130).

Deaf students are generally instructed in ASL but are not studying ASL as an official language (John-Steiner et al., 1994). An approach to literacy education that allows students to study their native language as a valid form of literacy “not only empowers language users, it also empowers and strengthens the suppressed language” (John-Steiner et al., 1994, p. 131). These scholars asked, “Why do we insist on denying Deaf children [literacy] experiences with their own language? Why must literacy for the Deaf students mean English” (p. 134)? Similarly, Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) asked, “Do we all have to become monolinguals (with a sprinkling of Japanese or other languages, good for trade, learned in school), in order to become “linguistically developed” (p. 662)? All of these scholars criticized the attitude that is commonly adopted on literacy and what it means to be literate, where one dominant language is recognized as the standard for children’s literacy development.

*Elementary Education: Emergent Literacy Environment*

Mayer and Wells (1996) noted that although deaf children acquire the conversational
form or “inner speech” of ASL (i.e., the language of thought), it does not automatically allow access to the conventions of written English because of the linguistic and grammatical differences between the two languages.

Skills-based conceptions of literacy development and reading comprehension involve two areas of skill (Drasgow, 1998). The first area of skill is at the grammatical level, including the identification of letters, spelling patterns, and vocabulary. The second area of skill involves reflecting on prior knowledge and experience. Therefore, one explanation for the higher levels of academic achievement of, (a) deaf children of deaf parents over deaf children of hearing parents and (b) students who are proficient in ASL, could be that the successful early ASL acquisition allows for a collection of experience and knowledge that feeds their English literacy development (Drasgow, 1998). Thus, teachers should focus on using ASL proficiency as a bridge to succeed in English literacy.

Intermediate and Secondary Education: Metacognition, Motivation, and Identity

In addition to the limitations of input, the difficulty of the task of learning an auditory language with severely restricted information is likely to lead to loss of motivation (Swisher, 1989). For adolescents, identity is constructed through their interactions with their peers and their involvement and engagement in the school environment (Yon, 2000; Leigh, 1999), which in turn increases the students’ self-esteem and self-image. A study conducted by Toscano et al. (2002) showed that deaf students who were successful in pursuing post-secondary education had a mindset that enhanced self-esteem and belief in their abilities. For most of these students, academics took precedence over their social lives and they were very focused throughout their academic years. Additionally, these students generally had “early exposure to and intensive experiences with reading and writing” (Toscano et al., 2002). Thus, not only is it important for
parents to provide early exposure to both ASL and English, or for teachers to provide techniques of instruction that provide students with many opportunities of success, they must incorporate motivational strategies that will allow students to increase their self-esteem and self-image within their community.

This research project is interested in the secondary school literacy programs and instruction due to limited research in the field. The elementary school programs might be briefly discussed due to relevance to literacy development but they are not the focus of this study.

**Instructional Approaches**

From the perspective of the socio-cultural model, Deafness is a cultural, rather than biological phenomenon. Educational approaches based on this model embrace the use of ASL as the language of instruction (Drasgow, 1998). However, with regard to the medical-deficit model, educational goals focus on overcoming, or compensating for, hearing loss so that students can learn to speak, read, and write English. Educational methods used to accomplish this goal include amplification and lip reading (Drasgow, 1998).

**Bilingual Education Approach**

A bilingual program has been applied to educating deaf students who are learning American Sign Language (ASL) as their first language and written English as a second. Several studies have shown that the ASL/English bilingual approach to deaf education is significantly enhancing deaf students’ English literacy skills by building on their previously acquired ASL skills (Hoffmeister, 2000; Kuntze, 2004; Padden & Ramsey, 1998; Smith, 2006).

Cummins’s (1984) theory of second language learning argued that in order to learn a second language, the learner draws upon his or her knowledge on their mother tongue. However, the implementation of teaching techniques for deaf students based on this theory is a complex
process due to the lack of a written form in ASL (Mayer & Wells, 1996). Evans (2004) performed a study to describe the teaching and learning strategies implemented by teachers and parents of a few deaf students in the bilingual learning environment. The findings of this study suggest that strategies such as using ASL as the language of instruction and making translation conceptual rather than literal contribute to literacy learning (Evans, 2004). However, there are still lingering issues that need to be investigated further including developing the most efficient balance between explicit and naturalistic teaching methods and challenging the process of the transition from a deficit model to a cultural model in deaf education (Evans, 2004).

**Guided Reading Approach**

Developed by Fountas and Pinnell (1996), the Guided Reading Approach is an instructional framework to support reading development for students from kindergarten through grade 4. There are four steps to this model including grouping students and selecting leveled books, introducing the book by looking at the title, author, cover, topic, etc., asking the students to read silently while the teacher observes, and finally, discussing the book upon completion (Schirmer and Schaffer, 2010a). Schirmer and Schaffer (2010b) found that the elementary-level deaf students who had been instructed through the Guided Reading Approach improved their reading skills; however, most of the students only showed minimal progress that was also inhibited during the summer breaks.

These researchers suggest three modifications to the Guided Reading Approach that are likely to strengthen reading achievement in students. The first is to increase dedication to the model by providing educators with more coaching and professional development workshops designed to make the Guided Reading Approach regularized within the school and throughout the academic year. The second modification is to develop a summer reading program, so the
students will have regular guidance with literacy during their time away from school. The third modification is to increase family engagement with the model to reinforce the skills regularly in the home (Schirmer and Schaffer, 2010a).

**Current Deaf Education in Ontario**

There are currently three Provincial Schools for the Deaf in Ontario, located in London, Milton, and Belleville, but there are sister-schools in public boards that have integration programs for deaf students. There is a Provincial School for the Blind and Deafblind in Brantford and a French School for the Deaf in Ottawa.

**Bilingual Education Approach**

All three Ontario Schools for the Deaf have adopted bilingual education programs. Although these schools maintain some differences in their elementary and secondary programs, they have very similar beliefs and approaches to teaching the ASL and Ontario Language Curriculum to their students. The following section describes the bilingual education programs as defined by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2015).

Bilingual education programs for deaf students in Ontario involve the development of literacy skills in two languages (ASL and English), including language and literacy acquisition, critical thinking skills and metalinguistic awareness. These programs are also meant to foster the appreciation of ASL and multicultural identities within a learning environment that is appreciative of diversity. The program also values the importance of positive self-image and successful social interaction.

In these bilingual/bicultural education programs, Cummins’s (1984) theory of second language learning is valued and since American Sign Language is the primary linguistic foundation of students, it is used as the language of dialogue, instruction, and study in order to
promote second-language “mastery” (Ministry of Education, 2015). Why, then, is there constantly a plateau of fourth-grade literacy levels seen in deaf students?

Ontario Curriculum Expectations

The residential schools for deaf students support the Ontario Curriculum and have a commitment to EQAO and OSSLT testing. The American Sign Language Curriculum and Ontario Language Curriculum work together correspondingly in these educational programs. Both of the curricula include the development of skills such as analysis, comparison, making judgments, coordinating ideas, higher-level thinking skills to develop metalinguistic skills in ASL and English as academic languages, and the analysis of ASL and English as repositories of cultural knowledge and identities. The five “Bilingual Bicultural Education for Your Deaf Child” principles are (1) child-centered education, (2) development of literacy skills in ASL and English, (3) understanding and appreciation of Deaf culture, (4) appreciation of cultural diversity, (5) development of a positive self image (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015).

American Sign Language Curriculum

The recent ASL curriculum (2004) incorporates the study of ASL grammar, vocabulary, discourse, semantics, styles, and forms found in stories, poems, as well as texts, lectures, and interpersonal interactions (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015).

The following table shows the ASL curriculum both as a study of the linguistics as well as the foundational language that will build English skills. This study examines the way the English curriculum is specifically structured for deaf students in Ontario in order to successfully provide the students with the English literacy skills required for life after high school.
**Table 1. ASL Curriculum Descriptors** (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASL Curriculum</th>
<th>ASL Curriculum as a Study of a Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Outlines expectations for Deaf bilingual students’ academic ASL and ASL literacy development</td>
<td>• Study of ASL structures, vocabulary, discourse, semantics, styles, registers and cultural markers found in ASL literary works and texts, lectures and interpersonal interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provides students with a first language base for the development of cognitive, creative, critical, analytical and literary skills</td>
<td>• Study of how to produce language in ASL texts and ASL literary works that accurately conveys meaning and which appropriately and coherently provides information to support a point of view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provides a first language foundation and support for Ontario Curriculum in both ASL and English</td>
<td>• Analysis of ASL literary styles and devices, cultural markers, registers, use of ASL distinctive attributes of localization, spatial reference frames, role shift, classifiers, non-manual grammatical markers and other linguistic features of ASL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Utilize ASL and multi-cultural heritage information in teaching</td>
<td>• ASL as a critical thinking and cognitive development language</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
General Ontario Language Curriculum (English)

The English curriculum incorporates the study of English grammar, vocabulary, discourse, semantics, styles, and forms found in stories, poems and other texts (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015).

Instructional Strategies of the Ontario Curriculum

Metacognitive Linguistic Analysis

Metacognition and metalinguistic awareness is developed through the studying, comparison, and contrasting of the two languages, ASL and English. This approach can be compared to the ASL-English bilingual approach to education where instruction occurs in ASL and the literacy tasks in various subjects are completed in English.

Manipulative Visual Language

Manipulative Visual Language provides a visual model of English in its basic forms to deaf students. Through colour-coding and the use of symbols and shapes, parts of written English grammar are taught, including nouns, verbs, and rules of simple sentence structures (Gore & Gillies, 2003). Gore and Gillies recommend using MVL in the elementary grades to establish a strong grammar foundation, but they believe it is also useful in middle school and high school, and helps make learning the syntax of English more efficient and effective (Gore & Gillies, 2003).

Cross-Linguistic Transfer Strategies

Cross-linguistic transfer is the overlap of linguistic skills from one language to another (such as vocabulary, grammar, etc.). In support of Cummin’s (1984) theory of second language acquisition, Andrew et al. (2014) found that the signing ability of young deaf children predicts their English reading comprehension. Their results are consistent with the theory that ASL
learning as a first foundational language promotes second English language development through transference of linguistic components (Andrew et al., 2014).

The Ontario Spoken English Program

The information about the structure of the Spoken English Program education programs in Ontario have been retrieved from the Ontario Ministry of Education website (www.psbnet.ca). The Spoken English program parallels the medical-deficit model of deafness, however, it provides deaf students with the opportunity to increase their English phonological awareness (being aware of the sounds of the English language). The program involves lip-reading, auditory training, and oral language development because it is believed the phonological awareness provides a solid foundation to develop English literacy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). The program includes training in the areas such as voicing and imitating, pragmatics (social rules of a language), phonics, lip/speech reading, auditory awareness through the Speech Perception Instructional Curriculum and Evaluation (SPICE) resource, vocabulary, semantics, and grammar (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015).

Conclusion

To conclude, I believe that there must be more attention given to deaf students in our community. With the median reading achievement of deaf 18-year-old students in the United States has increased only to that typical of grade four compared to their hearing peers with age-appropriate reading levels (Marschark et al., 2009; Allen, 2002; Conrad, 1979; Marschark & Harris, 1996; Musselman, 2000). Difficulties with standard text-based literacy cannot be the only contributing factor to students’ disengagement with English language learning. As stated in the previous chapter, there is a significant void in the current literature with regard to literacy education in secondary schools for the deaf, especially in Canada, and most of the support is
found from earlier decades. The significance of this study is that the focus is drawn back to the issues regarding literacy development in deaf adolescents with current educational and instructional practices. Trying to move beyond text-based and skills-based literacy practices, this study contributes to the literature in New Literacy Studies, as it highlights the importance of recognizing deaf students’ linguistic Discourses (i.e. distinctive social and cultural contexts of language and literacy use depending on social situations) not in comparison or as a supplement to the English language, but as a “culturally specific vernacular identity” (Gee, 2008, p. 156) of the Deaf community in correspondence with the ideologies that the students have acquired. It is important for us as educators to create the spaces necessary to end the marginalization of our Deaf students and allow them to carry their natural practices to reach success.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Rationale

The main research question of this project was: In what ways do the beliefs, attitudes, and values of Teachers of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing shape deaf literacy education in Ontario? This phenomenological research study investigated what beliefs and attitudes teachers of secondary deaf students hold regarding literacy education and how these values shape their educational practices and instructional approaches in literacy education. Following the review of the literature, in the attempt to answer the research question, the study was conducted by collecting data through formal interviews with Teachers of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and informal observations from my own in-school experiences and American Sign Language classes.

The interviews consisted of one face-to-face interview and one Skype interview, which were recorded and transcribed. The third interview was done through written response as the participant was Deaf and I wanted to ensure that none of her responses were interpreted incorrectly by me through American Sign Language. The most authentic way to capture the participant’s responses was to have her type them out. The interview data was then coded in an effort to uncover common themes proposed in the literature review, as well as themes that emerged throughout the interview process. The remainder of this chapter includes a description of the procedure I followed, including recruitment of participants, ethical review procedures, as well as the limitations of the qualitative research study.

Participants

Recruitment of participants happened through the distribution of flyers explaining the general nature of the study (electronically and in person) and briefly described the research study to educators practicing within schools in Ontario. The participants recruited were all ASL-
English bilingual educators of secondary deaf and hard of hearing students in Ontario. Prior to the interviews, participants signed a consent letter that described the nature of the study and their involvement. A sample consent letter is included in Appendix A.

