

***AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE SOCIAL IDENTITY
OF THE
SOUTH AFRICAN DEAF COMMUNITY:
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EDUCATION
OF DEAF LEARNERS.***

*A mini-dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree Master of Education (Special Needs Education).*

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work presented in this mini-thesis is my own, and that reference to work by other persons has been duly acknowledged.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ansuva Ram', is positioned above a horizontal line.

ANSUYA RAM

Durban, December 1998.

ABSTRACT

All Deaf people in South Africa belong to the Deaf Community of South Africa. Within this Deaf Community there is a separate, minority language and cultural group which accepts Sign language, as its first and natural language.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa calls for the acknowledgement of and respect for all minority cultural groups, and recognises the language of the Deaf, that is, Sign language as an official language.

This research has attempted to investigate the views of this cultural group and how they want to be perceived by the hearing people, how they want to conduct their lives within the realm of an overarching hearing society and more importantly, the implications of this acquired identity for the education of Deaf learners in South Africa.

To document the data on Deaf Culture and the implications for education, the researcher engaged in qualitative research using the questionnaire approach. This instrument was administered to 18 profoundly Deaf adults from various provinces throughout South Africa and representative of the demographic population profile of the Deaf Community of South Africa.

The study confirmed an emerging Deaf Culture and concluded that there needs to be redress and change with regard to the curriculum, the educators, the issue of mainstreaming, the status of Sign language and the provision of tertiary education in order for Deaf learners to be educated in the most enabling environment.

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CHAPTER ONE: CONTEXT AND MOTIVATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Conventional writings and research on Deaf people converged on their physiological condition, more specifically, the audiological impairment (Ross, 1996). Deaf people are unable to hear and all other aspects of their lives are interpreted as a consequence of this inability to hear. A shift in the focus, on how Deaf people are perceived by society, has taken place internationally. The physical condition of "not hearing" is currently being replaced by an exploration of the complexities of Deaf people's lives. It is acknowledged that Deaf people have accumulated a compelling structure of knowledge about themselves. They are a constituency large enough to comprise a community, with a common language, shared values and norms and established patterns of cultural transmission (Reagan, 1996).

From about the 1980's, it has become increasingly clear that one can adopt either of two opposing perspectives when interacting with the Deaf community. Lane (1993) explains that researchers have come to label these perspectives as the "pathological" and "socio-cultural" models by virtue of their respective ideologies and characteristic features. It is important to understand that the perspective one might hold may result in a diametrically different way of interpreting the Deaf community.

According to Lane(1993) the "pathological" view of the Deaf people is also termed the medical model, the clinical-pathological view or the infirmity model. Essentially it accepts the behaviours and values of hearing people as being the "standard" or the "norm", and then focuses on how Deaf people deviate from this norm. The focus is on how Deaf people are different from hearing people. More important, however, is that these differences are perceived negatively.

Adherents of this perspective believe that the Deaf community comprises people who are not "normal" because they cannot hear, and that they experience learning and psychological problems due to their hearing loss and their perceived communication difficulties (About American Deaf Culture, 1998). To apply this model to the deaf is to perceive them as having a bodily defect as is implied by the concept "infirmity". Implicit in this conceptual framework is the reference to societal institutions and the general condescending values that such institutions invoke . This perspective includes a wide spectrum of derogatory and discriminatory labels such as deaf-mute, deaf and dumb, hearing impaired, aurally impaired, abnormal, afflicted and other such terminology (Moore and Levitan, 1993).

The pathological or medical approach regards deafness as a deficit and, therefore, attempts to remediate it. This is precisely what is done when one focuses on speech therapy and lip-reading in education, when one is reliant on hearing aids to maximize whatever residual hearing a Deaf person may have,

and when one hopes to develop medical solutions to overcome Deafness. In other words, the pathological view of deafness leads to efforts to try to help the deaf individual resemble the hearing person as closely as possible (Reagan, 1996).

In this attempt to remediate deafness, the medical approach promotes the use of a spoken language and forms the basis of the aural-oral and total communication procedures, to the exclusion of Sign Language. The acuity of hearing, competence in spoken or written language, and the ability to speak are used as the primary yardstick to ascertain the level of functioning of Deaf persons. Traditionally, this view is held by those who have sufficient residual hearing to process speech, those persons who become deaf after acquiring spoken language, and a fairly large majority of hearing people. Collectively, this group is referred as "the outsiders" by those who regard Sign language as their first language (About American Deaf Culture, 1998).

The alternative view of deafness and the one held by the vast majority of the Deaf Community is the "socio-cultural" approach or more simply the "cultural view". This perspective recognises that there is a complex set of factors that must be considered when examining the Deaf Community. These include their values, norms, traditions, social habits, organisations, art forms and linguistic features. Those who hold a cultural view might describe the Deaf Community as a group of persons who share a common language, that is, Sign Language

(Padden and Humphries, 1996). This language provides the foundation for group cohesion and identity through which emanates a culture.

Here deafness is not perceived as a handicapping condition, but rather as a form of diversity present in a culture. Deaf individuals do not consider themselves as being pathologically impaired or infirm, but as being culturally different from the hearing by virtue of a different shared language and experiences. Comparisons in terms of deficiency are rejected and remediation with the aim of correcting the deficit is condemned. In short, while the pathological view of Deafness would encourage attempts to correct a deficit, the cultural view promotes the social and human rights of the group in question (Lane, 1993).

Within this perspective, the Deaf reject any medium of communication involving speech. Instead many advocate the Bilingual / Bi-cultural approach where pure Sign Language is the first language and the medium of communication, and the second language is a spoken or written language. Sign Language is accepted as the first language of Deaf people (Rosen, 1996). This view of Deafness, therefore, recognises Deaf people as a cultural and linguistic minority group or sub-cultural group of the wider society. In addition to the profoundly and congenitally Deaf, proponents of the cultural perspective include hearing persons who value and promote cultural diversity.

An important distinction to make when writing about Deafness is between "**deaf**" and "**Deaf**". The former refers to deafness from an audiological perspective and the latter to Deafness from a cultural perspective (Reagan, 1996). The idea underlying this distinction is that when writing about cultural groups in general, upper case letters are used, for example, **J**apanese, **Z**ulu, **B**ritish. Thus a person can be **deaf**, referring to the physiological or audiological impairment, without being **Deaf**, that is, not belonging to the cultural group of Deaf persons.

To those Deaf and hearing persons who subscribe to the values, beliefs and practices of the culture of Deafness, there is a marked distinction between "**deaf**" and "**Deaf**": "**deaf**" being associated with the medical condition while "**Deaf**" is allied to a distinctive culture. In spurning the medical model, Deaf persons are effectively liberating themselves from the disability construct.

In summary, it is essential to understand that the pathological perspective presumes impairment and reflects themes of deficit, loss, difference and exclusion. The Deaf respond with indignation to clinical references about their existence. The logical consequence of this social and political construction of the Deaf is segregation and marginalisation from the mainstream of society (Fulcher, 1989). One may question, whether the members of Deaf Culture invoke or impose this isolation on themselves or whether society has marginalized Deaf Culture from its mainstream.

In opposition to the pathological view are adherents of the cultural model, who proclaim self-reliance, independence and equality. The equality they are demanding is rooted in the concept of rights and the desire to be individuals who can choose for themselves. This rights discourse is progressive, and stresses social advancement.

According to Lane(1993), what we are concerned with here, is a language minority group, a community that consequently has a rich culture and art forms of its own, a minority history and a distinctive social structure. What is in dispute, however, is the use of one type of description rather than another for this language minority: a cultural description or one based on infirmity. The respective advocates will be those who prize cultural diversity or those who are ill-disposed to it.

1.2 THE AIMS OF THE STUDY

The present study is an investigation into the social identity of the South African Deaf community. The responses of a group of profoundly Deaf adults will be documented on issues pertaining to:

- The views of the Deaf community on the most appropriate education for Deaf learners.
- The socialization practices of the Deaf community.
- The attitude of the Deaf person to the hearing family and the hearing

community.

- The values, norms and beliefs that Deaf people associate with their deafness.
- Whether Deaf people wish to perpetuate their lives as a minority culture or whether they wish to be absorbed into the dominant hearing culture.

It is anticipated that these responses will provide an identity of Deaf people, and yield an understanding of how Deaf people wish their deafness to be perceived. The implications of this information on the education provision for Deaf learners will be explored.

CHAPTER TWO : THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The literature to be reviewed will be based largely on the North American context, where, according to Reagan (1996), the Deaf community is perhaps more cohesive and has certainly been more successful in pursuing what might be called a 'cultural agenda', than virtually anywhere else in the world. The review will address critical issues pertaining to Sign language, education, socialization and technology in the Deaf community.

2.2 DEFINITIONS OF CULTURE, SUB-CULTURE AND DEAF CULTURE

Padden and Humphries (1996) assert that culture is an abstract concept that provides a system of information. This information explains the manner in which an organized group of people interacts with the social environment. This interaction becomes identifiable only when it is compared with other cultures. The Gallaudet Encyclopaedia of Deaf People and Deafness (1987: p 261) explains the term culture as:

**"Culture is a process by which the values, norms,
language and technology are shared and
transmitted from one generation to another by**

means of a given group.”

Sub - culture in the same text is explained as:

“Whenever values or norms shared by a given group are similar to, yet deviate somewhat from those of the society where the peculiar group exists.”

Deaf people are often referred to as a **sub- culture**, presumably of a larger culture, which is the hearing culture. For the Deaf however, the prefix **“sub”** implies that their values, norms and language as a minority group are subordinate or inferior to the dominant hearing culture. The concept **“Deaf Sub- culture”** perpetuates negative connotations and is condescending according to Deaf advocacy groups (Lane, 1993).

To avoid such uncomplimentary references the term **“culture”** is used instead of **“sub- culture”**. **“Culture”** therefore places the cultural patterns of the Deaf on a level equal to that of the dominant hearing culture.

Rutherford (1988:131), defines culture as “the shared experience, knowledge and values of the group”. All cultures share two main objectives: firstly, to successfully adapt and survive in their environment; and secondly, to maintain their identity and unity through time. The environment of Deaf people, then,

dictates a need to develop a language to relate to and survive in the environment. The evolution of a visual language of signs forms the cornerstone of Deaf culture and provides Deaf people with their cultural identity.

The South African National Council for the Deaf (SANCD) (1994), now Deaf Federation of South Africa (DEAFSA) presents the following definition of **Deaf**

Culture:

“Deaf culture is a concept which represents the holistic intellectual asset of the Deaf community which includes Sign Language as the primary language, shared values, norms, mores, customs and technology and which is transferred from one generation to the next.”

Another concept that one frequently encounters in the readings on Deafness is **“Deaf community”**. Although the terms **Deaf culture** and **Deaf community** are used interchangeably, there are important distinctions. A community is understood in terms of a group of people who co-habit within a particular geographic location or vicinity. Schein (1987) explains that the concept **Deaf community** is used to describe the language, education, achievements, socialization, family dynamics, marriage patterns and employment features of Deaf individuals with congenital, pre-lingual, severe to profound hearing loss.

Padden (1993) believes that the Deaf community also includes hearing people who interface with Deaf people on a regular basis - such as interpreters, teachers of the Deaf, social service agencies, other professionals and hearing friends and relatives.

Therefore, culturally Deaf people belong to the over-arching Deaf community but not all members of the Deaf community are members of Deaf culture.

Often individuals deafened as a result of illness, trauma, or age, also referred to as post-lingually deaf individuals belong to the Deaf community, but not to Deaf culture. They share the condition of deafness, but because they have internalized the essential elements of a spoken language structure, through becoming Deaf after acquiring spoken language, they do not fully experience the knowledge, beliefs and practices that comprise the culture of Deaf people (Lane, Hoffmeister and Bahan, 1996).

2.3 DEFINING DEAF CULTURE.

Padden and Humphries (1996) compellingly argue that the Deaf cultural community is characterised by the same kinds of elements that define any other cultural community. These elements are a common shared language, a bonded awareness of identity, distinctive behavioural norms and patterns, cultural artefacts, endogamous marital patterns, a structured framework of transmission of culture and membership to a network of social organisations.

2.3.1 Sign language. The single most important component of Deaf identity is acknowledgement of and competence in the use of Sign Language. Sign Language is the vernacular of the Deaf and a powerful indicator of group identity. The use of Sign Language provides access to and qualifies a deaf person for admission to Deaf Culture. Among the culturally Deaf, Sign Language is learnt naturally as a first language since childhood.

Benderley (1988) writes of Sign Language that this unwritten language expresses ideas in space rather than in sound; it uses the hands, arms, facial expression, body postures, line of vision and subtle variations of pace and sign forms to provide rapid, resonant messages. It has been used by the deaf throughout the world for generations. Sign Language is a highly expressive, concise, poetic and even creative language in which a whole range of emotions and feelings can be expressed.

A hearing person may identify undertones of anger, distress, frivolity in the inflections of a speaker's voice. A Deaf person is receptively alert to visual clues and the body language that is being communicated.

Sign Language is a separate language which has no connection to a spoken or written language. It has its own syntax, structure and grammatical rules. For the Deaf in America, American Sign Language (ASL) or AMESLAN is the language of choice. ASL is one of the most complete and structured signed

systems in the world. It is not based on English or any other auditory or visual language. To the Deaf in America ASL is a true language. It is cherished by the Deaf community for its beauty and ease of expressing and receiving both complex and abstract concepts (Cindy's Home Page on ASL and Deaf culture, July 1998).

