SPEAKING HANDS AND SILENT VOICES

EXPLORING THE IDENTITIES OF d/DEAF TEACHERS THROUGH NARRATIVES IN MOTION

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2010

PROMOTER: PROFESSOR ANBANITHI MUTHUKRISHNA
DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work and has not been submitted for a degree at any other institution.

Other sources used have been acknowledged in the bibliography.

RESEARCHER: A RAM

PROMOTER: A MUTHUKRISHNA

This declaration was signed by me on ......................................
ABSTRACT

Recently, in the South African and the international context, teacher identity investigations have dominated the landscape of transformation in education, in an attempt to understand the relationship between teachers’ identities and their practice of teaching. However the dearth of research on deaf education and D/deaf teachers has created a gap in our comprehensive understanding and this study has aimed to address this void and advance existing theory.

This project focused individually and collectively on five Deaf teachers and how they experienced their deafness in widely differing circumstances at various stages in their lives from childhood to adulthood. The project explored firstly, how the participants constructed their identities as people living with deafness; how they understood and interpreted their lives in the context of deafness. The second component of the investigation addressed how they negotiated their deafness related identities in their practice as teachers. My purpose was to know through their personal stories how they have come to explain and know themselves as Deaf persons, how deafness gives character to their lives and how this image guides their practice as teachers.

The participants, who teach in schools for D/deaf learners in KwaZulu-Natal, were drawn from a larger cohort of Deaf teachers that qualified from a three-year pilot teacher education programme designed to train D/deaf teachers to teach D/deaf learners. At the time of the research, participants were in their eighth year of teaching. Through unstructured interviews, conducted via the medium of South African Sign Language, data was obtained in the form of narratives of participants’ lives which were captured in three seamless phases that included their childhood, schooling and their experiences as teachers. The signed data was transcribed into written English text. The written text which was collaborated by participants, was used for the analysis.

This study has examined their individual life stories and the construction of their identities as D/deaf persons, against the backdrop of proclaimed Deaf cultural identity, where difference rather than disability is highlighted. In the analysis I argue from a post-structural perspective that the participants’ claim to positioning in either Deaf or deaf or hearing discourses is not fixed and rigid. Instead positioning overlaps fluidly and continuously between the three discourses with
participants taking on character and conventions from Deaf, deaf and hearing discourses. They transition consciously or unconsciously between the systems and create multiple and contradictory identities. In addition I argue that cohesiveness and coherence in the conceptualization of a Deaf cultural community and Deaf identity is non-existent, when viewed from a post-structural lens.

The institutional resources that shape their teacher identity constructions include colleagues, learners, the parent community, the curriculum, and other micro-interactions. The institutional resources intersect with biographical resources of race, religion, gender, social class, childhood and later experiences, relationships, recollections, role-models and other signifiers. A multitude of intersections and permutations emerge, to create an inexhaustible inventory of teacher positions embedded in the general discourse of teaching and discoursed by teaching.

In both instances, that is, as D/deaf person and as D/deaf teacher, the school is the site that instantiated the D/deaf identity and the teacher identity and the cultural discourses that prevail in schools are the sites of resistance, acceptance and negotiation of identities. Here identity emerges in the space where subjectivities intersect with narratives of social, cultural and political discourses. This research which draws from the Deaf educators’ personal and professional experiences and is articulated through the medium of South African Sign Language, hopes to bring the educators’ histories together, and through these reflect on their lives, visualizing new possibilities for understanding deafness in an educational and cultural context.

**KEY WORDS: Deaf culture, identity, post-structuralism, discourse, narratives, subjectivities**
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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to…

All the D/deaf people who have entered and enriched my life.
   You are truly enigmatic and intriguing.
   Your differentness has made me different.

And to my Dad, whose memory will forever guide me.
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CHAPTER 1: EXPLORING DEAF TEACHERS’ IDENTITIES.

“...while the number of narratives increases, there exists a cavernous void in the budding cacophony of discourse as one group remains unheard”. (Melissa Jones, 2007)

1.1 Introduction: The Research Intention

A theoretical exploration of identity informs that the self is simultaneously constituted through multiple representations of biographical factors, such as race, gender and language that start to profile our lives at birth and immediately contribute to shaping the manner in which we continue to perform our lives. What follows is uninterrupted engagement and intersection between the known biographical factors and other extraneous structural factors that map-out the ongoing story or project of the self. For the participants in this study, one such factor that has been identified and which may be positioned either as biographical and/or structural is ‘deafness’. Since it is pivotal to this research ‘deafness’ is intensely contextualized, in the next chapter. Deafness is presented in literal form as the physiological condition of not being able to hear, followed by the metamorphic re-conceptualization as a cultural enterprise. For persons living with deafness, identities assume meaning that is contingent upon how the subject positions him/her self in the physiological and cultural debates on deafness.

Identity is a key concept in this study, and the theory of identity is detailed in a subsequent chapter. From a post-structural lens, it has been argued that human beings do not embrace fixed and essentialized identities. Identities continuously traverse the boundaries and realms of human subjectivity, agency and power dynamics (Walkerdine, 2008; Hall, 2000; Bourdieu, 1991). Moreover several researchers explain identity as being a socially constructed enterprise and that identity is constituted in discourse (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006; Tajfel and Turner, 1986). In addition there are scholars who contextualize identity as an elected performance and as an entity that can be produced in narratives (Butler, 1990; Norick, 2005). From this multi-dimensional, post-structural understanding, the absolute or truth-based explanation of the concept of identity is challenged. This research extrapolated from the context of the post-structural theorizations obtained here, to an exploration of the lives of the participants as people living with deafness and as teachers.
This project focuses individually and collectively on five Deaf teachers and how they have experienced their deafness in widely differing circumstances at various stages in their lives spanning infancy to adulthood. Amongst the multi-faceted and fluid identities that constitute their realities and sense of self the study has explored firstly, how the participants have constructed their identities specifically as people living with deafness; in other words how they understood and interpreted their lives in the context of deafness. The second component of the investigation was how they negotiated their deafness related identities in the execution of their present performance as teachers. My purpose was to know through their personal stories how they have come to explain and know themselves as Deaf persons, how deafness gives character to their lives and how this image guides their practice as teachers. Fundamentally this work explores the nexus between constructions of deaf identity and their performance as Deaf teachers. The proposal to draw from the teachers’ own stories and hear their voices served my intention to validate and give ‘voice’ to people who have variously been muffled, misinterpreted, misrepresented and marginalized.

In the investigation of how the Deaf teachers are experiencing their professional practice, this study probed the biographical, social, institutional, contextual and curricular factors that shaped their identities. By exploring the identities of the Deaf teachers and the intersection of their identities with practice, the study hoped to illuminate their personal theories and contribute to much needed research on Deaf teachers, and to simultaneously advance the knowledge base on teacher identity studies in general. Perhaps through reflection on their experiences as teachers, new foundations and possibilities for Deaf education could be visualized. Equally importantly the study further proposed to challenge conventional histories of Deaf people, and to incite new, critical thinking on the construction and performance of their identities within the framework of deafness.

My experience of working with the Deaf community is grounded in an education and training context where I served initially as a teacher and advanced to the current school managerial position. What was resounding in debates during this twenty-five year tenure was the extensive advocacy observed throughout the South African landscape for Deaf children to be taught by Deaf teachers. Proposals for transformational initiatives in education were increasing and at that
time Penn and Reagan (1991) in advocating a national policy for Deaf education in post-
apartheid South Africa, advised that the use of Deaf teachers should be encouraged and
supported as such persons can play a significant role not only in language teaching but also in
enculturation of Deaf learners into Deaf culture. The Deaf educator will assume the important
position of 'Deaf role model' and will be effective in offering guidance and counselling, and
leadership and life skills training to Deaf learners through the medium of signed language. The
authors also envisaged that the presence of Deaf teachers in the same school will enhance
hearing educators’ fluency in signing.

Other prominent scholars on deafness and related issues at that time were Lane, Hoffmeister and
Bahan (1996) who claimed that in more developed countries Deaf children were being taught by
Deaf teachers. They argued that Deaf persons would make excellent teachers of the Deaf since
they could transmit the native language and culture more effectively than hearing teachers. Their
argument was that the Deaf educator will enhance the signing environment with spontaneous
body language and facial expressiveness. In addition there would be effective use of the
grammar of sign language, demonstrated in the shape, size, speed and location of the hand
configurations, all of which are critical in conveying accuracy of meaning and achieving
understanding. These scholars were persuasive that Deaf teachers would contribute better to
creating the least restrictive environment and maximizing participation of each learner.

In the context of post-apartheid South Africa, the Report of the National Commission on Special
Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) and the National Committee on Education Support
Services (NCESS) (Department of Education, 1997), drew attention to the learning challenges of
the majority of Deaf learners owing to teachers being inadequately equipped with signing skills.
The Commission’s recommendation was that South African Sign Language (hereafter referred to
as SASL) be the official medium of instruction for Deaf learners. The rationale was that Deaf
learners, whose learning context is mediated by sign language, will have equal access to
education as hearing learners in a context mediated by spoken/written languages. This was the
political goal that drove an initiative in 1997 for the training of Deaf teachers to teach Deaf
learners. The five Deaf participants in my study were part of the first cohort that qualified as
teachers from the pilot training initiative, and are now practicing at various schools for Deaf
learners in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. What follows is the story of how they came to be teachers.

1.2 The Research Context

In the South African context, research on teacher identity has dominated the landscape of transformation in education, for its potential benefit in understanding the connectedness between teacher identity and the practice of teaching (Drake, Spillane and Hufferd-Ackles, 2001; Jansen, 2001; Mattson and Harley, 2001). However, extensive SABINET and other searches have revealed that among peer reviewed journals there is a dearth of studies on Deaf teachers, their identities and their concomitant practice as educators. Studies, on the social and cultural identity of the South African Deaf community and the role of sign language in establishing this identity, have been prolific (Heap, 2006; Aarons and Akach, 2002; Morgan, 2001; Ram, 2001). By examining their personal and professional life stories, this study aimed to explore firstly how the Deaf research participants have constructed their identities as Deaf persons and secondly how they negotiate their Deaf identities in their performance as teachers in the complex South African education context. Within the frame of reference of deafness, this research proposed to explore how the participants make meaning of themselves and their work as teachers.

This section includes a detailed account of the practical processes that concretized this unprecedented initiative in South Africa, from which the five Deaf participants in this research project qualified. The participants qualified at the end of 2000, and in 2010 the participants were in their tenth year of practice as teachers, no doubt adequately and efficiently positioned to narrate their stories of teaching. In 1997, Springfield College of Education, a teacher training college in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal responded to decades of lobbying and advocacy by the Deaf community and associated interest groups, to offer a diploma to train Deaf secondary school graduates to become Deaf teachers. The major role-players in the subsequent conferencing in respect of the initiative came to be the Deaf Federation of South Africa (DEAFSA) and V N Naik School for the Deaf (VNNSD). Across the table were Springfield College, the Department of National Education and the Council for Teacher Education Policy (COTEP). Detailed submissions and motivations were advanced, advocating the need for Deaf teachers to teach Deaf learners and thereby redress the illiteracy that prevailed in the Deaf community. Dr Elsabe
Smuts-Pauw, DEAFSA’s consultant at the time, on education matters and Mr RR Pillay, the then Principal of VN Naik School pursued this ideal relentlessly. The Vice-Rector, Mr M Mahipath tenaciously spearheaded the deliberations to fruition, on behalf of the Senate and COTEP.

Established in 1951, the College became reputed for its unprecedented transformative initiative when it launched the teacher education diploma for the Deaf in 1998 and was lauded for being the first tertiary institution in South Africa to offer under-graduate contact tertiary education for the Deaf. In endorsing the Deaf teacher education diploma at Springfield College, Dr AL le Roux, Director of Teacher Education in 1997, in a letter to the College’s Senate Chairperson, wrote of the predicament of Deaf education and the scourge of illiteracy amongst Deaf people: “This unfortunate situation will continue to exist, unless a courageous decision to break the vicious circle is made and Deaf students are allowed to enrol for teacher training, …”. For the South African Deaf community this was a breakthrough in Deaf education and a cutting edge decision for it heralded the training of the first South African cohort of Deaf teachers.

This was the endorsement that was to reshape the history of Deaf education in South Africa, and that the Deaf community eagerly awaited for several decades. A dream was realized for all those who tirelessly and unconditionally pursued the advancement of the South African Deaf community. Internationally, this was the fourth Teacher Education programme for the Deaf. Research records three other such initiatives, that is, in United States of America, Sweden and Kenya (Kellerman and Beaurain, 1997). This was indeed a proud achievement in South Africa that so recently entered the arena of transformation and redress. At the time of these negotiations, although Deaf education at school level had been established in South Africa since 1863, regrettably there were no tertiary facilities for the Deaf. Of the approximately 500 000 South African Deaf people at the time, fewer than 20 were graduates, the majority of whom studied at Gallaudett University, a tertiary facility exclusively for the Deaf in Washington, USA (Kellerman and Beaurain, 1997).

The new South African qualification, the ‘Junior Primary Education Diploma for the Deaf and Partial Hearing’ was to be studied over three years. Approval was sought, from COTEP for certain minimum admission requirements to be relaxed. The concessions were said to be
congruent with recommendations made in the Green Paper on Higher Education Transformation (1996) on the admission of students disadvantaged by special needs, to institutions for higher learning. The curriculum which was variously adapted to accommodate the needs of the Deaf students and inclusive of SASL and Deaf Culture Studies was approved by COTEP.

By this time information regarding the Diploma was circulated to all schools for the Deaf nationwide and Provincial Associations of the DEAFSA. Twenty two candidates presented themselves for the admission interview. Sixteen were selected for the Diploma in the first year. The incumbents included those who completed the National Senior Certificate and those in possession of other relevant National Certificates equivalent to a Grade 12 qualification. All conditions regulating admission were applicable to the Deaf students, including commitment to the College’s Code of Conduct. In addition there were the two students who left South Africa owing to the lack of tertiary facilities, to study at Gallaudet University. The admission of the Gallaudet students to the Diploma was approved on the basis of “Recognised Prior Learning”.

Students living out of the province of KwaZulu-Natal or not within convenient and affordable travelling proximity were afforded accommodation at the VN Naik School residence, guided by a negotiated arrangement. As compensation for accommodation and meals, there an arrangement between the School and the students, engaging the students rotationally in supervised weekend work obligations in the junior learners’ residences. This involved pastoral care, homework supervision and engaging learners in sporting and recreational activities. It was envisaged that they would develop proficiency in the co-curricular responsibilities as aspirant educators.

The Diploma commenced formally in March 1998. It was agreed that the first year of the coursework would be delivered by the staff of VN Naik School at the School campus, owing to their sign language proficiency. By this time the College staff had just embarked on sign language learning, arranged and financed by the College. The students attended certain practical learning programmes at the College campus including Computer Literacy, Mime and Drama and campus-based Teaching Practice. Here the College staff lectured with a teacher who supported the context with signing. Although VN Naik School staff conducted the major portion of the course content in the first year, the College staff was responsible for all curriculum matters including
course work design, compilation and printing of tutorial material, examinations, moderation and appointment of external examiners.

A collaborative relationship existed between the College staff and VN Naik School staff. For every learning programme there was a lecturer who would supervise and a teacher who would conduct the course work. The College provided furniture and other resources for the students while they were housed at the School campus. The College also undertook the responsibility to provide transport to Teaching Practice venues at schools for the Deaf, as these were not located within regular commuting proximity. To facilitate contact and liaison between the College and the School, Mrs V John (College Head of Department) and the writer (VN Naik School Deputy Principal) were appointed as respective co-ordinators to manage and convene the Diploma on a day to day basis.

Towards the end of 1998, the College staff was still not adequately equipped with sign language skills to lecture to the Deaf students who were soon to be relocated to the College campus for the 2nd year of study. Lecturers were fast becoming familiar with the lexicon of sign language but fluency was lacking and general communication in sign language tended to be unnatural and mechanical. Furthermore lecturers needed to build confidence in interacting with the Deaf students and improving receptive communication skills. In liaison with DEAFSA, two sign language interpreters were appointed to mediate the teaching and learning context.

Springfield College hosted the official launch of the Junior Primary Diploma for the Deaf and Partial Hearing at an elaborate ceremony on the 25th August 1998. The guest speaker was Dr Mike Jarvis, the then Superintendent-General of Education in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education. In addition there was an array of other eminent guests, including members of the College Senate and Council, officials of the National and Provincial Education Departments and the Directorate of Teacher Education, members of COTEP, personnel from DEAFSA, the Board of Management of VN Naik School, other school principals and proud parents and students. For the country at large, the commencement of the Diploma for the Deaf was hailed with acclamation by respective speakers and described as a ‘historic event', 'turning point', 'milestone'
and ‘epoch-making day’. But for the Deaf community and especially the aspirant teachers, this was simply a 'dream come true'.

1.3 Theoretical Approach of the Study

In theorising identity, I invoked the views and explanations of several theorists that are aligned with the post-structural understanding of identity. In so doing I renounced essentialist understandings that are rooted in the Enlightenment approaches of theorists such as Marx and Weber and which are based on the conception that a person is a coherent and unified individual characterized by a foundational or central inner core that remains fixed throughout the person's life (Hall, 1992a). Notions of an essentialized and stable self are rejected in deference to conceptualizations of identity presented by theorists such as Foucault(1988), Mead (1934), Laclau and Mouffe (1985) who saw individuals as being produced by their personal subjectivities and narratives and as being constructed through participation in wider social and cultural discourses (Hall, 1992a). Post-structuralism is the preferred perspective for its approach towards identity as having multiple, co-existing representations of fluid and transient meaning, causing all notions of coherence to be subverted. Various theories that support the multi-faceted nature of identities are outlined below.

Eminent discourse theorists such as Foucault (1984) and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) account for identities as the product of dominant discourses that are linked to social arrangements and practices. Focus is decentred from the subject to the actual discourses that are presumed to be the foundation for the construction of identity. In this explanation identities are inscribed in available discourses and the development of the individual devolves to acquiring a particular ideological version of the world. Their claim is that identities are situated in discourses and that identity is about identification with the particular subject position that one assumes in any discursive structure. In the context of this explanation discourses determine and direct the identity that the individual embraces.

Aligned to the discursive construction of identity is Taylor’s (1989) analysis of identity as a group project explained in his Social Identity Theory (SIT). This is effective for understanding how individuals build their sense of self in the attachments they form with others. He classified
identity as being a sense of self which he refers to as ontological identity, as well as a sense of belonging which is categorical or social identity. Ontological identity emerges from voluntary and enforced experiences, while categorical identity refers to the relationship of one’s self-identity to others belonging to the same ideological group or social category. The self is given definition by virtue of its membership of particular groups and allegiance to certain ideologies. Tajfel and Turner (1986) elaborate that identity is viewed as a collective and is founded on the socio-cognitive processes of individual identification within group membership and the way in which belonging is sustained.

In Taylor’s (1998) more recent explanations, identity hinges on the combined conceptualisation of social structures and individual reflexivity, so that each can be talked about in terms of the other. Its meaning is given by the psycho-emotional or subjective attachment that subjects offer to the respective membership categorizations and discourses. Woodward (1997) explains that subjectivity involves personal thoughts and emotions which are brought to the different cultural positions we hold and that constitute the sense of self. Although subjectivity involves innermost thoughts and emotions, we experience subjectivity in a social context where language and culture give meaning to the experience of ourselves and subsequently to the identities that we adopt.

There is an implication of resonance between Taylor’s (1998) explanation of social identity and Giddens’ (1991) rejection of the agency and structure dichotomy, in understanding identity. Giddens’ view is that the dichotomy constructs the individual as being either free of discursive constraints or as being totally determined by discourses and social structures. Instead he posits the approach where agency and structure are intertwined in a structuration process creating a sense of equilibrium in the conjoined influences of personal agency and exterior discourses and structures. When extrapolated to whether the self constructs identity or identity constructs the self, structuration theory’s response is that the self and identity are mutually implicated in their co-construction.

In addition to theories that identity is the product of structures, social groups and discourses, there is the conceptualization that identity is an intentional, personal performance. This has been proposed in Judith Butler’s (1990) performativity theory which presents identity as an actively
constituted, intentionally performed, discursive enterprise. Identities are seen not as merely represented in discourse, but rather as performed, enacted and embodied through various linguistic and non-linguistic opportunities. Butler engages with the view that subjects may enjoy performative agency authorized by the intent of the subject that choreographs the performance. The subject decides on the conventions by which that performance or presentation is undertaken and fashioned. Each new performance that the subject undertakes may differ in character and intensity and is also contingently contextualized by the interlocutor/s and the agenda in that setting, causing identities to be continuously transient and unstable, and perhaps even at variance with previous performances of that same identity.

In a related context identity is also a narrative construction that is theorized as a discursive and a performative enterprise. The case presented by May (2004) is in accord with performativity theorist Judith Butler. In this theorizing the emphasis is on identity as performed by language and through language rather than identity existing prior to language; and identity is marked as being fluid and versatile rather than as fixed and pre-determined. In addition identity is culturally and historically founded, constructed in interaction with interlocuting people and institutions, and contextualized by the content of the interaction. Identity is continuously in the making, contextual and contradictory. May argues that since the narrative involves the performance of identity, the narrator has the capacity to constantly reconstruct different versions of the self by telling different stories or by telling stories differently. The performer owns the context and negotiates the performance within the context, with each performance generating a potentially new and different identity.

And finally, I have also come to understand identity as a concept that is informed by language and power constructs. Bourdieu (1993) in advocating power that comes with being competent in particular privileged cultural practices refers to ‘cultural capital’ which may be acquired through social networking with family, community, educational institutions, religious organizations and other structures. Each social network engages a particular language system, through which it presents itself. Through language, individuals negotiate positions of power within the cultural field or social context. In relation to language, Bourdieu (1991) created the concept of ‘linguistic capital’, which refers to the strength or competence of the speaker to participate in linguistic
exchanges that are appropriate to the norms of particular communities. Cultural and linguistic capital, therefore inform the extent of power that can be exercised in cultural and linguistic circles and identities are constructed through levels of symbolic power and the hegemony that can result from such power.

These are the broad theories that inform how identities are constructed and how we make sense of our lives. From these theoretical explanations we now understand that identity messages are sent and received through discourses, social structures, group attachments, individual experiences and personal subjectivities, through goal-directed performative acts using linguistic and non-linguistic means, and through the resources of language and power. From these messages we negotiate meaning and engage in the act of labelling the different co-existing components that constitute the self. It is from here that my interest extended to exploring and understanding the lives of a group of deaf teachers. I wanted to know who they are as deaf teachers and what it is in themselves that explains their teacher role positions. How do they interpret their deafness and negotiate this explanation into making sense of teaching.

The literature on the identities of deaf people is replete with theorizations that explain deafness in one of two ways and these two approaches have remained consistent for almost three decades (Lane, 1984; Leigh, 2009). Irene Leigh (2009) who is a Deaf professor at Gallaudet University in Washington explains that in one approach deafness is understood as the physiological condition of not being able to hear as a result of auditory or neural malfunctioning. The focus is on correcting and/or compensating for the hearing deficit. This is achieved therapeutically through deliberate speech and auditory training. Leigh explains that the alternate approach explains deafness as a cultural condition with deaf people constituted into a communal structure. Members of this community of Deaf persons share a common signed language and subscribe to other cultural conventions. However, whichever the approach deafness is a consequential condition that will inevitably guide the act of identity construction. In the study, my task was to intersect deafness related identities with the broader theorizations outlined above and establish the nexus between deafness and being a teacher or performing teaching.
In doing so other complexities needed to be addressed. This included an exploration of the discursive framework to establish how the deaf participants have positioned themselves in the various available discourses to realize their identities both as deaf persons and as deaf teachers. Through my experience with the Deaf community I am aware that Deaf culture is an imposing structure that informs the identities and governs the lives of its members. However the autonomy of the individual Deaf member needed to be foregrounded for the way in which he/she accepted, rejected or mediated the norms of the culture. In addition a performance theory framework is useful for demonstrating the myriad ways different performances of identity may occur within each of the spaces that the Deaf person inhabits. These may include, for example, the social network spaces of parents, children, friends, peers, colleagues and associates. Given the varying discourses, interlocutors and agendas that may pervade these spaces, this research will explore the participants’ attempts to establish self-coherence and meaning in the negotiated performance.

It is commonly known that Deaf people are subjected to a multitude of discourses and to each of these discourses a certain subjectivity or set of emotions is associated. At different times they may have even been recruited by contradictory discourses. Subjectivities by nature are complex and this study will examine such contradictions as sites of tension and struggle. By probing their acceptance or rejection statuses associated with the various categorizations, this study will attempt to explain how the participants negotiate their identities and give meaning to their lives as D/deaf persons and as D/deaf teachers. Issues of power and the extent of power are critical in any social field, since it determines the level of interaction and the choice between inclusion and exclusion, where one group can decide through the language of interaction who to include or exclude. The practice of symbolic power in linguistic circles is determined by the use of a language of choice by a dominant group to oppress less dominant groups. The research also needed to address the ‘cultural capital’ and ‘linguistic capital’ that one engages as tools to enable negotiation of positions of power in the social hierarchy through use of language.

1.4 Locating the Study in Literature and in Current Debates

There are two critical questions that guided the purpose of this research. The first of these addresses how the participants construct their identities as deaf persons. This raised questions on how participants came to know and recognize their deafness. How do they understand and
explain deafness? What is it about deafness that contributes to the construction of their identities as deaf persons? How is deafness interpreted and contextualized in the wider discursive fields? This issue is located within the context of Taylor’s (1998) Social Identity Theory which contests that identity is self-determined. This view explains how individuals build their sense of self within a multitude of social and cultural influences and how these constructions can be reflected in the attachments they form with others.

In his theorizing of identity as a social construct, Taylor (1998) emphasizes the importance of ‘a defining community’ in forming identity. He argues that individuals define themselves as they dialogue with people in the community in which they co-exist. The self exists in and through networks of interlocution and is shaped by a shared language. Through language networks are established over the norms, values and beliefs of the community and identity forms through commitments to what one values and believes. Individuals come to know themselves in conversations with the community through the process of socio-cognitive investment. Taylor emphasizes that identities are founded on what has meaning or lacks meaning and what is significant or insignificant. These are the foundations upon which identities are constructed in the context of allegiance to the ideologies of a social group.

In my study reference will be made to the relationship between participants and the particular cultural or physiological discourse that the Deaf community espouses. The study will explore the extent to which participants embrace the conventions of Deaf culture voluntarily or whether the unrelenting culture of the Deaf community imposes an identity on the Deaf participants that subverts their agency and self determination. Here I also seek support from Giddens’ (1991) structuration theory that articulates the intertwined association between individual accountability and structural determination in identity construction. The question of how deaf people construct their identities is also located in Gramsci’s (1971) conceptualization of power. He asserted that power was expressed through persuasion and complicity. Those subjected to the power of a dominant cultural group and its aligned discourse, are persuaded of the essential truth, meaning and rationality of the discourse. In this way the individual acquires a particular version of the world based on ideology that serves some hegemonic purpose. Identity thus becomes a colonizing enterprise that moulds and directs individual actions. In this context the post-
structural lens is particularly effective as a tool which can bring together the theories outlined here to explain the complex project of how deaf people construct their identities.

The second critical issue that the research proposes to explore is how the deaf participants negotiate their identities as deaf teachers. How do participants perform their role as teachers in the context of their deafness identities? How do participants take up subject positions as deaf teachers? How do participants articulate their deaf teacher identities? The response to this critical issue is framed within Butler’s (1990) theory of performativity which articulates how identities are performed in the narratives we select and in which we elect to present ourselves. Her view is aligned to post-structuralist thinking that identity is an intentional performance, marking a shift away from the self as being determined by or existing prior to the structures of social practices and relationships. As a performed act identity has the qualities of being discursive, transient, contextually-driven yet significantly, the theory allows subjects to engage agency. Using this framework I will explore how the Deaf participants negotiated their diversely impacted lives in their undertaking of deliberate performances to give meaning to their lives as teachers.

To accomplish the response to the issue of how participants negotiate their identities as deaf teachers, I also rely significantly on theories that elucidate narrative performances of identity. Narrative theorists Krauss (2006) Taylor (2006) and Gergen and Gergen (2006) explain that articulation through linguistic and non-linguistic means, is the site through which our identities are produced. We position ourselves discursively in the stories we tell and identities are invoked by the speaker through positioning. Weedon’s (1997) view is that given that language constitutes various social realities, it emerges as a critical site for the contestation of meaning. Language is a system of signs that contributes symbolic and contextual meanings. This implies that meaning cannot claim to be constant but continuously changes with context. Language does not have pre-determined, fixed, intrinsic meanings. Language varies across the terrain of different discourses and has the potential for variability in the meaning it offers relative to the fields of discourse.

May (2004) presents the view that narratives can alter with each new telling, creating multi-voiced and multi-faced identities. This study will explore the many selves of one individual constantly reconstructing the self in the search for meaning. In addition it will explore how the
deaf teachers articulate their life stories and contextualize their experiences, and importantly how they position themselves in the narratives they tell. Through their narratives the study will explore the various discourses that are embedded in their experiences of teaching and those that they resist, and how teacher identities are formed in their acceptances and resistances.

In addition to the two proposed questions on how participants construct their identities as deaf people and how they negotiate their identities as deaf teachers, there are other issues that have emerged from the literature study that I wish to address in this research. The first of these is the distinct dichotomy that has been drawn between deaf identities constructed around the discourse of physical impairment and the alternative of deaf identities constructed on the cultural-linguistic discourse. There appears to be a distinct firewall between the two ‘categories’ of deaf people. The literature does not account for deaf people whose identities intersect between physical impairment and cultural-linguistic discourses or who wish to embrace each of the two distinct identities contextually and contingently. There lives and realities appear to be rigidly recruited by either of these discourses and all else has become a consequence of the choice.

The other issue is that of the ethnic, minority group that deaf people have constituted themselves into. Minority and ethnic communities are profiled by marginalization and discrimination and assume the character of an oppressed group. In the context of current debates internationally that embrace discourses of human rights and inclusive communities, marginalization and all forms of separateness are eschewed. This calls for the unwavering determination of the D/deaf to remain a non-inclusive language based community, to be addressed. In general the questions I wish to raise pertain to the conceptualization of the exclusive ‘Deaf-world’ phenomenon.

In general, I wish to challenge the concepts ‘Deaf-World’ and ‘Deaf Culture’ which are indeed attractive for many deaf people since it shuns implications of deficiency and impairment. This however is cause for concern since the ‘Deaf-world’ ideology has created unfair divisions among people who share the same physiological character and as a consequence ought to be united by virtue of a common disadvantage. But even the common disadvantage should not be the basis for desired separation from mainstream communities. The ‘Deaf-world’ discourse has prescribed certain admission criteria that selectively includes certain members and restricts admission of
other, lobbies for the rights of selected deaf groups to the exclusion of others, elevates the status of certain groups and looks with disdain upon others, and forges marginalization and separateness. I contend that new directions for a post-structuralist understanding deafness need to be identified with rigorous consideration for more seamless boundaries amongst the broader spectrum of deaf people.

1.5 Locating the Theory: A Way of Knowing Deaf People

Subsequent to reviewing and understanding various theoretical perspectives, I have elected to position my study within a post-structuralist framework for its decentred approach. The premises that have inspired the conceptualization of identity within the post-structuralist framework of understanding are outlined here. According to Bhabha (1987) identity emerges in the space where narratives of subjectivity connect with narratives of culture and political context. In other words, identity cannot emerge only from the personal context or personal experience of the being but instead emerges from the interface between personal, subjective discourses and external, objective constructs. Such a contextualized perspective refutes the notion of a unified, fixed, clearly defined identity and presents the self as being constantly in a state of flux and unrest rather than as static. The self is perpetually developing, suggesting identity and its formation to be a dynamically and continuously evolving process. Post-structuralists believe that ‘subjects’ are created through their cultural connotation and practices and interpret meaning in their identity groups, activities in society and intimate relations.

The identities of Deaf persons may also be understood in terms of their personal narratives coinciding with various socio-cultural discourses. According to Lane et al (1996) sign language is a powerful symbol of social identity and more importantly sign language engenders emotional and psychological bondedness amongst its custodians. These internal subjectivities connect with external discourses and for the typical Deaf person, these may include family dynamics, schooling, employment, marriage and children and narratives of acceptance and rejection positioning in each of these discourses. Complexities will arise as individuals may find themselves occupying multiple and perhaps contradictory positions simultaneously in the different discourses, creating layers of varied meaning in one individual, and the potential to explain these contradictions lies in post-structuralist theorising. The fixed and essential nature of
identities is rejected in favour of post-structuralist recognition of diverse, multi-faceted and emergent identities.

Post-structuralism has also advancing thinking on how identities are evolving from emotions, thoughts, judgements and beliefs. Recent work by post-structuralist theorists like Holstein and Gubrium (2000) acknowledge that emotions play a fundamental role in identity formation. Emotions connect thoughts, judgements and beliefs and give interpretation to experiences. They also affirm that identity is a dynamic process of inter-subjective discourses, experiences and emotions. All of these change over time, constantly reconstructing and redefining identity. Emotions are central to the construction of identity and the multiplicity of emotions likely to be experienced in any one event is multifaceted. Zembylas (2003: 222) writes that:

“People organize their worlds partly in terms of emotions experienced in events, and show enormous variability in their propensity to experience specific emotions. The same emotion may be associated with different events, and different emotions may be associated with the same event in different situations.”

As is detailed in the review of literature culturally Deaf persons conceptualize their existence in terms of difference, rather than disability, thereby aligning to post-structuralist thinking. The post-structuralist focus on difference has sought to eliminate the existing boundaries between able bodied and disabled people and has shifted attention to analyses within groups. Barnes and Mercer (2003) posit that post-structuralist analysis deconstructs the dominant and concealed representations and gives voice to those who have been marginalized or silenced. A post-structuralist analysis endeavours to deconstruct identities and reveal the ways in which the body is constructed and maintained as different. Current debates on the social construction of difference and identity formation are highlighted and difference has become the centre of attention of Deaf culture and politics (Leigh, 2009; Barnes, 2000; Corker 1998) Having been marginalized for so long, the Deaf have now sought to turn their unique experiences into positive identities. It is necessary from a post-structuralist perspective that even recent identities be deconstructed to understand newer meanings of existence.
A post-structural perspective on identity has particular value to this study since one of its more significant prescripts is the identification of the link between knowledge, discourse, power and notions of reality. Its value lies in challenging the status quo by deconstructing taken for granted perspectives and representations, and in the process producing new ways of seeing, thinking and acting (Turner, 2003). Taken-for-granted meanings can be oppressive and stigmatizing and so the intention of post-structuralists is to show the ways in which the voices and activities of the members of certain social groups, take primacy and control over the voices and activities of marginalized groups. The deconstruction must serve to destabilize the assumptions that maintain social inequality. Against this theoretical backdrop of post-structuralism, the research will investigate the relationship between prevailing discourses and the meanings developed through the Deaf teachers’ own life experiences.

In summary, in theorizing identity formation through a post-structural lens, the dimensions of culture and discourse gain ascendance. Attention is drawn to the importance of studying identity in cultural and political contexts where the formation of identities is constantly at stake. In addition, the post-structural perspective embraces plurality in meaning and an integrated notion of identity rather than a dichotomy between individual functioning and socio-cultural processes, providing an approach that refutes the singularity of either 'component' of identity formation. And finally, the use of a post-structuralist analysis of identity formation creates spaces for Deaf individuals to reclaim agency in their lives and to construct identities by engaging formidable, yet systematic strategies of power, resilience and resistance.

The post-structural lens as a way of knowing the Deaf teacher participants is illustrated in greater depth in a subsequent chapter where various identity theories are explored individually and come together broadly to embrace identity in an eclectic form and approach. Using a post-structural lens I will argue that the identities of the participants cannot be constructed rigidly on the basis of either physiological impairment or cultural-linguistic orientation. From a post-structuralist lens identities are not formed through distinguishable and definable criteria. Instead identities may be constructed using seamless, fluid and overlapping criteria that might even exist somewhere between physiological and cultural discourses. In addition I will explore through the post-structural perspective the discourses that are embedded in the Deaf teachers’ experience of
teaching and how their identities are negotiated in these discourses. I will argue that their identities as teachers are negotiated, narrative constructs.

The next section will detail my relationship with deaf people, my interest in their realities and how I came to research their lives.

1.6 The Researcher as the Insider

Cross-cultural research has become increasingly widespread in researching education and other disciplines. Milner (2007) has stressed that consciousness, cultural positionality and awareness of both the researcher and the participants is critical. The premise of his argument is that dangers seen, unseen and unforeseen can emerge for researchers when they do not pay careful attention to their own and others’ cultural systems of coming to know and knowing the world. Concomitantly he rejects practices in which researchers detach themselves from their own cultural positionality and consciousness in researching across cultures. Vulnerabilities can result when and if researchers do not engage in processes that can circumvent misinterpretations and misrepresentations of individuals, communities and institutions. Such considerations are imperative to obviating affronts for researchers, research participants and consumers of research. Given this pretext I would like to locate my self-awareness by describing my relationship with the Deaf community and my involvement in their culture.

Edwards (1999), in a conference presentation entitled Inside the Whale, described a person who has been involved with the participant community for at least five years, as a “deep insider”. In this paper he outlined the benefits and contentions of “deep insider” qualitative research. Perhaps Edwards would have described me as an ‘extreme insider’ since my work and interaction with the deaf community extended over a period of more than two and half decades. Initially I was appointed as a teacher at a school for the deaf that promoted aural-oral communication as the medium of teaching and learning. Here the use of sign language and even informal gestural language was restricted and on occasion, even prohibited. Eleven years later I was promoted to a school that served a different community of deaf persons known to be the opposition. The latter group interpret their existence as a minority cultural group by virtue of the use of a demographically contextualized native language, that is, South African Sign Language (SASL).
The ideology and rationale underlying the respective preference for and proscription of oral and signed communication is detailed in a subsequent chapter in this text. Currently I serve the latter school in a senior management capacity and on a daily basis interact with deaf learners and their deaf and hearing parents, deaf educators, deaf support personnel, the adult deaf community, employers of deaf persons, deaf tertiary students, sign language interpreters and non-governmental organizations and welfare workers serving deaf persons. Collectively these constitute the different components and the overall face of the deaf community.

In my daily interface with the deaf community I have learnt to ‘speak’ their language of signs and through this I am able to teach, manage, administer, counsel, advise, empathize and socialize with this enigmatic yet fathomable community. Advantageously positioned as such, I have been privileged with an all-embracing exposure to the intense pride in their being and intimate insight into their needs, aspirations, accomplishments, arrogances, conspiracies and encumbrances, of which I remain in awe. I have fought assiduously for them and with them, defended their cause, upheld their rights, praised their fortitude and uniqueness, and advocated their agenda. In addition I was their accomplice and confidante. However in a paradoxical way my status as insider resonates significantly and concomitantly with being an outsider. This emerges since I remain a ‘culturally hearing’ person for whom South African Sign Language is not a first language, and in addition being a school manager and presently in this context being positioned as a researcher. The ambiguous insider/outsider duality of my position needed to be up-fronted as it is this complexity that I ‘struggled’ with throughout the study and which materialized as central to the subsequent analysis and interpretation of the project.

This is the relationship that I continue to share with the Deaf community and which I wished to foreground. Using a post-structuralist lens, McLaren (2009) argues that researcher self-awareness and subjectivity that emerges through reflexive engagement and working through their own discursively founded meanings, enables a sound depth of understanding of other individuals in society. Researcher self-awareness, which acknowledges the lived experiences and constructions of meaning, is more likely to better manage personal biases in the research process. McLaren argues that theories of people and their life experiences are unstable concepts from which there can be no one truth. Therefore research about people amounts to the researcher’s
personal intervention in the process, personal observation of the prevailing discourses and the world-views embedded in the discourses.

What emerges as significant are the histories and experiences from where researcher interpretations are formed and which will inform the analysis. McLaren (2009) recommends that it is a worthwhile objective for researchers to develop reflective understandings of their discursive realities and their power in order to lessen their power over the research participants and process. She calls for self-reflection of the “socially constructed inner self from which they also gaze out before and during any attempts to understand the ‘realities’ of others” (p. 3). Therefore in the context of this and other research, self-reflection of histories and background activities will construct how we understand ourselves and subsequently how we understand our research participants.

The pen-picture of the alliance that I have sketched between myself and the Deaf community illustrates the bond that I have with them. Maintaining the balance between the demands of the bureaucracy that employs me and the subjectivities of the community that I serve has proved challenging. Given the closeness of the relationship that I share with the deaf community, whether I could be dispassionate as a researcher is, and will continue to be, contentious. I continually had to question whether the participants were strangers in a clinical exploration or whether they were familiar people with whom I have a professional association and in whom I have a compassionate interest. I recognized my positionality in the research, and know that this would have to be closely monitored and kept in check.

While in the research setting I was constantly caught in the act of juggling positions between school manager, mentor, advisor, researcher and interviewer. The close relationships that I developed with participants added to the complexity. A sense of obligation and reciprocity for the support from participants triggered inevitable dilemmas while previous professional and personal associations in the Deaf community provided both advantages and limitations. The best way to proceed would be to identify my subjectivities and reflect on how prior knowledge, interests and personal preferences may influence the way I would interpret the data. However on the positive side my long-term relationship with the participants and virtual membership in the
deaf community, through proficiency in signing, facilitated the empirical exploration and shunned any anxieties that I would be considered a stranger, intruding in their lives.

Sharing a history with this community may have contributed to participants willingly agreeing to participate in the study, and to the rapport and trust established. More importantly as an insider-turned-researcher, I brought to the project fluency in SASL and accumulated awareness and understanding of Deaf culture and the history of struggle of the deaf community. My openness to ongoing learning about this community was evident. The participants were familiar to me as students in training to become teachers, as has been explained in the previous section. I availed myself as they needed when they were students, to resolve logistical and personal challenges. As their mentor, I supported them through their fragility and apprehensions about the intimidating unknown space called ‘college’ and through my perceptiveness, even recognized anxieties that they did not have the courage to ‘talk’ about.

However the impact of close proximity relationships between researcher and participants cannot be diminished. As Edwards (1999) cautions, the strength of insider research is also potentially its greatest weakness. One limitation of my previous history within the local deaf community was ensuring that the teachers agreed to participate voluntarily and did not feel pressured on account of the prior relationship with me. Familiarity with the participants and the data might have caused me to overlook certain nuances or significances in their narratives as these could have presented to me as being mundane or already known. Familiarity could also lead to predictability of responses. Herein was the possibility that I may have aborted certain narratives and foregrounded others. As an insider I was privileged and I needed to create a space between prior knowledge and the narrative to ensure that the privileged information did not distort the data.

I pondered at length over the alternate position of researcher that I was now occupying and how this would be perceived by the participants. According to Milner (2007) researchers’ multiple and varied roles and identities are intricately and inextricably embedded in the process and outcomes of education research. My position as a school manager was known to participants as they were now part of a larger collegiate since they were teaching in other schools for deaf learners. My known position as school manager was now cloaked by the transitory researcher
position. There was the risk that the more ‘superior’ status of my managerial position could subvert the researcher title thereby restraining their truthfulness and leading participants towards austere and sanitized narratives. On the other hand I needed to question whether as researcher, I created an environment conducive for participants to spontaneously express their stories and subjectivities on respective colleagues, school practices and the overall experience of being Deaf teachers? In other words I questioned whether participants’ narratives were restrained by my known background position as a manager in an associate school.

As a familiar insider I wrestled protractedly over the issue of disclosure in the final reporting of this research. How much was too much? The deaf teachers were a defined and distinctive rarity in the deaf community and they had become known for their accomplishment in qualifying as teachers. In the stories that I would reconstruct there were bound to be markers through which a discerning reader would identify the participant. Thus my pledge to confidentiality and protection of anonymity would be a challenge to adhere to. Deaf teachers in South Africa and more especially in the province of KwaZulu-Natal were few and their identities would be difficult to obscure. In addition, divulging that the location of the study in the province of KwaZulu-Natal would further heighten possibilities for the exposure of participant identities. These were participants with whom I had developed relationships that extended beyond workplace affiliations and which were intended to be enduring. Therefore the risk of betrayal of identities concerned me. I was constantly conscious of their vulnerabilities to becoming known.

I reflected on whether the critical commentary in the analysis would constitute offence or betrayal. There were implications, arising from disclosure in the narratives, for participants, their colleagues and respective schools. In good faith, the participants collaborated with my agenda and offered themselves for exploration. What if the identity, which I had constructed in my re-storying, was an affront to the participant? Should the truth be camouflaged in deference to my relationship with the participants or should the outcome of the investigation remain as the participants’ real stories that they elected to ‘tell’? I had the onerous responsibility to manage ethical obligations to participants and simultaneously deal with the risk of undermining my independence as a researcher.
The most sensible solution according to Patton (2002) is to avoid debates about subjectivity and objectivity since this would not serve any substantial purpose. His view, like McLaren’s, is that there should be a reflexive approach to acknowledge the influence of the researcher’s power, discursive constructions and subjective positions in the research so as account for unintentional mismanagement of data. Patton is also of the view that researchers who acknowledge their subjectivities based on personal experience and engagement, are more likely establish findings that have greater depth of meaning and authenticity.

In summary there were certain primary contentions that arose from my ‘extreme insider’ positionality and that needed to be foregrounded. Given my passionate interest in the deaf community, my ability to undertake this research dispassionately was questionable. How possible or impossible was it for me to engage in this undertaking with a neutral and purely analytical lens? The other issue was that the deaf community and associates are generally known to one another and this familiarity extends across the provinces in South Africa and is particularly stronger within a province. The participants know that I serve on the management of one of the ‘Deaf Schools’ and my concern was that the managerial position would inevitably permeate the research process and influence the responses of participants.

Over-familiarity with participants was also cause for concern. There was the possibility that my previously known information about participants, which remained undisclosed in the narratives, would mix with the disclosed narratives. In other words information which I knew, but which they did not tell, would backdrop the narratives and be subtly included for analysis and interpretation. My final concern was how to creatively muddle the identity markers so that participants and their respective schools would not become known. No doubt their schools were sites of struggle that informed their identity construction as teachers and reference to these sites could not be obviated. While juggling the complexities and intricacies of my positionality my firm pledge remained that I should re-tell faithfully, but through analytical lenses.
1.7 Overview of the Thesis

CHAPTER 1 provided the introduction to the study in which I outlined the overall intention to explore how a group of deaf persons constructs their identities and how they negotiate their identities in their performance as teachers. This is followed by a description of the research context in which I describe the establishment of the teacher training program that was designed for deaf students to become deaf teachers and my role in the implementation of the program. The purpose of this section was to contextualize the participants who qualified as teachers from this group of trainees. Next I focused on the broad theories that inform how identities are constructed and how we make sense of our lives. I also focus on the literature that addresses the specific identities of deaf people and the discourses that guide their identity construction, within the broader realm of identity theorization in general. I then explained the post-structural lens from which I wished to interpret the theory on identity construction. Such a perspective refutes the notion of a unified, fixed, clearly defined identity and presents the self as being constantly in a state of flux and unrest rather than as static. Following this I foregrounded my positionality and raised various concerns emanating from this positionality that could present as possible limitations in this research project.

CHAPTER 2 details the lives and existences of deaf people as interpreted and understood against the framework of three dominant discourses: medical, social rights and cultural/linguistic discourses. This chapter will elaborate these discourses and the implications that are derived for deaf people in terms of their behaviour, communication, education, socializing, values, norms, affiliations and artistic and cultural preferences. These discourses inform the way deaf people live, establish their positions, demarcate their spaces and in so doing translate to the ways in which they construct meaning about their lives and experience their identities. The two issues which I deem to be a priority in any study of literature on deaf persons and deaf culture will be reviewed in depth. One is the choice of communication, that is, sign language or oralism or bilingualism, and the other is whether deaf people consider deafness to be a disability or a difference to be embraced. Finally I will share the thoughts of some scholars as they contest the elitist and access restricted definitions that have been ascribed to deaf culture. Based on the literature on these discourses, I will highlight how deaf people construct their identities in
alignment with the respective discourses and the consequences this has for the way in which they assign meaning to their lives. I also wish to foreground certain contradictions arising from identities that are not accounted for in the dichotomously-positioned discourses and highlight the plight of deaf persons who wish to live their lives in the space between the two distinct descriptions. I will argue for this group to be legitimized and acknowledged.

**CHAPTER 3** is a synopsis of how I track identity from essentialism to post-structuralism, commencing with accounts of identity as an agentive, internal project of the self and its connectedness to personal subjectivities. This account is then contested against structural influences that inform identity construction. Social and collective identity theories are explored as a process based on reflexive understanding and emotional attachment to a group through belonging. Identity is also explained as a discursive doing and the self is a fusion of the multi-layered and multi-faceted identities that emerge from the diverse subject positions that people occupy within myriad contexts. Allied to this view is the theory that identity is a performed and actioned concept, which is constituted in and through discourses and determined by the context, the interactors, and the agenda at that moment. Language is a critical site for the contestation of social meaning and we engage language to enter and exit discourses. The power that is negotiated through language is highlighted as a factor in identity construction. By nature power is dynamic and changes continuously with context. And finally the search for knowing devolves upon narrative constructions of identity and the phenomenon that identities are submitted in the stories and biographies that we tell and the selves that unfold in the telling.

**CHAPTER 4** is a discussion of empirical and theoretical studies of teacher identity that have dominated the field of educational transformation, as researchers and educationists have sought to link teacher identities with the practice of teaching, policy implementation, teacher image, and curriculum and educational reform. These issues are theorized in concepts that inform identity constructions from a post-structural perspective and which have been discussed in the previous chapter. Teacher identities have emerged as intricate conceptualizations, infused with contestation and complexity. Several debates pervade the lives of teachers and the landscape of teaching and when affiliated with other structural and biological variables can produce a multitude of identity possibilities. The debates that I have selected to address D/deaf teacher
identities include the contradicting image generated by transformational policies; the issue of concomitance between the agency of the teacher and curriculum and policy implementation; and thirdly the conceptualization that teacher identities can be produced in teacher narratives. This will be explored as a contextual framework for analyzing how Deaf participants experience and execute their practice, and construct or negotiate their multiple identities as teachers.

CHAPTER 5 outlines the operationalization of the qualitative research process. The narrative approach that was used to generate the data and the post-structural lens, through which the data will be interpreted, will be documented. The actual research process detailing recruitment of participants and preparation of participants for the three-part interview schedule, are detailed. A detailed description of the interviews, the consent documents and other logistical and technical information are included. In addition this section will record my experiences of researching through the medium of signed language, the particularities associated with this form of articulation, and the complexities of trans-coding a manual language into written text, given its original physical and spatial configuration. My personal dilemmas regarding accuracy and possible adulteration of meaning through attempts to capture a spatial-physical language in written text are raised. I explain also my efforts to ensure that meanings intended by the participants were maintained, through various collaborative initiatives with participants. There is a discussion on issues pertaining to integrity and trustworthiness. I also discuss how analysis and interpretation was undertaken within and across the narratives told by the Deaf participants. And finally, my personal reflections on the data production are presented.

CHAPTER 6 contains five biographical narratives re-told by me and in the narratives I have included direct responses of participants. I have inserted my voice which reflects insights on Deaf culture gained through personal experience, reading of literature on identity constructions, and the use of the post-structural theoretical lens. To understand their identities as Deaf teachers, I have located their teacher lives within a whole-life perspective as professional practice can assume new meaning when contextualized in the complete life experience of practitioners. In co-constructing the already narrated lives of the participants I am aware of the power that favours me in these conversations and I re-tell their stories knowing that my re-telling is not contestable. The stories are co-constructed as my interpretive, sense-making experience of their lives and realities. The
stories are framed within empirical studies and established theories that have been detailed in the review chapters. Here I have re-scripted the lives that they scripted in the narrative.

CHAPTER 7 responds to the two key questions and presents the analysis across the lives of the five participants. In response to how participants construct their identities as D/deaf persons I contested their claim that deafness is a cultural construction, and from a post-structuralist perspective I argued that participants cannot claim to have coherent culturally Deaf identities since they continuously reposition themselves between Deaf, deaf and hearing identities and as a result, have created a hybridity of identities. In the context of this framework each participant then emerges as a multi-voiced self with multiple, overlapping and transient expressions of deafness identities within the single self. In response to how participants negotiate their identities as D/deaf persons I argue that the teacher identities that the participants presented were instantiated by the narrative opportunity presented by this research and that given another narrative opportunity their identities as teachers could be differently presented. The teacher identities that emerged were performed by and through language. During the narratives the participants enjoyed the power and the entitlement to decide which narratives to embrace and which to resist. I explored the personal and external structures that the participants engaged as resources to tell the story of their teacher lives and the events in their lives that have become biographically relevant to identity construction. And finally I argued for the significance of the position of power or powerlessness that the participant assumes in the narrative since the literature claims that identities are constructed in the space between the speaker and the audience.

CHAPTER 8 concludes the research. The research findings obtained in response to the key questions are summarized. My new and broadened insight into identity construction is explained as a metaphor in what I refer to as “a circle of selves”. The significance of the research is explained for its original contribution based on D/deaf people from KwaZulu-Natal. I offer suggestions for further research on the significance of teacher identities and its influence on learner identity construction and the limitation of using a single theoretical framework for explaining a concept as complex as identity. And finally I draw attention to the personal struggles of the D/deaf participants that they experience in their practice as teachers and offer some suggestions on how these challenges can be overcome.
CHAPTER 2: CONSTRUCTING DEAFNESS AND DEAF IDENTITIES

2.1 Introduction

Through my experiences of working with D/deaf persons combined with extensive reading on deafness I have come to identify a certain fundamental tensions that confront this community. These include deaf children being raised mostly within hearing families, parental choices about education through the medium of signed or spoken language, attending residential or non-residential schools, followed by decisions to embrace a deaf cultural identity or the identity of the majority hearing community, and the conceptualization of deafness as disability or deafness as difference. The attendant complexities and consequences of each of these choices are compounded when hearing adults interpret the lives of deaf persons in these varying contexts.

To support my understanding, I have contextualized the deaf person in the metaphorical context of a cross section of the trunk of a tree, with the innermost circle representing the child born with the physiological condition of deafness. As the child progresses through life to various stages of meaning making, he/she lives concentrically in different situated contexts: hearing / deaf family, extended family, class group, school, school residence, tertiary institution, place of employment, deaf social network, etc. Complexities are extended as each of these contexts intersects continuously with biographical markers of age, gender, ethnicity, religion and other dynamics.

