

# **Language Acquisition in a Deaf Learner: An Autobiography**

**by**

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

in the  
Teaching English as an Additional Language Program  
Faculty of Education

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY  
Summer 2018

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## Approval

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## **Abstract**

This thesis presents an autobiographical account of an exceptional learner's journey as a member of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community—a learner who, despite challenges, acquired four languages and become an educator of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. This 'learning journey' is interpreted through a sociocultural lens and approach of Plurilingualism informed by research and practice in language education. The exhibitions are based on the writer's ethnography concerning acquisitions of American Sign Language (ASL), English, Spanish, and German through decades of academic work that have been effectively applied to professional work and societal and cultural engagements.

**Keywords:** Deaf and Hard of Hearing; American Sign Language; language acquisitions; sociocultural; education; plurilingualism

## Dedication

*To Mom and Dad for providing a beautiful home filled with love and believing in me*

*To my brother Ron for your perseverance and positive approach to conversing in American Sign Language as the language of our Deaf and Hard of Hearing community*

*To Thomas for your immense patience and unconditional support in my journey furthering my education*

## Acknowledgements

This autobiographical thesis would not have come to fruition without the lessons of life by those I have crossed paths with all through the years and the lessons I have learned from each of you were based on failures, discriminations, doubts, fears, triumphs, love and confidence. This thesis would not have also materialized if the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University (SFU) had not admitted me in the circle of valuable learning activities with my colleagues. I express my sincere appreciation for the amazing lessons I have learned from each and every one on every level.

I would like to share my gratitude to Dr. Kelleen Toohey for taking interest in my education and experiences that could be shared in the Faculty of Education at SFU. While I do remember Dr. Toohey telling me that there was much to learn from me, I have found that there was much for me to learn. I am most grateful for the opportunity to be a part of the family of the Faculty of Education.

Additionally, I am grateful to Dr. Allan MacKinnon for his interest in and extended invitation to me to share my story relating to social construct and Plurilingualism. Dr. MacKinnon had such faith in me to do this thesis, and I am grateful for being given this assignment.

Dr. Charles Scott has also been an inspiration to me and I thank him for being a professor with enthusiasm and open mindedness by creatively making a harmonious and fun learning environment in his classrooms.

Koichi Haseyama was an interesting man who fearlessly took the initiative to work with me on and to learn about Deaf and Hard of Hearing culture and processes of language acquisition of American Sign Language. Koichi's contribution was monumental in his knowledge of what was entailed in research and studies in the Faculty of Education. Koichi was very much a role model to me in my search for answers. Thank you Koichi.

I wish to express gratitude to Dr. Angel Lin for having included research on Deaf and Hard of Hearing multimodalities, multilingualism in *Bilingual and Multilingual Education, Third Edition* (2017), as well as Plurilingualism in *TESOL* (2013) that awakened me to some facts that are applicable to and vital part of my life. It truly means a world to

me to discover your interest in and encouraging furthering in-depth research on Deaf and Hard of Hearing language acquisitions and language use in multifarious forms in life.

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# Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis presents an autobiographical account of my 'learning journey' as a member of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community who, despite challenges, acquired four languages and become an educator of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. This learning journey is interpreted through a sociocultural lens informed by research and practice in language education. The exhibitions are based on my experiences in the acquisition of languages—American Sign Language (ASL), English, Spanish, and German—through decades of study.

## **A Brief History of My Language Learning: Motivations for This Thesis**

As I ponder this journey I reflect on how it was possible for me to transition from a diagnosis of mental retardation and hearing loss to achieving a fruitful and developed education with four languages acquired. During the first decade after adoption, ASL and English acquisitions were like long battles searching for the power of the use of these languages. I also acquired two additional languages years later when I conversed bilingually and sometimes multilingually in my academic and social activities and professional life. Not only are the issues about language acquisition explored in this paper but I also reflect on my self-identity and endless struggles for a sense of balanced relationships in two very different social spaces, the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) and hearing communities and cultures.

While enrolled in the M.Ed. TEAL (Teaching English as an Additional Language) between 2013 and 2015 I came across an article that reported issues from the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT). According to Traxler (2000), many Deaf and Hard of Hearing students have significant issues with literacy skills in the areas of reading and writing. The overall outcomes of the performances of this group of students in these skills have fallen below the grade level needed to pass satisfactorily. Traxler's summary of the SAT of the 9<sup>th</sup> edition data was that eighteen year olds in reading comprehension were exhibiting just below the 4<sup>th</sup> grade level, and vocabulary results were at a mere 4<sup>th</sup> grade level. Comprehensions in problem solving results were at 5<sup>th</sup> grade level. I became dumbfounded at discovering this report, and the truth coming to the surface has helped me understand my own situation when I graduated from high school in 1986.

To this day, I have always wanted to turn the clock back and either start fresh on a clean slate or, if I would be spontaneously ready and competent enough, I would have had the natural urge to inquire upon my teachers, school administrators, speech therapists, parents, and many others why I was held back from the amenities of amazing opportunities for learning during my early childhood and on through high school. Acts of discrimination also come into play in many instances.

What is done is done, and there is nothing I can do about my past. After my years of struggles and not giving up on the discriminations and many obstacles set upon me that were difficult to overcome, and in my present experience as a student at Simon Fraser University and holding a position of professional instructor of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing I have come to realize that I have portrayed as an educator to my colleagues and a role model to my friends of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. Additionally, this thesis has given me the opportunity to share my ethnographic account in acquiring languages that were conducive to my social interactions within the world and my accomplishments in my academic career. I also offer other expanded accounts of my learning trajectories and struggles in many events in this autobiographical paper, particularly in chapter four. It incorporates phenomena of breakthroughs from apparent limitations into enriching opportunities in the midst of the massive hearing world society as a Hard of Hearing person with a variety of ways I acquired four languages outside the classrooms. The languages I learned and utilized were mostly through theater, music, church community, Deaf and Hard of Hearing community, post secondary education, living abroad in Germany where I professed as a teacher of English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) for many years and finally, at present, being a professional instructor of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing that included conversing in ASL and written and spoken languages. I was constantly exposed to them everywhere I was.

I am currently interpreter of American Sign Language to Deaf and Hard of Hearing students at a public school, supporting their educational needs. Partaking in working with the students as their interpreter it has been about learning and making meaning of sign language, English and Spanish simultaneously. In addition to working as an interpreter for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, I teach American Sign Language to students in Southwest Florida. I have a high school student who expresses interest in learning ASL, as she envisions her future career to become a sign language interpreter for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and, as well as a man who has a Deaf partner who wants effective

communication in the home and who wants to have better conversations through ASL. A third student, who has not worked with children with hearing losses for many years, hopes to join as an advocate for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing by helping improve their quality of education.

## **A Rationale for the Thesis**

The rationale for this autoethnography is naturally multifold, but I point out my desire to deeply reflect upon and share my own personal experiences that can be related to theoretical works that I have discovered in my journey as an avid reader of published peer reviewed articles and being an ongoing learner. I hope this paper would help launch a future project of research that can serve future educational, societal and familial purposes. I also hope to help increase understanding as to why language acquisition is vital to education for both teaching and learning and why multilingual languaging should be considered an effective approach to communication between Deaf and Hard of Hearing and hearing peoples. Multilingual communication skills are prerequisite for the world to understand one another and to break through barriers that enable opportunities for learning, teaching, social engagements, family support and professional work. I am quite sure there is more, but I do believe this thesis leads to more in depth study to understand the apparent and rapid search for identity in society, acquisition of languages that is thriving and social transformations that are never ending (Norton & Toohey, 2011) in our world today.

## **Theoretical Framing**

There is no question relating to the major changes that have occurred over the four decades in my discovery and enlarging my understanding relating to experiencing the emergence of multilingualism and sociocultural constructs of world nationalities (multinationals). Although I have been able to identify and apply these constructs to my own experiences, as well as to the community of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, I had felt something amiss until I was most recently introduced to and became quite intrigued by peer reviewed articles about Plurilingualism (Lin, 2013; Marshall & Moore, 2013, 2018; Moore & Gajo, 2009), which help explain my repertoires of multi language functions coexisting in education, family and social life.

I desire to add Lev Vygotsky's (1978) work on sociocultural theory and his notion of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) that help explain my learning through social practices in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing classrooms and social spaces. Because of the current limited exposure of plurilingualism in research for Deaf and Hard of Hearing linguistic acquisitions of English and ASL or other written and spoken languages and signed languages, I have found that further research is very much needed for understanding bilingualism, multilingualism and plurilingualism, altogether. It has been a long fight to consider spoken languages and signed languages to be an acceptable method of communication for both teaching and learning. However, this mode of communication had not been seen as being multifunctional until most recently where many educational settings are considering it. I review Vygotsky's notion of ZPD in social and educational learning in chapter two, specifically because the learning process I experienced in this way through my peers in my kindergarten and first and second grades has certainly had an effect on me. As a result I was able to carry on in additional language acquisitions a few years later that I was able to demonstrate multilingual method of learning and communicating in education and social spaces.

Sharing my lifelong learning in chapter four has been about understanding the plurilinguistic approach to teaching and learning in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, as I have experienced it. Identity and social issues are also included in my sharing. I am not speaking for my own importance, because many learners, including my adoptive brother, Carl and many friends of ours who are Deaf have experienced limited accessibility in literacy development for many decades through a mere monolingual practice of oralism in mainstream education. After my brother and I enjoyed our three years of learning sign language and English in Sacramento, California, my family and I relocated back to Massachusetts, where we endured oralism, for sign language was not recognized or permissible in their schools. History of this kind of struggle and frustration of not having the privilege of bilingual learning in the classrooms are still a problem nowadays. There are many teachers in the education sector who have constantly advocated for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing learners and community are learning to rise to self-advocate to instil multilanguages for better accessibility in communication. This is what they and I so desire. I offer my own story on my experience when I lost my opportunity to converse in both sign language and English in the schools

in Massachusetts. This is why I feel strongly that the Zone of Proximal Development illuminates my story and associates sociocultural approaches to identity in this thesis.

This autoethnography is meant to display the reality that oralism was accepted as the monolingual practice in the classrooms throughout my childhood. My narrative will also reveal success in my post high school trajectory in search of the feasibility of bilingualism and multilingualism. Having recognized this successful change and having become comfortable with the practice of bilingualism and multilingual modes of communication, I was bound for in-depth research activities beginning in 2013 pertaining to the practice of *bilingualism* and the concept of *multilingualism*. The term *plurilingualism* moved me when I found myself understanding my practice of codeswitching, or codemeshing, in ASL, English, Spanish and German in North America and Europe in education and social events. Finding this plurilingual practice more fully developed for well over twenty-five years in my adult life, I have decided to write this thesis. My hope is to partake in more discoveries beyond writing of this thesis to identify the meaning of my findings and I commit these pages to those who are seeking answers on the same path through further discourse and research.

I outline and develop three theoretical perspectives that help explain and inform my experiences in chapter two. I offer a methodology that outlines autoethnography in chapter three.

## **Insight on Education and Learning**

Before we proceed in chapter two, I find it imperative to explain one thing to keep in mind about literacy skills development in children. I'm inspired by Carol J. Erting's (2003) chapter in *The Young Deaf or Hard of Hearing Child—A Family-Centered Approach to Early Education* concerning Deaf children's development of literacy and language in their early years of age. Literacy development and language acquisition is a formal level of philosophy that I agree with as I reflect upon my experience as a child when I did not have the opportunity to acquire a language during the first five years of my childhood. The lack of language development during my years in foster homes, lack of accessibility to social environments and little or no provision of moral support for enrollment in an educational setting disabled me from what a hearing child could do naturally—hear and acquire language through incidental learning.

After being given up for adoption at birth in 1966 I was placed in a series of foster homes where a permanent home had not been imminent until at the age of five. The conditions under foster care did not offer me proper rearing, and I was diagnosed as mentally retarded and was believed to not be capable of gaining education beyond the age of five, according to professional physicians.

Being faced with a challenge of catching up with four to five years of having missed out on learning due to improper upbringing, I discovered in my mature stages in life that literacy skills development was a natural process for me, and there were different ways for me to acquire the languages I have learned beginning at the age of six. It has been demonstrated that hearing children have exposure to language through seeing, hearing and speaking, while my mild to profound hearing loss has called for reliance on visual learning. Figure 1 below is a beautiful illustration of how I see the world, through visual learning and visual hearing.

This inspiring piece that I feel very connected to may be found on the following website: <https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/233553930645477154/>



**Figure 1. Learn to See the World through Deaf Eyes**  
Image © Jacalyn Marosi. Used with permission.

## **Chapter Two: Theoretical Perspectives**

In this chapter, I will outline the theoretical perspectives or frameworks that inform and help provide explanations for my story as it unfolds in this and the following chapter, *The Autobiography*. The theoretical models in the field of language acquisition and socialization have both inspired and helped me understand the various dynamics involved in language learning, largely but not exclusively through examining my own experiences as a language learner. The theoretical frameworks included are sociocultural theories in language development: the work of Vygotsky (1978), Norton and Toohey's (2010 & 2011) work on sociocultural perspective, identity and acquisition of language; and work in 'plurilingualism' (Moore & Gajo 2009; Lin, 2013; Taylor & Snoddon, 2013; Marshall & Moore, 2013, 2018; García, Lin, & May, 2017)—all of these have stood out for me as being important to my autobiography, my story—my research—is way for me to unpack my experiences in light of these sociocultural perspectives about language learning. Thus, I present the ideas in a narrative form, embellishing the theories with stories from my life.

### **Sociocultural Theory in Language Development: The Work of Vygotsky**

Sociocultural theory in language development (Vygotsky, 1978) is of importance to me relating to the social foundation of language acquisition. My learning American Sign Language and English did not merely come from the classroom, people trying to talk to me or watching television—one particular social space I was attracted to afforded me the ability to enhance my learning in very influential and valuable ways. No foster parent, no government, no neighbor or acquaintances were able to have a positive influence, to encourage possibility for me to have the necessary exposure to society because I was thought to be simply retarded! The one thing that was left out of consideration was my hearing loss, which was never tested until after adoption at the age of six.

Vygotsky's theory on learning processes in children has set a course of insight for me, but I wish to give a preamble about two different groups of children, hearing and Deaf. Hearing children would naturally find their experiences to be flexible, depending upon the degree of abilities. However, in Deaf and Hard of Hearing children it is a whole different ballgame. In pondering upon learning needs, I realize that options have always been made available for schools and parents who could choose the kind of teaching and

learning that function well in children's trajectory of education. I refer this to a question as to what choices adult educators and foster parents made for me compared to what would be made for hearing children. Options for me were either limited or no one truly nurtured some idea as to what might be most effective for me to be exposed to learning.

Many hearing children would gain vocabulary and effective communication system through hearing, speaking and seeing, and this strategy for learning would be vastly distinctive from a child with a reasonable level of hearing loss. Many would assume that a child with a hearing loss might not function in learning, as do those with hearing. On the one hand, many hearing children typically acquire languages starting as early as months after they are born, and would come to know what language is. They can make language meaningful by way of intonation from songs or hearing poetry or stories colloquially read by parents, as well as the general phonemic awareness in any environment they would be in—their homes with their families watching television or listening to a radio, outings with friends at movie theaters, hangouts at other social engagements or in preschools. On the other hand, children with a hearing loss, however mild or profound, would acquire language rapidly if sign language would be put in place for the purpose of acquiring literacy skills in reading and writing by seeing letters, words and pictures in order to develop a system of communication. (It is very much like incidental learning, and this is what I have in mind relating to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory.) That was not the case with me, as I lacked access to language till after six years of age. In my situation I had been isolated from the amenities, such as pictures, letters, films and so forth that of a hearing child. Finally and simply, isolation from exposure to learning had nothing to do with retardation. Clearly, the rationale for my delay in learning was that I was not able to hear.

I was confined to my bedroom where I was isolated from any social interactions in the foster homes. The months following my adoption I found myself in a social space that had the most impact on me in my language learning and development of skills to communicate. That was an amazing shift to the social space of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing environment of a classroom, recesses on the playgrounds and in the cafeteria during lunches for children with a variety of hearing losses. The reason I bring into Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is that I have come to understand his explanation for children's first exposure to societal influence, which sparks processes for developmental learning. Vygotsky particularly takes interest in "...the process of internalization..." (p. 56) that involves transforming things in the mind, psychologically speaking. The initial

representation of an external activity that is learned would be in the process of reconstruction in the mind of the receiver prior to internally materializing (understanding) (pp. 56 - 57). What precedes internalization, and is at the heart of Vygotsky's work, are the social interactions that serve as the catalysts for learning; the individual then internalizes the learning through these interactions. This was precisely what my learning process was about.

Further to this, I would like to include additional details. For Vygotsky's the interpersonal to the intrapersonal processes that is not separable but inseparable pertaining to the cultural development in a child that happens in two stages in the process (p. 57). "[F]irst on the social level, and later on the individual level; first *between* people (*interpsychological*), and then *inside* the child (*intrapsychological*)" would be the two step process that happens in the cultural development. As with me, the impact on the functions came from those with skill and knowledge that I would discover in social locations. The impact was also in what I felt each time and I would be curious to grasp the meaning of them the knowledge that was conveyed through the interactions. As an individual having been exposed to the seeing and feeling of the impact I would be interpreting them into language that could be articulated. This was the process of internalization. This is basically what I call real life situations that I could relate to. Not only did the adults or hearing children have impact on me but also other Deaf and Hard of Hearing children.