Deaf people distinguish strongly between **Sign Language** and **Signed Exact Language**. When two Deaf people communicate they use Sign Language which is said to be pure, natural and the mother tongue of the Deaf. To the Deaf, signed exact language is based on a spoken or written language and is considered to be an artificial form of communication, used commonly when a hearing person communicates with the Deaf. This is because a hearing person is thinking first in terms of a written or spoken language and is then translating this verbal language into manual signs.

McCracken and Sutherland (1991) argue that a common myth that needs to be dispelled is that Sign Language is a universal language. There is no international Sign Language understood by Deaf communities around the world. Sign Languages are geographically or demographically peculiar. There is ASL in the United States and Canada, British Sign Language (BSL) in the UK and South African Sign Language (SASL) in South Africa. In South Africa itself there are about 12 versions of SASL, these being regionally different (Opperman, 1994). This does not however, cause isolation among the users. In

fact Deaf people throughout the world have an amazing and incredible ability to understand one another almost immediately after initiating contact. Deaf people nurture a bond of understanding that goes beyond the syntax and semantics of linguistic communication. In isolated locations where there is no formal Sign Language, Deaf people have been known to create their own visual-gestural language to communicate (Costello, 1983).

Like any spoken language, Sign Language is a powerful symbol of identity in the Deaf world and it is an effective medium of social interaction. Sign Language can transform an isolated Deaf individual into a participating member of Deaf culture. To the Deaf community Sign Language is a repository of cultural knowledge consisting of values, customs and information (Lane et al, 1996). Sign Language has emerged from being traditionally discouraged in the hearing world to a distinguished and respected language occupying official status amongst the other national languages in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa.

The following aspects are essential features of effective Sign language communication:

Getting attention. In an attempt to get the attention of a Deaf person it is appropriate to tap the person on the shoulder, pound the table, flash or switch lights on / off, stamp feet on the floor or wave hands. Waving hands across the room is acceptable; the size of the wave may depend on the proximity of the

persons. It is possible for several shoulders to be tapped in the process of attempting to gain the attention of a particular person.

Eye contact. Understanding of sign language is dependent on eye contact. If a hearing person breaks eye contact because of auditory interruptions, it is necessary to inform the Deaf person why s/he looked away. If they break eye contact and look at an object or person behind the Deaf person, the Deaf person will turn around to focus on the distraction too. One needs to explain or apologize to the Deaf person for this. Breaking eye contact without a reason is considered to be brusque and ill-mannered for not showing interest in the conversation (Gallaudet, 1998).

Physical setting. Good lighting, unobstructed vision and a non- distracting, non-glare background are essential environmental conditions for successful and comfortable, visual- based communication. When conversing in a group Deaf people will stand in a circle so that each one has a full view of the others. Hearing people must be cautious not to watch Deaf people signing- they could be looking in on a private conversation (RIT, 1998).

Facial expression. This is a critical part of the communication because it conveys the emotions and tone of the conversation. Signing without facial expression is similar to monotonous speech. Also, using moderate voice and mouth movements helps a Deaf person who has some lipreading skills and/or

residual hearing. However, a loud voice and exaggerated mouth movements distorts the message being communicated.

Deaf people appreciate the efforts of hearing people to learn and to use Signs. Hearing people tend to sign slowly because they are thinking first in a written or spoken language and then converting this to Sign Language. A Deaf person will understand a hearing person's message even with mistakes just as we will understand the message of a person learning English, together with its mispronunciations and grammatical errors. Deaf people are not always aware that they are disturbing hearing people. They may make noises, laugh loudly, bang doors or drag chairs- all in the name of Deaf culture. They appreciate being informed of this in a polite and friendly manner.

2.3.2 The Oralist-Manualist Debate. Despite the command and supremacy of Sign Language, a protracted and acrimonious debate has raged between the so-called "**oralists**" and "**manualists**" over the centuries. Gannon (1988) states that advocates of the oral philosophy hold out the hope and reassurance to parents that their child can learn to talk and lip-read and that with these tools he or she would fit into a hearing society as a "normal" person would. Parents are warned that if they permit the use of signs, they will retard or ruin the Deaf child's speech development.

Gannon (1988) asserts that attempts to make a hearing person out of a Deaf

child, to demand that the child talk, to forbid him or her to communicate naturally through the use of signs and to disallow contact with the Deaf community are seen by culturally Deaf people as cruel, unrealistic and unfair. The Deaf liken this to removing the crutches from the physical disabled person and compelling him to walk or giving glasses to a blind child and demanding that he see.

At the international conference on 'Bilingualism in Education', in Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, Kauppinen (1996) stated that when Sign Language is the first language and the primary mode of instruction, the Deaf learner develops a good foundation in Sign Language and a positive Deaf identity. In this way, one or more additional written languages can be mastered without much difficulty. In advocating bilingualism, Kauppinen (1996) informed that research has shown that Sign Language can actually facilitate the acquisition of a second language. In addition, Sign Language offers complete, direct and immediate communication to a profoundly Deaf child in comparison to the speech of a Deaf child, which is distorted and incomplete.

MacDonald (1989) presents the alternate view that oralism is by far the best method of communication and that oralism is vital in a world that hears. Her view is that the vocabulary of Sign language users is limited, they constantly need to have interpreters, of which there is an acute shortage in Britain, and that they are often left out of any news. MacDonald has three Deaf children

who commenced wearing hearing aids between the ages of ten and twelve months. All three received aural-oral instruction from a peripatetic teacher of the Deaf. She reports that the children were subsequently able to attend the local (mainstream) primary school. They have supportive friends with whom they can communicate verbally and share a laugh.

Hosking (1998) has recorded the experiences of South African singer and songwriter Sonja Herholdt who was devastated at the birth of her Deaf child. She experienced emotions of anger, denial and confusion. Every facility that Sonja approached told her that her son would have to learn Sign language and she was not content to send her child to a school for Deaf children. Determined to give her son a 'normal' life, Sonja resolved to start her own pre-school. She read extensively on how to communicate with Deaf children, developing the view that if they were allowed to become too dependent on Sign language, they would not feel the need to communicate in any other way. Sonja embarked on an intensive language stimulation programme for two years and her son Timothy, commences grade one at a mainstream school next year.

It would be informative to conduct a longitudinal study on Timothy's progression through the grades. The objective of such a study should be to ascertain Timothy's progress in language development in addition to the social and emotional development, emanating from being amongst hearing learners in a regular stream school.

2.3.3 Education. For centuries the education of the Deaf has been a highly contentious and an internationally disputed matter. As early as the 17th century the issue of whether the Deaf should be educated or not was debated. At the time, the Deaf were classed as “dumb” and “mentally handicapped” and the concern was whether or not it was beneficial to educate them (Gannon, 1988). This had been followed by the “oral / manual” controversy, which has just been outlined. A criticism has been that historically, outcomes and solutions for the Deaf were being decided by hearing people. More recently however, the controversy is about whether the Deaf should be educated at schools for the Deaf or at mainstream schools.

If any education system is to promote effective learning and development, then it must aim to eliminate potential obstacles or barriers to this important process. The Report of the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training and the National Committee on Education Support Services (1997) indicates that the barrier of Language and Communication can be especially detrimental to Deaf learners whose first language is Sign language. The report states that Sign language has its own unique semantic and syntactic structure, “which are entirely equal in complexity and richness to that which is found in any spoken language” (p.17). It is, therefore, essential that the Deaf learner be able to access the curriculum through the medium of his/her first and natural language, to prevent breakdown in learning. It is logical that the Deaf learner can most effectively be educated in the mainstream school if the environment

is enabling, with Sign language being an important component of the curriculum.

It is interesting that with the advent of the cultural perspective the Deaf themselves are actively participating in these deliberations about their education. They are attempting to materialize the goals of control, decision-making, independence, leadership and self-determination. They no longer see themselves as being docile recipients of professional services. Rather they are seeking independence initiatives, geared towards self-help.

The Proposed Policy on Deaf Education (DEAFSA, 1994) is based on:

- redressing educational inequalities in Deaf education.
- providing education and training, irrespective of any form of discrimination.
- providing education / training to the Deaf as a basic human right.
- empowering the Deaf to develop to their full capabilities, and to live and work in dignity.
- providing education that promotes understanding and acceptance of diversity.

The Deaf community are currently lobbying for the Bilingual / Bi- cultural approach as an educational medium. Here Sign Language is the first language,

with a spoken or written language being their second language. Penn and Reagan(1991) state that although a small and diminishing number of oral schools continue to exist, the pure oral approach has been criticized by a number of researchers from the social, psychological, linguistic, educational and political perspectives. The pressure from the Deaf for the use of Sign Language as a medium of communication is overwhelming and the oralists are having difficulty upholding their ideals.

The ideal of including the Deaf in the mainstream of society is fully supported by the Deaf community. But education of the Deaf in regular or hearing classes can only be effective and justified if qualified interpreters are available to make the school environment as accessible to the Deaf learner as it is to the hearing learner. Alternately, there needs to be teachers who are fluent in the use of Sign Language in the ordinary classroom settings (Smuts-Pauw, 1996).

The Deaf believe that these needs are logical, and above all, essential for a Deaf learner in a multi-cultural educational environment. Without the support services of interpreters and / or signing educators, main-streaming will isolate and under- educate the Deaf, rather than integrate and educate them (Padden, 1993).

Schools for the Deaf, most of which are residential, provide a vital link in the transmission of Deaf culture and language. Children are able to communicate in a language readily understood by their peers. The school is where deaf children

come together, meet other deaf individuals and learn to be culturally Deaf. Relationships established in the schools are reinforced in the social clubs, as Deaf children mature into adults. Being away from their homes and families from a tender age, Deaf children in the schools and residences, are dependant on one another for love, support, comfort, caring and nurturing. Reagan(1993) regards Deaf culture as a peer- promoted culture since the younger learners derive the language, norms, attitudes, customs and habits of Deaf culture from other, older learners while at school. As the children inherit these values, their understanding of Deaf culture is enhanced and a sense of pride in their own Deaf identity is affirmed. With this strength they are able to command recognition for Deafness as a social phenomenon.

2.3.4 Socialization and the Deaf . Reagan (1996) indicates that there is an extensive voluntary network of social organizations serving the Deaf community, and this provides to a large extent, the companionship needs of members. This network includes local Deaf clubs, sports associations and theatres for the Deaf. The thrust of the social interaction involves sharing information. Deaf people share detailed information about their lives, family and friends. Through socialization, they have formed a cohesive and supportive community.

It is common knowledge, according to Ross (1989) that the majority of Deaf children are born to hearing parents. Being unable to communicate effectively

with their Deaf children, hearing parents often experience difficult and traumatic relationships with them. As a result very little socialization takes place in familial and relational contexts (Reagan, 1996). Gannon (1988) affirms that the hearing community in several countries around the world, especially certain parents, have made concerted efforts to prevent their Deaf child from associating with other Deaf peers. Parents have been told that when their Deaf children learn to use signs, they become clannish when they grow up and may live in "Deaf ghettos".

Sign Language is the predominant mode of communication in the social environment of the Deaf clubs. These clubs, according to Reagan (1996), play an important role in the lives of Deaf people. They satisfy the human passion for companionship, and ward off the isolation imposed by the greater majority of hearing people. Garretson (1980: 7) describing experiences in the United States of America states that:

In any city the club of the Deaf is the heart of the Deaf community.

It is the principal meeting place and forum of the Deaf. It is,

in most cases the only place where they can socialize. It is their

ballroom, their bar their theatre their motion picture house, their

coffee house and their community centre - all rolled into one.

It is a piece of their own land in exile - an oasis in the sea of sound".

Sport is another medium through which Deaf people engage in social interaction. It is not often that the Deaf have the opportunity to compete against hearing counterparts or people of other disability groups in sport. In 1974, the SA Deaf Sports Federation was formed under the auspices of the then South African National Council for the Deaf (now Deaf Federation of South Africa- DEAFSA), giving Deaf sport both national and international recognition. Sporting codes include volleyball, netball, swimming, tennis, badminton, athletics, soccer and cricket. There are organised clubs for each of these codes. The South African Summer Games is a prestigious sporting event in which the 34 schools for the Deaf in South Africa compete for selection to represent South Africa at the World Games for the Deaf.

2.3.5 Marriage and Children. There is general consensus in the United and Canadas that 90% of Deaf children are born to hearing parents (Costello, 1983). As adults they spend much time in the clubs for the Deaf, to be able to enjoy the companionship of other Deaf people. Long lasting relationships develop here leading to courtship and culminating eventually in marriage. Often these relationships span a period of almost 15 to 20 years having commenced at primary school level.

Costello (1983) confirms that because of communication factors, many Deaf people are more comfortable associating with other Deaf people. They tend to marry other Deaf people whom they have met at schools for the Deaf or at the

Deaf clubs. Of American society, Reagan (1996) says that the maintenance of endogamous marital patterns is a common facet of cultural identity among the Deaf. There are strong cultural pressures supporting endogamous marriages in the Deaf community. This high rate of in-group marriage is promoted by the role of the residential schools for the Deaf and is also facilitated by the shared language.

It is not documented that Deaf parents prefer to have a Deaf rather than a hearing child but Lane et al (1996) reveals that the birth of a Deaf baby in a Deaf household is indicative that the Deaf heritage of the family will continue. Deaf parents have the unique opportunity of conveying their language, values, heritage and culture to their children. Deaf families with many Deaf members are proud of their genealogy.

2.3.6 Assistive Devices and Technology. The issue of assistive devices is controversial and has attracted firm protests from within the Deaf community. The controversy is based on the clash between the two prevailing models of Deafness. Carver (1994) outlines that the medical model assumes that the problem of Deafness lies within the child and that the problem must be remedied or cured in order for the child to lead a "normal" life.

For a long time, hearing aids were perceived by hearing people as the only means by which a Deaf person can lead a "normal" life in a hearing world.