There are further convolutions as all aspects of the lives and existence of deaf people are interpreted and understood against the framework of three dominant discourses: the medical, social rights and cultural/linguistic discourses. This chapter will elaborate the discourses and the meaning that each ascribes the behaviour, communication, education, socializing, values, norms, affiliations and artistic and cultural preferences of deaf people. These discourses inform the way deaf people live, establish their positions, demarcate their spaces and translates to the ways in which they construct meaning and experience their identities. The two issues which I deem to be a priority in any literature survey of cultural definitions of deafness will be reviewed in depth. One is the choice of communication, that is, sign language or oralism or bilingualism, and the other is whether deaf people consider deafness to be a disability or a difference to be celebrated.
Finally I will share the thoughts of some scholars as they contest the elitist and access restricted definitions that deaf people have ascribed to deaf culture. Based on literature on these discourses, I will highlight how deaf people construct their identities in alignment with the respective discourses and the consequences this has for the way in which they conduct their lives and assign meaning to their lives. I also wish to foreground certain contradictions arising from identities that are not accounted for in the dichotomously-positioned discourses and highlight the dilemma of deaf persons who wish to live their lives in the space between the two distinct descriptions. I will argue for this group to be legitimized and acknowledged.

2.2 Disability Discourses and the Implications for Deafness

Throughout history there have been two dominant discourses that have informed the meanings, interpretations and processes at play in definitions and conceptualisations of deafness, and the identities constructed through each of these discourses. Skelton and Valentine (2003), claim that the two discourses which image the medical and social models of disability, describe the construction or framework within which society understands and interprets human behaviour. Later in the 1970s a new discourse emerged, the cultural/linguistic discourse, mapping the lives of culturally Deaf persons and offering a further dimension to their identity. The respective paradigmatic explanations are based on Foucault’s (1984) conceptualization of ‘discursive production of the self’. He decentred identity from the subject to identification with discourses. Discourses are founded on ideologies and world-views and the construction of the individual devolves upon the acquisition of a particular ideology or worldview. The implication of Foucault’s conceptualization is that identities are inscribed in available discourses. These discourses and their respective contesting implications for Deaf identity will be detailed here.

2.2.1 The medical discourse

According to Ladd (2003), proponents of the medical discourse hold the belief that the disabled are not full human beings owing to the absence of, damage to or malfunctioning of a physical faculty and that people are considered to be disabled if they have physiological or cognitive impairment. Reference labels that are associated with this model include ‘disabled’, ‘impaired’ and ‘handicapped’ (Lane, 1993b). The disabled person is held culpable for not being able to achieve the level of accessibility and equality that favours their non-disabled counterparts. The
medical response is to seek a cure or treatment and the intention is to rehabilitate disabled persons into wider society.

Skelton and Valentine (2003) emphasize that with regard to deafness, the medical model focuses on the physiological condition, more specifically, the audiological status of not being able to hear. Essentially it accepts the behaviour and values of hearing people as being the ‘standard’ or the ‘norm’, and then focuses on how deaf people deviate from this norm. Deafness is tested and measured against normal hearing levels and consequently this model labels the deaf person as having impairment, compared to hearing peers. Aligned to the medical discourse is the term ‘deaf’ using the lower case ‘d’, referring to those for whom deafness is an audiological condition.

The term ‘deaf’, according to Lane (1993), is used with adjectival function and describes persons who have lost some or all of their hearing early or later in life. Different degrees of hearing loss can be measured, and individuals may experience the same degree of hearing loss differently. Rather than signed language this constituency of deaf people communicates through the medium of speech. They would most likely have attended schools for hearing learners or schools for deaf learners that promoted the use oral communication through auditory training and lip-reading. Ladd (2003) posits that internationally the majority of deaf persons in this category prefer to retain their membership and allegiance to the majority hearing society in which they were socialised and do not generally consider themselves to be part of the signing deaf community. Although they may spontaneously associate with deaf people their political leanings and adherence is to the conventions of the mainstream hearing society.

Globally documented statistics reveal that 90% of deaf children are born to hearing parents (Lane, 1993; Bat-Chava, 2000; Aarons and Akach, 2002), who previously were not exposed to the condition of deafness. Their views and response to deafness, according to these writers, are shaped by the various medical, therapeutic and educational professionals with whom they interact to advance the quality of life of their deaf child. In accordance with the professional services, parents align themselves with the view that deafness is a disability that needs to be treated or remediated. The process of Deaf enculturation for this 90% is fragile as they are continuously subjected to the ideological intervention of such professionals and their commercial cause. Ladd (2003) who describes these professionals as external power blocs argues that:
“Playing on those parents’ fears of ‘abnormality’ and their desire to achieve ‘normality’, they then present their medical model which claims that normality can only be achieved by denying the realities of deafness and keeping their children away from Deaf communities lest they be ‘contaminated’ by them” (p. 35).

Scholars in the field have contended that it is inevitable that the view that hearing parents imbibe from these professionals will be transmitted to their young deaf children who are unaware at this stage of alternative choices (Moores, 2001; Bat-Chava, 2000; Skelton and Valentine, 2003. These scholars argue that view that is conveyed by their parents will ignite the identity construction process for the deaf child in the formative years. Moores (2001) argues that the ‘enforced’ medically biased identity that most children experience in the formative years is often challenged later in life. There is the potential to assume the status of being culturally Deaf when, and if, these children attend schools for deaf learners that promote sign language and live in residential facilities that embrace the ideology of deafness as a culture. Alternately a deaf child who has been introduced to sign language as a mode of communication from infancy may defy this lifestyle and identity and privilege the learning of speech and lip-reading in later years. This however, according to Moores is generally the exception as the majority of deaf children fall into the former category and migrate from speaking to signing.

Scholars have also asserted that the role of medicine in preventing or curing diseases, addressing and treating symptoms, and improving functionality is the framework against which deafness is considered to be a deficit. Owing to deafness being a physiological or medical impediment, various attempts to treat, cure or rehabilitate the deaf person are implemented. Landsman (2002) argues that the emphasis is on remediation and rehabilitation and when such curative approaches fail for the deaf person then the focus shifts to hearing aids, cochlear implant procedures and other enabling sound and voice amplification and listening technologies. This is accompanied by intensive auditory and speech training to enhance spoken language, indicative of a search for normalcy and conditions that would enable deaf persons to function like hearing people.

The medical model has been denounced since it focuses on deficit and personal limitations for which the afflicted person is culpable and this outcry has come mostly from advocates of the ‘deafness as a culture’ campaign (Barnes, 2000; Landsman, 2002). Barnes (2000) argues that the
impairment implied in the medical model is exacerbated by exclusionary social attitudes and practices and the creation of an environment in which not being able to hear takes on the status of a disability. Individual loss and inability are emphasized as it contributes to a model based on dependency on the wider society, leaving the disabled at the receiving end of benevolence and charity. In fact Barnes claims that a significant proportion of traditional voluntary agencies support this model of dependency and that an infrastructure of complex, dependency creating services has lead to disabled people being placed in positions of passivity and disempowerment.

Bichenbach (1993) is also critical of the medical perspective in that in attributing infirmity it confirms the existence of a more desirable, more acceptable body that is alternative to the disabled body. There is the assumption that a normal human body exists and that a state of abnormality is attributed to physiological malfunctioning. Bichenbach asserts that this assumption denies or ignores that normality has a subjective and interpretative understanding. Lane (1993) argues that the act of constructing hearing loss as a physical problem embedded in the body is actually failure to recognize that normalcy has situational and cultural relativity. This interpretation, to be explored as the chapter progresses, is challenged by alternate discourses that construct deafness as difference to be embraced.

2.2.2 The social rights discourse

The social rights model was championed to challenge the medical model (Landsman, 2002). This model subverts deficit patterns of thinking and re-asserts the fundamental rights of disabled persons to equality and full citizenship by virtue of their status as human beings. This view is that societies should be constructed and managed with all citizens in mind and that ensuring equality, equity and access should be the collective responsibility of all citizens. Any other process is viewed as social and political discrimination ((Barnes, 2000; Landsman, 2002) Thus, these proponents of disability rights disrupted the traditional medical constructions of disability by shifting emphasis off the body to the agency of people with disabilities and the ways in which they confront conditions that are socially disabling.

The social model does not deny that disabled people have bodily impairment but challenges the medical model’s focus on the impairment, remediation and curative approaches. The social model instead centres not on the individual disabled person, but on society and the environment.
Lane (1993) explains that the social model addresses issues of resources and accessibility that could address the social and physical barriers in the environment and society. He explains that the society has been designed by and for non-disabled persons and from this view people are disabled not by their physical impairments but by their socio-political environments.

With respect to deafness Corker (1998) confirms that the social model of deafness recognises that it is the hearing world that excludes, oppresses and discriminates against deaf people. The hearing worlds’ lack of awareness of deafness and inability to communicate with deaf people places the latter in a disabling and disadvantaged environment. For such groups the problem lies not with the difference in hearing status but rather with barriers created by expectations of hearing people and the parameters that they have set for functionality. Ladd (2003) explains that deaf people use sign language and have limited or no access to the spoken language of the hearing community. This can impose serious restraints on social and professional interaction with hearing people, restrict access to technology and lead to further disablement by limiting educational and employment opportunities. Deaf persons are forced to fit into and function in the hearing world with hearing people who make educational and social decisions for deaf people.

The social model embraces a collective consciousness consisting of shared language, experiences and traditions as deaf people. This collective consciousness has mobilised deaf people, generating a linguistic-cultural perspective of their identity (Ladd, 2003). The link between the linguistic-cultural perspective and Deaf Culture is shown in the explanation given by Cote and Levine (2002) that culture consists of the known values of a group that represent specific beliefs and practices. These beliefs and practices guide individual development and social institutions, and cultural identity is constructed through contact with these social institutions as they reinforce a sense of belonging and meaning. The next section will demonstrate the influence of a cultural conceptualization through which deaf individuals ascribe meaning to their lives.

2.2.3 The cultural-linguistic discourse and Deaf culture

Over the past 40 or so years, the status of American deaf people has altered dramatically, as deaf activists and scholars have reconfigured the idea of deafness, using the civil and social rights movements as the basis for the struggle to form a deaf identity. The majority of Deaf people
consider themselves to be not just hearing-impaired or audiologically deaf but a linguistic minority that has elected to set themselves apart from the dominant hearing culture. According to Davis (2007), this discourse formed the foundation for the construction of deafness as a cultural phenomenon rather than a physical impairment, pointing to a new and alternative understanding of identity in a post-modern world.

The Deaf cultural community is defined prominently by the way in which their condition is referred to with the capital ‘D’. The differences in the use of the dual way of writing ‘Deaf’ and ‘deaf’ within academic and Deaf/deaf discourses is by no means subtle. Bat Chava (2000) and Ladd (2003) who wrote respectively on behalf American and British societies advise that internationally there is a broad acceptance among deaf people that ‘Deaf’ is linked to a unique social identity, allegiance to a specific culture and social group, and to the use of sign language. The writing of ‘deaf’, as mentioned, is used by most academics and medical professionals to imply a definition based on medical descriptions of deafness as measured against the ‘norm’ of hearing. The ‘lower case’ deaf community relies on oral styles of communication such as lip-reading or speaking rather than sign language (Bat Chava, 2000; Ladd, 2003).

Harlan Lane (1993b) a renowned scholar on deafness and a professor of psychology and linguistics at Northeastern University, USA, drew on the ideas of Michel Foucault, suggesting that the Deaf were like a colonized people. Lane was instrumental in defining Deaf identity based on the notion that Deaf people are a linguistic and ethnic minority, since they not only share a common language (American Sign Language) and common culture, but are seen by others and themselves as a separate group. The construction of the Deaf as a colonized, ethnic, linguistic minority is now widely accepted in USA and has been taught for more than two decades in D/deaf-studies programmes, and at institutions such as Gallaudet and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (Davis, 2007). The Deaf community here is consciously political and strives to defy all forms of subtle or overt oppression. They present as a tightly knit, impervious, language minority. Such cultures founded on language, states Davis, are activist in their approach, and resist decisions taken about them by the majority culture.

This understanding of deafness which was described initially as the socio-cultural perspective launched the concept of ‘Deaf Culture’ with the publication of such books as *Deaf in America*:
Voices from a Culture (Padden & Humphries, 1988). This publication explored how Deaf people viewed the world not from a position of being deaf, but from a ‘Deaf centre’, which represented a different normality. Culturally Deaf people reject fixed definition by hearing loss. Rather they want to be respected as a linguistic, cultural minority and to be treated equally in relation to the hearing majority, advocating co-existence and not assimilation (Hole, 2004). The socio-cultural claims of the Deaf community counter the negativity ascribed by hearing loss in the medical/infirmity discourse and construct hearing loss as a form of cultural diversity.

In his quest to recognize and create awareness and understanding of the complex culture of Deaf people to diverse audiences, Paddy Ladd (2003) formally named and introduced the Culturo-Linguistic Model. This is the third model through which to explain and understand the identities of Deaf people. Ladd explains that this construction essentially focuses on the collective nature of the Deaf experience. Deaf people are complete in their existence and not being able to hear is secondary to the positive experiences that emerge from their social, cultural and artistic lives together: These experiences are evident in their exclusive clubs, schools and organizations.

There is consensus by several international and South African writers (Harris, 1995; Lane, 1993; Ridgeway, 1999; Bat-Chava, 2000; Aarons and Akach, 2002) on the culturo-linguistic paradigm, its resonance with the Deaf culture phenomenon and the consequences for identity construction of Deaf people. These writers concede that there are certain conventions that guide membership to the Deaf cultural community. At the outset, members of the Deaf cultural community are a minority culture that has the foundational physiological condition of deafness. However they identify and define themselves as socially and culturally Deaf, maintain a clear-cut distinction between their socio-cultural deafness and have liberated themselves from the disability construct.

The members share a common indigenous sign language that is American Sign Language or British Sign Language or South African Sign Language and through this there is collective association with the community and culture of other Deaf persons. Ladd (2003) asserts that they are bi-lingual learners, with signed language as the first language of learning and communication and the second language being the written language. This group experiences its deafness as difference rather than as a disability. There are distinctive art forms, literature, humour, cultural
artefacts and endogamous marriage patterns associated with culturally Deaf persons, to be
detailed later in this chapter.

As mentioned earlier, internationally documented statistics reveal that 90% of deaf children are
born to hearing parents (Lane, 1996; Bat-Chava, 2000; Aarons and Akach, 2002). One may
question then how the legacy of Deaf culture is transmitted to generations of deaf
children/learners. Bat-Chava (2000) explains that Deaf culture is unique in that unlike hearing
cultures which transmit traditions from adults to children, the traditions of Deaf culture are
transmitted laterally from learner to learner, as they co-exist mutually in classrooms and
residential schools. These learners may vary in age, gender, race, social class and religious and
political affiliations but show spontaneous and natural unanimity in their alliance to the practices
and traditions of Deaf culture.

The culture within a Deaf school facilitates the construction and formation of culturally Deaf
identities as is endorsed by several Deaf studies writers including Padden (1993), Pettigrew
(1997) and Ree (1999). A deaf person who has attended hearing schools, by contrast, is
immersed in the norms of a hearing culture and becomes aligned to the view that that speech
should be therapeutically induced. The authors distinguish deaf children whose parents and/or
siblings, are users of sign language as a first language and are members of the Deaf cultural
community from those who have hearing parents. These offspring are most likely to be exposed
to the cultural model of deafness through their interaction with family members and the extended
Deaf community from infancy. Bat-Chava (2000) argues that it is possible that Deaf children
raised in Deaf families and who have been signing from infancy will not experience their
deafness as the physiological condition of not being able to hear and will not construct meanings
around deafness as a form of disability.

In Cyprus, Hadjikakou and Nokolaraizi (2007) undertook research using semi-structured
interviews, with 24 Cypriot deaf school graduates ages 19-54 years. Considering the crucial
impact of the school on the development of deaf children's identity (Ree, 1999), the aim of the
study was to explore how educational experiences, exposure to sign language, Deaf culture, and
Deaf role models during the school years impacted on developing a D/deaf identity. The study
revealed that deaf people in Cyprus developed three kinds of identities; culturally Deaf,
culturally hearing, and bicultural identities all of which resulted from their educational experiences. Deaf participants who attended the school for the Deaf identified with Deaf culture and socialized mostly with Deaf persons while the majority of the participants who graduated from general or ordinary schools, were immersed in and socialized with both the Deaf and hearing cultures, through exposure to Cyprian Sign Language and Deaf culture outside school.

The D/deaf participants who had graduated from ordinary schools were accepted as members of the Deaf community. This is also due to the fact that they had developed good signing skills and communicated effectively with members of the Deaf community. What derived from this study regarding the inclusion of deaf children in ordinary schools and the development of their identities is that the majority will develop bicultural identities, assuming that some prerequisites are met, such as exposure to sign language, Deaf culture and Deaf role-models according to Hadjikakou and Nokolaraizi (2007). Thus, it is unlikely that inclusion would be a threat to Deaf identity. The study recommends that deaf children in ordinary schools be encouraged to develop signing and oral communicative skills to enable them to immerse themselves in both the hearing and Deaf worlds as adults.

Heap (2006) offers her analysis of the notion of the Deaf as a community, based on ethnographic evidence that emerged from her research of the Deaf community in Cape Town, South Africa. This group refers to themselves as the 'Deaf Community of Cape Town' (DCCT) since their establishment in 1987. The research examined the notion of community as “sign-deaf spaces” from the perspective of adults in Cape Town who were born deaf or who became deaf as children and whose first language is South African Sign Language (SASL). Heap writes of many efforts to define the concept ‘community’ and that by the mid-1950s more than 90 definitions of the concept were identified. But community is not so much about definitions; rather it is about the meaning of community from the perspective of those describing themselves in this way.

For Heap (2006) a community essentially exists when a significant number of people (such as the Deaf in Cape Town) imagine or behave as if they constitute a community. This is referred to as the ‘imagined community’. However Heap’s preferred reference to the Deaf community is as a ‘diasporic community’. Heap engages Clifford’s (1994) explanation of the sensory diasporic context of the Deaf or 'dwelling-in-displacement' which denotes dwelling permanently within the
host society, amongst hearing people, being excluded from spoken language communication and with limitations imposed on integration merely on the basis of being deaf.

Like other diasporic communities, the Deaf strategize to manage their marginalized disposition with a desire to reconstruct cultural oneness in diverse locations forging new forms of community consciousness, solidarity and identity, within the sign-deaf space. A 'diasporised identity' is created as they construct an identity that is at once South African and Deaf. Such an identity allows for positive expressions of difference despite the discrimination. Heap’s ethnographic evidence suggests that signed language is a distinctive marker of Deaf identity and recognition in hearing contexts. But in the sign-deaf space where there is signing amongst the Deaf and the hearing, it serves more to diffuse or disperse Deaf identity. She wrote:

“The paradoxical outcome of a dispersed identity is that in the sign-deaf space the Deaf are rarely 'deaf', certainly not in any socially handicapped or deficit way” (2006, p. 35).

There can be a ‘creative coexistence’ or ‘entangled tension’ with the hearing society. Heap’s conceptualization confirms the mutability of identities and its contextually specific grounding.

Although each of the models of D/deaf identity discussed here presents a clear-cut, well-defined understanding in accordance with its particular ideology, the identities of D/deaf in reality are not as overtly distinctive. In their study of the ways in which young D/deaf British people expressed and experienced their identities and how their D/deafness intersected with other self-identifications, Skelton and Valentine (2003) revealed that in different spaces identity may be ascribed as Deaf and deaf. Someone might perceive him/her self as Deaf and at the local Deaf club where they use British Sign Language and feel part of Deaf culture. Hence they are likely to be recognised as Deaf.

However the same person may be compelled to use oral communication within the hearing context of the workplace. Their work colleagues might ascribe to them a physiologically deaf, deficient identity. In this setting there is no Deaf culture but only hearing culture. The young D/deaf people that were interviewed by Skelton and Valentine (2003) were negotiating between both identities. Indeed some were in the process of shifting from a Deaf self-identity to one more associated with communal Deaf culture while others were aware of the commercial privileges of
selecting deaf or Deaf identities in different contexts. Such is the fluidity and multi-dimensional nature of D/deaf identities as ‘Deaf’ / ‘deaf’ definitions contradict, overlap, coexist and compete.

In summary, it may be noted from the above discussion that the discourses that emanate from medical, the social rights and the cultural-linguistic models, inform the construction of deaf and Deaf identities. However contradictions such as that highlighted by Skelton and Valentine (2003) will be explored further in this chapter. Despite the fact the Deaf cultural conceptualization may romanticize deafness and forge positive connotations, through its very existence it is reputed to be exclusionary. This and other limitations of the cultural-linguistic model have been recorded and will be discussed later in the chapter. What follows in the next section is a discussion on perceptions of deafness as a disability or as difference to be acknowledged. These perceptions arise from alignment to the models that have already been discussed.

2.3 Deafness: Disability or Difference?

There are several D/deaf studies texts that indicate an ‘uneasy co-existence’ between being deaf and being disabled (Leigh, 2009; Barnes, 2000; Corker 1998; Johnston, 1997; Lane, 1993). Skelton and Valentine (2003) refer to this same relationship as an ‘uneasy positioning’, thereby challenging the assumption that deafness and disability are synonymous. This section will explore the relationship between deafness and disability from the position of both culturally Deaf and audiologically deaf persons. This is significant for my study as it will inform whether participants construct their deafness-identities around disability or whether their deafness is difference to be embraced. Each of these categories is complex and far from homogenous and constructs identities around disability differently. As outlined briefly in chapter, identities are rarely clear-cut and distinctive. Intersections and overlaps are inevitable and the extent of this in respect of the deaf will be examined here. Although there is general consensus among the Deaf cultural community that affirmation of difference and rejection of disability is integral to their identity, this section will also attempt to show exceptions and contradictions to this position that have been recorded by researchers of the D/deaf.
Prior to the 1970s in the USA deaf people typically understood their deafness as a disability. Since the 1970s, the lives of D/deaf people have been characterized by a growing recognition of their identification with a common Deaf cultural community (Lane, 1993; Ridgeway, 1999; Bat-Chava, 2000; Aarons and Akach, 2002; Skelton and Valentine, 2003). The understanding of deafness that emerged from this cultural conceptualization presented a significant challenge to the more popular view among hearing people that deafness was a physiological deficit condition considered to be disabling. The difference is not merely semantic; it is fundamental to one’s conception of deafness, what it means to be deaf or Deaf, and how individuals and society as a whole ought to respond to the various discourses of deafness. As Lane, Hoffmeister, and Bahan (1996) have noted in their powerful narrative, A Journey into the DEAF-WORLD:

“When hearing people think about Deaf people, they project their concerns and subtractive perspective onto Deaf people. The result is an inevitable collision with the values of the Deaf-World, whose goal is to promote the unique heritage of Deaf language and culture. The disparity in decision-making power between the hearing world and the Deaf-World renders this collision frightening for Deaf people.” (p. 371)

Bat-Chava (2000) also presents a compelling argument on D/deaf people and their dichotomous relationship with disability. He argues that children whose parents are hearing or who grow up in homes where spoken language is the primary mode of communication will most likely adopt the view of deafness as a disability owing to their inability to use spoken language. Consequently these persons will develop an allegiance to the mainstream society and develop a culturally hearing identity. On the other hand those who grew up with Deaf parents, in homes where sign language was the norm for communication, will most likely view their deafness as being a cultural phenomenon, and will identify themselves as being culturally Deaf. Bat-Chava’s assertion may be challenged in the light of theorizations that argue that identities are fluid and overlapping. They may embrace deafness as difference when amongst other culturally deaf persons but in workplaces amongst other hearing persons, for example, their deafness may be debilitating and exclusionary.

In later writings Corker (2000) extends her debate on D/deafness and disability to cochlea implant surgery (CIS). She posits that culturally Deaf persons are critical of cochlea implants and
campaign for the banning of this procedure especially on children. Deaf people argue that parents and medical practitioners who support and undertake CIS on children construct deafness as a disability to be cured and contravene the child’s rights of choice. This is construed as an attack on Deafness as a culture and on Deaf people as a linguistic group. In retaliation the Deaf community has in some cases, rejected deaf adults, who have had elective CIS. Deaf children are viewed with less condemnation since the decision to have the CIS was more than likely taken by the parent or guardian. Corker empathizes with people who identify as deaf, as their self-recognition of impairment is exacerbated by discrimination and marginalization and as disempowered people.

In her view, Corker (2000) implies that D/deaf individuals who opt for cochlear implant intervention are constructed through a medical discourse. She has failed to consider in her view culturally Deaf people who interpret not being able to hear as a barrier to inclusion in a society they have chosen to be a part of. It is their social right to be a part of any society they choose. So they may be actively seeking medical intervention, through the use of cochlear implants, to be enabled and included in the society of their choice so as to achieve their social right.

The issue of deafness and its relationship to disability is also contested here in South Africa. Aarons and Akach (2002), reputed to be flagship writers on D/deaf people and deafness related issues in South Africa, acknowledge that there are several reasons for the lack of clarity with regard to the way in which Deaf people are perceived by others and the perceptions that D/deaf people have of themselves over the issue of disability. The fundamental reason for this is the ambiguity and nebulous context of the Deaf, relative to disability. As indicated earlier, prior to the 1970s deafness was universally recognized as a physical disability, and most often classified along with blindness and other physical disabilities (Ridgeway, 1999; Bat-Chava, 2000; Aarons and Akach, 2002; Skelton and Valentine, 2003). However, these same authors have documented that the post 1970s is characterized by Deaf peoples’ revised understanding of themselves as members of a linguistic minority of sign language users. This resulted in increased lobbying by Deaf activists internationally, for recognition of indigenous sign languages and for this to be accorded the same status as other national languages.
According to Aarons and Akach’s (2002) study the natural language of D/deaf in South Africa is South African Sign Language (SASL). Despite their status as a marginalized, linguistic minority their right to their own language ought to be fully acknowledged as is indicated in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (November, 1996). Aarons and Akach argue that if their basic right to their own language were fully recognised, the Deaf need not consider themselves or be considered by others as disabled. On the contrary, if they were denied right of access to sign language then the D/deaf would indeed be a disabled group. The absence of sign language would constitute a barrier to communication and general information and learning would be challenged.

Aarons and Akach (2002) extend their argument to the context of education. If South African Deaf learners are educated through the medium of SASL, then there will not be a barrier to learning. SASL is a language that allows the Deaf child access to learning and information as a hearing child would have access, through a written or spoken language. It is the spoken language that presents as an impediment to the Deaf child. Thus the issue of disability may only be operative in the context of education as long as Deaf children are denied access to an appropriate language modality. One cannot assume therefore that D/deafness and disability are synonymous or that disability is a natural consequence of deafness as these categories are context specific.

It is clear that there are several competing conceptions of deafness that divide the Deaf and deaf, and the hearing worlds and emphasize the dominant constructions of deafness that prevail in each world. As numerous scholars internationally have explored in recent years, disability is a social construct grounded in cultural, political, ideological, and economic assumptions and biases (Reagan, 2002). Hence, D/deaf people may be constructed as ‘disabled’ by political, economic and social practices. How they present themselves is often contradictory since they may denounce disability but still be dependent on economic or environmental support from the state based on the disability category to pursue their goals in education and/or training and employment. Skelton and Valentine (2003) highlighted how young D/deaf British people experienced intersecting Deaf and deaf identities. Of note was that ‘a significant number’ of the participants did not consider deafness to be a disability yet at some stage in the interview they acknowledged that they received help from the Disabled Student Support Grant. None of the students seemed to recognize, though, the contradiction in being recipients of disability support
grants, yet being emphatic that they were not disabled. The D/deaf community is thus unique and also complex with inherent tensions and contradictions.

Johnston (1997) contradicts the position of the clear-cut allegiance between Deaf culture and denial of disability. He argues that there may be those who have allegiance to Deaf culture and who know how to sign, but who believe that spoken language is superior to sign language and therefore prefer spoken language over sign language. Johnson calls for acknowledgement and acceptance of D/deaf persons who consider themselves members of the Deaf cultural community but who do not subscribe entirely to its conventions. In his argument Johnson challenges sign language users who condemn D/deaf people who abide by the norms and values of Deaf culture but use both signed and spoken language or prefer spoken language only.

For many D/deaf people, finding the space within disability discourses and politics, can be very challenging as they may find themselves in an essentially fixed Deaf or deaf identity or in a complex, competing, overlapping, ‘in-between’ position (Bat-Chava, 2000; Skelton and Valentine, 2003). The issue of disability will be explored with the participants in my research, with a view to ascertaining the role of the construct of disability in the construction of their identities as D/deaf persons. In a discussion of their perceptions of disability, I will explore the connection between disability and their cultural identity; whether the participants affirm being D/deaf and disabled or whether they reject the notion of being disabled or interestingly whether the participants see themselves as being culturally Deaf and disabled. In this sense the participants may see themselves as being culturally Deaf but also disabled owing to the fact that they may experience language and communication related obstructions in their access to information, learning, employment and other environmental barriers. The impact of these competing discourses and identities on their lives as teachers of Deaf children will also be examined.

What follows is a discussion on the use of sign language and how this is perceived by Deaf and deaf identity allegiances.
Sign languages exist as mother-tongue languages for D/deaf cultures internationally. According to Heap and Morgans (2006) there is no universal sign language. As there is a national language in every country, so too there is an indigenous sign language as long as there are Deaf people in that country. Here in South Africa we have South African Sign Language; in America there is American Sign Language; in China there is Chinese Sign Language, and so on. Signed languages are fully fledged languages with their own linguistic structures. Sign languages are visual-gestural languages, using the hands, face, and upper body and are performed in the space in front of the body. Anything that can be articulated in spoken language can also be expressed in signs. As Aarons (1995) informs:

“You can gossip, flirt, joke, discuss calculus and politics, give a linguistics lecture, make poetry, all in signed language, (p. 9)” and as unique as this may sound, Deaf babies can even “babble using their hands (p.9)”.

Reagan (2002) writes about signed languages and more specifically about ASL as a legitimate language comparable in all significant ways to spoken languages. Although it uses a different modality from that employed by spoken languages, its operation and function are in no way inferior to spoken languages. It plays a key role in the construction of Deaf identity and the ‘Deaf-World’ worldview. Schein and Stewart (1995) explain that the ‘Deaf-World’ worldview is the way in which Deaf people make sense of the world around them. This worldview does this in two distinct ways: first, through its role as linguistic mediator, and second, as an identifying facet of cultural identity. The use of ASL historically functioned as a language of group solidarity for Deaf people, serving both as a badge of in-group membership and as a barrier to those outside the cultural community.

In the sections that follow I will firstly, discuss the issue of sign language as a basic human right of the culturally Deaf community in terms of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2007). Whether the D/deaf person elects sign language or oralism or the dual medium, must be acceptable to all and respected as the individual’s right of access to learning and communication (Reagan, 2002). Secondly, I will
examine the highly contested debate on the dichotomy of sign language and oralism, the respective support for each of these mediums of communication and the way in which each medium is rooted in the identity construction of deaf and Deaf persons. Finally I will highlight the ‘bilingual-bicultural method’, which is the medium of choice internationally for D/deaf persons, and the way in which this method is practiced within the Deaf culture and more subtly in the hearing culture.

2.4.1 Language rights and the D/deaf communities


According to the UNCRPD the core factors for the human rights of Deaf people are access to, and recognition of sign language including acceptance of, and respect for Deaf people’s linguistic and cultural identity, bilingual education, sign language interpreting and accessibility. The researchers Haualand and Allen (2009) state in the report, that as with spoken languages, signed languages are carriers of regional and national cultures, heritages and identities of Deaf people. The UNCRPD provides a powerful tool to enhance the human rights of Deaf people as its definition includes signed languages in all articles that mention ‘communication’ or ‘language’. Further, the UNCRPD recognizes that culture, identity and language are an inseparable triangle.

Skelton and Valentine (2003) in their study of young British D/deaf people concluded that the oralist methods these youngsters had grown up with denied them the freedom to communicate with others who were D/deaf since oralism is about communicating with hearing people only. However, there is an intricacy of power within this. The emphasis on the visual element in the use of sign language effectively excludes those who cannot see, including deaf-blind people.
Vision is therefore privileged in any effort at signing. A Deaf-defined construction can, therefore, be construed as carrying its own form of exclusion. The complex difficulties faced by deaf / blind people were not a focus of their particular study. Nevertheless, it highlighted the complexities of elements of Deaf culture with certain internal contradictions and even exclusionary practices.

In this same study Skelton and Valentine (2003) present the case of Sean who went through an oral education system with lip-reading and voice-manipulation exercises to communicate. At the age of 17 he chose to leave home and attend a college exclusively for D/deaf students in an environment that was totally for D/deaf people. There, British Sign Language was the main language, and he had to learn it. Although Sean enjoyed the visual aspect of sign language and the expressiveness of Deaf communication, he is pragmatic in his acknowledgement that his oral training will be valuable in his future choices. Sean, who expresses a realisation and appreciation of the value of both types of training, is an example of a hybrid and dynamic identity that some young D/deaf people are able to articulate had they been exposed to both hearing-oralist education and signing. Sean is one of the young D/deaf people who straddle between and challenge the binaries of hearing/Deaf and Deaf/deaf.

Oralists believed that manual language made deaf people different, led them to believe that deaf people were abnormal and that the teaching of oralism entrenched normality and that continued use of manual language would restrict communication and obstruct integration with the hearing majority. To oralists the rights issue pertained to their desire to conform to the norms of the majority community and resistance to forced allegiance to the culturally Deaf minority community (Pilling and Barrett, 2008). In their advocacy of sign language, the manualists claimed that the oralists neglected the psychosocial development and academic advancement of deaf children through long tedious oral practice sessions. Oralists claimed that manualists neglected the right of the Deaf person to use their residual hearing for auditory training and speech development and that continued emphasis on sign language isolated them from hearing family members and the wider culture, restricting them to a limited sub-culture and serving to challenge their integration in the general society (Pickersgill, 1998).
What is significant in the rights dilemma is the way in which each group contests the rights of the other and the ideologies associated with this right, the way in which they want to live their lives and be understood by others and the identities that each wishes to construct. Furthermore the issue of the right to language as stated in the UNCRPD (United Nations, 2007) highlights the rights of the Deaf community to sign language, to be recognized as a minority linguistic community with their own identity. However the Convention fails to acknowledge the rights of those D/deaf people who elect to use spoken language and residual auditory facilities to facilitate their integration into the wider hearing community and yet still belong to the Deaf Cultural community. In highlighting the rights of the culturally Deaf community, the Convention presumes that all deaf persons are culturally Deaf and denies the existence of audiologically deaf persons who wish to align with the hearing community. Perhaps it is the overwhelming authority of the Convention that has caused the non-culturally aligned deaf persons to present as a subverted, marginalized and disempowered minority community.

The impoverishment of deafness is not the lack of hearing but indeed the lack of language. In earlier writings, Lane (1984) expressed the view that man’s need for expression through language will emerge one way or the other, through the little articulators of the mouth or through the larger articulators of the hands and limbs. It is for this reason that since the beginning of formal deaf education in the 18th century, sign language, commonly referred to as ‘manualism’, and oralism have been two philosophies that have been on opposing sides of a heated debate that continues to this day (Leigh, 2009). D/deaf children’s access to education remains one of the most contested discussions in the history of D/deaf people and continues to be a controversy in many parts of the world.

After reviewing decades of arguments presented by the oralists and manualist, Baker (2009) finds herself hovering over two conclusions. She believes the individual needs of the person must be considered when a communication method is chosen and that perhaps the middle road in this debate is the best solution. Using a combination of both oralism and sign language will give the Deaf individual the benefits of both communication methods and the opportunity to choose the communication he or she truly prefers later in life. Furthermore Baker endorses research on the Bicultural-Bilingual method and the positive cognitive advantages that it reports (Schirmer,
2000). The idea of being raised with both communication strategies appeals to Baker for this could have value in intellectual advancement, integration and social benefits.

Despite the overwhelming support for the benefits of both oralism and sign language, the debate over which is the most beneficial method for the D/deaf continues. A solution to this debate revolves around the fundamental values held by each individual. My own view is that the two ends of the communication spectrum for D/deaf individuals, oralism and sign language both provide benefits for D/deaf individuals. However, the dispute emerges when those who support each method define what is beneficial quite differently. Fundamental values lead those who advocate the oral communication towards integration and educational benefits while those who support the use of sign language focus on human rights, culture, social-emotional and identity promoting benefits. The basis of this debate stems from differences in personal preferences which have been affected by ideological influences. Parents, teachers, D/deaf students, D/deaf adults, and all involved must make communication and educational decisions based on the values and benefits of each method. Attempts by many modern educational facilities to integrate both approaches, have emerged, as a result of regulations supporting both communication options. Some chose to avidly support sign language while others campaigned oralism. This merger towards advocacy and support for the Bilingual-Bicultural approach will be highlighted in the next section.

2.4.2 Sign-bilingualism: The medium of choice

The bilingual and bicultural (bi-bi) approach first gained momentum in Western Europe and the US in the mid-1980s. It developed out of the frustrations at the limited success of oral training in providing D/deaf children with a comprehensive education that allowed them to make a valuable and equal contribution to society (Biggs, 2004). At the end of the 20th century, linguists started to document that sign languages were just as natural and rich as spoken languages, and that neither spoken languages nor signed languages had any inherent superior qualities that rendered either more ‘human’ than the other (Pilling and Barrett, 2008). This discovery, along with continued poor academic results from the exclusive use of either oral or signing methods eventually led to a new approach (Haualand and Allen, 2009).
Baker (2009) explains that sign-bilingualism is the use of two languages in different modalities, that is, either a signed, spoken or written language, and which is distinctly different from using two spoken languages. In Deaf education sign-bilingualism uses the sign language of the D/deaf community and the spoken and written language of the hearing community amongst whom the D/deaf live. In the UK, this is British Sign Language, with the spoken/written language being English. In South Africa the signed language would be SASL and the spoken/written language would be one or more of the several indigenous languages, for example, Afrikaans, isiZulu, Sesotho, Xhosa, English, etc. In China this would be Chinese Sign Language and written Chinese. There is no prerequisite fluency in either language and may even include an oral language, depending on the user’s capability, residual hearing and access to hearing aids. There is a parallel strong influence on teaching reading and writing of the second language which is introduced through sign language to explain grammar, syntax and abstract concepts.

Pickersgill (1999) explains that the philosophy underpinning sign-bilingualism is based on the cultural-linguistic, minority model of deafness and the social model of disability. Deaf people are acknowledged as members of a minority group on the basis of their sign language and Deaf culture. The intention in the philosophy of sign-bilingualism is to enable D/deaf children to become bilingual and bicultural, and to participate fully in both the hearing society and the ‘Deaf-World’. “Society should value the inherent richness of linguistic and cultural pluralism.” (p. 89), rather than regard deafness as an obstacle to linguistic development, educational achievement and social integration.

Biggs (2004) emphasizes that the appeal of bilingualism lies in its bicultural aspect. There is acknowledgement of the culture of the Deaf, their distinctive characteristics and the provision of Deaf role models to ensure that they develop a positive and healthy self identity. The approach also instils the culture of the hearing world and enables acceptance and integration. Deaf teachers are valued and instrumental in the project, serving as role models to reassure the children of their equal status in society. At the same time hearing teachers offer children an insight into hearing culture, and the presence of both teachers exposes them to different forms of communication: some people communicate through their mouths and others through their hands.
Internationally the bilingual-bicultural approach is best practice in the education of Deaf learners (Leigh, 2009) relative to the under-achievement of D/deaf children. D/deaf children who have D/deaf parents have enjoyed significant academic success. Empirical studies document higher levels of reading fluency and overall academic achievement through bilingualism (Pilling and Barrett, 2008; Biggs, 2004). Extensive research on text communication preferences of Deaf people in the UK was undertaken by Pilling and Barrett (2008). The researchers believe that for the Deaf child to achieve first language competence in the formative years, the child must be assured the right of access to sign language early in life, in an environment with skilled signers. The national sign language should be the medium of teaching and learning for all subjects in the academic curriculum, while the national spoken will be the written language for the D/deaf. In facilitating bilingual educational programmes, both languages should exist independently but be paralleled in status.

Here in South Africa, Aarons and Akach (2002) endorse bilingual-bicultural learning and communication as the method of choice for teaching Deaf learners in schools for the Deaf, although there are no empirical studies to support this. Learners are taught face-to-face through the medium of SASL and they read text and write in English or in the indigenous spoken language of the respective ethnic group in which they were born or raised. It would be the responsibility of all teachers including the written language and other subject teachers, to arrange curricular activities to focus on enhancing written language and developing reading skills. Other research on sign language in South Africa indicates that there is one SASL with different vocabulary variations in the different D/deaf communities, but the grammar of the sign language is the same for all Deaf people irrespective of ‘age, ethnicity or geographical region’ (Morgan, 2001). The concept ‘mother’ can have many different hand signs, but the grammatical signals on the face are constant across cultural and racial groups. Morgan (2001, p. 7) argues that Deaf people ‘will quickly learn to understand the vocabulary varieties used by other groups’.

At the international conference on ‘Bilingualism in Education’, in Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, Lisa 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 overall communication and more importantly a positive Deaf identity. In this way, one or more additional written languages can be mastered without much difficulty. In advocating bilingualism, Kauppinen informed
through her research that the acquisition of a solid foundation in a sign language can actually facilitate the acquisition of a written language. Furthermore, sign languages offer complete, direct and immediate communication to a profoundly Deaf child in comparison to the speech of a deaf child, which is distorted and incomplete.

The support for sign-bilingualism is overwhelming with several countries turning to this method where pure oralism or exclusive signing systems have failed. One of these countries is China where Biggs (2004) explored the literacy levels and socio-emotional status of the D/deaf. China has the largest deaf population in the world, but also one of the most invisible with sign language having virtually no recognition. Before the 1950s, sign language was the preferred method for teaching but oralism superseded as this gained popularity internationally. Literally hundreds of preschool oral-language programs were established to offer intensive, spoken-language training at an early age which would allow deaf children to be competent to attend mainstream schools.

After decades of contestation and debate China adopted the bilingual-bicultural approach in its education policy in 2000, with a focus on spoken language, finger spelling, sign language and writing to develop Deaf students’ language capacity. Biggs recorded in 2004 that the bilingual-bicultural project after four years was already showing positive results. According to teachers, the children progressed academically, socially and emotionally. Not only has sign language helped the children to develop intellectually, it also provided them with a link to the broader Deaf community and forged self-confidence and pride in Deaf identity. The effectiveness of the trial has also prompted interest in research into sign language and Deaf culture. China was not alone in its efforts to reform Deaf education (Biggs, 2004).

The Deaf population, like the hearing population, can always be characterized by inherent heterogeneity (Bartha, 2005). Different sections of Deaf groups use communication modes differently, each having a set of cultural and linguistic rules, norms and expectations and negotiating different identities. They may also use different communication modes in different contexts. For example a culturally Deaf person may have signed throughout his life amongst family and in school. However in the context of employment, he may be forced to attempt speaking when confronted with an employer or colleagues who are unable to sign. The bilingual approach to education, communication and learning may therefore extrapolate to the idea that
hearing culture and Deaf culture are not mutually exclusive social-cultural constructions. As with ethno-linguistic groups, many Deaf people may not only be bilingual but bicultural: negotiating multiple social identities, participating in both worlds and belonging to the hearing as well as Deaf-World social networks. The next section includes a broad but detailed description of culturally Deaf persons and the nuances that they embrace.

### 2.5 Culturally Deaf Persons: Who are they?

According to Lane (1993a), culturally Deaf people are a language minority, a community that has a rich culture and art forms of its own, a proud history and a distinctive social structure. Such constructions of identity, which are grounded in the experiences and history of the Deaf-World and the Deaf community, stress the socio-cultural and linguistic aspects of deafness. As Padden and Humphries (1988) wrote at the start of their book, ‘Deaf in America: Voices from a Culture’:

*The traditional way of writing about Deaf people is to focus on the fact of their condition: that they do not hear, and to interpret all other aspects of their lives as consequences of this fact. ... In contrast to the long history of writings that treat them as medical cases, or as people with ‘disabilities’, who ‘compensate’ for the deafness by using sign language, we want to portray the lives they live, their art and performances, their everyday talk, their shared myths, and the lessons they teach one another. We have always felt that the attention given to the physical condition of not hearing has obscured far more interesting facets of Deaf people’s lives’* (p. 1).

#### 2.5.1 Transmission of deaf culture

Padden (1993) and Ridgeway (1999) are convinced that D/deaf culture originates in schools for the D/deaf and not within the context of families and homes as with hearing people. It here that the behaviour patterns, values, norms and communication modes of the D/deaf are recognised and upheld. D/deaf children traditionally begin schooling in residential schools from about the age of three and are thus often dependent on other D/deaf learners for support and companionship from a pre-school age. Older learners unintentionally teach the younger learners and enable and encourage them to learn the language, customs, and values of D/deaf culture.
In Baynton’s (1996) study of the campaign against sign language in USA, it emerged that generally D/deaf people learned sign language from each other and mostly while at school since they are born into or become D/deaf mostly in hearing households and therefore cannot learn language in the same effortless way that hearing children do. The D/deaf learnt sign language amongst themselves even when it was prohibited and oralism prevailed. For D/deaf children, the most significant aspect of school life is the dormitory. Away from the structured control of the classroom, D/deaf children are introduced to the social life of D/deaf people (Ladd, 2003). This may be understood as a peer-promoted culture that is integral to the dynamics of D/deaf Culture, compared to a culture conventionally inherited from parents and older relatives and siblings. There is therefore the potential for conflicts regarding cultural allegiances since the Deaf do not live exclusively within their own culture. Their living within and amongst hearing people as well cannot be held in denial.

2.5.2 Shared awareness of Deaf cultural identity

Equally significant in D/deaf culture is the shared awareness of cultural identity. Members of the D/deaf cultural community identify themselves as socially and culturally D/deaf, maintaining the distinction between audiological and cultural deafness. Reagan (2002) wrote of emic and etic constructions of deafness. Emic is relevant to how D/deaf people construct their own identities while etic relates to how D/deaf peoples’ identities are constructed by people outside of the D/deaf communities. Leigh (2009) posits that within an emic construction of deafness, audiological deafness is actually neither a necessary nor a conclusive condition for cultural deafness. Hearing people can also share the culturally Deaf identity. In fact hearing children of D/deaf people who grow up with sign language as their first language are potentially significant members of D/deaf culture. To the contrary older hearing people who lose their hearing due to aging may disclaim the culturally Deaf stance and position themselves as hearing people who can no longer hear. Members of the Deaf cultural community have a strong, bonded awareness of their culture and heritage. Gannon (1981) is reputed for his outstanding scholarly work on the history of D/deaf people, the shared consciousness of this heritage and the pride that is reinforced through this communal attachment.
2.5.3 Distinctive behavioural norms and patterns

Overtly peculiar to culturally D/deaf persons are certain behavioural norms and patterns that differ distinctly from the hearing world, as noted by Padden & Humphries (1988). Most notable here is the direct eye contact in the conversational space of the D/deaf, the permissibility and indiscreet physical contact such as touching on the body to gain attention, the use of facial expressions and gesturing and the use of ‘name signs’. Name signs constitute a special category of signs that combines sign language and gestural language, and develops wherever there is a group of D/deaf people. McKee & McKee (2000) explain that ‘name signs’ are created for individuals within each generation or social grouping of Deaf people, and that:

“Most typically, name signs originate in deaf school settings where Deaf children form an autonomous social world beyond the gaze of teachers … the name signs that Deaf adults bestow on each other later in life are determined by Deaf social norms and visual language structures rather than those of the “outside” hearing society” (pp. 4-5).

The authors McKee & McKee (2000) add that the acquisition of a name sign marks a person’s entry into a signing community, and the use of sign names can strengthen the bond of shared group heritage and use of an alternative language in relation to mainstream society. A common facet of cultural identity for many ethnic groups is the presence and maintenance of endogamous marital patterns and the same holds for D/deaf people. Mowl (1998) estimates that in-group marriages in the contemporary Deaf community is about 86% to 90%. This high incidence of in-group marriages is facilitated by the role of schools, residential facilities and Deaf clubs and the way in which these promote shared awareness of common language and heritage.

2.5.4 Deaf humour and traditional artefacts

This concept of cultural or attitudinal deafness is a key element in understanding much of Deaf humour (Erting, Johnson, Smith and Snider, 1994). Jokes and humourous stories proliferate in the Deaf-World, and many involve the presumed difference between Deaf people in the Deaf-World and hearing people in the hearing world. As would be expected, the punch-line focuses on hearing people and their ignorance of deafness, and Deaf people and the power of sign language. Several stories have been handed down for generations in Deaf folklore, and the most treasured
are those that delight in the inability to hear as being a positive spin-off. This is typically Deaf humour, as told by Erting, et al (1994):

“A Deaf couple has just arrived at a motel for their honeymoon. They start unpacking for the night, and then the nervous husband goes out to get a drink. When he returns to the motel, he realizes that he has forgotten his room number. Because it is dark outside and all the rooms look alike, he blasts the horn until the rooms start lighting up with fuming and irate hearing boarders who were awakened by the noise. Only one room remains with lights out, and that’s the room where his Deaf wife is waiting for him” (p.19).

In addition to showing how Deaf people can solve a problem creatively and humourously, Erting, et al (1994), elaborate that humour is essential at social gatherings where people cluster in groups and exchange stories, jokes and experiences. Humour is one way in which people share their perceptions of the world, express different levels of intimacy, and find comfort in knowing that others share their attitudes and sense of humour.

The cultural artefacts of the Deaf community are primarily technological devices designed to facilitate the ability of the deaf to function in the hearing world. The key difference according to Mowl (1998), between audiologically and culturally Deaf persons with respect to the use of such technologies is that culturally Deaf people are reluctant to use technological devices, especially hearing aids that focus primarily on enhancing hearing. Other kinds of technological innovations, such as Teldems which is a type-medium telephone, television decoders for closed-captioned programs, and doorbells and alarms linked to lights are liberally used both within the Deaf culture and by auditorally Deaf persons. More specifically cultural artefacts emphasizing membership in Deaf culture, such as jewellery, T-shirts and bumper stickers which involve visual images of signs, are artefacts more likely to be found among culturally Deaf people.

2.5.5 Network of social organizations

Finally, there exists an extensive voluntary network of social organizations serving Deaf people that effectively maintains the cohesiveness of the Deaf community and provides for the companionship and socialization needs of members. The vast majority of D/deaf people become members of D/deaf culture relatively late compared to membership in most cultures because, as
indicated earlier, most D/deaf children have hearing parents and are introduced to D/deaf culture in the context of schools and residential facilities for the Deaf. Individual Deaf people identify as culturally Deaf in different ways and to different extents (Reagan, 2002). This network includes local Deaf clubs, the state and national organizations of the Deaf such as the Deaf Association of South Africa, sports associations, theatre companies and sheltered workshops.

The long-term study by Heap (2003) on the D/deaf in Cape Town, South Africa, examined the notion of community as “sign-deaf spaces” from the perspective of adults who were born deaf or who became deaf as children and whose first language is SASL. A signing space or a network of social relationships based on signed communication was identified as a key strategy in creating community and constructing identity (Heap 2003). The network established over time extended from including Deaf-signing individuals only to hearing people who could sign. Through the signing spaces, the D/deaf and hearing people made social life meaningful for themselves and those with whom they interacted. Within the realm of the signing spaces D/deaf people assumed layers of social roles and accompanying identities in courtship, marriage, parenting, working and other roles creating networks of shared language and communality.

The section has described the peculiarities and nuances of the culturally Deaf community. My reason for presenting this section in such depth is that participants in the study claim allegiance to this community. I wish to highlight however that despite their claim to being culturally deaf their identities tend to intersect with audiologically deaf persons. There are contradictions in use of technology, marital relationships, interaction with their children and their social networking. In the next section I highlight contradictions and prejudices in cultural conceptualizations of deafness.

2.6 Challenging the Linguistic / Ethnic Model of Deafness

The definition of the Deaf as a colonized, ethnic, linguistic minority is widely accepted in D/deaf circles and has even been taught for more than a decade in Deaf-studies programs and at institutions like Gallaudet and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf in the USA as well as in certain tertiary programs in the UK (Bat-Chava, 2000). This construction of the Deaf as a
linguistic, ethnic minority is attractive, since it has removed the physiological stigma of deafness and the Deaf are no longer viewed as being ‘handicapped’ or ‘disabled’. Through the linguistic minority conceptualization Deaf people are recognised as a cultural group or community.

But there is a negative side and it is anomalous that not many writers or researchers of the D/deaf have exposed this view. After extensive searching I stumbled across a truly critical appraisal of the cultural-linguistic model by Lennard Davis (2007). Davis, who is a professor of English and Disability and Human Development at the University of Illinois, Chicago, is a hearing person who grew up with D/deaf parents. His writing therefore is based on his uniquely personal experience and perhaps it is for this reason that he writes of ‘Deafness and the Riddle of Identity’. Although Davis writes of D/deaf persons in the context of America, his views on the shortcomings of the linguistic / ethnic minority model of deafness can be extrapolated and may indeed be relevant, to Deaf communities internationally.

The idea of an ethnic group or minority, according to Davis, is blemished with the somewhat brutal politics of racialism. There is a sense in which slavery and apartheid have paved the way for the separateness of minorities and in which the oppressor has created the oppressed. Davis questions whether this is then the best model on which deafness should base its existence. Furthermore, a re-examination of identity politics is under way in the USA that questions even the concept of group identity (Davis, 2007). Postmodernism combined with globalization has undermined the traditional notions of individual and community. It is complex enough to say what it is to be an ‘American’ now, let alone a member of a minority group in the US. In the context of these debates, it seems that the minority model of Deaf identity is austere and limiting.

The other challenge that Davis cites with defining Deaf people as a linguistic group is that to do so, ‘you have to patrol the fire wall between the Deaf and non-Deaf in very rigid ways’ (p.3). If Deaf people are defined and limited to those who are native users of sign languages, then one has to define all non-users as the ‘other’. This would immediately exclude or marginalize deaf people who are orally trained, that is, those who were taught to denounce sign languages in favour of speech alone, deaf people who have had cochlear implants and deaf people who were denied the opportunity to learn sign language, but who are adherents to other aspects of Deaf culture nevertheless. Many people who grew up in non-signing settings in the 1950s and 1960s
and who have contentedly thought of themselves as Deaf would have to reassign themselves to the ‘other’ camp. In addition the rigid linguistic-group definition excludes hard-of-hearing people who have not needed to learn sign language.