The qualitative data collected reflects current and past practices, attitudes, and experiences of three ASL-English bilingual secondary teachers, who have been given pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. All participants teach in Southern Ontario region. Michelle is a full-time Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and is currently teaching a range of secondary English courses to signing students, including English Language Development. Keira is a hearing Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, working with both signing students and oral students with cochlear implants in a variety of subjects including English, science, and math. Finally, Nora is an Itinerant Teacher of the Deaf and an Audio-Verbal Therapist, working mostly one-on-one with students with cochlear implants to develop oral speaking skills and reading and writing. All participants have had extensive experience working with deaf and hard of hearing students with regard to literacy or language development.

Procedure

Instruments of Data Collection

The data was collected through three semi-structured interviews that ranged from an hour and a half to three hours long. The interview questions addressed beliefs, attitudes, experiences, and perspectives of the participants in a variety of capacities involving teaching English literacy. Two of these interviews were completed face-to-face, and the other was done over Skype, since the participant was located farther away. The participants involved in the face-to-face interviews were reimbursed for their travel cost. All interviews were based on the same question set and a sample of the interview questions has been provided in Appendix B.
The interviews were transcribed verbatim, and a member check was done, which involved sharing the transcripts with the participants to check for accuracy and ensure reliability of the content.

Data Coding and Analysis

Following the transcribing, the interview data was coded through several methods including initial coding, simultaneous coding, in vivo coding, provisional coding, holistic coding, and values coding (Saldana, 2009). The coding was manually performed by the researcher using multi-coloured markers and was translated into the MAXQDA11 coding software. Following coding, the interviews were analyzed by reading and rereading the codes and identifying themes that highlighted teacher beliefs of the nature of literacy and deafness, instructional approaches to teaching English literacy to deaf students, perspectives and attitudes about the issues within deaf education, as well as identifications of the needs of deaf students and available supports.

Reliability

This study was conducted over the span of two years. The data collection proceeded through triangulation, involving related information from (1) a literature review, (2) data from semi-structured interviews, and (3) field notes from conversations throughout my post-secondary American Sign Language classes and experience with secondary deaf students. As described previously, transcripts were shared with the participants for feedback in order to ensure accuracy and reliability of their responses.

Ethical Review Procedures

To ensure the privacy of the participants, all correspondence and meetings have been kept private. A letter of consent was provided and the terms of the research project agreement were reviewed before meeting for the interview. The participant was asked if they had any questions
or concerns with the letter, and it was reviewed with them thoroughly and signed and dated before the interview commenced. It was also ensured that the participant was given a copy of the agreement for their records. They were told that they have the right to withdraw from the study up to the day it was submitted (April 10, 2015) and that a copy of the transcripts and a summary of the final project could be provided if they were interested in the final findings (see Appendix A).

Each participant has been given a pseudonym that employs a generic name. Anonymity was assured, as no one other than the researcher knows the original names of the participants and all names and institutions have been removed from the transcripts. There are no known risks to participants involved in the study. The benefit of the participation in this project was to allow participants to reflect on their own teaching practices and share their experiences in the field in the hopes of raising awareness about the issues in deaf education.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is the small sample size. In spite of this small sample, the experiences described by each of the participants are valuable and have the potential to influence research in the field of deaf literacy education. There were two more participants in the study who withdrew before any interviews were done. Although the small number of participants is a limitation, the challenge I found in identifying participants may also point to the serious need for discussing deaf literacy with fellow professionals in the field in order to provide more support to these students.

Another limitation involves the nature of the study. This research was completed as a qualitative case study due to the Research Ethics Board restrictions of the Master of Teaching Program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, which
may leave some of more quantitative questions unanswered. Each participant had a specific role in the field of education that was different from the other. Since this is not a comparison study, I examined each participant’s experiences individually. Further comparison research would have to be pursued in order to discuss relationships and differences across participant interviews and data.

Also, since the data collection was focused on adult educators rather than students, the data may be biased towards an adult standpoint on the issue rather than the personal beliefs and struggles of deaf students. However, this can also be an advantage of the study because ASL-English educators can pinpoint the struggles of their students as well as effectively discuss their own difficulties during their time as students, and how they learned to overcome those struggles to advance their literacy skills.

The final limitation involves the focus on secondary deaf literacy education in Ontario rather than elementary. Since the literature lacks research on secondary deaf literacy development, the focus of this study was on secondary deaf education. However, research with elementary educators could potentially add to the perspectives on secondary education highlighted in this study. Also, the focus on Ontario-only teachers may be another limitation, as I did not explore the experiences of Teachers of the Deaf and initiatives in deaf education outside of Ontario as well. One direction for future research may be to cross-analyze practices in a variety of regions to understand what counts as effective practices across regions in the field of deaf literacy education.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Three semi-structured interviews examined the ways in which the beliefs, attitudes, and practices of Teachers of the Deaf shape deaf literacy education in Ontario. The interview questions were designed to elicit teacher perspectives about defining literacy and what counts as literacy in their classrooms. Sub-questions prompted views regarding instructional approaches, classroom environments, and issues in the field of deaf literacy education relating to resources and support for our students.

The findings from the qualitative interview data show five emergent themes and relating sub-topics that were discussed by all participants. Most of the sub-topics were discussed in both interviews; however, some were only prevalent in one or another. Following data coding, the five major themes that emerged from the data are: (1) defining deaf, (2) deaf-inning literacy, (3) learning environments, (4) resources and supports, and (5) challenging assumptions.

Theme 1: Defining “Deaf”

The first theme to emerge from the interview data encompassed the way participants would define “deafness.” All participants viewed deafness as a fluid concept that cannot be restricted to a single definition.

Following the socio-cultural model of deafness, Keira described being deaf as being part of a “linguistic minority” rather than having an “impairment.” If we are looking at deafness from an audiological and linguistic perspective, then deafness is linguistic difference and not a disability. Keira believed in the importance of recognizing that we cannot simply define deafness in one way: “What is “deaf?” Who is “deaf?” What is “deaf education?” Who are we talking about? I don’t think we can answer that... It is as if we are talking about a “shape that doesn’t really have a solid definition [and is] too diverse.”
Identities are fluid and constantly changing. Keira described that it is problematic to think that we can have stagnant definitions of identities, whether we are talking about deaf, hard of hearing, or hearing individuals. Even the term deaf is an umbrella term. There are people who were born deaf, deafened throughout their lives, or hearing but orally deaf (i.e. “mute”). The following subsections describe three motifs that were prevalent in the discussion of defining deafness.

*Intersectionality and Linguistic Types*

All participants identified deafness as an intersectionality of identity and that there is more to student identity than just their hearing loss, including their adopted language or form of communication, preference for learning environment, and whether or not they have learning differences or exceptionalities. Not all of these factors are “medical” signifiers of a deaf identity. Michelle’s definition was as follows:

I personally define “deafness” both as a disability and cultural identity. Being deaf in the world of hearing people using a majority language (e.g. oral communication) puts [a deaf person] in a disability light. Unable to hear and speak the spoken language puts a person at a disadvantage and thus, disability is the term given to describe such people. Being deaf in the world of Deaf people reinforces the cultural identity where language (ASL), common experiences, norms, and values are embraced holistically. As a side note, everyone is disabled to some degree in one or more areas and it is not only with language. Michelle differentiated between the aforementioned definitions of *deafness* and *Deafness*, but also recognized that everyone, deaf or hearing, has some sort of disadvantage in this world, regardless of linguistic ability.
Depending on the educational setting, the students in a given deaf and hard of hearing program can have multiple identities that move beyond the labels “deaf” and “hard of hearing.” Keira called these *linguistic types*:

So really, the students that I have in any given class are completely unpredictable. I mean, they become predictable because, in the program, we start to see - let's call them types, for lack of a better word - of deaf students. The only thing that my students, in any given class, have in common is that on their audiology tests there's some indication that there's hearing loss. But that tells you *so* little about a student.

Keira then highlighted a few examples of these student *types* and how there are several variables involved in Deaf identity that should be considered when shaping educational programs and streaming:

Although we're using the word “deaf,” we haven't spent any time defining what that is. And I don't think it can easily be defined. It's quite problematic because there isn't an explicit understanding of who the students are that should be in the program. So, we have, for example, hard of hearing students who could function in the mainstream. Sometimes do, sometimes are in withdrawal support classes. We have deaf students who could also potentially function in a mainstream but what they really require is direct instruction, which they can only get from the department because the department offers courses in Sign Language. There are students with significant learning disabilities, which prevent them from being able to achieve the learning expectations of the curriculum. And then there are students who are not delayed, who have the capacity to learn at grade-level, who are in class because they are trying to access the language directly from their teacher without having to go through an interpreter.
Furthermore, Keira discussed students’ language as part of their identity and a determining factor of how deafness can still vary and should not be looked at as a stagnant entity, rather a multifaceted and changing part of students’ identities:

The most diverse classes that I have include students whose dominant language is English, dominant language is Sign Language, dominant language may be Tamil, Tamil Sign Language or British Sign Language. They've emigrated from another country, so we're not even starting with a common language in the classroom. Then on top of that, varying literacy levels, some who are literate in the class and some who are just nascent learners.

Students are entering the classroom with varying levels of hearing loss and various native languages to which they have already been exposed and in which they are proficient at varying levels. In Keira’s experience, it is evident that students have different educational needs when there is not a common foundational language in the classroom to begin with, which, in my opinion, makes it extremely difficult and problematic to categorize students’ identities.

When asked about the types of students Nora teaches on a daily basis, she also identified varying student descriptors that she identifies within her itinerant role as an Audio-Verbal Therapist:

So one of [the students] has sort of a dual - he uses both functional language and an interpreter. But there are multiple exceptionalities in that one. And then the other two use American Sign Language as their main method of communication. So they have an interpreter with them all day. Most kids have multiple exceptionalities, but there are still quite a few that are just deaf.
Therefore, throughout these findings, it is evident that deafness cannot be defined as a stagnant entity. Intersectionality shapes deafness similarly to how it is encompassed in all individuals and their identity differences.

*Manualism: American Sign Language*

This section begins the debate between the two major streams of communication, manualism (signed language) and oralism (spoken language). For the purposes of this project, the manualism theme will reflect the use of American Sign Language, while oralism will focus on the implementation of cochlear implants and their use to promote spoken language in deaf students. Themes emerged from the three interviews relating to the participants’ roles. While none of the participants dismissed the benefits of either ASL or cochlear implants, Keira and Michelle had a strong stance for *choice* whereas Nora advocated for cochlear implants due to the success she has experienced with them.

Keira’s responses highlighted the importance of maintaining American Sign Language as the foundational linguistic influence in deaf children and students:

I think, as far as a linguistic group and linguistic minority, I think it's really significant that we live in a province where students have a right to ASL as a language of instruction according to the law, but they don't have a right to study it. And it's the only language like that, that I know of, in the world really. That you have the right to access it as a language of instruction but not to study it. I think it's really significant - and it has a significant impact - if you're not literate in your first language… But we're talking about your literacy in your second language?

Keira criticized the fact that despite having ASL as the language of instruction, deaf students do not have the right to study ASL as an official language in Ontario. This raises several concerns
regarding student support offered at the linguistic level. The value of language access will be further discussed in the *Access to Language* section of this chapter.

Community becomes a huge aspect of the deaf identity. As Keira mentioned, the ASL community is comprised of not just deaf people, but hard of hearing and hearing as well:

I think American Sign Language is - the ASL community - it's not just made of deaf people, it's made of hearing people too, hard of hearing people, all sorts of different people who are part of, essentially, a language minority.

Once again, it is well established that deafness should be recognized as an identity beyond the mere association to hearing loss and be looked at as a linguistic minority instead of a disability.

Nora discussed the value of community as well and emphasized the importance of maintaining Deaf culture. However, she also highlighted the difficulty deaf students face when they adopt manualism:

As far as the big-D deaf and you know the hearing culture, I get it. Because I grew up with those kids that were deaf, and I've seen some of them be very successful and some not so much, and some will never have more than the grade-four education! So the kids that are American Sign, if they're [fostered] in a deaf community, absolutely. But if they're in a complete hearing world, and they're the only ones... it's challenging, there's no doubt about it. I have friends that are in the big-D deaf community down in the States, and they're hugely successful, but they have deaf people all around them, and that's the culture. It's tough to get a job, it's tough to get all those things. If they can have the right supports, 100% for American Sign. It depends on where you are.

As will be further discussed in the *Cochlear Implants* section to follow, Nora highlighted the tension between hearing and deaf worlds. Particularly, Nora emphasized the reality that the
manualism route may not be the easiest stream in a hearing-dominant world. However, if there is strong support in the students’ Deaf community, then it is more likely that their success will be fostered. This raises the issue of audism, the oppressive natures of the “norm” of oralism, and the medical-deficit model of deafness. Instead of altering the oppressing system of our hearing society, deafness is “medicalized” to fit the hearing norm.

*Oralism: Cochlear Implants*

When Keira was asked about her views on deafness, she saw deafness as a perfect whole in itself and ASL as a valid linguistic form of communication:

If I lost my hearing and could get a cochlear implant, that would be another thing. I don't know if I would. I'm hearing, so it would affirm my identity. If I had a child who was deaf, would I give them a cochlear implant? I don't think so, because for me, I see a deaf child, like born deaf, as perfectly whole, as perfect as they are. I actually see them that way and I think that I can envision and see the reality of a life for that child that would be totally successful and beautiful and unique as who they are.