As part of his work in laying the foundations of sociocultural theory, Vygotsky developed his model of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) in his book, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (pp. 84-91), and this notion has struck me. The ZPD is that cognitive space between what the learner can already accomplish mentally without assistance and what the student would not be able to do, even with assistance. That is, the ZPD is that space where the student can make cognitive progress *with assistance from those who understand how to work in that zone*.

While the process of my learning took place in various social spaces, I was engaged in learning in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing classroom. I was an absolute novice at communicating in sign language and I had experienced the loss of years of literacy skills development of the spoken and written language of English. The whole system of learning was new to me, as I had limited ability to independently solve problems and not have skill in learning. Vygotsky describes ZPD as "*the distance between the actual*

*developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86).* While it may not be news to my teacher, Miss Davis, about my predicament she was proficient in scrutinizing my interactive skill by grouping me with stronger peers in classroom learning activities for enhanced class participation. The guidance of our teacher assigning collaboration among my peers proved to be effective; they were stronger but were able to work within the ZPD in the classroom we were situated in. The ZPD that operates as an equalizer in the process of my learning development from lower cognition level and weaker abilities helped me towards opportunity to be exposed and engaged to the everyday activities. I was expected to build skill and self-confidence from interactions with the peers who were actually my role models. The stronger students boosted my engagement in learning and I quickly developed skill to communicate. Whether or not my classmates knew of this process, I had such an intense feeling that they were naturally including me in their group for the purpose of social engagement. The in-the-classroom learning and outside-the-classroom social activities were indeed a great combination to enhance my acquisition of sign language. Vygotsky’s theory provides a way for me to recognize the importance of a social foundation for learning that initially was lacking in my life, and which became available to me after it was recognized that I was hearing impaired.

I remember two different scenarios in the school. First, there was a moment of epiphany while I was sitting on the floor in the classroom. I sat next to peers who were my working group. Miss Davis would be vocalizing and signing simultaneously. It was a problem solving and answering questions relating to the five W’s session. It was only the beginning stage of what I was bound to learn in my communication skill, vocabulary building and interacting with the teacher and my stronger peers. I had a sense of what was happening and I felt very engaged. The second was a time when all of us kids were outdoors. It was a very informal and social experience with open dialogue among us. During that event, I learned what it meant to be cold, because we were talking about winter. In Sacramento there was no snow, but a peer brought a photo of her backyard covered with a dust of snow for a show and tell. She explained that she lived in a mountain a ways from our school. I stood directly in front of her when she showed me the photo. I learned the word “snow” when she signed the word and voiced it slowly and with clarity. We socialized about having snow in winter and what it was like to have summer. This, as

coined by Vygotsky in his work, is what I believe to be the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). I remember well that after the classroom collaborative activities of the process of scaffolding that seemed to be functional and served me well (Wood *et al.*, 1976) were dismantled after two years. I was able to continue advancing, not only in learning sign language but also using the language with meaning in social and educational spaces. As a result, my brother Carl and I were able to create stories at home and I was able to engage in the hearing impaired group at the school.

## **Poststructuralist Model of Identity**

In addition to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and ZPD relating to my educational learning, one crucial topic of discussion for me is that of *identity* and it goes along with the search for social cliques and unlimited opportunity for language acquisition. Norton and Toohey (2011) state that "We have drawn on a rapidly increasing body of research to argue that language learners' identities are always multiple and in process, and that learners often have different investments in the language practices of their classrooms and communities" (p. 437). Earlier in their article, the authors stressed a "reminder of the powerful relationship between identity and language learning" (p. 413).

There has been no argument that I searched for ways to invest in expanding my learning in my competency and performance in language. The first test for identity is my competency in sign language that was prerequisite to fit in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. English literacy (speaking, reading and writing) was essential for me to associate with hearing people as an entirely different identity that I needed to prove particularly in mainstream learning in educational institutions, as well as in social situations. I was oppressed through intense expectations that I met the standards of both worlds.

It was no easy task and I often found that there was no resource outside the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community to access sign language, as I could in the school with other deaf peers taught by our teacher for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. I did not have access of English in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing classroom, but I could find resource for learning English within the hearing community and mainstream education to access the language. Truly, the one form of articulation of sign language could be learned through our own social group—the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. It is a social language that my peers

and I were able to comprehend and engage in conversations. However, I consider it appropriate to include sign language as a form of literacy for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

Having access to English in social settings, after acquiring the language in the classrooms, was always difficult. I would be considered the minority of the large student body in school or the only “Deaf” child in the whole neighborhood of my town that I would be seen different. I would be seen different because, when I was much younger I would be working diligently with speech therapists to improve on my ability to speak as a native speaker of English. My speech impediment was noticeable and I would be mimicked or teased for it. Of course, I was not a native speaker of English for my primary language was sign language. Multitudes of individuals had no idea of my learning trajectory or a whole other culture I belonged to—the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. Due to their blindness of this fact, I had to not give up on the hearing community for I knew there was so much more I had to do to succeed or win opportunities to advance in the hearing society. It was not until at least twenty years later when I finally found my turning point in successfully attaining my position in the hearing world, because having a Bachelor of Arts in Foreign Languages studies in Spanish and German qualified me to become a teacher of English as an additional language in Germany. That was my breakthrough from multiple barriers.

However, when I would mingle each day with my Deaf and Hard of Hearing peers or current day friends of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community I would have ongoing chats without struggling to search for meaning in sign language. I was very comfortable being around my Deaf and Hard of Hearing peers and we would just sign away. There were no conflicts from outside our group, the hearing world. I recall feeling that I had missed my fun when I would be at home, because no one in my family, except for my one brother who could converse with either of us in sign language. When we would come home from school each day we would share stories through signing. I found my real identity of having a hearing loss and that I was like my peers and friends in the inner circle of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. My friends, my brother and I were able to corroborate a social community we knew and the sign language we articulated, and our identity transpired with clarity. Simply put, we considered each other as members of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community.

All in all I am actually bilingual, bicultural in both the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and hearing communities in the case of the sets of two languages and cultures I am acquainted with.

The most complex issues with groups of people within the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community are the dominance of characteristics of ability (not *disability*) to converse in American Sign Language that is learned, to be Deaf or Hard of Hearing that is based on cultural identification, and the values and beliefs we share with each other. In light of learning that Norton and Toohey (2010) made a significant point on learning language and identity based on poststructuralists' notion of learner identity, I'm convinced therefore "that people use language to negotiate a sense of self within and across a range of sites at different points in time, and that social relations in those historically specific sites enable or constrain opportunities for social interaction and human agency" (Norton & Toohey, 2010, p. 181). This relates to positioning or identifying one's self in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community that relates to Bourdieu's (1977) notion of *cultural capital*. My acquisition of sign language and engagements with my peers allowed me to gain a sense of my *identity* as a person with a hearing loss like everyone else in my group. We all shared cultural capital. Our thoughts were alike, we shared our knowledge with one another, and as a result, the credentials I possessed afforded me to connect my position as a member of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community.

It is in form of human agencies within a group of people that have competencies in language use that enables them to acknowledge their positions in that community. Competency of literacy of communication in the Deaf or Hard of Hearing individual is American Sign Language, and when this would be invested that would identify the individual as the agent and member of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community. Upon success in my acquisition of sign language, wearing a hearing aid that had a chord connecting from an ear mold to a box strapped to my chest and having a genuine demonstration of a hearing loss, in those days they would identify me as *hearing impaired*. I was naturally welcomed in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community circle without rituals or seeking approval from other members. Simply put, I merged into the circle without effort. I knew very well that I belonged with the group. An additional vital point is that I have a brother, Carl who is Deaf. He and I would be attending the same school and riding the same school bus. Being seen as Deaf himself, our peers would see connections and we would be well known.

In addition to this, it is imperative to understand that a hearing person that does not have a trace of the identity of a Deaf or Hard of Hearing individual, not a CODA (Child of a Deaf Adult member who is a signer), does not have a family member who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing and does not sign is not a member of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community, even if they are able to converse in American Sign Language.

Not only is identity about “what have you got in order to be a member of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community?” It also has to do with one issue that Kelleen Toohey (2000) wrote about in her book, *Learning English at School: Identity, Social Relations and Classroom Practice*. The issue that stood out to me was the formulation of identities among students in their learning spaces and display example of the unfortunate costs of possible lack of accessibility to vital resources for learning and conversational and engagement practices that may be the venue to furthering language learning (Toohey, 2017). Furthermore, she explicates the intertwining of “identity, activities and resources (or the “stuff” of the world)” that are encouraged and educated by sociocultural theory. They are indeed inseparable to the events of what happens in the schools when Deaf and Hard of Hearing students who do not have access to the same levels of, or types of resources like every other hearing student in mainstream education. As with me, it was clear that my learning was confined to private tutoring through oralism that did not commensurate with classroom lectures that would normally be presented in mainstream education. Missing out on those resources of education was not up to par with the rest of the graduates on every level as suggested in Traxler’s (2000) summary relating to Deaf and Hard of Hearing children’s results on the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT).

I appreciate Toohey’s (2010) clarity on a study on the positioning based on “powerful identity” pertaining to classroom participation relating to my experience. She addressed a positioning situation between two girls in primary classrooms. One student claims a powerful identity that is “derived from a particular arrangement of classroom practices that displayed her as powerful,” and “another child, positioned more subordinately, was frequently denied access to classroom playgroups and, as such did not seem to progress as quickly in her language learning” (p. 186). This reminds me vividly of my situation in the classrooms similar to the “subordinate” girl. My identity as Deaf or Hard of Hearing in educational institutions (mainstream education programs) in the public schools that identified me as not learnable, having insufficient social skills and displaying hardship in communication, particularly in reading, writing, speaking and

listening. Was I not educationable? I am unsure as to whether my teachers would be in position to resuscitate my slow learning process. Progress was extremely slow on their part. However, it would be optimal for my teachers to consider Toohey's argument to "better assist students to speak from the powerful and desirable position by addressing issues of dominance and subordination directly and by analyzing how classroom practices are arranged to display some children as dominant and others as subordinate" (Toohey, 2010, p. 186). My autobiography entails some points where discrimination against me was placed in many instances.

## **Plurilingualism**

A colleague of mine introduced to me the term *plurilingualism* (Lin, 2013; Marshall & Moore, 2013, 2018; Coste, Moore & Zarate, 2009; Moore & Gajo, 2009) about four years ago. I listened attentively and gathered with some interest to know its meaning that Daniel Coste, Danièle Moore and Geneviève Zarate (2009) described: "Plurilingual and pluricultural competence refers to the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social actor has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures. This is not seen as the superposition or juxtaposition of distinct competences, but rather as the existence of a complex or even composite competence on which the social actor may draw" (p. 11). When I heard this I decided that it was not applicable to me or to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. I did not pursue interest in the term, believing that multilingualism, bilingualism and monolingualism have always been marginalized within the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community and we had our own world of languages and culture serving our own purpose as a community. I must admit that I confined my comprehension of plurilingualism to the hearing world until only recently when I read some work by scholars on the subject that offered me a deeper insight.

Angel M. Y. Lin (2013) stressed the paradigmatic changes in methodologies of TESOL in the education system of language teaching in Hong Kong. It appeared that methodologies that were created in curricula and implemented would be operative for learners, educators and school administrations over the last few decades. Indeed monolingualism, bilingualism, audio-lingualism, direct method and communicative language teaching approach (CLT) appeared to be functional, until recently it has been noted that a realization of surprising rapid shifts in globalization, teaching and learning

processes, multimodalities of language use, and multicultural knowledge forced administrations and educators to amend the original methodologies to meet students' learning needs. The purpose for this is clearly indicated in Lin's article that "seeks to contribute to paradigmatic change in TESOL methodologies by proposing to build legitimate plurilingual pedagogies from the ground up in various local contexts" (p. 522). In the last pages of her article, she points out that we must brainstorm by answering important questions to consider about the developments for initiation for change in TESOL methodologies and assessment practices, as well as to see how to retrieve local resources for strategic steps towards comprehensive changes for students in their identities and aid them in utilizing resources that they learn where to get them and how to use them.

While Lin's article points out a need for recognition for such a role for all that are included in the education sector—i.e., teacher educators, curriculum designers, school administrators and the etceteras—I have given much thought to one important point relating to curriculum. The crafting of curriculums had been thought carefully, but in my personal experience as a learner and a teacher I found flaws in them in relation to mainstream education for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. An issue based on Joseph J. Schwab's (1969) insight on future curriculum for education from the 1970's and beyond has proven to us all on a global scale of what to expect. He envisioned curriculum in a way that could, without doubt in my own mind, be frightening to imagine, and we arrive at the point to prove his theory as correct. He published his journal article piece, "The Practical: A Language for Curriculum" in *The School Review*, and in light of one of his major three points he stressed was "that the field of curriculum is moribund, unable by its present methods and principles to continue its work and desperately in search of new and more effective principles and methods" (p. 1). So in our current day education market in language acquisitions, we turn to the need for the renewing of the original design of curriculum pertaining to methodologies to meet the current day needs of what works in plurilingualism for teaching and learning.

In the same publication of *TESOL Quarterly* of September 2013, Steve Marshall and Danièle Moore conveyed very similar insights as Lin's. Thus they indicate, "educators are playing catch up," and they are "rethink[ing] their understandings of multilingualism and consider new analytic lenses that can provide broader views of changing social, cultural, and linguistic phenomena" (p. 473). In order to comprehend the meaning of multilingualism, the authors clearly explain how these two terms, *multilingualism* and

*plurilingualism*, accommodate the search for the participants' plurilingual competence through their multilingual skills in their qualitative research study. They found fluidity in the participants' scale through the interrelating circumstances surrounding language use through a variety of ways, such as formal use of English for academic purposes through monolingual approach, and less formality of the use of their competency of multilingual and digital communication. The research was apparently successful in the authors' findings and they confirm that monolingual approach to learning that largely excludes multilingualism, multimodality, digital literacy in the classrooms are essential to plurilingual students' natural emergence to utilizing resources they had access to outside the classrooms proved their competency in multilingual skills and multicultural knowledge beyond the old system of TESOL methodologies. This is rationale for Lin, Marshall and Moore's work to be implemented for such need for changes in the old methodologies to meet the globalization of plurilingualism of our teaching and learning today and our future.

When such a change of methodologies in TESOL dawned on me in these readings, I have had to seriously ask myself what changes have I noticed in traditional methodologies that had an impact on me in my personal life as a member of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community, as a teacher of American Sign Language and English to students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing and hearing, and as a learner? Also, I desired to understand the meaning of the term plurilingualism. So, I thought about breaking up the prefix from the root word "lingual" to make sense of the word. *Pluri*, as I understand to mean many, multiple or several. I was drawn to some facts that Deaf and Hard of Hearing multinationals with various levels of competencies in multilingual and multicultural aspects in my classrooms and in my everyday learning activities and social events have truly taken bicultural and bilingual practice to the next level. Therefore, I deem multilingualism and plurilingualism as appropriate terms for the new curriculum and methodologies to be in place.

My hearing students in my private sign language classes and multiple hearing students in the public school, where I am sign language interpreter, have shown interest in learning sign language and engaging in conversing with Deaf and Hard of Hearing people. Their fluency of American Sign Language is not fluent but they make themselves very much understood. These students come from Spanish and Creole speaking countries, which convince me that plurilingual practices are in place. Therefore, I have reconsidered *plurilingualism* in multilingual use in my Deaf and Hard of Hearing community

and classrooms. Not have I only found plurilingualism to be unquestionably applicable because of the existence of multiculturalism, multi- and bi- lingualism in my practice as a social agent and teacher, there is one thing that struck me of interest pertaining to languages.

While American Sign Language is a language native to North America (The United States and Canada, excluding Mexico) and some other parts of the world such as West Africa and parts of Southeast Asia, American Sign Language is a language that does not require voicing. For learning purposes, however, pictures, digital literacies and amendment in materials for teaching Deaf and Hard of Hearing learners this is the only way to reach out to them and to aid them in search for resources that are accommodate them. This is not doable through monolingualistic approach.

My practice as a learner, however, has certainly been based on plurilingualism that is told in the autobiography chapter in this thesis. While I don't limit my focus on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community, I am able to elaborate on relating plurilingualism to valuing cultures and engaging in social spaces with multinationals, as well as in educational experiences and political discourses. I also speak three languages and converse in sign language wherever I would be, and I participate in learning the languages and engaging within my community where I currently live as I have done so when I lived in Canada and Germany. The reality is that renewed methodology through plurilingualism, when implemented, will bring in a whole different picture as to the ways we communicate and interact with one another on a global scale within our local communities.

P L U R  
 I L I  
 N G U A  
 L I S M



**Multilingualism**

**Bilingualism**

**Monolingualism**

**Figure 2. Under the Umbrella of Plurilingualism**

So, what's the point here? Plurilingualism, as we speak, exists in our practice of multitudes of peoples from different nationalities, cultures, and, most importantly, languages. In my diagram above (Figure 2) I scattered the letters from the word *plurilingualism* among the raindrops. Beneath the umbrella I listed multilingualism,

bilingualism and monolingualism from the top down. My idea of plurilingualism that is spelled among the raindrops is about the multinationals' repertoire of skills that are practiced in multicultural, multilingual, and bilingual situations. I purposely scattered the letters among the raindrops to signify the vast world of the repertoires of the multiplicity of and complexity of skills of languages, cultures, societies, and politics, as well as in social and educational settings that are ever operating in this world. I deem this repertoire as vital to the system of communications in social settings, for instance, is considered less formal and the person's competency in more than L2 would most likely not be entirely grammatically correct or vocabulary use could be rather limited. Still, I believe that the process of communication here shows demonstration of understanding between multinationals regardless the broken grammar rules and limited vocabularies. Each individual possesses an identity derived from a culture from his country of origin.