This model also marginalizes those who have been educated orally; “they are seen as victims of oral education rather than as victims of audism” (Davis, 2007, p.3). Since it is hearing parents who make the decision to educate their deaf children orally or to give them cochlear implants, Davis is emphatic that it does not seem fair to define those children as not being Deaf and not being eligible for inclusion in the cultural-linguistic community. The other flaw in the model, says Davis, is that it includes the hearing, signing ‘children of deaf adults’ (CODA's) as being part of the Deaf linguistic community, since they are native signers, having been introduced to sign language since birth. One could argue that the CODA's are not discriminated against by the hearing world. However if one were to take this position and prejudice the hearing children of Deaf adults for being native signers, then one has to abandon the idea of language as a determinant of identity in favour of the notion of biological deafness as a criterion.

The position of physiological deafness as an essential or adequate condition for cultural allegiance is contested by Reagan (2002). There is a noteworthy number of hearing children of Deaf parents in Deaf communities throughout the world, who are raised with sign language as their first language. This group, known as CODAs (Children of Deaf Adults) ought to be members of both the Deaf cultural and hearing community. Alternately older hearing people, who become deafened under normal circumstances, may not necessarily be culturally Deaf. Rather they may consider themselves to be hearing people who can no longer hear. For this reason Reagan considers socio-cultural deafness to be a phenomenon that ought to be referred to as ‘attitudinal deafness’. Schein & Stewart (1995) also agree that a hearing person born to two Deaf parents and who was introduced to sign language since birth, almost as if it were a mother tongue language, should be part of the Deaf cultural community.

For Davis (2007), defining deafness in terms of ethnicity does not hold up any better than linguistic definitions. While it is true that many Deaf people share a common culture, history, language, and social behaviour; with the introduction of mainstreaming of Deaf students into regular schools and the decline of residential schooling for the Deaf, it is now difficult to argue
that the Deaf are significantly different from the non-Deaf. There have been subtle relaxations in the overall culture with more frequent integration with hearing teachers and other hearing persons who sign fluently. To a certain extent this has blurred the sense of ‘otherness’ that the Deaf have historically clutched at as a way of defining themselves. Davis (2007) wrote:

“That is why places like Gallaudet have come to be seen nostalgically as the "home" of deaf people and deaf culture: They continue to define the deaf as a separate cultural group” (p.3).

Davis challenges the argument that the Deaf are an ethnic minority since this presumes a ‘pure’ Deaf person, which is characteristic of racial profiling. In this ethnic-group model, just as in the linguistic model, there is an ‘in-group’ and an ‘out-group’. Typically the ‘in-group’ is a very small percentage – about 5 to 10 percent of all those born deaf. This is an elite, unadulterated group who are the offspring of deaf parents. The ‘out-group’ or those excluded are the hard of hearing, those who learned to lip-read and speak instead of sign, hearing children of deaf adults, those who never had the opportunity to learn signed language for various reasons, and D/deaf people with limb impairments or spinal injuries that make signing a challenge.

The issue of whether a Deaf person ought to be excluded from ethnic identity of deafness if he/she chooses not live like a D/deaf person is raised by Davis. Some Deaf people have lip-reading and speaking skills that might allow them to pass for hearing while others might choose to avoid the obvious Deaf markers, such as signing. Davis explains that African-Americans who speak standard English and do not code-switch are sometimes accused of being ‘Oreos’, that is, black on the outside and white on the inside. Davis extends the analogy to D/deaf people and cynically asks if we want to conceive of some people as deaf ‘Oreos’ – culturally Deaf on the outside and quasi hearing on the inside.

One of the key notions of an ethnos, a people, is the idea of an extended kinship. People within an ethnic group are related not only by language, history, and culture, but also by a family structure that passes along a genetic inheritance. Davis argues that it is inappropriate to refer to the Deaf as an ethnic group, since the vast majority of Deaf people do not come from Deaf families. According to a widely cited statistic, quoted in this text as well, only 10 percent of
D/deaf people are born to hearing families (Ridgeway, 1999). The other 90 percent who constitute the majority do not have any kinship or genetic association and so in this sense the Deaf cannot be constituted within the rubric as an ethnic community.

One can argue according to Davis, that Deaf people transmit their culture through a non-kinship system, but then this refers to a different kind of social organization system compared to groups that claim to be bonded on the basis of common ethnicity. In her study of Deaf people in Cape Town, Heap (2006) posits that the feelings of belonging, solidarity and sociability, tend to designate ‘sign-deaf spaces’ as 'ethnicized' or comparable to ethnicity. Ethnicity is flexible and multi-faceted. The Deaf cannot claim ethnicity on the basis of descent since for the majority neither their parents nor children were deaf. Heap is firm in her claim that without allegiances to descent it is not possible to mobilise as an ethnic group on the basis of the 'call of blood'.

The concept ‘Deaf-World’ or ‘Deaf Culture’ is appealing for many Deaf people since it is devoid of implications of discrimination and physiological deficiency. Despite the appeal Davis finds the concepts problematic because they exclude certain groups of people, impose restrictions on their rights, and forge marginalization of communities. An elite group of Deaf people has declared themselves the gatekeepers, and have determined the criteria for admission into the Deaf-World by defining deafness in the narrowest possible sense. Davis believes that new directions for deafness need to be considered and in doing so there needs to be integrity and considerations towards inclusivity.

Davis’ most poignant and most philosophical censure of the Deaf as a linguistic / ethnic minority relates to the way in which Deaf people believe that they are the only ones struggling to define themselves in this post-modern age. The Deaf do not have to go it alone, he argues. In the past, social injustices have caused discrimination against people who suffer absence of certain bodily traits or bodily functions. Defining people according to these absent traits is denounced and a newer, more-inclusive concept of identity is favoured. The latter holds that the full and complex identity cannot be founded on alleged bodily traits because their existence as markers cannot be justified. The grand categories of race, gender, and so on are also no longer authentic because there are no distinct binaries or ‘rigid fire walls’. The categories of black and white, and man and woman have blended and have become murky and intermingled.
Similarly, we are reminded by Davis that deafness as a distinctive category can prevail only if there are rigid fire walls or frontiers that cannot be crossed. Since there are these seamless boundaries, the D/deaf are compelled to confront an almost continuous line of possibilities, including the hard-of-hearing, partially deaf, profoundly deaf, and so on. Then there are also the D/deaf who vary in oral and signing abilities, and the variations in signing noted among D/deaf and hearing children of D/deaf parents and D/deaf children of both hearing parents and one hearing and one D/deaf parent. Gender, race, religion, age, social class and schooling are yet other determinants of the endless possibilities of variability, and the countless new configurations that can emerge from these combinations. The concept of deafness, therefore cannot claim any ideal of exclusiveness neither can this be achieved by any form of purification.

And finally Davis (2007, p. 5) says with a sense of conclusiveness:

“I am arguing that defining the deaf or any other social group in terms of ethnicity, minority status, and nationhood (including "Deaf-world" and "Deaf-culture") is outdated, outmoded, imprecise, and strategically risky. We would be better off expanding our current notions of identity by being less Procrustean and more flexible. Rather than trying to force the foot into a glass slipper, why not make a variety of new shoes that actually fit?”

In my study I will raise questions to challenge the claims of the research participants that they are culturally Deaf and that their identities are constructed on the foundation of cultural deafness. Firstly admissibility and eligibility to the cultural community will be questioned. If admission is said to be based exclusively on the use of sign language, then how do participants explain their identities in circumstances when they are compelled to vocalize. Furthermore how could participants claim ethnic minority status when they were all born to hearing parents and some were not even born deaf; they had experienced acquired deafness through illness. The fact that participants are of variable race and religion also challenges ethnicity. These are some of the contradictions that I will foreground in the analysis.
2.7 Conclusion

In a variety of ways, Deaf people have accumulated a set of knowledge about themselves in the face of the larger society’s understanding or misunderstanding of them. They have found ways to define and express themselves through their codes of practice, stories, performances and everyday social experiences. The richness and power of their sign language affords them the possibilities of insight, invention, and irony. In exploring this culture, we have collected an array of resources that suggest new ways to process information about what it means to be Deaf and deaf. Using these resources, I have tried to present the culture from the inside to reveal how Deaf people interpret their lives, the ideologies they subscribe to and how they wish to be perceived by others. In their quest for identity and meaning they have created systems that guide their positioning and context in the universe.

In summary, this review of the literature of D/deaf people and D/deaf studies acknowledges the views and claims of several authors that persons who are ‘Deaf’ subscribe to a linguistic/ethnic construction of identity, are involved with the communal Deaf structure, embrace the tenets of deafness as a culture and use the indigenous signed language. The reference ‘deaf’ is used mainly in the medical profession, by academics and deaf people, to imply a definition based on medical descriptions of deafness as measured against the ‘norm’ of hearing. This latter group do not generally present with a strong culturally Deaf identity; do not use sign language as their first language; rely on oral styles of communication; and identify as having physiological debilitation. However as indicated, identities are multi-faceted and not rigid and D/deaf people may subscribe to facets of Deaf cultural identity, combined with aspects of audiologically deaf identity.

More recently, post-structural writers and critics have identified fluid and seamless boundaries between Deaf and deaf identities, where meanings and constructions are not fixed and grounded in certainty. Instead these identities may merge, mingle and at times demonstrate inflexibility and single dominance. All D/deaf people are deaf by virtue of the physical and physiological description of not being able to hear and this conceptualization cannot be denied since it is this understanding that attributes meaning to deafness. However, at different times they identify as
Deaf, as a consequence of their linguistic or cultural allegiance. The latter definition may clash, coincide, overlap or simply blend delicately with the former construction.

Deaf or deaf identities may dominate or recede in different spaces. There is also the significant variable of how they are perceived by others relative to the way in which they perceive or understand themselves. This refers respectively to the etic and emic constructions of the self described by Reagan (2002). Some might perceive themselves as being Deaf and will be recognised as Deaf at the local Deaf club where they feel part of Deaf culture and use signed language to communicate. However, while they might self-identify as Deaf, the same person in their hearing dominated work context will be forced to assume a deaf identity and use oral styles of communication. In such a context there is no Deaf culture; there is only hearing culture and the context for using sign language would be virtually non-existent.

The complexities and contradictions in these self-representations demonstrate the diversity of D/deaf peoples’ sense of self and reflect the obscurity in defining D/deaf identity. They also show the fluidity of these identities over space and time, and the transformations that they experience as they enter different spaces of life relationally and with time. People who become deaf after the formative years, who might be described as ‘partially hearing’ may initially reject their deafness. Their understandings about being D/deaf will be different to those who were born deaf and who are described as severely and profoundly deaf.

There are several other attendant complexities associated with D/deaf identity construction - such as socio-economic status, race, religion, gender and family dynamics. One of the participants in the study undertaken by Skelton and Valentine (2003) is a young, Deaf, Muslim female. Being Deaf and Muslim were important and meaningful parts of her identity. However, she found it difficult to participate fully in D/deaf culture since the culture did not reflect the understanding of her faith. She also found it difficult to participate fully in Muslim culture, because her D/deafness limited her access. During her interview she expressed a combined sense of resignation that this was how life was, tinged with an element of enthusiasm for meeting more D/deaf people, especially D/deaf Muslims, as she got older and traversed different spaces.
All human identities are complex and often contradictory, but in a small, already marginalized community such as the Deaf, the tensions between competing or different identities can have profound social and spatial implications. There is variability in each of these spaces and each space requires negotiation. D/deaf have to reject, compete with or submit to each of these spaces. It is the response to and the way in which each of these spaces is experienced and articulated, that creates the framework for post-structural thinking. As a researcher, it is important for me to recognize the ways in which D/deaf people are defined and represented as hearing definitions of deafness are being increasingly and constantly challenged. The binary categories of Deaf and deaf are informative but do not adequately capture the complexities of the identities that exist in the chasm between being Deaf and deaf.

D/deaf people, including the participants in the study, would need to undergo the arduous task of negotiating between these identities. Within a post-structural framework, D/deaf people are compelling examples of hybrid and dynamic identities. The contribution of race, gender, age and social class variables cannot go unnoticed. Within this framework, I will also explore the influence of the host of other relational variables, including D/deaf and hearing parents, siblings, teachers, partners, children and friends, that are included in ‘deaf-spaces’. How does the participant make the complex choice of whether the context requires that he be Deaf or deaf or whether he needs to straddle between the two binaries? At each stage in the project of these relationships there has to be decisions about redefining themselves, the aspects of their identities they choose to express or suppress, and where and when this should occur. Such determinations are a reflexive process, informed by the extent to which they experience marginalization, resistance or acceptance in each of these spaces.
CHAPTER 3: THEORISING IDENTITY: THE TRAJECTORY TO POST-STRUCTURALISM

“Identity is a moving intersection of the inner and outer forces that make me who I am, converging in the irreducible mystery of being human.” (PJ Palmer, 1998)

3.1 Introduction

This investigation into the identity of Deaf teachers compelled a virtual three-part review of available literature. This is the second of the three-part review, which presents the broad theoretical approaches to understanding the notion of identity and converges on certain characteristic features of identity formation. The first part, Chapter Two, was an extensive review on deafness and the discourses that inform how D/deaf people construct their identities. The next section will be a review of how teachers construct their identities.

In this chapter, I will trace paradigm shifts in identity conceptualization, progressing from accounts of identity as an agentive, internal project of the self and its connectedness to personal subjectivities. This account is then contested against structural influences that inform identity construction. There are social and collective identity theories that define identity as being individual identification within a group, based on reflexive knowledge and understanding of group membership and the developing of an emotional attachment to the group through the act of belonging. Allied to social theories are possibilities that identities can be examined as being discursively produced. That is, individuals may simultaneously occupy positions in a wide range of discourses with each contributing to shaping identity in a particular fashion, while simultaneously demonstrating that these are temporary attachments and not essential cores.

More recent post-structural accounts confirm identity as being fluid, contingent, multi-layered and constituted in discourse. As will be seen, identity is not an autonomous, unified and fixed entity. Identity is a discursive doing and the self is a fusion of the multi-layered and multi-faceted identities that emerge from the diverse subject positions that people occupy within myriad contexts. Allied to this view is the theory that identity is a performed and actioned concept, which is constituted through discourses and in interaction with others. Interaction itself
is a performance determined by the context, the partner with whom the subject is interacting, and the agenda or intention of the subject at that moment.

I probe interaction as it is characterised by linguistic and non-linguistic opportunities that give meaning to social reality. Given that language constitutes social reality, it presents as a critical site for the contestation of social meaning. The way in which we attribute meaning to social relations and structures is informed by how we engage language to enter and exit discourses. The power that is negotiated through language is highlighted as a variable in identity construction. By nature power is dynamic and unstable, changing continuously with context, offering sites of divergent positioning. Finally the search for knowing devolves upon narrative constructions of identity and the phenomenon that identities are submitted in the stories that we tell and the selves that unfold in the telling. Through narratives individuals instantiate and negotiate identity.

This is a synopsis of how I track identity from essentialism to post-structuralism. An important point of reference is the view of identity as the essential core of a person's self. This has its roots in Enlightenment philosophy founded on approaches of theorists such as Marx and Webber, and is based on a conception of a person:

"...as a fully centred, unified individual... whose 'centre' consisted of an inner core", which remains constant throughout the person's life (Hall, 1992a, p. 275). In contrast, a concept of identity presented by theorists Foucault, Mead, Laclau and Mouffe emerged that saw individuals as being:

"...formed subjectively through their membership of, and participation in, wider social relationships" (Hall, 1992a, p. 284).

The culmination of this chapter suggests post-structuralist rejection of Enlightenment approaches as identity is conceptualized as being transient with multiple representations and layers of meaning, and no fixed, essential or stable character (Harro, 2000).

In explaining and understanding identity from a post-structuralist perspective, it must be acknowledged at the outset that this particular lens is complex and incorporates a multiplicity of allegiances and orientations that more than likely have the potential to contest one another. Therefore post-structuralism cannot be viewed as a single, coherent theoretical phenomenon.
Furthermore the use of post-structuralist theory alone to understand D/deaf identities offers a somewhat limited and homogenous version of identity. Howard’s (2000) proposal of ‘theories of inter-sectionality’ is appealing since this dispels homogeneity, in favour of increasing acknowledgement that multi-dimensional stories of the self can intersect to offer a broader yet more succinct understanding of identity.

Engaging post-structuralism as a theoretical position from which to understand identity, rather than as a theory, explains the convergence of incongruent critical theorists such as Giddens who is not an avowed post-structuralist and whose theory of structuration is based on realist epistemology, and Gramsci who was a committed and active socialist. As a lens, post-structuralism is eclectic in its approach and draws on insights into understanding identity from several contesting perspectives aligned respectively to various theorists. The dynamics and complexities of identity cannot be understood purely through post-structuralism as this position is neither essential nor pure. More importantly the use of more than one theoretical approach opens possibilities of dialogue across paradigms. As disparate theoretical approaches are juxtaposed the nuances and intricacies of D/deaf identities can be more broadly conceptualized.

### 3.2 Subjectivity: The Site of Disunity

In its conceptual form, *subjectivity* has assumed prominence amongst researchers across a vast landscape of disciplines. There appears to be a re-prioritization of subjectivity as a primary category of socio-cultural, psychological, historical and political analysis, resulting in notions of subjectivity having a catalytic impact in changing the terms of debate across many areas of the social sciences. In their editorial of the inaugural issue of the journal ‘Subjectivity’, Blackman, Cromby, Hook, Papadopoulos and Walkerdine (2008) emphasize the relevance of subjectivity to several disciplines, including cultural studies, sociology, social theory, science and technology, geography, anthropology, gender and feminist studies and psychology. Scholars from across the social sciences and the humanities are in a collaborative project aimed at exploring subjectivity as a locus of social change, identifying the processes by which subjectivities are produced, and how emerging subjectivities are remaking our social worlds.
The terms ‘subjectivity’ and ‘identity’ were in the past occasionally used in ways that suggested that they were interchangeable and that there was common ground between the two concepts (Weedon, 1997; Woodward, 1997; Hall, 2004). However more recent research has demonstrated that the difference between the two concepts is far from subtle. The explanation that has best supported my understanding of the variation in the concepts is that proposed by Woodward (1997). She explains that subjectivity involves personal thoughts and emotions which are brought to the different cultural positions we hold, and which constitute the sense of self, resulting in ‘this is who I am’. Although subjectivity involves our innermost thoughts and emotions, we experience our subjectivity in a social context where language and culture give meaning to the experience of ourselves and subsequently, to the identities that we adopt.

In his writing on the experiences of post-colonial lives, Venn (2006) draws attention to the conventional ways in which identity and subjectivity are defined against each other. Identity, Venn (2006) claims, “refers to the relational aspects that qualify subjects in terms of categories such as race, gender, class, nation, sexuality, work and occupation, and thus in terms of acknowledged social relations and affiliations to groups, such as, teachers, miners, parents, and so on” (p. 79). Subjectivity, in contrast, indexes the acting, thinking and feeling being. He adds that subjectivity evokes the set of processes by which a subject or self is constituted, this self being the result of an internalization of attitudes, values, expectations, memories and experiences discoursed in relationships and activities that, through historically specific self-reflective practices of recognition, constitute a particular named person.

Venn (2006) sets identity and subjectivity apart but goes on to argue that any complete account of lived lives needs to include both identity and subjectivity. He clarifies that identity is a response to what groups or categories and their relations make possible for subjects, while subjectivity tells the story of how a specific self lives those cultural positions, actively realizes them, takes responsibility and ownership of them as an agent, converting social category memberships and social roles into ethical, emotional and narrated choices. Conventionally Venn constructs identity as the public face: about groups and the external. It is about social categories and modes of conduct derived from those social categories. It is how the person is known to others in the broadest, most general and least interesting ways. Subjectivity, on the other hand, or the singular
character, sums up the actual complex person and the lived life. Subjectivity encompasses the aesthetic experience, the feelings and the personal self.

Identities, according to Woodward (1997), are produced, consumed and regulated within cultures, thus creating meanings through these systems of representation, about the identity positions which we might adopt. Similarly Hall (2004) also explains that subjectivity is founded on a post-structuralist discourse and focuses on the making of the subject, this includes the taking of subject positions with emphasis on the reflexive dimension. The concept subjectivity allows for an explanation of the emotions associated with the personal investment which is made in positions of identity and of the reasons why we are attached to particular identities. Subjectivity includes unconscious dimensions of the self and can be rational as well as irrational, implying contradiction and change. We attempt to be clear-headed, rational agents but are challenged by forces beyond our control.

Rational, humanist subjects have been examined through narrow identity categories that attempt to represent them as stable, coherent and static. Contrary to humanist notions of knowing reality and the existence of rational subjects, “post-structuralism theorizes subjectivity as a site of disunity and conflict” (Weedon, 1997, p.21), produced through a whole range of discourses, therefore rendering subjectivity to be neither coherent nor fixed. Weedon (1997) indicates that despite the existence of different forms of poststructuralism that vary in practice and political implications, there is the underlying common relationship between language, meaning and subjectivity. Here the common factor in the analysis of social organization, social meanings, power, and individual consciousness is language. “Language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed” (Weedon, 1997:21). Thus, concludes Weedon, subjectivity cannot be said to be “genetically determined, but socially produced” through language.

Investigating an individual’s subjectivity, through a post-structural lens is thus a way of gaining access to the discursive practices through which we are all constituted as subjects and through which the world we all live in is made real (Davies,1993). By this I mean the way we
conceptualize ourselves, present ourselves to others and negotiate acceptance or rejection of the roles that we occupy. The discourses and practices through which we are constituted are also often in tension, one with another, providing the human subject with multiple layers of contradictory meanings which are embedded in their conscious and subconscious minds (Davies, 1993). Since subjectivities are in motion and always under construction, this theoretical framework does not try to fix or unify these subjectivities, but instead it looks to the more fluid process of meaning-making and subject formation. According to Blackman et al (2008) subjectivity as any other concept is seen as an active agent that shapes and is shaped by prevailing social, cultural and political spaces. Subjectivity, in this account, is the experience of the lived multiplicity of positionings. It is historically contingent and produced through the interplay of power and knowledge and is sometimes held together by desire and affect.

Wetherell (2008) a social psychologist, examines subjectivity from the standpoint of discursive identity research, being wary that subjectivity seems to disclose the private and personal and does not engage with the discursive practices through which identities are constructed. She challenges Venn’s (2006) positioning of identity and subjectivity as distinctive entities. In support of her opposing position, she presents arguments against singling out subjectivity as terrain for new research. She cites that with this division we immediately overlook something very important about the nature of social identities and category memberships. We are likely to deny the ways in which practices allocated to subjectivity such as self-reflexivity, affect and emotion are absolutely integral to the very construction and definition of social categories and their cultural imaging. Social class, for example, emerges not just as a material position but as a position in an affective hierarchy where value is assigned to associated levels of emotions and these are then individualized and presented as a particular social class performance. In addition there is the risk that in taking subjectivity as the analytic starting point, researchers may over-emphasize interiority and privacy. Subjectivity, when contrasted to the publicly available identity, risks becoming privatized and individualized.

Secondly, Wetherell (2008) takes issue against marking out subjectivity for in so doing the challenge of new work on intersectional identities will be disregarded. Work on inter-sectionality demonstrates, for example, the ways in which identities based on social categories are
inextricably linked and mutually articulated. Social categories based on race and ethnicities are in complex interaction with social class and gender. It shows how identity categories are relational and defined through each other, constantly being reconfigured across social contexts. Intersectional positions are translated into narratives and stories that become part of the discourses through which people live, and identify with the social. For this reason identities cannot be meaningfully decomposed into constituting fragments. In fact more recent research on identity is testimony that identity cannot be taken for granted as being external to subjectivity or simply matter for subjectivity to work upon.

As an alternative to engaging ‘subjectivity’ as the analytic starting point for investigating identity, Wetherell (2008, p. 80) proposes that her own preference for attempting to make:

“sense of both the cultural resources for identity work and in vivo identity performances is to make psycho-discursive practices the unit of analysis”.

Psycho-discursive practices are discursive practices, which are recognizable, conventional, collective, social procedures through which character, self, identity, the emotions, motives, intentions and beliefs are performed, originated and composed. She argues in support of qualitative identity research that is now sufficiently sophisticated to be able to leave behind older distinctions between publicly defined *identity* and the private self evoked by the notion of *subjectivity*. Moreover the use of *psycho-discursive* practices as the unit of analysis for examining identity, presents the opportunity to re-visit the terrain of the psychological and the social in new, creative ways. And at a juncture in the social sciences when even disciplines like geography, social policy and politics, formerly contemptuous of the psychological, have burgeoning curiosity for identity and emotion.

Lynne Layton (2008), a relational psychoanalyst, like Wetherell (2008) argues that in attempting to understand subjectivity, psychoanalysts should not easily separate the psychic from the social. To that end, she argues, we need to understand that the very way our psychic structures become intertwined with split gender, race, sexual, class and other identity investments not only divides subjects against each other but also divides the subject against itself. These two accounts, when taken together, show us something interesting about the ways that academics from different
branches of the psychological and social sciences struggle to understand the complex production of subjectivities.

Recent work by post-structuralist theorists, Holstein and Gubrium (2000) introduced the role of emotions as an added dimension in the construction of subjectivities. The authors acknowledge that emotions also play a fundamental role in the subjective formation of identities. This work creates opportunities for a multiplicity of voices connecting with a web of emotional experiences. The authors also affirm that identity is a dynamic process of inter-subjective discourses, experiences and emotions. All of these change over time, constantly reconstructing and redefining identity. Irrespective of the magnitude of events experienced within a particular cultural and political context, they are significant in constructing meanings as they are subjected to discursive practices. Interpersonal identity constructions blend the discourses of personal identity formation with social identity formation, accentuating its affective character. Emotions connect people’s thoughts, judgements and beliefs, giving interpretation to experiences.

Zembylas (2003) confirms that emotions are central to identity construction, but the multiplicity of emotions likely to be experienced in any one event is complex. Post-structuralism is advancing thinking on how identities are evolving out of the process through which emotions, thoughts, judgements and beliefs have been constructed. Zembylas (p.222) writes that:

“People organize their worlds partly in terms of emotions experienced in events, and show enormous variability in their propensity to experience specific emotions. The same emotion may be associated with different events, and different emotions may be associated with the same event.”

An important issue is how an integrated personality evolves out of socially constructed emotions within a context that is shaped by and shapes the tensions of power relations.

In the terrain of research on identity, subjectivity is indeed critical to understanding identity and cannot be conceptualized as an autonomous phenomenon. The stereotyped definition of identities as social category memberships or identification with the role positions that one occupies and that which is simple, public and uncomplicated is fragile. Social class memberships and role positions are not mere accessories or appendages of the self and cannot rest with simplistic
material definition. Its meaning is given by the psycho-emotional attachment that subjects offer to the respective membership categorizations and discourses and the meaning is in fact enhanced by the magnitude and value of the emotional attachment.

I am aware that the Deaf participants are subjected to a multitude of discourses and to each of these discourses a certain subjectivity or set of emotions is associated. Some of the participants at different times in their lives have even been recruited by contradictory discourses. Subjectivities by nature are complex and this study will examine such contradictions as sites of tension and struggle. By probing the acceptance or rejection statuses associated with the various categorizations, this study will attempt to explain how the participants negotiate their identities and give meaning to their lives as Deaf persons and as Deaf teachers.

The next section engages with the concepts of ‘agency’ and ‘structure’ and contests the extent to which identity is self-determining and independent of social structure, against the extent to which social structure determines individual identity. Cote and Levine (2002) describe this as the agency-structure debate.

3.3 Agency and Structure

Several researchers have given prominence to the dualism of agency and structure in theorizing identity (Taylor, 1989; Hall, 1992a). Crucial here is the degree of agency and autonomy exercised by the self in the construction of identity and whether there is free will on the part of individuals to construct their own identities. If free will prevails, then the individual is ascribed as having agency, or is an agent of his actions. The opposing view is that identity construction is informed by various structures of power. Here positions within discourses are imposed upon individuals, causing subjective agentic influence on their actions to be restricted, and social and cultural structures are fore-grounded as the instruments of identity construction.

The notion of identity has been conceptualized by researchers and theorists from a range of traditions and disciplines. Two views of identity that appear to be particularly influential and aligned respectively to the agency-structure binary are the psychological /developmental and the socio-
cultural traditions. Both of these perspectives conflate at some stage, as will be seen in this chapter, towards post-structural theorizing. A significant feature of the psychological/developmental perspective is the focus on the individual. Identity formation is seen largely as self-determined, as the individual adapts or develops to fit with the events and situations of life. Taylor (1989) supports this position in his theorizing and presents the individual with agentive identity and as a self-interpreting subject. There is emphasis on the reflexive capacity of the mind, bringing subjective power over objective experiences and facilitating the construction of the: “human agent who is able to remake himself by methodical and disciplined action” (Taylor, 1989, p.159), with identity emerging as a project of the self, and the individual having the personal capacity to fulfil one’s own destiny.

In contrast to the earlier position on agentic identities, Taylor’s (1998) later analysis of identity transcends the bounds of self-determined action. This view is effective for understanding not only how individuals build their sense of self within a multitude of social and cultural influences, but also for how these constructions can be reflected in the attachments they form with others. He classifies identity as being a sense of self as well as a sense of belonging. He differentiates between ontological (self) and categorical (social) identity. Ontological identity refers to the formation of a sense of self through a collection of enforced and fragmented experiences, while categorical identity refers to the relationship of this self-identity to others belonging to the same group or social category. The concept of identity hinges on the combined conceptualisation of the social and the individual, so that each can be talked about in terms of the other.

Taylor (1989) emphasizes the importance of "a defining community" in forming identity. He argues that individuals define themselves through conversations with people in "communities". The idea that a self only exists through "webs of interlocution" explains this notion and its formation is shaped by a shared language through which the world and the self are interpreted. Through a mutual language the individual and others in the shared community are the interlocutors and together they constitute a network of dialogue. Conversations are exchanged over the norms, values and beliefs of the community and commitments are established. So identity is essentially tied up with what one is committed to and what one values highly and strives for.
Taylor (1989) sees identity as orientation in moral space, a space for interlocution in which questions arise about what is acceptable and unacceptable in the community, what has meaning or lacks meaning and what is important or unimportant. And categorical or group identities are constructed on these foundational cornerstones. In my study reference will be made to the relationship between participants, the broader Deaf community and the culture that it espouses. The study will explore the extent to which participants embrace the conventions of Deaf culture voluntarily or whether the steadfast culture of the Deaf community imposes an identity on the Deaf participants that subverts their agency, control and self determination.

Renowned sociologist Anthony Giddens (1991) shows bias against the more traditional, rational, agency model in interpreting identity that is located in a framework that theorizes identity as being counter to modernity, towards a framework that favours social and cultural influences on identity. Giddens elaborates that identity does not refer to a set of traits or observable characteristics but rather to a project, as people seek create coherence and continuity in their lives. The self is constituted by sets of biographical narratives. My personal understanding of biographical narratives is the various positions that one holds in the different categories of life, these being for example, mother, sister, Sunday school teacher, chairperson of women’s guild, housekeeper, and other such role definitions.

Identity, according to Giddens (1991), is the person’s own reflexive understanding and interpretation of his/her set of biographical narratives. Coherence is not seen as pre-existing or internal to an individual's life. Instead the individual deliberately seeks coherence, as part of an ongoing, reflexive, identity project. In the process of composing a biography, a person continually integrates and internalizes events which occur in the outside world into the ongoing narrative of the self. Giddens (1991, p.5) argues that:

"...in the post-traditional order of modernity, and against the backdrop of new forms of mediated experiences, self-identity becomes a reflexively organized endeavour" which comprises "the sustaining of coherent, yet continually revised narratives."

The self therefore refers to an amalgamation of the multi-layered identities that we hold with each connecting variously to the roles that we occupy at different junctures in life.
Another psychoanalytic theorist who was interested in accounting for the way in which subjects came to recognize themselves and integrate into social life was Lacan (1977). He extended the identity construction process to the discursive realm, theorizing that a key stage in the socialization of the infant is the acquisition of a shared system of discourses. He attempted to explain how the chaotic unconsciousness of infancy is brought under control and subjected to a coherent identity. He refers to this as the ‘mirror phase’ where the infant understands itself as a whole, thereby creating the illusion of unity and coherence. But simultaneously there is an ‘other’ to this whole. Identity for Lacan is about identification with the ‘other’ and this refers to the subject positions that discourses offer the individual. The notion of the true, essential self is fictional since the individual is structured by discourses. But even this structuring by discourses is not totalizing since it still does not account for the complete individual.

Despite his earlier alliance to agency as a determinant of identity, Hall (2004) later critiqued agency as having a somewhat uncertain or ambivalent position in psychoanalysis. His justification for this claim is that on the one hand agency affords an objective description of the psyche that may lead to an exclusive, reflexive, introspection of the self, by the self. And on the other hand, it constructs a version of the self that is subjected to the unconscious actions and motives of the psyche, and also to various discursive positions. This contradiction is the basis of the argument that psychology is guided towards normalisation of social beings. In other words in a psychotherapeutic relationship the client believes that his participation in the process is self-directed, but it is the therapist who is directing the client towards institutionally prescribed normative behaviours.

Allied to this view on identity is the humanist perspective, with its focus on the use of cognition, rationality, scientific method and profound individuality. Penuel & Wertsch (1995) engage a starting point that directs attention to the phenomenon that the individual creates and maintains a dynamic conception of oneself as a coherent whole. There is undivided emphasis on the role of the specific, isolated individual in identity construction. The focus is on promoting the notion of compartmentalized identity constructions, and the lack of attention for socio-cultural aspects.
Hood (1998) explains this as being the intra-personal psychological approach typically investigated by clinical procedures, with the central idea of identity as an essential, cognitive, psychological phenomenon that guides the actions of the person. Here identity is acknowledged as a personal, internal project of the self. It is assumed that although people may present themselves variously in different contexts, the essence or core of that presence is a stable, coherent, explainable identity. Tatum (2000) refers to this self-deterministic view as the Ericksonian approach which operationalized identity concepts in largely psychological terms. In this view identity formation is an unconscious central psychoanalytic concept relating to how an individual defines one’s sense of self.

Alternate to this view of identity is the exterior performance that occurs in discourse and is socially constructed. What prevails here is that identity is repositioned from the internal privacy of cognition and the psyche to the external territory of interpretation based on discourse and other continuous and dynamic processes that constitute meaning. Hood (1998) refers to this as the inter-personal socio-cultural approach investigated by the social sciences. This perspective rejects the notion of an absolute or true self underlying the discursively informed self and instead posits that the performance of who we are is negotiated and/or disputed in discourse. Those who align with this socio-cultural perspective focus more specifically on the interactions that prevail amongst the individual, culture and society. In this sense, identity is located both within, and external to, the individual, and it is developed through social and cultural practices. Identity formation is seen as being "steered" by society with the individual attempting to "navigate predetermined passages" (Cote & Levine, 2002).

Thus, from the emphasis on the internal workings of subjectivity, there was now a new convergence of thought towards social processes within the family and extended social groups and the impact of these categories upon the psyche. Adams (2003) discusses sociologist GH Mead’s research in 1934, which also contributed to the conceptualization of identity and the self as constructs in psychodynamic and cultural processes. The personal self is embedded in social contexts, and the attitudes and actions of important others was seen to impact significantly on the formation of the personal self. Mead informed of our ability to be reflexive and that reflexivity is
determined by social and cultural influences, thus giving meaning to the cultural context that informs the way in which the self is experienced. Mead proposed that the basis of social order is the self developing in the process of social relations and interaction. Through symbols, meaning is derived from interaction and the position one assumes in a particular discourse.

The *Cycle of Socialization* proposed by Harro (2000) is a useful starting point to understanding identity in the interactionist context. This theory describes the socialization process that begins at birth and to which we are subjected without choice. Parents and significant others in the extended environment start to impose shape on the self-concept and identity of the infant through the already established structural prejudices of religion, culture, traditions, beliefs, values, socio-economic position, race, gender and other dynamics. The *Cycle of Socialization* distinguishes Giddens’ (1991) reflexive project of the self from other social and culturally dominant conceptualizations of identity. He rejects the dichotomy of agency and structure in explaining identity as this constructs the individual as being either potentially free of social constraints or as being totally determined by them. Instead he posits the approach where agency and structure are intertwined in a structuration process creating a sense of equilibrium in the conjoined influences of personal agency and exterior structures.

The *Structuration Theory* advanced by Giddens (1990, 1991) was not intended as a theory in the sense of advancing generalizations about social reality. Instead it underlies the:

“...conceptual investigation of the nature of human action, social institutions and the inter-relations between action and institutions” (1990, p.204).

In more recent writings Giddens’ (2002) conceptualization of identity is that the austere impositions of tradition and culture actually serve to stifle awareness of the self and reflexive intervention and prohibits individual freedom and creativity in constructing identity. Identity and behaviour are determined primarily by how individuals receive and process environmental information and use this to construct individualization. Structuration theory’s response, therefore, to whether the self constructs identity or identity constructs the self is that self and identity are mutually implicated in their co-construction.

This latter view resulting in the prejudicing of internal accounts in favour of constructionist orientated approaches is aligned to the turn to post-structuralism. The post-structural perspective
challenges identity formation as being either an individual or a social phenomenon (Foucault, 1984). Moreover, the whole notion of having a fixed-self is problematic and the process of identity formation is viewed as dynamic and somewhat unstable. To this end, poststructuralists often describe identity formation as a continuing process of becoming. This perspective of identity emphasizes the impossibility of an origin of the self, meaning that there is no 'fixed' self. The focus here is on how identities are constantly in the making and continuously re-defined. Giddens (2002) suggests the incompleteness and dynamism of identity construction; a non-linear, unstable process where new features emerge constantly and by which an individual confirms or problematizes who she/he is or becomes.

Clearly, the notion of identity brings with it connected and multiple discourses. Whilst accounts of identity as a project of the self frequently position the reflexive self within a particular social context, there is a more radical, post-structural version of identity that also competes for recognition in its quest to explain the self. Post-structuralists argue that rather than being reflected in discourse, identity is constituted in discourse in an active, continuous, dynamic process. In this account the self is defined by its position in social practice and it is to this description that I now turn. Post-structuralism which embraces the view of plurality and continuity in discourse, has caused all essentialist notions of conceptualizing identity to be dismantled.

What we have seen in this section is that concomitantly theories of identity pursue the course of a three-fold trajectory, parting ways along essentialist, constructionist and post-structuralist descriptions. Although these views may be spoken of independently, there are researchers who acknowledge that the divisions are somewhat arbitrary and indistinct and continue to work across these divisions. With regard to the agency-structure debate my own conceptualization of the competing hegemony between individual autonomy and various social and cultural structures is that identity construction is the joint enterprise of both individual agency and the power structures that pervade reality.

Gidden’s structuration theory is appealing and it is within this framework that I will argue that although the Deaf participants may have exercised agency in embracing the conventions of Deaf
Culture, there is also the reality that their identities have been co-constructed by the strong cultural structure of the Deaf community. Through my experience with the Deaf community I am aware that Deaf culture is an authoritative and supreme structure that governs the lives and informs the identities of its members. I will also explore the agency of the participants through the way he/she autonomously responds by acceptance, rejection or mediation of the norms of the culture. Is it personal agency that guides the way in which the Deaf person negotiates the conventions of the culture or resists integration of certain of these conventions into his/her own identity? I will also explore the possible tensions in the adjacent influences of agency and structure as these projects work together perhaps to spawn disharmony and disequilibrium. How does the Deaf individual process the sense of knowing the self in amidst tensions, incompleteness and constant re-definition?

Up to this stage in the theorizing on identity, we have observed early traditions of identity as an agentive, *internal project of the self*, with the sovereign subject fashioning his or her own identity. Towards the end of the 20th century, there emerged new trends to re-configure the subject as a socio-cultural, collective being constructed in discourse. This is the content of the discussion that follows in the next section.

**3.4 Identity: Constituted in Discourse**

In this post-modern, post-structural account identity prevails as fluid, fragmentary, contingent, multi-layered and most significantly, *constituted in discourse*. As explained in the previous sub-section, post-structuralist approaches embrace discourse-based identities and have caused all essentialist notions of conceptualizing identity to be dismantled (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). Essentialist constructions include notions of identity being fixed, stable, rational, having a constant inner core and determined essentially by either personal agency or social structures. As a theoretical position rather than a theory, post-structuralism which is rooted in the work of Derrida (1973), Foucault (1975) and Lacan (1977) amongst others, argues that humans and their social world exist in a dialectical relationship in which each creates the other. Although the material and social worlds are experienced by most individuals as objective realities, its
meanings are subject to change and always precarious, causing the nature of reality to be continually constructed and reconstructed through interaction and shared definitions.

Benwell and Stokoe (2006) contend that a discursive view of identity can be realized as discourses interact with biographical structures. This section attempts to capture this side of the self where existing discourses regulate power and determinism upon identity as the self is subjected, structured and produced through identifications in discourse. In other words identities are given meaning in the context of each of the individual’s several subject positions, memberships in different structures, the intent with which the self is performed and in the framework of the individual’s beliefs, values and ideologies, as these collectively and individually intersect with the specific biographical projects.

Hall (2004, p.51) argues that “an individual’s self-consciousness never exists in isolation … it always exists in relationship to an ‘other’ or ‘others’ who serve to validate its existence”. Hall’s theory of connectedness between the self and an ‘other’ presumes that identity does not merely originate from the individual but emerges from the processes of negotiation and contextualization. Identity can be a matter of being subjected to a discourse, taking up a position in a discourse, being active in the discursive process of engaging with other interlocutors and identity can be contingent on the conditions of the interactional context. Through interaction with various interlocutors, audiences and social actors, conflicting versions of the self emerge, creating ‘repertoires of identities’. This view of identity represents a conceptual shift towards newer accounts of identity which promote discursive views of the self, dissipating psychological constructs of identity and redirecting the focus of researchers to identities that are socially actioned (de Fina, Schiffrin & Bamberg, 2006).

In addition this view of identity leaves in its wake a broad platform for the performance of newer accounts of identity. It thus becomes clear that discourses are not confined to language use only, and that people do not use language only to choose or construct identity positions in their daily interaction, but that the whole being comes into play in defining one’s identities. Pennycook (1994, p.36) supports this position in defining discourses, as “ways of organizing meaning that are often though not exclusively realized through language”. These understandings of discourse
by Weedon (1997) and Pennycook are appealing since they emphasize discourse as broader than language, and as embedded and expressed in bodily performance and actions.

Despite their claim that identities are socially situated, Benwell and Stokoe (2006) are critical of identity being integral to discourse. If this is so then discourse takes on the attributes of being prescriptive, deterministic and limiting, thereby disempowering the individual of autonomous investment. They challenge the notion of identities or subject positions within social discourses, while at the same time recognize that these are temporary attachments and not essential cores. With its post-structuralist bias, this perspective has implications for the oppressive and disenfranchising nature of structurally orientated identities, leading to shifts towards the end of the 20th century towards the discursive turn in interpreting and understanding identity, calling for identity to be reconfigured as something socio-cultural.

In his ‘discursive production of the subject’, Foucault (1984) accounts for identities as the product of dominant discourses that are linked to social arrangements and practices. He decentred the post modern subject and shifted focus from the essential identification process to the actual discourses that were presumed to be the foundation for the construction of identity and the individual response to ‘who am I’. The implication of this model is that if our identities are inscribed in available discourses, then the constitution of the self will be founded on ideology, and the development of the individual devolves to becoming a process of acquiring a particular ideological version of the world, serving whichever ideology is dominant at the time. In this context, Foucault’s explanation of identity is that it is a subsuming force that determines and directs the individual.

Eminent discourse theorists, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) share Foucault’s view on identity. They reject the common understanding that identity is founded on an essential core that has potential expression across contexts. Their claim is that identities are situated in discourses and that identity is about identification with the particular subject positions that one assumes in a discursive structure. The discursive structure is constituted by several discursive practices and the subject acquires identity through the way in which he/she presents the self in
the different discursive practices within the larger discursive structure. It is in the performance of these practices that identity is accepted, refused and negotiated.

In addition Laclau and Mouffe (1985) claim that identity must be managed as being discursive since it is constituted relative to the way in which the self is represented in the various discursive practices. The self is not presumed to be the *essence*, but the *description* or the representation of the way it presents in the different discourses in which it participates. The subject is decentred with identities being contingent on the way in which it engages with the discourses at its disposal. In this form of theorizing, the self is a description of the particular discourse in which it presides at any given time or context, and not essential in itself. And as indicated earlier participation may constitute acceptance, rejection or negotiation of the discursive practice in question. Although discourses have the potential to remain stable, participation in the discourses can be of unstable character causing identity to be fragmented and transient. Identity may be continually re-shaped and reconstructed and the presence of conflicting discourses may cause lack of coherence and instability in selfhood.

Indeed the paradox in the thinking of both Foucault (1984) and Laclau and Mouffe (1985) was identified by Hall (2000), representing the field of psychology. His view is that in order for a subject to position itself in a discourse there had to be some kind of cognitive coherence that existed prior to the discourse. Hall saw the need to create a balance or harmony between identities that are discursively constructed, as elucidated by Foucault, and identities that are psychoanalytically processed. For Hall identity is the point at which there is a transient but live connection to the subject positions that are constructed by discursive positions. The subject is not passively or involuntarily placed in a discourse; the subject reflexively identifies and deliberately invests in the position. Integral to discourses are associated sets of meanings, beliefs and values which are activated and effected when the sets recruit subjects. Once recruited, the subjects become subjected to the discourse and accordingly position themselves within the discourse.

“Post-structuralist theory argues that people are not socialized into the social world but that they go through a process of subjectification” (Davies, 1993, p.13).

The positions which we identify with in the subjectification process constitute ‘identity’.
Although the discursive framework prejudices agency in identity construction, this conceptualization is nevertheless appealing and will guide my research objective towards establishing how the Deaf participants have positioned themselves in the various discourses to realize their identities both as Deaf persons and as Deaf teachers. This paradigm in which identity is situated in and constructed through discourse implies an anti-essentialist view of identity, since it presumes meaning to be situated not within the self as an essence, but as a description in several different discourses with the potential to occur individually or collectively. The research will also explore Hall’s (2000) explanation with regard to the extent to which the Deaf participants would have exercised personal, cognitive self-determination at the point at which they positioned themselves in the discourse. What were the positions that they accepted or resisted? What were the positions that they took up for negotiation? How did their positioning in contradictory texts guide the project to coherence? The dialectic nature of discourses will also be examined as teachers are sometimes constrained and at other times enabled through structures. For example, in the context of power discourses, teachers are not only produced but may also use power to produce particular subject positions.

The next section will focus on Taylor’s (1998) Social Identity Theory (SIT) and the analysis of identity as a group project. This is effective for understanding not only how individuals build their sense of self within a multitude of socio-cultural influences but also for how this is reflected in the attachments they form with others. In Taylor’s more recent explanations, identity hinges on the combined conceptualisation of the social and the individual, so that each can be talked about in terms of the other.

### 3.5 Identity: A Socially Constructed Enterprise

Benwell and Stokoe (2006) argue that this construction of identity as being socially located, paved the way for theories in sociology and sociolinguistics, in which the self is given definition by virtue of its membership of particular groups and allegiance to certain ideologies, for example, ‘black’, ‘women’, ‘Zionist’. It is perhaps this conceptual relocation that has come to influence several discursive views of identity, in which the self has come to be defined by virtue of its identification with particular groups or allegiance to certain ideologies. Howard (2000,
p.382) proposed the idea of *theories of intersectionality* dispelling homogeneity in this version of identity, in favour of increasing acknowledgement that multi-dimensional stories of the self can intersect. A leading theory in the terrain of group identity is Social Identity Theory (SIT), which will be discussed in greater detail within the context of the Deaf community. The theory espouses one of several approaches that depends on this collective view of identity and is founded on the social-cognitive processes of membership and the way in which belonging is both initiated and sustained (Tajfel and Turner, 1986).

As opposed to personal identity, Tajfel and Turner (1986) explain that within SIT, social identity is defined by individual identification within a group, a process based on reflexive knowledge and understanding of group membership and by an emotional attachment to this belonging, hence the social-cognitive process. The writers claim that identity lays dormant, waiting to be ‘switched on’ in the presence of others. There appears to be a cause and effect relationship between social identity memberships and actions and behaviour of members.

For my own study on the community of Deaf persons, Taylor’s (1989) emphasis on the importance of a “defining community” in the construction of identity is compelling. He argues that individuals define themselves through interactions and exchanges with people in “communities”. The self exists and labels itself by virtue of participation in ‘webs of interlocution’.

“I am a self only in interaction to certain interlocutors ... a self exists only with what I call webs of interlocution”, (Taylor, 1989, p.36).

Identity is shaped by a shared language and it is through this shared language that the world and the self are interpreted. Conversations with members of communities take place within these ‘webs of interlocution’. These conversations are not necessarily face-to-face but can also take place by engaging with the ideas of those within the community. So identity is in effect grounded by what one is committed to and the values that one strives to uphold. Identity is not fixed or stable; at various stages identity will be subjected to significant changes owing to a multitude of influences.
In recent years proponents of psychology and sociolinguistics have challenged the notion of a collective identity and sought to subvert the essential, enduring quality of group allegiance while simultaneously securing the personal and subjective investments that these groupings hold for some individuals. For example Lave and Wenger’s (1991) theory of ‘Communities of Practice’ challenged the essentialist notions of collective identities but acknowledged the shared experiences and social practices of people in their local communities. It is also the personal projects of participation and engagement which propagate coherence and Wenger (1998) identified three elements which distinguish a community of practice. Firstly, there is mutual engagement of participants as people engage in actions which they negotiate with one another. Secondly, there is negotiation of a joint enterprise creating relations of mutual accountability. Thirdly, there is the development of a shared repertoire. These dimensions of practice which give a community competence and coherence become facets of identity.

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1998) explain ‘Community of Practice’ as an aggregate or group of people who come together for a common purpose, such groups being defined by their social engagement, rather than their location or population grouping. This social collective is not an abstract categorization; rather it is meaningful to those who participate in them. Identity is redirected to social practice rather than being pre-existing and essential. It is interesting that the individual is not restricted to being a member of one particular group but may participate in several communities of practice simultaneously. Examples of such communities are permanent structures such as family, work colleagues, religious congregations; or more transient structures such as coming together for a photography workshop or a training camp.

The Deaf community is in itself a distinctive social structure. Constructions of deafness that focus primarily on Deaf people as a cultural and linguistic minority community are characterized by basically the same kinds of elements that would distinguish any other community. The first of these features is a common, shared language. In addition culturally Deaf people are a community that has a rich culture and art forms of its own and a proud history. Members align themselves to the norms, values, beliefs and traditions of the communal structure. Collectively these elements contribute to a cohesive Deaf identity. Equally significant in the Deaf community is the shared awareness of their cultural identity. Members of the Deaf cultural community have a strong,
bonded awareness of their culture and heritage and this awareness passes on from generation to
generation largely through the medium of signed language. These elements conform to Wenger’s
(1998) description of a ‘community of practice’ and the associate identities that emerge through
group engagement.

Although Tajfel and Turner, and Lave and Wenger are social theorists, my intention in reviewing
their theories was to illustrate that identities are constructed through membership of social and
cultural groups and identities are performed in social and cultural groups. Through mutual social
practice teachers may constitute themselves as a ‘community of practice’ as a result of which
they may embrace a collective identity. However I wish to explore the sense of belonging that
the Deaf teachers experience within the fraternity of teachers. What are the inclusionary and
exclusionary factors that enable or restrain membership in their respective schools and in the
larger community of teachers? How has the inclusionary and exclusionary factors informed their
identity construction as teachers?

The next section captures the conceptualization of identity as an intentional performance. In line
with post-structuralist thinking there is the conceptualization of identity as a coordinated
performance, marking a shift away from the self as a model exclusively determined by or
existing prior to the structures of social practices and relationships.

3.6 Identity: A Choreographed Performance

Judith Butler’s (1990) theory of performativity presents identity as discursively constituted and
performative. She allies herself to post-structuralist feminism with sound respect for
psychoanalysis. Here the gendered subject is immersed in discourse and is therefore lacking in
coherence and stability. Such a performance of identity has the qualities of being non-
essentialist, transient and adaptable yet still being the individual performance of constituents of
psychoanalysis, that is, thoughts, motivations, memories and attitudes. In this sense therefore,
identity is an actively constituted, intentionally performed, discursive enterprise. Pennycook
argues that performativity is:
“...the way in which we perform acts of identity as an ongoing series of social and cultural performances rather than as the expression of a prior identity” (2004, p. 8).

Performance of identity therefore means that knowledge and its objects, social relations and social identity are being constituted and reconstituted over time; and are not fixed or static.

Butler’s (1990) contribution has confirmed that people can display ‘polyphonous identities’ during which they can assume voices that are associated with different discourses, and that they can perform identities. In other words, they can present themselves according to the conventions of each of the different discourses available to them. Alternately they can resist the conventions of the available discourses. This presentation or performance has the potential to be at variance with what their overt characteristics may suggest. Butler’s account is appealing since it affords post-structural leverage and discards the model of fixed, essential gender contextualized by rational agency. She cautions however that this must not imply a plural model of seamless gender with liberatory freedom and is resolute that a subject may not transcend the identity discourses within which it is situated, in her words:

“There is no gender identity behind the expression of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results (Butler, 1990, p. 33).

In her basic premise, that identity is a discursive practice and yet an elected performance, Judith Butler (1990) challenges the exclusive Foucauldian theory in favour of reconciliation between Foucault and psychoanalysis. The account by Foucault that identity is informed essentially by discourse disputes the view of identity as an effect of the agentive self and neglects the agency of the subject. Identities are seen not as merely represented in discourse, but rather as performed, enacted and embodied though various linguistic and non-linguistic opportunities. Butler (1990) engages with the view that subjects may enjoy performative agency, authorized by the voice of the very subject that choreographs the performance and decides on the conventions by which that performance or presentation is undertaken and fashioned. In this way Butler reconfigures Foucault’s account of the subject in a way that it is able to reconcile concepts of both structure and agency.
In addition, in the post-structural conceptualization of identity, each new performance that the subject engages with may involve new elements of style, character and intensity of performance, depth of reflexivity and new or amended material and concrete occurrences, causing identities to be continuously transient and unstable, and often at variance with the previous performance of that same identity. White (2005) confirms that identity is a complex act of meaning-making, a process in which the self is being configured. Identity is revealed as integrative and relational - a matter of transforming cultural resources into performances of the self and meaning-making is a continuous process where the self is being reconfigured in each new performance.