On the other hand, she criticized cochlear implants on the basis that they are a medicalized orientation that corresponds to the medical-deficit model of deafness:

The thing that I feel about cochlear implants is that it's such a medical orientation to deafness and there's so little acceptance of what deafness is on its own. It's such a desire to correct something that is viewed as flawed. That it is really - it has oppressive practices, which prevent children with hearing loss who have cochlear implants from being bilingual, from accessing people who might share common experiences with them, like adults who might have gone through similar experiences [and] like languages that might be naturally acquired.
Since most deaf children are born to hearing adults, cochlear implantation is the most common route that parents take. Keira also believed that cochlear implants eliminate the possibility of deaf children building relationships with others in the ASL community, and therefore, potentially restricting them from developing ASL and learning about Deaf culture.

More specifically, Keira identified how power and privilege play a role in the manualism and oralism debate. Comparing to gender norms and patriarchy, she highlighted how altering a deaf child’s brain physiology so they fit into hearing-dominated societal norm and benefit from more opportunities only shows that the system is privileged and discriminates against deafness by *not* providing more opportunities for deaf individuals:

> So, the possible risk of maybe you'll be able to hear and talk and you know, you'll have more opportunities. You'll have more opportunities in life as a man, but I'm not going to have my child have a sex change. Yeah you have more opportunities if you could hear, but that's a function of society. Yeah I would love to be able to share music with my child and whatnot, but I think because of my life experiences, because of my orientation to the world and deafness, if I had a deaf child, I imagine I would love them as a deaf child. If they wanted a cochlear implant at a particular age, we would talk about that. But I don't think that I would risk any possible medical loss of life or ability for the ability to be able to hear more… So I think the problem I have with cochlear implants is the chasm it creates and the affirmation of a particular part of society, of hearing society.

Keira believed that deafness is a perfect identity that does not need compensation. However, through her response it is evident that she valued a deaf child's right to choose whether or not they want a cochlear implant.
Michelle shared similar views. She discussed that cochlear implants should be offered to deaf individuals who are informed and are at an age where they can make decisions for themselves, rather than being forced to go through with the implants:

If a Deaf adult wants to get one, fine. If a hearing person who became deafened later on in life wants to get one, fine. If a deaf child who can make decision for himself or herself wants to get one, fine. Deaf infants and young toddlers? I am against it. They have to go through multiple surgeries to put new implants since they’re in developing stages of growth. Hearing aids would be the next best alternative till they come to the age of reasoning and responsibility.

Michelle’s response also emphasized the importance of personal choice. She rejected the notion of forcing infants to go through with cochlear implant surgery and valued the necessity of allowing Deaf individuals to make the decision for themselves once they are older and able to make an informed choice.

Nora discussed the efficiency of the cochlear implant route according to its success in helping deaf individuals access sound the way hearing individuals do. Through the use of cochlear implants, deaf children face less challenges because their linguistic development is often parallel to their hearing peers:

I see more possibilities for the kids that have cochlear implants, without any other assistance... A child with a cochlear implant doesn’t need anybody else and they can continue on in life without having an interpreter, without needing anybody else to help them. So, I see both sides… Cochlear implants - if you'd asked me that same question 15 years ago, I would’ve said absolutely not - opening up a child's head and putting
electronic devices in? I would be worried. But now I've seen the success, so I am...

wow. They can do absolutely anything.

Despite the general success seen with cochlear implants, a fundamental issue is that not much confidence is given to the American Sign Language, or manualism, stream. Unfortunately, not enough people believe that deaf students “can do absolutely anything” through the manualism route because it is more of a challenging and longer process and is not associated with society’s norm.

Michelle highlighted the limitations about cochlear implants and challenged the general medicalized belief that cochlear implants are “cures” for deafness:

[A cochlear implant comes with] the understanding that it is a mechanical tool for individuals to “hear,” but they [do not become] “hearing” like hearing people. There are limitations and challenges with the cochlear implant technology, no matter how far it has come. It is my understanding that young clients with cochlear implants must undergo intensive speech training with no ASL learning or support as it may mess up their data collection and result interpretations regarding its success… If parents of a deaf child want him/her to have one against his/her wishes, that is another topic of discussion as it is a form of abuse. I won’t go there.

Michelle echoed the concept of primary language acquisition. If children are restricted from developing ASL skills due to the cochlear implant, they are not given the right to access a foundational language that will help them develop literacy skills.

**Theme 2: Deaf-ining Literacy**

It was crucial to conceptualize the teachers’ understanding of what literacy encompasses and what counts as literacy and what does not. Most of the interview questions were directed at
learning what the teachers’ understanding of literacy is in the deaf classroom and whether or not they validate one form of literacy over another.

*Literacy as Communication*

All participants discussed literacy in terms of the ability to communicate. Michelle defined literacy as follows:

> The subject of literacy is a broad one. Literacy touches on the knowledge and skill one has towards subject matter and life experiences. The more the person knows and understands the subject matter and life experiences, and communicates and applies in a variety of ways, the higher literacy skills he or she has. It applies in the opposite direction as well. The less the person knows and understands the lower literacy skills he or she has. Literacy includes thinking, reflecting, and communicating one’s ideas clearly and follows through where possible.

Michelle defined literacy as the ability to think, reflect, and communicate one’s thoughts, but also as the knowledge and experience one has built throughout their life as the tools needed to “read” the world.

When asked about current research that states most deaf students plateau at about a fourth-grade reading level, Keira challenged the research and raised some points about the factors that are being neglected in the field, including the creation of boundaries and limits into which students are expected to fit. Instead, she stressed that we should alter our ways of thinking when it comes to language and think beyond skills-based conceptions of literacy. By setting limits, we categorize students based on what they cannot do. We should change our standards to reflect ongoing progress and fluidity rather than a limit at which our students suspend:
Obviously that fourth-grade research question is about a limit. About reaching a limit in literacy that plateaus and doesn't move on. And if that is the case – when that is the case, I point to all the factors around it. Given that I've been signing for 20 years and I still have a hearing accent, I love it when people say, “Are you deaf?” I've been signing in such a way that a deaf person didn't know at first. But given enough time, a deaf person would know I was hearing. I would give it away somehow, in my grammar, in a mistake I made. So, here we expect deaf students to be able to communicate in English flawlessly, and yet there's the smallest percentage of hearing people who can communicate in ASL without giving themselves away as hearing. Because we are who we are. So maybe if our standard was communicating effectively, whatever it is we want to communicate, then this would be a whole other conversation.

Keira emphasized the need to change the mindset of "perfecting" our language use. With regard to everyday speech, hearing individuals make errors, use slang, and mispronounce words constantly, but do not get reprimanded for doing so. Even hearing individuals who have learned Sign Language make mistakes. Keira signified the flawed goals in literacy education and emphasized that if the goal of language and literacy development were to effectively communicate, we would not be so focused on standards-based assessment and would allow students to build on their strengths, rather than focus on their weaknesses.

Nora also defined literacy as the means by which individuals communicate:

[Literacy is] anything to do with reading, writing, speaking, having a functional and above ability to communicate with others in whatever matter or form that is. So whether it is Sign Language, whether it be listening, speaking, reading – to be able to fully communicate and participate in society.
The purpose of communication is a prevalent understanding of literacy. The purpose is to strive in a given society and to develop effective communication by sharing thoughts and feelings in a given language.

*Literacy as Symbols and Decoding*

Although the nature of literacy education varies depending on the teachers' roles, all of the participants discussed literacy as a combination of decoding and meaning making. Keira defined decoding as looking at symbols in order to understand what they mean:

If I had to reduce [literacy] to its simplest form, I might say it's a kind of symbolic dexterity. So there's math literacy or numeracy, which is about having some kind of dexterity and interpreting and understanding the meaning behind numbers and symbols. And reading is that same thing; it's like a function of decoding symbols. I mean, there are people who talk about ASL literacy. Even though ASL isn't a written language, there's still a kind of literacy and decoding of symbols and meanings. Or music literacy, which is also about that. So I'd say my definition of literacy – to be literate – would be to have dexterity, to have the capacity to readily understand and interpret the meaning behind symbols of a particular field. Usually it's referred to as reading in a particular language, like English or French.

Keira suggested that literacy is a metaphor for competency in any given field. For example, if a student is translating a written English text to ASL, decoding is to know how to fingerspell words in order to understand the English-ASL orthography interpretation. On the other hand, to make meaning, one would have to be able to use the *sign* for a given word or concept. Therefore, regardless of being able to spell, if the student does not know what that spelled "word" means, they are not "reading" and no comprehension is occurring. For example, Keira explained that in
terms of ASL literacy, if a student sees a word in English and can fingerspell it, but does not know the actual hand-shaped sign associated with that English word and does not understand the concept, they will not make meaning and therefore the process of literacy is not complete.

Especially in deaf education, especially if the dominant language is Sign Language – the decoding part is so painful. In a hearing class, it's quite regular practice from young to have students read aloud. Like, read me this paragraph. Read the directions on such and such. That happens a lot less in a deaf and hard of hearing classroom, especially if students are using Sign Language as their dominant language, for all sorts of different reasons. It's also hard for the teacher to understand what the student is saying because the deciphering, the particular kind of sign is not natural. They're essentially showing English on the hands and so sometimes it doesn't make any sense at all. So you have to work backwards and use a bilingual approach... I guess my advice would be to recognize that there is no short cut, that there's decoding and meaning making, and create opportunities for it.

Keira understood that the process of reading for deaf and hard of hearing students is not as quick compared to their hearing peers. Since they are representing English on their hands through fingerspelling or verbatim English translation, it does not become a natural way of reading and does not make sense in ASL. She stated that teachers do not create many opportunities for deaf students to read because the decoding part of literacy takes a lot of time and patience. She continued:

There is no way around it. You have to do the work. You have to sit and read one word at a time, decode one word at a time, and then allow the penny to drop when meaning is made. And without that there is no reading, there's just pretending to read.
Deaf students need a one-word-at-a-time approach to reading early on in order to be able to properly interpret a text into ASL. In Keira's opinion, without the time devoted to word-by-word vocabulary learning, there is no progress in literacy since meaning making is not occurring.

Nora’s experience as a Teacher of the Deaf evolved into an Audio-Verbal Therapist role. In her realm of education, there is a large focus on technical linguistics:

Literacy can be very technical if you’re in an AVT role – phonics, sounding out, verb order. So a typical deaf student typically has a high frequency loss. That's more common than the low frequency loss. So they'll miss the s's, the f's, the th's. So when they're speaking to you, you'll hear them say, “I ha- a book.” So they've missed the v. “She ha- a pen.” The s isn’t there. In plurals, “They're in the room.” Like it should be an s, but they're not saying it. So things like that, you're actually missing the s. So I work on the s to try and make sure they're saying it. They may not hear it, so sometimes we have to teach it. But with our excellent hearing aids now and cochlear implants, they can hear them, for the most part. So teaching it just to make sure they remember that that's what they have to say, and then it becomes habitual as they go along.

Nora’s role focuses on teaching oral language. So for her, literacy symbols are phonemes (letter sounds) that students have to associate with meaning. For example, she talked about the plural s and how you explicitly have to teach that there is a sound associated with that letter that signifies plural words or various verb tenses:

You’re trying to get them to associate a letter with a sound, which is difficult. So, if you were to take the letter B [signs letter B], right? So, ba, ba, ba. And enough of them try. These two kids anyway, do try to speak as well. So, they are getting that idea. You can certainly see the speaking to the reading connection. And so much of it, before they start
to read, is oral anyway, or gestural or whatever it is. Then it starts to link as they go through.

In the role of an itinerant AVT, Nora goes into the schools to reinforce the oral expressive language. Part of the literacy process in this setting becomes the decoding the sounds of the letters through the use of ASL orthography and English phonics to build oral language skills.

*Literacy as Meaning Making*

The second step of the literacy process is to make meaning of what is being decoded. Keira said she would explicitly teach that there is a difference between decoding and meaning making. Echoing Nora’s comments, Keira compared the decoding in ASL to that of oral language:

> It’s the same, say, a hearing child learning to read when they're just deciphering the sounds, sounding it out, decoding the sounds of the words. Sometimes they'll say the word out loud but not hear the word at all. Not know the word they've said out loud, not know its meaning, not being able to visualize it… And I think actually that the joy of reading is that visualization in the mind – that moment when an idea comes to life.

Visualization becomes a key component in meaning making. Deaf students are extremely visual learners. If the students cannot create the image of what is being decoded or read (whether mentally or through ASL), then they are still missing that second part of literacy:

> I'd distinguish decoding from meaning… So, I give the students a lesson on the difference between decoding and actually making meaning and that they're two steps, two parts of the process. And so the same thing happens in Sign Language. Some students will spell the word and they feel like they've said it because they've spelled it. And I say, "But what does that spell? What does that mean?"
Alluding to the previous section, literacy is a two-step process. If students can fingerspell the word they are reading, they have decoded it, but they are not producing a natural sign for that word; they are only representing English on their hands. Whereas if meaning making was actually occurring, they would be able to contextualize and use specific hand-shapes to interpret what they are decoding and reading without signing the text verbatim.