Although many Deaf people wear hearing aids, they do so more for the benefit of environmental and extraneous sounds, rather than in the hope of benefiting from listening to speech, (Carver, 1994). However, hearing advertisers, in promoting its use, state that hearing aids enhance speech without background interference and create an invisible link between the Deaf person and the speaker.

From the medical view, cochlear implantation is seen as the ultimate advancement in science, towards attempting to "correct" deafness and its benefits to the post-lingually deafened have been demonstrated (Van Heerden, 1992). The transmitting device, placed under the skin, behind the ear, is part of a complex and intricate system of electronic wires and circuits that connect to the core of the cochlear. According to Lane (1993) a suitable candidate for an implant is a healthy, post-lingually deafened adult. The recipient needs to be healthy so that s/he can make a balanced, well-informed choice about implantation. Furthermore, the adult needs to be deafened after having acquired oral language. The patient can benefit best from use if s/he knows how the language sounds, to be able to associate the sounds coming from the implant with the words intended and spoken by the speaker.

Advocates of the cultural view, on the other hand, argue that implantation of this cochlear device is to commit oneself to the intention to communicate orally, thereby implying rejection of Sign language and Deaf culture. In this regard

Lane (1993) raises the issue of child rights, the imposition of implantation on children without their mutual consent and refers to cochlear implantation as the 'genocide' of Deaf children. He also states that to uninformed hearing parents, implantation holds out the false hope that their child will not embrace a minority language and culture, which they find 'alien'.

The technologically assistive devices that the Deaf do prefer, however, is based on the cultural model. This recognises that the problem lies outside the child and that Deafness does not need to be repaired or corrected in order for the child to live within the mainstream of society (Carver, 1994). This technology includes the Telecommunication Device for the Deaf - abbreviated as TTY or TDD. This enables the Deaf to use the telephone. Conversations are typed and appear on a screen. Both people involved in the communication must have a TTY instrument. The Deaf internationally, frequently use the fax and e-mail services.

There are also other devices that the Deaf use but are not reliant on: lights that flash if the doorbell or telephone rings, an alarm clock placed under the pillow, that vibrates to awaken them, the Closed Caption television service that decodes spoken messages into print, which accompanies the picture that is on the screen. The latter facility is not available in South Africa.

2.3.7 Other Values and norms. Padden and Humphries (1996) explain that Deaf people agree that a hearing person can never fully acquire the identity of the Deaf. There is no doubt however, that in order to understand and grasp the culture of the Deaf, one needs to entrench and immerse one's self in its values and norms.

Like in any other culture, name-giving is significant because it attaches identity to a person. Anyone Deaf or hearing who comes into contact with Deaf people is given a "sign- name". These descriptive sign names frequently represent a person's appearance or behaviour. The name may reflect a mannerism, a hairstyle, body posture or some visual or physical feature. Once a person is christened with a sign name, it remains always, even if the identifying feature has changed or no longer exists.

The Deaf community has a long and prominent tradition in the visual and performing arts. They use creativity and imagination, to express deep feelings and beliefs, and to teach others about Deafness. The Deaf are exceptional in dance drama and have showcased some outstanding and memorable performances, internationally.

In the United States of America, their talent in mime and imitation is outstanding. The themes in artistic expression, according to Padden (1993), are about the "language, communication, power, freedom and oppression" of the

Deaf. Deaf humour and folklore can only be appealing and appreciated when it is conveyed in the visual language. The essence or the nuance of the humour or story cannot be accurately attained when attempting to translate Sign Language into a spoken or written language.

2.4 CONCLUSION

The rich legacy of cultural traditions, folklore, literature, art and drama all serve to foster and maintain the identity, pride and solidarity of the Deaf community (Ross, 1989). Padden and Humphries (1996) affirm that Deaf culture is a powerful testimony to both the profound needs and profound possibilities of human beings. Out of a striving for communication they have created a rich and lively, visual language.

The information documented in this review will be used as a basis to explore the issues to be investigated in this study. The emerging body of knowledge will provide a framework against which the identity and social existence of South African people can be conceived. This study will focus on how Deaf people wish to be perceived by the hearing society, and the vision that they have for the future of Deaf children.

CHAPTER THREE : THE STUDY

3.1 THE SUBJECTS

There were eighteen subjects in the study, from the various provinces throughout South Africa. The subjects are representative of the demographic population profile of the Deaf community of South Africa, comprising seven Africans, four Indians, four Whites and three Coloureds. The group comprised both males and females. All subjects are adults, ranging in age from twenty-four to thirty-five years. Three subjects are married to other Deaf persons. The minimum basic education of all subjects is senior secondary school level; nine subjects are matriculants. Two of the subjects are graduates from Gallaudet University in the United States of America. Currently, five subjects are full-time students in a Teacher Education programme, two subjects are employed as Teacher Aides at schools for the Deaf, five subjects are employed by the Deaf Federation of South Africa at the provincial organizations for the Deaf and other six subjects are employees in the private sector.

3.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The task of describing the characteristics of a culture is painstaking and arduous, more so if one is not a member of that culture. With the Deaf this difficulty is enhanced because Deaf culture is both complex and intricate. This

paper must be seen, therefore, as an expose' of the lives of Deaf people by a hearing person, who is very much a part of the Deaf community but excluded from the Deaf culture because of having a spoken language, rather than Sign language, as a first language. What is being researched in this study is Deaf Culture in the South African context. Does the South African Deaf community consider itself a cultural and linguistic minority group; and if so, what are the features that characterize its existence.

At the outset, this investigation may be perceived as an attempt to evolve knowledge which will promote an understanding of the social context of the Deaf community in South Africa. Cohen and Manion (1994) explain research as a process of arriving at information through the planned and systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of data. These authors elaborate that research is important in advancing knowledge, promoting progress, and in enabling individuals to relate more effectively to their environment.

In studying the social world, research can employ either of the two broad methodologies, that is, quantitative research or qualitative research. A brief comparative discussion will facilitate understanding. Quantitative research sees knowledge as objective and measurable in a precise and accurate manner. This approach uses numbers, statistics and scientific techniques to describe and analyse the social world. The research aims to produce laws that can be generalised and is based on the philosophical perspective of 'positivism', which

emphasises the model of the natural sciences (Finch, 1986).

Qualitative research, on the other hand, proposes that the interpretations of social reality held by individuals and groups are subjective. It seeks to predict human behaviour, by observing and interacting with people in order to be able to construct it. It seeks to understand behaviour by identifying the meanings and interpretations people place on events, relationships and institutions in the context in which they occur, and sees people as continuously active in shaping and re-shaping these contexts through their interpretations, language and actions. This is why qualitative approaches are sometimes referred to as 'interpretive' approaches (Silverman, 1997).

The approach selected for this research is the qualitative methodology. An important dimension in applying the principles of qualitative research to the study of Deaf culture is the concept of 'ethnography'. Ethnography is described as 'the science of cultural description'. The word derives from anthropology and literally means 'mapping people'. It seeks to ascertain the cultural patterns shared by members of a social system. While recognising that culture is fluid and continually being altered, the ethnographer tries to impose preservation for a period long enough to be able to sketch this culture. This involves learning the language of the group, observing the rituals and everyday life and interacting with informants in natural settings (Sherman and Webb, 1988).

The study of Deaf culture through the methodology of ethnography is therefore

appropriate, since the ethnographer seeks to obtain information and promote understanding of another culture. This research will involve interacting with members immersed in the Deaf community for the purpose of obtaining information on their existence and on their interpretation of the world. The research will be conducted overtly with the acquired permission of participants, who are aware of the objectives of the research.

Sherman and Webb (1988) indicate that a positive feature of qualitative research is that it can be judged and appraised. This does not imply that the behaviour being studied is approved or disapproved of. Instead it describes the essential qualities of the phenomenon of Deaf culture. The meanings and relationships among these qualities will be interpreted allowing the significance of Deaf culture to be appraised. Qualitative researchers believe that human experience cannot be quantified in statistical terms. Similarly, the intricacies and complexities of Deaf culture cannot be expressed quantitatively.

Equally advantageous to the study of Deaf culture is that qualitative research occurs in natural settings. Vulliamy (1990), states that the research situation or conditions are not contrived or artificial. The various facets of Deaf culture cannot be interrogated in a laboratory, using standardised and formal techniques. Burgess (1985), confirms that every attempt is made by the qualitative researcher to disturb the process of social life as little as possible, so that potential distortions may be avoided.

One of the limitations of qualitative research is that the findings cannot automatically be generalized to other social settings or situations. Accordingly the data obtained from investigating a particular culture will not be authentic when applied to another social group. Even within the same culture the findings may not be relevant at a different time. Rather than the ability to generalize findings the strength of qualitative research into Deaf culture is to illuminate and provide understanding of depth, intensity and profoundness (Vulliamy, 1990). Qualitative research aims to generate new information and theories from the data that emerge rather than test pre- conceived hypotheses.

An issue of significant concern in any research, whether qualitative or quantitative, is its reliability and validity. Researchers like Sherman and Webb (1988), agree that there is the tendency for qualitative research to be deficient with regard to reliability. It is possible that in any survey - style research, a researcher using the same questionnaire at another time may produce different data; this may be so in studying Deaf culture because cultures are constantly in flux with time progression.

Qualitative research can be especially sound with regard to validity. This is so when the data being collected is a true indication of what is being studied. However, the validity may also be questionable if the respondents do not reply honestly. It must be accepted that the information being obtained is people's answers to questions and qualitative research assumes and anticipates that

respondents will present a true picture of the reality as it exists in the respective social setting.

3.3 RESEARCH METHOD.

3.3.1 The Questionnaire

The qualitative method or technique selected to obtain an in- depth insight and understanding into the experiences and culture of Deaf people was the questionnaire. The questionnaire was preferred amongst other methods, for the following reasons:

- The questionnaire could be self- administered. This was necessary since the sample was selected from various centres throughout South Africa, and the questionnaire afforded the possibility of being posted to respondents.
- Administering a questionnaire is impersonal. In this way the mood variations, facial expressions, body language and attitude of the researcher would not in any way have influenced the data collection process. Deaf people are very recipient to non- verbal cues such as these.
- Furthermore the absence of the researcher, rendered an environment free of time constraints. There was no pressure imposed on respondents

to reply immediately. Participants were allowed the opportunity to reflect on questions and compose responses.

- The questionnaire was economical in terms of time. Respondents were given approximately four to six weeks within which to respond, from date of receipt to date of return.
- The open- ended, questions allowed respondents latitude with regard to expression of emotions and feelings. This was necessary since, in any investigation of a human phenomenon, it is the lived and felt experiences that need to be documented. Moreover participants were not confined to selecting response options from prescribed alternatives.
- Finally, if respondents were interviewed or observed they would have responded using the medium of Sign Language. For myself, as researcher, this would have meant video- taping their responses and subsequently decoding the Sign Language into a written or spoken language, for the purposes of analysis and interpretation. This would have been an arduous and time- consuming process. For the researcher then, the questionnaire was beneficial, since the information was received in the written English medium which is the researcher's first language.

In anticipation of its effectiveness, having considered the above issues, the

questionnaire emerged as the most appropriate instrument to obtain data that would evolve a body of knowledge on Deaf culture.

3.3.2 Selection of subjects. The sampling technique used to select the subjects was a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Cohen and Manion (1989) state that in purposive sampling, the researcher handpicks the participants to be included in the sample on the basis of his judgement of their typicality. In this way, the researcher compiles a sample that is satisfactory to the specific needs.

For the purposes of this research, the first step was to identify the main centres for the Deaf in South Africa. These centres are provincial organizations affiliated to the Deaf Federation of South Africa (DEAFSA). Four main provincial committees were selected, that is, Kwa- Zulu Natal, Gauteng, Western Cape and Eastern Cape including Port Elizabeth and East London. At each of these centres, two Deaf 'leaders' were identified as respondents in the first stage. These persons are role-players or key persons involved in networking activities or events for the Deaf in the respective provinces.

In the next stage the snowballing occurred, during which the two already identified informants identified three other respondents. The five participants selected in each of the provinces most typically represented that Deaf community. They belonged to the Clubs for the Deaf, co-ordinated activities

and events for the Deaf, and interacted on a regular basis with the Deaf community.

The respondents were required to:

- be profoundly Deaf because it is this group that forms the majority in the Deaf community.
- be literate in the written English medium, so that they would be able to comprehend the questions in the questionnaire and respond accordingly.
- be currently engaged in employment, tertiary training or tertiary education because it is this group who are actively and most frequently involved in the affairs of the Deaf community.

On the basis of this procedure, a sample of twenty respondents was obtained.

3.4 THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The questionnaire was a fifteen page document. This included a cover sheet containing a brief letter to the respondent which expressed gratitude for participation, explained the objective of the investigation, assured confidentiality and appealed for honesty in responses. The letter also informed participants that findings would be availed to them. The final sheet was a request for personal contact details so as to facilitate the conveying of findings. There were no complicated instructions indicated. The questionnaire indicated

the following categories of questions:-

- Education
- Socialization/Sport
- Family
- The Hearing community
- Being Deaf

These dimensions represent a holistic perspective of the environment with which the Deaf community interacts. They would give insight into the values, norms, habits and language of the Deaf community and in so doing, contribute to an understanding of this minority group, in its own right, as it co-exists within a larger culture.

The following factors were considered when compiling the questionnaire so as to arouse and maintain the interest of participants:

Quality of questions. In formulating the questions, careful consideration was given to the level of language used as written English is the second language of the Deaf respondents. Several modifications ensured that ambiguities were obviated. Questions were designed to be specific and succinct, and not long and tedious to read. Questions were compartmentalised into the mentioned categories and presented in a logical sequence so as to engage and sustain the

trend of thought. Questions were repeatedly reviewed to avoid the use of words that are emotionally loaded.