An optimal example of plurilingualism would be in the environment of the Lower Mainland of British Columbia (Marshall & Moore, 2013) that touches on a study that shows the rapidity of "changing linguistic makeup of Canada and specifically Metro Vancouver, with the increasing presence of cultural and linguistic diversity in the city's many institutions of higher education" (p. 473). There are multinationals abiding in the cities of Vancouver, Burnaby, New Westminster, Delta and Surrey. These nationals come from different parts of Asia (East and West), Spanish speaking countries and Quebec or France and many code switch between minimums of two languages. Some languages other than English that are spoken are French, Mandarin, Chinese, Japanese, Hindi, Spanish, just to name a few. Most of these languages could be heard on the streets, in the stores and many environments where people socialize. Each multinational comes with a background of cultures they originally grew up in and they have amazing repertoire of competencies to mingle with one another as a community and to communicate in more than one language.

While I appreciate and agree that the hearing world demonstrate reliance on speaking, reading and writing, and that whichever additional languages are conversed grammatically perfectly or vocabulary use may be limited, I challenge application of plurilingualism in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community that specifically experience a minimum of two languages from their countries of origin while their colonization in a new country and new cultures force them to learn additional L3 and L4. Along side with language acquisition among the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, developing an acquaintance

of new culture and social skills are some of the most important items for settlement in a new country. For instance I have found many of my Deaf and Hard of Hearing students over the last five plus years emigrate from various countries. To name a few they came from Japan, Iran, Iraq, Cuba, Mexico and the Philippines. I noticed that some students carried Tagalog dictionaries; signed terms they knew from their L1 or L2 conversational experiences from their countries of origin; and a few other noticeably diverse cultural behaviors that sparked need to expand their knowledge of vocabulary in their L3 (American Sign Language) and L4 (English). The point I am making here is that my students have demonstrated ways they knew how to communicate and share their differences in terms of their nationalities and cultures. Their interactions of American Sign Language and English were formulated, although imperfectly, to be made understood on the level of satisfaction. Their recognition of being members of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community gave them a sense of security that they were culturally and linguistically social.

To apply plurilingualism that involves a repertoire of skills in my experience has been about engaging in the world community by signing in American Sign Language in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community; speaking Spanish in Mallorca, Canada and The United States; and speaking German with Germans present anywhere I would be in the world and while living in Germany and Canada. English, of course, is one of the top languages of the world that I easily conversed in in Europe, North America and Japan. Additionally, my family language situation consists of two languages: English and American Sign Language. All in all, my life over the years has been about having the view of being among multinationals and conversing in multilinguals on a global scale. It is fascinating that I have always connected with people of other nations and carry on conversations in languages that applied to them and that my competency of language use has been effectively operational. For example, I managed a café in Vancouver for six years. There would be speakers of Spanish, French, German, and ASL each day. As a manager of my store, I would converse with people all day, each day. When the individuals enter my store, I would naturally and openly communicate with each person in his or her knowledge of the language with high respect. I categorize this experience under multilingualism, for I conversed not only bilingually at one time but multilingually.

A word on bilingualism beneath the umbrella as shown in figure 1 signifies an example, which would be when at home with my family, I would speak English with my

family who did not converse in ASL. When my father was alive he never knew the language as well. My one brother who is the only Deaf member of the family and I would converse in ASL. In my case, when I communicate in ASL I find more comfort in this than to speak English at home with multiple people in one room. Due to this my hearing loss contributed to the disability from carrying on conversations.

The monolingualism approach to communication, in all honesty, was not my thing in learning English after having successfully learned sign language. Monolingualism is strictly a mode of communication through one language. The shift from bilingualism of sign language and English learning in Sacramento to oralism, which is the modality of monolingualistic approach in my education experience in Massachusetts, and literally it happened overnight, was rather a nightmare for me. I was spoken to, lectured at without the use of sign language. The pace of my learning decelerated unlike my bilingual learning. In order to accommodate my learning due to being delayed by five years, special needs tutors and speech pathologists were available to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing students in their public schools in Duxbury. No sign language was utilized, as speaking was the only form for teaching and learning. The Cohasset public schools in Massachusetts were worse than Duxbury. There was no administrator, teacher or tutor that could work with me well, for they had zero understanding about Deaf and Hard of Hearing learners. I felt as if I failed until I discovered my love for Spanish in my fourth year before relocating to Weston where the town's school system was by far professional in terms of allowing me to show my skill in multilingual knowledge that included sign language (this language was still not permissible although they were interested in understanding my language acquisition phenomena along with English and Spanish).

I am a very social person who honed skills in communicating languages, learning about cultures and nationalities, foods and ways of thinking and partaking in a variety of fascinating activities. My acquisition of languages did not happen merely from the academic settings but in social spaces. My languaging consists of fluency in American Sign Language and English, while Spanish and German levels of competency would be conversational. Each day I would converse in American Sign Language and English on professional and social levels and there would be opportunities for me to dialogue in Spanish and German. Very often I would find myself code switching in either languages and depending upon which social group I am attending to at that moment.

# Chapter Three: The Autobiography

## Methodology – Narrative Inquiry in Qualitative Research

There are inquiries about narratives that have been of interest to me while composing this thesis. It is thought provoking when I found John W. Creswell's *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research* (2015) pointing out that narrative research is performed when a researcher takes interest in stories that are told of chronological events. Participants tell their stories to researchers who would collect and write about narrators' events in narrative form, and the end product of those pieces would be considered a narrative research (p. 504).

This research has involved in the articulation and narration of my story in light of sociocultural theory and language education research. When invited to consider that I write this autobiographical thesis as a narrative form of qualitative research, I thought carefully as to how to put this all together. This chapter, which contains the main body of my autobiography, is slightly different from Creswell's (2015) explanation of how a narrative thesis ought to be developed and presented. It illustrates that I am the sole researcher with a wealth of historical reminiscence of my phenomena of life learning and practice of my knowledge of languages and cultures. As Connolly and Clandinin (1990) write, narrative inquiry is the description of storied lives in narrative form. They add that it is common among educators and among additional language learners. They add: "In understanding ourselves and our students educationally, we need an understanding of people with a narrative of life experiences. Life's narratives are the context for making meaning of school situations" (p. 4). I have found useful references that are applicable to the events from the perspectives of scholastic, peer-reviewed published articles, and finally I integrated them in this thesis.

This methodology of writing has infused confidence in me to take up the opportunity for me to freely write about my life story based on acquiring languages, utilizing languages as discussed in sociocultural theory, corresponding languages with identity in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and hearing communities, and an amalgam of modalities of communication that are in forms of bilingual, multilingual and sometimes monolingual in education and social spaces. I offer in-depth references to my readers with hope that they bring to the table discussions on particular frameworks I have chosen for this piece and

this thesis takes on further needed research on the subject of plurilingualism, identity, and sociocultural theory. However, it is imperative to first understand what narrative inquiry is in the process of this qualitative research.

My story is taken into account to display real-life events from what I could remember from being three years old in a foster home through my four decades of events to this day. As it is told in my autobiography I point out the realization on my parents' own education of my hearing loss after they adopted me and of my education being delayed by five years of the absence of incidental, social and prekindergarten learning and any schooling of any kind. Furthermore, the lack of social engagement and any detail I present, in light of social events, include analysis of the narrative (Polkinghorne, 1995). The narrative analysis is a data filled with necessary details that are gathered from my own memoir of events enables me to not only produce my story but also to interpret it in perspective of a qualitative research. In this research I've used my autobiographical work and story telling as a way of interpreting sociocultural theory about language acquisition; the autobiography resulting is the emergent meaning of these perspectives in my learning journey.

The most crucial point of this qualitative research with the events that are contained in this writing are unreservedly tied to the theoretical frameworks that have interested me to explicate them. Particularly, *plurilingualism* is the crucial theoretical framework that I have set in this thesis, because it is a term considered by prominent scholars from around the world that is relatively new and applicable to the cluster of other related theories, and as a result I have embraced this idea only recently. I have been advised to expand upon the meaning and use of this term in my real-life events of acquiring languages and utilizing them in multifarious forms of life—not only in educational spaces but also incidentally outside the schools, such as in social settings of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and hearing, and family home situations.

## **Audiology and Hearing with or without a Hearing Aid**

An initial audiological assessment was in place when I was six years old after adoption in 1971, and a need for a hearing aid was fitted for me. Being hearing impaired in the 1970's and that being fitted with a suitable hearing aid was thought to "fix" the hearing loss and that I would hear as well as a hearing person. This was not entirely the

case, for the hearing aid did enhance my hearing but only to a certain extent. Compared to my practice of repeating what I thought I had heard without a hearing aid prior to being fitted with a hearing aid, that kind of problem still persisted but to a lesser degree even after a hearing aid was available to me. In reality, with or without a hearing aid I would make attempt to repeat what I thought I had heard and that remained a struggle for me. I was also unable to read lips without prior training or acquisition of language or communication. Due this, I was unsuccessful at mastering articulation of speech that I would be required to be understood. I was still unable to find distinctions of sounds in speech or where sounds would come from in any environment I would be in even with the hearing aid. The result of this would be a deprivation of exposure to any surrounding, and most importantly in social environments, to speech in my years in the foster homes, as well as delayed acquisition of language and learning. Instead of considering this belief, the medical examiners and foster parents inevitably thought all along that I was mentally retarded and that I would not successfully develop literacy or learning skills. Neither would social skills be experienced through certain levels of engagement in communication that would be prerequisite for success in the development of literacy. Prior to adoption it was not considered a possibility that I might qualify to be subject to a hearing loss.

## **Being Inquisitive in My Educational Journey**

The journey of my education to date has been similar to a wonderful story I had read in the book, *The Little Prince*, written and illustrated by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (2000). My colleagues and I read and discussed this book in one of the master's courses I had taken at Simon Fraser University. I found *The Little Prince* to be unique. I was attracted to it, and I found connection with it. What was important to me was the content of the book that was educational that ignited some reflections on my life and learning trajectories, and its novella for grown-ups was also entertaining that brought to me, the reader, the concept of an inquisitive child. It was quite intriguing to be connected to the prince who was the inquisitive type for I was also one. The pages were filled with amazing creativity. From the standpoint of inquisitiveness and creativity, my life has been filled with just these. Similar to the prince in the book I have also gone about talking to any stranger very openly that my family would not do.

For instance, when I was about eight years old, and this was after I had learned sign language and have just begun acquiring English literacy skills—speaking, reading

and writing— I would often hop off the school bus coming home from school in the mid-afternoons and head up to my neighbor's house. There were a few things my neighbor would be doing in his yard or in his garage. I would be asking many questions about what he was doing, why he was doing the things he was doing, how he was doing them and etcetera. The one thing about the neighbor was that he and his wife were elderly, and there was something unique about them that made me return to visit them. They were like teachers and friends to me. Their last name was Heath, and Mr. Heath was the son of the founder of the Heath Bar—the chocolate covered crunchy English toffee bar. Mr. Heath would often hand me a bar each time I would visit his home. I would find it entertaining to be engaged in conversations with Mr. Heath. This is one example of the numerous counts of visits I would make to my neighbors' houses and the storeowners in the nearby downtowns where my family and I had lived. I would talk to everyone for hours and a few days per week.

Furthermore, my motivation to talk openly to strangers was symbolic in terms of my use of the spoken language of English and engaging with society. Those were the first five years of my childhood I had missed. I would guess that my feeling about that experience was that I was just catching up with the world. I always loved to be with people and to learn how to talk, engage with them. Most of the people I would speak with tend to be older than my age group. I was not conscious as to whether the people I was speaking with could or could not understand me, but what I saw in them were enlightenment to see me present and to visit them. As in the pages of *The Little Prince*, I would be very much like the character that would find human relationships extremely important and constructing social events as an interlocutor.

## **Background in My Education and Professional Experiences**

I began acquiring American Sign Language (ASL) at the age of six at the Starr King Exceptional School that offered mainstream education to Deaf and Hard of Hearing children in Sacramento, California with an Individualized Education Program (IEP). IEP term came to be known around 1975 in the United States of America, which was designed to accommodate learners with special needs or, simply put, those with various kinds of disabilities. Therefore, ASL and any material adapted to meet my educational needs through the system IEP proved to be functional for the time I was enrolled in kindergarten, first and second grades. I recall that school experience the most blossoming time for me

to learn how to relate to language and to those who conversed in ASL. Sociologically speaking, the experience I attained was ethnocentric because I was a member of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community, I was able to identify my whole being similar to other peers in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing classes and community, and I quickly adapted to the environment with very little struggle or no effort. However, as I reflect upon the development of extreme transition from 1975 and onwards, I found that the hearing community was so vast and overpowering for me to adapt to whenever I would not be in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing classroom or even with my DHH peers outside the school grounds.

Having discontinued enjoying the amenities of the education I was receiving in California due to my father's change in his career, I was bound for a major shift in my academic experience in in the state of Massachusetts from 1976 until 1983. The difficulties my parents and I dealt with were the state's Department of Education that did not accommodate conversing in ASL for students and teachers. Their remedial assistance in the *Resource Room* offered to students with learning challenges and those with a variety of disabilities, but they lacked the necessary means of support for their students that were Deaf or Hard of Hearing. Specialized and professional resources teachers were helpful to me but to a certain extent. However, they seemed to be the only people I could go to for the extra help I needed in the schools. Additionally, speech-language pathologists (speech therapists) worked with me at the schools in Massachusetts. Relating to speech therapy my experiences will be shared later in this thesis.

The final two and a half years of senior high school in the Weston Public Schools in Massachusetts where I "successfully" graduated from were by far the best I had experienced in all my years of learning. I grew to love Spanish and English, and I even dreamed of furthering honing literacy skills of ASL. Despite my love for ASL it was not anywhere in reach for I had lost ten years of the use of the language while enrolled in the public schools' mainstream programs. Weston High School met my needs very professionally and knew precisely what I needed to do to enhance my learning and literacy skills. I yearned to learn more while leaning towards fluency in English literacy of reading and writing while ASL was still not included in their program.

It seemed not quite the right time to “successfully” graduate from high school, as my literacy skills in English remained quite low. When I was admitted to and enrolled in classes at Johnson and Wales College in Providence, Rhode Island in 1986 it was clearly evident that my proficiency in college academic work was rather at the elementary level that I was withdrawn prior to the end of my first year there. I did not understand the stakes of my position, but a few years later I learned about it and gained understanding of the meaning of my status in English literacy.

### **Lack of Exposure to Education and Living Conditions in Foster Care**

It was in 1966 when I was placed under foster care upon birth in Boston, Massachusetts. Since there was no established home, I was transferred to different foster families a few times within five years. It was believed that four families had been employed to care for me. As for my experience in foster care, they were not at all comfortable and there was really no sense of a loving home. I recall feeling isolated from social interactions in the homes I lived in, and, quite frankly, I don't even recollect having engagements with other children. It felt lonesome. I could not tell the difference between feeling alone and sharing with others, as I did not experience either.

Without hesitation, I am openly inclined to share common abusive conditions, improper rearing of children, and inadequate provision of education that were, and still have been unruly practiced in foster homes (Turney, K. & Wildeman, C., 2017). Evidently, the main motivation a foster parent would have, and still has, is merely for the benefit of earning some stipend from the government. Unfortunately, I would not ignore this. I know that I would not be the only child enduring cases such as mine, and my personal strongest feeling and opinion was that little or no professional training was in process prior to taking me in as their foster child.

I believe not much was done to care for the problem early on for me. However, eventually, a psychological assessment of me reported that my acquisition of language had been rather far behind that of children my age, and I would merely repeat some words I thought I had heard. My repetitive talk was like a parrot talking. I had no sense of communication and language, as words did not mean a thing to me. As an example of lacking recognition of meaning of language would be that I was unable to grasp simple instructions during the psychological examinations or in learning. It was later believed that

I had been lacking direct personal care and attention to education during my foster years. It was noted in a summary of a developmental evaluation clinic that my adjustment to preschool, language acquisition, and speech development were poor.

The one condition I can vividly remember in a foster home was a feeling of isolation, neglect. At about the age of three, and there is no way to be exact of my age, there was an *accident*. I italicize the word “*accident*” because I feel the need to stress what kind of a scenario I was in that future physicians could not know the incident. Of course, this was not a topic of discussion as a possibility to the physicians. What my situation was, when I was sitting on the floor of my bedroom one day, I was playing with colorful blocks and some toys. I vividly recall that I was enjoying myself, and the next thing occurred, as I recollect, was I experienced hearing a loud thud in my head and then a blackout. I must have passed out after a hard blow to my head, and the worst next thing I noticed was when I awoke with a sense of some sort of disorientation.

From the day I awoke after the *accident* and the blackout, something pertaining to my being and hearing were drastically different, unlike from how I had normally felt. I was also unable to enjoy playing with my toys and that I remained in my room in isolation that was worse than before. It was a life without outside contact or contact within the foster family. That change in me remained, which was a very difficult time for me to find ways to express myself. It remained in me to show that I was incompetent to learn, to socialize or to interact with others, and to mature in my childhood. That change prevented me my right to learn and grow like any child should. Due to my gratitude for having been adopted, my adoptive mother did not hesitate to retell accounts of the physicians’ input that they would not rule out the possibility that I was slammed against a wall. With that kind of force, my mentality was put to a freeze from any sort of development for learning in my childhood. The topic of discussion the physicians took on stopped short of a possibility of a hearing loss, which was then discovered at least a year later.