Nora continued to describe her expertise in Audio-Verbal Therapy and teaching deaf students English grammar:

Again, with teacher of the deaf, a lot of our focus is on the oral, the expressive. I do some writing, but that takes a lot of time out of our actual time we're working on their expressive. So that's truly my focus. With my older students in high schools, yes, I will work with them on mind maps, sequencing, organization, definitely linking ideas, going through getting proof, all the things that a good teacher would do anyways, but really honing in on some of those things. Making sure that they have not only the proper ideas in order, but really focusing in on [grammar]. Are they using the tenses correctly? Are they adding the "ings" where they need to be? Are they making sense as they go? If they're American Sign, then I'm actually working on their second language. So, in that case, it's having them write out their ideas first to the best of their ability, and then working with them to put that into English. And that can be hard, because the kids don't necessarily see that structure.

If the students do not understand the structure of English grammar and language, then they will not make the meaning necessary for literacy to take place. Nora highlighted that when working with students who communicate through ASL, she is working on developing their second language (English). Therefore, deaf students should be considered as English Language
Learners, and teachers can use similar educational strategies as other English as a Second Language programs. The idea of deaf students as ELLs will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

Multiple Literacies

This section highlights the types of literacy and literacy practices that participants revealed throughout the interviews. Participants were asked to discuss what kinds of literacy are valued in their classrooms and what types of literacy are overlooked or denied. Each participant highlighted a numerous amount of literacies that move beyond traditional “reading or writing” understandings of literacy.

Keira began her discussion by posing some questions that challenge society’s general understanding of what literacy encompasses: “What is literacy? Some people think it's just reading in question. But how do you validate one form of literacy and not the other? But you never escape literacy, I mean literacy is interwoven into everything.” Therefore, literacy does not become just the notion of being able to read a book, but it engulfs many more practices alongside the idea of being able to read. However, most of the time in schools, we see a focus on reading and writing as the only form of literacy valued in classrooms.

Michelle also recognized literacy as a multi-faceted concept beyond traditional text-based reading and writing:

Reading texts of any kind in the classroom is counted as reading. Reading SmartBoard files, reading worksheets, reading newspapers, reading a passage, reading text messages, reading the internet, reading charts, and so on. Not all will be marked for reading, however, the reading everyone in my class gets to do is constantly available. Michelle allows her students to be exposed to a variety of literacy forms, including graphic texts and the media. By opening up the range of activities students are involved in, she broadens the
spectrum of literacy and helps her students make meaning of larger literacy dimensions, beyond just skills-based literacy assessment.

Keira discussed the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test as an example of the skills-based conception of literacy in deaf education:

They take the literacy test in my department and the majority of the students don't pass the literacy test. And the literacy test is there to measure something. How many students are literate in this way? But it becomes the thing. And that's a problem across the board with standardized testing. Now you're teaching to the test. Now the point is the test rather than the task that was important in the first place. And that's especially bad with the deaf students because they don't even necessarily know that they have literacy issues, like really get that. Somehow, I think high school is a bit of a realization point. I think there are probably other ones along the way – other testing points along the way – but that test is required to graduate. So the students are really motivated to pass it, and then they don't, and they feel quite devastated by it because they believe they have to graduate, they have to go to university, and if they don't they'll die or be homeless. I mean they really have fears about it. So they get really upset. They take it again and fail. Then they get to be exempt from it but then they have to take the [Ontario Literacy Course], which is all about taking the test. And then they don't necessarily pass the OLC or they struggle through it because there's nothing romantic about the OLC. It's awful.

So I don't know how much literacy is affirmed. Because really, the only literacy I see sitting around… Most of the time, it's a photocopy of a page of something that's - or a digital - something that's put up on the SmartBoard to read. There's no aesthetic, there's no choice, there's no freedom in it. You're going to be marked for it.
Once again, the traditional conception of literacy is to test students to a certain standard of a dominant language. The OSSLT does not account for students’ literacy expertise in languages other than English, and in turn, continues to foster a society that supports stagnant monolingual practices. Finally, Nora also resonated with the idea that literacy in school is stagnant: “In school, they read what they have to, and I think that's every kid, I don't see that it's different from any kid or any other typical child.” In Nora’s opinion, this is not just an issue specific to deaf literacy education but in the schooling environment altogether.

In critique of the skills-based conception of literacy, participants discussed alternative attitudes on literacy that they promote in their classrooms and educational settings. The data obtained for this section have been arranged in the table on the following pages to ensure clear presentation of the findings relating to the types of literacy that are validated in these teachers’ classrooms. The chart below is intended to present the findings clearly to the reader. Quotations are included where applicable.
Table 2. Participant Attitudes on Different Types of Literacy

| Abstract Literacy | Keira: “I don't know how important it is for them to have that small piece of information. How important is it to know your blood vessels go around the world four times? But I think the capacity to think in that kind of abstraction or to imagine, or the idea narrative, that all of those things are the things that kind of happen before you're six. When you're developing language, so that when you go into literacy, you have this wealth of understanding of the world and imagination that allows you to interpret texts like that. And part of what makes it difficult to understand that text is not having access to that primary experience of the ridiculousness of laying your blood vessels. So, I acted it out and we had a laugh and it was fun.” |
| Art and Visual Literacy | Keira: “I think that my students are incredibly literate and literacy-passionate when you think about literacy in terms of symbols, graphics, and visuals. Not necessarily when you think about reading - although some of my students are really passionate readers as well.” |
| **Body Literacy** | **Keira:** “I did this mime of describing [the concept that our blood vessels can trace the world four times] so if I were to remove my veins and lay them on the floor and walk out. Then I walked around the classroom, stopping off in Australia and Europe and coming back to the table, sitting for a moment and then going around. They were all laughing because they could understand. In that particular class, if I had not made it something that's tangible, they wouldn't have understood the concept.”

“I was teaching the circulation in one of the science classes. I was in the process of physically describing in Sign Language the process of the blood vessels, the veins, the blood in the veins returning to the heart, to then go to the lungs, to off-gas, carbon dioxide. As I was signing it, there was this natural movement, this natural choreography. So, I said, "You know, we could make this a dance!" Two of the girls are in a dance class. So we started little by little and we created this whole dance choreography to the movement of blood through the blood vessels. By naming them and what was in them. It got really elaborate - we were giggling and laughing - but in the end when I asked them to explain what it was and they understood because some things are just most conducive to learning.”

**Michelle:** Michelle briefly mentioned sports as a form of literacy in which her students are involved. |
| **Examples:** Mime, dance, choreography (writing for the body), sports |
### Everyday Literacy

**Examples:** Instruction manuals, television guides, ingredient labels, item labels, maps

| Keira: “Everything counts as reading. I mean, when I'm teaching English specifically. When I'm actually teaching English as opposed to science, because there are all kinds of different things that count as reading in science specifically, they're having opportunities to read. But we're talking about reading in my English classes... I don't care if it's the back of a shampoo bottle or the directions on the top rom, or the TV guide, because we can talk about how you decode any of those forms of reading, writing. So yeah, everything gets counted, every opportunity there is.” |
| Michelle: “Reading texts of any kind in the classroom is counted as reading. Reading SmartBook files, reading worksheets, reading newspapers, reading a passage, reading text messages, reading internet [pages], reading charts, and so on. Not all will be marked for reading, however, the reading everyone in my class gets to do is constantly available and there.” |
Incidental and Overheard Literacy

Examples:
Expressions, figures of speech, and incidental learning

Keira: “But, having said that, in the dance class sometimes the students will be kind of the equivalent to whispering in the back - in any class - but I always try to see, what are the students are seeing. It's easy not to listen when you have to make an effort to listen, like pay attention. Like you overhear stuff all the time - you don't overhear Sign, you have to pay attention. And the opposite that even when you're talking about big concepts you don’t forget about all the missing - and I think teaching deaf and hard of hearing students. Especially because of the language thing, potentially, and the capacity to overhear. There are a lot of things that they're not aware of.”

Nora: “All those things that happen, the nuances in every day language, they might not get, because they didn't hear it. They can’t overhear. So if you think, how many times we've heard our parents talking in another room, they wouldn't hear that. So they miss out on those things that we have, that inside knowledge, they’ve missed that.”

Michelle: “Students must be aware of English idioms.”

Media Literacy

Examples: Social media, news programs, news papers, current events

Keira: “Certainly media literacy is an important thing, especially in our time. The students are getting access to information about Ebola, for example. And Ebola is all over the media, social media, news media, newspapers… So then they're told about it, but they don't have the discriminating capacity. So, if they watch something on Facebook, if they watch a video on YouTube, some of my students haven't begun to
distinguish real from not real, let alone corporate sponsored or not corporate sponsored, or media bias. There are much bigger concepts that they need.”

**Nora:** “They’re not reading much as kids used to. Definitely Facebook, Instagram, all of those great social networks and they're so used to things flying back quickly, so it has to be short, quick ways to grab their attention and move on.”

**Music Literacy**

**Examples:** Composition, decoding notes, playing an instrument

**Technology and Design Literacy**

**Examples:** Architecture, stonemasonry, video games, graphic design

**Skills-Based Literacy**

**Examples:** Vocabulary, concept maps, grammar, spelling, reading books, comics/graphic novels, graphic texts, Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test

**Keira:** “You can create something, like a photograph. You can create something that then someone else can take a pause and look at. And they might not see what you saw when you took the picture. They might not even understand the context of the picture or even what the content of the picture is. But they're taking a moment to see, to look at something that you took some significant time to look at. There's something really intimate about that kind of sharing. And I don't hold that strictly to writing and reading as literacy. But there are all kinds of different literacy.”
It was very interesting to see these multiple dimensions of literacy be valued in the participants’ classrooms. All participants recognized that there are different forms of decoding and meaning making that students are doing throughout their interactions with various texts, including music, art, and media. I will briefly expand on the notions of *everyday literacy* and *shared literacy*. However, since we are discussing students who communicate through physical gestures and movements, the concept of body literacy that emerged from the findings is extremely significant and will be discussed in depth throughout this chapter and Chapter 5.

It was refreshing to see Keira and Michelle value every kind of reading as reading that is welcome into the classroom, no matter how insignificant that text might be. Keira mentioned it does not matter whether the students are reading the “back of a shampoo bottle” because it is still a form of engaging with a given text that students come across every day. Similarly, Michelle does not dismiss one kind of reading in favour of another one. It appears as if these participants do not rank the types of literacy as better than one another, but each as holding intrinsic value.

The concept of shared literacy is also noteworthy. Keira recognized different forms of art as a personal creation that can then transcend through the public sphere and be shared with others. This also relates to the notion of literacy as innately social (e.g. reading as a social process shared between groups of people). On one hand literacy practices can take on personal characteristics, but the ability to be able to share a work with a given audience brings an interpersonal dimension to the conception of literacy.

Another meaningful finding that emerged was the notion of Incidental Literacy, and the difficulty for deaf students to learn through incidental literacy, including English expressions, idioms, and figures of speech. Nora and Michelle both touched upon the difficulty with explicitly teaching figurative language and idioms to deaf students. Nora said:
I was teaching this to one of my private students this morning and I said it was “raining cats and dogs.” If you think of a child who's walking in on a conversation and hears you and I speaking, “It's raining cats and dogs!” And I don't say “outside,” I don't say “right now.” If they don't have enough hearing to know that it's raining, and they haven't seen outside, they might come into the conversation and say, “There's no way there can be a dog and a cat falling from the sky,” and take it so literally. But then they're made fun of, or they're laughed at, or some sort of a look like, What do you mean you didn't get that? So, teaching all those things that happen, the nuances in every day language, they might not get, because they didn't hear it.

Meaning making in literacy education can be difficult if there are more abstract concepts to be decoded. Michelle discussed her students’ struggles with reading. Since many of her students do not recognize themselves as readers, even though they can all read. It is difficult to help them understand that they are still readers, regardless of their reading skills:

My students have a hard time accepting themselves as readers let alone a good one. I had to convince them repeatedly that they are readers. The question of how well they are reading needs to be answered individually as some are better than others. So, as a collective whole, their attitude toward reading is generally negative or laid-back because they’re struggling readers. Making sense of the text is a challenge for most students I teach. They know work is involved and putting effort into it is a task they generally do not want to extend other than on a “need-to-know” basis or “to-pass” this course. We need to encourage our students to take full ownership of their own learning and be active readers. Step-by-step approaches with reading and modeling are needed to ensure understanding is taking place and encouraged wherever possible.
Like Keira, Michelle recognized that struggling readers need a step-by-step approach. The content has to be broken down and the topics must be revisited to build a foundation of understanding and knowledge before moving on to harder texts or other activities. The reading skills students require cannot be gained all at once, just as you see with elementary students learning to read. Therefore, modeling and breaking down of the material is necessary to help our students make meaning of the texts and become better readers.

**Theme 3: Learning Environments**

Several topics were discussed regarding the environments and spaces created for literacy and the impacts these spaces have on learning. The first idea that Michelle touched upon was the concept of a safe classroom:

All students have the ability to learn, yet in different ways. All students are good at something and shine in different areas. Classrooms must be safe environments for every person to participate and be active with their learning. No one should be interfering others from learning.

If the learning environment is unsafe in any form (e.g. lack of mutual respect, misbehaviour, etc.) there will be no learning taking place. It is important to ensure that student learning is not impeded by any factor in the classroom, otherwise, students will be passive in the class and will not learn.