Appearance. The layout was spacious. The font size and style were bold and pronounced to enhance legibility. There were approximately 4 questions on each page to retain the capacious presentation. Four blank lines were inserted after each question. This number remained consistent so as to prevent length of responses from being influenced by the number of lines. The questionnaire did not contain elaborate and complicated instructions.

Piloting. The questionnaire was piloted with two respondents to evaluate the instructions, the questions and the responses. The questionnaire was administered directly, the duration being approximately 2 hours and 15 minutes for each respondent. This proved to be a fruitful exercise to evaluate whether questions were misinterpreted or misconstrued. During the administration, the interest of respondents was sustained. Participants were observed during administration. Neither appeared to be restless or bored. At no stage did either respondent require clarification or further explanation on questions. To affirm the validity of responses, certain question were randomly selected and administered through the medium of Sign Language. The respondents replied in Sign language and the signed responses were consistent with the written responses.

The questionnaire was processed and despatched in batches to the regional centres. From amongst the five respondents it was arranged that one would be responsible for distributing, collecting and return-posting the questionnaire. Of the twenty questionnaires despatched, eighteen were returned.

3.5 PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH RESEARCH PROCEDURE

Although the questionnaire was preferred as being the most effective for the purpose of this research, there were several problems or dilemmas encountered during the procedure.

Firstly, the preparation of the questionnaire was extremely time consuming. Extensive effort was involved in presenting clear, concise and relevant questions. Several revisions and modifications were necessary to ensure that ambiguities were avoided and that questions were presented sequentially according to the outlined categories. The length of the questionnaire also contributed to the preparation being protracted.

Furthermore substantial cost was incurred in duplicating the 15 page questionnaire and posting these to respondents. An amount of money was enclosed with each batch for the return postage.

The analysis of the responses was exceptionally demanding in terms of time

and effort. Responses had to be read repeatedly so that they could be evaluated critically. There had to be rigorous analysis to code and categorise responses and identify emergent patterns from the data. The open-ended nature of the responses compounded the analysis even further.

Several dimensions of questions in the document necessitated the creation of a variety of categories so that analysis eventually yielded data that could be presented with impact. What was most fractious was interpreting the responses according to the meaning that the respondent intended to convey.

Consideration had to be given to the fact that the respondents were not replying in their first and natural language. Instead they were responding through the medium of written English which is their second language. This immediately compromises the in- depth quality of responses.

Despite the time and thought invested in preparing the questions, there was still no way of ensuring that respondents understood the questions and interpreted them as intended by the researcher. Piloting the questionnaire did not obviate or circumvent this dilemma. The risk or possibility of questions being misconstrued or misinterpreted was ever-present. Ultimately the efficacy and value of the questionnaire would depend on the reading ability and level of comprehension of the respondents. Prescribing the criterion of attendance at secondary school level was not adequate foundation to assume that respondents would comprehend the content of the questionnaire.

Gaining accessibility to respondents was often tedious. Owing to the deafness direct contact with respondents through the telephone was not possible.

Furthermore not all respondents were in possession of the TTY (telephone for the Deaf using typed messages on a screen). The only means of communication was through facsimile located in the regional offices. Although this mode was appreciated, the contact was neither direct nor immediate.

Deferment was inevitable, frequently causing several hours of delay between receipt of faxes and subsequent response.

Although this research was demanding in terms of thought, preparation and ultimately time, the associated rewards cannot be quantified. The data obtained from the research made an invaluable contribution towards achieving the objectives of this investigation, which was the exploration of a rich and vibrant culture. In addition this study provided a window through which to peep in on a group of people surrounded by a quiet mystique because of their intriguing language and more especially, on a tight and cohesive community who appear to be impenetrable.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In investigating the social and cultural identity of the South African Deaf community, several pertinent and pervasive issues were addressed. What follows is a summary and discussion of the findings relevant to the respective issues obtained from the eighteen respondents. It is anticipated that these findings will give insight into the needs of the Deaf and their views about their existence in the wider hearing society. The findings of this study will be presented and critically discussed in accordance with the broad themes that have emerged.

4.2 VIEWS ON EDUCATION

According to Penn and Reagan (1990), the field of Deaf education in South Africa has been marked by considerable controversy and debate. They indicate also that the fragmented and underdeveloped educational infrastructure is the result of an inadequate research foundation and the ongoing dominance of hearing people in policy making positions. The last four years however has seen a more unified and progressive national policy for Deaf education in the new South Africa. What needs to be ascertained though is the extent to which this policy has been implemented. The Deaf participants in this study have had to

reflect on their own schooling experiences and their current knowledge of the education system. Against this background, they have expressed views on what they believe to be priorities and concerns regarding current practice in Deaf education.

4.2.1 Deaf / Hearing Educators. One of the sub-themes that emerged is related to the effectiveness of hearing teachers in schools for the Deaf. In response to preference of Deaf or hearing educators, all eighteen respondents indicated that schools for the Deaf should have both Deaf and hearing educators.

All eighteen respondents prefer Deaf teachers because they intrinsically understand the culture and language and will, therefore, best be able to relate to Deaf learners. Deaf educators can enhance the self-esteem of their younger charges. Some of the responses were:

“Deaf teachers understand Deaf children.”

“Deaf teachers know Sign language.”

“Deaf teachers can be role-models to Deaf children.”

Smuts-Pauw (1997) confirms that Deaf educators will be able to :

- act as role models to Deaf learners
- offer life skills training

- develop Deaf leadership skills
- teach Sign Language to hearing educators and
- cultivate a bi-lingual bi-cultural approach in schools

The focus on the need for Deaf educators has of late been given increasing prominence. This has resulted in the historic commencement in 1998 of the Junior and Pre-Primary Education Diploma for the Deaf at Springfield College of Education in Durban, Kwa-Zulu Natal. This event has been internationally applauded as a milestone in the education of the Deaf in South Africa. In advocating for this Teacher Education Diploma for the Deaf, Smuts-Pauw (1997) contended that in order to bring Deaf education in South Africa on par with Deaf education worldwide, Deaf educators need to be trained and appointed at schools for the Deaf. This will ensure "mother tongue" or first language instruction in the most enabling environment. The author states that if Deaf learners are educated and trained by Deaf educators through their mutual first language, then teaching will be effective and the learning process will be facilitated in a natural medium.

All respondents also indicated that in addition to Deaf educators, there was a definite need for hearing educators. They explained that hearing educators:

"can facilitate contact with the "outside world" and furnish the Deaf with important information".

"have tertiary qualifications and are needed for their experience, skills and creativity.

“can be interpreters and communicate with hearing parents or visitors to the school”.

These reasons do not presume the role of the hearing educators to be of a primary nature in their education. Their role is envisaged as being secondary or complementary to the Deaf educator.

Nine respondents recommended a mutual relationship of assistance and support between hearing and Deaf educators in the education of Deaf learners.

All respondents indicated that hearing educators at schools for the Deaf needed to improve their Sign Language proficiency. Four respondents indicated that they had encountered hearing educators who used Sign Language fluently. The views of the respondents are that hearing educators:

“must take Sign Language more seriously”

“don’t know about Deaf language”

“do not augment Sign Language with appropriate body language and facial expressions”

“use Sign Language in a very mechanical way, whereas the Deaf are natural”

The need for instruction in the first language is so significant that Reese

(1995), in a study of hearing educators and their Deaf learners recommended engaging other learners in the class to explain and convey concepts and ideas in Sign Language to their Deaf peers. The suggestion is that the Deaf learn better through the first language of another Deaf person, than from the hearing teacher whose first language is a spoken language.

One respondent commented that irrespective of how effectively hearing educators sign, they tend to use a spoken language grammar simultaneously.

One respondent explained that:

“Deaf learners become confused with being exposed to two languages simultaneously and are unable to master either of these two languages”.

The view of one respondent is that hearing educators see Deaf learners as being “incapable of learning”, rather than acknowledge “that they are unable to teach in pure Sign Language”. According to Smuts-Pauw (1997) the language barrier in the education of the Deaf has largely contributed to the underachievement of Deaf learners and the repression of their potential.

With regard to the hearing teachers’ knowledge of deafness and Deaf related matters, twelve respondents replied that this was “not good”, while six replied that this was satisfactory but still needed improvement. As a result of hearing educators’ knowledge of deafness being insufficient, there is the tendency

amongst them to perceive the Deaf incorrectly, that is:

“as being a disabled group”

“as having a medical disorder”

This has caused Deaf learners,

“to be oppressed”

“to leave school, unable to read and write well”.

One respondent reported that some hearing educators are insensitive to the needs of the Deaf and in so being “force their own culture onto Deaf learners”.

Six respondents acknowledged the attempts of hearing educators to learn Sign Language, to volunteer to work with the Deaf and to understand the Deaf.

They commented that the educators are motivated by “love” and “kindness”.

4.2.2 School Curriculum. With regard to the matter of curriculum, fifteen respondents wrote that the curriculum according to their own schooling experiences, was unsuitable. Three respondents did not reply. In the main, it is felt that the present curriculum has been transferred from the mainstream school without any adaptations to suit the needs of Deaf learners. There is too much emphasis on English as a first language and high expectations in English performance are imposed on the Deaf.

Very little consideration is offered to sign language as being the first language of the Deaf with English being the second language. In English, the

performance of Deaf students is evaluated in terms of mainstream standards.

In the secondary school level the curriculum in schools for the Deaf is vocationally orientated and precludes Deaf learners from "realizing their full academic potential". Five respondents recommended that the curriculum include academic subjects and that these subjects be assessed into the medium of English as a second language. Seven respondents also expressed the view that the curriculum must include the study of Sign language as a language and the study of Deaf culture as a subject.

The views of subjects in this study concur with the those of Penn and Reagan (1991). These authors, in proposing a National Policy for Deaf Education in the "new" South Africa, recommend that:

- The use of sign language be considered an indispensable feature of Deaf education for all those children in schools for the Deaf, for whom it would be beneficial, and that
- subject matter concerned specifically with deafness be included in the curriculum, namely, sign language, history of the Deaf, the study of culture and the ways in which Deaf and hearing cultures interact and "life skills' for the Deaf child.

In response to whether examinations should be presented in written English, all respondents replied in the negative. The general view was that English is the

accepted second language of the Deaf and that Deaf learners have poor written English skills. Therefore, it is not appropriate to be examined or assessed through the medium of English. It is clearly as a result of poor English proficiency that the Deaf do not perform well in written tasks. It is unfortunate that educators of the Deaf assess the written tasks of Deaf learners on the basis of their expression and presentation of the content rather than the content itself.

Respondents recommend that only the subject English be assessed in written English form. Ideally Deaf learners should make presentations for assessment and evaluation in Sign language, and these should be video recorded for subsequent evaluation. It is felt that they are best able to express themselves through the use of their natural, first language, that is, Sign language.

4.2.3 On the issue of mainstreaming. As in several other special education forums, the topic of mainstreaming is equally contentious amongst the Deaf. All eighteen respondents did not support the idea of mainstreaming Deaf learners. Some of the reasons are that:

“there will be a lack of communication and understanding between the Deaf and hearing”

“the hearing will insult the Deaf”

“Deaf will lose confidence and self-esteem”

“the hearing make the Deaf feel stupid”

“mainstreaming would oppress the Deaf”

“Deaf culture will be oppressed”

It is evident from these statements the concern about mainstreaming is that it is socially debilitating rather than educationally unsound. Swain et al (1993) states that many Deaf people see integration as an erosion of identity. Padden (1993) supports this view with her statement that mainstreaming is supposed to expose Deaf children to education, instead it isolates many and under-educates them. It is also apparent that these concerns expressed by the respondents, are an indictment on the mainstream system. The system is intolerant and alienates learners who are different. Deaf and hearing learners are diverse in their needs and the mainstream education system has failed to accommodate the needs of Deaf learners in the regular stream classroom. The inflexibility in the mainstream curriculum, inadequate and inappropriate provision of support services and the lack of human resource development strategies can present the Deaf learner with barriers that will further his/her disablement.

Five respondents were of the view that mainstreaming is not recommended because Deaf and hearing cultures are different and therefore “cannot mix”. It is regrettable that these Deaf respondents have given little or no consideration to the existence of diversity amongst cultures and that integration amongst cultures will effectively be facilitating tolerance of other

cultures. Recent policy documents such as the Report of the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (1997) focus on the need to develop learners who will value and respect all forms of diversity: race, class, ability, culture and language.

This however, does not appear to be forthcoming from the Deaf community. In their quest to maintain a social identity as an exclusive minority language group, the respondents are presuming and concluding, without any firm foundation, that Deaf and hearing cultures will not be able to integrate. Is it possible that the Deaf are deliberately resisting attempts at harmonious integration, for fear that they would be overpowered by the much larger hearing society and be forced to submit to the values and norms by which hearing people live?

In South Africa and internationally, it must be stated that the debate has moved beyond "mainstreaming" to "inclusive education" (Department of Education, 1997; UNESCO, 1994). Inclusion is not seen merely as a move of students from special to mainstream schools, with the implication that once they are there, they are included. Inclusive education focusses on challenging the system that is often regarded as rigid. Inclusion is seen as a continuous process, depending on on-going pedagogical and organizational transformation within the mainstream to ensure that the system is responsive to learner diversity (Booth and Ainscow, 1998).

The concern of the Deaf about the placement of Deaf learners in mainstream settings is of fundamental importance. A mainstream setting that does not challenge the curriculum and organizational arrangements, and that fails to address barriers to learning experienced by Deaf learners will indeed be an exclusionary setting. Placement in such a setting will fail to ensure curriculum access, and will be a violation of the rights of Deaf learners. The ethos of a mainstream school should affirm the culture of Deaf learners, if they are placed in ordinary school settings. In the same vein, schools for the Deaf must also stress interventions that uncover and minimize barriers to learning and development that may exist, and maximize participation in education of all learners.