After that incident, I was transferred to another home. I remember my bedroom was situated in a dark garage. I don’t remember how clean or dirty it was, but the bed I slept in was at one end of the room opposite from the garage door. There were little squared window panes along the top of the garage door, and I was able to see the blue sky and puffy white clouds through them in the midst of the darkest room in the house. The nights were pitch black. There was nothing in the room but the bed and me. It was

a dark room, very much like a dungeon that could be seemingly dark and lonesome. I was not given much attention while I was in the garage, but at the same time I was not alone. A dog would accompany me in the garage and follow me around the house pretty much around the clock. It was a collie and the name was Tammy.

I have often reflected over the years about my bedroom set up in that garage, and I must say clearly that it would be criminal to place any child in a dark garage turned into a bedroom, and it would also be criminal to abandon a child in such a room without social interactions. And, it was utterly criminal for an older, possibly late teenage, babysitter to have the freedom to sexually abuse me. Yes, I vividly remember the instances. Tammy the collie was my only friend, but Tammy and I apparently had a mysterious sense of communication for I was unable to articulate. Instead, we felt such love for each other. That relationship lasted a very short time before I was transferred to another home, once again.

I don't remember anything about social interaction with any of the foster families, people in general, or with other kids. I often wonder if it was the one foster family who kept me in the garage must have decided to relocate to another state that was quite far from Massachusetts. They were probably packing up and getting ready to move. I remember standing in the middle of the empty house, because there was nothing but white walls and bare floors. It finally dawned on me the meaning of this when my adoptive mother would tell me that the family left me behind when they moved to Florida without informing anyone and without taking responsibility to report to their agent that it was too much for them to continue to care for me. The feeling of not being wanted around or not including me in social events or education was one genuinely lonesome world. Knowing that I was not the only child experiencing such, Turney and Wildeman's (2017) revealed the most accurate depiction of children's foster home conditions that failed to adequately provide proper rearing for children not being given the privilege of education, learning, and social interactions with society.

## **Cognitive Skills Analyzed**

Since the concern of my isolation and my inability to communicate, there were two analyses that were reported relating to my cognitive skills, but in my opinion one was more accurate than the other. The first was that the physicians determined that I was retarded.

Through the expertise of psychologists they were determined that my learning ability and literacy skills were quite low compared with those of other children my age and that I was mentally retarded. There was no indication in the medical report that suggested there was an accident in one of the foster homes that could leave me disabled.

The second analysis I believe to be more logical and authentic. The blow to my head from the blackout has been haunting me to this day, which gave me reason to believe this: An ear, nose, and throat specialists' audiological report indicated nerve damage affecting my hearing. I lost all hearing in my left ear and I'm profoundly deaf in that ear. I lost a high percentage in my right ear and I'm mildly to profoundly deaf in that ear. My adoptive parents requested a complete audiological report in 1972 that indicated proof of a moderate to severe high frequency sensorineural hearing loss. That confirmed the case of the damages and a permanent loss of my hearing without question.

## **Adoption Becomes Imminent in One Final Foster Home**

The next family I was living with concludes that adoption was becoming imminent. I learned about the family when I matured after adoption, for my adoptive mother was a friend of the foster mother, Karla Cager who cared for me. Karla and her husband had adopted a little girl, Lucy that was deaf and had had open-heart surgery from a birth defect that was apparently a ventricular septal defect (VSD), which was known as a hole in the heart. After a while, and only having known that she was deaf, professional doctors discovered her to be the deafest baby they had ever seen. Lucy was to be given back to the hospital to be professionally cared for, and the adoptive parents were strongly urged to reverse their decision about adopting her. Instead, they chose to keep her, to work with her.

Shortly after adopting Lucy, I was placed in the Cagers' home to be fostered. The environment of their home was a bit strange and very simple. There was not much in their house. Mr. and Mrs. Cager had four other children of their own that three of them were hearing and one was Deaf. It appeared that their children were not home much of the time, except for Lucy and me. They seemed old enough to have their independence and were allowed to wander off with some friends. I do not remember Mr. Cager being at home. I learned that he was a fisherman living mainly on a boat and was hardly at home. Karla was managing their home and mothering her children all by herself. It was only a

very brief time when I was living with them when my adoptive parents learned about me. Karla was quite relieved when my adoptive parents thought it would be a loving thing to do to adopt me. Karla was having a nervous breakdown, for her children were on drugs, and she was dealing with a severe challenge caring for Lucy who was profoundly deaf.

I, myself, was a handful, too! My adoptive father confirmed to me years later that I was a *basket case*. Mr. Cager expressed sadness that I was not living with them anymore when he learned that the Bergenheims were strongly considering adopting me. That was the point when Mr. Cager did not realize that his wife Karla was left alone, struggling to make a home life while he was on his fishing boat in the Atlantic Ocean for many days at a time. As I gather from the stories my adoptive parents shared with me over the years, I was better off not continuing on in isolation and in poor family environments. That was the end of the five years of horror, loneliness and lack of social engagements I had missed for too long. The Bergenheims were able to include quality education and, ultimately, love.

## **Adoption**

When the Bergenheims adopted me in 1971 at the age of five, Barnstable County Court in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts approved the adoption process unusually quick. I learned from my parents that an adoption process would require a much longer time to finalize with the courts. However, it took a mere couple of weeks for the court to approve the adoption when they were relieved to know that I would be placed in a well educated and suitable home. They believed that my adoptive parents would make an impeccable home that would be conducive to my upbringing and achieving education from that day forward.

My father was very involved in escalating his knowledge of the newspaper industry and made it his career when he was a reporter and manager of a newspaper firm, *The Christian Science Monitor* in Boston. My adoptive mother had credentials in secretarial and office work. However, due to having six children of her own she worked at home for the family.

Physicians at a children's hospital in Boston explained to my adoptive parents that I was mentally retarded, according to their diagnosis. My parents, however, shared their perspective of the definition of retarded as not fitting with me having sparkling eyes. They

analyzed that it would not be possible that I would be retarded with sparkling eyes, and that to spot a retarded person would be to discover dull eyes. Suppose one would try to get the child's attention, and his eyes would not be dancing, responding, nor even showing signs of wanting to play. The implication of that kind of lack of response and seeing dull eyes is when you would know that that individual would be considered mentally retarded.

Additionally, an assessment on my language acquisition was performed to comprehend my level of learning. The reports unfortunately revealed that it would be rather too late to educate me for being nearly five years behind in learning. It was believed that I could develop only at a certain rate and my parents were told that I would never be mentally more than five years old.

An audiological examination was performed on me and it was deemed necessary that I be fitted with a hearing aid. A total loss of hearing was detected in my left ear, while there was a rather low percentage of hearing in my right ear. It was then feasible to the audiologist to fit a hearing aid in my right ear to amplify it. Without the use of a hearing aid, I would find it impossible to discriminate sounds in any surroundings and in speech. Furthermore, my speech impediment would persist, and it would be highly difficult to phonetically train me without a hearing aid. My speech today appears to be satisfactory.

Shortly after summer of 1971 came to a close, my adoptive parents registered me in a kindergarten class in West Dennis, Massachusetts. It was my very first school experience, and for one reason or another it was decided that I immediately be enrolled in kindergarten even though I had not gone to nursery or pre-kindergarten. I had not developed literacy skills. It was decided that I moved forward with learning without further delay than I already had. Upon arrival at the school, my mother spoke with the teacher and administrator and explained about the challenges my teachers might face. The teacher and administrator assured my mother that I would be just fine and to not worry. Furthermore, they explained that if an issue of concern might arise they would phone her. My mother would tell me, "They thought I was an overly concerned mother." So, she returned home waiting for a phone call, and before she knew it she heard from the school administration.

The matter of concern raised was I had inability to converse as if my language span was very limited. I spoke much like a parrot repeating what I thought I had heard.

My mimicking caused great concern among my teachers and the school administration. After the phone call with my mother and realizing the issues with my communication and cognition level, the schoolteacher and administrator rolled up their sleeves to work on crafting some lessons that would be suitable for my learning. My mother would be thankful each day for their willingness to work with me, and that, as she would say to me, "They were good to you." I do not remember much of my activities in the school or my relationship with the teachers in West Dennis, for my family and I lived there for a mere one year until my father found a principal position as director of newspaper operations with the McClatchy chain of newspapers in Sacramento, California. The family then left Massachusetts and relocated there in the summer of 1972.

### **Settling in Our New Home and My Learning Sign Language as a Means of Communication**

Upon moving into our new home and settling down in the city of Sacramento, my parents did not hesitate to enroll me in a school that worked with Deaf and Hard of Hearing school children. To their amazement, and it was like a Christmas present, they learned that their philosophy of teaching and children's learning were well ahead of the Massachusetts school system. The comparisons between the two states' public school philosophies were drastic. Massachusetts on the one hand had adopted Alexander Graham Bell's (1893), an inventor of telephone and educator of the Deaf in those days, philosophy of teaching the deaf through oralism. In response to his assertion at the conference he lectured at, he had been understood that sign language was not valued and educators believed his input that there would be conflictual conditions in the Deaf children's ability to be oral. His lecture convinced a majority of those who believed his case valid while the other group in disagreement with his philosophy had been going on for well over a century in New England and other parts of the United States.

California, on the other hand, had a completely differing philosophy instilled prior to my enrollment in the Starr King Exceptional School in Sacramento. They accommodated and taught their Deaf and Hard of Hearing school children through sign language as effective means of communication along with oralism. In that case their program was considered mainstream. Many children and their parents were in tune to conversing in sign language on a familial level. They also enjoyed the amenity of conversing in sign language on a social level. My parents were not used to that idea, and

subsequently, they thought my education was more important and enrolled Carl and me in their school.

## **The Lord's Prayer, "Church" and the Words of Wisdom Relating My Trajectory of Learning to Helen Keller's**

In addition to settling into our new home and enrolling me in Starr King Exceptional School's mainstream program, my mother would begin working with me on my acquisition of language through the repetition of The Lord's Prayer, which may be found in the King James Version of the Bible, while tucking me into bed each night. The moments of repeating the prayer together gave me such a sense of peace and love, and the connectedness with my mother abounded. Through such a sense of love and care that I had never felt during the five years of living under foster care, I felt as if I had come home to a garden of healing so divinely natural that I cannot illuminate in words. The Lord's Prayer was The Word that led me to develop an acquisition to languages, but the work in this direction in education was only a start, which became a journey that lasted for many years. My church life was filled with inquiries in the realm of Spirit and the Word of the scriptures divinely guided me, as I was a student studying and applying the meaning of the message in my church.

Each Sunday my family and I would attend church. I enjoyed Sunday school where other kids and I sat at a round table reading aloud some Bible stories and joined in singing some hymns. I had been attending church for I don't know how long before I entered a washroom in the church building one day. I lifted the toilet seat and saw a green color printed word "church" on the rim of the ceramic toilet bowl. As funny as it may sound, I remember standing there thinking about the word, as it was probably my very first word in my literacy of English I would come to connect with and comprehend it. The word "church" came alive and I thought it was beautiful. It was coincidental when I must have thought about what learning was, when my teacher at the Starr King Exceptional School taught me some word signs with pictures. I expected to know what church was when my teacher invited the class to her wedding, which took place in a church. When I got to the church on her wedding day, I had known precisely what she had meant. That was a real exposure to me when I could see the symbolic meaning of the word "church" in form of a picture, spoken and written in English and signed in sign language.

Reflecting on that experience and being a regular attendee of church services for over twenty years, I wrote a paper, "The Words of Wisdom" during my undergraduate studies at Principia College in 1994. It was about my experience in some detail how a Deaf-Blind woman, Helen Keller and my experiences were about overcoming limitations in our communication that was a skill that every wise person needed, not only in order to be able to communicate with others, but also to communicate with one's own soul and with God. For some people, language is an easy tool to use in this activity, even though it has got limitations. For others, however, like Helen and me, human language is a tool much more difficult to use because of physical handicaps. The wisdom writers of ancient Israel knew that understanding is a quality basic to communication, and it is a prerequisite to effective thought and speech.

When Helen was little, she would often find herself in the midst of confusion. She felt secluded in darkness and she felt her life was full of discord, pain and fear. Similarly, I was in confusion that I would not know what to do or how to say what I wanted to say. Like she did, I matured to grasp my relationship to God and how to express ideas from Him. This was a purely spiritual approach I naturally would target what worked for my journey and survival of communication. However, the most helpful illustration came to mind in the King James Version of the book of Psalms 19:14, "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer." Through earnest effort and with help from some family members and patient and great teachers in the schools I gained skill in thinking and expressing ideas in words. I would not know what I would do without the connection to spirituality, church and membership in the church to attend the college where I was able to write this paper. I consider my church experience a perfect schoolhouse for the occasion of enlightenment and language learning.

### **Issues Relating to Sign Language and the Downfall with Lack of a Communication System**

In this segment of this thesis narrative, I will discuss my experience about and the importance of the advantageous communication tool of sign language I acquired and used in social and cultural situations in a special educational institution, Starr King Exceptional School. I will also include how my brother, Carl and I conversed in sign language as our primary form of communication at home. Additionally, there were hardships in our

communication with our family who never learned sign language, with hearing people in our neighborhood and in our church community. My acquisition of the written and spoken language of English had not yet begun, and my general learning was unfortunately late for my age, which was about five years behind that of other children. I was enrolled in classes with other children my age with what was considered the normal and accepting age any child should learn.

It was late summer of 1972 when my family and I relocated to Sacramento, California. I turned six years old in the fall. My parents discovered that there was an institution, Starr King Exceptional School, for children who were hearing impaired. The term "hearing impaired" was known and labeled upon those with hearing loss until it was favorably changed to "Deaf and Hard of Hearing" in the early 1980's. However, there are many who still use "hearing impaired" to date due to either not being aware of or not being educated about the preferred term *Deaf and Hard of Hearing*.

When my parents discovered about the school's existence in Sacramento, they were delighted to know that such a school would be able to meet my needs by means of their uniquely designed Individualized Education Program (IEP) that Duxbury, Massachusetts had long struggled to implement. Additionally, sign language was a norm in communication among students and between students and teachers in the school and the classrooms. Sadly, I learned from my parents who admitted that they were skeptical about the feasibility of conversing in sign language with Carl and me. However, I, for one, was fully attracted to the language that a sign of freedom escalated to my advantage after the half dozen years of being deprived of language acquisition and social limitations, which I endured in my foster home experiences.

For reason my parents thought sign language would not be favorable, my mother would explain years later about her struggles with the Department of Education in Massachusetts and a school district in Duxbury, that influenced her and my father to believe that sign language in the schools would be conflictual in children's learning articulate through oralism. In the late 1960's my parents and other parents who had Deaf and Hard of Hearing children would work together diligently to convey the need to employ a professional teacher that would be skilled to improve accessibility and a more effective learning environment for Deaf and Hard of Hearing learners in the school district. There had been no accommodations for Deaf and Hard of Hearing learners since the notorious

Horace Mann, a Whig Politician in America, a bold member of the Board of Education who successfully reformed the education system in Massachusetts in the mid-1800's and an attacker on signed languages had convinced the state's school administrations and schoolteachers that they were to be taught regular academics through oralism omitting conversing in sign language. Mann proved the worthiness of teaching articulation through oralism after discovering that deaf students could verbally communicate through lip-reading in the schools in Germany (Edwards, R. A. R., 2001). Mann's attack on sign language left many Deaf and Hard of Hearing schoolchildren in Massachusetts to experience a much harder approach to articulation while trying to accomplish learning in mainstream academic environments in the public schools since mid-1800.

Many parents and schools welcomed Mann's theory and Bell's work while thinking they could be crafted and made functional. The minority of those that opposed their philosophies continuously fought the battles to advocate for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing by reinstating sign language, and ultimately, they won their merits of discourse until the last half of the twentieth century. It took a number of protesters since Mann's days. It was no simple battle after the Massachusetts Department of Education instilled the system of oralism into law and was firmly valid. Due to the acceptance of Mann's perspective of student learning and teacher instruction that had long been implemented, my parents, in similar cases with many families in New England who had Deaf or Hard of Hearing children, were brainwashed to believe that Bell, Mann and the Department of Education's directives were conniving and naïve to make them appear to be most effective. It was therefore, very challenging for my parents to accommodate their son who was Deaf in the late 1960's, prior to adopting me, and that even continued to be a problem for well over twenty years.

My parents and several other parents raised questions about the Deaf and Hard of Hearing children's learning and communication. So, in that case, my mother and a few friends advocated for the Deaf children and their parents and approached a Duxbury school principal to bring about accessibility for Deaf and Hard of Hearing learners to have remedial support through an IEP by employing a skilled teacher. After long planning and meeting the requirements of the Department of Education, they successfully implemented a program in the school district of Duxbury designating a classroom for their Deaf and Hard of Hearing students, and a teacher in the area of Special Education was readily available to operate a newly implemented classroom. It was one great step towards a

comprehensive education plan for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, but sign language was still not to be made accessible.

A representative at the Starr King Exceptional School back in Sacramento, however, and a parent of the Deaf or Hard of Hearing child enrolled in the school attempted to convince my parents that providing sign language was a miracle for their child's learning. Unfortunately, due to Massachusetts having made my parents believe that sign language was not proven to be a useful tool they persisted in not accommodating my brother and me. Regardless of my parents' disbelief in the Starr King School's system, the school in Sacramento gave me every opportunity to acquire sign language and offered accessibility to me as I emerged into realizing education for the very first time at the age of six. My parents also enrolled my brother who also learned sign language.