*Learning in Community*

Regardless of subject matter, communal and social learning is a very important part of education. David Bloome (1985) describes reading as a social process and with regard to literacy, participants highlighted the importance of learning in community.
Michelle described how learning takes place in her classroom. She does create opportunities for students to read independently and with others, depending on the learning goals. However, she recognized the importance of reading as a social process:

Using reading as a social process, students bring meaning and background knowledge to the task and build and expand on each other’s ideas, thus remembering the story meaningfully and [becoming] better at decoding and improving their reading skills.

Students … make connections through discussion. Students read printed English and discuss ideas relating to the print and their experiences [in ASL]. Connections are made from text-to-self, text-to-text, or text-to-world, depending on the goals of the reading task.

In Michelle’s classroom, reading is both an independent task and a social one. However, students are constantly discussing topics they read to share their own experiences and opinions, which helps them practice perspective taking and peer communication.

Keira discussed the importance of mutual respect in a classroom and to foster the relationships in order to build a sense of communal learning:

Especially in our school system, the students don't have the choice to be there, they're required to go to school. So I take my position with them very seriously, in terms of always trying to see the best in them, to call out the best in them, even when they're not demonstrating that to me. And to really foster that in their relationship to each other, to learn by community.

She also brought attention to the way in which people value reading with young children. Through bedtime stories and picture books, children are exposed to literacy concepts early on in their lives:
With children, we know the importance of reading *with* them. So, we sit with them and read one word at a time, and then we repeat it, and we giggle, and we turn the page. Some of the students that I teach, haven't come to reading until so late because they weren't given the opportunity to acquire language until so late that now they're in the place where they really need someone to sit with them and read with them. But nobody - you know, they'll get the story and be told to read it - but they *can't* read it. And then they go home and nobody's going to sit and read it with them at home, for one reason or another, one of which being potentially that nobody at home signs.

Keira highlighted that secondary deaf students also need the experience of reading *with* people and learning literacy through communal reading. She offered strategies that could potentially help create spaces where deaf students can read in community:

I've actually been thinking that it'd be really good to have like a reading program for teenagers who are deaf who have literacy issues. To have somebody who is literate and fluent in Sign, to sit with them and read, even if it's children's stories or if it's an ESL book. Because there is no way around it. You have to do the work. You have to sit and read one word at a time, decode one word at a time, and then allow the penny to drop when meaning is made. And without that there is no reading, there's just pretending to read. And I think actually that the joy of reading is that visualization in the mind, that moment where an idea comes to life. Nobody was even in the room with you and suddenly you have a whole story that takes place, entered a whole other world. To do that, you have to go through the steps and I think people try to cut corners. So, I guess my advice would be to recognize that there is no short cut, that there's decoding and meaning making and create opportunities for it.
Keira believed we have to create opportunities to sit down with these students and actually read, word-by-word. She also mentioned how most teachers will often do the reading for the students and then interpret the material into ASL (See next section: Learning by Independence). But students need the time to be taken when slowing down and reading together one word at a time.

In Nora’s context, reading is also a social activity. She described her duty to practice speaking and listening and turning the text into spoken language:

We're reading together. So it may be just a short paragraph. What's the main idea? How does it make you feel? What are you inferring? Going through all those typical English concepts still needs to be done. So, we'll probably read out loud. I'm practicing speech, I’m practicing listening, I’m practicing language and then definitely comprehension for all of those literary components that need to be learned. So, I think it's essential. It's social in the sense that, the best way to do it is talk it out and obviously kids learn better when there's discussion.

The idea that linguistic communication is meant to develop social relationships and to communicate thoughts to others in a society emphasizes the idea that literacy is a social process. Also, Nora identified the importance of educators learning from one others in their community, particularly the community of teachers: “It's great to have learning from other people, seeing what else is out there, what other great ideas. And you don't necessarily use everything that you're given but it gives you a springboard to move on.”

Learning by Independence

Although there is a value in learning through community and social practices, there is also a huge benefit in learning by being independent. As Keira stated:
The goal is always to foster a sense of community and personal responsibility and empowerment. That the school is their school. I really try to, as part of secondary, undo some of the paternalism that they've potentially experienced before getting to me. That "Let me do it for you, let me help you, let me check everything you do." That kind of elementary school approach. But to me, my attitude towards secondary is that it's the last opportunity you have before you're entering the big wide world where people expect you to be independent or responsible for yourself. So every opportunity I have to give the students the space to make decisions for themselves. Even if they're bad decisions, even if they didn't do their homework, or they didn't bring their binder. I'm not doing binder checks, or homework checks for everyone. I'm checking - did you understand the concepts and if not, why not? Let’s talk about that. If there’s something you need, let’s talk about that. But I put all the responsibility on them.  

The independence is not only attributed to the course content and subject matter, but to skills like responsibility, initiative, and decision-making. In the Ontario education system, these categories are called “Learning Skills and Work Habits.” Students need to have opportunities to be independent and not always having someone holding their hand throughout their academic lives. Keira continued:

I look for every opportunity for independence. That's my point, because the goal is for them to be able to read without you there. It's quite fundamental. It's pretty obvious and yet I don't see that in practice. I mean teachers, you know, they're teaching Of Mice and Men to students who can't even read children's stories. And if you can give up that pride that one might have about the kinds of books they read, then they have access to so many more books. So I try to do that by modeling it, by talking about my favourite children's
books. About other adults who love certain children's books. How some children's books are actually geared for adults and are not for children. Sometimes I've gotten money and gone on trips with the students where they can all buy a book, so they have that sense of self-empowerment.

Keira alluded to the fact that it may not even be the classroom culture we create in our schools that create opportunities for independence in the classroom, but fostering a sense of empowerment through the types of books we choose for them. If these students have not developed literacy skills at their age-level, then pushing them to read books like Of Mice and Men will not give them the pleasure of reading or even a sense of confidence because they struggle through it:

Then finding reading that's relevant to them, and that matches their reading level. And if that's a 5-word sentence, it's a 5-word sentence. If it's a 3-word sentence, it's a 3-word sentence. But there is no comparison to the engagement level of the student who has [actually] read something.

Nora also believed that independence is important for student achievement. Specifically, she highlighted the value of self-advocacy in high school:

It’s self-advocacy in high school for sure. If somebody's writing down the announcements or gets a copy of the announcements, the types of things that you would miss, because PA's are notably horrible for everybody, but especially a child with hearing loss. Self-advocacy is for the child to be able to advocate for themselves, especially when they know they did not hear something or will have difficulty hearing.

Michelle discussed the small population of students who understand their responsibility as independent learners:
Some students come to school expecting to receive answers from teachers or staff and receive them. By showing all students the learning tools, most will do what is necessary to “get-by” rather than using them purposefully, making connections to other classes, courses, to the world, to the self, to the text, or developing a refined set of learning tools for their own uses. Fewer students understand their role as learners and take responsibility for their own learning. These students come prepared to work.

Not only should teachers show students the learning tools, but they should teach their students how to use them independently so that students are able to learn the skills that will help them succeed on their own.

Integration vs. Separation

Referring to the discussion of learning in community, one of the ideas Keira discussed was the notion of academic separation. She highlighted the idea that most things are segregated in schools, whether it be subjects, departments, student seating, etc., and how integration can make subjects more conducive to learning:

I think there's all this separation, you know? This subject is separate from that, and this room is separate from nature and from the arts. And you're separated from each other and don't look at anybody else's paper and eyes down! But actually we learn all kinds of things communally. We learn all kinds of things by asking our neighbour for help. So there's a time to maybe use certain assessment and evaluation strategies to see what exactly does this individual know. But I think it's a terrible thing to create classroom communities where learning with each other is a bad thing.

Keira’s criticism of segregated learning reflects the social and cultural perspectives on literacy and learning as will be described in Chapter 5. She also discussed the value of combining various
disciplines including integrating the arts, nature, and the real world when teaching about the “real world:”

I try to integrate things rather than separate things. Except distinguishing them when it's important to distinguish something in particular. But, I have a lot of arts integration where possible. I find lots of opportunities for field trips and to be out in the world. The room is full of computers, wall-to-wall computers and a giant SmartBoard. So when I'm trying to explain to them something about the world, I can call it up on the SmartBoard. So we've created this totally sterile environment and then we try to recreate the real world with technology, but we could instead just be out in the real world. We could just be out in the trees to learn about the trees.

Keira recognized a fundamental irony in education. We teach students about “real world” through didactic and segregated approaches, including textbooks, computers, and lecturing when we could actually use the real resources in the world to educate our students.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally relevant pedagogy is a term introduced by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994). This concept describes “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Through the use of backgrounds knowledge and prior experiences of students, teachers connect students’ home and school lives while meeting the curriculum expectations.

Keira alluded to the importance of incorporating culturally relevant teaching in the classroom and that it should not be exclusive to students who have cultures foreign to the privileged culture in their community. She emphasized that it is important to teach concepts that may even be uncomfortable or outside of students’ norms:
So, I don't think multiculturalism is for those “other” kids. I should have included that in my original values. But I think it's for everyone. That it's as important to recognize yourself in the curriculum, as it is not to recognize yourself in the curriculum. So my students all the time are taking on things that are completely outside of what their norms are, what they know. And also they have the opportunity to be completely within their parameters of what they know, to affirm what they already know. Looking for opportunities for the simplest and the more complex, you don't just say, “Oh you're basic, so we're just going to talk about basic stuff.” They have the capacity to talk about really important things; they're starving for it.

Similarly, Michelle highlighted the necessity of including students’ varying cultures in classroom topics, however, it is also important to value their shared language and culture, ASL and Deafness:

Students from various backgrounds share their literacy experiences where possible.

Mostly students choose topics close to their interest reflecting their cultural values.

Sometimes I include images, texts, and news about other cultures in a positive light. We have a multi-culture environment in our school but we celebrate our common language, ASL, and experiences of being deaf.

She also believed that taking students’ interests into consideration is extremely important when planning the curriculum. Her advice to teachers was: “I often include students’ interests and engage them with their learning through communication, reading, and writing. Instill a love for learning; encourage students to find something they’re interested in and fly with it.”

Nora had a slightly different approach to culturally relevant pedagogy. Being a teacher in a Catholic Board, she recognized that her setting looked at cultural pedagogy from a Catholic
perspective and not through a multicultural lens. However, she highlighted that the needs vary depending on the school’s location and student demographic:

I work for a Catholic school board, so our needs are slightly different than a public board, because you have to be Catholic to go from K to eight. We don't have kids from any culture that's not Catholic, obviously. But in the province of Ontario, grade nine and beyond is public funding so anybody can go to any school. So when we do get kids in the older grades, it changes the community quite drastically, because we’re not used to it. And I’m not saying that in a negative way at all, it’s just very different. Coming from the elementary school where it’s pretty much where everybody celebrates Christmas, and then not as the high schools, it’s – it’s just a different environment. Um, in public schools though, they’re not celebrating Christmas. So it depends on where you are. So definitely cultural differences that way, I think in my stream we’re certainly look at a lot of different genres and everything that’s out there, but it might not be as prominent to pick something that is from a different culture, unless that student is particularly in your class.

Nora also talked about “teacher choice” when it comes to culturally relevant pedagogy. Our system has mostly adopted a teacher-centred approach to curriculum development where the teacher becomes the one choosing the material with which students will work:

So, I guess what I might choose if I was a teacher of a classroom, might be very different from my neighbour who works at the public school, because she has set up a multicultural class. But I have taught ESL as well, so teaching English as a Second Language, and I'm the only white Canadian in the classroom, my teaching is very different. You teach to the needs of your classroom. So you might bring it in where you
can and it becomes a matter of choice. And the first thing that you're going to grab is something that's more relevant to the kids you're teaching.

Whereas Keira and Michelle believed that it is important to share culturally diverse material to all students in order to foster critical thinking, perspective-taking, and awareness for shared experiences, Nora believed culturally relevant teaching changes based on the needs and demographic of one’s classroom. When asked about teaching Deaf culture,

If I have a student in my class, I might be more likely to choose something that has someone with a disability. It might highlight somebody who has a hearing loss, but that all depends on the child. I have one student that I've worked with in the past, who had a teacher of the deaf who worked very strongly on a lot of deaf history for this particular student. And when I started to work with her, it was "I don't want to know anything more about the deaf culture. Stop it. I want to be seen as a regular kid." And yeah, absolutely, that was jumped. And it's the sensitivity of your kids and where the need lies. So, sometimes I see a kid who with hearing loss is having a hard time understanding and relating, so I'll pick a book that has a kid as the main character, that is deaf, and I have a number of those books. And I love teaching the younger kids with those to show them that they're not alone. But to hit that with an older kid, it'd almost be, you know, "Again, like really? Why do I have to be seen as the deaf kid?" So, again, I think as they get older, they - they're like everyone else. They have a hearing loss, so what?

In this situation, it is evident that in order to maintain student engagement, Nora had to accommodate the student’s complaint. However, I think it is important to include these culturally relevant teachings in the classroom. If it is not reaching the students, perhaps there is a different approach to implement it into the classroom to achieve student engagement.
Theme 4: Resources (or Lack Thereof)

This section examines the types of resources that are available to students who are deaf and hard of hearing. The following will also discuss teacher perceptions on the ways in which Ontario lacks resources.