A recent study by Jairaj (1996) investigated the inclusion of a Deaf learner with hearing parents, in an ordinary school. Jairaj reports that the learner has developed good social relationships, self-esteem and confidence amongst her hearing peers and teachers. In addition, this setting has enhanced the Deaf learner's language ability and communication skills to the extent that she is functioning above average academically. The study indicates that for this particular learner, an ordinary school setting is an enabling environment. However, it is imperative that the school is constantly vigilant in its attempts to minimize barriers to learning, and maximize participation for this learner, throughout her schooling career. In the case study, the issue of choice becomes significant. The right to choice for this learner and her parents was

not violated. This right is enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) and in the South African Schools' Act (1996). A longitudinal study of the learner and her family, documenting her development to adulthood is likely to yield interesting information that could have implications for educational practice and policy.

Corker in Swain (1993) argues that the educational policy is frequently confused with social policy, when integration is viewed as a sometimes misguided way of caring, rather than a means of achieving access to society through education. While policy-makers proposed social integration of the Deaf with the hearing through mainstream education, there was little regard for the possible identity crisis that could follow. There is also a sense of fear of rejection by the Deaf community if Deaf learners attend mainstream schools, as indicated by one respondent:

"Deaf in hearing schools will be frowned (upon) by other Deaf."

Corker in her chapter in Hayes (1996) states that there is increasing interest in the plight of "deaf ex-mainstreamers" who are often unable to find a community to which they feel they belong. They feel rejected in both the Deaf and hearing communities. These ex-mainstreamers are perceived as betraying allegiance to Deaf cultural identity by attending mainstream schools and allying themselves to the hearing oppressors.

Communities striving to practise 'inclusive education' attempt to structure a school environment in such a way that the needs of every learner are accommodated. According to Clark, Dyan and Millward (1995), all children regardless of the type or intensity of their educational, physical or psychological challenges are valued. Inclusion is seen as a process of operating a classroom or school as a supportive community. These authors state that there is mounting evidence that schools and communities that have not incorporated inclusionary practices reflect increased educational and social problems. In this context, what the Deaf learners need is an education and training system that enables them to participate actively in the education process so that they may develop to their maximum potential and participate equally as members of their communities and of society.

4.2.4 Access to tertiary education. The subjects views on the provision of tertiary facilities for the Deaf in South Africa was explored in the questionnaire. Seventeen responded that there has been no effort on the part of educational authorities to provide tertiary learning opportunities for the Deaf in South Africa. One response was not relevant to the question.

Many gifted Deaf adults in South Africa are working as cleaners, filing clerks, domestic workers, in unskilled positions and even in sheltered employment because the education system has failed them (Smuts - Pauw, 1997). It is highly likely, that this situation is such because of the legacy of non-provision

of tertiary facilities for the Deaf in South Africa.

All respondents are acutely aware that the following provisions are necessary to establish tertiary learning for the Deaf in South Africa:

- Sign language interpreters.
- Hearing lecturers that can communicate in Sign Language.
- Note takers, to record notes for the Deaf student while the lecturer is communicating orally.

It is evident from this discussion that the Deaf eagerly anticipate a restructuring of the present education system to ensure quality education at all levels through appropriate curriculum, organisational arrangements and resources. The South African Federal Council on Disability (1995) supports the right of all learners to equal access to education in a system that is responsive to their diverse needs, and in the case of Deaf learners, to their unique language needs.

4.3 SOCIALIZATION OF THE DEAF

Members of the Deaf community interact with one another in a wide variety of activities and occasions such as informal gatherings of friends and in more structured events such as meetings, religious services and athletic tournaments for Deaf people only.

4.3.1 Participation in social activities. Some of the social activities that the respondents engage include:

“Deaf community events”

“Deaf forum meetings”

“meeting other Deaf people”

“sport”

“dancing”, “parties”

“drama”

“attending church”

Reagan (1996) confirms that in the USA there is a a broad social network available to the Deaf. This includes organisations, sports associations and Deaf clubs. Membership to these organisations provides for the companionships needs of the group members. Identification with one another is strengthened and experiences are shared.

Seven respondents stated that they did not enjoy going to the movies because there were no subtitles. The balance responded that they do enjoy going to the movies but that it becomes boring after a while because there were no sub-titles. One respondent indicated that she “cannot lip read at the movies even if the speaker’s face is in full view on the screen”. She added that she enjoys watching “foreign movies because they are always sub-titled.” Another

respondent wrote that she, "did not mind watching a movie about a book that I (she) read." This obviously enhances understanding. Prior knowledge of the story and the outcome help the Deaf to read facial expressions and lip-movements of the speakers. It is clear that the absence of sub-titles has seriously marginalised the Deaf and has presented a social barrier to them.

In the experience of Erting, Johnson, Smith and Snider (1994), Deaf people may laugh hysterically at an inappropriate stage in the movie, because their cues are all visually dependent. The screen may reflect an image of people in terror. With sound effects booming and the people screaming, the hearing audience is afraid. But for the Deaf people, the funny reactions and dramatic expressions of the actions may provoke laughter.

Three respondents currently do not belong to clubs. The rest belong to sports and social clubs affiliated to the local associations for the Deaf. Only one respondent belongs to a sports club comprising both Deaf and hearing participants. All others are clubs exclusively for the Deaf. It is possible that membership is exclusively for the Deaf because, according to Ross (1989) the social life of these clubs takes place in an environment where sign language is the predominant mode of communication. Wiese (1992) confirms that when Deaf friends get together, everyone's hands talk at once. Several conversations can go on simultaneously because there are no voices competing with one another.

4.3.2 Socializing with the hearing. All the respondents do socialize with the hearing, qualifying this positive response with statements such as:

“not totally ”

“don’t really enjoy their company”

“mostly with those who can sign”

“only to get to know what’s going on in the hearing world”

“depends on the social activity”

The respondents outline several difficulties associated with socializing with the hearing, all of which pertain to communication. These are that:

it is “tiring to lipread.”

the “hearing tend to leave me behind.”

“communication is not effective.”

the “hearing do not know sign language and are lazy to write down conversation.”

the “hearing are impatient, cannot be slow in conversing.”

“when socializing with hearing people I experience insensitivity - because they forget to communicate with me.”

Some Deaf people refer to hearing people who cannot sign as being “ignorant.”

A respondent indicated that it is an extreme dilemma socializing with hearing friends in situations where there is no lighting. He indicated that,

“They can hear one another but “I cannot see their facial

expressions or lip movements or their gestures at night and I feel isolated.”

4.3.3 Participation in sport. Respondents were unanimous that they enjoyed playing sport with and against hearing counterparts. The Deaf do not expect any special favours except that the referee must be clearly understood. The views of the Deaf on this matter are:

“we have the same feelings, we are equal”

“we play the same sport”

“like to show that, I can do what the hearing can do”

“deafness should not affect sport”

“deaf and hearing are physically equal”

One can gather from these statements that the Deaf are not intimidated by the hearing on the sports field. There is a strong sense of commitment to exhibit and prove their equality to the hearing in their physical and performance skills. They do not evade infacing with the hearing in sport. In fact their statements reveal a hidden challenge. Information from the South African Deaf Sports Federation, established in 1974, is that the Deaf do not qualify officially to compete with the hearing in sport, nor do they qualify to compete against people from other disability groups. It is unfortunate that society compels them to compete against one another in an isolated manner. It is barriers such as these created by society, that allude to deafness as a handicap.

4.3.4 Deaf humour. All questionnaires revealed a bold "Yes", in response to whether respondents liked 'Deaf jokes'. Erting et al (1994) confirm that humour is essential at social gatherings where the Deaf cluster in groups and exchange stories, jokes and experiences. Through humour the Deaf share their perceptions of the world and find comfort in knowing that others share these beliefs and laughs about life. Deaf humour, to the respondents, is:-

"understood only by the initiated"

"straightforward, unapologetic"

"about imitating people-generally hearing people"

"about teasing people"

" associated with the Deaf community and about Deaf culture".

"about being oppressed" (perhaps by the hearing)

"difficult to describe"

The "Deaf love to laugh," wrote one respondent. Many stories have been handed down for generations in Deaf folklore, and the most treasured are those that delight in the inability of the Deaf to hear, as being an advantage.

4.3 EXPERIENCING THE FAMILY

The family is an important agent of influence in the life of any child and its influence is most pervasive in the formative years. The questionnaire investigated the experiences of the Deaf person in the hearing family.

4.3.1 Communication Within the Family. Three of the respondents have Deaf family members. Two of the respondents have sisters who are Deaf, while the third has a Deaf uncle (who is now deceased). All the respondents have hearing parents and other family members. A frequently quoted statistic in the literature on the deaf is that 9 out of 10 Deaf children are born into hearing families (Ross, 1989).

From this research, it has emerged that the respondents experience emotional crises, as Deaf persons in hearing families. The typical frustrations or difficulties that are experienced pertain to communicative barriers. For example, when watching a movie, the family forgets to interpret/explain to the Deaf person. The family uses speech and the Deaf person is expected to lipread. The hearing family enjoys a joke and all members laugh spontaneously, but they forget to share this joke with the Deaf person. Deaf respondents feel excluded and ignored. Sometimes family members get annoyed when the Deaf person repeatedly asks for interpretations or for information to be deliberately repeated. There are occasions when hearing families have neglected to inform the Deaf person about important family events or happenings.

Many of the problems experienced by Deaf persons in hearing families is admittedly due to ineffective communication. Only one of the families of the respondents is able to communicate in Sign language. This family happens to

be the one where the respondent has a Deaf sister. It is likely that since there are no other siblings in this family, the parents were compelled to learn Sign language to be able to communicate with their two Deaf daughters. The pressure to learn sign language was born out of necessity.

All other families communicate with the respondents orally, through writing messages or using informal gestures. All respondents concur in their view that this type of communication is ineffective, because they find the lipreading laborious and strenuous to the eye. The respondent is expected to be extremely attentive to lip movements.

If for any reason, he or she is distracted then the gist of what is being communicated may be lost. The Deaf person is despondent while the hearing family members may be annoyed at having to repeat the information. Holcomb (1996) confirms that many Deaf adolescents experience frustration, anger and pain at being isolated at home. The self concept of such adolescents forms increasingly around the inadequate social interactions with family members in the home.

The dejection experienced as a result of ineffective familial communication impairs self-esteem and has the potential to retard confidence in interfacing with other Deaf persons and hearing counterparts. It is extremely unfortunate, says Schlesinger (1987), that very few parents can communicate effectively

with their Deaf child.

4.4.2 Participation in Cultural Activities. Despite the exclusion that the Deaf endure in their hearing families, sixteen respondents reported participating in the cultural activities of their hearing families. These activities include weddings, funerals, traditional dancing and religious practices.

Holcomb(1996) endorses this with the view that parents are a major influence on the development of self concept. As children seek the respect and regard of their parents they organise their actions and behave in a way that will seek favourable responses from their parents. Perhaps it is a social need of the Deaf person to feel a part of the hearing family.

Although the majority of respondents attend the cultural activities of their hearing families, when given the choice all respondents indicated a preference to spend time with the Deaf community rather with their hearing families. The reason given for this preference is that there is flexibility and a spontaneity in the communication channels with the Deaf community. Members do not experience loneliness and isolation. There is mutual understanding pride and solidarity within the Deaf community because of the uniqueness of the language they share. The sense of identity with the Deaf community nourishes the Deaf person with the confidence and esteem necessary to interact with the world of hearing persons.

Hayes (1996) concurs with this view that when Deaf people affiliate with other Deaf people, they do not experience blocked or damaged communication because there is a common language and a common culture. Members of Deaf communities interact with each other on the basis of their communication preference. It is an almost natural eventuality that those who use sign language will interact more freely with others who also sign. On the other hand, Deaf persons who are able to speak will tend to communicate orally with other speaking Deaf persons.

4.4.3 The Influence of Parents. In response to whether parents have influenced the respondents to socialize with hearing peers, fifteen replied in the negative. From the responses given it is indicative that parents used to or did at one time, influence their children to socialize with the hearing. However, now that their Deaf children are adults, they no longer do. One respondent wrote:

"At the beginning, they did. Not anymore. They respect my wish. I told them I was born Deaf, will stay Deaf and die Deaf.

Holcomb (1996) explains that as the children get older, there is a shift in focus from the parents to Deaf peers. They begin to seek approval from their peers and to behave accordingly, in order to be accepted by other Deaf persons rather than their parents. This process maintains their self-esteem and ensures a healthy Deaf identity through the adult years. As they grow into adults, Deaf

children develop a natural affinity and an attraction to the behaviour patterns, values, norms and communication modes of their Deaf peers . Reagan (1993) has documented that this peer-promoted culture is acquired at schools, school residences and Deaf clubs.

It is essential that parents realise the potentially harmful effects of denying their Deaf child access to the Deaf community. Lane et al (1996) concur that it is critical to realize that once the Deaf individual's self-concept allows him/her to react positively to his /her Deafness then the person will be better able to develop a bi-cultural identity and form healthy relationships with both Deaf and hearing people. Deaf children will struggle to find their identities in the Deaf or the hearing communities if they are denied access.

4.4.4 On the Question of Marriage. There is very little contention about the marital preferences of Deaf persons. Sixteen respondents indicated that they would want their marriage partners to be a Deaf person, while the other two indicated that they would marry either a Deaf or a hearing person. The general feeling regarding their choice is that there is better understanding and communication between Deaf spouses. Three respondents replied that hearing people cheat on their Deaf spouses.