Being a Hard of Hearing child was problematic for me due to having very little or no prior background in acquiring language through education or society, neither was there opportunity for me to incidentally learn as a hearing child would. After being fitted with a hearing aid, it was a new thing for me to adapt to, and regardless of the hearing aid boosting sounds in my ear, I was still having trouble discriminating sounds and speech. Instead of exactly responding to words I thought I had heard I would repeat them with effort but failed to articulate with proper speech. Along with learning sign language a speech pathologist was hired to work with me on my speech, but to my remembrance, I do not recollect finding it an easy transition into connecting to oralism with meaning, and neither was I able to express myself in normal conversations. Those three years of learning sign language in the school were not as stressful as developing speech in the spoken language of English because it was a sturdy uphill effort to master the challenges. I felt it was natural for me to learn and apply sign language.

## **Sign Language and Strengthening My Learning through Joint Engagement**

The nature of learning the language included joint engagement (Adamson, L. B. et al., 2008) and development of a language in my childhood has always been a topic of interest to me. Interestingly, this area has been offered with clear explanation in Vygotsky's (1978) notion of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky outlines his notion thus: "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by

independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). In this sense, my interactions with some of my Deaf and Hard of Hearing peers with stronger sign language skills in a mainstream school system were always the most reliable source and that strategically afforded me the “boost” through honing my own competency in literacy skills. Additionally, my ZPD experience was included in my teacher’s instructions to the stronger students that were valuable assets for me, not only in my learning but my engagement in the lessons and accomplishing them successfully. Miss Davis, my teacher in the class for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing taught us through a process I understand to be “scaffolding” (Wood et al., 1976, p. 90) in my learning and practicing what was there for me to experience. Her sense of engagement was a comprehensively conducive way to enable developmental learning processes in her students. In that case, when having accomplished the learning of the lessons I was able to become independent in my continuation of learning. When I would be unable to progress or move forward, I would return to the aid of the stronger signers that could aid me in the process. Considering the ZPD and the process of scaffolding to be conjoining factors in my classroom experience a vivid memory of my engagement with my class and my teacher has always remained a powerful inspiration to me.

I would always remember the most emotional feeling of learning my first signs of American Sign Language (ASL) and the immense opportunities to increasingly enhance my learning of it in a mainstream classroom. A feast of learning a language was set before me for the very first time and, as I recall, it was as a milestone for my age, being seven years old. Learning sign language was very much like tasting ice cream. I would taste it, and if I liked it, I would eat it till I would be satisfied. With that idea in mind, I would be mesmerized by the scrumptiousness of the eye-catching movements and genuine flavor of the language’s gestures, the sight of the sweetness and the madness of expressions in sign language afforded me the actual ability to acquire it through exposure of incidental learning in the classroom environments, on the school grounds and in the cafeteria at lunches with my classmates until it would all be digested. There were lots of stimulations in both social and schooling events. I recall feeling so alive in my connectedness with other human beings through conversing in ASL like never before my very first signs, because at that point, now it is impossible to even reminisce any sharing of my ability to communicate, whatsoever, in activities with other kids my age or even adults.

When I started experiencing a sense of connection with those who conversed in sign language it was purely and positively profound and unquestionably useful. The experience of connection was in relation to conversing only in sign language with others—with my teachers and peers in the classrooms and during recesses with others that I came into contact at the school. I was also conversing in sign language with Carl at home. So much of the sign language that I had learned in the classrooms would be natural for me to make use of the language with meaning. I desired to understand words and to articulate them with hand movements, facial expression and body gestures it was so important to me to yearn for more receptivity and expressive skills. My receptivity skills enhanced in very short time and without much effort. It was very much like incidental learning. So, in this case, hearing children quickly and naturally pick up on sounds and sight while Deaf and Hard of Hearing children would receptively learn through the visual hearing. Recalling the social interaction with other peers in the school, I felt such freedom from bondage of limitations in our communication that I felt no sense of isolation.

I can remember one word in sign language that made complete sense to me within seconds of observing a peer in class signing the word “late”. It was one morning when my peer teased another peer who showed up late for school. As the latecomer approached his desk after having entered the classroom door, the peer doing the teasing stood up leaning forward over his desk and swung his arm in a pendulum movement behind his butt signifying that the latecomer was late. I got a kick out of that sign, and the whole class laughed at the scene. This is one example of many others I could describe relating to my receptivity skills that were quite strong and that I was able to pick up sign language as if it were a language I could reason with on a natural level.



The photo to the left is a demonstration of the sign for the word “late” with the full palm of the hand swinging forward and backward. This photo can be found on the following website: <http://www.lifeprint.com/asl101/pages-signs/l/late.htm>

**Figure 3. “Late” in American Sign Language**

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My teachers were very accommodating in the classes I was enrolled in. I could hear them speaking while watching their signing. I remember each time being in class by how much I was in awe at the concept of code switching and, in that case, I was quite attentive. Words spoken were what I attempted to correspond with the signs so as to bring about comprehension as to what was being said. Code switching was a skill that I was able to improve, but it took work. Code switching is when a person speaks a minimum of two languages in a situation. For instance, the teacher would sign in ASL and speak English simultaneously. While this one example happens in the classrooms other situations most likely involve code switching out in the real world. When I would be speaking to the speaker of English I would sign to the signer simultaneously. I could also be reading the written word of English and signing at the same time. In many instances, we are aware of our surroundings in multi-lingual and multi-cultural cities. Similarly, we would hear people speaking one language and switching to another. That is considered code switching.

The signs that were clear to me were what I could understand, but the spoken words were what I struggled to put together with the signs during the three years at the Starr King Exceptional School. I developed some vocabulary in English but it took much time, and once again, it must not be forgotten that my acquisition of the spoken language was delayed by over five years. My teachers were keen on displaying pictures when they would tell stories and I could relate to them in sign language. However, and it will be discussed later in this paper, when the teachers in the public schools read stories aloud but without signing, I struggled to hear and understand the words I was hearing. As part of the challenges of the delay by years in literacy, I would still not be a book reader.

## **Home Communication System**

At home, Carl and I were the only two family members who could sign. We had so much in common and understood each other very well—he was profoundly deaf and couldn't speak as well as I. We shared stories and talked about our day-to-day activities at our schools and whatever else happened. Since he and I learned how to tell stories in sign language in school, we would come home and create our own stories and entertained each other. As I think of that now I would say that that was a genuinely creative way to communicate as if we were watching a film on television or staging a drama. It was a natural way for us to open up dialogue with each other that the rest of our family members

were never able to participate in any of our conversations. My brother and I were very close and that we clung to survive with sign language in our home.

I don't recall my family discouraging me or my brother from conversing in sign language, but years later my brother told me about one account of his discovery when he arrived home from school one day. With full of enthusiasm he approached our Mom and showed what he had learned in sign language in school. He began to say, "My name is R – O – N." ("R – O – N" is displayed this way to signify he was spelling his name.) Mom told him not to sign and that he was to only speak at home. I had been unaware of the issue that endured over the next three years until the day we were forced to relocate once again back to Massachusetts.

My communication at home with my family was quite the contrary that of the school environment. All of my siblings (two girls and three boys) and my parents did not learn sign language, except Carl. The only mode of communication in the home with the majority of the family members was through oralism. It was not easy for my brother and me to speak and hear. The only reason I could convey as to why my family did not learn sign language and my Mom's urge to tell my brother to not sign at home was the strong political impact the Massachusetts Department of Education had made upon my family that conversing in sign language was not at all a choice. Apparently Sacramento did not convince my family enough to prove that sign language would be beneficial for us. It was rather a bit too early for my family to be convinced enough to see the benefits if we had not left Sacramento. More time and years of living there, I believe, would have been most fruitful. We lived there for a mere three years and relocated back to Massachusetts.

## **What was it Like to Acquire Sign Language and What Did it Do for Me?**

How I describe learning sign language in my experience was simply listening through the "hearing eyes." In other words, I learned sign language by listening by sight. Sight listening is seeing the movements of hands, various facial expressions made along with movement of hands, as well as body shifting and classifiers with the movements of hands. Body shifting may be easily misunderstood as a mere form of gestural movement. Body shifting and movements in sign language are a language of literacy. It has also been believed that sign language is symbolic, but, in fact, it is literacy that fueled my ability to

enhance reading and writing skills through story telling and group chatting. Speech had no accommodation with sign language. A combination of sign language, reading and writing are tools, or skills, in a Deaf or Hard of Hearing child would be useful venues to communication in early childhood (Wertsch, 1985).

Sign language or speaking, or both (bilingualism), should be *optional* for social engagements or interactions (Slobin, 1985), and, beyond Slobin's means of bilingualism in social engagements or merely interactions, I would consider bilingualism as important in educational events for both teaching and learning as in my case. This was my only option. The positive side to acquiring literacy skills in reading and writing early on in my childhood would be conversing in sign language and speaking English would have been ideal for me to enhance cognition and communication skills, as well as learning in, not only social interactions but at home with family and at school.

Cognition and social emotions could also be improved through proper training from the start of my earlier childhood and be functional at the right age for educational and societal purposes if sign language would be put to the practice. Other children with ability to hear at my age and I would be more on the equality in schooling and social life. Truly, my experience in learning sign language when enrolled at the Starr King Exceptional School in Sacramento gave me the essence of communication, regardless the five plus years I had missed in acquiring a language. The concept of bilingualism (sign language and English) at the Starr King Exceptional School proved to open up opportunities and be quite effective in my trajectory of gaining some sense of communication (Grosjean, 1992). From there I thirsted for learning and interacting with both the world of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community and the vast hearing society, and my journey in education that was not thought possible just escalated from there. A jump-start of cognition and social emotions just began between the age of six and eight.

### **Post-Sacramento: Limited Use of Sign Language, Conflicts and Inaccessibility**

It was in summer of 1975 when my family and I returned to Massachusetts to live in Duxbury. My parents were happy to return to the southern area of Boston, as it felt very much like home. The reason for our return to New England was that my father was offered a prominent position of publisher of the *Boston Herald American*, the name now defunct,

a daily newspaper operated in Boston. My father had felt he could not pass up the opportunity for such an enriching career. It was considered a promotion in his line of work coming with experience in journalism and newspaper management. Leaving California was no easy decision for both my parents especially when their older children expressed dismay of the idea. I, for one, had no clue as to what I was exactly headed for, for I was too young to understand. This section of the thesis covers my struggle with relating to limited or no access to sign language and inaccessibility to the amenities that Sacramento had so ably offered me. I also offer accounts of conflicts between the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and hearing communities in my course of learning when I was enrolled in the Duxbury public schools. Challenges leading up to the acquisition of the spoken and written language, English will also be presented in this piece.

Returning to Duxbury was not an issue for my parents for they had already been acquainted with the school district Special Education (SPED) teacher, Ms. Jones who was hired shortly prior to my family's move to California in 1972. Ms. Jones crafted an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for me as I entered her elementary school. I began in the third grade. Ms. Jones employed an assistant SPED teacher, Mrs. Brown to offer effective remedial support for me on subjects such as math and English, and a speech pathologist was also available to work with me on my speaking, for I had not articulated words correctly. I recall my learning trajectory during my four years in the elementary and a middle school as not only a struggle but also sign language was not accessible to me.

Within a couple of months after settling into the new school environment that was strictly a mainstream program mandated by Horace Mann in the mid-1800's in Massachusetts (Edwards, R. A. R. 2001), my brother bluntly said to me not to sign anymore at home. I was dumbfounded to be told to discontinue using sign language and that I was to only speak. Speaking for me was purely dreadful and it dawned on me that I would be changed into a culture I had never once adjusted to. I did not have proper upbringing in the foster homes that I even lacked training in speaking English, nor had I felt adapted to oralism in my family setting when no one had learned one word of sign. Aside from these concerns, I was perplexed and simply wasn't sure with whom I could converse in sign language at school. There were a few hearing impaired students at the schools and they did not have enough understanding of sign language, for the school district did not include it in their mainstream program. It was very obvious to see the

students not signing, because I felt self-conscious about the kind of a Deaf community I was getting engaged with that was different from what I had been accustomed to in Sacramento.

The amenities of societal engagements that I had had with the hearing impaired peers in Sacramento was certainly long behind me, and there was no turning back. Going forward, however, I thought of at least some hope. Two things came to mind. First, there were five other hearing impaired peers in the school district I hoped to converse in sign language with, and second, I decided to, in the back of my mind, secure sign language as my primary form of communication and that I refused to give it up. Due to my brother's firm tone ordering me to stop signing with him at home and other Deaf peers in the school, I felt it was best to back off not using the language with him or anyone. Regardless of the circumstances, I did not convey to him my sense of security with sign language, and I decided to use it in solitude when talking to myself or imagining stories in my very own bedroom. With the door shut in my bedroom, it was literally liberating when I could sign to myself. Sign language was my best tool for communication and my best friend. Reflecting on that experience, I consider sign language as my very first language that was very dear to my heart and that I found it quite valuable.

Although communicating to myself and signing stories in my room seemed like fun, it felt quite lonesome. When I would be outside of my bedroom in real life, however, I truly felt I was in a world quite the contrary. While sign language was not used in the elementary, middle and high schools in the district, my social interactions with six or seven other hearing impaired peers were functional regardless our limited knowledge of sign language or even speaking. Not only did we struggle little during our social events our Deaf and Hard of Hearing culture was quite unique that of the majority of the hearing world. We verbally spoke and signed English to make our interactions worthwhile to understand one another. Signed English was a form of Signed Exact English (SEE), and it is an older version of sign language that we now use American Sign Language (ASL). Each of us was able to tell stories, talked about our lives with our families or the vast hearing world, and we had our normal ups and downs in our unique relationships. We felt that we had a community and it was quite an effective one. Our group cliqued and bonded even though the larger Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities in bigger cities and in the Deaf schools were not at all familiar or accessible to us during those school days.

There were about eight of us Deaf and Hard of Hearing students that supported each other as a very small community in the town of Duxbury. We managed to survive. We felt very much alive and healthy accompanying one another having much in common, and we were free to converse in the languages we knew how and whenever possible off the school grounds by code switching between sign language in form of Signed Exact English (SEE) and spoken English. Regardless the Special Education (SPED) program not including sign language in its curriculum neither of us could tell if the languages we were signing or speaking were ever correct. We just expressed in the very best way we knew how.

While discovering the majority of us peers that did not sign as well, one person did know some. I was drawn to her. Lucy was profoundly deaf and signed very little, but I could connect with her no matter her limited knowledge of the language. Interestingly, I learned that I had lived with Lucy and her brother Dick prior to being adopted by the Bergenheims. Regardless how difficult it was to understand Lucy's signing, we were able to get by. Additionally, her deaf voice was impossible to understand. Being profoundly deaf, Lucy could not articulate clearly with her deaf voice. Regardless of the challenges she endured in communicating, I still felt a connection with her as a friend. Not to underestimate her skill in communication, she knew more than what hearing people would know about what she was capable of. Ms. Brown, however, used very little signs with Lucy for she needed it most. Sign language, however, was very limited even to her. Brown and her SPED teacher colleagues did not use sign language, and the teachers in the classes I was enrolled in with knew nothing about hearing loss ever used sign language with me or any of my deaf peers. It appeared to be the natural norm of things in terms of the way we communicated in mainstream education.

I felt very restricted from being able to express myself, and it took at least two to three years to finally experience an epiphany that I would be able to do just that. To clearly explain this in brief: imagine being able to fingerspell, sign and gesture using the arms and the rest of the body? Now imagine the hands are restricted from movement when they would be placed under the hips while sitting in a chair? If I literally did sit on my own hands I would be unable to sign and unable to articulate. That would be utter chaos, and that would be pure language deprivation. So the restriction from being able to speak with fluency and not fully understanding or making meaning of the spoken language, I felt controlled and that I was forced to learn something new all over again—to speak. Hands

and body gestures were “silenced” and my voice began to undergo training. That was a new mode of communication I had to learn in order to read and write the written word of English, which I was delayed due to my inability to hear and not from retardation.

## **An Update with More Information from One of the Sped Teachers as of 2018**

Interestingly I managed to consult with one of the SPED teachers, Mrs. Cynthia Brown this year, 2018. I was successful in contacting her for she was still residing in Duxbury, Massachusetts. To her surprise she was gratified to hear from me and about my years of progress in my language acquisition of English and American Sign Language, along with acquiring Spanish and German. Mrs. Brown was able to offer me her recollection of my childhood in the Duxbury Schools in mid-1970. She remembered how difficult it was to communicate with me, my brother and my other peers. She even recalled my new process of acquiring English and confirmed that I was quite a few years behind that of a child my age. She knew how intelligent I was and just did not know how I would develop over time.

Mrs. Brown explained about how important it was for my peers in the district to not be isolated from the hearing society. It was a big concern not only to her but as well as to Ms. Jones. They both did wonders for our rather small hearing-impaired community by creating events to keep us all healthy and motivated in our learning. Social interactions for Mrs. Jones and Ms. Brown were of high importance. They, my mother and all the parents of my deaf peers agreed to make time to gather the group and arranged many outings to assure that we had social interactions as much as possible. As a result of that we were able to feel that our learning was in place.

Mrs. Brown added in our phone conversation that my parents enrolled me in a speech program at the Children’s Hospital in Boston. Pathologists and psychologists worked with me to help my parents understand my transition into learning in mainstream education and to engage more at home with the family.