A similar theorization and understanding of ‘identity’ based on an analysis of the concept by Fairclough (1992), a theorist in the field of sociolinguistics and critical discourse, is that identity is not conducted in isolation but in direct relation to the structural and social conditions that pertain within societies. The constructing that Fairclough refers to implies that identity is an actioned concept, which is constituted through discourse and in interaction with others. As an actioned concept, identity is an actively constituted, discursive performance that challenges the premise of an essential identity, or the premise of identity as being either agentically determined or discursive. Discursive practices according to Fairclough, yield a framework and give definition to the way in which individuals conceptualize and present themselves to others and negotiate roles they occupy in terms of their acceptance or rejection of these positions.

Benwell and Stokoe (2006) confirm that the performative paradigm tends to focus on the prominence of interaction as the platform of identity development. In his analysis, sociologist GH Mead (1934) explained the self as being situated in everyday life and accounted for identity as being contingently constructed through interaction. Interaction is a performance determined by the demands of the context, the person whom the subject is interacting with and the agenda of the subject at that moment in that setting. In other words identity is a discursive process informed by the interactional context in which it presents. For Mead however the difference between himself and Butler is that the performance is self-determining and deliberate, guided by selective objectives to maintain a stable and consistent persona.
A unifying theme in discourse and identity research is a rejection of the essentialist position that identity categories are fixed, unitary properties that individuals possess. In contrast post-structural researchers locate identity in the public realms of discourse and semiotic systems. From this perspective identity is not a universal of nature or culture, but a question of performativity (Butler, 1990). Pure discursive approaches collectively explain identity as a fluid, transient and versatile process with the potential to undermine any type of order, stability or rational explanation and also one in which identity can be investigated in the dynamism of interaction. Discourse based theorists mentioned in this chapter claim also that interaction based theories of identity may address several of the contradictions that prevail in the literature theorizing identity. These include the agency versus the structure binary and the incongruence between post-structural conceptions of fluid, transitory identities and cognitive conceptions of rational, resolute identities.

The way in which, or whether these dualisms are reconciled, will be examined in the analysis of the findings of this investigation. The specific use of a performance-theory framework in this section highlights both the constructed and context-dependent nature of social identity. This is useful for demonstrating the myriad ways different performances of identity may occur within each of the contexts that the Deaf participant has to traverse. These include the spaces of family, home, school, college, work, friends, colleagues, and other circumstances and interactors. Further, the emphasis on the performative and polyphonous nature of identity draws attention, both implicitly and explicitly, to the intersectional nature of identity. In my view, this is an important focus, because it reminds the reader about the dynamic interconnectedness of people’s lived experiences. Dynamism however, is dialectic as it has the potential to create harmony and disharmony. Complexities can abound when contradictions emerge in the intersections, such as when a Deaf person is forced to action a reality congruent with the norms of a hearing family. For this individual, as will be seen in the analysis, self coherence and integrity are may be achieved in the performance, as the Deaf participant may resist, accept or negotiate discourses.

The next section focuses on issues of language, power, discourse and identity. The significance of language is overwhelming owing to its embeddedness in the personal, social, political and
cultural systems that pervade our lives. Using post-structural theorizing, language is discussed in its relationship with discourse, identity and power.

3.7 Language, Power and Identity

All forms of post-structuralism assume that meaning is constituted within language and is not guaranteed by the person who speaks it. (Chris Weedon, 1997)

Language is known to be a means of solidarity, resilience and identity within a culture or social group. Lanehart (1996) is of the view that although language consists of arbitrary signs, symbols or sounds constructed to make meaning, its goal is not simply to communicate, nor is communication its most essential function. Bakhtin (1986, pp. 67-68) supports this view in the claim that:

“Language arises from man’s need to express himself, to objectify himself ... And if language also serves as a means of communication, this is a secondary function that has nothing to do with its essence.”

Lanehart (1996) pursues the view that in the field of social and cultural identity, a person has the tendency to form a close bond or relationship with a group of people who share a common language and it is through this common language that they develop a unique understanding of the world. The language one speaks is the language that that person identifies with. Language is a part of one’s culture and identity and to try to dictate or change a person’s language is an attempt to alter the person’s identity which may be fundamentally detrimental to the persona.

Weedon (1997, p.21) claims that post-structuralism sees language as:

“...the common factor in the analysis of social organization, social meanings, power and individual consciousness”. And language, through a “range of ways of giving meaning to social reality, offers us various discursive positions... through which we can consciously live our lives” (p. 26).

Weedon (1997) clarifies the relationship between discourse and language. Discourses are more than just ways of thinking and producing meaning. They also engage the body, the conscious and the unconscious mind, and the emotional life of the people that discourses govern. It is uncomplicated to attach the meaning of discourse exclusively to the way in which language is
used because of the continued association between discourse and language more than with other aspects of being human. In Weedon’s (1997) view:

“The discursive constitution of subjectivity addresses and constitutes the individual’s mind, body and emotions” (p.108), and “…the acquisition of modes of subjectivity involves the accumulation of the memory, conscious or unconscious, of subject positions and the psychic and emotional structures implicit in them” (p.109).

The discursive positions that we assume and the discursive fields in which we participate,

“… consist of competing ways of giving meaning to the world and of organizing social institutions and processes. They offer the individual a range of modes of subjectivity” (Weedon, 1987, p. 35).

While some discursive fields are more central and exude more power, others are not as significant. Therefore given that language constitutes social reality, it emerges as a critical site for the contestation of meaning. The way in which we assign meaning to social relations and institutions is informed by how we use language to access existing discourses.

With regard to language, post-structuralists claim that signs cannot have fixed meaning or stable identity. In challenging the notion of fixed signs, Jacques Derrida (1976) alluded to the concept, ‘difference’, which refers to the continuous process of production of meaning through the two-fold strategies of ‘difference’ and ‘deferral’. This implies that meaning cannot claim to be absolutely fixed, but continuously changes with context and that language does not have pre-determined, fixed, intrinsic meanings. Language varies across the terrain of different discourses and has the potential for variability in the meaning it offers relative to the fields of discourse.

The theorizing by Bourdieu (1991) on a number of fields including the study of culture and language has been immense and has contributed to a social theory of language that contextualizes the broader phenomena associated with language in society, such as the relationship between language and power. Italian political theorist, Gramsci (1971) described how people came to accept and internalized existing social relations and norms. He saw power located not only in the police and the army but also in bourgeois culture industries such as the media, arts and education. While the repressive institutions exerted power through the process of oppression, the culture industries achieved power through persuasion and complicity.
Those subjected to the power concede since the dominant cultural group generating the discourse persuades them of the essential truth and rationality of the discourse. In this account the individual emerges through a process of acquiring a particular version of the world based on ideology that serves some hegemonic purpose. Identity thus becomes a colonizing force, shaping and directing the individual. This discursive model offers an anti-essentialist view of identity, since it presumes meaning not to be situated within the self but in representations mediated by language. For Derrida (1978), there is no meaning beyond or beneath the text. The essential reality is always represented through systems of language, and thus it is language that constitutes the subject and brings it into being.

Mesthrie and Deumert (2000) from the works of Max Weber, describe power as the fundamental concept in relations of inequality, and concerns the ability of people or groups to carry out their will despite objection. Classes, status groups and political parties are significant in the distribution of power. Bourdieu (1993) in indicating the power that comes with being competent in particular privileged cultural practices, refers to cultural capital, which he defines as a form of knowledge or a cognitive acquisition which equips the social agent with appreciation for or competence in deciphering cultural relations and cultural artefacts. Cultural capital may be acquired through social networking with family, community, educational institutions, religious organizations, business associations, and other structures. Each social network practices or engages a particular language system, through which it represents itself. If one looks at the relationship between language and society, then one can see that language is socially determined, and varies according to the social situation that it is used in. For Bourdieu (1991) all human activity takes place within webs of socially constructed fields: family, community structures, educational systems and institutions, corporations and businesses, all of which change with time and context. An individual can be subjected to one or more of these cultural fields or discourses in one day. The extent of ‘cultural capital’ that one has determines the position within the hierarchy of society.

Through language, individuals negotiate a position of power within the structure of a particular cultural field or social context. However, the same capital cannot be applied across all fields.
Each field would require a different form of capital. In relation to language, Bourdieu (1991:18) creates the concept of ‘linguistic capital’, which refers to the strength or competence of the speaker to participate in linguistic exchanges that are appropriate to the norms of particular communities. The higher the status of a language, for example French, the higher is the value placed on it and consequently the higher its capacity to ensure success, power and wealth. Cultural and linguistic capital, therefore inform the level of power that can be exercised in cultural and linguistic circles.

The extent of power is critical in any social context or ‘field’, since it determines the level of interaction, the outcome and the choice between inclusion and exclusion, where one group can decide who to include or exclude by simply changing the language of interaction. Bourdieu (1991) refers to this as symbolic power. Bourdieu’s notion of “symbolic power” is similar to the Gramscian concept of hegemony. He explains that symbolic power is invisible since it has no concrete reference such as wealth. The practice of symbolic power in linguistic circles is determined by the use of a language of choice by a dominant group to oppress less dominant groups. The ‘cultural capital’ and ‘linguistic capital’ that one has, are the tools that enable the individual to negotiate a position of power in the social hierarchy through use of language. The position of power that the individual is able to negotiate invariably affects relationships within the cultural field and more importantly, social identity, that is acceptance or rejection within the group. Power is significant in discourse, because according to Fairclough (1989) power does not belong to the institution but to the person who possesses the power, relative to the position. By its very nature power is dynamic, unstable, and changes with context.

In their study of the relationship between language and identity in the Caribbean, Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985), argue that the speakers’ linguistic choices or use of language is a series of acts of identity, in which speakers attempt to associate themselves with, or distance themselves from certain social groups. Language use impacts membership of particular groups. Later Mesthrie and Tabouret-Keller (2001) also argued that language use is not just attributes of groups or communities, they are themselves the means by which individuals both identify themselves and identify with others: hence the locus of existence for individuals rests in language itself. There are several identity markers that flag the identity of a person and one of
these sites of identity is located in language. Other identity markers such as race, ethnic group,
gender, age and social class tend to influence our use of language, though not in a direct
relationship, thus causing the continuous flux in identity.

Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004), in their investigation of language/multi-lingualism in
supporting the poststructuralist approach to the study of the negotiation of identities, claimed that
languages cannot be seen to be exclusive markers of particular identities. They argued that
identity options are not necessarily imposed by language choice or use. In fact linguistic and
identity options may be negotiated, as these are continuously contested and reinvented.
Furthermore individuals are agents of change of their own identities, and use their linguistic
resources to negotiate, resist or accept identities depending on how these identities position them
in social structures and discourses.

Weedon’s (1997) expose’ of post-structuralist theory has influenced the understanding of the
notion of identity as multiple and continuously in the making. Linked to the explanation of
changing identities, is Hall’s (1992b) theory of hybridity that informs how identity resists being
stable, fixed and rooted owing to a multiplicity of discursive social and cultural influences. We
are therefore reminded, by Hall (1992b, p.258), that:

“... we all speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular
experience, a particular culture, without being contained by that position”.

Hence, the importance of discourse in determining the relationship between specific language
use and the performance of identity is highlighted. Issues of power, inclusion or exclusion and
how this relates to variations in identities are also significant. In Weedon’s (1997) understanding
language is dynamic since it is the site where meaningful experience is constituted, and also the
site where possibilities for change may be created. Language has the potential to constitute a
range of discourses, with each discourse being the construction of new meaning and a new act
for the performer of the identity.

The phenomenon of language choice and use being an act of identity is aligned to the
poststructuralist idea of performativity. As indicated, Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) point
to the use of language as a series of acts of identity, while Weedon, (1997) indicates that
performances of identity can vary with different languages and different discourses. In
agreement, Pennycook, (2004) also indicates that meaning making in language is constantly
changing and being re-negotiated, and in supporting this, refers to Butler’s notion of
performativity, which Pennycook (2004, p.1) defines as a:

“way of thinking about language use and identity that avoids foundationalist categories,
suggesting that identities are formed in the linguistic performance rather than pre- 
given”.

What is conveyed here is that there are no essential categories upon which identity is founded. A
linguistic performance has the potential to reveal or expose a certain identity, but it is still not
fundamental to the formation of that identity. In the association between language use and
performativity, language choice and the way in which the language is used is seen as the medium
through which an act of identity is performed.

My interest in identities finally devolves upon narrative identities and the phenomenon that
identities are constructed in the stories and biographies that we tell, the selves that we reveal and
the specific and unique identities that narratives produce. In the next section I will discuss the
contribution of the narrative approach to my understanding of discursive identity construction
using a post-structural lens. Integral and fundamental to narrative discourses are positioning
spaces since these are potential sites of exclusion and prejudice or power and autonomy.

3.8 Identity: A Narrative Telling

*Humans make sense of their lives as an unfolding story in a way that gives meaning to their past
and direction to their future. (Ruth Abbey, 2000).*

The realm of ‘narrative analysis’ has burgeoned exponentially as narrative theorists argue that
we live in a story relating world and it is through this story telling that we give meaning to and
make sense of our lives and the events that occur in it. Cortazzi (2001) expounds that through
narrative telling, there emerges a constructionist approach to discourse as we attempt to construct
identities and constitute ourselves in a coherent and meaningful way. Much work has focused on
understanding the ‘narrative’ as the primordial organizing and sense-making framework of social
life. It is through storytelling that people’s lives are experienced, presented and made meaningful and in doing so their identities are constructed:

“Through life stories individuals and groups make sense of themselves; they tell what they are or what they wish to be, as they tell so they come, they are their stories” (Cortazzi, 2001, p 388).

In the broad field of narrative studies, amongst social construction theorists (Krauss, 2006; Taylor, 2006; Gergen and Gergen, 2006; Edley, 2001) there is the understanding that who we are, our identities, are derived from the accumulation of ideas, images, recollections, relationships, emotions and so on that constitute the wider social and cultural contexts of our lives. In analytic terms, Taylor (2006) refers to these as the discursive resources available to speakers, which can both enable or restrain identities. In addition talk and articulation are the sites through which our identities are produced, out of the resources made available by the larger contexts in which we live. Equally important in identity investigations is that although actively constructed, identities may be either conferred on the speaker or taken up by the speaker through positioning. The position in which the speaker finds him or her self may be challenged, negotiated or even rejected by the speaker, depending on how the particular position presents the individual. (This will be explicated later in this section.)

The concept of ‘available narratives’ as demonstrated by Norick (2005) is a starting point for understanding how tellers and listeners negotiate ownership of experience. The concept does not refer to a collection of narratives but rather to the process of negotiating what gets told and what doesn’t. The teller is the authority and through self-determination pronounces on what is told, what is withheld and manipulates how it is told. Available narratives are the stories that become tellable in a particular context about a particular topic. We begin to understand how storytelling is used in negotiations of power by asking how narratives classify and organize experience in different contexts. While some categories of experiences are intentionally not recognised in certain contexts, other categories may be recognizable but deliberately excluded from conversation as experiences to be denied. Such is the power and authority of the teller.
The tellability of these narratives is informed by the extent to which the event is acceptable or unacceptable to the teller. Norick (2005) cites the example of trauma discourses which may fit this description, as stories about things that should not have happened, rather than about things that did not happen. Questions of tellability, the availability of certain narratives and the suppression of others in particular occasions, raise the stakes in claims for entitlement of the narrator to the ownership of the experience and empathy of the listener in the response to the telling. In negotiating the categories of available narratives and the selection of which stories to tell and how to tell it, the teller claims ownership of the experience. From a post-structuralist orientation narratives have several lenses, each affording a new perspective on an event or experience. This multiplicity of perspectives leads naturally to the fragmented self, unable to emerge as a stable, unified coherent subject.

The process of narrative construction of identity is theorized in similar ways to the discursive construction of identity and the construction of identity as a performative enterprise. The case presented by May (2004) is in accord with performativity theorist Judith Butler. In this theorizing the emphasis is on identity as performed by language and through language rather than identity existing prior to language; and identity as fluid and versatile rather than as fixed and pre-determined. In addition identity is culturally and historically founded, constructed in interaction with and in the context of other people and institutions. Identity is continuously in the making, contextual and contradictory. May argues that since the narrative involves the performance of identity, the narrator has the capacity to constantly reconstruct different versions of the self by telling different stories or by telling stories differently.

As indicated earlier, the assumption of discursive approaches is that ideas, thoughts, emotions, recollections and meanings which prevail in a social and cultural context become resources for people’s talk and the ways in which they make sense of the world and themselves within. This typically post-structuralist perspective on identity is supported by Taylor & Littleton (2006) who also claim that these are not the only possible resources. In constructing a narrative, a speaker will not necessarily be starting anew but presenting an extension of what has been said before. In the realm of discursive analysis, each presentation or extension also becomes resources for
subsequent talk. Narratives gradually snowball and newer and different identities accrue over several tellings, thus creating complexity and multiplicity in identity construction.

Like other resources, each telling can continue to enable or constrain a speaker’s identity work. Taylor (2006: p.98) states that:

“A life narrative can therefore be considered as a construction which is resourced by previous constructions which aggregate over time. This suggests that an analysis of identity work should look beyond a single instance of talk to consider the work done across multiple interactions”.

Therefore Taylor suggests that the study of discourse and identity, and the study of narratives, is a cumulative process; an ongoing and open-ended identity project.

The post-structural lens adds even greater depth of explanation to the notion of re-telling and re-framing with Shuman’s (2006) view that both multi-voiced and inter-textual representations undermine the authority of ownership. Although individuals do tell stories about their own personal experiences, those tellings inescapably include other voices in the form of reported speech and the personal experiences of these other voices as well. If personal experience narratives were strictly personal, they would not reach as they do into discussions of collective memory, public discourse and the politics of identity, according to Shuman. In each of these realms, the person remains larger than personal and one of the tasks of narrative research is to unravel how this works. Benwell and Stokoe (2006) explain that yet another distinguishing attribute that underlies identity is the notion that the local or the micro stories that we tell about ourselves have a connection to broader discourses or master narratives. Our identities as social beings emerge as we present our unique personal experiences and demonstrate positions in relation to wider social and cultural expectations.

A discursive approach therefore rejects the conventional assumption of mainstream psychoanalytic research, that narratives superficially communicate something in the person which existed prior to its expression, such as an attitude, feeling or recollection of some idea or event. Taylor (2006) challenges the notion that observable aspects of a person which includes the talk are the appearance or manifestation of an internal phenomenon or intrinsic identity.
Instead, discursive approaches which are grounded in post-structural thinking propose a conceptual understanding of the self that extends beyond what lies beneath talk to what is continuously in the process of happening, and to actions and practices in their social and cultural context. The particular point of interest here for the interpretation of identity is succinctly conveyed by (Taylor, 2006), which is, that narratives are the foundation upon which identity is constructed; narratives are the sites in which identity is instantiated and negotiated. In other words the narrative is the means through which identity may be expressed and investigated.

Unique to Taylor’s (1989) theorization is the way in which he connects narratives to the idea that human beings inevitably orient themselves in life by means of strong evaluations, which are the central issue in self-interpretations and that narratives are an inescapable form of self-interpretation. Taylor says that our everyday world is not a neutral or value-free reality. Invariably we experience everyday reality in terms of the value that it has and our identities are partly constituted by what we value. Thus we live in a moral space instead of a neutral space and narratives enable us to interpret our actions in this moral space. In this space, we orient ourselves, we set goals and embrace things we value or conceive to be good. We aspire to, respect, idealize and admire certain modes of life more than others. When a person internalizes an ideal self, this contributes directly to what he or she is like. Thus we orient ourselves towards what we value and become defined by these strong evaluations or orientations. Taylor aptly states that our lives run in a direction that is either toward or away from the strongly valued projects. This movement within moral space underpins our biographies. Thus, narrative identity makes sense of and explains our movements in moral space.

What is therefore needed according to Krauss (2006) is a model of identity construction as a process which must also allow for the conceptual possibility of ‘multi-voicedness’. Such a self presumes, in post-structural conceptualization, the notion of many selves waiting to be interpreted. The author of a self-story must be seen as a person with many selves, constantly trying to reorganize the self towards short-term unity and coherence. This multi-faceted characteristic demands a new exploration of agency and the self-other relationship, a binary that should be considered in terms of the construction of difference and power. Identity thus becomes a reflexive, performative project continuously exposed to self-investigation and scrutiny. Krauss
(2006) is concise in the view that approaches based on identity theory are particularly interested in the manifestation of power and dominance in self-stories; however it is in the performance of narrating that the display of power is set in motion.

Paul Ricoeur (1987), for whom narratives are a central form of self-interpretation, endorses the dominance and multi-facedness of the individual, typical of post-structuralist orientation. In this sense, in narrative identity, the person is not merely the one who tells the story, or merely the one about whom the story is told, but instead the person appears both as a reader and the writer of its own life. Thus, the individual is the *interpreter*, the *interpreted*, as well as the *recipient* of the interpretations. Ricoeur states that the making of a story is an organisation of events into a story with a plot. Emplotted narratives therefore have the potential to bring about harmony to the temporal discordance by organising the separate events into a coherent and organized whole. Narratives can accomplish the submission to unity and coherence.

Fischer and Goblirsch (2006) present their understanding of narrative construction of identities using the *biographical structuring* model which comprises three basic concepts significant in the creative process of self-constitution and co-constructed in talk: these concepts are interaction, memory and biographical experience. These constitute an understanding of the world, of others, and of oneself in the very same process. Fischer and Goblirsch (2006, p.30) explain that:

“How and which decisions individuals make, which decisions serve as milestones, and how they interpret them, depends on their previous biographical experiences, their possibilities and social constraints, and the era they live in. Continuously renewing the self, shaping a reliable pattern of behaviour and experience while leaving space for dealing with emergent concerns is the process we call biographical structuring”.

The writers explain that the model is based on the idea that individuals experience events that become biographically relevant, in other words the event becomes part of the person’s biography. They have to come to terms with the event by talking about it with others. Biographical structuring, which is ‘doing biography’ as conversational practice in interaction, takes place each time an individual talks about his or her life resulting in autobiographical self-understanding and restructuring.
Closely allied to the narrative construction of identities is the concept of ‘positioning’, where identity can be claimed in the relationship between the speaker and the audience. Positioning theory, framed within post-structuralist understanding, demonstrates a genuine connection between subject positioning and social power relations, while positioning analysis clarifies how individuals position themselves in relation to others in the course of the conversation, and how identities are created in this act of positioning (Bamberg, 2004). According to Bamberg, through narrating stories of themselves people position themselves as powerful, powerless, empowered or disempowered. In addition to offering or surrendering to a position, the speaker can also refute, negotiate and adopt positions in the process of relating to the audience. Therefore any identity theory of the present day will be required to respond to questions of positioning and the negotiation thereof.

In line with other leading narrative theorists mentioned here, Georgakopoulou (2002), claims that the telling of stories is the forum for recalling, recounting and reflecting on our lives and it is from these narratives that researchers can establish the position that narrators embrace within the story, the identities that are performed through the narrative, the reason why the story is narrated in a particular way and in a particular order, the association between the small story and the discourse or the master narrative and most significantly the power that the narrator is able to assert in the position that is assumed. In any particular narrative opportunity, the teller, whilst searching for meaning and coherence, will assume a position which spontaneously maximizes the manifestation of power and dominance, thus performing an identity of autonomy.

Positioning builds on the insight that identity may be socially constructed at various levels. De Fina, Schiffrin and Bamberg (2006) identify some of these levels: the relationship between the speaker and what is being said; the relationship between the speaker and the other (interactor) in the interaction context and the essential ideology or social practice that is drawn together as the discourse. The underlying significance of these levels of identity construction is that in addition to guiding the position of the speaker, each level concomitantly informs the power that the speaker wants to claim or manifest. In other words the power of the speaker will be determined by these variants.
If the interactional practices, in which we routinely engage, are central to the process of identity formation, then the question that arises is the extent of personal agency inscribed in these practices. Leading scholars of positioning theory such as Davies and Harre (1990) postulate the ‘bi-directional’ disposition of agency. On the one hand socio-cultural forces in the form of dominant discourses or master narratives position speakers in situational practice and construct who they are without their agentive involvement. On the other hand speakers position themselves as constructive, self-determining and interactive agents and elect the means by which their identity is constructed both by others as well as by the master narratives.

The interest here is in how talk is made up from meanings which prevail in a wider social and cultural context of a society and culture. As already discussed, the meanings are the resources for talk. Drawing on the Foucauldian concepts of discursive identities, Edley (2001) explains that a subject position can be understood as a temporary identity which is conferred on or taken up by a speaker and which becomes both who the speaker is seen to be by others, and the perspective from which the speaker understands and interprets the world. Identity is co-constructed in the space between the speaker and the audience. Armed with the capacity to perform as such there is support for the preservation and performance of agency in identity construction. The speaker performs a particular identity in the context of the given audience. In the context of another audience the speaker can alter the identity, using the same stable narrative text (Bamberg, 2004).

Davies and Harre (2001) identify two types of positioning. These are interactive positioning, where one speaker determines the position of the other speaker, and reflexive positioning, where a speaker determines his/her own position, in the given situated practice. Such positioning is not intentional; it occurs inadvertently through the course of life and is an ongoing process. Several subject positions are available to take up within a particular discourse and the rationale for taking up a particular position is informed by one’s subjective understanding. One’s own ‘subjective lived histories’ which include emotions, beliefs, knowledge, experiences and institutional structures enable one to select a position to occupy (Davies and Harre, 2001). Our understanding of agency is significant here as agency will operate to accept, reject or negotiate the position to occupy in accordance with the power that it bestows.
Despite our myriad efforts at establishing a unified, coherent and stable self, individuals still present themselves as complex and contradictory beings. Davies (1999) postulates that perhaps the reason for this is that the social world is constantly being constituted and re-constituted through the discursive practices in which individuals engage, causing us to renegotiate positions and manipulate discourses accordingly. Subjectivity is a consensual process, occasioned as an individual takes up particular subject positions within discourses. Subjectivity is constructed in line with the position that has been selected for occupation within a particular discourse (Bamberg, 2004). Investment in the position is informed by the unique meaning that the position will hold for the individual. An individual may occupy different and often conflicting subject positions since people are involved in discursive self-production and meaning making with mutations in identity emerging with new discourses and new meanings.

Through this discussion on identity as a narrative construction, I will argue that the teacher identities that the Deaf participants presented were instantiated by that particular narrative opportunity and that given another narrative opportunity their identities as teachers could be different. The teacher identities that emerged were performed by and through language. During the narratives the participants enjoyed the power and the entitlement to decide which narratives to embrace and which to resist. I will explore the personal and external structures that the participants engaged as resources to tell the story of their teacher lives and the events in the participants’ lives that have become biographically relevant, in other words the events that have become integral to the participants’ biography. And finally I will argue for the significance of the particular position that the participant assumes in the narrative since the literature claims that identities are constructed in the space between the speaker and the audience. Identities are constructed from the power or powerlessness that the space offers and from the social and cultural context of the researcher-participant relationship.

3.9 Conclusion

It is now well noted that the post-structuralist subject is conceptualised as having no fixed, essential or permanent identity. People are seen to "live webs of multiple representations of class, race, gender, language and social relations; meanings vary even within one individual" (Lather,
1991, p118). Post-structuralists reject the notions of an essential, core identity and instead pursue the idea that existing structural variables start to profile our lives at birth and shape the manner in which we continue to perform our lives. Identity is informed by the interaction between the existing structural and biographical variables and factors that are external to the individual, thereby rendering identity to be continuously transient and changeable in character.

As a proponent of post-structural approaches Lather (1991, pp 118-20) challenged the Enlightenment concept of identity as a central essential core, rejected the notion of the coherent self and argued that identity may be altered through being repeatedly re-constituted and renegotiated since an individual may occupy different, even conflicting subject positions but engage in discursive self-production and meaning-making where they "attempt to produce some coherence and continuity" in their lives. Giddens (1991), who sees identity as a project concurs that coherence is not intrinsic to an individual's life. The individual seeks coherence, as part of an ongoing, reflexive enterprise. A person's biography needs to continually integrate events occurring in the outside world into the ongoing story or project of the self. Accounts of identity as a project of the self frequently position the reflexive self within a particular social context and the radical, post-structural version of identity competes for recognition to explain the self.

Post-structuralists see the social world, knowledge, meanings and notions of reality as contingent and dynamic rather than fixed. In addition, post-structuralism represents a radical, unconventional approach to giving meaning. Selden (1989) sees it as deconstructing order, liberating the established, fusing forms, mixing disciplines and breaking barriers. There is an element of playfulness, creativity and irrationality. There is always the desire to establish a singular truth, an unambiguous principle that would account for everything that is real. He concludes however, that no such centring principle exists. The characteristic position of post-structuralism then is associated with an attack on the idea of an absolute, essential, core or single truth, a dismissal of any centre and the acceptance of plurality. There is a shift away from the human subject as the agent, to the idea of participation in continuous, interactive discourses. O’Brien, Penna, and Hay (1999) also reject the humanist view of fixed, essential identities in favour of post-structuralist recognition of diverse and emergent identities. They claim that identities have detached from spatial, social and temporal significance and any identity is a
potential vehicle for self-realization. In their analysis, identities are multiplex and the result of practices in different social spheres.

As indicated, I have elected to accomplish the exploration of the identities of the Deaf teachers using a post-structural lens. In theorizing identity formation through a post-structural lens, the dimensions of culture and discourse gain ascendance. Using a poststructuralist lens draws attention to the importance of studying identity in cultural and political contexts where the formation of identities is constantly at stake. In addition, the post-structural perspective embraces an integrated notion of identity rather than a dichotomy between individual functioning or socio-cultural processes and provides an approach that refutes the singularity of either 'component' of identity formation. Furthermore, the use of a poststructuralist analysis of identity formation creates spaces for individuals to develop a sense of agency in their lives and to construct strategies of power, resilience and resistance. These premises have inspired me to locate the conceptualization of identity and the broader context of this research within the post-structuralist framework of understanding.

In relation to my own study with the Deaf teachers, arguments will be presented to support, contradict or establish the extent of some of the defining features of this phenomenon of identity. Firstly, whether the identities of the Deaf teachers are multiple and contradictory since they too are the subjects of more than one discourse during any one time in their lives, and secondly, how they may be positioned in contradictory ways in these discourses. Thirdly, whether identity is a site of struggle for the Deaf teachers, in their attempts to resist positioning in a particular discourse, or set up a counter discourse which favors a position of power and dominance rather than subjection and subservience, given their history of marginalization. And finally whether their identities are subject to alteration and change owing to the dynamic and fluid nature of the various discourses in which the D/deaf persons participate as they circumstantially traverse between audiologically deaf and culturally Deaf worlds, and as they enter and retreat from the realm of the hearing.
CHAPTER 4: EMERGING DEBATES ON TEACHER IDENTITIES

“Identity has become the bread and butter of our educational diet.” (Diane Hoffman, 1998)

4.1 Introduction

In the last decade, teacher identity studies have dominated the field of educational transformation, as researchers and educationists have sought to link teacher identities with the practice of teaching, policy implementation, teacher image, and curriculum and educational reform. These issues may be theorized in concepts that inform identity constructions from a post-structural perspective and which have been discussed in the previous chapter.

Subjectivities are integral to the image that teachers have of themselves and the way in which the image is formulated. The significance of teacher images extends to their practice of teaching, how they experience and deliver the curriculum, how they interpret and implement educational policies and how they position themselves in the various discourses that are embedded in their practice of teaching. Their agency as teachers is also at stake and the issue that is in question here is whether and to what extent, their practice as teachers is informed by personal agency or whether their practice is restricted by structural prescripts.

There are several narratives embedded in the master discourse of teaching. The way in which teachers position themselves in each of the narratives is significant in their identity construction as they may accept, resist or reject positioning in the narratives. Tensions may arise from resistances and contradictory positioning. In other words identities are given meaning in the context of each of the teacher’s several subject positions, memberships in different structures, the intent with which the teaching is performed and in the framework of the teacher’s beliefs, values and ideologies, as these collectively and individually intersect with the specific biographical projects.

In her journal documenting the development of her identity as a teacher Krista Yerkes (2004) offers a post-structural conceptualization of identity. She states that:
“Identity is not set in stone. Identity is always changing. My identity today may be different from the identity I had yesterday as the different factors come into play today and every day. The experiences that everyone faces play a huge role in a person’s identity. Each person’s experiences are different; this is what makes us all unique individuals and unique teachers” (2004, p.21).

Yerkes affirms that since identities are constructed in discourses, we should:

“Think of a discourse as an ‘identity kit’ which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act and talk so as to take on a particular role that others will recognize” (2004, p.4).

The formulation of the professional self can be intricate especially for young teachers who are required to make decisions, grapple with the consequences and search for ways to effectively articulate and give expression to their roles as teachers. For young D/deaf teachers the context could be embedded with even greater complexity. Wenger (1998) is succinct in his description of the variables that inform identity construction and explains that the identity of teachers occurs at the intersection of their professional training, the curriculum that they elected to teach, their own experiences as students, the teachers whom they strive to emulate, the cultural alignment of the students they teach, the ethos that prevails at the school and their own subtle images of being a teacher. The dissonance that can emerge between each of these concepts places new teachers in positions where they must organize and make meaning of their past, present and future experiences so as to create an individual and coherent professional identity.

Teacher identities have emerged as intricate conceptualizations, infused with contestation and complexity. Deafness can only serve to add to such complexity. Several debates pervade the lives of teachers and the landscape of teaching and when affiliated with other structural and biological variables can produce a multitude of identity possibilities. The debates that I have selected in this chapter to address D/deaf teacher identities include the contradicting image generated by transformational policies; the issue of concomitance between the agency of the teacher and curriculum and policy implementation; and thirdly the conceptualization that teacher identities can be produced in teacher narratives. This will be explored as a contextual framework
for analyzing how the Deaf participants experience and execute their practice, and construct or negotiate their multiple identities as teachers.

4.2 Transformation and Teacher Image

In this section I will discuss teacher image, in the context of transformation in education, and show how this is framed within the post-structural theorization that identities inform subjectivities and are also constructed through subjectivities. The subjectivities of teachers are their personal thoughts, emotions, beliefs, values and attitudes, and all that is inner and private. In this theorization I will argue that teacher subjectivities influence transformation initiatives and emanate from such processes. The concepts ‘identity’ and ‘image’ are frequently engaged in respect of how these relate to teachers and to policies. While "personal identity" is the view teachers hold of themselves, “policy image” is the image that teachers are expected to present and that which is preferred by transformation initiatives (Jansen, 2001). In this respect Drake, Spillane and Hufferd-Ackles (2001) describe teachers’ identities, as being constituted by their subjectivities, as their sense of self as well as their knowledge and beliefs, dispositions, interests and orientation towards work and change.

In recent decades, large scale reform of public education systems has become a global phenomenon and continues unabated. There has been an array of attempts to redress challenges in educational practice and to institute reforms by changing curriculum and altering teaching practices. In South Africa we have witnessed enthusiastic and vigorous attempts to redress the inequities of apartheid through the radically innovative Curriculum 2005, inspiring much needed research on the systemic impact of the implementation of educational change. In both the international (Carson, 2005) and the local (Mattson and Harley, 2001; Harley et al, 1998; Jansen, 2001) literature that I have reviewed there is the tendency to refer to ‘teacher image’ as implied or conjured by educational reform and policy prescriptions. Jansen (2001) refers to teacher image in reform initiatives as "policy image", meaning the ideal image that is projected by official policies related to transformation in education.

Since 1994, there have been several educational policy initiatives in South Africa aimed at redressing previous inequalities. The policies indicated wide scale changes from apartheid-
grounded Christian National Education to a more participatory, democratic system of education. The National Department of Education’s *Norms and Standards for Educators* (2000), aligned to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) stipulated the roles and competences for educators. These include being learning mediator, interpreter and designer of learning resources, leader, manager, researcher, lifelong learner, assessor and learning area specialists and participant in community and pastoral projects. These roles and competences, presented as the norm for educator functionality, have provoked much critical commentary. At the outset, the Department sets itself up for criticism and condemnation in its haughty presumption that all teachers are essential and standardized and share a predictable consistency about their presence in the classroom. But we know that this is not the case.

In retort, Mattson and Harley (2001) undertook classroom-based research with teachers in rural schools in KwaZulu-Natal, in South Africa, to establish how real teachers responded to the idealised policy image of the “universal subject” and the prescribed roles and competences described above. The research was aimed at exploring the dimensions of the ‘misfit’ between policy and practice. They concluded that the relationship between policy and practice is contentious and that the prescribed competences are incongruent with both the teachers’ professional identities and their personal and cultural identities. Although the teachers will support the policy, they are challenged by having to enact the policy roles. Mattson and Harley (2001) suggest that the teachers are forced to negotiate the tensions and contradictions that are both created and ignored by policy in their day-to-day classroom practice. Consequently they resort to “mimicry”, to “look competent”. This may be described as following blindly, without questioning and understanding how and why policies and procedures work. Mattson and Harley (2001, p.1) add that:

> “*Teacher education policy and providers reinforce teachers’ strategies of mimicry by trying to reform teacher identities in the image of a first world, modern, global citizen or universal subject, rather than attending to their more pressing and practical needs.*”

In Mattson and Harley’s (2001) study they insinuate the position of the teacher to be a complete mockery, where the teacher becomes a manipulable instrument of the state with denial of the agency of the teacher as a potentially innovative classroom practitioner. This can be debated
however and interpreted as the teacher having agency and deliberately intending to subvert policy imperatives. These authors propose that instead of prescribing competences, there should be a focus on teachers’ subjectivities, understanding of their work and a clearer awareness of the contexts in which they work, as this may be practicable, functional and self-affirming.

Carrim (2001) researched the challenges that emanated from the implementation of Curriculum 2005, which was intended as a transformation and redress initiative. A major challenge that Carrim noted was the way in which teachers were being homogenized in the reconceptualization from ‘teacher’ to ‘educator’. The process has not taken into account the personal and cultural realities experienced by teachers that constitute their complex identities. Black and white teachers have been polarized in their understanding, response and allegiance to the implementation and policy of Curriculum 2005 given their racialized differences, political and union affiliations, gender, religion and a host of other variables that the system has failed to consider in the identity-image dilemma. The prevailing view is that there is disjuncture between policy visions and practical realities, since the competences outlined in the Norms and Standards for Educators (2000) seem to be out of sync not only with teachers’ professional identities but also with their personal and cultural identities. They are forced to engage with and enact a policy discourse that does not represent who they are. From a post-structuralist perspective teachers also have racialized identities and these would also need to be considered along with their subjectivities.

In problematising the dislocation in the relationship between policy image and the personal identities of teachers, Jansen (2001) re-organises the personal identity characteristics according to how teachers as practitioners feel about themselves professionally, politically, and emotionally. The professional basis for teacher identity refers to the ways in which teachers understand their capacity to teach and implement policy reform and curriculum while the political basis for teacher identity addresses teachers’ understandings of their position to respond to policy reform and transformation. What is useful for my purpose is Jansen’s interpretation of the emotional basis for teacher identity which refers to the teachers’ response to the emotional demands inflicted by policy implementation and reform, given the tensions and power relationships in the profession.
Recent work by post-structuralist theorists, Holstein and Gubrium (2000) and Zembylas (2003) is advancing thinking on how identities are emerging from and generating new emotions, thoughts, judgements and beliefs. The role of emotions is an added dimension in the construction of subjectivities. The authors acknowledge that emotions are fundamental to the subjective formation of identities and affirm that identity is a dynamic process of inter-subjective discourses, experiences and emotions. Emotions change continuously, constantly reconstructing identity. What is significant is that as identities are redefined new meanings and interpretations are given to the same experiences, leading teachers to experience teaching differently as identities change.

In challenging the relationship between prescribed policy images and the personal identities of teachers Jansen (2001), refers to the “image-ing” of teachers, as images make demands on teachers that are contradictory to their personal identities. As noted, his view is that teachers’ identities ought to be constructed on the basis of how they feel about and position themselves emotionally, professionally and politically. Jansen (2001) recommends that ‘multiple identities’ be addressed by researching the participation of teachers with different structural characteristics, such as, black, rural teacher, a teacher belonging to a teachers’ union. As these competing images co-exist within teachers’ lives, they are bound to present as conflict in their work and in their attitudes towards policy. Jansen reinforces the idea of teachers’ racialized, and culturally and structurally defined lives that expand in layers as these co-exist with their personal subjectivities.

In his study of educational reform in Canada, Carson (2005) also confirms that by focusing on change in relation to identity, we by-pass the discourse of what is to be implemented and instead draw attention to the idea that:

“…change involves a conversation between the self (identity) and new sets of circumstances that are external to the self” (p.3).

In this Canadian-based study, Carson (2005) illustrates the case of education in South Africa as a pertinent example, where the project of creating a “post-apartheid” society is complex. The new Curriculum 2005 which included several policies and practices related to gender, language, race
and economic opportunity, was intended to redress past inequities and to build a democratic and multi-racial society through the medium of schools and education. Carson (2005) points out that very little of the literature on educational change addresses the individual subjectivities of the educators and their personal and national histories. Carson’s view is that failure to consider the impact of teacher subjectivities and identities in democratizing education may be cited as a reason for the pedestrian pace of educational transformation in South Africa.

In his Swiss investigation of the professional life cycle of teachers, Huberman (1993) identified the following distinctive, progressive stages:

- Career Entry Phase – a period of discovering and survival
- Stabilisation Phase – the period of consolidation and committing to the profession
- Experimentation Phase – searching for new ideas and new challenges
- Diversification Phase – using new instructional resources and methods
- Reassessment Phase – period of self-doubting / mid-career crisis
- Serenity and Relational Distance Phase – reconciling the ideal self and the real self
- Conservatism and Complaints Phase – rigidity and resistance to innovations
- Disengagement Phase – gradual detachment from profession, taking personal time.

This sequence of phases is conventional and fails to recognize individual discrepancies, subjectivities and variations in the real lived experiences and diverse discourses of teachers, created by their unique histories, cultures, socio-political contexts and other inconsistencies. The notion that teachers’ lives can be documented and compartmentalized with such predictability, rigidity and presumed accuracy renders Huberman’s theory presumptuous and shallow in its plot to essentialize their lives, deny autonomy and orchestrate their lives into a perfect professional life cycle.

Dhunpath (1998) is also critical of Huberman’s theory. He berates the theory for failing to acknowledge the eccentricities and nuances that characterize the very essence of being human. Neither does it account for subjectivities, self-mindedness or the personal resources of each teacher which can create possibilities, limitations and consequently inform practice. The theory also neglects education policy contingencies, such as rationalization, re-deployment, curriculum
changes, promotions, in-service training and other unanticipated changes. Huberman’s theory limits possibilities for teachers to be spontaneous and different as practitioners and creates a consistent framework for teachers to progress through their professional lives. To the contrary post-structuralists challenge this neatly rounded conceptualization, abandon the security and sanctuary that it can offer to teachers in favour of being able to actively construct the pedagogical process, shape the lives of their learners and define their own lives. From a post-structural perspective the pedagogical process can also construct and re-construct new and different identities for teachers.

The major argument arising from these studies is that identities impact practice and in addition the converse holds, as changing practice can create significant shifts in teachers’ identities. This identity of a transformative teacher begins from and uses as tools his or her previous and current identity forms and a new identity is reconstructed. The new identity is indeed a selective and conscious reconfiguration from lived experiences. What was presented in the literature in this section is a partial view of change and a perspective of administrative or organizational actions likely to impede or promote change. In implementing educational change, what is common and indeed deleterious is the absence of attention to teachers’ subjectivities, the role of subjectivities in identity construction and the mutual relationship between teacher identities and the practice of teaching. Policy implementation does not account for the meaning that change will have for teachers, thereby creating dislocation between policy visions and practical realities, and policy visions and personal identities.

Schools and classrooms are subverting stereotyped images and practices, embracing diversity and becoming inclusive, as Deaf learners are increasingly being resourced by Deaf teachers. Given the uniqueness of deafness, the subjectivities, identities and agency of Deaf teachers have emerged more evidently as a site of inter- and intra-personal conflict and struggle. Deaf teachers are required to internalize firstly their newly acquired professional teacher status and secondly to negotiate the demands of policy and curriculum changes induced by transformation. Since overlooking this aspect would be a travesty of professional initiatives, this research will examine the context of how Deaf teachers’ subjectivities are constituted and reconstituted relationally through their history, language, culture and organizational practices. The effect of such neglect
as Deborah Britzman has observed, is to “neutralize the scary question of identity, leaving us with the dreary essentialism that beneath the skin we are all the same” (1994, p. 54).

Palmer’s (1997) conceptualization of teacher identities is explained by the significance of identity in the pedagogic triad, comprising the content of the subject, the learner and the identity of the teacher. The intellectual, emotional, socio-historic, cultural and spiritual paths form the inner landscape of a teacher’s life and these are integrated into their pedagogical discourse. He suggests that teachers have only one resource at their immediate control that is, their identity or sense of self and this resource that interfaces with the learner and the curriculum. Apart from the complexities associated with students and the curriculum, the greatest complexity in teaching is in the fact that teachers teach who they are.

4.3 Teacher Identity and Professional Practice

The professional identity of teachers informs how teachers teach, what they teach and how they position themselves as teachers within the wider discourse of teaching. This section elaborates how teachers action or perform their professional identities in their professional practice. Here professional practice is theorized within Judith Butler’s (1990) post-structural conceptualization of performativity. In other words, it is through their professional practice that teachers perform their teacher identities.

Policy change, as described in the previous section, requires extensive teacher re-learning and amended classroom practice, with implications for identity reconfiguration. It demands that teachers be reflective, interrogate their relationships with their learners, examine the knowledge or subject matter they want to unpack and the context in which they want to teach. Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop (2004) understand the professional identity of teachers to be an identity within the larger patchwork of identity constructions. Professional identity constitutes a crucial component of the teachers’ self-concept and therefore influences teachers’ competences and their performance as teachers. They argue that professional identity has a major impact on the way teachers teach, their development as professionals and their ability to cope with changes in the educational system. Professional identity, they claim, has to be re-conceptualized to include
teacher role, reflection, self-evaluation, community expectations, own experiences and personal background.

Teacher identity is not only multiple or hyphenated, but also layered. It is *dialogic*, in Bakhtin’s (1986) sense of invoking and overlaying multiple voices, roles, or discourses, including the teacher’s past voice as a student, the teacher’s current voice as a member of an institution, and the teacher’s separate voices as a member of the community of colleagues within the school and in the larger professional fraternity. The teachers' previous careers, even as students, shape their view of teaching and the way they undertake their teaching. In addition their lives outside school, including their latent identities and cultures, shape their practice. Where the teacher is positioned in the career cycle is significant in guiding how they implement practice, irrespective of whether they are beginning, middle stage or veteran teachers. According to Pennycook (2004) identity performances do not remain constant; they are re-constituted as identities change and represented as new and different performances.

This link between teacher identity and classroom practice has been investigated by Jita (2004) in a South African narrative study of how the identities of Black science teachers influenced their construction of alternative classroom practices. This study, using life history accounts, is located within Knowles (1992) theorizing of 'teacher role identity' in which he presents the connection between identity and classroom practice. Knowles’ model is that teachers’ childhood experiences, early teacher role models, previous teaching experiences and other critical incidents in their lives all come together to shape their 'image of self as a teacher', which is significant in developing classroom practice. Jita (2004) argues that a teachers' classroom practice is contingent on more than just what they know or believe about teaching and learning. It also depends on the teachers’ sense of self and how they understand themselves in relation to their learners, colleagues and subject matter. In other words their practice is shaped by the various facets that constitute their identities. Their practice as teachers translates to a performance of their identities and how a teacher gives meaning to the practice of teaching is closely related to whom the teacher is, that is, his or her identity.
Jita (2004) captures the case of one black science teacher, Movement Sithole, who used his personal previous experience of marginalization and challenge as a resource to create transformative classroom practices for his students. Jita refers to these personal experiences as ‘resources of biography’ and as the conceptual link to explain how identity enables and/or constrains the development of alternative forms of classroom practices. Armed with his personal biography, Mr Sithole re-interpreted his own adverse experiences and used this as a resource for constructing an alternative, transformative schema for his science teaching. While teachers' personal histories present a set of experiences that may function as obstacles to reform, they also remain available as potential resources for transformation.

In a similar South African based study, Jita and Vandeyar (2006), investigate the issue of the current mathematics curriculum with its new focus on reasoning, problem solving, learner engagement and other process skills in mathematics and how this continues to elude practitioners whose identities are embedded in traditional approaches to the subject. This research, which focused on the professional basis for teacher identity and which describes the teachers’ subject matter competence, extent of training and their formal qualifications, was undertaken against the backdrop of the conceptual framework proposed by Jansen (2001) on the contradictions between the visions of the policy makers and the teachers' accounts of their lived experiences and identities.

In their study Jita and Vandeyar (2006) used life-history accounts to explore the mathematics identities of two primary school mathematics teachers working in two former 'whites-only' schools for English and Afrikaans-speaking white children respectively. Prior to the advent of democracy in South Africa in 1994, schools catered exclusively for separate race groups. The study attempted to explain how it is that teachers continue to be challenged by implementation of the new mathematics curriculum. The data was obtained over a two-week period through classroom observations, interviews and analyses of key documents, including learner transcripts, teacher workbooks, marking schemes and diagnostic tools. The two teachers were interviewed on their experiences as learners and as teachers of mathematics.
The study confirms that the teachers' knowledge and beliefs about mathematics, mathematics teaching and mathematics learning were significantly shaped by their previous experiences as students and as teachers in other schools, as both teachers describe,

“… a less than ideal set of experiences around mathematics learning and teaching in their early experiences” (Jita and Vandeyar, 2006, p. 49).

Therefore it is essential that policymakers take into account the prior experiences of teachers. The researchers use the analogy of their identities as a ‘filter’ through which the new reform curriculum is interpreted and presented. It is critical that teachers engage with the new mathematics as learners themselves and as they would be expected to be taught. Such experiences and opportunities for engagement are crucial elements in the construction of a professional identity in mathematics and in developing a ‘counter-identity’ which will support their unlearning of traditional practices, the learning of the new reform language and their subsequent re-defined performance as teachers of the ‘new mathematics’.

A similar study of Canadian secondary school social studies teachers was undertaken by Barty (2004). She examined the correlation between the construct of teacher identity and pedagogy with specific reference to their use of primary sources in the classroom, and how the teachers managed ambiguity and controversy that arose from the use of these resources. Primary sources are contentious as they may contain sensitive language that has cultural biases, multiple viewpoints and prejudices in visual material. In terms of the theory of identity this study is also located in the notion that educators inevitably bring their personal constructions of identity to bear on their pedagogical practice which in turn contributes to re-shaping and re-negotiating their identities. The writer emphasized the need for engaging primary sources in teaching social studies since these empowered teachers with the ability to reconstruct personal meanings and alter professional performance.

Barty (2004) informs that although education authorities have the power to prescribe curriculum documents and resources, each teacher brings a unique set of life experiences and personal meanings to the classroom. This individuality informs the teacher's beliefs, values and worldview and ultimately, the pedagogical approaches that the teacher engages to interpret and unpack the curriculum in the classroom. This is what we have come to understand and refer to as
‘teacher identity’. Here again the literature on the construct of teacher identity suggests that it is influenced by many factors, ranging from individual experience and teacher training, to socio-cultural discourses that include gender, ethnicity, religion, language and personal values culminating in nationalism.

Teachers must be able to manage the challenges that primary sources can instigate, so that its benefits can be achieved and misunderstandings can be obviated. Barty (2004) is convinced that teachers must be taught how to effectively incorporate primary sources in their teaching and value the type of outcomes that result from its use so as to more fully experience its cognitive and affective benefits. They must strive for a classroom where debate, ambiguity and even controversy are hallmarks even where and when their own identities are contested. They must see students as capable of thinking critically and compassionately about complex and disturbing issues and have the confidence to facilitate the inquiry process rather than offer a performance that merely conveys indisputable facts. This pedagogical process is inherently linked to teacher identity and the performance of professional practice. Teachers need to position themselves relevantly in the discourses that confront them so as to enable acceptable and transformative practices.

An added dimension in curriculum implementation is that teachers are also gendered agents and that their identities are created through constant interaction with female and male colleagues as well as with female and male learners. Chege (2006) undertook studies based on two data sets from two separate studies in the ESAR (Eastern and Southern African Region) including Kenya, Botswana, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The studies were designed within a qualitative research paradigm using interviews, observations, drawing and diarizing and aimed at exploring the construction of gendered and sexual identities and the role of teachers in producing gendered identities within themselves and in others, in ways that influenced classroom dynamics in HIV/AIDS and sexuality education. The study outcomes according to Chege (2006) revealed firstly, that the teachers’ gendered identities, which included sexual identities, tended to influence teacher images constructed by the students. The construct of gender and sexuality assigned to female and male teachers differed explicitly, and suggested the female teacher
identity was constructed within the framework of care, compassion and empathy while the male teacher, represented power, sex and violence.

Secondly, the motherly disposition dispensed to female teachers rendered them incapable and embarrassed about responding to questions about their own sexuality. Female teachers therefore need to position HIV/AIDS education not merely as knowledge to be conveyed,

“… but rather as an educational and social discourse to be interrogated freely and discursively in the context of contemporary challenges that the pandemic posed to humanity” (Chege, 2006, p. 40).

Thirdly, it was clear that HIV/AIDS education had introduced new challenges for teachers who were expected, to guide young people on the practice of safe sexual behaviour and to be role models of this behaviour. This was contradictory in HIV/AIDS education classes as the students perceived inconsistencies between what was being taught, particularly in the context of male teachers whose identities were constructed as sexual towards their female students while at the same time attempting to be moralistic about sexual behaviour that they taught. Significant also was that in constructing manhood, violence was essentialised as a masculine attribute which boys could use to intimidate weaker boys and as form of threat and intimidation for the sexual pursuit of girls.