Flexibility and ease in communication is an important aspect of Deaf relationships, whether this be with friends, family members or potential life

partners. Reagan (1996) confirms that marital relationships are closely linked to the bonds of the common, shared language and culture. Ross (1989) and Reagan (1996) both agree that there are strong cultural pressures supporting endogamous marriages in the Deaf community and that the rate of these marriages in the USA is as high as 90%. Benderly (1988) and Reagan (1996) are of the view that these relationships between Deaf persons emanate from their associations in residential schools for the Deaf and in Deaf circles in general.

In her interview by Wiese (1992), Annette Heyns, a Deaf person explained that Deaf spouses help rather than hinder a marriage,

“There are no harsh words between us, we talk with our eyes, and if one looks away the other can’t continue a fight.”

There was no uniformity among the respondents about the preference of having Deaf or hearing child. Seven respondents chose to have a hearing child for the simple reason that the hearing child can serve as interpreter to the Deaf parent/s. The hearing child will be able to hear sounds and react accordingly, interpret certain happenings on television or interpret conversations with or between speaking persons.

Seven respondents showed preference to have a Deaf child because there will be better understanding between parent/s and child, there will be

“communication for life,’ and more importantly, as Deaf parents, they will be able to convey their own culture to their children. Four respondents indicated that they would be happy to have either Deaf or hearing children, for the same reasons. As an indication of the extent to which some Deaf people have foresight, four respondents who wished to have hearing or either Deaf or Hearing children said that the reason is because educational facilities and tertiary opportunities, for the Deaf in South Africa, are very limited.

In the United States of America, the preference to have Deaf children is deeply-rooted in the concept of culture. Many Deaf couples wish for a Deaf child so that they may pass on their heritage and culture. It is not just the language, but the values, habits and customs that they wish to instill in their children (Cindy’s Home Page on ASL and Deaf Culture, 1998).

Deaf parents with Deaf children is said to be the heart of Deaf culture (Erting et al, 1994). What is intriguing about this phenomenon is the positive value that Deaf people give to having Deaf children of their own. This is how Deaf people differ from other “disabled” groups. No other minority group of “disabled” people wants to have “disabled” children. This is perhaps because other disabled groups do not constitute a culture. What is clearly evident from this discussion on the Deaf person in the hearing family, is that despite the impact of the family in the formative years, there is a distinguishing bond that exists amongst Deaf people. It is this bond and shared attachment that

enhances both the individual and group identity.

4.5 EXPERIENCING THE HEARING COMMUNITY

For generations there has been conflict and tension between the Deaf and hearing people, both overtly and covertly. Disagreements have arisen largely over the power of the hearing in decision and policy making for the minority Deaf community. Furthermore, the experience of Deafness is isolating, as has been recorded in this research. It may, therefore, be interpreted that the formation of the Deaf community is a response to being in opposition to the hearing society and to the concomitant isolation.

4.5.1 Perception of Attitudes Towards the Deaf. All respondents express the view that hearing people are oppressive and demanding in their attitudes to the Deaf. Respondents elaborate that:

“hearing think that Deaf are stupid”

“when we voice our feelings, hearing don’t take them seriously”

“hearing believe that Deaf can’t do many things”

“hearing use Deaf to make themselves feel superior, feel good”

“hearing think that the Deaf can’t make their own decisions”

This rejection and antagonism expressed towards the hearing is not congruent with the view that the hearing have been helpful when their assistance was

needed. All indicate that the hearing were helpful, but with qualifying phrases such as:

“not all the time”

“but not all the hearing people”

“depends on the situation”

One response was that the hearing in some situations **“are nervous and uncomfortable when helping me out, but sometimes they are impatient and selfish”**.

The extent to which these emotions is a true reflection of the hearing people cannot be ascertained. It is unfair to even assume any authenticity about these feelings. What is critical through is that these statements reflect negative undertones towards the hearing. Although this is an indictment against the hearing community, it is possible that this attitude of hearing people emanates from a lack of understanding of the Deaf and inhibitions about not being able to communicate effectively with them.

4.5.2 Access to the Hearing World. The study explored the extent to which community services were available to the Deaf. Only one respondent indicated that his community offered services to the Deaf. These services included:

“schools for the Deaf”

“Deaf clubs”

“few interpreters”

“social workers”

“agency for the Deaf”

It is obvious from the responses obtained that other participants also encountered these services, but that these services were not offered in the communities in which they lived. Participants could only access the benefits of these facilities in other communities. Reagan (1996) confirms that Deaf people in the USA merge in certain communities, and the Deaf group within this large community consolidates itself into a cohesive unit. Other community services required by the respondents are:

- **public teldem services.**
- **teldems at police stations, hospitals and emergency services.**
- **captioned movies.**
- **interpreters or captions on television news and documentaries**
- **interpreters at live theatre.**
- **interpreters at church services.**
- **interpreters at emergency services.**

These are essential services needed by the Deaf if they are expected to integrate comfortably within the mainstream of society.

The participants in this study are deeply disillusioned about television services in South Africa. Television services are insensitive to the needs of the Deaf and the Deaf community do not benefit from television despite the fact that they "pay the full price for the television and for the television licence." In the hundreds of hours of programme broadcasting on the various channels, the Deaf community are only able to access two half an hour programmes through interpreters and/or captions. The respondents recommend that the News, certain documentaries and at least one movie a day be captioned or have an inset interpreter. They feel that there is a need for these programmes be advertized in the printed media.

Once again difficulties experienced within the hearing community pertain to communication. The site of these problems are hospitals, police stations, employment agencies and tertiary institutions. Personnel at these sites are not literate in Sign language and to exacerbate this situation there are no interpreters services for the Deaf. The following responses provoke much thought and indicate a lack of sensitivity and concern for the Deaf as equal citizens:

"When I go to the doctor it takes a long time to receive assistance because I have to communicate with the doctor or people. Some doctors get angry (impatient) and tell me to wait in the back seat."

“If maybe a man grabs me and rapes me I will shout, but no one will hear me. Then I go to the police station I can’t communicate with them. They don’t understand my writing (English) or my voice or my signs”.

“When I go to the meetings I have to stay in the hotel. I cannot phone for room service when I am tired and the reception can’t phone to wake me up in the morning.

In his feature on the Deaf Heyns family, Wiese (1992) writes that:

“They can’t telephone for the police or an ambulance and even a routine doctor’s appointment poses a problem. Sometimes they will ask a neighbour to phone for them, but they may not want their neighbours to know what is wrong. Privacy is precious to the Deaf people too”.

Garretson (1981) recounts that from daybreak to the end of each day, each Deaf person encounters subtle little problems or inconveniences. Some of these incidents may be accepted humorously but more often they are tolerated patiently as everyday facts of life.

Subjects were asked to comment on the extent to which are Deaf people dependent on hearing people. One respondent wrote,

"I am dependent on their ears, not their minds".

All participants in this study admitted dependence on the hearing for the purposes of interpreting and for the use of the telephone (since not many Deaf people have Teldem and fax services). These may appear to be negligible services, but to the Deaf they are invaluable and their absence could seriously impair the proper functioning of the Deaf individual in a hearing society.

Ross (1989) records a study on the interaction between Deaf and hearing persons. Only a minority of hearing people were reported to be willing to help and there was nothing to indicate a willingness to persist in the effort to learn to communicate with the Deaf. The hearing community's response to deafness ranged from interest and sympathy to embarrassment, lack of interest and flight.

It is reasonable to question at this stage, whether the Deaf community have succumbed to the overwhelming presence of their hearing counterparts and have become more adjusted to them or whether they are challenging the negative attitudes of the hearing.

4.6 EXPERIENCING DEAFNESS

In a variety of ways, Deaf people have accumulated a structure of knowledge about themselves in the face of the larger society's understanding, or misunderstanding of them. They have found ways of expressing themselves and explaining their identities through their language, values, norms and customs.

One of the most fascinating of these norms is the unique manner in which Deaf persons have come to be baptised by the Deaf community. To those in the Deaf community, the name given at birth is merely a word, but it is the "Deaf name" that has a far more meaningfully distinguishing identity.

Examples:

The letter A signed at the nose refers to 'Asha' because she wears a nose ring.

The letter C shaped at the side of the face with the thumb touching the centre of the cheek refers to 'Cynthia' because she has dimples.

Millicent is referred to by signing the letter M at the chin where she has a scar from a burn.

When Deaf people christen a newcomer to the Deaf community, there is no negotiating or group decision- making about the name to be given. This name emerges spontaneously and naturally and is unceremoniously bestowed on its owner. Before long the entire Deaf community knows the sign name associated with the individual.

4.6.1 Deafness as a Disability. Subjects were asked about their perceptions of deafness. Deaf people have come to accept their Deafness as being distinguishing and non-debilitating. Sixteen respondents do not perceive of their deafness as a disability. Two respondents believe that their deafness is a disability because,

"I can't hear", and because,

"There is malfunctioning of one of my senses".

Others believe that their deafness is not a problem and that the

"Deaf can do everything except hear."

More accurately one respondent indicated that,

**"I can do everything that the hearing can do,
but I can't hear and speak".**

Another respondent is of the view that,

"Society disables me. No access to this and that."

Carver (1993) very aptly questions whether deafness in itself constitutes a disability or whether society's response to deafness disables the Deaf individual. He explains that many Deaf persons have developed different but equally effective ways of communicating and coping in a hearing world: writing, sign language, Teldem communication and through interpreters. Ross (1989) confirms that Deaf people are often disabled not so much by the pathology of their deafness but by their interactions with the hearing world. Furthermore Lane (1993) argues that professionals in their efforts to rehabilitate the Deaf child by reducing the effects of deafness, actually exacerbate the child's disability, thereby rendering him/her more handicapped than in actuality.

Historically, the label "disabled" has included Deaf people together with other disability groups. However, the issue of disability as it pertains to the Deaf now, is a very controversial one. In the discussions and debates about "access", "inclusion", "human rights" and "Deaf rights", the Deaf no longer consider themselves "disabled". Deaf people feel disabled amongst hearing people, just as hearing people will feel disabled among the Deaf if they do not know sign language. Many Deaf people bear the quiet conviction that if left to their own devices, they would be self-sufficient and would successfully be able to run their own lives.

4.6.2 Views on Technology for the Deaf. Subjects were asked about their views on cochlear implantation. Very simply this process involves the implantation of a mechanical or artificial ear. All respondents were vehemently opposed to this process. They feel that this:

“ is unnatural to the Deaf”

“ will not benefit the Deaf”

**“ will perhaps be more useful to the hard of hearing
or to those who lost their hearing in adulthood”.**

While the benefits of cochlear implantation in the post-lingually deafened adult have been demonstrated, this process for the congenitally Deaf child is much more controversial (van Heerden, 1992). The user can benefit best from use if s/he knows how the language sounds, to be able to associate the sounds coming from the implant with the words intended and spoken by the speaker. The respondents feel that:

“It should not be imposed on young children;

fitting must be subject to the choice of the wearer”.

“It makes the medical personnel very rich”.

“Cochlear implantation is a big disaster”.

One respondent considers cochlear implantation to be an experiment by the hearing on the Deaf, for personal gains.

“If we were born Deaf, why do we have to pay to be hearing”.

According to Kemp (1995), cochlear implants are not rejected by the Deaf only because they are of no benefit to them. There is also the element of fear associated with its use. Kemp advises that there is the fear that wearers will constitute a new group of Deaf people, a group that will belong to neither the Deaf nor the hearing world. Those who choose to wear the cochlear implant are effectively abandoning their allegiance to the Deaf community and rejecting Sign language in favour of the aural-oral method of communication.

Carver (1994) explains the rejection of cochlear implantation in terms of the clash between the two prevailing models in the field of Deafness. These are the medical (deficit) model and the cultural (difference) model. The former model is based on the assumption that the problem exists within the child and the problem, that is, the deafness must be fixed in order for the child to have a normal life. The difference model recognizes that the problem lies outside the child and that deafness does not need to be fixed in order for the child to lead a normal life.

Subjects were asked about the extent to which they were dependent on hearing aids. It is in the same perspective that hearing aids are also rejected. All participants, except one indicated that they are not at all dependent on their hearing aids, because these do not help.

"Hearing aids cannot take the place of ears," commented one respondent. The exception amongst these respondents indicated that he used

hearing aids for the purposes of differentiating sounds, for example, voices, a motorbike or an aeroplane.

For generations, hearing aids and other assistive hearing devices were perceived by hearing people as the only means by which Deaf people can function effectively in a world of sound. In pursuing the values and norms of the Deaf community, it is evident that this type of technology has been rejected by the large majority of Deaf people. The technology that is preferred is based on the cultural model that recognizes that deafness does not need to be corrected for functioning to be effective. According to the responses recorded, the technology that is preferred by the Deaf are the Teldem (which is a telephone modem through which the Deaf relay typed messages), fax machines, flashing light alarms, vibrating alarm clocks and closed captioned television programmes. Carver (1994) reports that hearing aid advertisements are virtually non-existent in Deaf magazines and newspapers, but advertisements for Teldems and other assistive living aids are in abundance.

Erting et al (1994) informed the International Conference on Deaf Culture of a tradition at an American school for the Deaf where on the last day of school those about to leave marched down to the railway line at the bottom of the field and placed their hearing aids on the track. When the train came by and crushed the hearing aids, they all shook hands and hugged one another in acknowledgement that school was over forever.

It is clear that in this era of rapidly developing technology, assistive hearing devices have brought the Deaf community on a collision course with such technology. The study indicates that the Deaf are critical of technology that attempts to make them 'normal'. The acknowledgement and use of hearing devices, from the Deaf perspective, are viewed in opposition to who the Deaf person really is.