Finally, in our phone conversation, Mrs. Brown mentioned about her experience seeing that American Sign Language was indeed a very useful mode of communication among the Deaf and Hard of Hearing children and adults. She has found that my peers and my growing up with the language proved to be conducive to our learning and a way

of life. She attested that as fact in January 2018. Due to her input I have been reminded about the “knowledge, credentials, and modes of thought,” which was explained in Bourdieu’s (1977) Cultural Capital in the classified group of other members of the DHH community. This tells me that our communication in either sign language or written form were tangible that I believe we had the skills when we were younger, because they were noticeable for we had a culture of our own.

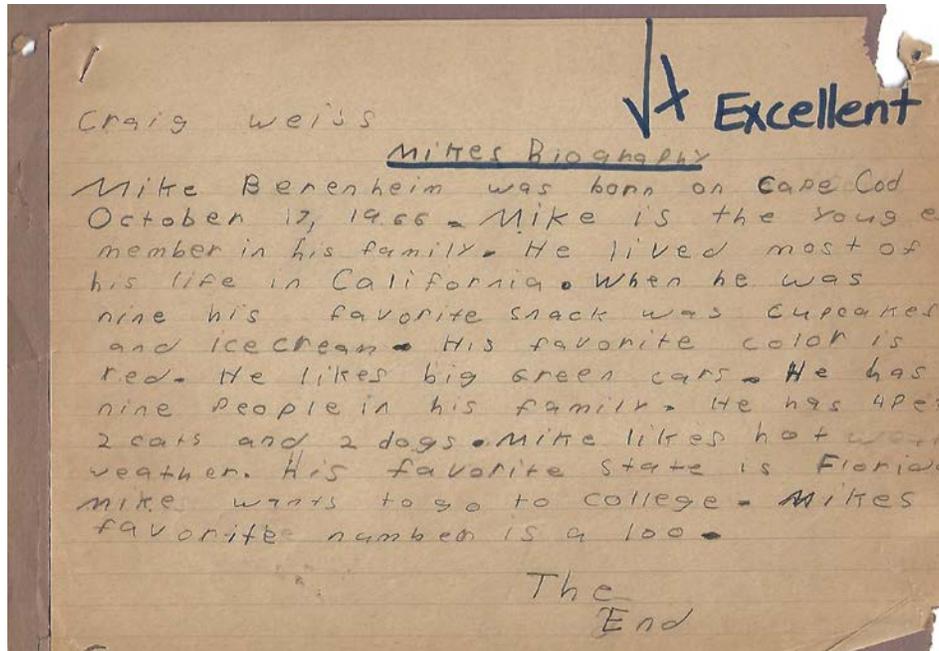
### **Acquisition of Mathematical Skills and Written and Spoken English in Mainstream Education in Massachusetts School District**

The written and spoken language of English was, as I remember well, very complex. Aside from learning it, I reflect on my experience in the classrooms. There were four situations involving my learning of English in the Alden Elementary School in the third grade. The classroom consisted of several third graders and our teachers were Mrs. Green and Miss Williams. The teachers were always happy to see their students and greeted us everyday. I loved them, and I found my peers to be likable.

The first situation I would like to share is the environment of the classroom. The classroom environment consisted of colorful posters, chairs and tables. There were, of course, many products such as colored pencils and paper, crayons, paint, books and much more for class activities. One item attracted me the most of all, and I would notice them in the room, and that was cursive alphabet letters hanging along the top of the chalkboards. Each card had its own printed letter imitating chalk writing on a dark green background, similar to the chalkboards one would see and use in the 1970’s. During the lessons in class, I would have the tendency to slip away from focusing on the teachers’ course contents. While they were teaching, I would be drawn to imitating the cursive letters on a piece of paper I would write on. I used a pencil to practice. I recall the teachers to not come to me to ask me to return my attention on them, as I guess it was perfectly fine for me to do what I was doing as long as it was productive. To this day I would still naturally write in cursive and I still enjoy it while feeling it natural for me to write this way.

The next situation is my interaction with my peers in the classroom. It is actually quite interesting to remember what transpired the whole time I was there. I remember engaging in activities such as drawing and some writing, but there is one thing in particular that comes to mind. I truly do not know how much English I knew but there was one

engagement activity I participated in with one peer, Craig. Craig wrote a paper based on the answers I had given him during our interview. I must have also written one up for him. However, I do not have a copy handy to see how I wrote a biography about Craig. How much English I knew was familiar to my knowledge based on family affairs. Craig did an excellent job of writing the following biography about me in complete sentences, and it was probably done sometime in the fall of 1976:



**Figure 4. Craig's Biography of Me**

With this paper in mind, I draw on the most practical idea put into perspective based on student learning, as well as teacher learning in light of social practices (Vygotsky, L. 1978). The concept of teachers in schools are encouraged to engage students in learning from one another based on family and community knowledge, which is discussed in E. Marshall and K. Toohey's "Representing Family: Community Funds of Knowledge, Bilingualism and Multimodality" (2010). The occasion here, as I recall, is learning through others' knowledge and they activated my learning. We often had show-and-tell sessions, pictures with numbers and music that went along with story-telling or mathematical problems. My peers and teachers would be speaking constantly during classes, and with this in mind I truly had to pay very much attention in order to feel as if I were participating. I did feel connected with the class in big ways.

Relating to mathematical problems, one morning I had an epiphany during our singing session on multiplication. It dawned on me how I was able to connect words and numbers in multiplication factors differing from how I learned some of them in sign language. We sang together “three times one equal three,” “three times two equal six,” and when we arrived at “three times three equal nine,” my math teacher looked at me with a surprise that I was fully on board knowing what I was learning. I was filled with enthusiasm from that day forth in the Duxbury schools for the remainder of my three years. However, the experience in every class and with every teacher was not always the same. There were still mountains of work to do in my learning activities. I would say that it was nearly painful and very difficult to master having the hearing loss.

The third situation here is having been enrolled in private speech therapy sessions. Those sessions involved much lip reading and listening skills. Formulations of the mouth movement, tongue placement, voice tones, breathing techniques and the like were all included in the package. In addition to the practice of speech, vocabulary lists would be included on the agenda for my learning. At one point I was learning to say the word “spaghetti.” As silly as it may sound, it was very challenging for me to say it correctly. The problem there was to get me to pronounce the “s” before the letter “p” in the word. It took quite some time for me to master this.

Learning to pronounce the word “spaghetti” was about the time when my parents took off on a business trip to London, and they left me with a very good friend of theirs to take care of me while away. I stayed at Mr. and Mrs. Hicks’ home nearby my parents in Duxbury. I was taken to school, fed, bathed and even given lessons. Mrs. Hicks sat me down each day to get me to practice saying the word “spaghetti.” I don’t remember how long it must have taken for us to work on it, but if it had taken three days still I remember sitting on the sofa in her living room rejoicing over the success that I was finally able to pronounce the word correctly. Social learning with Mrs. Hicks was the most valuable I could ever have. It was practical learning in a different home environment where I could gain social conversations, and I found that to be amusing. Mrs. Hicks was of such delightful character that I would be drawn to her so easily.

The final situation I would like to share here is the Special Education tutorial I had received from Ms. Jones and Mrs. Brown. Ms. Jones was specialized in working with students with disabilities but mainly with hearing-impaired students in the Duxbury

schools, and Mrs. Brown was an important support for Ms. Jones and the students. Daily I would often meet with Ms. Jones or Mrs. Brown on English grammar, vocabulary, reading and writing. Much of the work I was doing was from books or printouts for the activity of developing language. No sign language was utilized during my tutorial sessions.

Mrs. Brown was a kind of person that enjoyed working with me. She would have me engaged with the lessons when I was in third, fourth and fifth grades to assist the teachers. I remember one day when one of the teachers came in the room where I was working with Mrs. Brown, and they were talking about me. Apparently my physical appearance must be quite important to Mrs. Brown when she asked me to stretch out both my arms. She and the teacher looked at my arms and saw something that might have evidence to what they were concerned about. My mother must have mentioned to them that I had a broken left arm only a few years back before adoption. I am quite sure now that they must have spoken about the conditions of neglect and abuse without any hint of acquiring language or social engagements.

Ms. Jones was a good teacher to work with. She was always patient and ready to work with me every time I would sit with her. Not only did I work with her in the third grade but through the sixth grade in the middle school. I was sitting in the lesson room with Ms. Jones having a conversation one day. There was a deaf student, Brad at the opposite end of the table we were working at. Ms. Jones told me one thing relating to my being. She said, "You are a special person." She annunciated the word "special" very clearly so that I would understand what she was saying. At first I was a bit embarrassed when Brad and I eyed each other at the table. I looked at Ms. Jones asking, "Special?" She again insisted that I was a "very special person."

Since that day, I have thought of the meaning of the word "special." I grew to understand it but have increased a dislike of the idea that I was "special." I also realized later in my academic experience at my undergraduate studies that I was not "special" but simply Hard of Hearing, which had nothing to do with learning disabilities. In my case I was one of those who was assumed to have learning disabilities.

## **Identity in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community and Hearing Society**

The construction of identity, as Bonnie Norton (2013) maintains, is as multiple, conflictual and changing in each individual. I find this to be quite an imperative issue. I feel the need to draw on her perspective into my experience as a member of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) community and having to face challenges in adapting to seeking my true identity in the midst of the differing design of curriculums in mainstream education, as well as in society. My acquisition of sign language was guiding me in the direction towards acquainting myself with being a member of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community, and, ultimately, I was seeking tirelessly to figure out who I really was during that time due to my natural ability to rapidly develop sign language and marked it as my primary language. Therefore, I thought I had found my identity at the Starr King Exceptional School in Sacramento. I shared this identity as a Hard of Hearing child with my brother Carl whose identity was, and still is Deaf. This identity was not sharable with the rest of society, for they had zero understanding about Deafness and hearing losses. This kind of identity was also not shareable in terms of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals' use of American Sign Language.

“Conflictual,” as Norton used in her writing is the perfect word for events where and when I was in the process of learning to clearly define who I truly was. I thought I had found it, but the conflict arose during my four years at the Duxbury schools where it continued on through my junior high school experience and first one and a half year at the high school in Cohasset. Those years were horrifically difficult shifts in my experience in the Massachusetts public schools where I was not permitted to see my true identity as a member of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community.

When that shift happened during my family's relocation back to Massachusetts after living in California for a mere three years, I was trapped between being a child with a hearing disability and speech impediment. It was a very big backward step for me, language wise. That was a struggle, which took me a very long time to understand and to figure out how to come to terms with oralism. I was surrounded by thousands of hearing students, over three dozen hearing teachers, my family members and the society at large who were mainly hearing, except for my one brother Carl and five other Deaf peers. There was absolutely no sign language provided as means of communication among the five

other Deaf kids living along the same street, which were miles long from my home. Although we visited each other, we had very limited access to sign language within our very small community. This major change of event in my education in acquiring the English language began in 1975, and that was when I just turned nine years old.

Identity between the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community and the hearing society was conflictual. Identity was multiple as I was labeled with learning disabilities, hearing disability, speech impediment and swinging between two worlds, two societies. Changing my identity was no easy task, but I did the very best I could in difficult situations and different environments to try to feel that I was included. I was not, because multiple identities were rather too conflictual to the core of my very being.

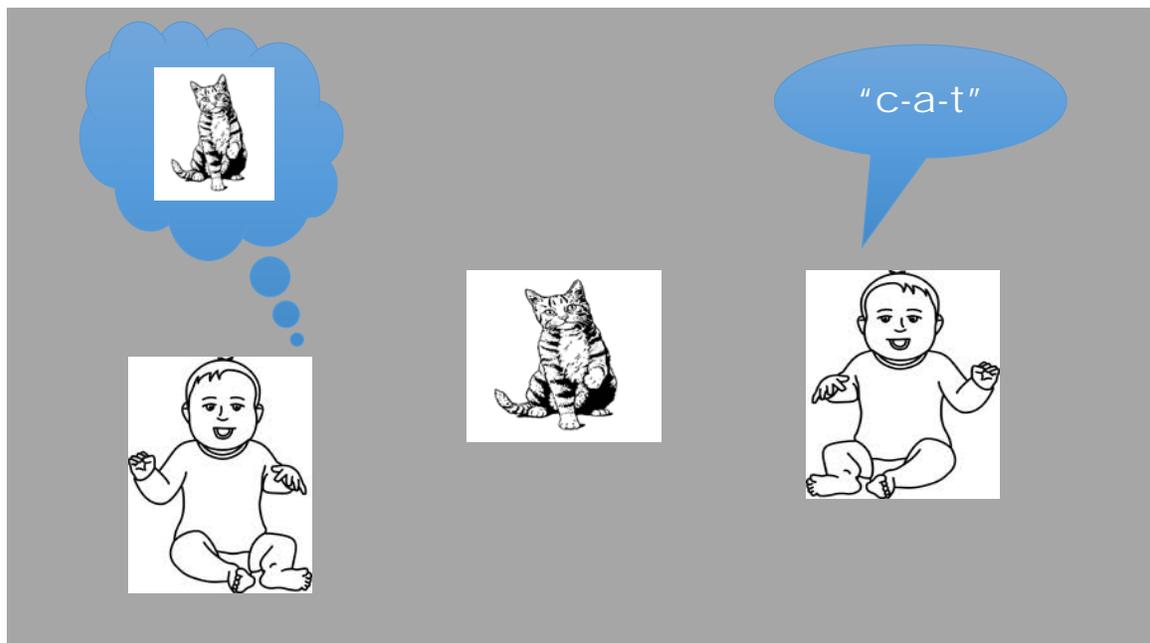
In the case of seeking my true identity between the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community and hearing society, there were arduous steps for me to make changes in my education and life from what I had acquired and known. I refer to the discussion on phonetics that forcibly drove me to seek the ability to speak like other hearing children my age. I had no choice, but my first and foremost major concern was the feeling of isolation, on a daily basis, from other kids that were hearing and able to carry on conversations. I had not been attuned to this kind of skill. That experience was tough to adapt to and to eventually fit in with the rest of my peer group. It was an experience of acculturation, and the process of becoming acquainted with English and a part of the hearing culture was extremely long, discomforting, and somewhat depressing.

## **Two Kinds of Learning Scenarios**

There are two distinct scenarios in learning that need to be clearly understood in order for me to further share my story in the next pages. I have mentioned this early in the paper, but I feel it is imperative to expand here. First, let us consider a hearing child's learning development. Being able to hear would naturally contribute to incidental learning in the hearing world. The child could receptively hear sounds of different kinds and identify them from a variety of environments: sirens, birds chirping, winds, raindrops, vehicle movements, music, people talking and the etceteras. Descriptive illustrations of these sounds could be explained through writing and speaking and could be accomplished through particular skill in a hearing person. Therefore, words are easily spoken, written and read.

The second distinct scenario is a Deaf or Hard of Hearing child (without a hearing aid fit in the ear) who has the ability to incidentally learn. This child may not respond to, if any, of the sounds or not able to identify them as explained in the paragraph above describing a hearing child's ability. The DHH learning is incidental in a completely different way. The receptivity of descriptive illustrations would be set through visual effects. Concrete nouns are extremely important to the DHH in terms of visual receptivity. Many concrete nouns would be shown to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing learners who are able to quickly develop vocabulary through American Sign Language. If a sign is not available, fingerspelling would be used, and in that case words can be displayed along with the pictures in order to acquire language.

The diagram below, which I designed, portrays clear incidental learning experiences between a Deaf Child and a Hearing Child in their responses to the concrete noun placed in front of them. Note the Deaf Child on the left in the diagram is only able to picture the cat (in the bubble) in his mind and is not able to articulate the word "cat" as the Hearing Child does on the right. The reason the Hearing Child is able to say the word "cat," and most likely able to spell the three-letter word, is that he had heard the word before and is ready to identify the animal.



**Figure 5. Incidental Learning for Deaf and Hearing Children**

The processes in a hearing child and a Deaf or Hard of Hearing child's incidental learning experiences are quite distinct when it comes to language acquisition. In my case, I acquired language slower, and behind the group of children my age, because I was not able to spell or say the words. A question was often asked of me in my experience: did learning American Sign Language occur incidentally or take place in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing classrooms? This is a question of interest, because the language development was quite productive in both the classrooms and incidentally. The next question about learning to speak, however, was not easy in any case. My delay in acquiring language contributed to speech impediment and not being on the same level as other kids my age in mainstream.

I was vulnerable to bullying and teasing made by other kids in the school for my speech impediment and I was constantly mocked and imitated for several years in both schools I attended, Duxbury and Cohasset. Although the teasing caused me embarrassments, I yearned persistently to speak but found it extremely challenging to articulate what I wanted to say. I did not refrain from speaking in timidity for I was a curious person desiring to communicate. However, becoming able to speak "normally" like every other hearing child was not a quick road to success. Regardless of the many years I spent in private speech lessons with therapists and tutors, every hour of remedial and tutorial sessions were rather dreadful. The slow progress disabled me from quickly adapting and identity as a hearing person in the case of being drilled with lessons on speech in the hearing world. Additionally, I was wearing a hearing aid and was seen as different by others around me.

My identity in my immediate family comes into account just as important as in my development of speech and education. There were struggles in understanding my siblings and parents when speaking. Their communication system on their agenda was about vocalizing. My one Deaf brother Carl, however, was the only person I was able to converse with in sign language. We also shared our complaints about the struggles of being the only two people with hearing losses in the family. The rest of our family members were hearing, including my parents, and they did not know sign language, for they had never learned it or even bothered to join in our unique conversations we were having. Our family also did not take the time to research and understand the issues deaf kids dealt with in hearing families and in the vast hearing world society. We were not fully able to comply with their dominant rule that we must speak as "normal hearing persons," but we

were encouraged to be educated. My two sisters and mother managed to access workbooks for young learners in mathematics, English, vocabulary and grammar. We received education as if we were being home schooled. We were given math problems to solve or given English vocabulary and grammar to work on before exiting the door first thing in the morning to school for the day. I remember those days when we were given substantial amount of time to learn, and I would guess they helped.