These studies support the notion that there is a link between identity and performance of teaching in the classroom and they also bring to the fore the interconnectedness between whom a teacher is and how he/she constructs and gives meaning to his/her professional practice. To some extent these studies have unravelled some of the ways in which the different teachers discursively produced their identities as they functioned within the frameworks of their respective biographical projects, with which they constructed their identities. The biographical projects or category of intangible resources includes such things as one's experiences of advantage and disadvantage, the emotions, power and agency of the teacher and the experiences of participating in certain kinds of social or political activities. According to white (2005) identity is a matter of transforming cultural resources into performances of the self and meaning-making is a continuous process where the self is being reconfigured in each new performance.
What is equally significant about the studies discussed here is that it foregrounds the post-structural construct of the power of agency in identity. Agency according to Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner and Cain (1998), is about consciously gaining and asserting control over one’s behaviour and actions in such a way that one acts deliberately and reflectively, with purposeful intent to bring about change. Moore (2008) undertook an exploration of pre-service elementary teachers’ developing identities as science teachers and their ability to effect positive social change in urban classrooms. The study’s theoretical framework is based on an agenda of emancipation and democracy and aimed at researching marginalized voices and embracing human agency.

To contextualize her research goals, Moore (2008) identifies with the explanation given by Holland et al (1998, p. 5) that identities are,

“… lived in and through activity and so must be conceptualized as they develop in social practice”.

Identities are by nature dynamic and unstable and therefore in the context of teachers, identities are constructed within different contexts and at different times in education, in teaching, and in schools. Additionally, identity may be associated with curriculum implementation and subject matter, such as with teachers experiencing a sense of self in identifying with science, or mathematics or history. It is therefore logical to expect that identity would be constructed and experienced, in accordance with different teaching contexts; however, the issue of performative agency is fore-grounded based on the ways in which the individual teacher consciously and intentionally constructs and negotiates a science teacher identity.

Amongst other findings reported by Moore (2008), what was significant was the way in which the teachers saw themselves as actioning power and influence in their teaching of science. This was crucial to establishing the connectedness between identity and agency. Science teaching is an activity that is embraced by who we are as cultural beings and how we consciously exercise our ability and capacity to perform the act of teaching science. More importantly agency is operationalized in understanding how teachers perform the act of teaching and the intent that lies behind this performance. When a teacher is able to subvert the institutional and positional barriers that abound in any context, then their sense of agency has created an identity, with the will to institute social change. Moore (2008) argues that science teachers must believe that all
children have a right to a quality science education, and this belief must empower them to act and teach in ways that encourage social change. She also affirms that the development of identity and agency in teachers is a lifelong process, an essential part of learning and teaching and that these two conceptualizations are complementary co-constructions leading to social change.

Given that agency cannot be isolated from the dynamics of power from which it is constructed, poststructuralist views move a step further, accounting for agency in its cultural and political context (Butler, 1990). In this view, teacher identity is both the effect of existing power as well as the condition of possibility for a form of agency. A poststructuralist account of teacher identity might give us a promising route for teachers' efforts to construct ways to empower themselves and overcome the feeling of personal inadequacy and powerlessness in teaching. Transformation in identity occurs when there is change in the power of one's experiences (Zembylas, 2003).

Zembylas (2003) explains that through a poststructuralist discourse, possibilities for transformation of the teacher self can emerge and within this discourse of theorizing about the construction and transformation of teacher identity, teachers may come to discover through their own agency, empowering tools to know their teaching, themselves, and others. Teachers are required to undergo the complex task of navigating within and between various resources which constitute their being, to know themselves and give meaning to their professional practice and then re-negotiate their identities as their identities come to confront other tensions and prospects within the classroom, the school setting and the wider discourse of collective teacher identity. In his quest to advocate “communities of practice” Wenger (1998) confirms these as important sites where acts of negotiation, learning, meaning making and teacher identity and agency construction take place.

The context of Deaf teachers and the influence of their identities on their respective professional practices will be examined within this empirical framework based on the broad spectrum of ordinary teachers. I have committed to exploring the presence of agency amongst the Deaf participants and how they make teaching significant and purposeful by empowering and transforming themselves and the lives of young Deaf learners. Given that agency is consciously
performed, this study will examine the role that the Deaf teacher chooses to perform to privilege those who, like him/herself are disadvantaged by the condition of deafness in relation to access. Do the Deaf teachers act deliberately to empower and alter themselves and the lives of students through transformative practices that make learning accessible for the Deaf learners? How and to what extent does the Deaf teacher perform acts of power and agency to negotiate institutional and organizational obstructions to achieve desirable practice? The construction of identity invariably exposes tensions and initiates negotiations between the different discourses that confront the Deaf teacher. Each discourse is framed in images of culture, power, and performative agency and to theorize about the identities of the Deaf teachers is to describe how they experience these discourses, how they resist the normative discourses that prevail amongst their hearing colleagues and whether they discover their own ‘voices’, selves and identities in the process. We are reminded by Butler (1990) however that identities are seen not as merely represented in discourse, but rather as performed, enacted and embodied though various linguistic and non-linguistic opportunities.

4.4 Teacher Identity as a Narrative Construction

In the previous chapter I have elaborated the use of the ‘narrative’ as a fundamental meaning-making framework for understanding our lives. It is through telling that our lives are experienced, presented and made meaningful and in this way identities are constructed. In the field of narrative studies, there is the understanding that our identities are derived from the convergence of recollections, experiences, relationships, emotions and biographical markers that constitute the wider cultural contexts of our lives. Taylor (2006) refers to these as the discursive resources available to speakers, which can function to either enable or restrain identities. Importantly though, articulation is the site through which our identities are performed and produced out of the available resources. In this section I discuss various empirical and theoretical studies to support the conceptualization of identities as narrative constructions.

At the outset it must be emphasized that professional work cannot be detached from the personal lives of professionals. Similarly the personal life of a teacher cannot be viewed as an entity separate from his/her professional practice. Goodson & Sikes (2001, p. 71) express the view that when professional practice is located within a whole-life perspective, it has the capacity to
transform our performance and our understanding of the performance. Professional practice can assume new meaning when contextualized in the personal life of the practitioner. Therefore, the construction of teachers’ professional identity is inextricably linked to their sense of self; and when teachers are given the opportunity to narrate life stories of teaching, they will engage in reconstructing and re-negotiating their sense of self. Social commentary and research on teachers' narratives, that is, stories of teachers' personal presentations of their experiences is increasingly being seen as crucial to the study of teachers' thinking, culture, and transformative behaviour and attitudes.

In addition framing my research within a narrative construction of teacher identity and using a post-structural lens paves the way for a broader, discursive understanding of the subject, the associated subjectivities and the agentic and structural influences that form the resources of both personal and professional identity construction. Hall (2000, p. 19) says succinctly that,

‘... identities are ... points of temporary attachment to the subject positions that discursive practices construct for us all.’

In this way an understanding of the subject as discursively produced will shift the analytical focus from the individual teacher’s identities to the teacher’s narrative expressions about what it is like to be a teacher and the available narrative resources that the Deaf teachers can access, to construct their identities. In other words my research, from a post-structural perspective, will focus on the structures these teachers are embedded in and how their professional identity is narratively constructed, rather than on essentialist perspectives of teachers having a core identity.

The narrative construction of teacher identity is also appealing to my research intentions since the narrative or ‘data story’ in any research is representative of several multi-faceted and complex voices and it is my aim to establish the many voices of the one Deaf teacher. Although the narrative may be articulated by one person there is no single voice. Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) explain that the individual does not speak with a solitary, dominant voice but may represent different voices; for example, the way in which opinions, thoughts, feelings and facts are conveyed can be constituted in different ways. A single interview, for instance, can generate a multiplicity of interpretations demonstrating that the subject is expressing ‘multiple discursive constitutions’. Individuals, according to post-modernism and post-structuralism, are
unintentionally ambiguous, equivocal and inconsistent. And according to Gill and Pryor (2006) multiple voices suggest that teachers’ stories are not merely isolated personal tales. Instead, they mingle with stories of others and are drawn from past and present, private and professional, individual and collective, and personal and socio-cultural contexts and each of the various permutations here constitutes a single voice.

Clandinin & Connelly (1998) reputed in narrative research, note that through narratives, teachers can be understood as cultural, discursive subjects and as knowers of themselves, their situations, learners and subject matter, as narrative research remains a powerful tool to document the way in which discursive environments inform the construction of teacher identities. Teachers’ personal narratives become particularly relevant for establishing their pedagogical approach and professional identity. Narratives unfold not only individual character but also professional character. Hence a teacher’s narrative amounts to more than simply telling stories; it has significance for how they perceive education as professionals. Recent thinking and practice in teacher education places narratives in a unique position both as a means to study teachers’ lives and as the object of teachers’ personal inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Soreide (2006), in her study of five Norwegian female, elementary school teachers, aimed to show how teachers’ identities can be narratively constructed through positioning of the teacher and the negotiation of this positioning. She describes how the women actively used available spaces as narrative resources to position themselves as teachers. In the analysis of the five interviews four major constructions of teacher identity emerged from about thirty different subject positions: ‘the caring and kind teacher’; ‘the creative and innovative teacher’; ‘the professional teacher’; ‘the typical teacher’. These identity constructions are not prescriptive, ready-made, clinical and sharply defined identities, but rather more flexible ‘clusters’, which construct and are constructed by the relevant subject positions the teachers related to in the interviews.

The teachers constructed and negotiated several possible teacher identities and combinations, in their narrative presentation of their practice as teachers. This is what Somers and Gibson (1994) call ontological narratives, which are the stories we tell in an effort to make sense of how we experience ourselves and how we would like to be understood in order to bring structure to our
personal and professional lives. A diverse range of positions is available as possible resources in the teachers’ narratives and these positions are used to construct ontological identity. The narrative positioning is achieved either through negative positioning which involves distancing from or rejection of the available subject positions, or through positive positioning which entails identification with and acceptance of available subject positions. The different subject positions that the teachers identified with or rejected in their narratives revealed their images, expectations, practices, opinions and values, and are therefore significant in constructing of different understandings of themselves.

What is significant about Soreide’s (2006) study is that it draws attention to the interdependence of different identity constructions. In other words the different identity constructions are dependent on each other to exist. Furthermore the construction of multiple identities and negotiations between them is a necessary part of the construction of teacher identity. The study also reveals the flexibility and lack of fixedness in the teachers’ identity construction and how narrative identities are constantly shaped, reshaped and adapted to varying situations. Within the discourse of teaching, there can be a multitude of possible and accessible identity resources and constructions, which lends itself to multi-dimensional narratives of teacher identity.

The issue of positioning, footing and voice in teachers’ narratives is captured again in this next study of teacher identity and the culture of schooling, through the narrative of a white, female, middle class teacher, in a suburban primary school in South Africa (Nduna, 2008). Her narrative of disillusionment with changes in educational policy and her inability to deal with the lack of order and discipline of learners to which she was once accustomed, captures how language and texts reflect the positioning in a social actor's utterances. Mary, as she is known in the research, struggles to re-contextualise herself amidst ongoing demographic change and to establish her footing, to assume a new position, and to find her voice in the new position where she encounters pupils and parents from the broader social, ethnic, and cultural spectrum of 'the rainbow nation'. The ‘rainbow nation’ in the South African context, is a post-apartheid inclusive arrangement of different race groups and other nationalities living in South Africa. Prior to this she was comfortably positioned in the familiarity and security of an all-white school. She finally
succumbed to the struggle as the position of strength and excellence she previously held in her interaction with learners, parents and colleagues was eroded.

In her narrative Mary disclosed her previous position of a confident, bold and celebrated teacher. But as the reflexive data accumulated, with increasingly more reference markers to the person that she was struggling to find, it became evident that her present teacher position was now fragile and insecure. It was clear that she was losing her *footing*, was forced into changing her *position*, and ultimately lost her *voice* as she failed to re-negotiate the new position and integrate this as part of her sense of self. To this end Nduna (2008) argues that who teachers are as professionals is so intimately linked to who they are as persons, that to think of teaching as a job that can be undertaken separately from the personal values that one espouses, is actually to dehumanise and essentialize the role of the teacher and to deny the subjectivity of the teacher.

If several subject positions form clusters within a discourse, an identity construction will emerge. Although the narrative resources might be shared by more than one teacher, the way these members interpret and manipulate these narrative resources to construct possible identities might vary contextually, from person to person and from situation to situation (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). To understand identity construction as a process of narrative positioning is useful, because it opens up an understanding of teachers as active agents in their own lives and the construction of teacher identity as a dynamic and continuously changing activity (Davies & Harré, 2001). The choice of positions within each discursive practice or situation, the combinations of subject positions, and the variety of positioning in teacher narratives are all variables in the complex process of constructing teacher identities.

In support of narrative inquiry as an intervention form that can empower individual teachers to make sense of their personal life and work, and potentially transform their understanding of personal identity and educational practices, researchers Gill and Pryor (2006) designed and organized a three-day international conference on Human-Centred Education (HCE) held in July 2005. It was attended by 50 teachers from schools and educational projects in Europe, America, Asia and Africa. The approach that was proposed was one where teachers can work as researchers and directly inquire into each other’s stories of personal and professional
experiences. From a theoretical point of view, narrative inquiry provided opportunities for teachers to explore and understand how different social, cultural, historical and personal factors influence their educational values and practices and their personal and professional identities.

The goal was to construct a space that would expose teachers to recent research in HCE, engage with each other’s practices and, above all, respond by sharing personal narratives of lived experience through interaction, dialogue and experiential learning and to help teachers co-construct meaning, socially and dialogically. Gill and Pryor (2006) interacted with the teachers during the conference to explore the conference’s effect on teachers’ perceptions of self, teaching, educational visions, values and world views and how they had translated these into teaching practices. The teachers talked about their own experiences, including their own schooling and education, their decisions to become teachers, their educational visions and values, and practices. The conference highlighted the voice of the person who teaches, mixing with the voices of those in the teachers’ stories, including parents, children and other social agents.

Central to the study was the recognition of teachers serving as narrative inquirers to engage directly with each others’ stories and experiences. The teachers reconstructed who they were and reconceptualized the journey they were are taking, questioned and re-articulated their assumptions, values and beliefs, their pedagogical underpinnings visions. Significantly Gill and Pryor (2006) argued that teachers’ narrative and identity are mutually constitutive. This suggests that there is no narrative which does not respond to the teachers’ identity and conversely, no teacher’s identity exists separately from personal narratives as the essence of being teacher is embedded in personhood.

Yet another dimension of narratives and stories is its benefit as a tool in reflective practice for teachers. Beattie (2000) researched the narrative excerpts written by teachers in the context of a year-long teacher education program in which the teachers were enrolled as a cohort in two consecutive courses in the foundations of Education, Teaching, Students, Schools and Systems. The study set out to explore the narrative orientation to teacher education which is grounded in the framework of Dewey’s belief that we learn from experience and reflection on experience and
that a transformative educational experience is based on on-going reorganizing and reconstructing.

The teachers in this study worked on a variety of activities and projects which engaged them in individual and collaborative inquiry, ongoing reflective writing, role-play activities, analysis of critical incidents in practice, storytelling, cooperative research and group presentations. These narrative activities provided them with multiple opportunities to share ideas and to hear perspectives different from their own. As they developed relationships with their colleagues and the instructor, participants learned that they could talk about their frustrations, dilemmas, failures and difficulties of becoming teachers, as well as the joys and successes. It allowed for their voices to be heard and analyzed as they expressed their concerns, issues and ways in which they experienced their learning and their lives in education. What was illuminated distinctively was that teaching was a human process that involved the performative agency of the teacher.

Also significant in Beatties’ (2000) study is the concept of the relational self, which is the idea that learning takes place in relationships, and that the self is formed, given meaning and understood in the context of others. At the core of this process is the notion of the dialogic self which points to the significance of interaction and collaborative interpretation in meaning-making. This is significant to the process of becoming a teacher and of learning to teach. Through dialogue and conversations with multiple others, individuals come to know themselves and others, to know what they know and to construct professional identities. It holds also that by entering into a relationship with others, genuine dialogue can take place and inclusiveness and mutuality can develop. Beattie concludes that in teacher education, narratives and stories become the frameworks within which experience is reflected upon and shared. When it is understood that personal, social, cultural and organizational stories are temporal arrangements and that narratives can be re-scripted, there is the potential for transformation in personal lives, classroom situations and organizational settings.

The focus on the subjective, narrative experience of a teacher or the social actor, as the basis for understanding and studying a system of society, like the education system, is similarly highlighted by Smit and Fritz (2008) in a study described earlier in this chapter. They argue that
teachers, interact socially and adjust behaviour in response to the actions of others. As teachers interpret the actions of others they adjust their own actions and behaviour. In constructing their social worlds teachers interact as active beings and not as passive objects. Social reality and human behaviour from the post-structural perspective are conceptualized as communicated and subjective experiences.

What this inquiry reveals is that personal, situational and social narratives are appropriated in the core principles of language and thought, through narratives, and sheds light on how teachers’ identities are forged. Through the narratives of the two teachers the researchers accessed their understanding and thoughts of themselves as teachers, as this became visible in their activities and interactions. More significantly, is that teachers do not have an essential dominant narrative that shapes their identities. Instead there are three intertwined narratives: the situational, the social, and the personal narratives. Our understanding now is that each narrative informs, shapes and influences the others and can contribute towards an identity that could play out as the teacher’s professional performance. Such narratives reveal how teachers view themselves as professionals in their interaction with their learners and the school community at large. It would appear that external pressures, emanating from society and situational contexts in conjunction with the personal identity, impact teacher identity.

And finally with regard to the notions of personality, character, and nature, Sfard and Prusak (2005) argue that these have connotations of natural and biological determinants, and are therefore not aligned to the socio-cultural project. In contrast, identity is thought of as man-made and as constantly created and re-created in interactions with people and events. Years of involvement with identity related research led the writers to the decision to equate identities with stories about persons. They are bold in their deliberation that identities are the stories, and are not merely expressed through the stories. Narratives reveal stories of others, according to Mikhail Bakhtin (1986) and identities emerging from different narrators and addressed to different audiences are in constant interaction as these inform one another. The stories would not be effective in their relationship-shaping task if not for their power to contribute to the audiences’ own narratives about themselves and about others. Thus the people, to whom our
stories are told, as well as those who tell stories about us, are actually tacit co-authors of our own identities.

In the context of my research I have conceptualized the narratives of the Deaf teacher participants as vehicles for their expression and self-interpretation. In the act of creating their stories and narrating their experiences, they would be constructing identities both as Deaf persons and as Deaf teachers. As teachers, their narratives will be interrogated to establish how they occupy professional spaces in their quest to form professional identities. I will explore the claim of the Deaf teachers, in their narratives, that there are power relations and professional knowledge differences in the ‘Deaf school’ workplace. The claim that the binary strategy of ‘us’ and ‘them’, meaning Deaf teachers and hearing teachers, has generated a marginalized location for the newcomer Deaf teachers in workplace spaces of the staffroom, classroom and school, will also be explored.

Have the Deaf teachers accepted or rejected the available positioning in the hegemony of hearing teachers? The tensions, if any, in the shared space and their relationships will be examined in the narratives to establish its impact on identity constructions of the Deaf teachers. Is professional space contested and to what extent have the Deaf teachers lost or discovered their ‘voices’ in the struggle for space? The narratives will be explored for emotional identities of the Deaf teachers to understand their feelings of being either the invaders or the invaded. Given the power dynamics, how are power and knowledge relations within the work space negotiated to secure professional identity coherence? In the ten years of practice has professional meaning for the Deaf teachers derived from workplace harmony or discord?

The emphasis on reflective practice in teacher education and development is central to the work of researchers, Clandinin and Connelly (1998). They have written extensively about ‘storying lives’, ‘stories to live by’, and ‘storied landscapes’. Implicit in their writing is the view that the narrative is a tool for shaping and understanding experience, not just for recording it. Their research challenges the image of the teacher as passive and dependent, and suggests that teachers’ perceptions of teaching are shaped by the knowledge that they bring to their practice. They claim validation in the teachers’ individual experiences of schooling, their personal
biographies and family histories, growing up in different cultural, gender and ethnic environments, and the societies, institutions and communities in which they have lived.

The traditional and dominant view of teacher education as a form of training, with mastery of techniques, and where theory is externally produced in the form of educational literature and public policy documents, is supplanted by theory grounded in personal experience narratives, allowing for the professional teaching identity to be reconstructed and reconceptualized. Together with the acceptance of identity as being pivotal to teacher practice research, comes the declaration that through performances and narratives of their performances, teachers become active agents who play decisive roles in determining the dynamics of teaching, in shaping teachers’ behaviour and in structuring their own teaching. For the Deaf teachers as well, identity construction is a developmental process in the ecological sense as they interact with the entities and others in the social, political, cultural and educational environments to re-configure continuously changing identities according to the context of the their performance and the narrative telling of this performance.

4.5 Conclusion

As seen in this review an understanding of how identities develop or are constructed is critical to the complexities of teacher identities. How does a teacher transition to role of the teacher? How does a teacher establish coherence in this new and unfamiliar territory? How does a teacher define and begin to construct meaning and make sense of personal and work experiences? Franzak (2002) explains that we live in a world of negotiated identity, where we continually construct visions of the self. Those of us who create ‘teacher’ as part of our identity must negotiate the implications of our professional identity in relation to others such as, students, peers, parents, role models, the community, other associates, and ourselves. In addition to relationships, identities are also constructed through a host of available discourses and other biographical and structural resources. She clarifies that the development of a teachers’ identity is a continuing and dynamic process, as identity is continually being informed, formed, and reformed as teachers develop over time.
Post-structural approaches lead to understanding the construction of teacher identity as a narrative and discursive process contextualized by the institution. The view of Kalmbach Phillips (2002) resonates with that of Mattson and Harley (2001) and Jansen (2001), that teachers cannot be fitted with ready-made and universal identities that they are compelled to adhere to. The use of narrative research through which the lives of teachers can be permeated supports my own exploration of how the identities of Deaf teachers can be constructed through articulation, social interaction and self-presentation. In researching the lives of Deaf teachers, their narratives may also be constructed and performed through signed language articulation and in response to cultures, contexts and practices peculiar to their deafness. In addition the perspective framing this study will focus on an awareness and elucidation of the positioning of teachers in the various discourses that confront them, the way in which they experience their subjectivities, the resource capital that the institution avails to its teachers, their experiences and the practices in which teachers participate. These resources combined with stable biological markers and other structural variables inform identity construction.

Davies & Harré, (2001) caution that the identity that is constructed must not be understood as a sign of ambivalence, confusion or inconsistence in the teachers, but as an indication of an active, constructive relationship that is continuously altering in accordance with available narrative resources, in the different settings. Post-structuralist approaches present an understanding of teacher identity as a construction and as an alternative to a more traditional essentialist understanding of identity which considers teacher identity to be stable and fixed. The relationship that teachers have with colleagues, mentors, associates, supervisors, learners, parents, the curriculum, the school environment and the community informs the positions they assume, how these positions are negotiated and the way in which the teachers ensconce themselves into the discourse of teaching. In addition, their choices, practices and language constantly create, construct and reconstruct their identities (Weedon, 1987).
CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

5.1 Introduction

Researchers working within the framework of interpretive traditions, as opposed to the clinical and sanitized objectivity of their statistical counterparts, have often been called “journalists or soft scientists”, according to Koch (1998, p. 1187). She describes other issues of censure including that story-telling work is unscientific, unverifiable, replete with bias and informed entirely by the personal agenda of the researcher. Furthermore the writer’s position, which constitutes a fusion of the researcher and the researched, in the final text is challenged. Narrative stories are condemned for not being generalizable with findings that can change with every repeated process, and so why should there be investment in qualitative research. Critics insinuate that researchers fabricate stories since human subjects and their stories are malleable (Patton, 2002; Ayres, Kavanaugh & Knafl, 2003). And finally there appears to be no consensual method for ensuring rigor. This is the backdrop against which this research was conceptualized and undertaken.

This chapter will outline the operationalization of the qualitative research process in my study. The narrative approach that was used to generate the data and the post-structural lens through which the data will be interpreted, will be documented. The actual research process detailing recruitment of participants and preparation of participants for the three-part interview schedule, are detailed. A detailed description of the interviews, the consent documents and other logistical and technical information are included. In addition this section will record my experiences of researching through the medium of signed language, the particularities associated with this form of articulation, and the complexities of trans-coding a manual language into written text, given its original physical and spatial configuration. My personal dilemmas regarding accuracy and possible adulteration of meaning through attempts to capture a spatial-physical language in written text are raised. I explain also my efforts to ensure that meanings intended by the participants were maintained, through various collaborative initiatives with participants. There is a discussion on issues pertaining to integrity and trustworthiness. I also discuss how analysis and
interpretation was undertaken within and across the narratives told by the Deaf participants. And finally, my personal reflections on the data production are presented.

5.2 Using Qualitative Design

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001), there are multiple interpretations and perspectives on single events and situations, and as people perform they create multi-layered and complex realities. Such multiplicities are characteristic of the nature of identities which my research strives to explore using the qualitative approach. The authors add that the aim of qualitative research is not verification of a predetermined idea, but instead discovery that leads to new insights. The focus is on studying participants in natural settings, in which participants ‘speak’ for themselves. Research findings do not result from statistical procedures or manipulation of variables of interest (Patton, 2002). The author explains that unlike quantitative researchers who investigate cause and effect relationships, and make more definite predictions and generalizations, qualitative researchers emphasize elucidation, understanding and relativity to similar situations.

Qualitative design, reputed for its popularity and effectiveness in the social sciences, was a logical option for this investigation since it uses a naturalistic approach and offers understandings and explanations on real world phenomena in context specific settings. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001) state that qualitative research is often a broad term that describes research that focuses on how individuals and groups view and understand the world and construct meaning out of their experiences. People are deliberate, creative and performative in their actions and actively construct and make meaning of their social worlds. Situations are fluid and changing, rather than static and fixed, and events and behaviour are situated activities as they evolve over time and are affected by context.

The qualitative approach appeals to my investigation since it endorses and embraces the researcher’s close involvement and function in the research, as is noted by my own position in the research. Patton (2002) supports the notion of researcher involvement with participants and immersion in the research with the view that events in the real world are continuously subjected
to change and qualitative researchers are valued for capturing events, changes, complexities and particularities. Other strengths of qualitative research that appeal particularly to my investigation is that it is essentially narrative-oriented and has the ability to illuminate the subjectivities of human experience despite the certain common contexts (Ayres, Kavanaugh & Knafl, 2003). In addition to the general context of the phenomenon being investigated, qualitative research seeks to account for experiences that occur subjectively (Ayres, Kavanaugh & Knafl, 2003). Subjectivities, as discussed earlier, are significant in identity construction and have validity in each participant’s individualized discourse.

The group five Deaf teacher participants are constituted in this qualitative narrative study as the unit of analysis. Denzin and Lincoln (2004) claim that the narrative study allows for analysis of participants’ personal narratives giving a perspective on the inside view so as to make social behaviour meaningful. It offers the possibility of understanding and interpreting participants’ lives in different phases, separately. In this case, the Deaf participants will reflectively disclose their realities at different stages in their lives. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001) contend that narrative study research is valued for its convenience and accessibility to in-depth information through a broad data source.

Research theory writers generally agree that the use of the narrative study is limited for its applicability, possibility to generalize findings and that data does not fluently lend itself to verification (Denzin and Lincoln, 2004; Ayres, Kavanaugh and Knafl, 2003). However none of these limitations is of relevance to my research intentions. According to Flyvbjerg (2001) generalizability and verification potential are highly sought after affirmations in positivist research initiatives in the natural, physical and chemical sciences. As earlier declared, my investigation is driven by context-dependent knowledge and participant subjectivities, generating a multiplicity of possible realities. Generalizability and verification would not even be remotely achievable. As Flyvbjerg succinctly states:

“... predictive theories and universals cannot be found in the study of human affairs”, (2001, p. 73).

The value of this narrative study lies in capturing the complexities and nuances of human behaviour through the storied narratives of the Deaf participants.
The story which emerges from narrative enquiry offers features which transcend the conventional criteria associated with the quantitative paradigm for determining the reliability, validity and generalisability value in data. As mentioned qualitative data offers the richness and complexity which is needed to explore multiple ways of knowing, and the contingency of humanness on personal experience and individual conceptualizations of the world (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001; Denzin and Lincoln, 2004; Ayres, Kavanaugh and Knafl, 2003).

5.3 Storying the Lives of Deaf Persons through Narrative Enquiry

The section will focus on the narrative approach for studying the concept of identities. In it I offer essential features of narrative research that support my selection of this method of inquiry. These include telling through the use of linguistic tools, the context-dependent nature of narrative inquiry, the tendency towards being reflective, the potential for the process of negotiation of meaning and interpretive reconstruction, the narrative as constituted by both cultural resources and the agency of the subject, and the narrative as a performance of identity. Narrative inquiry is rooted in post-structural epistemology and is founded on the presupposition that knowledge does not exist independently of humanity (Plummer, 2001). In fact it is people, and not inanimate manipulable variables, that are the active participants in the meaning-construction process. This position views assumed knowledge critically and denies the dominant positivist beliefs that we can know the world unproblematically (Burr, 1995) or through predictability and generalizability.

Allowing people to tell their own stories is an acknowledged and well used research technique in the social sciences, embracing several discursive contexts. Plummer (2001) associates the narrative preference to the turn towards post-structuralism and the increase in regard for diverse interpretations and understandings. There is a shift from generalizations towards specific cultures and their multiple stories since the narrative is the most basic way for people to understand and explain their worlds. Mishler (1999) reinforces multiplicity and advances the idea of layers of experience embedded in narratives and advises against reading lives as a progressive, continuous
movement through various developmental stages. The absence of sequence is not suggestive that lives are chaotic and devoid of order. In fact meaningful narratives of experiences can still be constructed with adequate space for multiple and sometimes competing discourses to commingle.

Realities are reconstructed everyday by the very people who share the culture and the language, using whatever linguistic tools are available in their culture. We get to know of the world through the linguistic practices of individuals who are defined by on-going construction and reproduction of knowledge, and not through direct observation. The negotiated meanings between the signifier (speaker) and the signified (content) are never fixed: they are constantly negotiated, subjected to rigor, contested and transient (Burr, 1995). Language and its processing therefore are fundamental to the construction of the person and narrative self-expression is essential to inquiry. The practice of language and the construction of self become inextricably linked as identities are performed through language.

"We express, display, make claims for who we are - and who we would like to be - in the stories we tell and how we tell them," (Mishler, 1999, p. 19).

In support Arvay (1999) argues that the act of constructing the self is a social and linguistic performance, an ongoing creative process accomplished through narratives. Our cultural worlds present conflicting discourses and as agentic beings we select certain discourses and perform our identities with available linguistic resources.

The narrative approach is a way of representing the stories that people tell about themselves as it offers the opportunity for an interpretive re-construction of part of a person’s life through personal stories. In a research context the participant tells the story of his/her self with his/her interpretation and meaning. The same story is subsequently reconstructed and retold by the researcher with new and/or different interpretation and meaning. In this theorization, Arvay (1999) posits the self as being narratively constructed, or created through the narrative, with the reconstructed self emerging in each re-telling. This is alternate to the view that each of us has an inner core being, a cohesive underlying essence that develops through progressive stages as suggested by Marx and Weber (Hall, 1992b). Narrative research is useful in understanding identity as it explores whether the self is constructed in the context of cultural resources or
whether lives have a personal identity lying at the core. The narrative method is thus appropriate for studying identity since it allows for an exploration of the multidimensional, multilayered and textured contours of human experience (Hole, 2004).

Parker (2005) has an interesting conceptualization that personal identity emerges as ‘figure against the ground’ of culturally dependent images of the self, and how identity complements, rather than alienates, the self. The author supports the use of narrative research in identity studies since it respects the individual story and whatever shape of life emerges from a personal account. The researcher constructs a biography, with the autobiographical performance of the self offered by the narrator. The way the person performs his/her life is framed by the dialectical relationship that exists amongst agency, temporality, event and context. The narrative addresses the production of identity and in this view the narrative is the performance of the self in a story of identity (Squire, 2000).

The context-dependent nature of the narrative approach is yet another reason why I found the approach to be most suitable for this research. It views reality as being contextual and dependent upon how the respondent perceives and constructs meaning at the time of the research. The data is contingent upon the unique understanding and interpretation that the individual assigns to a particular context at a particular time. Within this understanding there can be multiple meanings (Miller and Brewer, 2003). The idea of a fixed reality through the use of empirical information is not acceptable to the pure narrativist, whose focus is on the interplay between the actors in the research partnership and the fluctuating reality of changing and subjective positions emerging from the wider context and mediated through the lens of those being researched.

Miller (2005) further explains that the respondent actively constructs the narrative of his life in response to the social and cultural context at the time of the interview, with emphasis on how the narrator negotiates and interprets the reality and meaning of change. Through the narrative I was able to elicit accounts of the informants’ lives, their personal complexities and development as teachers. While this process of data collection resonates with a view of identity as a reflective project, it also encouraged the informants to highlight what they felt were significant in their lives and to their realities. Engaging in reflective practices is valuable in managing changing
circumstances and in challenging interpretations of events, circumstances and beliefs. Clandinin and Connelly (1998) see reflection as a means of emancipation and empowerment that can encourage teachers to take control of the environments in which they work while its added strength lies in its ability to promote open-mindedness and willingness to change.

Narrative enquiry is widely supported in education and in research involving teachers and provides the structure and context for explanations on educational practice, according to McEwan and Egan (1995, p.xiii. They comment that narratives form a framework within which discourses about the capacity and power of humans emerge and contribute to our ability to deliberate over educational issues and challenges. In addition, since the function of narratives is to give meaning to and to be able to explain our actions to ourselves and to others, narrative discourses are essential in the understanding of teaching and learning and consequently, have the potential to influence policy, practice and implementation of change.

According to Rakhit (1998) the value of the narrative lies in its ability to take seriously the subjective factors in the social life of the respondent. It recognizes that lives, including the professional lives of teachers, are complex and that all the nuances, ambiguities, changes and richness of lived experiences relate to each other. By tracing the individual’s life as it evolves, narratives can show how individuals experience, create and make sense of the social world. Importantly, the study of teachers’ personal narratives of their experiences is increasingly being seen as critical to the study of their thinking and behaviour. Clandinin and Connelly (1998) note that narratives which are concerned with specific concrete events in a person’s life, has become an important in understanding how teachers know themselves, their situations, their subjective issues and their teaching.

Broadly explained the narrative interview yields a story. Wiles, Rosenberg and Kearns (2004) explain that the narrator presents information as a sequence of connected events, with thematic coherence and temporal structure. Narratives are also understood as being relevant to the way people learn about, explain and organize their experiences. Narratives make the meanings that people assign to their experiences accessible to the listener or researcher. Pavlish (2007) elaborates that narratives contain people’s subjective interpretations of meaning derived from the
realities that they have experienced. Therefore, narratives disclose data that has already been interpreted by the narrator well before the researcher engages with the data in the analysis process.

The opportunity for exploring the dialectical relationship between individuals and their social, political, economic and historical contexts is presented through narrative research, according to Goodson & Sikes (2001). In other words, individual stories ought to be connected to the larger contexts of society. The method aims to explore the nature of the connections and participants’ subjective experiences and interpretations of those experiences, values, assumptions and beliefs. These are the interpretations that people attach to their everyday experiences, as an explanation of their behaviour. Such accounts may include any expression of the individual that can reveal her view of herself, her life situation, or the world as she understands it at a specific time. The account is composed at the request of someone other than the person the narrative describes.

In the narrative account researchers ask open-ended questions to capture how the person understands his/her own past. Neuman’s (2006) view is that precision and accuracy is less critical than the story itself. Instead, the main purpose is to establish how the person relates the past but not just as some kind of objective truth. Researchers must recognize that a person may reconstruct or add new interpretations from the present to the past. In other words the person may re-write her own story, repeatedly. Neuman (2006) also explains that researchers may use a life story grid where the life may comprise different stages or portions in the person’s life. In my research, reference is made to childhood, schooling, college years, family life and the phase of professional practice. In each phase the participant shares his/her experiences and reflections on these experiences.

My final comments on this issue are that through my experiences I have come to know that researchers often experience a sense of anxiety and apprehension when considering research initiatives that involve Deaf participants. This is largely due to sign language which presents as an obstacle in the research process especially when the researcher is not fluent in signing. Although sign language interpreters are the option of choice, they are generally not preferred
owing to limitations in reliability that relate to distortion of content, dilution of content, invasion of the space between researcher and Deaf participant and matters of confidentiality and ethics.

What has resulted from this communication-barrier contention is that the Deaf have become increasingly marginalized from research initiatives that ought to involve their authentic ‘voices’. By offering the participants direct engagement in the process through the signed performance of their narratives, I was able to secure what Jones (2007, p. 33) refers to as “research accommodation”. In this way the process gave recognition to my participants’ critical participation in my research endeavour. More importantly the participants were able to ‘tell’ their stories first hand and in a way that did not contribute to their further marginalisation.

The use of narrative inquiry was appropriate for this research because stories are the form in which individuals disclose themselves and this would become the means or the opportunity through which I would unravel their multiple identities. Individuals understand and make sense of the world through narrativizing their lives and reflecting on how they have experienced the various phases of their lives. Through the narrative method I hoped not only to contextualize the experiences, knowledge and beliefs of the participants, but also to know who they are firstly as Deaf persons and then as Deaf teachers, as well as to understand their experiences, beliefs and feelings about their professional practice.

My reading of Rachelle Hole’s (2004) research on the narrative identities of three Deaf women inspired my engagement with the collaborative narrative method developed by Arvay (2002). It suited the purpose and intentions of my research, and supported my understanding that knowledge and truth are co-constructed enterprises. As in all research projects the collaborative narrative method acknowledges the roles of both the researcher and the participants in the investigation. Given the articulation complexities in signed language, I pre-empted the possibility that truthfulness in representation of data would be compromised during trans-coding from a manual, signed conversation to written script. Arvay’s collaborative strategy between the researcher and participants would bridge any divergence between what was signed by the Deaf participant in the video-recorded narrative interview and the researcher’s written script transcribed from the visual recording.
In the next section I will describe the use of the post-structural framework to explain the identities of the Deaf teacher participants, and illustrate the alliance between the post-structuralism and the narrative method. From a post-structuralist lens meaning is fluid, fragile and constructed through an on-going process of negotiation with the subjective or internally experienced reality. Lather (1991) advises that poststructuralist views of people's contingent, multiple and contradictory identities need to be tempered by recognizing the agency of subjects in striving for coherence and in making an active contribution to their own identity formation.

5.4 Using a Post-Structuralist Lens

Although it may be conceived of as dated, the conceptualization of post-structuralism proposed by Selden (1989) augments my understanding of the paradigm. Selden explains post-structuralism as a framework for explaining phenomena that disrupts any secure sense of meaning and reference in language, any explanation given by the senses and any rational or legitimate way of understanding identity. Seldon cautions that disruption here should not be seen as being disparaging. Instead the attraction of post-structuralism lies in its power to resist and work against settled truths and oppositions. What is most fitting for me is that a post-structuralism lens has the potential to reveal the complexities in struggles against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender, race, background, class or wealth. It can help the researcher to adopt a critical stance and disrupt stereotyped perspectives on marginalized groups.

Post structuralist theorists including Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Julia Kristeva suggest that identity is completely decentred, imperfectly known and somewhat elusive (Bourdieu, 1993). Benwell and Stokoe (2006) explain that in the post-structuralist approach to textual analysis, the reader replaces the author as the primary subject of inquiry. This displacement is often referred to as the ‘destabilizing’ or ‘decentring’ of the author. Without a central fixation on the author, and disregarding an essentialist reading of the content, the post-structuralist focus is not simply ‘in’ the person being interpreted, but on the space that lies ‘in-between’ the interpreter and the person being interpreted. Even this ‘in-between’ space as an alternative source for explaining identity, is neither authoritative nor does it promise consistency. All embedded knowledge and assumptions on identity are destabilized.
The potential for post-structuralism to inform identity construction is based on the abundance of available research studies and, even more so, evaluated policy and practice initiatives to demonstrate its credibility in the field (Vick, 2006). Two key concepts for poststructuralist research are discourse and the subject. They are understood in such distinctive ways within post-structuralism that it is not possible to discuss poststructuralist research without understanding how these concepts are used. Post-structuralism treats discourse as if it were language in use. Meaning is established by association, through what Derrida, in particular, calls ‘intertextuality’ (Derrida, 1978). Meaning and social realities are thus constructed, and are not discovered or disclosed through text. Meanings are constructed largely by drawing on different combinations of existing available discourses. The meanings are never fixed, but are always being reconstructed, redefined, challenged and contested, and constantly changed.

A second key concept for post-structuralism is the subject. Post-structuralism treats the subject as an ongoing outcome of discourse, through the construction of different identities individuals might take on, and through the ways individuals are manipulated by discourses to take up particular identities. People come to occupy and take up such positions that reflect who they are through techniques of self-inspection and self-regulation (Foucault, 1988). The identities individuals come to be through these processes are not singular but multiple, and the multiplicity of identities are not necessarily in congruence with each other. These understandings of the nature of discourse and its relation to the subject are the issues post-structuralism addresses, and it can illuminate the broader cultural factors shaping identity. Sondergaard (2002) also stresses that the central object of post-structural investigation are discourses themselves. Consequently, discursive data are not to be understood as evidence of something beyond itself; the data is the actual evidence. Thus, instances of discursive practice are the evidence of available discourses. They are not anecdotes referring to something else - they are the data.

Czarniawska (2004) acclaims post-structuralist research for its use of articulated and visual textual data, including subjective narratives, giving particular strength and appropriateness to my research. Narratives are widely recognized as some of the most powerful ways in which individuals construct their understandings of themselves and their worlds, and the ways in which the two interact. Narratives are rich sources of the metaphors and imageries. Crucially, they
demonstrate the complexity of the interplay between discourses, as well as points of discontinuity among them. Further, the form of narrative, whether this takes on the discourse of trauma, romance, adventure, comedy or any other, demonstrates how the narrator moves beyond the self and positions him/herself as a social actor - a powerful agentic hero, or a subordinated victim of circumstance.

Sondergaard (2002) adds that meaning is theorized as never ‘fixed’, and discourses in use are conceptualized as the mobilizing of available discursive resources that are constantly changing, inconsistent, contradictory, and as inevitably shaped by experience, social position, values and other subjective factors. Therefore there can be no such thing as a distinctive, comprehensive or even representative account of the discursive construction of identity. In other words the elusiveness of identity offers a measure of comfort to a researcher that identity is an explainable phenomenon and not a concrete, conquerable phenomenon that research can either discover or not discover.

In summary, in sociological and psychological research and theory, the individual is the fundamental social category, the focus of investigation and the essential foundation for explaining identity phenomena. However in post-structuralism the human subject is secondary. In this sense the human subject is the outcome rather than the origin or starting point of any identity process. Rather than understanding Deaf behaviour in terms of internal psychological dynamics, individual differences in cognitive capacities or the social and discursive factors shaping the ways they process and respond to external circumstances, post-structuralism will seek to explore the discourses through which the Deaf participants will formulate their understandings of themselves as teachers. In this approach the focus is on the ways in which the Deaf teachers will position themselves in relation to certain objects and behaviours as these come to appear as either desirable or unacceptable in the framework of their own identities.

It is well established that as an interpretive form of research, the post-structuralist approach is a communal process informed by the researcher and the researched. The researcher co-constructs realities and different researchers may construct the same discourse through different processes. It is hoped that like all qualitative research, mine too will be judged on the fidelity and
trustworthiness of the investigative procedure, the merits of the investigative outcomes and the subjective ways in which the Deaf participants construct their realities. Finally, it is my wish that credibility and legitimacy would rest with how I conceptualize the realities that my Deaf teacher participants experience in their silent worlds.

5.5 The Production: Deaf Identity in the Making

This section will detail the actual research process showing firstly how participants were recruited. Fluency in SASL and written English were required. In addition demographic profiling and variability in school context were also considered. The initial meeting with participants is described, during which I explained the purpose of the research and the nature and extent of participant involvement. Correspondences, including letters of consent to participants and other stakeholders and logistical preparations are outlined. This is followed by a description of the three-part narrative interview and what was required of participants during each stage. The collaborative effort in re-casting data from sign to written script is presented, accompanied by the challenges of such an undertaking. Finally there is an account of within and across case analyses, including how data was sorted and identified into themes using an inductive approach.

5.5.1 Auditioning the participants

The five participants in my investigation were purposively selected to include Deaf educators in urban, semi-urban and rural schools. In addition the sample was adequately inclusive of gender and ethnic representivity, relative to the numerical dominance in the original core group of 25 Deaf persons that qualified as educators by 2001, from the teacher education and training course, detailed in Chapter One. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001, p. 103),

“… in purposive sampling, researchers handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgment of their typicality. In this way, they build up a sample that is satisfactory to their specific needs.”

One very significant criterion that guided my selection of the sample was that participants should have as their linguistic tools South African Sign Language (hereafter referred to as SASL) as the first language and language of communication, with English as the second language, which is, the language of reading and writing. Given their bilingual-bicultural status, participants
identified themselves as culturally Deaf persons. SASL is the language of choice amongst the South African signing Deaf cultural community (Aarons and Akach, 2002). By conceding to the use of their preferred method of communication, I ensured that participants would be accommodated and more importantly, effective in telling their stories.

Furthermore the use of their indigenous language was an ethical consideration, as much as it was strategic this demonstrated value for their mother tongue, acknowledgement of their minority culture status and respect for their diversity. And finally the use of a language that the participants prioritized needed to supersede my own expedience and preferred fluency with a spoken/written language. By electing to conduct the narrative interview in signed language the issue of power relations between researcher and participants was given attention. Participants experienced a sense of power derived through using a language in which they had achieved mastery and control.

The number of persons selected to participate in the research was not a contestable issue to me, since it was not intended for the findings to be generalized and research using narrative methods are not aimed at achieving objective truths. Rather than being guided by traditional positivist assumptions of knowledge and scientific inquiry, the rationale for my decision to select five participants was rooted in hermeneutic explanations and understandings and in the post-structural theorizing of achieving single, measurable truths (Denzin, 1997). As noted in reviewing the literature on identity constructions, multiple truths exist and such truths are situated and culturally contextualized. Such multiplicities can be achieved and discovered even with one participant.

Collectively the participants offered numerous biographical variations that intersected with structural variations in their respective families, schools and communities. All of these would contribute to a multitude of layered meanings in the construction of their identities. Biographical variations of the participants included age, gender, ethnicity, level of hearing loss and origin of deafness, marital status, area of residence, classification of school, additional qualifications, family constitution and school dynamics. All participants were raised in hearing families and acquired SASL during their schooling while living in residential establishments.
As indicated, I also prescribed that it was necessary for participants to be able to read and write English. The reason for this was that I intended for participants to read and verify the accuracy of the transcripts. The video-recordings of the narrative interviews would be transcribed from SASL into English by me. Thereafter I would revert to the participants so that each could verify that the content in the transcript was precisely the story that the participant intended to narrate in SASL. In this way I would have ensured that participants were comfortable with this aspect of the research owing to their direct participation in the member-check process of the written transcripts. Through integrating the member-check process into the research design, it was hoped that any misinterpretation of the narrative on the part of the researcher would be circumvented.

The participants, at the time of the interview were in employment as Post Level One teachers at schools for Deaf learners in KwaZulu-Natal. Schools for the Deaf are administered by the KZN Department of Education as ordinary public schools catering to the needs of Deaf learners. Although two of the participants served initially as Governing Body paid educators, they were later appointed by the State in the same schools. At the time of writing up the dissertation, in 2010, they had been in practice for ten years. And finally, since this project required that participants contribute profoundly and comprehensively their experiences of living with deafness, it was important that I recruited participants who were willing to participate in this kind of dialoguing and share empathically my interest in the investigation. The purposive selection of participants was contemplated against the backdrop of the research initiative, its design and critical questions. Following this the actual contacting and contracting of participants was both simple and uncomplicated. Participants were informed by cellular phone short message text, that each should expect a fax at their respective schools inviting their participation in the research project, aimed at exploring their lives as Deaf persons and as Deaf teachers.

5.5.2 Setting the stage

The first meeting was arranged for a Saturday morning at the school where I work as Deputy Principal. Noting that some participants, who reside in staff accommodation at their schools, would need to travel by public transport for almost 4 hours, I offered for them to arrive the evening before the meeting where accommodation and meals were arranged at my school’s
residence. Participants were compensated for return travel and other costs incurred during the weekend. I was able to secure a liaison person in each of their schools to facilitate communication with the participants. The participants promptly indicated, through the respective contact persons, their willingness to attend the preliminary meeting.

The participants were familiar with me through my involvement in their teacher training programme at Springfield College of Education. Concerns regarding this familiarity have been addressed in Chapter one in the content of my ‘extreme insider positionality’. Thus rapport between myself and the participants was well established. The purpose of the initial meeting was to detail the objectives of the research and the nature and extent of involvement of participants. I elaborated that I would draw on their histories and life experiences to gain insight into their lives as Deaf persons and as Deaf teachers. Having established the project focus, my intention was to secure the teachers’ consent for participation.

My personal values and ethics in maintaining confidentiality of participants and anonymity with regard to their schools were discussed at length together with details of how data would be protected and presented in the final text. Participants were assured that they could be spontaneous and uninhibited in relating experiences and incidents that impacted their lives as teachers, even if this involved learners, colleagues or parents, and that any identification with their respective schools would be camouflaged. They were assured that the video recordings were for my personal use only and that this would be stored in a coded safe as this was an ethical requirement. I explained that from the visual recording of the interviews there would be a verbatim transcript and a narrative of their life stories would emanate from the transcript. The narrative would be my re-telling of the stories that were first told by them. It was intriguing that participants were concerned that possibilities for their potential promotions or any form of upward mobility would be jeopardised if their tellings were disclosed and considered to be libellous. There were also apprehensions related to the likelihood of victimization by their school management members if their utterances were provocative or defamatory.

It was necessary to advise that such an undertaking could be time-consuming and personally exhausting. In addition other logistical concerns were outlined, including the research design, the
video-taping procedure, the trans-coding into English script, the number of sessions, duration of each session, types of questions to be asked, interview venues, and travel and accommodation arrangements and costs. As I sketched the roles and responsibilities of both participants and researcher, I was enthused by their increasing keenness and eagerness to be a part of the collaborative research effort.

Amongst the issues that were raised was the participants’ preference to narrate their stories in SASL. Their aversion and unwillingness to have to respond to questions in writing was clearly evident. I gathered that this was because any written form constituted expression in their second language at which they felt somewhat incompetent. They were also relieved that their stories would be signed directly to me and not through an interpreter. Once mutual dialoguing in SASL was guaranteed, commitment to participation was given (Appendix 3). As researcher I understood at this stage that I had ensured the voluntary participation of participants and was certain that they had the information necessary to give informed consent. The need to maintain my professional reputation and personal integrity in the Deaf community was a priority. Therefore it was important that I did not bring pressure to bear on the potential participants and coerce their involvement and contribution in the project.

Consent forms were dispatched by post to the principals of their respective schools. In addition to informing principals about the nature of the research, they were also assured that the participants would be not identifiable, that the anonymity of the school would be prioritized and that any form of disrepute to the school, staff and learners would be averted. In addition, the participant could withdraw from the research process at any stage without prejudice. Participation would not jeopardize the position of the teacher or his/her relationship with colleagues at School. And finally all information gathered during the interviews would be treated with strict confidentiality and used for the intended purpose.

Permission to conduct research involving the Deaf educators practicing in schools administered by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education was sought. Here again the purpose of the research and details of methodology were indicated in detail. Importantly the Department was notified of the Schools that were to participate and anonymity and confidentiality was assured.
There was a commitment that the research process would not impinge on instruction time and that no costs would accrue to the participants, the respective schools or to the Education Department. As a courtesy, the Deaf Association of South Africa (DEAFSA), the ostensible gatekeepers of Deaf persons and their interests, was informed about the research.

5.5.3 The performance: the co-constructed research interview

Prior to the first signed interview, participants completed a written questionnaire (Appendix 4) requiring biographical details, causal factors relating to deafness, status of hearing loss, family composition, school demographics and dynamics, professional responsibilities and extent of professional support received from hearing colleagues and officials from the KZN Department of Education. The questionnaire requested brief responses as I was aware of participants’ disinclination to engage in expressive writing. The required responses were single words, short phrases and brief descriptions, intended to present the researcher with an overall pen-sketch of the participants prior to the narrative ‘telling’. For the researcher, the exercise provided valuable contextual data pertaining to onset of deafness and implications for how participant would have responded to deafness, their family circumstances and the potential role of the family in the construction of their identities as d/Deaf persons and their particular schooling contexts and how they are positioned within the broader school environment.

The duration of each interview stage was approximately 2, 5 hours, with each being conducted on separate days. The venue for each interview session differed and was guided by safety, convenience, cost and travelling time in deference to participants. My concerns as researcher were availability of electricity for the video-recording and for the safety of my equipment. I undertook to guarantee that the venues were clean, comfortable and well ventilated. I also needed to ensure that the interview rooms were bright and adequately sized for effective use of the video-recording paraphernalia.

The three part narrative interview (Appendix 5) was respectively scheduled as:

INTERVIEW 1: Childhood and Schooling
Neuman (2006) argues that semi-structured interviews may not necessarily produce relevant narrative data, since the schedule could have a potentially determining and pre-emptive effect on what participants say and that stories may deviate from the intended research purpose. In the approach suggested by Neuman (2006) which combats this effect, researchers may use a ‘life story grid’ where the life may comprise different stages or portions in the person’s life. These may include, for example, childhood, secondary school, college years, and family life, each reflecting a different age range. Rather than concentrating upon a snapshot of an individual’s present situation, this approach emphasizes the placement of the individual within a network of social connections, historical events and life experiences (Miller and Brewer, 2003).

The method is elaborated by McAdams (1993) who describes a context in which participants are prompted to think about their lives as ‘chapters in a book’ with each chapter having a title or framework. Participants are then asked to identify and relate stories about critical incidents in their lives; high, low and turning point events; earliest and significant memories in childhood, schooling, college and perhaps teaching year; persons who have inspired their actions and impacted their lives; conflicts and controversies encountered; and personal ideologies, followed by the ‘future script’, eliciting plans for the years ahead focusing on the career context. This was the guideline that informed my interview questions. Finally in McAdams’ (1993) approach, participants are asked to consider an overall life theme that defines their lives, that informs the discourses that they embrace and that guides their embedded subjectivities.