4.6.3 Attitudes to the Hard of Hearing. There is substantial disagreement amongst Deaf persons as to whether hard of hearing people are considered to be part of the Deaf community. Two participants replied in the negative, revealing that the hard of hearing think that they are better than the Deaf and should therefore belong to the hearing world. There is a known tendency for the Deaf community to perceive hard of hearing individuals who have relatively good speech and usable hearing to belong to the hearing world.

To admit that one is hard of hearing is interpreted by the Deaf, according to Padden (1993) as "putting on airs" and this attitude, she says, has the potential for developing frustrated "second class citizens."

Ten respondents cited the following reasons for accepting the hard of hearing into the Deaf community. They stated that the hard of hearing:

"know sign language"

"cannot hear like hearing people"

"know about Deaf culture"

" learn at the Deaf schools"

Lane et al (1996) supports the view that the hard of hearing people in the United States of America are perceived to belong to two cultural worlds, the hearing and the Deaf worlds, but are not entirely a part of either. Instead they are on the edge of both worlds socially and psychologically.

According to Lane (1993), while the profoundly Deaf have been identified as outsiders in the hearing world, those who are hard of hearing can easily be labelled outsiders in both the Deaf and hearing worlds. Deaf people accept the fact that they cannot hear and do not attempt to communicate auditorily. The hard of hearing, however fluctuate between hearing and deafness and some may have difficulty finding themselves a niche in either world.

In her case study of the Deaf learner in the mainstream school, Jairaj (1996) reports findings that are contrary to the perception, that the Deaf learner experiences difficulties with being in a hearing environment. Jairaj's detailed study of 'learner Y' revealed that she enjoyed a good relationship with her peers at school. She interacted confidently with both her friends and teachers. Y was socially accepted by her peers and did not in any way feel isolated. Jairaj attributes these sound inter-personal relationships to the positive attitudes of her teachers and peers which are critical to an accepting environment. These findings indicate that if the attitudes of Deaf people were altered to being more flexible and accommodating, then social interaction between the hearing and

the hearing impaired, could be greatly enhanced.

The other six respondents indicate that the hard of hearing can only be accepted into the Deaf community if they accept Deaf culture 100% and use sign language as their first language. In addition they must decide whether they want to belong to either the Deaf or the hearing community. This attitude of the Deaf towards the hard of hearing is dogmatic and certainly prescriptive. Since they appear to be somewhere between the Deaf and hearing worlds, it should be acceptable for them to belong to both communities. Furthermore, if there has to be a decision about which community to belong to, this decision should be made by hard of hearing persons themselves. Acceptance into the Deaf community should not be contingent upon the hard of hearing having to make a choice.

The Deaf community is extremely difficult to access. They are a relatively closed and exclusive system. It appears that they deliberately wish to exclude intruders, to their community, who have the potential to destabilize the culture that they have constructed to give themselves identify.

4.6.4 Sign Language. This is the most crucial and distinguishing feature of Deaf culture and it is the use of Sign language that provides access and entry into the culture of Deaf people. Reagan (1996) confirms that the single most significant component of Deaf cultural identity in the United States of America is competence in Sign language, the Deaf community's vernacular language

and a powerful determinant of group solidarity. All the respondents were compatible in their views on the critical role of Sign language in their lives.

To the respondents, Sign language:-

"is the bridge over barriers"

"gives me accessibility"

"opens doors to my ambitions"

"helps me to socialize, communicate and learn"

"is my life"

"is my culture"

More dramatically, one respondent wrote that,

"Sign language is my first and natural language. I think, dream, study, argue, debate, tease, and flirt in Sign language.

Without it, I cannot imagine how I would survive in this world".

Sign language is so essential to the survival of the Deaf community, that they admit feeling neither shy nor embarrassed about using Sign language in public,

"It is my language and I am proud of it."

"I feel delighted to use Sign language in public, because it makes hearing people aware of the Deaf."

Four respondents expressed that they feel confident about using Sign language in public but are concerned about the attitudes of hearing people:-

“they stare at us for a long time”

“they think that we are mad when we sign”

**“if we look at them, while signing they (hearing) think
that we are talking about them”**

Hearing people are poorly perceived here but one can also speculate that they stare in admiration, amazement or curiosity at the Deaf who are so adept at using their arms, hands, fingers, faces, eyes and bodies to give expression to their thoughts.

Despite the attitudes of hearing people, and the various attempts over the generations to suppress Sign language, it has remained a resilient and powerful language. The heart of the Deaf community is their Sign language and it is this language that embodies the experiences, traditions thoughts and values that they share. Lane (1993) conceives that,

**“It seems as though man’s biological need for language
will out one way or another, through the little
articulations of the mouth or through the larger
articulations of the hands and limbs”.**

4.6.5 Racial Barriers within the Deaf Community. The existence of racial barriers within the Deaf community does not seem to be contentious issue. While two respondents gave no response to this matter, the rest are acutely aware of the presence of racial barriers within the Deaf community. There was

no attempt or the part of respondents to deny the existence of the racial barriers.

In South Africa the presence of racial segregation amongst the Deaf may be attributed to the practices of apartheid. Historically, Whites and Blacks have lived in different areas throughout South Africa. Within the well-defined boundaries of these residential areas each group existed separately. It is also common knowledge that historically Black and White learners attended separate schools. This has been the case with Deaf learners too, thereby causing separation. Furthermore, many Deaf people in the rural areas have no access to information about the moves towards racial integration and transformation in the new South Africa. It is perhaps as a result of these factors, that the South African Deaf community, has been racially separated. In the context of this segregation each racial group learnt a different Sign language. This also, to a certain extent, imposed limitations on contact between Deaf people of different racial groups.

Dunn (1990) reports that the Black Deaf person has been especially oppressed throughout the world. The Black Deaf person has been isolated from the Black community because of communication barriers and simultaneously isolated from the wider Deaf community because of inherent racial practices. The Black Deaf person was often on the fringes of both cultures. He indicates that various studies have found that Black Deaf children have often had minimal exposure to communication systems beyond homemade gestures used in the

family.

Within the last decade however, with the advent of the awareness of "Deaf community", "Deaf identity" and "Deaf awareness" racial barriers within the Deaf community have been visibly relaxed in South Africa. There is integration in sport, at schools, school residences, and social organisations. Responses indicate that there is no longer the tendency for the Deaf to identify more closely with other Deaf, from within their own race groups. The respondents indicate that,

"The Deaf world is a small world -we now identify with the Deaf from all cultures".

"I am starting to see Deaf people first, not their colour".

"I can identify closely with any Deaf person. Colour does not matter."

Simmons (1992) says that it is interesting that Deaf people, in spite of their different racial groups, educational backgrounds, Sign languages and second languages, are drawn to one another. They understand one another and feel a sense of comradeship and group identity in the Deaf world.

4.6.6 The Deaf: A Global Culture. Irrespective of where in the world Deaf people reside, it is apparent that their deafness makes them a part of a natural community. This sense of identity comes from seeing the world in a different way, shaped by a unique language, values and norms. All participants revealed

that they feel a greater sense of identity and bonding with foreign Deaf people rather than with South African hearing people. Despite their different nationalities, when Deaf people from anywhere in the world meet, there seem to be no boundaries between them.

Simmons (1992) has documented that when Deaf people come into contact with other Deaf communities in foreign countries, they seem to be able to communicate with relatively more ease than hearing people in a foreign country. After staying some for time in another country, Deaf people are able to assimilate the values and culture of the particular Deaf group to such an extent that they become quite proficient in the Sign language of the foreign group.

Ladd's vision for Deaf people, outlined in Snider (1993), is "global Deaf consciousness," a sense of connection and community with every other Deaf person in the world. Because Deaf communities are small, their contact with other Deaf communities is relatively intimate. Ladd's view is that "Deaf identities transcend international borders and merge as a global union."

4.6.7 Pride in Deaf culture. All of which brings one to the question of whether the Deaf enjoy and embrace a sense of pride in being Deaf and in belonging to the Deaf community. All respondents indicated that they were proud to be members of the Deaf community, as is reflected in these words:

"will remain a patriot, of the Deaf community"

"we are one family"

"we fight together for needs and rights"

"life is very interesting in the Deaf community"

**"impossible to hate oneself because you have lost
one of your senses"**

Erting (1994) recorded this perspective of a Deaf person.

**"Although many disabled groups dream of a physical
cure for their disability, such a dream is inconceivable
to most people who have grown up Deaf. If we could
hear tomorrow we wouldn't want to. We wouldn't want
to become hearing people because inside we are Deaf.
Our minds are Deaf, but our thoughts and feelings are
alive with Sign language."**

Deaf people speak of themselves as belonging to the Deaf community and take pride in a cultural heritage based on sign language. Ross (1989) recognizes that most Deaf persons will always be Deaf and that it is far better and easier to prepare them for life as strong, confident Deaf persons rather than as weak imitations of hearing persons who are most likely not to develop a self-respecting identity in the hearing world.

As individuals, Deaf people have come together to form a community based on a shared language, shared experiences, shared interests, shared norms of behaviour and shared survival strategies. And above all they share pride and dignity in being Deaf.

CHAPTER FIVE: LIMITATIONS AND STRENGTHS, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This investigation has been an attempt to present the social identity of the South African Deaf community, from the inside: to discover how Deaf people describe themselves and the norms by which they live; how they perceive their lives and how they wish for hearing people to interpret their culture.

Both as individuals and as members of a community, Deaf people have developed a social identity based on their deafness. They have embraced deafness as an essential positive part of themselves. They have interpreted the surrounding world in a way that is compatible with their experiences as Deaf persons. Through Sign language they recognize and participate in a culture that they have created.

5.2 LIMITATIONS AND STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY.

The issue of Deaf identity is both intricate and complex, since ninety percent of Deaf people do not learn their language and the essential characteristics of this identity from their families. Human infants are born with an innate ability to learn language and to create meaning, but for this they are dependent on other language users. The model of human development assumes that each

child is born into an environment, that provides adult models for learning a language. However, Deaf children born into hearing families often do not have access to such models. They do not hear the spoken language of their parents, neighbours and relatives. It is only on entry to school that they encounter the beginnings of a new realm of deafness. The regulations and structures of this realm are integrated as an identity, and collectively, this identity emerges as a 'culture'. The study of Deaf identity, therefore, in the hearing, family posed a major challenge to this research, since all eighteen subjects were from hearing families and had hearing parents. Two subjects, though, had Deaf sisters.

An overtly conspicuous constraint in this study pertained to the extent to which the selected sample adequately represented the population being investigated. The Proposed Policy on Deaf Education (DEAFSA, 1994) records that, in data obtained from the Central Statistics Services (July, 1994), there are 402 847 profoundly Deaf persons in South Africa, while the sample in this research comprised 18 respondents. In numerical terms the sample appears to be a negligible proportion of the total population. It is logical to question, therefore, whether this sample is a substantial representation of the total population.

It was ascertained during the selection of the sample, that these eighteen participants belonged to the provincial agencies to which all the local schools for the Deaf and adult Deaf clubs are affiliated. It was presumed, that on the basis of the shared association, the views of the respondents were reflective of

the views of the membership as a whole.

However, depending on such variables as the quality of family influence, level of education, school residency and personal experiences, it is highly likely that all the Deaf persons in that association do not share the same perceptions of Deaf identity. In this regard the views of the sample may not necessarily be a valid indication of the views of all the Deaf people, in that community, or province.

The age of the sample is also biased in terms of representivity. The sample was a distinct adult group and may perhaps reflect only the views of other adults. A very significant component of the Deaf community in any geographic area comprises children and young adults. There is the possibility that the children at a young age have, as yet, not completely integrated or internalized the values of a their culture. As children they are still uncertain about their identities because of the absence of bonding with hearing families, on the one hand, owing to communication barriers. On the other hand, there has not been sufficient time to develop an identity with their Deaf peers at school because they have recently commenced school. It may be deduced then that the views of the respondents in the sample, are not necessarily those of the children and the younger school- going constituency in the Deaf community.

A further constraint in this study is that the sample was selected from five of

the nine provinces. The views of Deaf people in Northern Cape, North West, Northern Transvaal and Eastern Transvaal were not considered. Furthermore, the sample comprised Deaf persons living in the cities and immediate suburbs of the provinces. In this regard, the data and the views obtained from the sample is not reflective of those Deaf persons residing in the rural areas of the Republic of South Africa. There is a strong probability that rural Deaf persons are not included in the statistics on the Deaf, have not had any formal education, have not been exposed to a structured Sign language, and instead communicate through the medium of self- devised gestures. For this reason the information gathered from the sample, cannot be considered to be an adequate representation of the perspectives of the wider demography of Deaf persons living in the Republic of South Africa.

With specific reference to the methodology, the use of the questionnaire was, in itself, a major limitation. At the outset of the analysis, I had to be mindful that the Deaf participants were required to respond through the medium of written English - this being the second language of the respondents with Sign Language being their first and natural language. Not only were the respondents expected to express exacting and thought-provoking responses in a second language, they were also expected to independently read and comprehend questions presented in second language.

Deaf people are able to express themselves emphatically and compellingly in

Sign Language. It is possible that respondents were unable to write competently about the issues being investigated. Owing to the very likely possibility that the respondents were unable to express themselves effectively because of limited written English proficiency, the data presented in the questionnaire might not necessarily be an authentic indication of the message that was intended.

A significant limitation of this study, is that it does not include the views of hard of hearing people. This group forms a significant constituency within the wider Deaf community and this investigation has not taken cognisance of their views. Important issues involving hard of hearing persons, have been addressed in this research and they have not been given the opportunity to explain themselves or their perspectives.