Teaching Strategies

Listed below are some of the teaching strategies that were prevalent in the participants’ discussion about their classroom practices. The findings are presented in the following format to ensure clear reading of possible strategies that new Teachers of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing might choose to adopt in their classrooms. However, many of these strategies have been applied to hearing classrooms to, which challenges the assumption that deaf students cannot participate in similar activities as hearing students. Alongside the use of ASL interpreters, hearing aids, and other auditory advancement technologies (e.g. FM Systems), the participants discussed the following additional useful strategies:

• Finding reading that is relevant to the students
• Providing material that matches their reading pace (not too easy, but not too challenging) before advancing to harder levels
• Using the library as a resource for a wide range of reading material
• Altering the environment and space of learning

Keira: “I try to create soft spaces for reading. We'll bring in a rug in the room. I'm really sensitive to the environment, and I think the environment, especially when reading is involved, is important. Even though you're disappearing into another world, your body almost has to be invited to just stay awhile. So, I've had beanbags in rooms. I've had couches in rooms. I've had places for students can
choose if they want to sit on the floor, on a beanbag or on a couch or at a desk or table - wherever is a comfortable place. So whenever we have reading activities the students have the opportunity to sit wherever they want, be however they want.”

- Treating reading as a pleasure, not a testable act:
  
  Keira: “I think one of the worst things that people do with reading is [be didactic and] really rigid about it. Okay, now we're going to sit and read for 10 minutes. Turn the page. You're reading that wrong, read it again. It's like killing the reading spirit. But if it's something that you do that's a pleasure, and there's lots of different stuff that reflects what you might be interested in.”

- Offering a variety of genres to read/write about:
  
  Keira: “I'm also trying to be really sensitive about things that people might be interested in. So I've had graphic novels, books on sports, books with deaf characters as often as possible, ESL books, children’s books.”

- Using manipulative visuals:
  
  Keira: “I have these sentences that are all wacky English sentences. So the order of the words totally changes the meaning, like "He gave the man a fish," or "He gave the fish a man," have different meanings. So if you draw a picture that describes that, we do actual visualizing exercises, and when the students actually realize that there's something funny in what they're reading, there's meaning or there's an image. When there’s that image, sort of a light to their mind, there is engagement.”

- Translating/interpreting:
Nora: “If they're [students using] American Sign, then I'm actually working on their second language. So, in that case, it's having them write out their ideas first to the best of their ability, and then working with them to put that into English. And that can be hard, because the kids don't necessarily see that structure.”

- Vocabulary building: breaking down sentences and associating words with signs (if applicable)
- Practicing repeatedly
- Using Signed Exact English/Manually Coded English (different from ASL, every English word has a specific sign associated with it, helps with understanding difficult grammar structures)
- Ensuring pre-teaching, post-teaching, and class notes and handouts are available (i.e. photocopied, posted digitally)
- Being cognizant of teacher position in the classroom (i.e. Don't stand in front of a window, don't have the light blocking you out, do not face the wall when writing…)

These strategies are not universal or the only strategies that can be used with deaf and hard of hearing students. Also, they may not apply to every type of student in every classroom as the needs of students vary based on each individual student and every new classroom environments. These strategies have been useful for the participants in the study and are presented here as practical guidelines and suggestions for other Teachers of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

*Access to Language*

All participants highlighted the issue of deaf and hard of hearing students not having access to a foundational language (ASL) before they start learning English. Keira raised a
possible cause to this problem and believed it is correlated with the limited proficiency in ASL of hearing parents who have deaf children and the exclusivity of cochlear implants:

Ten percent of deaf children are born to deaf parents. So ninety percent are born to hearing parents who most likely don’t know Sign Language. So in order [for deaf children] to acquire a natural language, they have to have access to people. There has to be a societal approach and that doesn’t have to be an either/or. Because there’s this whole debate between oralism and manualism – it’s like an invented debate; it never had to be a debate. If you hear, or if some opportunity, potentially science, creates a possibility for you to hear and speak, there’s no reason why that has to be mutually exclusive to bilingualism, to fluency in Sign. And the only reason that students fall through the gap is that one of those options is being taken away.

Perhaps the issue is not the fact that the students have innate linguistic delays but that ASL and spoken language are seen as mutually independent of each other, and therefore, the student is not given access to a language that could potentially help build their linguistic ability:

In Ontario, there's actually an incredibly restrictive attitude toward [Sign] language acquisition for the deaf. And part of it is that it's a very medicalized model, where the children are given cochlear implants or hearing aids, and then they're expected to learn English. And the idea is that if they learn Sign Language, it will hinder their ability to learn English, which actually is not true. If English is a natural enough language for them to acquire, they will acquire it; and if Sign Language is not useful enough for them, they will drop it… But there's so much fear around it and so much dominance about speaking English and so much lack of understanding about Sign Language and what it is as a language and the importance of it in the brain.
The medical-deficit model of deafness is prevalent in our society and it is seen through the linguistic hierarchy between ASL and English, where English is seen as the superior language. Keira also discussed parental-induced language deprivation in deaf children (i.e. not being given access to ASL at infancy) by juxtaposing the idea of hearing parents that provide their hearing children with bilingual opportunities in Sign and English:

There's a reason why there are certain students who are taking three languages in school; there's a capacity in language that's nurtured in infancy. A lot of deaf students have the opposite experience: language deprivation where they're deprived of language in infancy. And it has a life-long effect. If you sign to a hearing baby, signing is easier to a hearing baby than speaking; that's why we have all these "Mommy and Me" Baby Sign Language opportunities. And when the baby comes into speaking age, they don't say, “I'm not talking, I prefer Sign Language.” They'll speak when they're ready! And they'll speak English. If they choose to be bilingual, they will be, like hearing kids of deaf parents. Hearing children are provided with language wealth. They naturally acquire English through aural and oral means, and some are even given the chance to learn signs for babies throughout infancy. However, language deprivation in deaf children is partly due to the fact that one of their options for language development is being taken away.

Michelle also discussed the importance of having access to both ASL and a second language:

It is my understanding that young clients with a cochlear implant must undergo intensive speech training with no ASL learning or support as it may mess up their data collection and result interpretations regarding its success. It is my view that a child should have the best of both worlds: speak, read, and write in the majority language and learn ASL and
Deaf culture as part of his/her identity. Having ASL along with the majority language gives any child access to high literacy skills.

Keira and Nora compared American language programs for the deaf to Canadian programs. Keira discussed an infancy program in California that assists with the problem of language deprivation in deaf children:

In California, they have infancy programs, for example, a specialized program for children who are deaf and hard of hearing who will be going into the board from grade one to six. From infancy on they have a program that's really language intervention for families. So they have deaf adults, fluent adults, fluent in Sign, who go to the family's home and teach them in their home words that are appropriate to their home or culture and their language. To ensure that by the time the kid enters elementary school, if they're fluent in English, great! And if they're fluent in Sign, great! And if they're fluent in both, great! But it will prevent the possibility that they will be six years old and not fluent in anything.

Keira continued by urging the need for a similar program in Ontario to support language acquisition in deaf children because the children who do not have successful cochlear implants, there is an opposite possibility of “languagelessness” and therefore a policy of infant bilingualism should be implemented to prevent that possibility.

Keira also raised the issue of linguistic age (i.e. the number of years a person has had access to language) and its relationship to language development and psychological development:

If we're looking at [deaf people] as a language community, [we should] look at them in terms of the years of access to language. They may understand body language more than
you ever could or I ever could, but it's not necessarily a language that they can use with any kind of dexterity with somebody else to share common knowledge, to share an idea, to share a vantage point. So a sharable language. How long have they had access to that? So if they've had three years of language, they're three linguistic years old, but not necessarily developmentally. They could be a teenager with all the things going on in adolescence, physically, physiologically, and their desires. We're used to developmental years and linguistic years being matched in a predictable way. But they're not with these students, with this population necessarily. And being able to distinguish that - like linguistic language from literacy, from the mode of language like speech or sign - I think that's significant.

It was interesting that Keira identified this dissonance between linguistic age and developmental age. This idea corresponds to the need for teachers and parents of deaf and hard of hearing students to put in the time to read together, read slowly, and offer constant access to language throughout the child’s life to prevent the possibility of “languagelessness.”

When asked about the research on fourth-grade reading level plateaus commonly seen in deaf and hard of hearing students, Keira raised the topic of language access as being the ultimate determinant of grade-level reading abilities.

We're talking about students who had late language acquisition. Why did they have late language acquisition? [Perhaps] they were either given hearing aids or cochlear implants that were not successful for them for one reason or another. There are multiple reasons why that could be the case. They have learning disabilities, which could be a case either way. Or the language that they would naturally have acquired at birth, ASL, was withheld from them for some reason.
Again, the various circumstances of the individual are what make up their literacy abilities and without early language access, there is no opportunity to develop language (signed or spoken) decoding skills. Keira continued:

So, grade-four reading level. How well do you think we would read if we didn't acquire language fluency before grade 9? Before grade 12? How literate are you going to be? Because literacy is staggered for a reason. We learn language as infants and then we decode that language in reading. If you don't have the language, there is nothing to decode. There is no decoding, there's still acquiring language.

Michelle had similar views about the fourth-grade reading plateau. Like Keira, she highlighted the importance of being able to find meaning in a text and make connections with it in order to develop literacy skills. Michelle said that in order to move beyond the fourth-grade literacy plateau, students need to move from “learning to read” to “reading to learn”:

The fourth-grade level benchmark has been around for a long time in determining deaf students’ reading plateau. Students are still learning to read and, from there, to progress to reading to learn would make a breakthrough of the 4th grade plateau. When they make further connections with reading personally, know that English words carry multiple meanings, and consistently put effort into managing comprehension and other reading strategies, they can go far.

Part of the issue with secondary deaf education that was discussed throughout the interviews was that there is not enough support for the students who need extra resources. Particularly, Nora spoke about the challenge with finding appropriate resources for students, that oftentimes relates to lacking access to appropriate language:
If the students are not supported with the American Sign Language and everything else… And that's where I'm finding it really tough with the student who's completely ASL; I have no problem with it, but we have to make sure those kids have supports. And that's what Ontario is truly lacking. We don't have enough interpreters. Too many people are being hired that aren't interpreters. It's a four-year program at George Brown; it's not you and I taking Sign Language classes. Not that that's wrong, but it's not an interpreter. And people don't realize everything else that's done as an interpreter. They prep, they have all those other additional needs that have to be done in a classroom that you wouldn't think of. And there are not enough Teachers of the Deaf, and there are not enough interpreters, so what do we do?

Nora also built on the role of an ASL interpreter in the classroom, and it is clear that access to language in terms of having them in a mainstream classroom plays a significant role in the students’ engagement and learning:

A certified interpreter's job is to interpret everything that is taking place that they hear. It is the whole environment around them. A signing EA, or communicator might be able to give the information to the deaf individual, but it is unlikely able to translate accurately into ASL. The interpreters are also the individual's voice when speaking to others. So you're seeing, "Oh, he just said this to this person and he just said that to this person," and that's their role: to communicate everything that they're hearing in that classroom to that child. You and I, with the Sign Language, we'll get by signing. But we're sure not going to be signing everything else that everyone else said, and certainly not the classroom culture, what the person said, what the announcement said, what is going on and on. And,
it makes it so much more rich when you have [that]. When you think of how many things they are left out of if they don't have that.

If the deaf student is placed in a mainstream hearing classroom, there is a serious need for an ASL interpreter and not just someone who knows how to sign. Consequently, Nora mentioned how valuable an interpreter’s role is, as they sign every little detail that occurs in the classroom, not just signing one-on-one conversations with that student.

Nonetheless, she also discussed the lack of hiring in some boards and how that also affects the amount of time students are getting with qualified Teachers of the Deaf:

I think that one of the big things that needs to really be mentioned is that [students who are] deaf and hard of hearing right now are not getting the support they need, regardless of where they are. I'm in a board that really has two Teachers of the Deaf. I am covering a leave, so when the leave comes back, we still have only two Teachers of the Deaf, and I'm a qualified Teacher of the Deaf that doesn't have a job. I'll still be a teacher, but not in the same role. [Another] board has thirteen Teachers of the Deaf. Now, they are double our size, but double. So two plus two is four. Thirteen is… Kids that are in the [other] board are sometimes being seen up to four times a week; I'm seeing my kids this year once a week. I have such a large caseload. The time that students are getting with qualified Teachers of the Deaf have been drastically going down.

It is not merely the case that there are not enough Teachers of the Deaf, there is also lack of resources because the population of deaf students is so low. Therefore, although student need may be on the rise, there is not enough support going into the programs that support deaf students and that promote the need for hiring Teachers of the Deaf.
Theme 5: Challenging Assumptions

The final theme that emerged from the interview data involved the notion of challenging assumptions that are commonly associated with deafness and deaf students’ abilities, both in the classroom and in society. The two topics that were most challenged were paternalism towards deaf individuals and viewing deafness as a disability.

Paternalism

Paternalism is also a topic that arose in my interviews, which involves regarding deaf people as individuals who always need help and cannot persevere on their own. Keira described how many people come to Deaf Studies because they feel like they need to help the Deaf community. She offered another perspective that shaped the way she found herself pursuing deaf education:

I didn't come to deaf education to help anyone. I didn't come to Sign Language to help anyone. I teach Sign Language and I ask the students sometimes, why are you taking Sign? And sometimes they say, I want to be a speech pathologist or I want to help deaf people. And I always, both affirm that it's wonderful that they want to do something [but] here's another way of looking at that: I came to Sign because I was really moved by it and I was moved by the Deaf community and I met people that I admired right from the beginning. So I don't hold myself above the community. I hold myself as part of the community, as part of the Signing community.