In the narrative interview, researchers ask open-ended questions to capture how the person understands his or her own past. Neuman’s (2006) view is that precision, accuracy and objective truths are less critical than the story itself. Researchers must recognize that a person may reconstruct or add present interpretations to the past. In other words the person may re-write or re-tell his own story. Of importance to narrative researchers concerned with identity, are the stories people tell about their lives and how they understand their worlds. In the storying process the participants are creating narratives and also constructing their identities (Arvay, 1999).
Subsequently there is intervention and participation from the researcher and selves and identities are co-constructed. It was important to me that the participant conceptualized this undertaking of identity exploration as the researcher’s biographical re-construction of the participant’s narrative. Benwell and Stokoe (2006) describe this as the ‘active interview’ which accentuates the role of the interviewer in the co-construction of narrative accounts. This is opposed to the ‘passive interview’ characteristic of the Biographic Narrative Interview Method, emphasizing the passive role of the interviewer, aimed at producing a story that is unhindered by the conventions of social interaction.

Before each interview, participants were briefed on the issues or specific events, according to each interview schedule, that they would need to respond to. They were advised to relate their narratives in as much detail as possible to achieve depth: “What happened, where it happened, who was involved, how did you respond, your thoughts and feelings about the event or issue ….. More importantly, I would like to know how this event/issue impacted on the story of your life, your experiences as a Deaf person and as a Deaf teacher”. Participants were afforded latitude with regard to length of responses and there were no prescriptions as to how narratives should be composed. Writing material was availed should they have felt the need to pen certain points to aid recall and support their narrative telling. At each session participants were reminded of the research focus.

The narrative exchange was conducted in SASL, the preferred mode of communication of the participants. Interviews were video-recorded to facilitate unhindered dialogue and to capture facial expressions, body language and manual and non-manual textures of the signed context, as all of these features add meaning to the core text (Ladd, 2003). Developing the life stories of individuals through narratives is challenging as a narrative is a momentary glimpse of a real lived experience. The challenge is exacerbated for those who have little or no verbal language and are compelled to communicate through signed utterances and facial expressions. Ideally lives should be captured as they are lived, allowing visual images to speak the stories. For participants with communication barriers Jones (2007) ideally recommends extensive video clips of individual interactions within the family context, school environment and other structures within which the individual participates. These could be combined to create a ‘cinematic’ view
of participants’ lives, allowing the viewer to be able to interpret the scenes based on his/her own experiences.

My position as researcher with fluent SASL skills was certainly beneficial to the exploration. In contrast, a researcher who is unable to use SASL would need to engage the skills of a sign language interpreter. In the presence of a sign language interpreter, content-rich data is captured first by the interpreter in sign language after which it is re-told through the spoken medium, to the researcher. Such content rich data is known to be diluted and compromised in the process of being re-cast from the interpreter to the researcher. In the same way, issues being addressed to the participants by the researcher are also re-told and ‘negotiated’ in a sense by the interpreter. Secondly the role of the researcher is conceded through having only indirect access to participants in the narrative endeavour.

The whole process becomes mediated by and dependent on the sign language interpreter. Although the presence of the interpreter is a mere technical resource, the position of the interpreter becomes yet another co-constructor in the identity construction process. The researcher is shifted from being a designated significant player in the process, to an inconsequential and relegated other, while the sign language interpreter assumes priority in the research process. To the Deaf participants, the only significant player in dialogue is the person who has the skill and capacity to communicate with them in their native language. From my experience of working with Deaf persons for 28 years, those who are unable to sign become irrelevant others.

5.5.4 Recasting the data from sign to script: A collaborative effort

Conventional research practice using audio-recorded narrative interviews involves re-presenting spoken dialogue into written text, which becomes the main source for the analytic process. In my research, the visually rich sign language data had to be trans-coded from a manual mode to written text. Generally the transcription process is addressed in the research methodology description as being an elementary, technical and arbitrary process that is secondary to the broader context of the research design. My concern with the process of re-scripting data, whether
it is auditory or visual, into written text is that the data is undergoing an altering process as we meddle with and disrupt the spontaneity of the original, seminal narrative script.

Arvay (2002) is disparaging of the view of researchers that transcription is simplistic and uncomplicated, since transcription itself is an interpretive enterprise which occurs even before the researcher begins to dissect the data. Arvay adds that the act of reproducing speech is an impossible task. My concerns and anxieties were extrapolated to the onerous task of trans-coding a signed system of language into written text, where I pre-empted that even greater losses would be incurred in the abridged script. I now outline the technological intricacies and complexities that my SASL data was subjected to in the transcription procedures and my personal involvement in the process.

Upon completion of the recording of the first three-stage narrative interview I decided to commence the transcription process. My intention was that if there were any shortcomings in the interview process with the first participant, then this could be addressed and amended in the subsequent interviews. The first step was to download the data from the video-camera to a folder in my computer, identified by the participant’s name. The three interviews were stored in three separate word documents within the folder and labelled according to the interview sequence schedule. In the interests of safe-keeping and storage a DVD comprising each interview was cut, so for each participant there were three DVD’s, each comprising approximately 2,5 to 3 hours of recorded interviewing.

First, I watched the 3 complete interviews to acquaint myself with the overall context. Next began the process of converting the visual data to written text. The recordings played on the computer and I watched for 30 seconds, paused the recording and wrote precisely what was signed. And finally I watched the recording again to document important non-manual aspects of the narrator’s response that would enhance interpretation of the printed text, such as, changes in emotions, facial expressions, delay or spontaneity in responding, tone and other subtleties. The hand written script was then transferred to computer using visual markers such as bold font to denote emphasis and uppercase letters to indicate finger-spelt words and words that needed to be expressed in printed form. All the non-manual features were bracketed in the typed text.
Although the process was extremely time-consuming and indeed arduous, I benefited tremendously as repeated viewing of the recordings lead to familiarity with the data. Each 10 minutes of recording took approximately 40 minutes to transcribe, inclusive of both the manual and non-manual features, amounting to approximately 8 hours for each 2 hour interview. In composite I invested almost 30 hours for each participant, including the time spent on typing of the script. A computer software engineer then introduced me to a technique that saved me about 10 hours on each participant, for the next 4 participants. I was able to split the screen on the monitor so that half the screen played the video recording, while the other half was a word document allowing me to type directly onto the screen while watching the recording. During this process I transcribed what was signed and simultaneously included details of the non-manual codes. In this way, I obviated the second viewing and the typing was done during the original transcribing process.

Several additional hours were spent writing the summative story from the conversational script. This was presented in biographical form with me, the researcher, writing as the third person. The biography was composed as the life story of the participant as told in each phase of the three-part narrative which included the participant’s childhood, schooling, college and adult years as a teacher. The story captured how the participant experienced and progressively responded to deafness during these diverse phases. In addition the experience of various social structures, such as family, school and community, were explored. The multitude of discourses on power, oppression, defiance and others, with which the participant interfaces, were signified. The participant’s experience of being a teacher is illustrated in detail accompanied by its own peculiar structures, discourses and interactions. At this stage I did not question the relevance or appropriateness of data. I presumed that every ‘utterance’ was worthy and held meaning for the teller and that if it was devoid of meaning it would not have been recalled in articulation. The biography was composed as a story without a conclusion; a continuous performance, generating a series of unanswered questions and complex thoughts.

The final stage was the two-part member check process of the transcribed interview. I was determined that the participants should read the transcripts to confirm that what I had written was
what they actually intended to disclose, even if this was not necessarily the truth. There were intimate details of their respective schools and family dynamics which I thought they may want sanitized. To corroborate the transcript, I arranged for us to watch the DVD of the interviews together. Participants were quietly accepting of sensitive data about their families and their schools, and upon reflection agreed that it should remain in the transcripts since these were truths that impacted respectively on their lives as Deaf persons and as Deaf professionals. Minor amendments to the transcripts pertaining to translation and interpretation were implemented at the behest of participants. The mutual viewing exercise provided the opportunity to clarify the English context of certain signs that were unclear.

The second part of the member check process was for participants to read and affirm the narrative stories compiled from the conversational transcript. In summary therefore, and in keeping with Arvay’s (2002) collaborative narrative method, I had secured the collaboration of participants in the two-stage member check of their respective conversational transcripts and the subsequent narrative stories. By this stage the first reading which was for content, was completed. The transcript was then consolidated with participants, specifically with respect to clarification of meanings of certain English words and phrases, sequencing of issues, ordering of events and integration of the same incident that repeated across interviews. Amendments suggested by participants after the member check process were implemented and the story was given temporal character, such as the year in which specific events occurred and the corresponding age of participants.

The strength of collaborative narrative research for me was in the shared voices of the participant and the researcher across the research endeavour. Jones (2007) hypothesizes that perhaps the lack of development of more useful research methodologies for engaging minority or marginalized groups may actually be advancing a hegemonic researcher agenda. If we cannot hear the voices of those who have been marginalized, then we are not compelled to give consideration to what they say. By not addressing this issue, researchers contribute to gagging their voices and systematically eliminating their inclusion from discursive processes. Jones recommends that to achieve an understanding of oppressive practices in society, it is necessary to devise adaptive forms of narrative research methodologies to better access the stories of
marginalized individuals, facilitating their participation in on-going dialogue and providing new dimensions and varied access to their voices. These methodologies would need to capitalize on their strengths while by-passing potential barriers in communication.

Owing to the collaborative nature of the method, there were five meetings conducted with each participant: the initial joint meeting that ‘set the stage’, three co-constructed research interviews, and the fifth meeting was a conversational collaboration to authenticate the trans-coding from the signed interview to the written transcript. The involvement of participants in stages subsequent to the data collecting interview is in keeping with post-structuralist processes. Post-structural understanding calls for attention to discourses through which subjectivities are constituted, and to the tensions and instabilities in personal subjectivity. Davies (1993) alerts the researcher to the notion that subjective discourses and practices provide the human subject with contradictory meanings inscribed in their conscious and subconscious minds. Since subjectivities are continuously developing and under construction, this framework encourages the more fluid process of meaning-making and does not attempt to stabilize these subjectivities.

Collaboration was integral to the process that involved trans-coding the signed interview into the written English conversational transcript, followed by the researcher’s representation of the biographical narrative. Harding (1991) calls for researchers to allow for contradictions and controversies, accept resistances from its players, recognize the multiplicity of positioning based on contextual interactions and create opportunities for intersecting voices in the process. From here onwards in the research I elected to establish autonomy as researcher and monopolize subsequent proceedings. The story would now become the researcher's story comprising the researcher's interpretation, understanding and meaning of the participants’ lives. My intention was to intervene to disrupt the story package, to deconstruct neat interpretations, subvert meanings specified by participants and keep systems of meaning continuously active in negotiation.

5.5.5 Giving life to theory: Data analysis and interpretation

At the stage of analyzing and interpreting data, I elected to detach from any further collaboration with participants and that the partnership between researcher and participants would be dissolved.
during this time. The meanings ascribed to the final story would not be a shared enterprise between myself and the participants: this meant that I would work independently and that autonomy in the analysis and interpretation stage would now rest with the researcher. Collaboration in interpretation and analysis would inevitably lead to contestation of how the researcher would represent truth and ‘voice’, which at this stage in the research needed to be fore-grounded. The other issue that I would need to confront if there was collaboration would be that of concurrence, that is, whether participants agreed or disagreed with the meanings that I ascribed to the construction of their identities as D/deaf persons and as D/deaf teachers.

During the analysis I worked continuously in transit between the two texts, that is, the recording of the live interview and the typed narrative story. Although the process was complex, time-consuming and laborious, the act of moving between the re-coded transcript and the performed text during analysis and interpretation stages contributed to assuaging issues of inaccuracy that may have presented during the trans-coding. In addition issues of research accommodation were addressed to enhance accessibility and respond to the needs of diverse participants, in the quest for effective and appropriate methodologies. The choice to work between two texts is of significant consequence for researchers in a cross-language and cross-cultural investigation as this is certain to impact outcomes.

Qualitative analysis like its counterpart quantitative analysis also depends on the identification of key variables or issues in the phenomenon being investigated. The difference however is that in quantitative analysis the variables are identified at the conceptual level of the investigation and manipulated as measurable constructs (Miller, 2005). Fundamental to the analysis of the narrative is the organization of the data into common themes or categories. It is often more difficult to interpret narrative data since it lacks the built-in structure of numerical data. Initially, the narrative data appeared as a collection of random but somewhat connected statements, thoughts and ideas with the pervasive potential to subsume and overwhelm the researcher. To overcome this, the researcher needs to be promptly reminded of the research purpose and critical questions which serve to direct the focus and inform the data organization.

The two critical questions that would inform this research are:
• How do participants construct their identities as D/deaf persons?
• How do participants negotiate their identities as D/deaf teachers?

Using a post-structural lens, these critical questions will be explored within the framework of the literature that has been reviewed on identity construction and more specifically the identity construction of D/deaf people and teachers. Issues pertaining to the broad framework of identity construction, such as power, agency and subjectivity will be investigated within the context of D/deaf people and their cultural and/or medical orientation to deafness. I will argue also that the teacher identities of the participants have been constructed in and through the narrated performance.

I decided that I would read and organize the data for each question separately so as to focus on questions individually. Secondly I would group the comments by themes or categories so as focus on one issue at a time. To accomplish the research objectives I would first need to understand and interpret each individual account and then compare across these accounts to identify themes common to all respondents’ accounts.

This model of data analysis, referred to as ‘within-case’ and ‘across-case’ approaches, is suggested by Ayres, Kavanaugh and Knafl (2003). Typically, qualitative researchers collect multiple accounts of human experience and construct the narrative data. In addition to the general context of the phenomenon under investigation which is common to all participants’ accounts, each individual account of experience occurs in a context of its own. The qualitative researcher will interpret the narrative data that reflects each individual’s experience and will examine further if this applies across all of the accounts in the data set.

In the course of their analyses, researchers must distinguish between information relevant to all participants and those aspects of the experience that are exclusive to particular informants. Such distinctions are necessary because those aspects of an experience that are unique to one individual may be critical to understanding that particular person’s story but may have limited usefulness outside that individual’s experience. Insights from one account sensitise the investigator to similar information as it occurs in other accounts. As an idea repeats in multiple contexts it is instantiated as a theme. Themes that emerge overtly both in individual accounts and
across the sample, are most likely to apply beyond the sample. Ayres (2000) refers to this potential for wider application as *generalizability*.

Tesch (1990, p.115) interestingly describes the mechanics of interpretive analysis as “de-contextualization and re-contextualization” (p. 115). Data are de-contextualized when they are separated into units of meaning through sorting because they are separated from the individual cases in which they originated. Data are re-contextualized as they are reintegrated into themes that combine units of like meaning taken from the accounts of multiple respondents. The re-contextualized data create a reduced data set drawn from across all cases which the researcher uses to explore theoretical relationships among clusters of meaning. In this model of qualitative data analysis, the origin of each unit of meaning is less important than its membership in a group of like units. Inevitably, some of the original context in which each unit of meaning occurred is stripped away as the data are reduced. Such context stripping is consistent with the goal of comparisons across cases.

The use of sorting and the identification of themes are essential to qualitative research, according to Coffey & Atkinson (1996) but they are not an end in themselves. Sorting is effective for capturing commonalities across cases but less so for capturing individual uniqueness within cases. The writers recommend interpretive techniques designed for use within individual accounts that provide a wealth of contextual richness and are often used to explore the nature of stories, their components and the ways in which stories might be interpreted but on the other hand less effective for making generalizations. Neither across-case nor within-case approaches alone enable the researcher to interpret an experience both through its parts and as a whole, such that readers can recognize individual experience in a generalizable way.

As indicated my analytic project commenced with composing a narrative story after reviewing interview transcripts, which was the final stage during which the participant was involved. Henceforth I immersed myself in the narrative story which now converted to my researcher-composed data. Using the interpretive understanding approach suggested by Coffey & Atkinson (1996) for within-case analysis, it was my intention to acquire a sense of how the respondents were experiencing deafness and re-arranging this experience to conduct their lives as teachers.
To identify coherent categories I scrutinized each story through repeated re-reading for life-impacting statements and latent emphases that articulated the meanings that they attached to their deafness and to their lives as teachers.

I searched for repetitions of words and sentences, evasion of issues, contradictions in beliefs and values, and how these were contextualized within the story. My aim was to capture individual aspects of the ‘deaf experience’ and for each case I accumulated a collection of relevant statements. From the way in which they signified their experiences there emerged a broad singular descriptive category through which my participants subsequently came to be identified. At the conclusion of each within-case analysis I broadly defined the five participants as ‘Popularity Power’, ‘Lone Crusader’, ‘Trespasser in Transit’, ‘Dare to be Different’ and ‘True Transformer’. These were the descriptive definitions by which I came to make sense of their experiences and understand their lives. To me these were the fundamental descriptions or categories that substantiated their identities.

Although repetitions, evasions and contradictions can present within the boundaries of an individual account, it cannot be assumed that such information in one story would appear in the same way, or would appear at all, in other stories. I then proceeded to compare the significant statements and issues from each individual account with that of other accounts, paying attention particularly to the commonalities pervading across the narratives. The purpose of this across-case analytic strategy was to compare the experience of all participants and identify categories of significant statements that were common among them which would be presented as themes. Through the themes participants would be brought together through intersecting meanings.

Rather than using a deductive framework decided beforehand with preconceived themes, I elected to operationalize the analysis using an inductive approach. In this approach I would need to be open to themes emanating from scrutiny of the data. Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003) refer to these as “emergent categories”, where the themes are identified directly when working with the data. The categorization process also referred to as coding or indexing the data, was informed by the guidelines given by the same scholars. To illuminate meaning in the narrative I assigned abbreviated codes to the themes or patterns that were identified. These helped to sort and
reorganize the data into coherent categories. Relevant statements were then grouped according to the identified themes and further sets of sub-themes were developed as they applied across the five cases.

The overarching themes formed the essential structure which was the fundamental framework of how the participants conceptualized their deafness and performed their lives as teachers in the context of their deafness. This rigorous process of reinterpretation enabled me to track thematic variation found across cases without causing estrangement to individual context essential to narrative inquiry. The research findings were established through the strategy of re-reading within individual cases and broadened through the application of comparisons across cases, from which broad themes emerged. However my intention was not to generalize the findings across the Deaf community and beyond. Rather I wanted to understand how this particular group of Deaf persons understands their deafness and performs their teaching given their peculiar understanding of deafness.

Ayres, Kavanaugh and Knafl (2003) caution that every story is uniquely personal and therefore there is little in narrative theory to justify across-case analyses. On the contrary the assumption that each story is a unique and personal interpretation of events implies that even individuals in externally similar circumstances are likely to interpret those circumstances differently. Individuals take the same experiences and translate them into different stories in which the same events can have different meanings. Therefore the narrative researcher must understand and interpret these stories as self-contained wholes.

5.6 Data Production: A Reflexive Account

Although, conventionally it is acceptable for social science researchers to use transcribed audio-taped narratives for analysis, Lapadat (2000) has highlighted the complexities and textual implications of transcribing spoken language that has been audio-taped into printed English. Although this in itself becomes an interpreted text, the underlying context is that the written text is the altered form of the same language and the risk of loss of data is highly probable. Denzin & Lincoln (2004) refute the assumption that social science researchers can directly capture lived experience. The authors argue that any form of re-presentation of the first hand text will cause
gaps and this in unavoidable. There is an inevitable space between the reality of the actual lived experience and even the first telling of that experience as Riessman (1993) also claims that even narratives are mere representations of the real experience as told by individuals.

In narrative investigations, researchers do not have direct access to the phenomenon that they are investigating. Access to phenomena is negotiated and co-constructed by the researcher, with the narrator. If this is the case with spoken, written or audible languages then the reformatting of the signed experience has far greater embedded complexities. The actual event is the lived experience of the Deaf person. This is followed by the signed version as ‘told’ by the Deaf person to the researcher. The point at which the signed format is recast as written text by the researcher becomes the re-telling or the third version, invariably accompanied by its own brand of peculiarities.

Through my interfacing and interaction with Deaf learners from as young as pre-school to secondary school and with Deaf adults, and through skilling myself in and being exposed during this time to two sign language systems, that is, American Sign Language (ASL) and SASL, I have learnt that there are fine and intricate nuances to sign language that are not evident in written script. In any system of signed language, there are variations that pertain to the size and boldness of signs, the speed and force with which hand movements are executed, the precise location of the hands in front of the body, and the shape and particular style of the signs – all of which constitute the grammar of sign language. Any attempt to decode this into written language would be a biased practice. My anxieties and apprehensions about the translation were related to accuracy and truthfulness of representation in the written script transcoded from its original signed format, since every variation and its intersections, no matter how minor, becomes momentous in interpretation.

Of the many tensions that I experienced during this research, one that certainly needed to be fore-grounded was the issue of trans-coding a signed language to written language, since I was researching across languages - SASL and English, and working across cultures - hearing culture and the Deaf culture. My anxieties devolved upon the extent to which accuracy and truthfulness could be achieved in an undertaking of this dimension, and the extent to which such an
undertaking could potentially compromise the original data. After videotaping the narrative lives of the participants during the research interviews, I began the task of trans-coding from the signed interview to printed English. My own position heightened the complexity of transcription. Although I may belong to the Deaf community through association, SASL is not my first language because I am culturally hearing. Culturally specific signed expressions may not be easily recognizable and there was the risk that I would misconstrue or subvert the value of such nuances in signed form. One possible way to have overcome this would have been to acquire the services of a D/deaf person who is proficient in sign language to engage in the whole process. This however would have been an arduous and time-consuming task for anyone to undertake and would also have delayed the process for me. Perhaps this is would be a consideration for future researchers in the field.

Kegl (2003) confirms that a signed language is a visual that is performed in the space in front of the body, and that signed languages have no printed form. Like other indigenous sign languages, SASL is its own language with its own phonology, syntax, and grammar, different from English (Aarons & Akach, 2002). The emotions and nuances of meanings and movement inherent in signed communication are bound to be disrupted when reformatting a language in visual form into an audible or written language. However at the risk of transgressing true meaning, the accomplishment of the goal of analysis took precedence, and SASL was converted into English. Unlike signed languages, English is a language that can be represented in both speech and written format.

Storytelling is extended to its limits both by the use of a particular story beyond the context of the real experience and by the use of a personal story that becomes the shared experience of the narrator and the researcher. This leads Shuman (2006) to raise the issue of entitlement; in other words, who has the right to tell the story? In addition she asks whether this representation is a sufficient, adequate, accurate, or appropriate rendering of the lived experience. Ethical questions of ownership of the narrative start to intersect with the way in which the experience is represented. The more a story represents a shared, or even a purely human experience, the greater the hazards in asserting or challenging its legitimacy. Thus, the concern of my research is not with who Deaf teachers really are but with how they come to know themselves and come to
be known through the stories they tell and the choices they make in what to tell and what not to tell. Identities and realities are not presumed to be located within the Deaf individuals, but rather within the narratives, the culture, the relationships and the subjectivities which contextualize and position them within discourses.

What raises the stakes is the claim that the truth that the story represents is not only factual, representing events that actually happened, but also true in the sense of conveying the real understanding of human experience. Shuman (2006) refers to the complex process in which the personal story acquires that larger meaning as ‘trans-valuing’ the personal to the more-than-personal. The narrative converts the personal experience into a shared experience and this transcends known boundaries and converts to a universal experience. ‘Trans-valuation’ works through a process of reframing, in which the personal story assumes the new status, new proportions and new value of the communal or the universal story.

If such is the predicament in re-texting within the same language, one can only imagine that the dilemma is intensified when undertaking cross-cultural re-texting. In her research on the narrative identities of three Deaf women, Hole (2004) also had to deliberate over issues of representation. Issues of representation emerged at every step in the process – interviewing, transcription, analysis of data and finally also in interpretation. She is succinct in her metaphor of a silhouette:

“Similar to a silhouette, the texts in front of me were a manifestation, a reproduction of the visual and visceral experience, but it appeared featureless and lacked the important nuances of the performed texts” (Hole, 2007, p. 703).

I was now confronted with the task of attempting to minimize the dilemma in representation that arose from working across languages and cultures. The collaborative narrative method (Arvay, 2003) that I engaged with in the research offered certain resolves towards the concerns with representation. The method encourages researchers to collaborate with participants at least to the point of agreement with the narrative stories. Since my positioning represented that of cultural outsider within Deaf territory, I felt appeased by my collaborative efforts with participants.
Collaboration presented the opportunity to interface directly with each participant to review the transcript and obtain comments and feedback on my version of the signed context. Confirmation of this was achieved through allowing participants to watch the recorded interviews. Collaboration in the member-check process brought to the project a sense of transparency and inclusion of participants. Hole (2004) supports collaborative member-checking as this addresses issues of confidentiality and ethical considerations pertaining to consent - specifically, participants’ consent regarding data to be included and/or excluded in the presentation of their narratives and the final stories. However, my own experiences as a researcher were different.

During the member-check process which I was engaging in through collaboration with participants I thought that there was integrity in my scholarship by availing the transcripts to each of the participants so they, in turn, could provide feedback in the form of affirmation of the signed interviews. However, instead of being an exercise in emancipation for the participants, it was ironic that the member-check practice which is a highly accepted protocol in research actually served to contribute to their sense of dejection and despondency as they were reminded of negative events in their schooling, family and teaching experiences. In retrospect I acknowledge that as a researcher I did not adequately prepare participants for this experience, beforehand. I ought to have anticipated that reading their personal narratives could be emotionally disrupting and could cause them to feel a sense of agitation at what they were subjected to. To support participants through this destabilization we talked at length and intensively, during the collaborative process, about the various negative incidents in their lives and their emotional responses. Towards the end of the collaborative process, I was aware that participants had achieved a comfortable level of acceptance as there was some degree of catharsis achieved through the mutual engagement. In addition I suggested further support if this was required and offered to refer the affected participants for professional therapeutic intervention. This offer to date has not been taken up.

To me there will always be the dilemma of whether the Deaf teachers agreed for their narratives to be exposed in print because they were impudent, courageous, daring and determined to tell the world about their lives or whether they wanted to withdraw their narratives at that stage but elected not to do so in trepidation that this would offend me and disrupt my research. Did they continue with the process out of obligation to me and my efforts in setting up their lives as
professionals? Nevertheless I took advantage of opportunities for collaboration up to this point as this helped somewhat to reduce some of my concerns about the extent to which accuracy could be achieved in translating signed language into written language.

Progressing from the original signed interview to the written transcript, the third stage in the metamorphic process was the narrative story. Although the narrative story, told by myself in third person, undoubtedly compromised the immediacy of the story, I tried to maintain the story-telling momentum, which gave direction to what was reported, and still left sufficient room for inclusion of quotations in the first person, that is from the participants themselves, so that the original ‘voices’ may still be heard. The reporting style was determined by decisions on the purpose that the story was intended to fulfil, the personal style of the writer, pre-empting the interests and desires of the audience, and the fluency with which the audience can extract relevant information. Since the main interest of the audience would be both the story and the analytic insights from the narrative, I opted for an informal but structured account. The story, presented as a biography, is chronologically portrayed and inclusive of significant incidents, events, people and places in the life story of the Deaf participant. The pervasive theme in the story is how the Deaf person experiences and interprets deafness and how he/she makes this interpretation relevant in real life. The relevance of the underlying theme is significant since it is this theme that responds to the critical questions that underpin and inform the investigation.

**5.7 Integrity and Trustworthiness in Narrative Design**

Issues of reliability and validity, standard features in quantitative research design and rooted in the positivist perspective, are now being reconsidered as essential in qualitative research and being redefined for use in naturalistic paradigms. In this way the need for some kind of qualifying check or measure for the work of qualitative researchers is established (Davies and Dodd, 2002). While credibility in quantitative research depends on instrument construction and the consistent yield of numerical data in qualitative research the researcher is ‘the instrument’ (Patton, 2002). In other words the credibility of qualitative research depends on the ability, effectiveness and endeavour of the researcher. My own preference on this issue is aligned to that of Golafshani (2003) who suggests that although reliability and validity are treated separately in
quantitative studies, these terms are not separated in qualitative research and are instead encompassed by terminology such as credibility, rigor and trustworthiness. The idea of discovering truth through measures of reliability and validity is replaced by the idea of trustworthiness (Davies and Dodd, 2002) which establishes integrity in the findings.

Trustworthiness in qualitative approaches might be established through the honesty of the participants, the depth, richness and scope of the data acquired, and the ability of the researcher to be objective. This is the view of Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001) who add that it may be prudent for the researcher to waive the idea of a positivist approach to validity. Data or verifiable methods are considered less important than the meanings that participants give to the data and the inferences drawn from the data. The terms ‘understanding’ and ‘interpretation’ on the part of the researcher are more appropriate in qualitative research than validity of the data, since the researchers themselves are very much a part of the world that is being researched.

As indicated, the concept of validity is described by a wide range of terms in qualitative studies. However its meaning is best understood when captured in accordance with post-structuralist conceptualizations, that is, that validity is not a single, fixed or universal concept, but “rather a contingent construct, inescapably grounded in the processes and intentions of particular research methodologies and projects” (Winter, 2000, p.1). The final story will reflect the richness and complexity which result from acknowledging multiple ways of knowing, and the contingency of human knowing on personal experience and individual conceptions of the world. Winter (2000) confirms that as in other qualitative approaches, the story which emerges offers characteristics which will transcend criteria, for determining the value of data in terms of reliability, validity and generalizability which are typically the criteria associated with the quantitative paradigm.

Healy and Perry (2000) and Golafshani (2003) advocate the use of triangulation for improving the research validity, reliability and evaluation of findings. Triangulation has gained ascendance in naturalistic and qualitative approaches in an attempt to control bias and establish valid propositions. This involves combining methods or using several kinds of methods or data and can include the use of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. In my endeavour to establish trustworthiness in the research I elected to engage the use of certain participatory techniques to triangulate the data methodologically.
Participatory techniques in data collection generally serve a manifold purpose. For my purpose, in addition to triangulation, the techniques enhanced and facilitated the participant involvement. Babbie (2002) recommends this approach to data collection as an essential component of in-depth emancipatory research that enables the production of knowledge in an active partnership with participants who are affected by that knowledge. Secondly the approach was effective in addressing the power imbalances that may have existed between myself and the participants. Boetigger (2004) supports participatory research since it has the potential to disguise the nature of inquiry. The focus is not on participants as objects but rather as collaborative partners in the engagement with the research and involvement with the researcher. The aim of participatory research is to champion the interests of the participants over those of the researcher and this is especially advocated with disempowered and marginalized groups.

One of the participatory techniques that I engaged was the *Time-line*. Time-lines involve the act of creating a chronological string of events over a period of time e.g. decades, months, a week or even just a single day (Boettiger, 2004). The time-line was aimed at collecting and analyzing information on the activities of the Deaf participants so as to facilitate greater understanding and self-reflection. Participants depicted their ten-year teaching career on a time-line by placing significant incidents, experiences, achievements and other life-impacting events on a temporal continuum. This method encouraged participants to recall events and experiences more accurately and chronologically and facilitated elaboration and in-depth discussion of the events.

The other participatory technique that was used was *Ranking*. This exercise involved prioritizing objects or issues according to certain criteria, such as preference, importance or prevalence. The participants ranked the *barriers* and the *opportunities* that they experienced in the context of teaching. Boettiger (2004) explains that the process of the exercise is more important than accuracy. Participants were observed during their engagement with the ranking process and on completion they were probed further for depth and meaning. Both the techniques described here supported my purpose in triangulating data that was obtained during the narrative interviews. The intention was to ensure that the data was consistent using multiple methods, as suggested in post-structuralism that there can be multiple ways of establishing truth. In addition the data
obtained through the participatory approach contextualized the impact of certain events on subsequent proceedings in the life stories of the participants yielding richer and more illuminating data in the dialoguing between myself and the participants.

The view that ‘triangulation’ is contrary to post-structuralist approaches is acknowledged. I have stated in the thesis that my use of multiple methods was initially intended to improve the validity of the findings by directing a range of methods to justify or verify a theme or pattern in the data. However, in the course of the data analysis and interpretation, I found that the different methods served to produce a deeper and more complex view of issues under investigation rather than merely duplicating the findings. Hence I acknowledge that ‘crystallization’ is of greater significance for the study, and that because of the constructed nature of social reality, any use of mixed methods can only ever produce a partial view of the research issue. Richardson (2000) offers this notion of crystallisation to support the idea that data can be considered from many perspectives, but will always be only partial. Crystallisation recognises that any given approach to study the social world as a fact of life has many facets. The crystal "combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multi-dimensionailities, and angles of approach. Crystals grow, change and alter, but are not amorphous" (Richardson, 2000: 934). Crystallisation provides us with a complex, deep, but completely partial understanding of the topic.

I will now turn to the issue of narrative data collection and its relevance to trustworthiness in qualitative social science research. There is no doubt that narratives have been widely celebrated and highly commodified by over-exuberant researchers. This has caused Atkinson and Delamont (2006, p. 166) to caution against unreflective and uncritical use of narratives in which “celebrity is created through the mass distribution of confessions, and through which ordinary people can have their personal problems and experiences transformed into public goods”. Narrative accounts are no more ‘authentic’ than other modes of representation: a narrative of a personal experience is not a clear route to truth, either about reported events, or of the teller’s private experience. One of the key lessons of narrative analysis is that experience is constructed through a narrative and that narratives are drawn from social and cultural circumstances.
It is therefore clear that social scientists need to treat narratives as ‘accounts’ and as ‘performances’. As Atkinson and Coffey (2002) point out, the narrative interview should be examined analytically as a performative act through which identities are enacted, actions are justified and recounted events are retrospectively constructed. Performative acts have been celebrated and advocated as acts of cultural resistance on the part of the marginalized, dispossessed and the muted. The concern of Atkinson and Delamont (2006) is not whether any given testimony is consistent or entirely accurate. An account does not simply represent some antecedent reality; it helps to create that very reality. Such performances do not give privileged access to truth. They urge that social scientists must commit to an analytic stance rather than a celebratory confession and retain a healthy distance from the narrative materials that they collect, analyze and reproduce.

‘How do you know if your informant is telling the truth?’ The response to this addresses the issue of reliability. Atkinson and Coffey (2002) believe that ‘truth’ is not an issue that informs trustworthiness of information. On the contrary, genuineness and verisimilitude should be examined as being critical to narrative accounts and qualitative researchers should treat narratives and any spoken performances with prudence. Equally critical to narrative accounts is the issue of coherence which also informs trustworthiness and legitimacy. This refers to the extent to which the findings come together in such a way as to make sense. Is there an order or an integration of the components in the narrative? In order, to check the verisimilitude and coherence of my findings I undertook member check processes. The narrative story that I wrote was taken back to participants to confirm that it resonated with their real, lived experiences. When consulted, the participants communicated that their respective stories reflected their lived experiences. None of the participants indicated any intention or propensity to want to alter, rephrase or omit any data since the narrative that was composed was a comprehensive, written, reflective account of their truths. Their firm and resolute stance on the script affirmed my belief in the credibility of the script.

In summary, researchers collecting narrative data should do so with discernment and greater analytic rigor. Narratives or spoken performances should be treated as adulterated representations of social realities and should be analyzed as a social phenomenon and not as the vehicle for expression of personal experience. Attributing moral significance to narratives and to narrative analysis is also problematic. While the ‘voices’ of the Deaf participants may be laden
with political rhetoric, authenticity cannot be guaranteed by their social positions. The narrative was the vehicle through which the ‘voices’ of the Deaf participants were privileged. There was access to their thoughts, feelings, experiences and perspectives which may not have been attainable through observational methods.

‘Voice’ gives credence to experiences and feelings that no theorizing can hope to achieve. However Lather (2001) cautions that including the voices of participants can never be totalizing since these voices are filtered through the researcher and data reduction is inevitable. Lather refers to “loss of innocence” in feminist methodology, acknowledging that researchers access a part of people’s lives which is presented as data after which further reduction occurs. Nevertheless voice becomes the basis of our understanding and naturally there is inherent and underlying validity in who is speaking. And finally I propose as researcher that that my distinctive position as an insider in the Deaf community serve as authentication of the data obtained as this afforded access to information and opportunities to observe patterns of behaviour, relationships, experiences and perceptions of the Deaf teachers that would otherwise not have been available to an ‘outsider’.

5.8 Conclusion: The Curtain Call

In conclusion I wish to reiterate my positionality in the context of this research. In Chapter One my connectedness to the research as an ‘extreme insider’, since being involved with the Deaf community for twenty-eight years, has been declared. In a convoluted sense my position is no different to that of an ethnographer. I struggled throughout this research with the issue of my positionality, particularly my allegiances to the philosophy and vision of the Deaf culture. It is inevitable that compromises regarding objectivity may emerge from such intimacy and this would be a noted limitation. There is the possibility that the research process and outcomes could be subjected to inquisition by other readers and researchers, on my inconspicuous or perhaps obvious influence on the narrative causing participants to juggle truthfulness in return for researcher favour, the extent to which I would protect the participants and preserve contentious information that would implicate their respective schools and colleagues, or the relevance of my personal agenda to the research intention and / or outcomes.
Given the duration of my association with the Deaf community, what I have accomplished for them has been significant. Therefore the elevated influence of my personal history cannot be understated. I realize that any such indictments as indicated above can be assuaged by my commitment to descriptive and interpretive sincerity in the analysis phase. It is hoped that this would allow me the latitude and space to balance my involvement with a sense of detachment, my closeness with distance and my familiarity with participants and the process with disinterest (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001). I argue for my presence in the process to be an unequivocal privilege, this being my knowledge of their history, their challenges, and most importantly their culture and language. The Deaf participants were comfortable and spontaneous in the absence of a sign language interpreter since I was able to mediate in SASL. The data was immediate and accurate as opposed to being re-told by a third-person interpreter. Edwards (1999) confirms that ‘insider’ researchers are advantaged by trust and rapport that usually accompanies long-standing relationships.

Furthermore my knowledge of organizational and systemic issues in the professional and social environments of the participants created the condition for low or no risk of posturing and fabrication by participants. On the contrary complexities arising from being immersed in the Deaf community also needed to be considered. These included the potential to overlook data due to assuming that this is generally known and taken for granted, the tendency to want to sanitize data to protect known persons and well established institutions, fear of reprisals when all is disclosed, and importantly restructuring and recasting myself from known person to unknown, impartial researcher. Within the framework of these complexities, the research process progressed.
CHAPTER 6: STORIED LIVES OF DEAF TEACHERS

6.1 Introduction: From Participants to People

This incredible research journey has been a progressively intensifying four part process: commencing with the signed interviews of five participants to their transcribed texts, followed by the storied narratives and finally culminating in my personal, introspective documentary of the narrated lives of five Deaf people. Here I have infused my individual subjectivities and imposed personal experiences and theoretical knowledge on each of the storied narratives reconfiguring and representing the subjects. There is neither a claim to, nor any justification for, validity in the stories of the subjects that have emanated from my personal research journey.

However the meanings may best be understood when captured in accordance with post-structuralist conceptualizations that validity is not a fixed or universal concept but rather a conditional construct that is grounded in the research project and in the project of the researcher (Taylor and Lyttleton, 2006; Leigh, 2009). This final story will reflect the richness and complexity which resulted from recognizing multiple and layered ways of knowing, and the contingency of human knowing on personal inter-facing and individual conceptions of such elusive realities. This is my account of each Deaf person and their peculiar variances, accomplishments and resiliencies. Each narrative has held a Deaf participant in animated captivity while each story that has been told here, I hope, liberates a Deaf person.

This chapter contains five biographical narratives re-told by me and in the narratives I have included direct responses of participants. I have inserted my voice which reflects insights on Deaf culture gained through personal experience, my reading of literature on the construction of identities, and the use of the post-structural theoretical lens. To understand their identities as Deaf teachers, I have located their teacher lives within a whole-life perspective. The view of Goodson & Sikes (2001) is that professional life cannot be detached from personal life and that when professional practice is located within a whole-life perspective, it has the capacity to contextualize and transform our
understanding of the performance. Professional practice can assume new meaning when contextualized in the complete life experience of the practitioner.

In co-constructing the already narrated lives of the five Deaf participants I am aware of the power that I am favoured with in these conversations with the participants. I re-tell their stories knowing that my re-telling is not contestable. I have exposed their lives leaving them vulnerable and powerless to challenge my re-created version. I co-construct the stories as my interpretive, sense-making experience of their lives and realities. However, in writing the storied narratives I do so with sensitivity and caution against reckless re-telling, by framing the stories within empirical studies and established theories that have been detailed in the review chapters. Important in identity investigations is that although actively constructed, identities may be either conferred on the speaker or taken up by the speaker through positioning (Taylor, 2006). These are the co-constructed identities that I have conferred on the participants through reading their narratives.

6.2 Popularity Power

Angel is the elder of two Deaf sisters. She has a hearing brother who is a teacher. Her father retired as Head of department (HOD) from a school for the Deaf and more recently her mother retired as a teacher aide from the same school. Angel’s sign name is indicated by the thumb of the A-handshape, touching the left side of the nose. The explanation is that her name starts with the letter A and she wears a nose-ring on the left side. Her parents realised that she was Deaf when she was about 2 years old. Initially they were puzzled that she did not respond to their voices or to extraneous sounds. Later they were astounded that she was not responsive to the loud bangs of fireworks. However while she was crawling she would turn towards people who walked on the wooden floors in their home. This confused family members who thought that this was an indication that she could hear. But it was in fact the vibration that she was reacting to.

This prompted a long journey to several doctors and related professionals and finally her deafness was confirmed by a medical team at Tygerburg Hospital in Cape Town. She attended various day care facilities for both hearing and Deaf children and practiced oral communication. Her first exposure to signed language was in 1983 when she was admitted to a proper school for Deaf learners, where her progress was commendable. Her background and upbringing were relatively
privileged compared to most of her Deaf counterparts. Angel was successful with entrance examinations and commenced with tertiary studies at Gallaudet University in Washington, USA, renowned to be the university of choice for the Deaf. Initially she was placed at the English Language Institute (ELI) at Gallaudet. This is a specialized programme for foreign Deaf students and is aimed at enhancing competency in English, which was a pre-requisite for admission to Gallaudet University. She became President of ELI in this year!

After two and half years, Angel was forced to leave USA and return to South Africa owing to financial constraints. The fees and accommodation costs were exorbitant and sponsorships were becoming increasingly difficult to secure. Her return to South Africa coincided with Springfield College of Education opening its doors to Deaf students to train as teachers. Angel is now in her 10\textsuperscript{th} year of teaching at a Deaf school in Durban. She teaches South African Sign Language, Arts and Culture and Dramatic Arts to both junior and secondary phase learners. She is now 35 years old and married to a hearing partner.

6.2.1 **Experiencing deafness**

Angel’s personal story of her deafness intersects with the typical, 1970’s cultural response to ‘disability’. She recalls that from about the age of 6 years, she observed that her family communicated with others using speech, but when they communicated with her they used hand movements. She was confused because she always saw her mother very sad and observed her cry often.

*I didn’t understand why she cried but I knew that something was wrong with me.* Frequent visits to traditional healers are vivid in her childhood memories.

*People told my parents that it was better for me to go to different temples, churches and mosques because maybe they could help me to hear like other people. My parents took me to many prayer places. Many priests blessed me and they tried to make me hearing.*

And she recalled her parents’ reaction of disbelief when her deafness was conclusively diagnosed.

*My parents were shocked and mum cried. They thought that I was the only Deaf person in the world. They felt embarrassed and tried to hide me from people ... Also they felt it difficult to tell people that I am Deaf. They argued with each other about my Deafness.*
During this period, having a child with an infirmity of any description, whether this was a sensory impairment or physical disability, was considered a transgression of the cultural definitions of what is normal. The child and concomitantly family members suffered condemnation and marginalization from extended family and the broader community. This was also the time when deafness was the site of contestation for Deaf persons, as sign language and oral communication competed for ascendancy by the respective proponents drawing voiceless and vulnerable parents into the unsuspecting scrimmage. Sign language and oral communication: each carried its own brand of normalcy and ‘abnormalcy’ discourses with respectively aligned identities.

Angel was subjected to the same identity struggles at school. She recalls poignant memories of some teachers who did not use sign language and instead forced learners to speak and to use their voices.

*They wanted me to speak like hearing people. My hands were kept under my bum and they tried to make me speak like hearing people. My orals were not good because I was profoundly Deaf. There was another hard-of-hearing pupil there. The teacher admired her good oral ability. I kept my hands under my bum and tried to speak but I failed. Teacher hit me and said “stupid” to me. I never forget……I tried again, again and still failed.*

She was aware and accepted that she was Deaf and that she needed to learn sign language, for several reasons: she was unable to communicate conventionally using speech; she was unable to hear sounds and any articulated language; in her reality gesturing and signing were becoming spontaneous expressive and receptive communication skills; and above all she was placed in a school where all the other learners were similar to her. It is well understood that those who are hard-of-hearing can produce audible speech through having residual hearing. However for the profoundly Deaf intelligible speech sounds are an enormous challenge. Just as the deafness was beginning to shape her identity, she was confronted with the challenge of conflict. Angel was confounded by the attempts of some teachers to force her to speak in an attempt to mimic hearing people. The narrative does not reveal any evidence that she resisted at the time. It appears that she attempted to conform and tried to speak. She was aware that it was acceptable and affirming to speak since she admired a peer was able to speak.
Given these contradictions she was left with uncertainty about who she really was. Her physical being represented a Deaf person but there was extraneous expectation that she should perform her identity or present herself as a hearing person. Angel is aware that there are two discourses available to her. These are the hearing and the D/deaf discourses. She can present herself according to the conventions of either of the different discourses available to her. However she elects to position herself within the hearing discourse since this is desirable to her teacher and even though this presentation is at variance with her overt characteristics of deafness. For her the normative script is deafness, but she takes up a position contrary to the normative script.

*Teacher said “stupid” and that the other (hard-of-hearing) child was better than me. ...I was upset and that time I wanted to be hearing ... because teacher hit me all the time because I could not say words and sentences. I never forget what happened to me.*

It is evident that Angel’s identity is not essentialized entity. It is not an integrated possession like a characteristic or a personality trait. Instead her identity is shaped by structures that impinge on her an elected performance. She did not have agency up to now. The discursive structures of the school superseded her agency because she was a child and adults made decisions. Angel is about 8-10 years old at this time and her identity is fragile. She is aware that she is a D/deaf person but her identity is being shaped contradictorily by the ideological and political values of the teacher. For these reasons she presented herself within the hearing discourse as this would position her in a space acceptable to the teacher and free of humiliation for her. Schools are discursive sites and participants within these sites create varying discursive resources. Soon she will be faced with intersecting identities as she may position herself within more than one discourse simultaneously.

Angel’s observance of certain significant responses to her deafness made her believe that *something was wrong with* her. Her mother cried often, her parents took her to various prayer places and argued over her deafness while some teachers forced her to try to use speech. These reactions caused her to want to denounce her deafness and be someone other than whom she really was. Even as a young child she fantasized about being able to hear. On several occasions in the narrative she reiterates her deep desire to be a hearing person. When she was in primary school she participated in an essay writing competition:
I wrote a story about batteries and how I got fed up when the batteries in my hearing aide finished quickly. And I got an idea about putting the battery in chocolate and swallowing it into my stomach and suddenly, I could hear all the time. My story was the best. I won the competition.

Later in the narrative Angel recalled her feelings towards hearing people and there is a silent, almost envious longing to be a hearing person and to be a part of this dominant discourse.

*When I was growing up, I wanted to be a hearing person. I asked God to make me a hearing person because of easy communication with people. I felt depressed and down.* While most people have already established identities in youth, Angel still oscillated between the hearing and Deaf worlds.

She only came to terms with and started to accept deafness when she was about 17 years old and whilst she was at the peak of her schooling. It was then that she realized that there can be power and potential in deafness. She became aware that deafness was not an end in itself and that there could be accomplishments despite being Deaf. For Angel these possibilities were embedded in the power of sign language.

*Before when I was small when I used speech it was because I was instructed by the teacher. Now I stopped using speech completely and I use sign language all the time. Sign language is very important for Deaf people. As a Deaf person, I feel that sign language makes me feel like a complete person. Sign language helps me to feel like a normal person.*

It is at this stage that her agency has now coming in to play. She deploys her personal agency in the deliberate and unequivocal decision to displace herself from the hearing world and positioned herself in the discourse of the Deaf cultural community. She started to construct her identity as a Deaf person and actioned this new identity by relinquishing all forms of verbal articulation and engages completely with signing. She no longer needed to make choices about which identity to perform or whether to position herself in the hearing or D/deaf discourse.

Positioning herself in the ‘Deaf-space’ identity was affirming and Angel found herself embedded in discourses of accomplishment and success and her identity was now being shaped by her achievements. She positioned herself firmly in this discourse and her successes and achievements
flowed prolifically. She excelled in sport, academics, swimming, dance and drama, and enthralled spectators with her charming performances. The decision to position herself in the Deaf cultural discourse heralded an array of accomplishments and the principal at her school was enthusiastic about her potential. He initiated the opportunity for Angel to study at Gallaudet University in the USA, even before she graduated from secondary school. Gallaudet is a prestigious university for the Deaf and Angel admitted that attending Gallaudet was a pivotal experience in her life. This opportunity again shaped her identity.

*Gallaudet changed my life because they made me more independent and made me become a strong Deaf person. I became more aware about Deaf Rights and Deaf Culture and Deaf language. Also Gallaudet gave me lots of confidence as a Deaf person.*

Angel was now firmly positioned as a culturally Deaf person and this offered her the space to perform her success as a Deaf person. What is interesting about Angel’s identity as a Deaf person is that it is both shaped by and constructed around her successes and accomplishments. Her Deaf identity flourished due to her pride in herself and the popularity that she enjoyed as a result of her achievements.

*I realized I didn’t need to be a hearing person because I got many achievements … People from my community already knew about me.*

Her school arranged concerts to showcase the talents of the Deaf learners and these concerts were held at various public venues in an attempt to appeal for funding for Angel’s impending admission to Gallaudet University in the USA. There were a host of Deaf performers, performing in different items and collectively they would have captivated the viewers. From my experience in working with D/deaf, I am aware that communities are generally sympathetic towards children with disabilities and impairments and the children’s display of talent appealed to their compassion and what better way to demonstrate recognition of the Deaf children’s giftedness than through generous donations. However Angel takes complete credit for the successes of these concerts as if she was the sole performer and revelled in the popularity.

*I participated in dances and concerts and we travelled to many places in this province to perform. People were happy with me and gave our school money and donations because of my...*
dancing and acting. I also won the Miss Deaf beauty contest three times and many times my picture was in the paper.

Angel extolled her parents for their support and the many sacrifices that they made for her advancement.

*They motivated and encouraged me to be properly educated like hearing people. ... My parents showed hearing people that I could do anything, just like hearing people. ... Now I am successful and my parents are happy and relieved.*

Angel understood that for her parents the benchmark of her success was measured against what hearing people could achieve. Now her parents are happy and she is relieved. If she could be educated like hearing people and do anything that hearing people could do, then she was successful. In addition she felt that her parents wanted to prove to hearing people that as a Deaf person she could accomplish similarly. Angel made sense of her success in an almost perverted way. It seemed as if the meaning that she gave to her success was that she offered it as a form of compensation and conciliation to her parents for the sadness and embarrassment that she knew they had experienced at having a Deaf child.

Angel’s identity was constructed as a response to what groups or categories and their relations make possible for subjects. Using her subjectivity she negotiated her identity as a culturally Deaf person and narrated the story of how she lived the cultural positions, actively realized them, took responsibility and ownership of them as an agent, converting social category memberships and social roles into ethical, emotional and narrated choices.

The emotions, thoughts, attitudes, beliefs and values that she experienced as a result of her parents’ despondency and sadness, constituted her subjectivities. Through her subjectivities she negotiates the construction of her identity as a successful person. Her subjectivity indexes herself as an acting, thinking and feeling being and evokes the set of processes by which she as the subject constituted her sense of self, this self being the result of her internalization of the attitudes, values, expectations, memories and experiences that characterized her relationship with her parents and her recollection of their reality as a family. Angel’s personal subjectivity informs the story of how she lived the social and cultural positions and actively realized them. So give examples of how she
negotiated these identities – her choice and agency comes in here. She constructed her identity as she assumed ownership of her position and gave meaning to the position through personal investment of herself as a thinking and feeling agent and presented, through her narrative, the identity that was most desirous and appealing.

6.2.2 Experiencing teaching

There is an intricate connectedness between Angel’s earlier life experiences and her present positionality as a teacher. Furthermore her identity as a culturally Deaf person intersects at various levels with the way in which she experiences teaching. In recollections of her earlier life this whole Deaf culture phenomenon was remote to her. However, she is now firmly entrenched in Deaf culture and lives her life by its conventions and in her perception Deaf culture has now taken its rightful place amongst other known cultures.

But there was Indian Culture and African Culture. Where was Deaf culture? There are many Deaf people and we know what we want. So now we have our own Deaf culture. Deaf culture is about our lives and how we live – our jokes, norms, customs, values, beliefs, behaviours, technology and most importantly, our own language – SASL.

The predominant and most overt feature that characterizes culturally Deaf persons is their use of signed language. This would be the indigenous language of their country of origin, such as, British Sign Language, Australian Sign Language (Auslan), Chinese Sign Language and here in South Africa this would be South African Sign Language, also written as SASL. Sign language is an identity marker and indexes the lives of Deaf people. When she became a sign language user, she staked her claim to her identity as a Deaf person and her life as a teacher of Deaf learners is no different. She finds it difficult to shed the painful memories of teachers who forced her to try to speak. Now as a teacher Angel protests vehemently against Deaf learners being forced to try to use speech.

I object! I don’t accept it. I don’t let Deaf children use orals because I had a bad experience about how a teacher treated me very bad. I don’t want Deaf children to suffer like me when I was in school. Teachers must not force Deaf children to use orals. … I feel that I want to tell
hearing teachers that they must understand and wake up about Deaf children. Sometimes I am still angry about what happened to me when I was small at school.

Her unpleasant experiences as a child in a Deaf school are vivid and Angel admits that she would not want to be born a Deaf person again.

Yes, sometimes I felt that I had enough of being a Deaf person. Maybe I want to be born hearing because in the past I suffered lots as I was growing up. I don’t want to look back in my past. I want to look forward to the future. It took so long to become a successful Deaf adult. When I was a small Deaf child, I suffered too much!