Although this research was exacting in terms of thought, preparation and ultimately time, the concomitant rewards cannot be quantified. The data yielded by the research made an invaluable contribution towards achieving the objectives of this investigation, which was the exploration of a rich and vibrant culture. The study also afforded respondents the opportunity to give expression to their feelings, thoughts, ideas and opinions about being Deaf and about Deaf related issues. Respondents could use this instrument as a vehicle to convey compelling and impassioned details about themselves, which they presume to be ignored by the hearing community. The incisive and intense

questions about deafness gave recognition to Deaf people.

5.3 IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH.

This study has prompted thought and critical introspection about certain very pertinent issues about the Deaf. The most significant and pervasive of these issues is the **education** of the Deaf learner. The aspect of education comprises several dimensions, each of which will be discussed below.

5.3.1 Educators. Deaf people are emphatic about the need for Deaf teachers. The success, of the educational experiences of the Deaf learner, is to a large extent dependent on the competence and skills of the educator. The Deaf educator will give credibility to the natural signing environment, which is widely recommended for the holistic development of Deaf children. In addition the Deaf educator will assume the important position of 'Deaf role model', who will provide both an identity framework and an inspiration to Deaf learners.

For hearing teachers in schools for the Deaf , there needs to be professional development and in-service training, with special reference to:

- communicating in Sign language
- knowledge of deafness as a physiological impairment, and the implications thereof
- knowledge of deafness as a cultural phenomenon, and

- managing deafness in the educational context.

Where it is not possible for there to be a Deaf educator, it is desirable to have a Deaf teaching assistant. These assistants should receive relevant educational training and be remunerated accordingly. The competence of the hearing educator and the signing skills of the Deaf teaching assistant can be complementary, and together they can provide the most enabling learning environment for the Deaf learner. Teachers in schools for the Deaf, whether Deaf or hearing, will play a key role in upgrading the status and effectiveness of Deaf education in South Africa, for the future.

5.3.2 Mainstreaming. Integrating Deaf learners into regular schools is an objective that has been sought for several years by interested proponents. The diverse and unique needs of the Deaf can only be adequately met in mainstream schools, if there are qualified interpreters and/ or educators who are fluent in Sign language. Educators working with Deaf people must acquire theoretical knowledge of Deaf language, Deaf culture and Deaf education. Integration without these conditions is restrictive and unproductive. Educational content can best be accessible with these existing conditions. In addition to interpreters and signing educators, there needs to be counselling and/ or support services to obviate the potentially debilitating effects of social isolation.

Despite this, it is necessary to inform policy-makers that a conducive learning environment for the Deaf child is a signing environment, which includes other

Deaf signing learners. Contact with other Deaf children promotes the acquisition of Sign language in a natural way. Hearing children learn a language in the same way, that is, through contact with other speaking persons. The acquisition of Sign language facilitates a stable psycho- social development. Sign language must therefore, take its rightful place and receive due recognition, in a mainstream learning context that includes Deaf learners.

5.3.3 Curriculum. BILINGUALISM is the preferred trend internationally in Deaf education and involves the use of Sign language as the first and natural language and the fundamental means of communication for the Deaf person (Kauppinen, 1996). In addition bilingualism entails the use of a second language in the written medium: this language being that of the dominant community within which the Deaf community is a sub- group. Bilingualism advocates the complete separation of Sign language and the written language, during instruction. These two languages have totally different linguistic structures and the means for expressing content differ fundamentally from each other. There is no one- to- one correspondence between words and signs. If Sign language is oppressed in favour of a signed exact language, for example, English, then this could have a very negative impact on the general knowledge, subject knowledge and development of concepts among the Deaf.

EXAMINATIONS. There needs to be the realization that the low achievement of Deaf learners in examinations is directly linked to the use of the written examination evaluation system, which is actually developed for hearing

learners. This is discriminatory since the majority of Deaf learners have inadequate written language skills. A structured system of assessment involving the use of Sign language, should be devised to evaluate the performance of Deaf learners.

This would be a far more authentic form of evaluation as it engages the primary language of the Deaf and the language through which they are best able to express themselves.

QUALITY OF CONTENT. There is both need and support for increased attention to the quality of the curriculum taught. Educators are required to improve their Sign language communication skills and raise their personal expectations of the academic performance of Deaf learners. In the current curriculum at schools for the Deaf, there is too much emphasis on vocational subjects which are demonstrable.

The curriculum must accommodate the diversity in learner competence and afford its learners the opportunity to acquire both academic knowledge and technical or vocational skills. If educators improve their Sign language competence, they will be able to effectively convey the content or theory of academic subjects. It is certain that curriculum redress would enhance performance and progress of Deaf learners.

5.3.4 Tertiary Education. The current focus on technical and vocational skills, the lack of emphasis on the quality of the content and the importance of

Sign language skills and the low expectations that the majority of educators have of Deaf learners may jointly have contributed to the marginalization of the Deaf from tertiary educational opportunities. Many very competent Deaf people are unskilled workers owing to this deprivation. These issues require urgent redress. Organizational restructuring at tertiary level needs to be implemented. This ought to include access to note-takers, interpreters and technological advancement that would enhance the opportunities for Deaf persons to participate in tertiary programs.

5.3.5 Single Sign Language. Sign language is the language of choice amongst the Deaf in South Africa. It should be considered an indispensable feature of Deaf education for all those learners in schools for the Deaf, for whom it would be beneficial. The current situation in South Africa indicates a diversity of about twelve Sign languages. However a single, unified South African Sign language would be both highly desirable and fervently recommended by the Deaf community as a goal for the future. Hopefully, this would emerge as a result of changes in social and educational policies. This would serve to consolidate and fortify the resilience of this group and promote the pursuance of their goals as a united community, rather than as community fragmented by different Sign languages.

There is no doubt that educational reform and redress would impact positively on all dimensions of the lives of Deaf persons. Through educational upliftment, they would be able to advance changes in their socialization patterns and

familial relationships. With a firm educational foundation the Deaf would be able to change the attitudes of the hearing community towards understanding of Deaf people, deafness and related issues; hearing people must understand and acknowledge that their attitudes have the potential to either enable or disable Deaf people. Education has the capacity to promote emotional, social and cognitive development. Effective education would serve to empower this community and facilitate the achievement of their goals and ambitions for themselves. Above all education would afford them the strength and support to resist any form of oppression and emerge as powerful activists of Deaf rights.

5.4 CONCLUSIONS

There is no doubt that Deaf Culture does exist in South Africa. However, it is not inaccurate to say that this culture is still in its infancy. This may be attributed to:

- the language diversity, that is, the variety of Sign languages that developed as a result of Deaf people being geographically and demographically isolated from one another,
- the lack of racial integration amongst the various population groups,
- the obvious hegemony of the hearing society and their lack of understanding of the Deaf community and
- the predominance of oral education in schools for the Deaf, for several decades, causing Sign language to be suppressed.

For these reasons Deaf Culture has not developed as potently in South Africa as it has in other countries. Despite these obstacles, in South Africa there has been a definite paradigm shift from perceiving Deaf people merely as being pathologically deficient of hearing to an emphasis on Deaf people as being a community and as a culture with its own distinctive language.

In addition to these conclusions, this study focusses attention on the challenging future that faces the Deaf community. The variation in Sign systems has the potential to create socially different groups within the Deaf community.

For economic reasons, the National Education Department is calling for rationalization of educator posts in all provincial education departments (HRM Circular No. 51 of 1998). The possible implication of this is enforced mainstreaming of the Deaf with hearing learners. The concern is whether these Deaf learners develop the necessary identification with and commitment to the larger Deaf community.

Residential schools for the Deaf are not unproblematic. Concerns here have been voiced around issues such as the alienation of children from parents and the family, the development of an 'institution-like' ethos and the experience of various forms of socially unacceptable behaviours in such centres. In recent months, plans for the entire family to relocate to a new residential area for the sake of day- school placement for their Deaf child, is not uncommon. This in

itself poses a threat to the continued cohesiveness of the Deaf community, since it is now well established that the ideals of Deaf Culture are transmitted in schools and more especially in residential programs.

If deafness and Deaf people become more accepted in the hearing world and if educational and social opportunities become more available in the hearing society, then one wonders whether Deaf people will continue to be as reliant on and as greatly involved in the Deaf community as before.

The need for economic survival in society is currently so overwhelming that many Deaf will be willing to assume 'second class' or relegated employment in the mainstream necessitating mobility in this direction. This will result in a growing gap between the Deaf community and those who are forced to relinquish their commitment and ties to this community.

All of these issues raise concerns about the future of the Deaf community, about their continued resilience and cohesiveness and about their capacity to resist the threat of fragmentation in the face of these obstacles. Ironically, if there is greater acceptance from and wider opportunity within the hearing society, then this will be due in part to the efforts of the Deaf community and their supporters, to their lobbying, to their leadership and to their determination. It is even possible that the success of the Deaf community, in their quest to be perceived as a culture equal in status to the hearing community, will ultimately be responsible for their own disintegration.

In countering the various avenues of resistance and domination by the hearing world and in striving tenaciously for recognition as a culture, what the Deaf community is very unpretentiously and un-apologetically saying, is that:

“We’re Deaf, and its all right to be Deaf. We have a history and a language and that is the source of our identity and our culture. We are human and we are whole”.

(Moore and Levitan, 1993).

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Dear Respondent

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this questionnaire. The objective is to establish a social identity profile of Deaf people in the broader South African context. The information that you provide will be invaluable to both Deaf and hearing people. I would like to make a special appeal to you to respond as fully and as honestly as you can so that an accurate data base can be obtained.

Please remember that the information you provide will be treated with the strictest confidence. If you feel that certain questions are not relevant, you may not respond to them. Kindly note that the questions have been carefully selected for the purpose of this research and are in no way intended to offend Deaf or hearing people. Your participation in this study is acknowledged with gratitude and at the conclusion of the research the findings will be made available to you.

Thank you once again for your sincere co-operation.

Ansuya Ram
Masters in Education (Special Needs in Education)
University of Natal (Durban)
June 1998.

1. EDUCATION

1.1. Do you think that schools for the Deaf should have:
(Tick the appropriate block.)

- Deaf educators only ?
- Deaf and hearing educators ?
- Hearing educators only ?

1.2. What are your reasons for this preference ?

1.3. What are your views on the Sign Language capabilities of hearing educators in schools for the Deaf?

1.4. Comment on hearing educators' knowledge of Deaf people and Deafness.

1.5. Comment on whether the present curriculum at schools for the Deaf is suitable for Deaf learners.

1.6 Should there be any changes to the present curriculum to make it suitable for Deaf learners?

1.7 Deaf learners are instructed through the medium of Sign Language. What are your views on Deaf learners being assessed/examined through written English?

1.8 How do you think Deaf learners should be assessed/examined?

1.9 What are your views on integrating Deaf learners into mainstream schools? Give reasons for your response.

1.10 Comment on the provision of tertiary training for Deaf persons in South Africa.

1.13 What structures need to be put in place to provide opportunities for tertiary training for Deaf persons?

2. SOCIALIZATION/SPORT

2.1 What social activities do you engage in?

2.2 Do you enjoy going to the movies? Explain your response.

2.3 What clubs do you belong to? Are these clubs for Deaf people only?

2.4 Do you socialize with hearing people? If you do, do you enjoy their company?

2.5 Do you experience any problems when socializing with hearing people? Explain.

2.6 Do you enjoy playing sport with hearing people? Tick.

Yes

No

2.7 During sport , how do you expect to be treated against your hearing counterparts?

2.8 Do you enjoy "Deaf jokes"?

Yes

No

2.9 Describe Deaf humour / Deaf jokes.

3. YOUR FAMILY

3.1 Are there other Deaf persons in your family. How are you related?

3.2 With whom do you prefer to spend your time - the Deaf community or your hearing family? Elaborate.

3.3 Does your family value your comments during family discussions? Elaborate.

3.4 Do you participate in the cultural activities of your hearing family? Elaborate.

3.5 How do members of your hearing family communicate with you? Is their communication effective?

3.6 What are your experiences as a Deaf person in a hearing family?

3.7 Have your parents tried to influence you to socialize with hearing people?
How did you feel about this?

3.8 Has your family been supportive in whatever you wanted to do? Elaborate.

3.9 Would you prefer to marry a Deaf or a hearing person? Why?

3.10 Do you want to have Deaf or hearing children? Why?

4. THE HEARING COMMUNITY

4.1 How have hearing people reacted when you needed their assistance?
Elaborate.

4.2 What do you think is the attitude of hearing people towards the Deaf?
Elaborate.

4.3 What support services does your community offer the Deaf?

4.4 Describe some of the difficulties that you experience within the hearing community. (Eg. At the police station, hospital etc)

4.6 In what ways are you dependent on hearing people?

5. BEING DEAF

5.1 Describe your "sign name". How does this relate to your physical features?

5.2 Do you consider your Deafness to be a disability ? Elaborate.

5.3 What are your views about " cochlear implantation"?

5.4 To what extent are you dependent on your hearing aids?

5.5 Comment on whether television in South Africa is sensitive to the needs of the Deaf.

5.6 Describe some assistive devices (technology) that you consider necessary for the Deaf.

5.7 Do you consider hard-of-hearing people to be a part of the Deaf community? Elaborate.

5.8 What is the role of Sign Language in your life?

5.9 How do you feel about using Sign Language in public?

5.10 Are there racial barriers within the Deaf community? Elaborate.

5.11 As a Deaf person, with whom will you identify more closely (tick the appropriate block):

- a South African hearing person
- a foreign Deaf person

Give reasons for your choice in 5.12.

5.12 Are you proud to be a member of the Deaf community? Elaborate.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME 😊 AND PATIENCE 😊 .!

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

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CONTACT PERSON _____

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