There was one member of my family who always cared about my education, and that was my oldest sister, Martha who was a schoolteacher in Greenwich, Connecticut in the 1970's and, simultaneously, she lived with a family for several years to privately tutor a young Deaf girl, MEJ. Interestingly, MEJ was adopted at birth and had begun acquiring language early on. However, American Sign Language was not an option for her adoptive parents for they thought she must speak, read, and write like a hearing child could. Due to her trajectory in teaching MEJ, Martha offered my brother and me similar lessons. She could only make short visits with the family during the summer. She might have, if I recall, visited us for just about weeks at a time. I felt quite close to Martha and always missed her presence when she would be over three hundred miles away from home, as I enjoyed learning from her each time we would be together. Martha was unique in terms of her being a sister and teacher to my brother and me. She did not need to make such strong effort to teach us and did not need to treat us as if we were "special." Martha also treated us like natural human beings, and she was skilled in mastering ability to work with deaf children. My other siblings, however, did not have the kind of flair or patience to communicate with my brother and me just as Martha did.

## **The Struggle for Making Meaning of English at Home and School with Emotional Disturbances**

Emergence into language acquisition of English in the elementary school in Duxbury was extremely problematic for me to adjust to and I was seen as a disabled student, let alone the fact that I was hard of hearing. The point of addressing the identity issue here is that students and teachers in the classrooms who knew absolutely no sign language overwhelmingly surrounded me—the majority of the hearing community was made up of the student body and teacher population while the Deaf and Hard of Hearing was, factually, the minority group.

I was probably viewed with low-level cognitive skills and interpersonal poverty (Clymer, E. William 1995) that led my teachers and other faculty supporters in various departments in the Duxbury schools to believe that I was inadequate to develop literacy skills of English in reading and writing. The oppression upon me took over my freedom from what I had once built in the hearing impaired classrooms in Sacramento. This was an experience many did not understand I was enduring at the time. Additionally, the medical diagnosis the doctors once found, when I was a child, that I was mentally retarded. The results led many to believe the diagnosis to be accurate by seeing the outcomes of my educational performance that I had lost over four years of learning and acquiring language. The meaning of oppression here is my feeling of the force that I must master the ability to speak and write in English without conversing in sign language, and along with the trials and struggles, I developed emotional disturbances.

After about a year it was suggested by the school administration and my teachers to my parents that I ought to meet with a psychologist, for my behavior appeared abnormal. There were many moments when I would throw tantrums upon returning home from school and from my visits to the psychologist. I didn't know really how to show my feelings, but after each visit I would erupt in anger. However, I vividly remember one day how horribly angry I was. I stood in the middle of my bedroom, with my mother present, and I tested what I truly wanted to say in a meaningful way. There was a particular word I wasn't sure whether it was what I wanted to use when expressing my anger. Now I am talking about saying what I was truly feeling, and it was probably the turning point in my ability to verbally express what I was feeling. I yelled at my mother saying, "I *hate* it here!" She replied, "well, you can tell your father that when he gets home!" I felt as if I were trembling with anxiety that I came to my senses on how I could truly comprehend the word "hate."

That event, however, did not indicate to me that I was on a journey to learning with ease, because there was always much work for me to become comfortable with other words in language. Right from the start of my learning in the mainstream education setting at the public schools, all I could do was repeat what I had heard. Sitting in any class, including English, I sensed a lack of connection with my peers and teachers, for I was confronting hardship on grasping what was being discussed and taught to me. It was, indeed, a long battle in the struggle to make meaning of language through speaking and writing. Instead of continuing working with the psychologist, for my psychologist assured my parents that that kind of service was not essential for me. They found that there was

strong support from tutors and speech therapists to work with me on my speech impediment and my academic work. After the four years my family spent in Duxbury, we relocated to another town, Cohasset, which was closer to Boston. My father found it more feasible for his commute to be shorter to his work when he was hired as Vice President at Boston University. Simultaneously, he was focusing on starting up a business newspaper in the big city.

In the new school setting in Cohasset, new Special Education teachers and tutors worked with me on my studies. Each teacher and tutor would work with me on different projects. One would discuss history while another, English. To be very honest here, I do not remember many of their names and I do not remember working well with them. I was a student there for a mere three and a half years. My peers in the school persisted in bullying me for my speech impediment. Regardless, I continued to do the very best I could in my classes.

When I completed my freshman year in high school, I was on grade retention as a freshman for the following year. My experience there was something I would not need to discuss in depth for it was not as good of an experience as in Duxbury. However, while I was attending classes I found one particular course I fell in love with during the year, and the love I found was Spanish.

### **Cohasset Senior High School—Motivation to Acquire Spanish**

A unique development of interest in the early part of my freshman year at Cohasset High School was about discovering my love for Spanish. I coincidentally walked by a classroom hearing students speaking Spanish with each other and their teacher. Each day I would literally ask my teacher in a class for permission to leave the classroom to go to the toilet. I was never barred from leaving the room when I would ask quite frequently at the same time each day, and instead of going directly to the toilet I would quickly leave the corridor area and find my way to the foreign languages corridor of the high school building. It would be easy for me to simply approach the Spanish classroom and hear discussions by way of the door left open ajar each time I went. For what reason the door was left open ajar, I don't know but each time I felt it was open for me to hear the attractive sound of the romantic language. I would turn up my hearing aid volume to hear the students speaking and they appeared to be having a blast at learning Spanish. While

listening in on the class discussions and pronunciations I grew desperate to the point where I felt I ought to enroll in a Spanish class the following year. I was quite inquisitive as to what it would take to learn a new language.

I pondered upon the idea of enrolling in a Spanish class for the next school year for about a few weeks. I did not ask my parents or anyone for their opinions, but when I finally figured out how to inquire upon my school guidance counselor about enrolling in a course, I was inspired enough to go to her in person to tell her about my interest. When I went to ask her about enrolling in a Spanish course, she appeared to be alarmed. She stared at me with fear to tell me that there was no way I could take any other language than English, for I was not doing well enough in English to do well in Spanish. Despite not knowing how to argue against the verdict of my inquiry, I kept my mind open about it.

When my mom and I arrived home from work that afternoon, I was helping her in the kitchen to prepare family dinner. She spoke up and asked, "I understand that you wanted to take Spanish?" I looked at her astonished and replied with a positive answer. She explained to me very gently that she had a telephone call from my school counselor earlier in the day about my desire to enroll in Spanish. She added that the counselor's concern was that my understanding of English, English vocabulary and English grammar skills were not high enough to be eligible to take a Spanish course. "But," without hesitation my mom said, "I told her that if you wanted to take Spanish, she should let you take it and give it a try. If you flunked the class we agreed to pull you out. Do you want to go ahead with it?" I perked up with joy and said that that was what I had wanted to do and convinced her that I understood and agreed the consequences if I failed the class.

I began enrollment in Spanish in the fall of my sophomore year in 1983. It was a dream come true to actually begin learning a new language. I was so over the moon about it and looked forward to attending class each day. I placed Spanish as my top priority of all the other classes I was taking during the fall term. The best thing about the class was the teacher, Mr. Fortin conducting the lessons. Mr. Fortin appeared to be of a Spanish descent and most certainly qualified to teach the language. Furthermore, Mr. Fortin was of a character that naturally could gesture and use proper intonations that helped me easily participate. The class size was about thirty students. When my peers and I would ask him questions or reply in Spanish Mr. Fortin would interact with each of us with poise. There was not a flaw in his presence as a teacher, and for those very reasons I was able

to perform quite well academically and to speak the language as if I naturally would emerge into it quickly without too much effort.

There was no barrier to my learning Spanish. I worked independently and was feeling very comfortable learning the language. However, just as all the other three years and four months of my attendance at Cohasset High School, I was continuously teased for my speech impediment and for having a slower ability to learn in other classes due to being the only hearing-impaired student. My peers in Spanish class refrained from mocking me, which I am sure, for the very reason the teacher would not tolerate such behavior in his classroom. That was the very reason for my appreciation for our teacher's ability to make sure his students were staying on the path to learning rather than what they had done to me in other classes. Outside of class my peers were continuously imitating my speech impediment. Somehow, I managed to make it through until my attendance at Cohasset ended in January 1984. My parents had decided to relocate to Weston, which was much closer to Boston and a much easier commute to their workplaces from our new home. My mother continued to work as secretary for a well-known college that had an office in the same town where we were living.

### **Continuation of Learning Spanish and Support Teacher/Tutor for Students of Spanish at Weston High School**

My Weston High School years from January 1984 to June 1986 were by far the best years of my learning experience. It was a positive time. The students at the public schools in Weston were quite mature and they differed from the students back in Cohasset. There was no bullying or imitating my speech. I recall many of my peers very thoughtful, helpful and inclusive of me. In addition to my impression of my peers, the foreign languages department at the school welcomed me with open arms, as they were captivated with my ability to learn and utilize Spanish in speaking, reading and writing. Additionally, I was a regular attendee of the learning center with positive-minded, supportive group of teachers who tutored me.

While I was student of Spanish I took whichever opportunity I could afford in terms of time and funding. Due to the rapidity of my learning I was made Spanish tutor to work with other students struggling to meet the language requirements for graduation at the high school. I worked with two students for a full year in my senior year and was paid a

fair amount of money. I was grateful to have that opportunity. While tutoring, I was able to learn more about the language of Spanish and its grammar, spelling and pronunciation rules. These enhanced my chances to go abroad to a Spanish speaking country. Unfortunately, due to my parents' finances that were limited I was unable to take up the chance to travel to Central America. Regardless of the result, I continued to love the language, learn it and spoke it when I would discover a Spanish speaking person in the city of Boston, where I lived the next five years.

## **Beyond Johnson and Wales College in Spring 1987**

After having been withdrawn from Johnson and Wales College in spring of 1987 due to low-level function of academic work, I was seeking ways to return to post-secondary studies other than hospitality in hotel and restaurant management. About a year after leaving the college, my church official, headquartered in Boston, contacted me and expressed interest that I shared my knowledge of American Sign Language by interpreting church service activities on Sunday and Wednesdays. I was delighted to be asked and at the same time I was concerned about how much of the language I was able to use due to not having conversed in it for nearly ten years. Instead of looking at this as a concern, they purchased materials to enable me to prepare for church services, knowing that I understood the message of Christian Science.

Each day I would spend hours practicing the signs for the messages that had been prepared for me by the readers of the church. I used an American Sign Language dictionary and the dictionary of English to put together a comprehensive interpretation of the lessons in American Sign Language. Simultaneously, I realized that as I worked on the interpretation of the lessons by using the dictionaries, I was enhancing my vocabulary and sense of grammar in English. My motivation was so positive that I could work well and discipline myself without a supervisor or a teacher. I also did not waste a moment of learning how the two languages worked.

What I learned was that English and American Sign Language did not work side by side grammatically speaking, but I realized why I struggled to learn English when after having learned sign language. The struggle was that the grammar rules between English and American Sign Language were completely diverse, for sign language did not have the basic rules of grammar as English and other forms of vocabulary that were involved in the

message I was interpreting. I also realized that it was very difficult for me to learn English without the aid of pictures or sign language interpretation from a teacher lacking knowledge of sign language.

It was a fulfilling time serving as interpreter for the church services and I was learning such a huge amount about English and American Sign Language. I was grateful to serve in a bit way to my church community, but there were not enough Deaf and Hard of Hearing attendees at the church services. So in that case, we had to discontinue this. It was not at all a negative thing for this to come to an end. At the same time I was looking into admission at a college in the Midwest, which successfully admitted me.

### **Unconditional Academic Support and Acquisition of German and Advanced Level Spanish at Principia College**

Principia College, an undergraduate four-year liberal arts program, was an experience of a lifetime for me. The college required each entering freshman to complete an exam for the purpose of placement for their students based on their academic performance. The results of my exam demonstrated seventh grade (middle school level) academic performance. Due to my test results, the college's learning center called me to meet about the results. They were ready to pave way for my departure similar to what had happened at Johnson and Wales College in 1987.

In our meeting they made a suggestion that I sought another college that might accept me into their program. We talked about considering the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) in Rochester, New York or Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. After the discussion on other educational possibilities for me, I was given a moment to contemplate on how to offer my feedback. While I appreciated their concern for my learning and encouraging me to look towards education in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing environment I offered a response. What I did not convey that was in mind was the sense that I gathered from them classifying my disability and placing discrimination against me. Instead, my response was that I was not going to give up my desire to continue to learn right where I was. Interestingly I knew the meaning of my decision, and proof of demonstration of *possabilities* (here I use possibilities with abilities) that led me to write "The Words of Wisdom" on Helen Keller and my overcoming disability of language use three years later. (Please see an excerpt of the 1994 paper on page 19.) I was convinced

that all would work well and asked the college to give me the opportunity to demonstrate the *possibilities* through inspiration and prayer. My request was granted. Furthermore, I was offered unconditional academic support from my Sociology instructor's wife and English instructor. My Religion and Philosophy professor also cared to take me under her wing during my Bachelor of Arts studies at the college.

My English instructor offered full support to me after hearing about my academic learning in my first semester in January 1991. Brian, the instructor was very accommodating by means of establishing an English course in reading and writing. The course he created for me was approved and certified. It was designed for me to earn regular college credits while upgrading my reading and writing to merge me into ability to perform academic work at the college level. I read a few books and wrote some papers based on the readings. The instructor was very patient and worked with me every step of the way. Of course, I improved on my reading and writing skills of English but not within one semester towards college academic work. The tools I learned during my lessons with Brian enabled me to utilize them in my next four years of academic activities at the college.

Meanwhile, my sociology's wife, Gretchen eagerly volunteered to work with me on reading current events in *The New York Times* and *The Christian Science Monitor* newspapers the following semester. She and I read articles that were of interest to me and we discussed them in depth. I simultaneously worked on my pronunciation and vocabulary development. Similar to Brian, she was very patient and worked with me each week for approximately a year. Our newspapers reading activities we did were not designed for credit, but it was very helpful to me in developing my reading and receptivity skills.

Dr. Eleanor, professor of Religion and Philosophy, and I worked very closely together during my last three years at Principia. Dr. Eleanor would keenly work with me not only in religion classes but also in other capacities when I would work on papers for other classes or for prerequisites for graduation from the college. She would give me big boosts when I needed her help and made sure I would not fall on the wayside. She eloquently showed me how to express myself in and organize my writing. I was in for some big treat learning many techniques in writing. When other professors did not know how to work with me, Dr. Eleanor would step in, as she utilized her expertise.

My main focus of studies was Bachelor of Arts in Foreign Languages—Spanish and German. As for Spanish I continued to love learning the language and reading, writing and speaking it. I attended all class levels in four years including a milestone that involved reading seven books written by a variety of authors' literacy works that were of different Spanish-speaking countries at Harvard University.

In my first two weeks at Harvard University, I attended night classes while working full time in Boston. However, when I attended each class I became rather uneasy about the Spanish professor's style of conducting her class. It appeared that the students and I in class did not have very much opportunity to engage in discussion on the books we were reading nor did the professor leave open questions or remarks. She took on the whole show by talking about the stories and points in the readings that I would think ought to be a responsibility of each student. The course level was advanced. I was discontent and not challenged enough to think and read independently or engage with the professor and the class. I contacted my Spanish professor, Dr. Duncan at Principia and asked to arrange for me to work on my final stages of reading and writing and corresponding with him through the rest of the semester. The college administration agreed to the altered arrangement, and added that I was to write a ten-page paper in Spanish and returned to the college campus one week prior to graduation to take a final exam that would be crafted by Dr. Duncan.

When I returned to the college to take the exam, Dr. Duncan and I met in his office one afternoon. We discussed the contents of the paper, and of course we spoke Spanish and English during our session. Apparently, Dr. Duncan congratulated me on completing the paper that led him to see no reason to have me take the final exam, because the points in my paper from the seven books I had read were already embedded that there would be no further questions he could ask me in the exam. I successfully graduated that week.

In my second year of the undergraduate program, however, I enrolled in my first German course as a minor to accommodate my studies in Foreign Languages. Spanish and German were my main focus of study in my last three years, and they were actually full-blown language acquisition activities. German and Spanish were not identical kinds of languages, as German is a West Germanic language that is mainly spoken in central Europe and Spanish a Romance language that could be spoken and heard in Spain, Central and South Americas and some other parts of the world. They were a very good

mix for me in my learning, and not only did I learn the languages, I was very much hooked on by and appreciated every dimension of the study of grammar, spelling and pronunciation activities. What I had not been aware of was that these languages accommodated my learning of English. I majored in Foreign Languages because I loved the idea of learning languages and that I was a natural at it.

Due to my deep involvement in and love for languages, Dr. Duncan hired me to become Teacher Assistant of Spanish for him and his colleague. Additionally, the Foreign Languages instructors hired me to be their language lab assistant to aid students in their studies of French, Russian, German and Spanish. I was, needless to say, exposed to multiple languages while serving as assistant to instructors and students in the foreign languages department.