Keira continued to discuss the power and privilege dynamics of being associated with both the hearing and the Deaf community:

It's a lot of responsibility in that to be part of a minority culture and to be part of a majority culture. To be hearing and part of the ASL community. I have opportunities that
my deaf colleagues don't have. And there's a real sense of responsibility in that - to not squander those opportunities and to not take advantage of them and to find opportunities to move the whole community forward with the community, as part of the community.

Keira recognized the difficulty of being part of both the minority and majority and how tensions can arise, but her philosophy on community reflects the way she views deafness: not as stagnant identity inferior to others, but a fluid cultural group. The only way to change the paternalism is to alter societal ways of thinking, which will be discussed in the next section.

Keira concluded by saying that she challenges the “save them” way of thinking when dealing with students with diverse needs and treats them with respects and gives them opportunities for independence:

I think especially with the deaf and hard of hearing students and students with disabilities, there's often this help attitude. Like let me help you, let me control you, let me parent you. But in my classroom, I really try to raise the bar of individual responsibility, maturity, respect, and playfulness.

Therefore, in Keira’s classrooms, the learning environment is not always a segregated and didactic one, but a space that allows for social interaction, independence, and fun.

*Deafness as a Disability*

As discussed in the literature review of this paper, deafness can be viewed through a medical model or a cultural model. Oftentimes, it is viewed as a medical disability that must be compensated for either through cochlear implants, audio-verbal therapy, and/or speech therapy. Several issues were raised throughout the interviews that bring up the notion of challenging the view of deafness as a disability.
Keira first highlighted how American Sign Language is listed under Special Education when referring to educational streams, whereas it should be categorized under Languages. She continued by discussing how deafness and ASL become associated with disabilities because there is a social construction of disability (i.e. what is different than the “norm”) and that is what causes the views of deafness as a disability.

Reflecting again on the research that states most deaf students plateau at about a fourth-grade reading level, Keira referred to this social construction and how the difficulty with reading is a product of the social environment of the students rather than the actual students’ abilities:

The reason that [the fourth-grade reading level is] common has everything to do with the society and the circumstances that the child is raised in and the circumstances of the child. So [a] child happens to be in plan to have a cochlear implant, or hearing aid, that was successful for them such that they were able to acquire English spoken language fluency at grade level, at age, entered first grade with exposure to literacy, and grew up. They probably don't have a grade-four reading level either, they're probably at grade level. So do they count as deaf?

Reflecting back on the definition of deafness, Keira challenged the way deafness is categorized as one rigid identity of hearing loss. She stressed that deaf identities are fluid and, as mentioned previously, even hearing individuals can be part of the deaf community, including hearing children of deaf parents and hearing signers. Keira questioned if all the diverse people in the deaf community are considered to have a “disability” whether they have a hearing loss or not:

If they're deaf and ASL is their dominant language, or if they're hearing, or deaf, or hard of hearing, and English is their dominant language, and they have had language from
infancy and literacy from infancy, the likelihood that they will be at grade-level is high and they're typically indistinguishable.

If these students who identify as deaf in one way or another are indistinguishable from their fully literate hearing peers, are they still identified with a “disability?”

Keira was probing this question with her responses, and she began to challenge the common assumption that being literate has to do with reading “at grade-level” by sharing her experiences with students’ abstract thinking abilities:

It's amazing because my students are often seen as less literate because they're not necessarily reading and writing at level. But for example, we went to see this really abstract dance performance recently in the city. It was quite abstract. And there was our class – the deaf and hard of hearing dance class and the mainstream dance class went together… [It was] quite complex: political structures and power structures… And the assumption was that the deaf and hard of hearing students would be less likely to get it, because it was abstract. Afterwards, they all had so much to say about it. All these nuances and movement that they noticed. Or the power structures between the people on stage.

The deaf and hard of hearing- students were able to understand so much of the dance performance. The concept of visual-body literacy is so important when working with deaf and hard of hearing students because they pick up on bodily cues differently than hearing students might:

Actually, they got it ten times more than their hearing peers because they're so well versed in the language of the body. They're so body literate. Which is amazing, the things
that they point out, the things that they see, the dynamics between people, the tensions they see. All of that. All of that human experience that's written on the body.

The concept of body literacy raised by Keira is so powerful. By challenging the notion that deaf students are unable to analyze complex material, Keira provided students with opportunities to dive into the experience of watching dances, reading body movements, and analyzing complex material, which may not be considered a “traditional” form of literacy. The topic of body literacy will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

Nora also discussed the students’ environment as a determinant of their success and that deaf students have the ability to accomplish anything as long as their circumstances are conducive to their learning:

Each student is capable of anything that they put their minds to and we need to be able to give them and foster that belief at any time. I have such a high special needs background; I've basically only taught kids with special needs with some sort of a learning disability or with just you know difficulties and challenges. It's adapting to them to be able to give them the best environment to learn possible. So, if it's handing them extra notes, if it's breaking it down, it's teaching them in a different way, teaching through games, whatever it is, give them all the possibilities.

The responsibility is on the teachers to create environments that are suitable and appropriate for student learning. Just as teachers in mainstream classrooms are expected to use differentiated instruction throughout their lessons, teachers working with deaf and hard of hearing students must provide opportunities for students to succeed.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

I begin this chapter by expanding on Keira’s notion of body literacy. Subsequently, the chapter will comment on the various ideas that emerged from the study and explore issues and questions that are commonly seen in deaf literacy education, such as the importance of understanding deafness as a spectrum of ability, the value of multiliteracies, and recognizing deaf students as English Language Learners. Finally, I will reflect on my personal experience working with students who identify as Deaf or Hard of Hearing and provide suggestions for areas of future research.

Access to a Foundational Language

Literacy as a spectrum of ability beyond text-based reading and writing was also discussed in Chapter 2. Being literate encompasses more than just the ability to read and write. If literacy is recognized as a multi-faceted way of communication, the range of ability we see in deaf classrooms increases. From visual literacy to social literacy, the concept of multiple literacies should be emphasized in literacy classrooms. Being literate is not a stagnant skill, but one that can be applied to multiple environments and tasks, regardless of having access to printed literature.

Regarding text-based literacy skill development, Justice (2002) argues that learning best happens in social environments and that parents who read to their children regularly have better vocabulary development. On the other hand, children who are deaf or hard of hearing generally have decreased incidental vocabulary learning through book reading because adults tend not to read to them as much as they do to hearing children (Cannon et al., 2010). As Kiera suggested, a helpful way of getting deaf children exposed to early literacy involves shared reading. The dialogic reading and repeated reading strategies during interactive shared picture-book reading
can help the child familiarize themselves with the pragmatics and social aspects of literacy, which play a huge role in social discourses (Cannon et al., 2010). As Guardino et al. (2014) suggested, the adult and the child could alternate roles to give the child the experience of being the storyteller, while the adult becomes the active listener and questioner.

In my findings, Michelle highlighted the importance of deaf children’s access to a foundational language (ASL) as a support for literacy skill development. As Wilbur (2000) stated:

Deaf children who have deaf parents (less than 10% of all deaf children) who use sign language at home are an apparent exception to the generalizations about deaf children’s reading ability, because they have a fully established language base prior to learning to read. (p. 82)

Furthermore, access to a complete first language during early childhood is critical for later reading comprehension. A language foundation is important for spoken language development, therefore, in deaf children, a parent’s signing skills predict their language development. Since language foundation is necessary in developing literacy, bilingual education (e.g. simultaneously learning American Sign Language and English) is advantageous for deaf and hard of hearing children and is practiced in provincial schools for the Deaf in Ontario (Baker, 2011).

However, not only should the students be instructed in ASL, they should also, as Keira mentioned, have the right to study ASL as an official language. As stated in Chapter 2, John-Steiner et al. (1994) stated: “ASL must play a much more active role in Deaf education. Students should be receiving formal classroom instruction not only in ASL but also about ASL. Students and teachers together must explore and discuss the languages of the community” (p. 130). An approach to literacy education that allows students to study their native language as a valid form
of literacy “not only empowers language users, it also empowers and strengthens the suppressed language… It is time for those concerned with Deaf students’ struggles to find a voice to realize the importance of ASL literacy. ASL is a beautiful language. It captures and expresses the pride, history, and the identity of Deaf people” (John-Steiner et al., 1994, p. 131; p. 134).

**Deaf Students as English Language Learners**

Although Guardino et al. (2014) defined Deaf English Language Learners as students who have a native language at home other than English and use American Sign Language as a third language, I want to suggest that even Deaf students who *only* use ASL are in their very nature ELLs, regardless of the spoken language that their family uses. Regardless of the language used at home, ASL is not their third language if it is the only one they are using.

Riker (2015) reflected on research done that evaluates English literacy development based on prior acquisition of American Sign Language. This body of research supports the claim that Deaf children require access to a foundational language *before* learning English. This foundational language cannot be a spoken language, but a visual one, because speech is not accessible to Deaf children. As Freel et al. (2011) suggested, there is a strong positive correlation between ASL proficiency and English literacy skills, meaning that Deaf children should have access to ASL as early in their life as possible.

At home, hearing children are exposed to a strong first language. Their parents primarily use spoken language to communicate, which provides a natural environment for them to acquire the language (Riker, 2015). After acquiring language, they can develop their Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), which are necessary to appropriately play, interact, and socialize with their peers (Cummins, 1979). Having a strong BICS foundation allows the student to enter
the classroom ready to learn and acquire Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), which includes academic skills such as literacy and math (Cummins, 1979).

Deaf children of hearing parents (who do not sign) do not have access to spoken language used by their parents as hearing children do, so they do not fully acquire a first language foundation. Therefore, Deaf children start school at a disadvantage because they need to learn both BICS and CALP simultaneously in a second language (Riker, 2015).

However, research shows that Deaf children of Deaf parents acquire language and enter school ready to learn because their parents use an accessible, visual language in the home, which provides them with the foundation needed to develop their interpersonal communication skills and succeed academically (Strong & Prinz, 1997). As Keira discussed, language acquisition must be supported in deaf children through American Sign Language because any language deprivation can possibly cause “languagelessness.” Although Deaf children of Deaf parents have similar academic achievement as hearing children (since they offer their children ASL from birth), the lack of early and fully accessible visual language exposure (e.g. ASL acquisition) in deaf children of hearing parents can contribute to low levels of reading achievement seen in deaf students because students without ASL exposure do not acquire a natural first language on which to build English literacy skills.

**Body Literacy and Aesthetics: Deafness and Literacy on a Spectrum**

Throughout Chapter 2, d/Deafness was defined and examples of deafness on a spectrum of identity were provided, resisting the limitation of being only defined as having a hearing loss. All participants recognized deafness not as a single identity but as an umbrella of identities to which an individual connects. Similarly, participants highlighted the range of literacy practices
that make up their pedagogy beyond skills-based reading and writing assessments. For this section, I would like to focus on Keira’s notion of body literacy as first discussed in Chapter 4.

As Vasudevan (2014) stated, “new literacies scholarship calls for a pedagogical reimagination that leans into the lives of youth and creates openings for their literacies, not a pedagogy that supplants one canon for another” (p. 237). Findings from my study reinforce the importance of recognizing literacy as a broad range of decoding and meaning making beyond just skills-based reading and writing. In terms of body literacy, there has been some research done to investigate the role bodies play in interpersonal communication. Johnson (2012) examined classroom environments and suggested that teachers’ direct actions, including their gestures and dress, hold meanings that are directed toward their students. On the other hand, students are also providing meaning through their own gestures, dress, and body language to their teachers, and that in turn determines how a teacher perceives a student (Johnson, 2012). Similarly, Youdell’s (2006) suggestion that teachers’ perceptions on students’ literacy abilities is innately linked to how the teacher interprets the student as a whole, including the way the student performs, dresses, speaks, walks, and interacts with others through body language.

Jones (2013) contributed to this notion of performance and how our biases and prejudices play a part in reading bodies:

We might also wonder how we come to make sense of a brown-skinned teenage boy in a hoodie, a young adolescent Latina in skinny jeans and blue eye shadow, a white tattooed biker parent of a student, a white teacher-education student from the suburbs… How is it that we encounter bodies and believe we already know something about them? What literacies provide us with such confidence and simultaneously such limited and partial perceptions of bodies in moment-to-moment interactions. (p. 526)
Although this form of body literacy differs from the type of body literacy Keira discussed, according to this literature, literacy is expressed and observed in and through the body.

Similarly, Vasudevan (2014) stated, “Beyond merely observing gestures or reading body language, the invitation to reimagine literacy recognizes the central importance of movement, positioning, and other uses of the body in everyday interactions” (p. 238). Therefore, bodies show a physical way of how literacy is being enacted. For example, the way in which we display ourselves and interact in and with a certain space can imply meanings about our comfort level or association with that space (Vasudevan, 2014):

[T]he way a child moves through a classroom and in doing so accesses books, pencils, and other material resources can hold meaning about her facility with her surroundings and the relationships she has cultivated in that space (and the kinds of literacies she may or may not be able to acquire in that space as a result). (p. 239)

Furthermore, Vasudevan (2014) also discussed the sociocultural contexts of schools and classrooms (including classroom management) and how they suggest certain ways of performing that relates back to making meaning with our bodies. This includes discipline policies such as walking quietly in hallways, practicing reading and writing as individual and unshared activities, regulating play to extracurricular time. All of these send messages about interaction that is read through the regulation of bodies and their importance in literacy, and must be reconsidered within the New Literacies model (Vasudevan, 2014).