Although Angel has now re-defined her identity as a successful Deaf adult, her identity of torment and anxiety as a child who was forced by her teachers to use oral skills remains a prominent layer amongst her several other identities that define her being. There is repeated reference to her suffering as a child, and other related references to not wanting to be born a Deaf person again and to her present adamant stance that she will not allow the Deaf learners to be subjected to this anguish. The time-line of her life cannot be described as a linear progression where Angel has advanced from a traumatized, emotionally disturbed child to a now confident, self-assured successful Deaf adult. Identities intersect at various points in our lives and continue to accumulate, creating multi-layered beings with each layer adding to meaning-making in the project towards realizing the self.

The question that arises, as a consequence, is whether the ‘troubled child’ identity has affirmed or perhaps problematized the more recent identities associated with her respective roles as a daughter, sister, teacher, wife, Deaf person, etc. Irrespective of whether the impact of this trauma story is positive or negative, the tellability or the decision to include this story in her narrative is significant for her identity construction. As the author of her self-story Angel has to be seen as a person with many selves, constantly trying to reorganize herself towards unity and coherence. Her trauma story is an ‘available narrative’ and reveals how she negotiates ownership of the experience. Angel is the authority and through her agency determines what is told and how it is told. The tellability of these narratives is informed by the extent to which the event is acceptable or unacceptable to the teller giving her entitlement to the ownership of the experience and power over the empathy of the listener in the response to the telling. Furthermore every telling can
create a new perspective on the experience and the multiplicity of perspectives leads naturally to the fragmented self, unable to emerge as a stable, unified coherent subject, thereby defying the pursuit for coherence.

The issue of sign language and in particular the way it is used by hearing teachers is a major source of indignation for Angel, not just for the personal and emotional impact that this has had on her life. She is seriously concerned about the ineffective use of sign language and the way in which this has presented as a barrier to the education and development of Deaf learners. She is convinced that the poor academic levels of Deaf learners are due in large measure to the lack of signed language proficiency amongst hearing teachers.

Also they perform poorly in subjects because of hearing teachers who use sign language differently. And sometimes they even fail but the problem is with hearing teachers whose sign language is not good. Sign language is very important for Deaf pupils and it is not their fault.

She described her feelings towards a whole generation of Deaf learners who would suffer these consequences.

It makes me frustrated and fed up because Deaf pupils complain to me about hearing teachers. It irritates me and also makes me angry!

She is empathetic towards the learners and personally experiences their indignity. She is aware that this is not a cause that they can take up. The dynamics here weighs heavily against the learners as they are not sufficiently equipped to challenge the proficiency of the hearing teachers on their use of signed language. She presents as helpless and disempowered in this situation since she understands the problem and even sees the solution as being tangible. But her aloneness as the only Deaf teacher amongst so many hearing colleagues was overwhelming and as a result stifled her response to the dilemma.

She admitted to being intimidated by the large number of hearing colleagues that would be in opposition to her claims about sign language and by the fact that she was a fledgling teacher while her colleagues collectively could boast several decades of experience in teaching Deaf learners. At times she was so unsettled that her identity as a culturally Deaf person felt fragmented and under threat. I didn’t feel confident because I was the only Deaf teacher
around many hearing teachers. A few months later a new Deaf teacher appeared at school. Then Deaf teacher aides appeared and now I have company. I am happy. We support each other as a Deaf group. It makes me feel confident. We feel connected!

The strength and stability in the collective identity of people who share the same language and culture cannot be over-emphasized. This resonates with various social identity theories where social identity is premised by individual identification within a group and by an emotional attachment to this belonging, hence the social-cognitive process. Angel’s identity as a Deaf person is fragile when she is the only one Deaf person amongst hearing colleagues. However her Deaf identity is invoked when there are other Deaf colleagues. There appears to be a cause and effect relationship between social identity memberships and actions and behaviour of members. In addition, to being a project of the self, identity is also a group project as individuals build their sense of self within a multitude of social and cultural influences and in the attachments they form with others. In the theory this is what is referred to as categorical identity which is the relationship of the self-identity to others belonging to the same group or social category.

In the context of the community of Deaf persons identity is shaped by their shared language and it is through their shared language that the world and the Deaf self are interpreted. Conversations within the Deaf community take place amongst its members. These conversations are not necessarily face-to-face but are still interactive in the sense that it can take place by also engaging with the ideals and values of those within the community. Identity is in effect grounded by commitment to the group and the principles that the group strives to uphold. Identity is not fixed or stable; at various stages identity can be subjected to significant changes within the group and its ideals.

The relationship between Angel and the hearing teachers is characterised by competitiveness and desire to prove that she is as good as they are or better than them. There is a noticeable striving on her part for dominance. She appears to want ascendancy over the hearing teachers because of the power that she draws from being a Deaf person and having ownership over her ‘mother-tongue’, indigenous language. As a Deaf teacher she flaunts her use of signed language as exceptional and faultless since it is her natural language.
She would like to believe that she is the front-runner with the banner, and has the expectation that all others in the school should be in pursuit of her expertise. When her ideas or her choice of signs is not accepted she feels that she is discounted as a Deaf teacher and not given the credit and recognition that she deserves.

*If I have a nice idea about some activities, the hearing teachers don’t accept my idea. Hearing teachers want their ideas to be accepted. … I feel not comfortable with hearing teachers because they still neglect the signs that I teach them and also their attitude towards me is not good. … I feel that they don’t appreciate me teaching them to change signs.*

As seen in the narrative of her earlier life, her identity as a successful Deaf learner was distinguished in terms of her accomplishments and reputation amongst Deaf peers, school teachers and her hearing family. This identity is extended into the teaching career as Angel’s pride in herself and lust for popularity concretizes when teachers and learners seek help from her with signing, especially for special events that are being hosted at the School. *I feel good to help the Deaf children. This shows me that some teachers respect and have confidence in me. I feel proud and popular when any children and teachers still ask me for help with signs.* She believes that her success as a Deaf teacher is defined by the extent to which others hold her in esteem and look up to her for her excellence.

There are other occasions in her narrative that substantiate my conceptualization that that Angel’s identity as a teacher is negotiated around the recognition and regard that she experiences from her colleagues and others around her. Her school has provided her with certain opportunities and she uses these opportunities as resources to augment her identity as a successful and popular Deaf teacher. One of these opportunities is through teaching drama to the Deaf learners.

*My school gave me the opportunity to teach drama through sign language. The pupils do well in Drama. Also in Grade 10, 11 and 12 pupils passed in Drama exams. They feel confident and are building their self-esteem when they are involved in Drama. Many people in public places admire them and enjoy watching their good skills in body language and movement.*
They performed at Sibaya Theatre and Playhouse Theatre. It is a good opportunity for me and pupils! This also motivates me and makes me want to work harder to help the Deaf.

She acknowledges the value that this has had for the learners but the attendant benefit for her cannot go unnoticed. Her assertion that people enjoy watching their body language and movement is indirectly recognition of herself since she was their teacher and choreographer. The power belongs to her. Yet another opportunity given by the school is for her to be the Mistress of Ceremony at official functions. Angel is the MC using sign language and she is accompanied by a hearing interpreter who voices what she says. The main person on the stage though is Angel. The hearing interpreter, who is not visible to the audience, is inconspicuously seated somewhere in the auditorium, at a point of vantage that has a clear view of what the Deaf MC is signing. It is a good experience for me to be a Deaf MC and I have a hearing person speaking what I am signing. It is different and people like it.

There is no doubt that this arrangement is unique and innovative. She alluded to the fact that the audience is left in complete awe and admiration for her confidence, self-assurance and sterling performance as a Deaf teacher.

In addition Angel teaches South African Sign Language (SASL) to the staff and this function affords her the opportunity to showcase her charm and charisma in signing, talent that is natural to her.

Some of the teachers are excited to learn more signs from me. Most of the teachers, their attendance at SL is not good. I will be happy if they come often. This is a learning occasion intended for the benefit of hearing colleagues to learn sign language so as to improve their teaching and interaction with the Deaf learners. However, there is a particular strategy with which this narrative is told and the way in which Angel manipulates the experience. She moves beyond the act of learning signs and extends the focus to learning signs “from me”.

Her satisfaction derives once she has located herself in the story. Sometimes some teachers ask me for help with signs then I feel good! I feel good, because many of the teachers were my teachers when I was a pupil. Now I am teaching them. Her power and ascendancy over the hearing teachers is prominent here and this gives greater definition to identity of being a successful and popular teacher. Through the mere act of teaching them how to sign for effect, her
authority, knowledge and power in position has superseded those to whom she was once subjected. Her repetition of “I feel good” is indicative of the heightened sense of pride and almost misrepresented gratification that she accords herself through the reversal of roles.

Angel’s narrative of her relationship with the Deaf learners is configured to reflect her as a superior, admired and looked-up-to teacher. The script is dense with reference to herself as one whom all the Deaf learners see as a role-model and seek to emulate for her accomplishments.

…I admire me that I got many achievements since my childhood to adulthood. They ask me many questions about my childhood and adulthood. They come to me for help with signs and projects and other activities.

I think that they see me as a role model. With the frequent reference to “me” she positioned herself as the teacher to be revered for her accomplishments, knowing well that the majority of Deaf learners in her classes were socially and economically disadvantaged. She presented her life before them knowing full well that it was an unachievable dream to them and that they could only yearn for the personal fame and glory that she enjoyed.

So great was their admiration for her that they developed an attachment to her and they turned to her for assistance with personal challenges that they experienced. They sought her counsel on various personal and emotionally impacting issues. These included issues pertaining to relationships with family members and partners, sex and pregnancy, and finance and grants. My one pupil complained about her dad who stole her money from her grant because he wanted money for drinking. I told her I didn’t know much but I gave her advice. Later she solved problem then she came to me and was very happy with me and thanked me. The significance of this story was not that the story ended happily for the learner but that the learner needed to be grateful to Angel. And so each opportunity that her school presented to her became a new narrative resource that she used cumulatively to process the desired ‘popular person’ identity.

Although the learners were her material resources and she used them for her purpose Angel’s attachment to the learners is unwavering as she has also developed an intense bond with them as Deaf persons. She admits that she responds to them first as Deaf people and secondly as learners. Theoretically they are both D/deaf and learners. From a post-structuralist perspective, the
conceptualization of ‘D/deaf learners’ ought to be a seamless, fluid and overlapping project. The two categories are in a co-existing rather than in a dialectical relationship. Angel has separated their existences and she locates them relative to her own sense of significance, that is, they are primarily Deaf and then they are learners. *Yes, I see a Deaf person first - then pupil.* She is entrenched firmly in her identity as a Deaf person and appraises them in terms of her own image. Even with people outside of the school context, she identifies first with the deafness followed by other identifying features.

*I identify the Deaf person first. I always identify a person as Deaf or hearing first - then I’ll ask their names or where they come from?* She responds to them in this way … *because of my Deafness and sign language. I want to see if they are same like me. I feel more connected to them because they are Deaf.*

Her connectedness to people in general is premised on their likeness to her own identity as a Deaf person, and she constructs coherence around this likeness.

Deafness is uppermost on her scale of description and all other features are secondary to Angel. However, identities are fraught with contradictions and there are contradictions in Angel’s supposedly steadfast Deaf identity for although she feels deeply connected to Deaf people she elects to marry out of her own cultural community – she has a hearing husband! And even more interesting is that in response to who is her role-model, I was pleasantly astonished to learn of her deep admiration for me, for which I am indeed proud. *I admire you because from a young age you had important management jobs. You are very committed to your job, to the Deaf teachers and the Deaf children. All the Deaf like you. … My dream is to do PhD also. But, it is not easy for me.* One would have thought that with her resoluteness and unswerving attachment to Deaf people she would prefer a Deaf marriage partner and indeed have a Deaf role-model. But such is the multifacetedness of identities and subjects cannot claim to have essential and permanent identities. In this case Angel’s identities are transient and are being altered through being repeatedly re-constituted and renegotiated. She may occupy different, even conflicting subject positions but will continue to engage in meaning-making making the search for coherence an on-going process.
Although this positioning of learners exudes compassion and empathy for them which seems to compensates for her painful childhood experiences, this has indeed compromised her position as a teacher in the teaching-learning situation. She notes that when she teaches the learners are inattentive and do not accord her recognition as a teacher. They tend to be disruptive and are not focused when she is teaching. On the contrary the same learners are conscientious and diligent when hearing teachers are teaching.

*When I give ask them questions about my lesson they say they didn’t understand. Sometimes when I write on board, pupils start talking to each other and make noise because they take advantage of me as Deaf person. Many times, I see hearing teachers in classes, pupils are quiet and doing work when teachers start working. When I ask pupils why they talk, make noise and not start working when I start working. Why? Pupils said they are Deaf like me and we are friends because of our Deafness. That is hard for me and I don’t know what to do about that. I also don’t want to hurt them. I tell pupils, that is wrong and I am a teacher and pupils are pupils. Not friends!*  

The attachment and the bond that she shared with the learners worked effectively towards enhancing her likeability but this has become detrimental to her performance of teaching. Her identity as a teacher has become fragmented.

Several opportunities were presented to Angel. These included the opportunity to attend Gallaudet University in USA, being the first Deaf Teacher to be appointed to the school, teaching signed language to the staff, teaching Drama through signed language, showing casing learners’ talent on public stages, and her other achievements such as being a presenter of programmes for the D/deaf on national television. Through these opportunities she was able to exert influence in the Deaf community with linguistic and cultural capital, these being the tools that enabled her to negotiate a position of ascendancy in her relationship with learners and in the wider Deaf community. However the relationship with learners became disjointed as she prioritized fame and popularity over constructive authority.

This foregrounds the question of how the Deaf learners perceive and position her in their learner-teacher relationship. Do they have admiration and reverence for her as a Deaf teacher or as a Deaf friend? It seems that their reverence for her has extended from her position as a teacher to
her position as a friend. This has become a dilemma for her since she knows that it is a problem but does not know how to resolve it. She knows that if she invokes her agency and constructs an austere teacher identity, she would offend the learners. She therefore needs to establish a perception of herself as both teacher and friend. Such is the seamless, fluidity of identities. Her subjectivities are embedded in both the discourses of teacher and friend and although each has its own particular conventions, her identity resembles merged and overlapping positions as teacher and friend.

Angel has internalized the attitudes, values and expectations of significant others in her early life, as experiences in her biographical project. The values and expectations that she became aware of characterized her relationships with these significant others and became integral to her positioning as a successful Deaf person. In order to materialize these expectations she has made deliberate personal investment and has deployed her agency to be a successful person and this explains her attachment to the particular identity. Hall (2004) explains that the concept *subjectivity* allows for an explanation of the emotions associated with the personal investment which is made in positions of identity and of the reasons why we are attached to particular identities. Subjectivity may include unconscious dimensions of the self and can be rational as well as irrational, implying contradiction and change. We attempt to be clear-headed, rational agents but are challenged by forces beyond our control. Angel presents as being a clear-headed and rational agent but the powerful forces of her earlier memories and experiences have shaped her identity construction.

She has constructed a *popularity power* image of herself to the learners and perhaps altering this identity would be more damaging to her own search for coherence, than it would be offensive to the learners. In her teaching discourse she has integrated all the subject positions that represent her as significant, successful, praiseworthy and laudable. There is an ingenuity and creativity with which Angel has successfully negotiated her identity as a popular, compassionate, admired, best friend and expert in sign language. But lurking amongst the layers of pleasant and popular teacher is the fragmented teacher who is striving for stability and recognition from learners to bring coherence and authenticity to her identity as a teacher.
6.3 Trespasser in Transit

At the time of this interview in 2008, Troy was 30 years old. He was born in Umtata in the Transkei and attended a school for hearing learners here. He was raised in an extended family with grandparents, parents, siblings and other paternal family members. He was born hearing and became profoundly Deaf at about the age of 10 years, as a consequence of contracting acute bacterial meningitis, during which time he spent several months in hospital. Subsequently he attended a primary school for the Deaf in East London and secondary schooling was completed in KwaZulu-Natal. Like all Deaf people, Troy has a ‘sign name’. This is described by the three middle fingers of the right hand moving downwards on the right cheek followed by the letter T hand-sign, with the same hand. The stroking on the cheek highlights the scars of three lesions which represents his isiXhosa speaking culture. He is unmarried and presently in a relationship with a young lady who is hard-of-hearing.

As a Deaf person, Troy experienced difficulty learning from and understanding hearing teachers. When he was in high school, for the first time he had the advantage of being taught by a Deaf teacher. Although she was unqualified he benefited tremendously from her teaching through her proficiency in sign language. She inspired him to become a teacher and he hoped that young Deaf learners would profit from his teaching through natural use of signed language. He is presently in his 10th year of teaching in at a school in a rural village in Northern KwaZulu-Natal where he teaches English, Life Orientation, Economic and Management Science (EMS) and Office Practice in the Secondary School.

Troy lives in the residential facility for staff and assists with supervision of resident learners. He coaches various codes of sport including cricket, table tennis and soccer to the Deaf learners and to the local hearing community. Much of his time is dedicated to studies as he is enrolled as a part-time student studying for the Advanced Certificate in Education (Deaf Studies), at Wits University in Johannesburg, Gauteng.
6.3.1 Experiencing deafness

Troy is aware that he was born hearing. He recalled poignantly the events leading to his complete loss of hearing. He became sick while at school. His body was in excruciating pain and his temperature soared. He alerted his mother to this but she was not sufficiently convinced that she should respond with any urgency.

*I did not feel well and although the weather was hot I started feeling very cold for many days. I complained to my mother but she did not believe me - she thought I was lying. We lived on the farm and the hospital was far away. … I remember vomiting everything that I ate and my body was getting very weak. My whole body was in pain. … Then I stopped eating. I did not know what was happening around me. I was like a dead person.*

Troy continued his narrative.

*Then my mother took me to a sangoma.* (A sangoma is a traditional healer that is sought by African cultural groups in Southern Africa). The practices of a sangoma are contrary to the drug therapy of Western medical science and include the use mixtures made from animal and plant extracts. *The sangoma gave me lots of things to eat and drink but still I vomited everything. … after many days I woke up again. I was confused I did even know how I came to the hospital. Everything around me was strange. It was very quiet. There was no sound. I could not understand what was happening. The nurse that was responsible for me came to me to talk to me but I could not hear anything. I could not identify with myself. When she asked me anything I answered wrong. They thought that I was playing and teasing them.*

This condition is referred to as acquired deafness and is irreversible owing to the bacterial attack on the central nervous system. Like he had failed to convince his mother of the severity of his illness, Troy’s attempts to convince the nurse that he could not hear were futile.

*Yes I tried to tell them but they did not believe me. One day in the hospital I walked to the window. Everything was silent. I was standing and looking outside - some children were playing outside. The nurse called my name from behind but I did not turn to look. I was still concentrating on outside the window. Then she walked up to me and tapped me on the...*
shoulder. She asked me - you did not hear me calling you? I said no, I cannot hear anything. For the first time she listened to me seriously. She identified with my problem.

The ‘little lives’ of all children are experienced at the mercy of ‘big people’ and Troy’s life was no different even at these critical times in his life. Troy experienced an overwhelming powerlessness as he was subjected to the prejudiced authority of the adult. He made a desperate appeal to his mother to intervene when he felt gravely ill. However two intersecting issues took precedence. These were the traditional beliefs that influenced his mother’s actions and perhaps her ignorance. Troy’s appeals to the nurse for her assistance when he realized that he could no longer hear were also unheeded, almost to the extent of being disregarded.

He returned to his previous ordinary school despite his recently acquired deafness perhaps because his parents were unaware that he now needed to attend a specialized or inclusive school that could accommodate his deafness. Although his family was now aware that he was deaf, there is no indication that his mother informed the school of this when he returned there.

Now everybody in my family knew that I was Deaf after the doctors told them. I came out of hospital and I was feeling better. My family sent me back to school again.

At the ordinary school he felt belittled by his teacher and peers and received no benefit from instruction here.

The teacher was teaching me but I heard nothing. She talked to me, she asked me questions but I did not know what she was saying.

The teacher was aware that there was a problem but did not have the necessary training to understand Deafness and to teach a deaf child. There was some attempt at accommodating his new special need by offering him seating at the front of the class. This was futile and Troy began to mimic the actions of the other learners to make himself feel included.

She used to ask the class questions and the other children put their hands ups. I used to just copy them and put my hands up also. The teacher used to ask me (perhaps through using some gestures) if I heard her. I used to say no but I am putting my hands up because the others are doing that.

One day his teacher chose to interpret his mimicry as an act of deception.
It was a spelling test. The teacher said the word and we must write. ... The teacher calls the word and all the children put their heads down and write the word. I could not hear the word. I looked into my friend's book and copied all the words that he wrote. When the teacher marked my work she asked me if I heard the words. Then quickly the other children told her that I copied the words. Then the teacher wrote a letter to my mother to say that I must stay at home. I must not come back to school. She was angry when she gave me the letter.

The next morning he prepared himself for school but he was perplexed when his mother disclosed the contents of the letter and told him to stay at home.

I got worried and confused. I knew that the normal children were laughing at me.

Troy was extremely despondent at not being able to go to school. This was accentuated when he saw the other children walking to school. He was unable to resist comparing himself to the time when he could hear.

When I was normal I felt good. I could hear. I could hear everything and everything was good. Everything was fine but after I became Deaf I felt like waste. I felt all alone in the world.

Debilitation of this nature are difficult and at times impossible to accept and internalize especially after having experienced complete lingual and auditory advantage. Through the “spelling test” incident the teacher exercised her power and authority and effected Troy’s exclusion from school. Perhaps it was the school policy to exclude him for placement in a school that could accommodate his specialised educational needs since the teachers in the school were not trained to manage his deafness. Judging from her response to Troy when he returned to the school, it was obvious that she did not know how to manage his deafness. In this sense, the teacher was ‘powerless’ and perhaps she acted in his best interest by excluding him since. But in his narrative, Troy’s perception of the teacher is that she was ‘powerful’ in the way that she excluded him. To him she had made the decision unilaterally because he had copied in the ‘spelling test’ and he interpreted her decision to exclude him as punitive. He was aware that the teacher was ‘angry’.
For the first time in his narrative there is disclosure, instantiated by the “spelling test” incident, regarding his feelings towards significant hearing adults and the damaging power they exercised to disrupt his once coherent identity as a hearing person. The incidents with his mother, the nurse, his teacher and his peers who laughed at him appeared to him as if hearing people conspired collectively in a sinister plot and ousted him from his ‘hearingness’ to an unfamiliar and frightening silent world.

*Everything in my world changed. I felt all alone. I hated hearing people for that.*

Embedded in his loathing for hearing people, were the subjectivities that he experienced about his new self as a Deaf person. Troy was despondent at not being able to go to school. The contesting discourses of ‘normalcy’ and ‘abnormalcy’ are prevalent here. When he could hear he was firmly positioned in the discourse of normalcy and now that he is deaf he contemplates transitioning to the discourse of abnormalcy. He felt that he was no longer a normal person as he associated his previous ability to hear with being a normal person and conversely the condition of deafness was aligned to abnormality. He had experienced an overall emotional recession and reduced his identity as a learner to “waste” since being excluded.

*When I was normal I felt good. I could hear. I could hear everything and everything was good. Everything was fine but after I became Deaf I felt like waste. I felt all alone in the world.*

His sense of self-worth as a learner was in effect non-existent. He felt useless, of no value and ready to be discarded. In my personal experience of working with and supporting learners who acquired deafness post-lingually, this particular revelation of emotions was most disquieting. Troy’s feelings revealed that he lacked legitimation as a learner and his identity was fractured and devoid of any semblance of coherence. Perhaps the other related identity as member of a learner peer group was also affected while other layers of identities such as gender, son, brother and youth club soccer player would have been intact and meaningful. In the several layers of identities that constitute the self, contradicting subjectivities can cause an individual to experience fragmentation and meaninglessness in discourses while experiencing harmony in other unrelated discourses. For this reason the quest for overall coherence is almost impossible to achieve.
Deaf people, deafness and Deaf schools were understandably unfamiliar to Troy and his family. This is not unusual of persons and families who are not personally or directly affected by deafness. He remained at home for six months and when his mother moved to East London to get employment, she became aware of a School for the Deaf in the area. He and his mother visited the school and here for the first time he saw children signing.

*We saw all these children. They could not talk. They were signing with their hands but I did know what they were doing. I only saw their hands moving. I laughed at them and they laughed back at me. I thought it was funny.*

Troy was happy to be admitted to the school. After several months of rejection and exclusion in his previous school, he immediately felt accepted. He started learning to sign and to socialize with his new Deaf peers.

*I went to the Deaf school and saw other Deaf children, and they accepted me. They did not laugh at me like the other hearing children, and I accepted myself as being Deaf. I was not alone here - I was just like everybody here. I felt part of everybody here. I started to progress and changed my idea (perception) of myself as a Deaf person. ...I felt accepted here. I copied everybody and started learning sign language.*

Fortunately he learnt sign language quickly because his Deaf friends used a method of communication referred to as Total Communication. This is a dual medium of communication involving simultaneous use of signed language and spoken isiXhosa, the spoken mother tongue. The oral versus sign language controversy has been a prominent source of contestation for all those who have had a stake in deafness and related issues, and is still contested to this day. What has been distinguishing however is that within the conventions of Deaf culture, sign language is the only *bona fide* medium of communication.

Prior to the advancement of Deaf Culture, the signing Deaf community was oppressed and forced to use speech, as signing was denigrated and attributed to lower forms of living species. Speech was considered the language of choice for the human species. In the last two to three decades Deaf Culture has become a doctrine strictly adhered to by its followers. Troy became a
member of the Deaf cultural community. He expressed concerns about his speech giving the contrary perception of his allegiance to the Culture.

*I wanted to be same like the other Deaf children. … I was embarrassed that I had some speech. I could not stop using my speech. Sometimes the teacher used to hit me because I was using voice.*

Troy was born hearing and had naturally acquired speech. He had lost his hearing owing to illness but still retained the speech that he had acquired prior to losing his hearing. He therefore had to intentionally perform the culturally Deaf identity, by avoiding using his natural speech and using sign language exclusively. This is the discourse where he elected to position himself since it was affirming and this is where he felt accepted. His identity as a Deaf learner had now become meaningful to him.

And thus began his integration into the Deaf world, his familiarization with its unique and peculiar culture and his internalization of an identity as a Deaf person. What he valued most about being in this school in East London was the way in which the people here responded to him compared to the collective response of the people in his village. *Here they treat me like I am a normal adult. And I like that.*

With his acceptance of the new identity the despised feelings of abnormality that were previously associated with being Deaf had reverted to being feelings of normality. All the learners at the school were similar him and Troy began to experience his deafness as self-affirming and positive.

Irrespective of one’s allegiance to an elected identity, there would always be variants since identity is by nature fragile and vulnerable to change. He accepted the Deaf identity but simultaneously agreed to wear the hearing aids given by the school. Within the conventions of the culturally Deaf identity the use of hearing aids is not acceptable. The explanation is that deafness within this identity construction is not an impairment that requires remediation through technology. In this construction Deaf people are a cultural and linguistic group that relies on signed language for communicating, rather than speech and hearing. However Troy was experiencing his identity in a fluid and seamless manner. He accepted to be culturally Deaf but overlapped towards being physiologically deaf. He exercised his agency and contested the
rigidity and fixedness of the culturally Deaf identity. The desire to experience hearing through technology merged with the Deaf cultural identity. He was excited and wore the aid diligently, **but it did not work like when I was hearing**. He stopped wearing the hearing aid, because his ability to identify sounds was not as effective as he had anticipated. **I was disappointed because this gave me hope that I will hear.**

When he met the Deaf teacher in high school, he finally **accepted being a Deaf person. I like being Deaf.** According to Troy, she was a superb role-model and helped him to affirm his Deaf identity and inspired his decision to become a teacher of the Deaf. He conceded that there was a time prior to meeting the Deaf teacher when he was **very determined to have the cochlear implant surgery.** He thought that this would improve his ability to access spoken words and other sounds. He researched this at length and established, after meeting the Deaf teacher, that this would compromise his identity as a culturally Deaf person. **I don’t want it anymore. I accept myself like this. It’s fine.**

The desire to want to wear hearing aids and undergo cochlear implant surgery informs of longing to retain his positioning within the hearing discourse. This is an indication that he did not willingly accept and position himself within the Deaf discourse. In formulating identities subjects may accept, resist or negotiate positioning. Troy resisted the Deaf discourse by wanting to engage with the technology that he thought could re-position him in the hearing discourse.

What can be noted here is that the transition to accepting his Deaf identity was not a smooth and linear process. He experienced various tensions and dilemmas that caused him to overlap between the Deaf and deaf and hearing identities. At various stages his version of acceptance was disrupted by attempts to become a hearing person again even if this could be achieved through technology. More recently, post-structural writers and critics have identified fluid and seamless boundaries between Deaf and deaf identities, where meanings and constructions are not fixed and grounded in certainty. Instead these identities may merge and mingle and at other times demonstrate inflexibility and single dominance. All D/deaf people are deaf by virtue of the physical and physiological description of not being able to hear and this conceptualization cannot be denied since it is this understanding that attributes meaning to deafness. However, at
different times they may identify as Deaf, as a consequence of their linguistic or cultural allegiance and this Deaf definition may clash, coincide, overlap or simply blend delicately with physiological constructions of deafness.

Despite the transitioning between Deaf, deaf and hearing identities, there is the sense that the Deaf discourse is becoming more meaningful in his sense of self. He no longer refers to the deafness with subtractive concern.

*Now I don’t see myself as a person who cannot hear or cannot speak. I see myself as a Deaf person who uses sign language. … I have a language to use.*

He shifted the focus from what he was unable to do as a result of being Deaf and gave credibility to being Deaf by drawing attention to what he was now able to do.

*When I felt strong about being Deaf I understood that Deaf people and hearing people are same. … I do not feel that hearing people are higher.*

This is his new confidence and self-assurance about being a Deaf person. He also does not believe that one language is more superior that the other. *Sign Language is important to me like any other language is important to a hearing person.* In performing his identity he has intellectualized deafness and has levelled the field making himself no different to the person that he was when he could hear. He expressed that he does not experience fear or anxiety in anticipation of meeting hearing people.

Troy recalled an unpleasant experience where there was a convoluted discrimination that prevailed as profoundly Deaf learners distinguished themselves from hard-of-hearing learners. This was cause for his disillusionment. The hard-of-hearing tended to be relegated to a lower status by the profoundly Deaf who considered themselves elite and pure. Troy believes that the admission of hard-of-hearing persons into Deaf culture was tokenistic.

*… because if you have speech, you can’t be a full Deaf person. …Because I had a spoken Language and I was not born Deaf, I could not enter the Deaf world completely. I had to go slowly, slowly in and only when I learned sign language really well, then I felt confident. Then the Deaf took me in.*

He storied lucidly about the caution that he exercised as he tread slowly and deliberately into the Deaf world. He knew what he wanted and he set out with purpose and intent to achieve this. The
culturally Deaf or pure Deaf are the gatekeepers and authorized his entry into what Heap (2006) refers to as ‘sign-deaf spaces’ when they were assured of his authenticity as a Deaf person. Their assurance of his authenticity as a Deaf person was guaranteed when he relinquished speech in favour of signing.

As Troy grew older he became critical and disdainful of certain aspects of society. One of these was the charity discourse within and through which he was constructed. Hearing people constantly being pitied him.

_The worst thing was when I became Deaf, hearing people used to say shame, shame, all the time. … They treated me differently. People always wanted to give me money or give me something because they felt sorry for me._

The people in his rural village also earned his contempt. They had not seen a Deaf person before and looked on him very curiously. He did not understand the cultural beliefs that influenced peoples’ attitudes towards him. It is possible that in his rural village, the prevailing culture was that hearing people were the norm. Therefore anyone that could not hear was contradictory to the norm.

_They used to look at me strangely. They looked at me like I was different, asked me funny questions. Is your ears paining? Is there something stuck in your ears?_

Most of all he detested the fact that his mother took him to many traditional healers in the hope that he would hear again.

_The sangomas used to mix lots of medicines for me to eat and drink. They also gave my mother things to wash my ears. They put things inside my ears. I did not like all this._

His mother also took him to a church campaign as she believed that a miracle based on faith could reverse his deafness.

_At the church the man told my mother to take some paper, fold it, and put it in my ear and bang the ear. And my mother did that. She banged my ears and head many times. But nothing happened. It did not make me hear again._

Troy detested his mother’s countless, desperate efforts to make him a hearing person again and this infuriated him.
She took me to many different places for the same reason. I told her to please leave it. Accept me that I am Deaf. She continued to protest. I refused to go anywhere again.

It was while he was in secondary school and perhaps at the time when he met the Deaf teacher that Troy started to demonstrate agency and resists the discourses of traditional and faith healing. For the first time he starts to protest against his mother’s attempts at alternate forms of healing. His identity formation becomes self-determined, as he adapts to fit with the events and situations of life. Prior to the advent of his agency, the alternate healing discourses were imposed upon him by his mother and the various traditional and spiritual resources. There is emphasis on his personal reflexive capacity of the mind, bringing subjective power over the discursive experience and enabling his agency in the construction of his own identity. Troy’s relationship with his mother had become acrimonious because of this and finally with a firm sense of resignation and frustration, he told her she must accept, accept, and accept. He interpreted his deafness as a cultural phenomenon and not as a curative condition like an illness. His rejection of attempts to cure his deafness showed that he had internalized the conventions of the Deaf discourse and the Deaf identity that he had now become comfortable with.

6.3.2 Experiencing teaching

Troy wanted to study but had no concrete plans. It was not his ambition to become a teacher since his personal experience of teachers and teaching was not pleasant. He has recollections of recurrent discord amongst hearing teachers.

My experience of teaching was not good. The teachers used to argue a lot about what the Deaf can do and can’t do. He slates most hearing teachers for their negative influence in his life. The hearing teachers did not give us support and encouragement. They made us have little confidence in ourselves. They gave me low identity. They always told us all the things that we cannot do.

But there was one Deaf (unqualified) teacher that encouraged him and enhanced his learning.

Her teaching was perfect and because her sign language was good we understood her clearly. … She was very special to me.

This does not necessarily mean that all hearing teachers are poor teachers and all that all Deaf teachers are good teachers. For Troy the benchmark of a good teacher was the way in which the
teacher used signed language. Through effective use of signed language, Troy was able to access learning.

He referred to her with pride and admired her resilience amongst the hearing teachers. She supported the Deaf learners zealously, espoused their potential and inspired Troy to believe that he had the potential to become a teacher of the Deaf.

... I decided that I wanted to be a teacher just like her. She motivated me to become teacher. And it is because of her that I went to college and now I am a teacher. Maybe I would not have even managed high school if she did not teach me.

Troy refers to hearing teachers as if they were a homogenous group; all of similar character. He recalls that they stifled his self-image. He lacked self-confidence and feelings of unworthiness flourished. However we live in a world of negotiated identity, where resources are recurrently available affording opportunities to construct and re-construct the self. Post-structural theory argues that an individual’s awareness of the self does not exist in isolation. Self awareness and meaning always exists in relationship to an ‘other’ or ‘others’ who serve to validate its existence of the self. Hall’s (2004) theory of connectedness between the self and an ‘other’ presumes that identity does not merely originate from the individual but emerges from the processes contextualization with significant or insignificant others. At a time when he felt unworthy, the Deaf teacher’s constructive presence in his life helped him to re-construct his ‘self’ as valued and worthy. He came to believe that he could also make a difference in the Deaf learners’ lives and resolved to become a teacher. Troy expressed deep indebtedness to the Deaf teacher for she gave meaning to his existence, helped him to make sense of his personal life and brought clarity and coherence to his life as a Deaf person.

In addition, it must be noted that Troy’s life is contextualized by others who are in it at various critical phases. Through the impact of these ‘others’ in his life, relational identities are constructed and in turn the relational identities impact the construction of professional identities. Included amongst the variables that potentially inform teacher identity construction and give meaning to the identity of teachers are their own experiences as students, the teachers whom they strive to emulate and the teachers whom they want to obliterate from experience. Dissonance in identity construction is inevitable and can place new teachers in positions where they must
reorganize and make meaning of their past and present experiences so as to create coherence in professional identity.

I would now like to turn my attention to Troy’s professional identity and how this is conveyed in the narrative. During the interview I invited him into several relational spaces that constitute his teaching experience, to establish how and where he was located in the respective relationships. All his responses appear to position him in general discontentment and dismay leading to emotions that reflected placid frustration and tolerable levels of annoyance. There are no passionate outbursts crying out injustice and appeals for help from authorities, although his complaints would justify such a reaction! Troy’s general disconcertment with hearing teachers commenced when he was a learner and now extends to his experience as a teacher where hearing teachers are now his colleagues. The professional relationship is overtly courteous with tones of underlying dissension.

Various reasons justify his disappointment with his hearing colleagues. He is explicit that he does not get professional support from them.

*Professional support? No nothing. I give them support with sign language, if they ask me, but they don’t give me support.*

Troy expresses the perception that the Deaf teachers are exploited by hearing colleagues and the distribution of curricular and co-curricular responsibilities is inequitable.

*When a Deaf teacher comes to the school many hearing teachers give their responsibilities to the Deaf teacher. The Deaf teachers do all the work and the hearing teachers do a little.*

Deaf teachers are frequently disrupted during teaching to solve problems that hearing colleagues encounter with Deaf learners.

*I am busy with my teaching, but they disturb me. I must leave my teaching to solve his problem. They use the Deaf teachers to do their work.* From my personal experience, hearing teachers often call on Deaf teachers to assist with Deaf learners since they, the hearing teachers, are unable to communicate with them. He attributes most of his disillusionment to their disregard for the Deaf and their apathy towards using sign language.
The hearing teachers don’t take sign language seriously. Some think that the Deaf children are stupid and there is no need for them to have the right to lots of information. … must show respect for the rights of the Deaf staff and Deaf children. But this is not happening.

He is acutely aware of how the Deaf struggle with school subjects because the signing of hearing teachers is ineffective. If the sign language was better then they would cope better. If they don’t know the words then how would they learn structure and grammar? A person must know sign language well to be able to teach the Deaf. Sign language is a problem for hearing teachers in the Deaf schools.

Their lack of concern in making learning more accessible through effective signing troubles him.

He places tremendous value on proficient use of sign language. Sign language is the way of communication for the Deaf. Without sign language a Deaf person is nothing. In my heart I feel strong about sign language and Deaf Culture.

His discontentment with the signing proficiency of hearing teachers prompted him to initiate weekly signed language classes to demonstrate creative ways of teaching and making learning accessible for the children. But the teachers were resistant to his ideas.

They argue with me. Like I tell them if they don’t know sign language well, then they must try to be active and demonstrate and be energetic. But immediately they tell me that they are too old now. They cannot be active. They don’t even try what I am suggesting. They always make me lose confidence.

Eventually he discontinued the lessons as he felt that his attempts were futile.

Troy is even-handed in his summative appraisal of hearing teachers and does not discredit their contribution entirely.

It is not fair to say that only the Deaf teachers are good for the Deaf pupils. Because before Deaf teachers were qualified all Deaf children were only taught by hearing teachers. The Deaf teachers are good with signing and the hearing teachers have good knowledge (of subject content) so both are good.

What he also finds objectionable is that the Deaf teachers have ‘no voice’.
Also what makes me angry in my school? Nobody listens to the Deaf. If we want something then a hearing person speaks for me. Why can’t the principal listen to my words? It is not fair. I don’t feel like I am important. I feel oppressed and excluded.

His attitude towards the Deaf learners is generally positive but he bemoans the learners’ perception that hearing teachers are superior.

… they respect me as a teacher, they understand me, they like the sign language. But negative is that they all see me as a Deaf teacher, with low qualifications. … They see the hearing teacher with more authority. They cannot believe that we have same qualification. How the hearing teachers treat the pupils, the pupils treat the Deaf teachers …. Not right.

As a Deaf teacher, Troy feels destabilized by hearing teachers. Through particular practices people in positions of power will influence, impact on individuals, and construct individuals. These institutions have discursive structures in place. The discursive structures or discursive fields, as they are known, are those that stipulate rules and regulations that determine what is possible to do, think or verbalize – they have discursive practices. Discursive practices are implicit in all power relations and it is here that change needs to be effected, to enhance the professional lives of Deaf teachers. In addition Troy also feels undermined by D/deaf learners. The D/deaf learners, perhaps through their own low self-concept are unable to conceive of D/deaf persons as being qualified teachers. It is for this reason that Aarons and Akach (2002) stress the importance of significant and effective role models for D/deaf learners in schools for the D/deaf.

There is a sense of power and oppressiveness that lies with the both the hearing teachers and the D/deaf learners that informs the way he feels about his teaching. Their attitudes inform certain subjectivities that shape Troy’s professional identity and contribute to the general malaise that he experiences in his practice. Troy is unable to negotiate his own position of power that can equal or supersede that of the learners and hearing teachers. This inability impacts on his relationships within the cultural field and more importantly on his professional identity, causing him to experience a sense of rejection by those whom he serves. Power is significant in discourse, because according to Fairclough (1989) power does not belong to the institution but to the person who possesses the power, relative to the position.
Despite this Troy, shows great concern for the welfare of the Deaf learners since he is able to empathize with them.

*I worry about the Deaf a lot. When they have a complaint, I want to support them. Some times I also feel it doesn’t matter, just leave them. But most of the time I give them a lot of support. I know how difficult it was for me when I was growing up, because I can compare my life as a Deaf and hearing person.*

Troy professional identity is infused with fluid, impermanent and transient subject positions. Earlier he was a carer, protector and supporter of the D/deaf learners. He re-positions his stance as a teacher who no longer wants to care. He then reverts to the position of supportive teacher. This emanates from his personal experience of once being a hearing person and thereafter being disadvantaged by hearing loss. Despite positioning himself in the culturally Deaf discourse, he still experiences hearing loss as impairment with consequences of disadvantage. There is no fixedness and rigidity about the subjectivities that he experiences in teaching. These alter from being caring and compassionate to being apathetic and indifferent to being empathetic. Through the varying subject positions that he takes Troy is at the intersection of conflicting subjectivities and identities and these are mutually articulated in his narrative. He wants to ignore the learners and leave them to contend with their plight but he reverts to thoughts of his own experiences of challenge in youth and this influences his subjectivities.

What emerged prominently during the interview was that Troy experiences his teaching with general dissatisfaction and an overwhelming discontentment subsumes his identity. He feels that schools for the Deaf want Deaf teachers because they augment the image of the School. The natural signing ability of the Deaf teachers is empowering for both hearing staff and Deaf learners, but the school does not enfranchise them as fully-fledged, integrated members of staff with professional development.

*Many schools want us Deaf teachers to be there. It is good for the school. They want us to give them power. But they don’t give us opportunity. We don’t feel integrated in the school.*

Troy disclosed that he is willing to work hard, educate the Deaf learners and enhance the quality of their lives. But his enthusiasm is thwarted by negative attitudes and his professional functionality.
He feels that he is not given appropriate respect as a teacher and his opinions are not valued. Often he feels despondent but he elects to continue as a teacher.

*If I leave then I will be hungry. Where will I find another job? How will I get money?* He admits to remaining in the job only for the monetary gain.

*If I continue I will get my salary and that keeps me satisfied.*

His expectation of hearing teachers is that they must be sincere in supporting, teaching and believing in the Deaf. So it is paradoxical that Troy should say of hearing teachers that:

*They must not come and just work for money.*

In simplistic terms Troy ‘speaks’ with forked tongue. However from a post-structural perspective he is adopting diverse subject positions that are informed by conflicting subjectivities. These subjectivities are associated with his feelings towards hearing teachers and his experiences of his own challenges with deafness. The subjectivities that he is experiencing in teaching are constructed by and are constructing his teaching identity. He is constantly shifting between multiple and connected subject positions and in this narrative he is positioned as a committed and caring teacher and as a teacher that is now teaching for monetary gain. Troy’s identities are being inscribed in each of these multiple but co-existing subject positions causing all notions of coherence to be subverted.

He expresses value judgments about his colleagues and his own practice. In Taylor’s (1989) theorization of identity he connects narratives to the idea that human beings contextualize themselves in life through evaluations, which are central to self-interpretations. Taylor says that our existences are not neutral or value-free. Invariably we experience reality in terms of the value that it has and our identities are shaped by this value. Thus we live in a moral space instead of a neutral space and narratives enable us to make sense of our actions in this moral space. In this space, we embrace what we conceive to be valuable or good. In judging his hearing colleagues Troy devalues their intent in teaching and he ought to position himself away from such judgement. However he contradicts his position and orients himself towards the very same judgement that he devalues. Such is the nature of subject positions, subjectivities and identities. They unconsciously mingle and merge in contradictory ways.
Troy’s narrative of his experience of his professional practice is a relentless grievance against every space that he pervades. He expresses acrimony towards the school management for their ineptitude in providing teaching and learning resources and for the way in which they oppress and exclude him. He is resentful of his colleagues for their lack of proficiency in signed language, their unwillingness to learn the language, and for not offering professional support to him. He also expresses a sense of discontentment towards the Deaf learners for not giving him the respect that he thinks he deserves and for the condescending way in which they contest his ability against hearing teachers. Collectively this is the entire constituency of people that he is required to interface with in the course of his professional practice at his school. The subjectivities that Troy experiences towards these significant people continue to frame his professional identity. He experiences a multiplicity of similar connected emotions towards the different interlocutors in his work space, for variously different reasons. According to Zembylas (2003) the subjectivities organize his professional practice and define his professional identity. Troy is surrendered to discursive self-production as his subjectivities enable a particular resistant positioning in the teaching discourse.

There is no doubt of the inextricable connection between the aggrieved emotions that he is experiencing as a teacher and his childhood encounters with his mother who did not react promptly when he pleaded illness, with the nurse who was not immediately responsive when he said that he could not hear and with the teacher who decided that he should be excluded because he could no longer hear and was mimicking the ability to hear. In the first part of the narrative, which indexed his childhood and its disruption through his deafness there is no explicit reference to associated emotions. However throughout the years as Troy moved from childhood to adulthood, he carried with him this set of inimitable experiences, packaged with his subjectivities of deeply entrenched, perhaps bitter, emotions and he unleashes this package onto his teaching space and to all who share this space with him!

He appears to be besieged by bitterness towards all and frequently expressed sentiments of his experience of teaching as ‘angry’, ‘frustrated’, ‘oppressed’ and ‘excluded’. Over a protracted period these have the potential to be explosive and can lead to outbursts. For Troy however, these extreme emotions remained mere expressions. There is no evidence of resistance nor is
there the will to retaliate against the discourses that cause him to experience these negative emotions. He complains unremittingly about systemic barriers in school but accepts the situation and continues with the practice his teaching notwithstanding.

When I first arrived … I saw that things were not right but I decided that I must just focus on the reason why I came here. I concentrate on me and my work and not other stuff.

It is almost as if his apathy is his way of resisting positioning himself positively in the Deaf teaching space and by implication he is ironically, a teacher, devoid of emotional attachment to the position.

Experiences and emotions are critical to identity construction, irrespective of their magnitude. According to Zembylas (2003) identities evolve from emotions and people organize their worlds in terms of the emotions they invest in a particular event. Identities are politicized through various discourses, cultural positions and the expectations and experiences of subjects. The composed and unruffled identity that the narrative articulates is contrary to the extreme emotions that he professes. Identity as we know it is a performed phenomenon and the performance can be undertaken with purpose. I do not aspire to doubt the authenticity of his performance but rather to highlight the alternate, counter-identity that Troy negotiated as a response to his emotions and how the alternate identity actually contradicts the emotions he is experiencing.

Typically a counter-identity is characterized by reactionary behaviour that would reflect in transformative attitudes and general responses. Instead the alternate identity that he presents is one of indifference, passivity and submissiveness as he accepts the transgressions that confront him. The identities that he experiences are fluid, nebulous and fragmentary. Within post-structural understanding identities are constructed in and through a multitude of variables including discourses, subjectivities and agency of the subject. Crucial here is the degree of agency and autonomy that Troy exercises in the construction of his identity and counter identity. Using his agency he engages in reflexive understanding and interpretation of his set of biographical narratives and the discourses in which in his teaching is embedded, and seeks coherence, as part of an ongoing, reflexive, identity project. Although he may present himself variously in different contexts, he seeks to accomplish an explainable identity.
He also accepted the indiscretions against him in childhood and endured this through to adulthood. There is no spirit of retaliation that characterizes his teacher identity and he surrenders effortlessly to outside forces. Once during his youth he noticed that the communication between himself and family members was deteriorating and marginalizing him. *I feel like an outsider. I am alone - we don’t communicate. They don’t start communication with me. They don’t face me ... They turn away. ... I took a sign language book home to teach my family, but they are not interested. They laugh when I try to teach them. My family doesn’t see the importance of learning sign language to be able to communicate with me. When I go home for the holidays, I spend all the time with my friends. I only go back home at night to sleep. ...* Without further effort he submitted to their ignorance and sought solace with friends and the absence of interaction with his family was no longer an issue of distress.

Power dynamics are evident here and he found his family’s unwillingness to communicate with him, through signing, oppressive. Troy deploys his agency by attempting to teach the family sign language so as to reverse the power imbalance and restore harmony in their relationship. This is unsuccessful and the family structure has failed him. He redeploy his agency in an alternate constructive way and makes the decision to symbolically ‘break away’ from his family and redefine his identity as a son, brother, grandson and member of the family.

Ordinarily, the typical reaction of any person who acquired deafness post-lingually would be to reflect on how life could have turned out had this eventuality not occurred especially since his mother’s appropriate and prompt response to his illness could have averted his trauma. But at this point in his life Troy no longer reflects on his alternate life. *I don’t know what would have happened in my life if I did not become Deaf. I cannot keep thinking of the past. I want to forget and move forward.* He need not have obsessed with what could have happened but to reflect on it would have been acceptable. Instead he elects to sublimate these thoughts. This begged a series of questions including whether he was sincere in professing that he accepted his condition of deafness for if he did accept why should he want to forget ... And if he was not entirely sincere about having accepted the deafness then was he feigning the Deaf identity and more importantly why was he performing the Deaf identity? Was he sub-consciously deluding himself or was he intentionally deluding me, the researcher?
Troy conceded during his narrative that one of the greatest disputes that he had to contend with was that he did not know which world he belonged in: the Deaf world or hearing world.

_In the beginning I did not know if I was in Deaf world or hearing world. I did not know where I belonged. When I was younger I needed to use speech. … But going to the Deaf school I needed to sign. But because the Deaf knew that I could speak some did not want to accept me in the Deaf world. Now they know that I am a strong signing Deaf person and I feel part of the Deaf world now. But there will always be a difference between a person like me and a person who is born Deaf. You live in the hearing world because you speak often and sign sometimes. But people in the Deaf world sign all the time. They have only one language._

This virtual cross-pollinating experience has constructed contradictory identities for Troy as identities of ‘hearingness’, Deafness and deafness are constantly in contestation, and in my opinion the contestation for dominance continues. He felt rejected by the hearing world when he was turned away from their school. He was forced then to turn to the Deaf world to restore his coherence and sense of self but his admission was contingent upon complete fluency in signed language and deliberate suppression of his speech. His identity as a Deaf person would remain forever fragmented since he was not a pure Deaf person. In other words he possesses the relics of his hearing identity but has acquired deafness, leaving him with adulterated Deaf and hearing identities and his dilemma was how to perform this permutation of selves.

Subjectivity within post structuralism is about who we are and the ways in which we understand and position ourselves both consciously and unconsciously within discourse and institutional practices and Troy’s subjectivities remain embedded in the cultural and discursive position of teacher. In addition to emotions being an indicator of his professional identity, the other significant contributor is power. The extent of power is critical in any social context or ‘field’, since it determines the level of interaction, integratedness and coherence that an individual experiences. Power also informs how we experience inclusion and exclusion, where one can preside over the desire to be integrated within a group simply by manipulating the interaction. The extent of ‘Deaf cultural capital’ that Troy possessed was obviously not sufficient to negotiate a position of power in the social hierarchy with hearing colleagues. The position of limited power that he was able to negotiate negatively informed his relationships within the
cultural field and more importantly, his professional identity. The puissance of his mother, the nurse and the teacher in childhood rendered him powerless and perpetuated the reductionist discourse on his identity as he progressed to adulthood and this militated against accomplishment in his project towards achieving coherence.

There is a calm, submissive, inert disposition by which Troy performs his identity as a teacher and paradoxically he does so with powerful agency. He has contrived a compliant nature and uses this as a strategy to negotiate the ‘which world’ impasse. The professional identity that emerges is that of a *TRESPASSER IN TRANSIT* treading cautiously within Deaf territory, fearing being noticed. Any resistance or rebelliousness to his discontentment and its origins would compel him to confront his apprehensions and resolve the impasse. This would require that he make bold, perhaps life changing decisions and it appears that he does not have the energy and vigour to embark on another reconstruction. His dilemma is where he should go from here. His unwillingness to offer resistance to the transgressions that confront him supports his need to supplant himself from the tensions and contradictions in his identity. The attitude of indifference and apathy to his professional practice gives him an excuse to avoid confronting his identity as a site of struggle. Therefore he surrenders to docile acceptance and conformity to the normative project. The trespasser identity enforces his silence and eclipses apprehensions about being ‘caught out’ by the so-called gatekeepers.

This was without doubt a moving narrative of how an unheeded illness dismantled the very essence of Troy’s once seemingly stable life and dislocated his existence. When I thanked him for this exceptional interview and for the opportunity to read his life story, I was indeed astonished when he reciprocated the gratitude. *Your questions were good. It gave me a chance to express myself.* It turned out that my research intention was displaced as Troy’s narrative opportunity and occasion for catharsis took centre stage. Troy had a range of discursive resources available to him which variously enabled and restrained his identity production. However, as stated by Taylor (2006) it is through talk and articulation in narratives that identities are produced, out of the resources made available by the larger contexts in which we live, work and socialize. Troy exercised power and agency in the telling of his narrative. Through his storytelling he negotiated power in the way in which he classified and organized his life
experiences in different contexts. He foregrounded certain categories of experiences while perhaps intentionally not recognising others and excluded these from conversation. Ricoeur (1987) states succinctly that the making of a story is an organisation of events into a story with a plot. Such was his power and entitlement as the narrative teller.

6.4 Lone Crusader

At the time of this interview, Patience was 35 years old, divorced from her hearing husband with a 12 year old hearing daughter. She is the only Deaf person amongst six siblings and was raised by her parents and a large extended family that comprised her grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins, all of whom lived in Umtata in the Eastern Cape. Her father is deceased and her mum recently retired as a school teacher. Three of her siblings are professionally qualified as a medical doctor, inspector in the Department of Labour and a project manager. Her other three siblings are university students, studying chemistry, law and journalism.