In my last year of Foreign Languages studies I was invited by Dr. Duncan to enroll in a course in Teaching a Foreign Language. There was great opportunity for me to choose American Sign Language as a language I wished to teach in my presentation to the class at the end of the semester. I taught the manual alphabet and some everyday phrases, such as “hello,” “good morning,” “how are you,” and etcetera. After completing my presentation I left the floor open for questions and discussions. When the students were finished asking me questions or discussing some things concerning ASL and Deaf culture, Dr. Duncan showed doubt that I could teach the language. I was surprised by his input and openness for argument. I asked why he thought ASL was not teachable. He said that I did not vocalize once while I was teaching. I explained that that was the way to teach ASL since the language is visually acquired and that verbalizing in teaching was not part of the curriculum. In fact, I proved to him and the class that it has been taught without vocalizing for as long as signed languages existed in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities. Thankfully, I earned a passing grade, and I have not forgotten the argument. It was a valuable experience that, perhaps, made me a stronger communicator than I had felt before. Defending the practice of teaching a visual language, American Sign Language, that I demonstrated was a thing I had not expected to do. It was spontaneous, indeed.

## **Beyond Principia College and Work Experience in an office in Boston**

From 1995 to 2000 an office in my church employed me to be their office assistant. Due to my education and knowledge of languages they found that I could be useful in

various capacities. The position I held was Office Assistant, but my responsibilities were beyond mere answering telephones and taking appointments. These I did far less than expected. Instead, I was also asked to scan, quick reading, a variety of published writings by authors outside our organization to assist the officers and board members with information they would find helpful in our research activities. I also took up the tasks of proofreading letters, articles, chapters in books and brochures written by the Board of Directors and other officers of the organization prior to publication. Many of the writings I proofread were in two languages that I was familiar with, and I was exposed to writings in French, Italian and Portuguese in which they were included. I had access to dictionaries that were helpful to me to complete the assignments. The kind of assignments I was called upon to do was based on my educational knowledge of how to work with languages and, as a result, the two languages I had learned in college were very much applicable to my current activities in reading multiple languages.

## **Teaching English and Living in Germany**

Six years after successfully graduating from Principia College and working in my church, I worked for a cruise company that filed for bankruptcy in Honolulu, Hawaii in 2001. At that point, I was apparently forced to consider becoming an English teacher. In that case I was led to relocate to Germany, and while contemplating on living in a new country and culture and considering a new professional career in teaching English there, I contacted my former advisor, Dr. Duncan to inquire about my qualifications for teaching English as an additional language. He was explicit and positive in his answers to my questions that it would work well for me to hold a position as an English teacher.

From the day I began working as a faculty member of a language school in Germany I grew to expand my horizon in the field of teaching and learning and enlarged my perception of what it meant to communicate on every level—speaking, reading and writing. The thought I loved about learning and teaching was to consider the world to communicate with confidence. This has remained with me not only through my years of teaching in a foreign country but also in North America when I taught Deaf and Hard of Hearing students. I grew to love and appreciate learning from my students and teaching them even to this day. I grew to understand better the meaning of identity and the importance of code switching in multilingual mode of communication rather than the monolingual approach.

## **Upgrading My American Sign Language (ASL) Skills for Teaching Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) Learners**

It was in 2010 when I immigrated to British Columbia, Canada after discovering opportunities for teaching English as a Second Language. Teaching English was my line of work when I lived in Germany for six years. A month after settling in my new home, I decided to begin searching for a teaching position in Vancouver and the Lower Mainland. When I began searching in [www.Google.com](http://www.Google.com) for teaching English as an additional language, the first item that appeared in the result of my search was an opportunity to teach Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) learners at Vancouver Community College in the city of Vancouver. I was pleasantly surprised and enlightened about the results. Without hesitation I made a visit to the college and met Deaf and Hard of Hearing department head that was on duty in August, just a mere two weeks prior to the start of their new school term. She was delightful to speak with, and after talking for over a half hour she escorted me to two departments that would offer me extended education in the Provincial Instructor Diploma Program and upgrading American Sign Language (ASL) skills for the teaching position.

That afternoon I met one of the ASL instructors and inquired about upgrading my communication skills in an ASL course they might offer, which I was immediately enrolled in. Simultaneously, I was taking classes in the Provincial Instructor Diploma Program (PIDP), and ASL interpreters were provided for me through the college's Interpreter Department. While visually listening to the interpreters in American sign Language in classes and upgrading my ASL skill in ASL lessons, my proficiency in the language rose very quickly within two years, and as a result I was able to secure a teaching position at Vancouver Community College teaching English and basic Math to adult Deaf and Hard of Hearing students. Having brush up reviews and developed new vocabulary of ASL within a mere two years, I felt as if I have returned to utilizing the language, returned to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community, communicating more closely in social settings and with my Deaf brother Carl. This is very much a solid conclusion in the process of my language acquisitions of American Sign Language, English, Spanish and German.

## Chapter Four: Conclusion: What I Have Learned and What I Can Share

Based on my discovery of rich peer review articles during my studies in the Master of Arts in Education at Simon Fraser University, I have engaged in numerous discussions on wide ranges of important aspects of interests such as sociocultural construct with identity and access to multiple languages. These have always been significant topics for me, because my forty-five years have been critical for me to access multiple languages, wherever applicable. I converse predominantly in American Sign Language for the purpose of my learning in educational settings, in my professional work as an educator and interpreter for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, engagements with the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community and with my brother. My conversations each day would involve code switching through multilingual modes of communication in American Sign Language, English, Spanish and German. Because of my skill in multilingual abilities, I have most recently come to relate to plurilingualism as central in this conclusion based on my thesis.

The sense that I have arrived at while writing this thesis is the need for recognizing and legitimizing globalization that multinationals in both social and educational contexts have shown vigorous paradigmatic shifts in TESOL methodologies as in the case of Hong Kong, which Lin (2013) tells in her view of the events in her article, and that I apply such shifts as these considering the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. As I have shared, many Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals have come with backgrounds in L1 and L2 as signed languages and spoken languages from their countries of origin, and not only these, but they have come with knowledge of their own cultures. Their emigration from their countries of origin to a new country in North America (Canada or The United States) is a discovery of new set of cultures due to multinationals that share their cultures and languages in many urban cities, and learning new languages (American Sign Language and English). These transitions involve culture shock with some degree of familiarity or unfamiliarity of new languages not only involving learners but education teachers as well. We take into account the paradigmatic shifts of teaching and learning languages in light of Lin (2013) and Marshall and Moore's (2013) stress on the issues we face and considering strongly our acceptance of *plurilingualism* as the term for the repertoires of multinationals' skills in multilingual competencies and multicultural knowledge. Furthermore, it is imperative to recognize the slow acceptance of this term in postcolonial

contexts of sociocultural and identity theories. These are considered, at least to me, the most important key elements on plurilingualism.

There is much work involving revamping; renewing; and designing, if need be in certain cases, new curriculum of methodologies for teaching and learning. As education teachers, education administrators, stakeholders, students and countless number of other individuals, we take up these projects with extreme precaution that our future does not depend upon old theories and methods. It is evident that we prepare for new contexts in light of postcolonial perspectives of communities and languages. Communities, I mean involve social situations and identity issues and educational institutions that involve plurilingualism. We can only be successful when we merge into the considerations of new ways of learning and teaching languages, which is then shown how we use languages in both social and educational spaces.

Due to my discovery and acceptance of plurilingualism in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, I offer solid examples relating to accessing multiple languages to my practice of learning and teaching. I have proven it to be functional. Although it is true that there is lack of accessibility to multilanguages in cases of educational institutions that practice monolingualism in mainstream classrooms for Deaf and Hard of Hearing learners it is a wake up call that we turn to designing curriculum. From my knowledge of this process that I studied from the Provincial Instructor Diploma Program (PIDP) in British Columbia, the development is to first identify our learners and stakeholders as our audience. Once we have the knowledge of who we are dealing with we merge into creating, designing, implementing curriculum but with a comprehensive set of steps, such as program or course objectives; strategy for instruction that involves the question as to how we teach it and to whom we teach it; and we also need a comprehensive assessment plan in place to know what level and where we meet the demands of the learners, stakeholders and, of course the education administrators and teachers. Finally, we turn to feedback, or evaluations, of our progress or necessary amendments, which is normally the case to maintain updated methodologies within the curriculum design. As for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing there must be a philosophy for teaching and learning in ways that are functional just as is desired in the hearing world of teaching and learning.

I continue to determine concrete goals in my own experience in learning and teaching and hope for specific goals to be implemented to fill in the gaps that I see in our

education system in the case of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. My practice is about evidence for the purpose of the conclusion of this thesis to realize that social justice would need to be implemented among the communities of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, in educational institutions and hearing society around the world. One of the things I tend to look back on is my submission of an assignment I completed for a course on Contemporary Issues in Curriculum. I pull out excerpts of my paper to share my insight on education for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

In reference to our DHH community sign languages have become a normal and enormous part of our culture. Yet, sign languages have not been identified like official languages of spoken and written languages in the world. Here we are in the twenty-first century that many new technologies have soared as form of communication tools of the Internet through cell phones, iPads, desktop computers, laptops, and other gadgets, and they are in use and practical in education and societies. The DHH community is drawn to utilizing them for enhanced accessibility in our form of communication and living. However, the one thing in education is the utilization of technology in the classrooms has been rather limited to the DHH. In our current day education, the DHH yearn to find progress in our own personal lives and in our community in terms of protesting against being belittled in our abilities. Just how can this be accomplished? How can administrators, educators, and civilizations understand our DHH community and culture in education and general communication? I believe change has yet to be continued towards progress in understanding our sign languages and ways of life in order to implement more accessibility among the DHH in education and society. Newness of resources in teaching and learning must be executed.

I appreciate Franklin Bobbit's (1918) expression with clear insight regarding new visions, new learning and teaching materials, and swift social changes set in the early 1900's, and I feel the need to echo his vision even in our world and society of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. In our current education and social changes today, we still lose sight of the painful separateness. An admirable woman, Helen Keller, eloquently shared that "blindness separates people from things; deafness separates people from people" (cited in Halpern, C. A., 1996).

Our civilization, whoever and wherever we are, could bring about a sense of togetherness and progress of understanding the nature of our DHH community and

culture. Because of the two remarkable individuals, Keller and Bobbit, they inspire me to move forward with the implementation of an educational plan that entails a perspective of Deaf culture in a global diversity. What is also important to recognize is the rapidity of learning among today's generation of children, and as this is noticeable as of late the changes have got to have its place for Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) children and adult learners. Mainstream educational institutions ought to be wary of the necessity to upgrade their accessibilities for these groups of learners.

There is need to consider challenges, implications and recommendations. While it is known is that curriculum is ever developing, there are possibilities to see either good reasons to do so and become good success stories, or they just don't make any sense or connections for one reason or another. In anticipation of developing and implementing this course it would be of no surprise that many people (educators, academic administrators, governments that funds education, parents, and many more) involved might be faced with barriers. Barriers come in many forms, which may include teachers not desiring to or having the time or energy to delve into continuing education, institutions and/or governments may not have enough funding available to enroll teachers in additional courses or even to launch a new course, and the greatest problem could very well be resistance to the idea of introducing a new topic of Deaf and Hard of Hearing studies and its culture studies. The reason I mention the latter is due to understanding that it requires much for the hearing society to adapt to a whole new idea of dispersing this kind of course in a curriculum that they may not know much about. There will need to be a good number of people involved in designing this course, as well as supporting and sponsoring this project.

Regardless of the seeming long and painful additional education on DHH culture studies, I would apply Doll's (2008) insight on relations having to do with developing epistemologies in not only students collecting data but moving into relationships that are made alive in their knowledge and learning. I would also recommend a less rigid syllabus as Doll (1993) believes it to be worthwhile a better practice in pedagogy. This perspective enables freedom within limits for enhanced learning processes and even better relationships among students and their relations to resources offered in this course. I consider relationship development and less rigid syllabus as flavors similar to choosing ice cream flavors. Choosing what works with what and what doesn't, and these are what

I desire to see in the process of creating this course and apply such a rich course in a program relating to learning identity in other cultural and social arenas.

Challenges could crop up, but it all depends upon how to master them in the process of creating this course. I recommend teamwork in light of careful reviewing, planning, developing, implementing and maintaining curriculum. In other words the process in the development and proposing what may be functional in terms of how issues or concerns may be resolved, designing a comprehensive project plan, offering authorized useful and authentic resources by educators, executing orientations and ongoing continuing education for teachers, and providing opportunities for feedback and support from stakeholders, students, colleague educators, educational institution administrators, and outside supporters: these are all important part of the development of and the maintenance of such curriculum or program.

I had no idea where I was going with this thesis. As it has taken shape, it took quite some time for me to discover at least some answers to many inquiries relating to the events of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and finding meaningful application to the many terms applicable to my case, as well as in the case of many people I have come into contact, during my armchair reading activities while writing this thesis. When I discovered in the reading of the article that further rigorous activity of research ought to be implemented to benefit educators, parents with children with hearing losses, educators and those interested in realizing more of and gaining understanding the importance of and effective utility of multimodality of linguistic means among the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community and hearing society.

My life, in every aspect, has been about being inquisitive through use of multi languages. I have not given up search for answers, and in the interim I have learned quite effectively beyond the limitations and hurdles set before me to escalate my desire to express my understanding and practice of multimodalities of American Sign Language and spoken languages in every aspect of life. I was asked to answer my colleagues and professors at Simon Fraser University to explain how it were possible for me to accelerate and overcome the limitations of being perceived or diagnosed that I was mentally retarded that should have left me not developing in learning or acquiring language in education or society. I would have been left in a children's hospital at five years of age, while the days and years would go by without contact with this amazing experience. I have decided to

exhibit my experience based on the notions I discovered and researched to gain understanding of and discussed with my colleagues what were presented in peer review published works. To answer the many questions my colleagues have approached me with, as well as I have got, it seemed logical and accommodating for me to write this thesis. Based on my ability to converse in American Sign Language and English (L1 and L2) beginning in my early years of schooling at the age of six and demonstrate my unreserved motivation for acquiring Spanish and German as my L3 and L4 learning experience and usefulness of the these languages it was so possible to seek some answers. The answers did not come from my tutors, teachers or school administrators, because I was drawn to languages so naturally despite a guidance counselor in high school who deprived me of trying out Spanish class. Not one person could block me from continuing to advance towards another language, because I knew what they did for me. They advanced my knowledge of English and other languages; and I was very involved in multilingual and multicultural social settings where I could use my skill. I look forward to furthering research and seeking philosophy of how multimodalities of multilingual and plurilingualism could have positive outcomes and to finally demonstrate concrete planning on educating the Deaf and Hard of Hearing learners.

I wish to not forget that identity has been a hot topic for me in my entire life, my whole being. I'm quite sure there are many Deaf or Hard of Hearing individuals that are seeking their true identity for themselves. As I have mentioned in my story relating to identity, it is important to understand how each person feels when one would be barred from his right to properly seek power pertaining to his identity as a member of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community in social justice.

What transpired in state of Massachusetts from 1975 to 1983 after I had earned my right to converse in American Sign Language in the Starr King Exceptional School in Sacramento, California, I continued to self-advocate for myself and learn both in the schools and in society what was not often supported by the Duxbury and Cohasset schools. This was also the case at Principia College, which I am an alumnus. Their base of the praxis of teaching and implementation of student learning were the mode of monolingual approach, which did not include sign language nor were sign language interpreters hired to accommodate my language needs.

The reason I explicitly share my story is to reiterate the complexity of all my academic years, even through college, when there were conflicts in the multiplicity of identity and being bilingual. I had to work out in the ever-changing environments and languages I encountered. Conversing in three languages in multicultural events—Plurilingualism—came to mind as a perfectly related concept to explaining the mode of code switching and code mixing, and I have come to appreciate the bilingual and multilingual approach in educational settings (García, O., Lin, A., & May, S., 2017) in teaching, learning and engaging in social situations. Plurilingualism apparently had already prepared me to become successful in my academic, social and identity search.

My education processes were based on mainstream education in the public schools. This means that I had many opportunities to be exposed to education that could be learned worldwide. In light of this kind of education I had through mainstream education, I have had a privilege of not only learning to understand the operation of the hearing society but also learning what to expect in the trials of difficulties that may lie before me. Reflecting upon my education experience I find that my access to languages and seeking my identity in sociocultural areas have served me well despite the limited use of American Sign Language in education and hearing society around the world in my earlier years as a learner.

Here is my final word on not only reflecting upon my experiences but also on how much it affects the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community and hearing society. There was this following instance in my experience with a small group of Deaf and Hard of Hearing community in Western North America. When I would introduce myself to the community I would receive some negative vibes, which were unfavorable. Through that I never gave in to reverse my stance on my identity as a member of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community regardless of where I had been and how much influence the hearing world had on me. I learned that a colleague, with whom I worked in our Deaf and Hard of Hearing profession of instructors, made some unfavorable complaints to other Deaf instructors that she considered me not Deaf enough to be a part of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community or to be teaching Deaf and Hard of Hearing learners. Playing a role as a teacher for the Deaf I would work diligently to demonstrate my understanding of the issues of bilingualism, multilingualism and multiculturalism, which plurilingualism has certainly been a practical view in my work. I also had supported search for identity within the social circle and culture of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. I have found it vital for me

to take up the task to further identify the crucial need for plurilingualism to avail the multicultural and multilingual members of the world community in their education and social engagements. This is, at least in my own opinion, demonstrable and applicable in these engagements, as I have demonstrated in my experiences as a learner and practitioner of plurilingualism for over forty-five years. I continue to work with the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community and students regardless the negative implications against me. The important thing of being multilingual and multicultural in the world of plurilingualism through social justice must be understood to alleviate fears that the hearing world would strip the right of any persons with any level of hearing losses to have the right to American Sign Language for educational, societal and cultural engagement purposes. This is not to be repeated in ways I suffered but to make improvements to multilanguages accessible anywhere possible.

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