When asked about the types of literacy practices that deaf students are involved in, Michelle briefly mentioned sports and physical activity as a form of literacy in which they participate, which also relates to Keira’s idea of body literacy. This led me to discover the concept of physical literacy. According to Higgs et al., (n.d), physical literacy is:
The development of fundamental movement skills and fundamental sport skills that permit a child to move confidently and with control, in a wide range of physical activity, rhythmic (dance) and sport situations. Physical literacy also includes the ability to “read” what is going on around them in an activity setting and react appropriately to those events. (p. 5)

Students who are physically literate are able to understand, communicate, apply, and analyze different kinds of body movements in a range of physical activities throughout various environments and are able to demonstrate a repertoire of movements confidently and competently (Physical & Health Education Canada, 2015). The Physical and Health Education Canada (2015) website highlights the benefit of physical literacy as enabling students to make healthy choices that are both beneficial to their whole self, their peers, and their environment. Additionally, Weiss and Ferrer-Caja (2002) showed the value of physical literacy and that without the development of physical literacy, many adolescents turn to more inactive choices during their free time, which does not allow for complete healthy development.

Jones (2013) examined the role of physical and emotional embodiment in classroom literacies and discussed two paths that focus on body literacy, including the way we “engage and cultivate literacies for making sense of bodies” and how we address “the literacies embedded in, performed through, and experienced as bodies” (p. 525). The performance of the body becomes a significant part of literacy. Similar to Keira’s notion of reading bodies through the arts and the value of aesthetics in literacy, Vasudevan (2010) discussed the aesthetics of the arts, including dance, music, and theatre, and the performance-based body literacies: “Imagination, which is both elusive and yet an utterly human capacity, renders our ability to connect with another’s possible realities and to see meaning in the aesthetic constructions of those around us” (p. 44).
The theme of integration was a prominent finding of this study. Participants highlighted the importance of cross-curricular pedagogy (e.g. arts integration, environmental integration, etc.), as well as the need for communal learning (e.g. social learning, sharing ideas, etc.). Specifically regarding arts integration, Vasudevan (2010) highlighted the “educational disservice” of regulating the imaginative elements of design and meaning making in the arts outside of literacy education, in order to separate them into more specialized areas that are specific to art and drama classes and clubs. Finally, she also advocated for the focus of educators to be on the meaningful aesthetics in literacy education and the integration of multimodal expression and the arts in their literacy classrooms, instead of the didactic uniformity of content.

In conclusion, deaf literacy education must move beyond enforcing skills-based notions of reading and writing. My findings suggest that educators provide students with opportunities to engage with a variety of literacies. With the help of arts integration, physical literacy, visual texts, and getting students immersed in settings that are conducive to their learning (e.g. learning about the environment by being in the environment), students can learn to build their literacy skills by fostering their existing strengths and talents (e.g. body literacy) through communal learning, discussing complex issues, and accessing resources that do not limit their success, but support it.

Field Experience of the Researcher and Implications for Future Research

Throughout my experience working with Deaf and Hard of Hearing students, my students who have developed a foundation in American Sign Language have been able to communicate their ideas, discuss complex issues, and express and support their opinions successfully in ASL. The difficulties occur when they are required to express their thoughts in written English. To better understand deaf students’ experience with English language learning, I present the
following analogy considered in *All Eyes* by Bainy B. Cyrus (2010): Imagine being fluent in a language, like English, and being immersed in a learning environment where you are expected to learn Chinese through a wall, with a cup to your ear. That is how oralist educational practices feel like to many deaf students. Even if schools are using an ASL-English bilingual model, it is as if you are fluent in English and being immersed in an environment where you are expected to read and write in Chinese. You are welcome to communicate in English, but all your textbooks, worksheets, assignments, and projects have to be learned in Chinese and written in Chinese.

Generally for my students, it is English grammar that is the most complicated to understand, as it is for most English Language Learners, whether hearing or deaf. ASL does not use articles or verb tenses, so it is very hard to make sense of those syntactical rules when they are unnecessary for communication in ASL. In my experience teaching students who are deaf or hard of hearing, most students I have worked with are extremely visual learners. Explaining grammatical concepts in visual ways can be difficult for a teacher, because those concepts are generally very linguistic or verbal, and most people learn them through linguistic or verbal means.

Some implications of this research include the importance of developing resources that support deaf learners who learn through the use of visuals. During one of my teaching placements, I was teaching essay structure and paragraph writing, which included the concepts of topic sentences, arguments and supporting evidence, and concluding sentences. One of my students was having a lot of difficulty understanding the relationship between these sentences, how they make up a paragraph, and how they connect to essay structures as a whole. I had tried explaining the concepts through ASL, written English, analogies to “The Walking Dead” (a
television series in which the student was very interested), and even drawings of the “hamburger paragraph” depiction, but nothing worked.

After discussing our next steps with my associate teacher, I decided to map out a sample four-paragraph essay by printing and crafting the “hamburger paragraph” structure on a large piece of chart paper. I then wrote out the sentences of each paragraph and my Associate Teacher suggested I colour-code each sentence in the introductory paragraph, to show their relationships to the sentences in the subsequent paragraphs (see Appendix C). Furthermore, the red colour representing the sentence containing the “First Argument” would be expanded on in paragraph two, therefore all the sentences in paragraph two would be red. Immediately after showing this to my student, he understood the importance of essay structure because he could visualize the relationships between the sentences. Therefore, future research could adopt a practical approach at developing visual ways of representing written languages and their grammatical and syntactical rules (e.g. using a visual grammar to break down the English language) so students can better understand the relationships between words, parts of speech, and sentences of text-based languages.

Through my field experience, I have also noticed that there seems to be a gap in elementary and secondary education. I was involved in an English Professional Learning Community, where I was offered the chance to observe an elementary deaf English classroom and have another teacher observe the classroom I was working in. We would both teach the same lesson, using the Frayer Model (1969) of a vocabulary graphic organizer to teach the concept of human rights (see Appendix D). After the lesson, we would reflect on and discuss the students’ understanding and compare the responses received from students. After the observations, we noticed that the elementary students had more concrete examples of the concept of human rights,
whereas the secondary students were having difficulty constructing a concrete understanding of the term and finding specific examples. When debriefing, one of the teachers mentioned that the secondary students had been discussing these issues for many years during their schooling, but the problem was that they never retained the information they learned. He also mentioned that students do not necessarily understand the concept of intersectionality and that their human rights can range across the spectrum of identities, including race, gender, and even audiological ability.

In addition, Michelle had discussed the importance of building on background knowledge to bring meaning to a given task in the classroom. It would be interesting to investigate how teachers are connecting curriculum points and topics as students move up in grade levels to bridge the gap between elementary and secondary deaf education. Referring back to the issue of separation that Keira raised in her responses, further research could examine the segregation of grade levels and the lack of continuity between pedagogy and curriculum, and how that affects students understanding of important topics like human rights and social justice.

Additionally, both Keira and Nora briefly compared the Ontario deaf education system to that of America, including Texas and California, and discussed how the States have more resources and support that is accessible to the community, including in-home and in-school infancy language development programs to support pre-school language acquisition. Many factors can influence this discrepancy, including population sizes of the Deaf communities, funding, and whether or not there are enough qualified educators in the field. This comparison is briefly noted, as additional research is needed in order to evaluate the differences between the Canadian and American deaf education systems and how Canada can improve its accessibility in literacy education for the Deaf students.
Finally, despite the recent development of the American Sign Language curriculum in Ontario (2004) as discussed in Chapter 2, none of the participants mentioned it in their interviews. Instead, Keira had mentioned that students do not have the right to study ASL as a language (e.g. develop ASL literacy) and only have access to ASL as the language of instruction. Therefore, it is not clear as to how this curriculum is currently being implemented, which suggests the need for research that investigates ASL literacy development practices in Ontario.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to reinforce the significance of Deaf studies and the importance of allyship between hearing and Deaf communities. It is troubling to witness the marginalization of the Deaf community, the lack of awareness that our society has for deaf education. Educators do not only have a crucial role to educate within their classrooms, but it is necessary for us to educate the greater community when there are injustices being experienced by marginalized communities. This study focused on teacher practices and perspectives on secondary deaf literacy education, but in no way does it fully encompass the injustices and barriers that the Deaf community faces. I hope that with this research project my participants and I have shed light on some of the issues that require attention in deaf literacy education and have deepened the reader’s understanding on deafness, the intersectionality of Deaf identity, and what constitutes literacy education for Deaf students.
References


Marschark, M., & Harris, M. (1996). Success and failure in learning to read: The special case of


Disorders, 18(4), 30–46.


Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interviews

Dear Participant,

I am a graduate student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, and I am currently enrolled as a teacher candidate in the Master of Teaching program. As part of my degree requirement, I am studying deaf education, teacher perspectives, and instructional approaches to teaching literacy to deaf adolescents for the purposes of a graduate research project. As we have discussed, your knowledge, expertise, and experience will provide me with a rich source of information about the beliefs and practices of an excellent teacher. In order for me to conduct the research with you, I request your permission for the following:

To conduct an interview (with a potential follow-up interview) with you that will take up to 90 minutes, with a potential follow-up interview in person, on the phone, or by Skype. It will take place in a private location and will be tape-recorded.

I will arrange for the interview to take place at a time and location that is convenient to you. The interview can take place in any quiet place where we are not likely to be interrupted, such as in an empty room or office in the school, or in a location of your choice.

I will write a report on this study to submit as a research paper to my supervisor. My research supervisor is Rob Simon. I will be pleased to give you a summary of my final research paper. In addition, the transcripts of the recording made of the interview will be available to you to read, if you wish to do so.

Confidentiality. The information you provide will be used for my research project, which will include a final research paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates.
and/or potentially at a research conference or publication. I will not use your name or any
information that might identify you, your school, colleagues, or any student in my written work,
oral presentations, or research paper. This information remains confidential. The only people
who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and my course
instructor.

**Right to withdraw.** If you decide to withdraw from the study, you may do so at any
time, up to the submission of the final paper. The tape of our interview will also be erased at the
end of the project. There are no known risks to you for assisting in the project and the benefit of
your participation in this project is to advance the literature around secondary deaf literacy
education.

Please sign the attached forms, if you agree to the interview. Return one to me and keep
the second copy for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Matine Sedaghat

---

**Consent Form**

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions
that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any
time without penalty. I have read the letter provided to me by Matine Sedaghat and agree to
participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature: ____________________________________________

Name (printed): ____________________________________ Date: __________________________
Appendix B: Interview Questions

Statement of Intent:

Over the course of this interview, I will be asking you questions related to the educational practices in the high-school ASL/English classroom. The questions will be divided into three sections: background information, teacher practices and beliefs, and next steps. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Section 1: Background Information

1. What is your educational background?
   a. Which disciplines did you pursue?
   c. What are your teachables?
   d. Do you have any other experience working with literature, reading, or relating to the deaf community outside of the education system?
   e. Where did you get your ASL qualifications?

2. How long have you been teaching in Ontario?

3. Are you currently teaching English-language courses? If so, what grades and sections?

4. Have you taught any other English courses previously?

5. Why did you decide to become a deaf educator? Who or what influenced you?

Section 2: Teacher Practices and Beliefs

6. To begin, what is your understanding of literacy?

7. How do you implement Ontario curriculum in your school? (i.e. Are courses differentiated to accommodate deaf learners?)

8. What instructional approaches do you use to teach writing (English)? Do you find these strategies effective? Some more than others? Why?
9. If you could give one piece of advice to other deaf educators about developing their students’ English literacy engagement, what would it be?

10. What are your beliefs and priorities as an educator and how do they influence your decisions in the classroom? (i.e. How would you describe your teaching style? What types of differentiated instruction do you implement in your classrooms? Do you implement character education in your classroom? What types of literacy-oriented activities do you implement in your classrooms? Is there a focus on one type?)

11. What interests do you or your students have with regard to literacy within or outside the school setting? i.e. social networking, blogging, comic books, novels, fiction/non-fiction, media literacy, drama, etc.

12. David Bloome describes reading as a social process. Do you agree or disagree? In your classroom, does reading take on a social dimension or is it an individual task? What activities are put in place to allow this to happen?

13. What gets counted as reading in your classroom? What reading gets overlooked?

14. In what ways do your class or school’s reading events reflect certain ways of acting, feeling, valuing, believing, and thinking?

15. In what ways are cultural differences recognized, valued, and bridged? In what ways are cultural differences overlooked or denied?

16. Research shows that most deaf individuals plateau at about a fourth-grade reading level. Why do you think this might be?

17. How would you describe your school culture and relationship with your students?

18. What are your views on cochlear implants?
19. What types of practices promote and encourage student pursuing and succeeding in “higher education?”

Section 3: Next Steps

20. What would you still like to learn about deaf education to better incorporate it into your lessons, if necessary?

21. Any further comments? Thank you!
Appendix C: Visual Representation of Essay Structure
**Appendix D: Human Rights Vocabulary Organizer**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition:</th>
<th>Examples:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition in own words:</td>
<td>Word used in a sentence:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Human Rights**