In the Deaf community the name “Patience” is likened to the flower, the rose. The sign for the rose is indicated by the R manual alphabet hand shape tapping once on either side of the nose. Patience’s sign name therefore is described by the P and R manual alphabet hand shapes tapping once respectively on either side of her nose. Patience is not profoundly Deaf, nor is she hard-of-hearing. She cannot hear any sounds in the right ear and has about 20 % hearing capacity in the left ear. However on this left side she does not have an ear canal, an ear opening or an ear lobe. Despite the minimal hearing capacity on the left, she experiences difficulty interpreting sounds as these are vague and distorted.

After completing Standard 10 (Grade 12), Patience worked as a support teacher at a special school for children with physical and intellectual disabilities in Umtata for two years owing to the lack of tertiary opportunities for her at the time. The principal where she schooled, informed her of the teacher training initiative at Springfield College of Education. Subsequent to completing the teacher education diploma in 2000, she was employed as a temporary teacher for about a year in a school for Deaf learners, situated along the KwaZulu-Natal South coast. She is currently permanently appointed and in her 10th year of teaching at a similar school, located in a
previously politically turbulent township in the KwaZulu-Natal midlands. She is the only Deaf teacher at this school, teaching English, South African Sign Language and Life Skills.

6.4.1 Experiencing deafness

Patience recalls vividly that she was very quiet as a child and was unable to speak.

*I did not talk – nothing. I always point, point, point when I need something.*

Her parents understood that she was Deaf shortly after she was born because she did not have an ear lobe. Patience however did not understand her condition. The realization that she was unable to hear emerged in a rather incongruous way several years later when she attended a school for the Deaf at about the age of 10 years. Prior to attending the school for the Deaf, she attended a school for hearing learners. It is ironic that she did not realize at this stage that she was Deaf, but sensed that she was different.

*I still did not know that I was Deaf. To me I felt normal but I know that there is something different between me and other children.*

Despite the fact that she was amongst hearing counterparts and that she could not hear the teacher Patience was comfortable and did not experience anxiety.

*All the time when she (the teacher) is spelling words, I don’t hear any words. I have to ask the other children what she is saying. And they used to laugh at me because I cannot hear.*

Notwithstanding the mockery, she admitted that she was not nervous.

Her parents realized that she was not benefiting from the educational programme at this school and transferred her to a school for the Deaf further away from home where she had to live in the residence. It was here that she began to experience her deafness when for the first time she was confronted with peers who were, like herself, not speaking but communicating with their hands.

*I felt a big difference here. I felt like I was in another world. I did not know what happened here. The children around me in that school made me feel very nervous.*

Patience remained introverted and it was only when she got involved in the classroom activities with the other learners that she realized that she was similar to them.
I never talk anything to anyone or ask anyone anything. I did some drawing and this girl started to sign and I knew that she was also not talking. The other children were also signing and I watched them. I started to realize that they are like me. And that I am in their situation.

With the realization came understanding and gradual acceptance as she continued to integrate with other learners.

Then I understood that I was Deaf. I felt strong and confident and achieved many things.

Patience’s identity as a Deaf person emerged only when she attended the school for the Deaf. It was here that she encountered others with whom she was able to identify and positioned herself amongst them as a Deaf person. Her identity as a Deaf person was constructed as she interfaced with her Deaf friends and more especially through their concomitant use of sign language which is the language that she contrived as a child as she pointed for reference. She positioned herself first within the discourse of deafness with subtle reference to the power and autonomy that she held in knowing of her reality and then determined that they are like me. It is as if she diagnosed her deafness first and then determined that the other learners were similar to her. Each of the other participants indicated that first they saw other Deaf learners then realized that they (participants) were like them (learners). Prior to this realization she described her feelings.

I felt like I was lost. I have no idea why they bring me here to this school.

Following her experience of bewilderment and apprehension associated with being admitted to this school, she was able to establish her own identity as a Deaf person as she understood that they shared the common characteristic of not being able to hear and used sign language to communicate.

I started to feel a bit happy and I understood why my parents brought me here to this school.

At the Deaf school she connected with her Deaf peers. This prompted her voluntary membership in the larger community of Deaf persons and she takes on the Deaf identity. I am in their situation. Taylor’s (1989) emphasis on the importance of a “defining community” in the construction of identity is compelling. He argues that individuals define themselves through interactions and exchanges with people in communities. The self exists and labels itself by virtue of participation in ‘webs of interlocution’
Patience espoused agency as she willingly positioned herself self-determining individual, within the discourse of deafness. Furthermore agency as we know it theoretically has bi-directional disposition. Her identity as a D/deaf person emanated from her agency as well as the collective structure of group. Identities are evolving constantly and continuously as she secured her individual D/deaf identity and simultaneously constructed her identity as a member of a distinctly defined group. Patience embraced the new-found identity as a D/deaf learner and enjoyed several notable achievements at this school. She gained foothold as a confident and self-assured being as she participated in dance, drama and sport and was awarded several certificates for both curricular and co-curricular accomplishments.

*I was very proud of myself because I achieved a lot.*

Patience’s pride and gratification at this school ended abruptly owing to the demise of her father. This compelled her to have to leave the familiarity and security of the Deaf school to attend a school for hearing learners close to her home - a course which was fraught with negative experiences. Her mother could no longer afford to keep her at this school as this required both schooling and residential fees and there were other children in the family to support. Her mother made this decision even though it would be counter productive to her educational progress. In addition to causing her to have to leave the school for the Deaf, the demise of her father was distressing and heartrending.

*That was very, very painful for me. He was the one that supported me and gave me the full, full love. My mother favoured the other children more than me. She pretended to love me …*

Her father’s death left a void in her life. He was instrumental in admitting her at the school for the Deaf and attended to her needs.

*He helped put me in the Deaf school and when I was there, he always visited me. He always visited me and brought me food and something to eat and clothes. He used to check if I’m alright in school. He will come to meet my teachers and check about my schoolwork.*

There is distinct divergence in the relationship and the bonding that Patience had with each of her parents. This is evident in the way in which Patience positioned herself relative to her mother and her father and this positioning informed the extent to which each affirmed her identity as a Deaf person. The concept of the relational self is significant in identity construction as identities
are constructed in relationships and through relationships. The idea that is expounded here is that learning and knowing the self takes place in relationships, and that the self is formed, given meaning and understood in the context of its relations with others. As a relational phenomenon her identity could have presented as a site of struggle and disunity owing the inconsistency in the way in which each of her parents responded to her deafness. To Patience her father affirmed her deafness since he admitted her to the Deaf school, visited her and showed interest in her progress while her mother showed disregard for her deafness since she was instrumental in removing her from the Deaf school after which she was compelled to attend a school for hearing learners. Patience was aware though that her mother could not afford the school and residential at the Deaf school which was afar from her family home.

Patience admits to having had the most unpleasant and unforgettable experiences when she was forced to attend the school for hearing learners, which she refers to as the ‘hearing school’.

*I think my worst negative experiences were about the way I was treated in the hearing school.*

*When I came to the hearing school, I was very, very frustrated. I loved the Deaf school and I was doing well there. The environment made me feel comfortable because of sign language and Deaf Culture and everybody was very much friendly. We did many things together and this made me feel part of a group. We understood each other and knew each other and we were happy together. But going back to the hearing school was not good. The teachers here did not understand about Deafness. They used to shout at me and mock me.*

In her narrative Patience reveals her position of a confident, bold and celebrated learner at the ‘Deaf school’, owing to her achievements and her contentment here. She had constructed her identity as a Deaf person through the cultural structures of the Deaf school, communal association with other Deaf learners, the use of sign language and subscription to the tenets of Deaf culture. Her D/deaf identity was given meaning in the context of her positioning in the overall D/deaf discourse, her membership in the communal structure, and in the framework of her beliefs, values and ideologies, as these collectively and individually intersected with her biographical projects. But as the narrative unfolded reflexively, with increasingly more reference markers to herself as the embattled person, it became evident that her new position in the ‘hearing school’ was fragile, insecure and contradictory to the previous position. She attempted
to re-negotiate her new position and re-integrate hearingness as part of her sense of self. Hall (2000) states that identities are points of temporary attachment to subject positions, in structures and discourses. She espoused the identity of a Deaf person and positioned herself in its discourse while she was at the Deaf school but failed to hold on to this dominant identity in the hearing school. It was clear that she was losing her footing, was forced into a challenging political space, and was beginning to lose her voice as a Deaf person. Her position in the hearing school would redefine her identity accordingly. Physiologically she is a deaf person and she elected to position herself in the culturally Deaf discourse. Although the D/deaf identities would remain layered in her selfhood, their dominance was being challenged by her new positioning in the hearing school.

Her initial years in the ‘hearing school’ were disconcerting and demeaning as she described several episodes when educators inflicted humiliation, embarrassment and exclusionary practices on her, all attributed to her deafness.

*There’s one teacher who will always say to me “you are Deaf – you cannot do that”. In her mind she thinks that a person who is Deaf is not capable of doing many things. She believed that Deaf are not normal and that they cannot do normal things like everybody else. So I kept quiet and I cried outside.*

Patience’s strength of character was gradually eroded. She oftentimes left school crying and returned home to her grandmother to lament what had happened. Each time her enraged grandmother had to intervene by seeking recourse with the Principal who in turn would appeal to the teachers to treat Patience with respect and dignity. In response they would offer the most patronising overtures towards Patience but this was only temporary as the humiliation would re-surface soon after.

Through sheer dint of determination and resolve Patience once again re-negotiated her identity as a student, shed the docile and submissive mantle, and what emerged was the same strength of character that she once enjoyed in the ‘Deaf school’. She confronted the needlework teacher.

*She used to shout at me and embarrass me because I was Deaf. And in her subject the other children used to laugh at me. She thought that she could say anything to me and abuse me.*
But now I was frustrated. I became brave and I started to challenge her. If I did not understand then I asked her to repeat. I was not frightened of her anymore. She was shocked and she started to respect me.

Patience claims agency and determines that she will not allow the needlework teacher to oppress and stifle the successful-learner identity that she desires for herself. She demonstrates the will to self-determine and self-interpret her learner identity through the reflexive capacity of the mind and through recall of her previous experience as a successful learner that had accomplished. Adams (2003) in his discussion of sociologist GH Mead’s (1934) research, states that the personal self is embedded in social contexts, and the attitudes and actions of important others was seen to impact significantly on the formation of the personal self. Patience determined that she would not let the needlework teacher impact negatively on her cultural context as a learner. She was aware of how she wanted to position herself in this context and re-negotiated her relationship with the teacher to achieve this.

Patience’s tenure as a scholar revealed identities that were dual as she transitioned from hearing to Deaf to hearing identities, a jagged yet fluid and continuous process. She voluntarily assumed a Deaf identity at the ‘Deaf school’ when she understood her Deaf character and when she felt a sense of oneness with her Deaf peers. A relationship between her self-identity as a D/deaf person and others belonging to the same group was established and this brought solidarity and resilience to her reality. Her identities as a learner are also foregrounded in her narrative as she reveals her determination to succeed and beat the barriers to access to education. She knew she had the potential to succeed. There were several other factors that shaped her identity as a learner. This included her agency which she revealed in her resolve to combat discriminatory attitudes of her teachers and hearing peers. In addition the support and affirmation from her grandmother also shaped her identity as a successful learner.

In the ‘hearing school’ Patience had to adopt the hearing identity and take on an alternate subject position in the discourse of normalcy. She needed to internalize this new disposition and reconstruct her new self differently. In the new discourse she was compelled to abstain from signing, since nobody would comprehend this, and to attempt verbal articulation. She had to train herself to develop lip-reading skills and listening competency in the malformed ear. The group
cohesion and spontaneous bonding that prevailed between herself and other members of the Deaf cultural community were now non-existent.

Patience intentionally set out a new agenda in her aim to restore coherence in her life. *I just joined them in everything. If they sing, I sing. What they do, I do. My idea was to show them that I am normal, like them.* Patience invokes her agency and does not reject or offer resistance to the hearing identity. She took on subject positions that were informed by the discourse of normalcy. Here in the hearing school, the hearing discourse would obviously be more powerful and would set in place the process to re-define her identity within the cultural context of ‘hearingness’. The D/deaf identity will no longer be foregrounded but will remain amongst the many layers of other identities. Crucial in the act of assuming new and different subject positions is the way in which Patience experiences her subjectivities. According to Blackman et al (2008) subjectivity is an active agent that shapes and is shaped by prevailing social, cultural and political spaces and in this account subjectivity is how she experiences the lived multiplicity of positionings at any particular time. The multiplicity of positionings at any particular time is aligned to Giddens’ (2002) suggestion of the incompleteness and dynamism of identity construction and that identity construction is a non-linear, unstable process where new factors emerge constantly and through which an individual may either confirm or problematize who she/he becomes.

A significant and prominent factor that guided Patience’s sense of self and the way in which she positioned herself during her youth was her profound and unwavering religious conviction. This was deep and intense and materialized frequently in her narrative. The strength and self-assurance with which she is endowed seemed to emerge directly from her religious fervour and through this conviction she legitimizes her deafness. *As I was growing up, I read the Bible a lot. I remember reading the Bible and there was a verse about Deaf people. Then I felt that it is not a shock to be Deaf. It is not a bad thing. I read in the Bible that there was a Deaf person and Jesus accepted that person. … I felt that God was with me and I did not feel bad about myself. I did not blame anybody or be angry with anybody about why I was Deaf. I saw myself as being able to do things like other people.* Later in the narrative she says: *I believe that if you are a committed Christian, you can learn and achieve many things. You can stand on your
own feet and be brave. There are several other similar convictions of faith throughout the narrative. Concurrent with the several other identities that are being disclosed in the narrative, is the identity that is embedded in the discourse of religion. Through this identity she moralizes, expresses ethical values and beliefs, and makes value judgments about people in her environment, and their actions.

Patience’s self-awareness does not exist in isolation. In this context her self-consciousness existed in relationship to an ‘other’ which served to validate her existence. Hall’s (2004) theory of connectedness relates to the relationship between Patience and the Bible, which is the ‘other’. The theory argues identity does not merely originate from the individual but emerges through processes of negotiation and contextualization. I never stopped reading the Bible. I had 2 Bibles – one in English and one in Xhosa. I used to read and read and look in the dictionary for the meanings of words.

Any discourse is meaningless in the absence of a subject since it is the subject who brings interpretation and meaning to the discourse. Patience subjected herself to the discourse of religion and composed an identity through subjectification. She positioned herself positively in the discourse as she identified with and accepted this positioning. In addition there appeared to be an interactive process in which she actively engaged with the Bible as an interlocutor. She gave human aspect to the Bible and it was almost as if the Bible spoke to her and guided the affirmed interpretation of her identity as a Deaf person. In her narrative, Patience attributes her achievements, behaviour, career, moral standing, relationships, her marriage and divorce and other aspects of her life to her deep commitment to the Biblical discourses that she positioned herself in. This is the lens through which she made meaning of her life and her life course.

Patience invokes her agency and subjectivity and positions herself wilfully in the discourse of religion. Subjectivity within post structuralism refers to who we are and the ways in which we understand and position ourselves within discourses and institutional practices. This may be done either consciously or unconsciously. She positions herself in particular ways within the religious discourse and through this positioning she negotiates her deaf identity. It is through the structuration process and the intertwined relationship between her agency and the Biblical
discourses in which she positions herself, that her strong religious identity is constructed. Perhaps in the final reflexive quest for coherence the dichotomy of agentic and structural influence ought to be rejected in deference to intertwined manipulation.

There is always the presence of strong evaluations in narratives in general and this is also present in Patience’s narratives. In fact narratives are connected to the idea that people invariably orient themselves and make changes in life through ongoing evaluations. Taylor (1989) informs that evaluations are pivotal to self-interpretations and narratives can be an intentional or inadvertent form of self-interpretation. Our everyday experiences are not neutral but instead are laden with value and our identities are shaped by the experiences that we value, the amount of value that we attribute to these experiences, and equally significant are the experiences that we do not value. In the similar context, Patience has identified certain morals and values that she aspires to and embraces and accepts what is good and rejects what is not morally unacceptable. The way in which she positions herself with the context of acceptable and unacceptable value discourses shapes her multiple identities.

Patience described her relationship with her Deaf role model and mentor, a relationship that she has profound respect for. *She taught me to stand up and fight for my rights, fight against oppression and not accept anything that was not good for the Deaf. She taught me to tell the truth about how I feel about anything or any person. She taught me to tell the person: you are wrong, this is wrong and this is right. She taught me about my rights as a Deaf person.*

The mentor presented the resource that made Patience aware of her rights and of issues that pertain to social justice. The rights discourse is yet another discourse that shapes her multiple identities. Within this space, she has formulated her goals and embraced what she conceived as good, self-affirming and worthy and has constructed a moral identity. The moral identity that she espouses intersects with her subject positions in other discourses of her life and has even merged into her teaching identity. The attitudes, values, expectations and judgements that constitute her moral identity infuse with the various subject positions she takes, including her position as a teacher. This is evident, as will be seen in the next section which encompasses Patience’s life as a teacher, in the way in which she lobbies, defends, and takes up the cause for righteousness of the Deaf learners in her school. Fearlessly she tackles other hearing teachers in her school and
ensures that the Deaf learners are not denied opportunities that would promote their academic and personal advancement.

Individuals ascribe simultaneously to several sets of norms. The norms which are framed by particular discourses accumulate over time and are reified. A post-structural view of identity foregrounds the issues of temporality and spatial situatedness. One cannot assume, therefore, that such enactments arise out of a ‘true’ or ‘fixed’ identity. Subject positions, as noted in Patience’s case, are not stable, continuous or linear. They can shift, are sometimes discontinuous and conflictual, and reveal an arbitrary and constructed nature.

6.4.2 Experiencing teaching

This section will focus on how Patience re-invents and re-interprets her adverse life experiences and uses this as a resource for constructing a transformative teaching role. Her undesirable life experiences include marginalization and exclusion on account of her deafness at the hearing school she attended and in her home, her experiences of challenge and confrontation in her first teaching context, her experience of failure in the marital relationship and several critical incidents. Her narrative as a teacher unfolds as a long and arduous journey that becomes a quest for justice and social rights. Along this journey there are interpersonal, systemic and structural resistances to endure and to overcome in the context of her school. Though intangible, these experiences materialize as resources which she deploys to reconfigure her sense of self and create a transformative professional identity. This is evident in the way in which she presents herself as teacher, divergent to her earlier life and divergent to the way in which her colleagues present as teachers. Her professional identity reveals change in her attitude to her teaching, to the school management and the curriculum, to her colleagues, to her learners and their parents and to her relationship with her daughter.

In her transformative schema her focus was on the learners, their right to education and more especially their right to be educated effectively and sincerely, both of which she was denied as a school learner. She is goal-directed and sets out to make a difference. She is adamant that
schools are first and foremost about educating children. The secondary function of schools is, perhaps for the purpose of enhancing the personal and professional lives of teachers. 

*I’m working for the government and I’m doing my job for justice, for the children, not for myself because schools are not about who you are, not about yourself and not about people. Schools are about children.*

Her agenda for the children went beyond academic learning. Her motive was to prepare them for life after school, to be emotionally self-sufficient and to have strength of character. She is deeply aware that this knowledge does not come incidentally to the learners. These are life-skills that need to be taught to them consciously.

*I want the children to have a good life and a good future and be able to identify the problems that happen in their lives when they become adults.*

Later she elaborated her personal efforts.

*I try to motivate them, teach them what life is about – problems, poverty, different people’s attitudes and how to deal with these problems.* There is an overt sense of agency in the conscious role that Patience chooses to perform to privilege those who are socially disadvantaged, relative to her own life experiences. In this way she acts deliberately to transform the young minds and the lives of the learners and in so doing positions herself as a teacher that has power, influence and is able to effect positive social change. In her second, permanent teaching position she reveals an identity of a social rights activist teacher. This is in contrast with her first, temporary appointment where she presents her identity as an embattled, aggrieved teacher that was oppressed by the Principal. This draws attention to the relationship between her new, empowered identity as a teacher and the agency she now espouses.

After qualifying, Patience was appointed as a teacher at a secondary school, where there was complete lack of discipline amongst learners. She is discerning and objective in her approach and knows that education can only be effective when learners are receptive, motivated and committed. Their lack of discipline and irreverent attitudes to teachers would not augur well for their learning. So she makes it her mission to uncover the reason for their belligerence.

*The behaviour of the children was bad, they had no manners, and they had no respect for adults. There was always fighting and arguing between teachers and children. I called all the
children and told them to sit down and I asked them: What is your problem? Why is your behaviour so bad? When they told me, I cried.

She was able to establish an intimate bond with the learners since she communicated with them in sign language and also since she lived in the staff quarters at the school. She was able to spend quality time with the learners in the afternoons and weekends. Patience was successful in accomplishing her mission which was to establish why the learners were retaliatory, and boldly claims credit for this. Patience’s motive in questioning the children was to ascertain the cause of their lack of discipline and to support them towards some resolution. The learners seemed to be agitated and she wanted to foster understanding and rapport between the teachers and learners.

It was distressing for Patience when after discussions with the learners she was forced to attribute their discontentment and frustration to sign language. There was complete lack of effective communication between the learners and their hearing teachers since they were not adequately skilled in sign language and could neither teach appropriately nor communicate with an acceptable level of comprehension. The children did not understand the teachers and this was aggravating to say the least. Patience knew all too well the humiliation that she experienced at not understanding and not being understood and this made her empathetic to the plight of the learners. Ironically, she became disliked by the principal and this lead to a series of altercations and confrontations with the school principal.

But one person she did not like most was me because I changed the lives of the children in that school.

Patience discovered the key cause of the learners’ frustration and ill-discipline but this lead to an even greater predicament for her.

But the teachers refused to believe that sign language was the issue. The teachers are quick in showing the children’s books and everything is correct, correct, correct. But the children say that they don’t understand what they are writing – the teachers are giving them the answers because they are afraid of the principal. Then in the tests and exams they are failing.

Patience felt that by doing this the hearing teachers were dishonest and insincere towards the learners and it pained her to see the learners being betrayed in this way. And furthermore as long as this situation prevailed the learners would not benefit from the educational programme and their lives as adults would be stymied.
Her expectation that she would receive support from the principal to institute plans for the re-
skilling of teachers in teaching the Deaf, and to initiate attempts at remedying of this situation
was thwarted since it caused an adverse reaction from the principal. *She hated me! She started
to clash and fight with me. The teachers also were angry with me and shouted at the children
because they (the learners) told me that they don’t understand the teachers and the teachers
don’t know sign language. … it is their right to be taught in sign language and to understand
and to learn. The children must grow up knowing what to do and how to solve problems in
school, home and in the community.* Patience believed soundly in the precept that superior
quality basic education was the cornerstone for building character and stability in adulthood. She
was convinced that the quality of education that the children were receiving at the school would
not serve them well in adulthood.

She introspected on the exclusion that she experienced in her younger days at home where she
was the only hearing person, and when as a Deaf person she attended a school for hearing
learners. It was only when she was admitted to the Deaf school that a sense of stability and
coherence started to prevail in her life as she began to understand who and ‘how’ she was as a
person. She was able to interpret and give meaning to herself as a Deaf person. With a newly
acquired language, she positioned herself into the D/deaf discourse community and for the first
time she began to experience inclusion and a sense of integratedness. She extrapolated this
personal experience to the dilemma of the learners and it is a poignant moment for her when she
realizes that:

*The worst thing for Deaf children is when their school does not support them.*

It is expected that the bonding and communal identity that a Deaf learner experiences in a Deaf
school is virtually inviolable. While most hearing people experience communal identities within
families and extended family relationships from early childhood, D/deaf children experience
communal identities only when they enter school. Despite having spent many years in the family
institution, shared identity is only achieved at the Deaf school. For this reason the Deaf school
becomes a revered institution to its learners, where it is not expected that they will be betrayed.
Tajfel and Turner (1986) explain that social identity is defined by individual identification within a group and can extend to group attachment to an institution. This is a process based on understanding of group membership and on an emotional attachment to the group and the institution. The writers claim that identity lays dormant, waiting to be ‘switched on’ in the presence of others. But identities are forever at the mercy of change agents as different discourses constantly compete to re-define and re-shape our identities. This caused the learners’ shared and communal identities to become fragmented. Patience could not help personalizing the learners’ feelings of unhappiness and dejection at school since these were her feelings at one time and she empathized with their plight.

The school principal here was instrumental in the way in which Patience’s identity as a teacher is constructed. She says that the principal detested her and this was evident in the way in which the principal interfaced with her thereafter. The discourse of authority that the Principal represented oppressed Patience and thwarted her enthusiasm as a teacher.

*The Principal – she really made me want to leave that school. I liked the children very much but I was not happy there. … I was only interested in the children. What I did was for the sake of the children – all children, not only Black children. … The children are innocent.*

The children were her inspiration and justice prevailed here in a perverted manner and it was indeed the principal’s unfavourable response to her that heightened her resolve. *I told myself that I will continue fighting for what is right.* She did not allow this to diminish her activist spirit. In fact she became stronger and bolder and showed even greater determination to protect the rights of the Deaf learners.

There developed a divide between Patience and the hearing teachers as she positioned herself in opposition to them. Although she is a teacher foremost she distinguishes herself from the hearing fraternity and distinguishes herself as being different from them in that they are hearing teachers and she is a Deaf teacher.

She says of the hearing teachers: *When they socialize they are very good. They smile, talk, joke a lot together but when it comes to work they are horrible - they argue, argue, argue a lot. They are always gossiping, insulting, fighting with each other and jealous of each other. They do all this in front of the children - they argue with bad attitude.*
Later in her narrative she remarks: *There is always conflict and fighting about promotions. One person gets the position and the others continue arguing about it. They will not give up. They don’t think about children.*

She constructs hearing teachers in particular ways here. Firstly what is significant in this context is that Patience belongs to a community of Deaf people and to a community of teacher practitioners. As a member of a community of practitioners, identity is constructed through mutual engagement of participants, negotiation of a joint enterprise and mutual accountability. These dimensions of practice, according to Wenger (1998), give a community competence and coherence and become facets of identity. In addition to being projects of the self, identities are also reflected in the attachments that people form with others (Hall, 2004). Individuals define themselves through interactions and exchanges with people in ‘communities’ and the self exists and labels itself by virtue of participation in these networks of interaction.

However Patience distinguishes and distances herself from the fraternity of hearing teachers in her school, where she is the only D/deaf teacher. She positions herself apart from this group of teachers, not because they are hearing and she is D/deaf, but because of their values systems, lack of professionalism and their oppressive behaviour. The inconsistency in membership status in the two communities highlights the fluidity of identities and that one voice can simultaneously occupy different spaces and that identities may be constituted in the discourses associated with each of these spaces. The issue of contention here is a teacher who is a professional (Patience) and the group of hearing teachers who are not. Patience’s identity as a teacher and as a professional is in conflict with the ‘other’ even though they are positioned within the same community of practitioners. Identities therefore may not necessarily be consistent amongst members of a community of practice. Patience’s identity as a teacher is constructed in conflict with the identities shared by the other teachers in the community of practitioners. The lack of professionalism, we need to note, is not peculiar to hearing teachers; such indiscretion may also prevail amongst D/deaf teachers.

Patience indiscriminately describes the lack of professionalism of her hearing colleagues and by doing so she creates a schema of this particular group of hearing teachers in her narrative. The
audience in the narrative partnership is required to formulate an understanding and conceptualization of them as a distinct group. They argue, gossip, insult, fight, contest promotions and display bad attitudes. In aggravation they do this in the presence of learners and do not show concern for their main purpose which is educate the learners. Critical here is that Patience dissociates herself from the subject positions of the hearing teachers. This dissociation becomes a resource which she uses as capital to construct her own identity.

Jita (2004) refers to such experiences as ‘resources of biography’. Her identity as a teacher is constructed as she fluidly shifts and repositions herself away from the schema of the hearing teachers. She rejects and disparages the subject positions by which she defines them and instead shapes her identity through the discourse of the teacher who is characterised by professionalism and integrity. Other factors that shape her identity as a teacher may include her quest for social rights and justice, her deep religious conviction and her experiences of adversity. As she rejects these subject positions in her narrative, Patience reveals her own images, expectations, practices, opinions and values of how she wants to perform as a teacher and this is significant for her own attempts at seeking coherence.

Patience cites reasons why she thinks that the Deaf learners prefer Deaf teachers and in these reasons the social justice and activist discourses that construct her teaching identity are evident. *They like Deaf teachers because they learn a lot from us. They also see us as role models. We help them to build confidence. When they are with us, we teach them not to be afraid to say anything and to bring out what they feel. We teach them that it is their right to say what you want to and what you believe.*

She also advances reasons why she believes the Deaf learners in her school don’t like hearing teachers in their school.

*They don’t give the children love, proper care and encouragement. Yes they care but not properly. They don’t participate in activities with the children, extra curricular activities such as sports. … They shout and say to the children that they are stupid. They pretend to do a lot of things for the children but all the time they are swearing. I can see their faces are not satisfied. All the time they use bad words with the children.*
There is repeated reference to “we”, the Deaf teachers, and “they” the hearing teachers, as she presents the Deaf and hearing teachers in a binary association in terms of how each respectively relates to the Deaf learners. Patience slates the hearing teachers and presents them as being demoralizing and demeaning of the Deaf. No acclaim is given to hearing teachers for the many years during which they taught the Deaf and when there were no qualified Deaf teachers. There is a feeble patronising attempt at acknowledgement of hearing teachers’ efforts.

Yes they care but not properly.

Her own qualification and appointment as a teacher becomes a paradox. Was she not a product, and a successful one at that, of tireless efforts and diligence of hearing teachers and hearing lecturers?

On the contrary she presents the Deaf teachers as the ideal role-models to the Deaf learners, empowering in their stance and effective in their teaching. The image that Patience presents is that of the utopic teacher – the perfect response to all the controversies that have permeated Deaf education for decades. It is clear that the position of power that she holds relative to the hearing teachers is connected to her competence and their incompetence in sign language. Perhaps it for this reason, that she is the preferred teacher amongst the learners.

The significance of language is profound owing to its embeddedness in the personal, social, political and cultural systems that pervade our lives. Language is an integral part of one’s culture and identity, and language is reputed to be a means of solidarity, resilience and identity within a culture or social group. In Deaf culture, as well as in all other cultures, a person has the tendency to form a close bond or relationship with a group of people who share a common language, and in this instance she shares sign language with the Deaf learners. It is through the sharing of this exclusive language of manual symbols that Patience together with the learners developed a unique and distinctive reality of the world through their shared D/deaf lens.

Armed with the power of language, Patience negotiates a position of supremacy over hearing teachers. She creates a hierarchy in the school whereby the Deaf teachers gain ascendancy over hearing teachers owing to their use of sign language. Sign language is the dominant language in the Deaf cultural setting and this gives hegemony to its users, while those who are not able to use
the language effectively, such as the hearing teachers, assume lower or outsider status relative to the Deaf community.

There are several subject positions that Patience adopts in the course of her performance as ‘teacher’ in the school for Deaf learners. These include kind and caring teacher, problem-solving teacher, counsellor, teacher of moral values, believer in the Bible, role-model teacher, confidence builder, a social rights activist, motivator, disciplinarian, communicator, community builder and several other such descriptors that are similarly aligned. If all of these subject positions are clustered they resonate with the identity of Deaf lobbyist, advocate of Deaf needs and defender of Deaf rights. Patience has negotiated an identity that presents as a LONE CRUSADER of the Deaf. She campaigns fearlessly and relentlessly for Deaf rights: the right to quality education, the right to effective teaching, the right to accessing learning through the medium of sign language, the right to counselling support, the right to resources to facilitate learning, the right to ‘speak out’ and other such rights. Not only does she campaign for their rights, she is acutely aware of their responsibilities as learners: to show good conduct, to do homework, to attend school regularly, to care for school property, to respect teachers and to be worthy community members and commendable citizens. She also campaigns for teacher professionalism.
6.5 Dare to be Different

Violet was born in Darnall, a small town on the North Coast of KwaZulu-Natal. Her father and three siblings are in professional employment. Her need for specialized schooling prompted her family to relocate to Stanger, also on the North Coast of KwaZulu-Natal, a larger town more urbanized and better resourced. She spent most of her childhood here attending various schools all of which were not appropriate for her condition of deafness.

The cause of Violet’s deafness is unknown, but her parents are aware that she was born Deaf. Her father responded promptly to her inability to hear and sought therapeutic intervention through hearing aid technology. Violet was fitted with hearing aids when she was three years old and, in addition attended a private audiology clinic for speech therapy. The speech therapy and the use of hearing aids from a very young age enhanced her speech development. Although Violet subscribes to the culturally Deaf discourse, she has relatively intelligible speech and good lip-reading capacity, through which she is able to communicate with persons who are unable to use sign language. She has a Deaf spouse who is a teacher aide at a Deaf school and they have two hearing sons now aged 5 and 8 years. Her sign name is referenced by a V, followed immediately by a J, using the right-handed finger spelling alphabet and positioned near the forehead.

Violet was 31 years old at the time of this interview in 2008. She graduated with her Teaching Diploma in 2000. When she was appointed to her school in April 2001, she taught in the Junior Primary Phase. Five years later she was redeployed to the Secondary Phase at the behest of the school’s management. The management deemed that her natural signing ability and mature level of interaction will benefit senior learners in the academic and skills-based learning programs. Currently she teaches Hospitality Studies in Grades 10 to 12, and several other skills courses, including needlecraft, garment making and cooking to learners in an alternative Skills Development Programme designed for learners who are unable to pursue an academic programme.

6.5.1 Experiencing deafness

Violet’s earliest awareness of being Deaf was that she communicated differently relative to her siblings.
When I was with my family I realized that I did not fit in because they only talked and I had no speech and I could not hear. I remember when I asked my mum for something, my mum would shout and say “What you want?” I would look at her and try to understand what she’s trying to say. It was difficult as I used to point my finger only.

To this day as a teacher she has deep respect for the innocuous act of pointing and recalls it with veneration. This is a simple, insignificant, inconspicuous gesture but for the Deaf child who has not entered school and is yet unaware of the possibilities of language, the gesture of pointing is a powerful survival tool.

Today as a teacher when I see a Deaf child coming from a rural place and when they have no language and their first language is pointing, that makes me remember how difficult communication is.

She observed also that there was a connectedness between her parents and her siblings through their communication.

In my family, my brothers and sister, I observed they have a bond with my mother and father, I saw that they always speak but I realized I’m different because I could not talk. I’m not same like my brothers and sister.

Through her understanding of being different Violet constructs an identity of herself as a ‘non-speaking’, person relative to the way in which her parents and siblings presented themselves through speaking. She became aware that her ‘non-speaking’ character was a disadvantage and envied the interaction amongst family members and other hearing people. She cherished the hope that one day she will be able to hear.

When I saw how children used to speak to their parents and teachers, that’s the time I wished to be like them.

Like most other families that experience deafness for the first time, her family was not aware that there were schools that catered especially to the needs of Deaf children. As a result her schooling was turbulent with frequent disruptions through moving to several schools. She was first admitted to a training centre in Stanger, a small town situated on the North Coast of KwaZulu-Natal. Communication was a challenge to her here and she did not feel comfortable.
There they spoke and I did not have the courage to communicate and make friends. … That school was for blind, cripple and mentally retarded. In class I used to catch up quicker and my teacher told my dad that I don’t fit in that school.

Her other experience of being misplaced was when she was admitted to a specialized unit in an ordinary mainstream school that addressed the needs of slow and learning disabled learners. Her teacher advised her parents that despite her deafness and associated communication challenges, her capacity to learn was more advanced than the others in the class and suggested that she attend a mainstream school. These were positive and constructive interventions from hearing teachers.

Neither Violet nor her father anticipated how daunting and demoralizing an experience this would be.

I didn’t know that the language will be difficult in a mainstream school, but I felt I should take the challenge. The teachers and learners were fast speakers, they never have patience to let me see and hear what they were saying. That time I was really emotional and frustrated too, but I never blame them because they never saw a Deaf person before. In that school I was the only Deaf learner.

Fortunately, and finally, this school assisted in placing her at a school for Deaf learners where she observed learners and teachers communicating with their hands, similar to the gestural language that she devised for her survival.

I realized that I am linked to the school and also belonged here… I felt that my language is here, I was happy, the teachers were so motivated to teach the Deaf and they had warm hearts, they showed love that’s best for Deaf children.

She only understood that her difference was deafness when she went to the school for Deaf learners at about the age of 9 years.

When I entered the school for the Deaf, I saw them using their hands a lot and I realized I am in the right place, a school for the Deaf and with my Deaf friends. I knew that this was where I belong.

Violet started learning how to communicate in sign language when she was admitted to the Deaf school. This accentuated the lack of communication in her family. Most of her childhood and
schooling years were spent away from her family since Violet lived in the school residence. She returned home in the school holidays to a family that was still unable to communicate with her. Interaction with her parents and siblings turned out to be quarrelsome because they misunderstood each other. She described an incident which occurred when she was about seven years old.

*When my father takes us to the shop he always asked my brothers and sister what they wanted first and leaves me for last. Sometimes they even forget about me, sometimes they say I can’t talk and they know what I like, but whatever they buy is not what I like. I remember one day when my father bought a new car, he told me not to mess the car. He was signing to me trying to make me understand, My father bought juice for my brothers and sister and he got me a chocolate, I told him I don’t want the chocolate but he said I have to eat it. I was so upset. I ignored the chocolate and left it on the car seat and it melted. The paper was opened and the car was messed. That time my father was angry and he hit me.*

She was disdainful of her parents for treating her as a lesser being on account of her deafness while living away from the family exacerbated the marginalization she experienced.

Most children start to spontaneously develop a cultural identity from infancy as parents and family members inadvertently transmit values, norms and conventions. For Deaf children the acquisition of their cultural identity is delayed until the time they attend a school for Deaf learners, which is their first exposure to Deaf culture.

*There is no one to lead us and teach us during our childhood … so when we come to the Deaf school we start to learn for the first time about Deaf culture and beliefs.*

It was only when she attended the Deaf school that Violet started to construct her identity as a D/deaf person. Her identity as a D/deaf person was shaped jointly by the D/deaf learners and the Deaf school. She gained in confidence and concomitantly started to enjoy acclaim in all her achievements.

*I was really good in academics as well good in sports. I had a good name and my behaviour was good in the hostel. I used to participate in beauty contests and drama … This made me confident because when I was in the hearing school I did not have these opportunities … My greatest achievement … was being in the first group of Deaf students to matriculate 1996.*

Violet participated amongst Deaf competitors in various co-curricular, sporting and cultural events and was able to match her abilities favourably amongst like peers.
Deaf people cannot live exclusively in a world of Deaf people. Ideally this would keep them feeling comfortable and secure in being amongst culturally familiar people. Violet conceded that it was imperative for the D/deaf to interact with the wider hearing culture of which they are a linguistic subculture. However she experienced challenges with such interaction and one such incident caused her to be embarrassed about her deafness.

_I remember I was chosen to attend the Children’s Rights Summit in Durban. There were many hearing children from different schools. I was selected to represent our school .... We had to form a circle and all of us had to debate about children’s rights. One teacher from a hearing school asked all of us questions but she forgot to ask me. When I reminded her she looked at me angrily and said in a loud voice, “You missed your turn. You did not pay attention.” Everyone was laughing. She did not know that I was Deaf and she thought that I was rude. That time was most embarrassing for me._

Incidents such as these occur frequently when socializing with hearing people. But Violet did not show bitterness at being humiliated nor did she feel entirely rejected by the group. She remained rational and reasoned that the person responded in that way as she was unaware that she was Deaf. _They often forget about us and we feel excluded because we don’t hear them._

To her this is a normal, natural reaction of someone who is unaware of how to communicate with the Deaf rather than a flagrant violation of her rights as a Deaf person. It had not been easy growing up with many hearing people around her. _It was difficult because every time I would ask them to look at me and talk. Sometimes my hearing aid is not loud, sometimes my battery gets dead. Not all hearing people are sensitive._

Violet is not affected by the insensitivity of the hearing world.

Violet is indebted to the presence of active role models who had a strong, positive influence on her life and teachers who motivated her and encouraged self-confidence.

_We had a hearing principal who had a strong belief in the Deaf and he believed that one day this group will become Deaf teachers. He influenced us to do our matric … They (some teachers) also had a vision for us but we never expect it. They found a place where we could fit. I can say these people really worked hard to make us what we are today._
Despite the impediments that she experienced at the various hearing schools she attended, Violet is now a proud and confident Deaf person and Deaf teacher, inspired by being in a Deaf school.

*Compared to when I was in a hearing school I did not have confidence being Deaf. But when I entered a school for the Deaf, that’s where I started to build my confidence and I had to accept how I am. I felt I had to change myself because God can’t make me hear again…. It’s good being a Deaf person, but you have to be positive, keep to your Deaf culture and language.*

Sign language has been invaluable in her life, because it created,

*… a strong bond in the Deaf community and between Deaf adults and Deaf children as the medium of communication. Sign language is the way of making Deaf build confidence. Through sign language we are able to communicate with other Deaf people and with hearing people today.*

Violet is refreshingly different in her response to hearing people. She does not hold sign language as a shield to keep hearing people out of the Deaf laager. Instead she sees it as an assistive mechanism to draw hearing people into her world and to create opportunities for integration. She demonstrates willingness to mingle with the hearing but retains strong allegiance to Deaf culture.

*Deaf culture is when we socialize not only with Deaf people but hard of hearing people as well. There are rules in our culture, and we have to respect Deaf culture. Hearing people can also be part of our culture…*

Although she refers to the two cultures as being separate entities she implies that there can be harmonious co-existence and extends an invitation to hearing people to enter the Deaf space. This is an exceptional and atypical quality of a culturally Deaf person as they are generally territorial and tend to view the hearing as invaders of their privileged and exclusive space.

She appreciates her position now as a Deaf adult because she has a better understanding and acceptance of Deaf Culture compared to when she was younger. As Deaf children, they spent more time with hearing families and relatives and opportunities to acquire Deaf cultural identity were limited.

*We did not have good role models who could teach us to build our confidence and to learn about our culture and language. Today being an adult, we have people who are in authority. Presently we have DEAFSA, (Deaf Association of South Africa) and they show us that Deaf have a strong*
bond and we must practice our culture in the Deaf community. In a sense this association preserves Deaf culture and sign language and shapes their cultural identity.

Violet settled into the stability of her Deaf identity in early adulthood. In her first year at college her life was once again thrown into emotional upheaval but this time through her own injudiciousness. Her parents did not support her intention to marry so she eloped from home. She exercised a strong sense of agency in her decision and was prepared for the consequences.

*I realized it’s my life, my right and my choice. …My dad felt that I was clever and he said that I was going to become a teacher and DG (her husband) was an ordinary worker … and that I should marry someone higher than me. … My dad worried about status.* She was filled with remorse for defying her father’s sentiments. She married much to the dismay of her parents, siblings, relatives and lecturers.

The marriage came with its own discursive experiences. She was in her freshman year and was forced to relocate to her in-laws’ home in Pietermaritzburg, 90 km away from the College which was in Durban.

*The first year I was absent often (from classes) because there were many problems at home and also trying to arrange transport to college. … That year I was absent for about three months and I missed a lot of work…*

There were also serious financial constraints as she needed money for tuition fees and books, and daily transport costs were exorbitant. But most distressing was that amidst the logistical challenges, she had to contend with an alcoholic husband. For fear of reprisals she could not ask for help from her family. She commended herself for having survived those challenging years.

*In my years of college I needed someone to help me balance my marriage and studies. … That year my husband was an alcoholic and I used to arrive home at seven in the evening from college and when I arrive he’s not at home. … I made sure I get my driving license because when DG is drunk I know I have to drive. Congratulations Violet you did well … and you did it by yourself. …It took me one year to change him.*

There were many obstacles but sheer willpower helped her overcome them. Her identity as a wife at this time revealed resilience and strength of character. The obstacles were numerous but she did not vacillate from the ambition that she envisioned. She had chartered a course for herself and resolved
to walk it even if she had to do it alone. She had offended many people through her unilateral decision to marry and resolved to restore their respect for her.

It is interesting that in her choice of partner, Violet envisaged that she would marry a Deaf person. Yes! I only thought it will be a Deaf person. She made this decision when she partnered her brother’s friend to his school farewell dance. I realized I was not comfortable with a hearing person.

Violet has two hearing children. Contrary to the traditions of Deaf culture she disclosed that she did wish that her children would be hearing and she substantiated this.

If I had a Deaf child I’m sure I would go through all the difficulties because there are no good schools for the Deaf where they are many Deaf teachers. Presently in schools for the Deaf there are only 3% of Deaf teachers in the schools and the rest are hearing teachers. I know from my experience when I was in a hearing school, what a difficult life I had with communication and that should not happen to my child if he was Deaf. Also most importantly, there are no job opportunities for the Deaf.

She communicates with both her children through the medium of sign language and described the typically valid concerns of Deaf parents raising hearing children.

I remember when my child was born and I used to breastfeed and talk to him, I used to say that mummy and daddy are Deaf and you have to learn to sign. … Now my child is growing up and has started developing signing skills. He knows that his mother and father are Deaf. I used to try to say words, but the words were not right and everyone said that his speech was bad because he was saying the words just like me. So we decided that we, the parents, will sign to them and the grandparents and other family members will talk them.

Both the children are aware that that they are hearing while their parents are Deaf. They are aware because they have observed their parents communicating with their each other and with their Deaf friends. The children talk to hearing people and sign to their parents. Yes, he understands because when he is around Deaf people he watches how they sign.
The children are simultaneously learning other languages that they are exposed to including isiZulu from their caregiver and Tamil from their grandmother. *And it was amazing that when my second son was born, my first son taught him how to communicate with us, in sign language.*

Violet believes that:

*God had a reason for them both to be born hearing. Maybe He wanted me to respect my children’s hearing culture also.*

This is thoughtfully articulated for it is precisely how Violet positions herself as a Deaf person. She shows sincere respect and reverence for hearing people. She believes that hearing people have played a significant role in the lives of Deaf people and that gratitude to them would not be misplaced. Her identity as a culturally Deaf person is strong. Violet’s positioning is so untypical and divergent from the norms of culturally Deaf persons. I could not help contemplating whether she was embracing hearing people during the interview in an attempt to patronize me or whether her feelings spoke truth to power. But then I reasoned that she has two hearing children, and that she has chosen to position herself simultaneously in the two cultures.

Several subject positions are revealed during this part of the narrative. Violet has positioned herself as a D/deaf child, learner, D/deaf adult, daughter, wife and mother and to each of these cultural positions there are associated subjectivities. Her subjectivities tell the story of how she lives these cultural positions, actively realizes them, takes responsibility and ownership of them as an agent and in this way Violet’s social category memberships are converted into ethical, emotional and narrated choices. We know of subjectivity to be an active agent that shapes and is also shaped by the prevailing cultural positions and in this account subjectivity is the experience of living through a multiplicity of positionings and discourses. The discourses and practices through which we are constituted may often be in tension with one another, providing the human subject with multiple layers of contradictory meanings which are embedded in their conscious and subconscious minds (Davies, 1993).

In Violet’s narrative there does not appear to be active tensions between the different subject positions that she occupies, although the associated subjectivities were at variance. She was the patient and enduring wife at home while at college she was enthusiastic, energetic and ever keen to achieve. In each position she presents with a sense of rationality and even where the identities
intersect there is harmony. Her identity categories of wife, mother, daughter and D/deaf person are relational and defined through each other constantly reconfiguring at varying intersections. Each of the subject positions that Violet occupies is a biographical narrative and the self is constituted by sets of biographical narratives. In her personal project she has achieved continuity and fluidity between the sets of biological narratives, making self coherence an almost achievable enterprise.

6.4.2 Student survivor

Violet’s three years at college while training to be a teacher were accompanied by immense personal struggle that emanated from her decision to get married. There were financial restraints, long distances to travel daily between Durban and Pietermaritzburg and an alcohol dependent husband. Despite the setbacks that she experienced at the time, her identity as a student was not reflective of aversion for college and associated experiences. She has an overall pleasant recollection of college. There is a strong presence of her agency in the way in which she positioned herself in the college-student discourse and in the way in which she determines the ‘available narrative’. Norick (2005) argues that the available narrative is the point of departure for how tellers negotiate the ownership of an experience. Through her agency, Violet engages in the process of negotiating what gets told and how it gets told. The teller is the authority and through self-determination pronounces on what is told and manipulates how it is told.

Violet further extolled the lecturers and acknowledged them for their positive influence on her life as a student.

Most of my lecturers were my inspiration. … They also influenced us to work hard, do well and study hard. … Not all colleges have special needs education for the Deaf. They also influenced us not to give up … show ourselves what we can do.

She expressed profound admiration for the lecturers for their sincere interest in wanting to learn about Deaf culture, its norms and traditions and the unique way in which the culture is transmitted.

I remember one subject - Arts & Culture … When she asked us about our culture she thought that we were going to give answers about Tamil, Christian, Hindi, Xhosa and Full Gospel. … What she learnt from us was about Deaf culture.
She praised the lecturers for their personal efforts in learning and attempting to sign in the absence of their sign language interpreter.

*What I admired about the lecturers was they never give up learning about Deaf culture and sign language. We experienced difficult times in college when there was no interpreter … The lecturers did their best and I tell you that I praise them because they did their best to teach us.*

Violet was grateful to have served as the representative of the Deaf students on the college Students Representative Council as this presented her with the opportunity to integrate with the hearing students.

*I felt good to integrate with hearing people. I felt it was a good way, where we can socialize with hearing and share our cultures. I also tried to get them involved in signing … they made sure during their lunch times they meet us in the café to learn sign language and our culture.*

She was enthusiastic about sharing her culture and her space and learning about their culture. Her only lament was the curriculum which she felt was not appropriate for Deaf teachers to teach Deaf learners. But she turned the curriculum issue around and commended the lecturers for their intervention and attempts to modify the curriculum with accommodations for the Deaf.

*During my college times, I saw the curriculum was not linked to the Deaf. Most of the subjects were for and about hearing children. What I admired about the lecturers was that they tried their best to find out what methods were available for the Deaf children in the classroom.*

Her graduation was one of the highlights of her life and she recalled this moment with pride and sheer delight as this honour was bestowed upon her.

*There were thousands of people sitting in the hall. I felt it was an important day for me because of my hard work and my hard life, my daily travelling from Pietermaritzburg to Durban for 3 years. When it came to teaching practice I had no accommodation in Durban. So I had to stand on the freeway to wait for the school bus to pick me up … about 6:30am. I used to plead with him not to forget me and if I’m late please wait for me. On my graduation day I felt proud receiving my Diploma. She expressed her astonishment at receiving the Merit Award for Teaching Practice. I never thought they will announce my name. I was looking at Sharon (the interpreter) and she said to me from the stage, yes it’s you, come up. I got congratulated by the Dean of the college*
and the Minister of Education. I received my certificate and thought what an achievement this was.

This was a long and arduous journey and years of struggle were overcome by her resilience, self-motivation and personal desire to triumph over the odds. Davies and Harre (1990) argue the ‘bi-directional’ disposition of agency. The institutional structures and the prevailing discourses shaped Violet’s identity as student. On the other hand she positioned herself in this discourse as a self-determining and interactive agent and elected the subjectivities that should accompany discourse. In this way her identity as a college student was constructed both by institutional factors and her agentic self will.

6.5.3 Experiencing teaching

Violet was fortunate to have been appointed as a Junior Primary teacher in 2001, at the school that she attended as a learner. Her agency in the form of strength of character and single-minded determination emerged again when she resolved to foreground her identity as a proficient teacher.

*When I entered the work environment for the first time, I said to myself that I’m Mrs V. Govender, not a pupil anymore. I will do my best to teach the children.*

Identity is known to be continuously in the making with new features, new faces and new voices. In foregrounding her teacher identity, her identity as a learner may recede but will continue to intersect with her teacher identity, together with her several other identities and biographical variables.

Her initial relationship with hearing teachers at the school where she was appointed was strained because she disapproved of their condescending attitude towards her. She felt that they still regarded her as a learner rather than as a fully fledged teacher and colleague.

*The relationship … was 60% perfect and 40% thumbs down because some of them thought I’m still a pupil.*

She felt that her colleagues who had taught her when she was a learner were now undermining her subject positioning as a new teacher and stifling her initiatives.

*First day of my teaching I remember telling a child to pick up toilet paper and go to the toilet. The child understood me and went. …I showed the children a picture of toilet paper, hands and soap. I felt the child must know the steps. (The teacher aide) … told me no you have to have the words. I told her for little kids in the play group you don’t need words now. … I felt those children must*
learn signs first and see the picture then the words. We had an argument and she told me don’t you remember when you were in school. She had given me words to learn when I was a pupil at the school.

Although Violet needed support and welcomed advice, she did not appreciate being forced to revert to methods that were used when she was a learner. She was innovative and fiercely intent on asserting her identity as a professional. She worked diligently at performing her teacher role, proved herself and earned their respect as a teacher.

**It took time to progress. Now I get on very well with all staff, from teaching to non-teaching staff. My relationship with the staff in school is perfect. If I want to say something then I’m ready to be open.**

Now Violet feels neither intimidated nor inferior to the hearing staff with whom she works.

She is aware of her position as a teacher, and has claimed her space. There are many voices to her character, one of these prominently being her teacher voice. And she deploys this voice to interpret her actions as a teacher.

*I have confidence in myself and I have a voice to say what I want and what my idea is … When I’m in a meeting I make myself feel included. I say what I have to say. If I don’t say what I feel then I know later I will regret.*

Her agency is a potent force here. Her free will prevails and she exercises autonomy. Violet’s identity formation is largely self-determined as she adapted and developed her persona to fit the new discourse of being a teacher. She has achieved some degree of coherence since she knows what she is aspiring to, that is, to be an efficient and effective teacher. She has positioned herself positively in the discourse of the teacher as a professional and has made a strong investment in her self development as a professional.

She commended her hearing colleagues for the professional and moral support that they have given her when she relocated from the Junior Primary to the Secondary department.

*I thought no one will help me but there were teachers to support me. They helped to show me what curriculum is required, what to do in the classroom and the equipment that was needed in the Home Economics Department. I had a lot of support from them.*
She even admitted to feeling comfortable and included in by them.

*When it comes to a meeting with the management … they make me feel part of the school. They make sure we’re not left out.*

She believes firmly that Deaf teachers are more effective than hearing teachers and offers judgment on this controversial issue.

*I think that Deaf teachers are best to teach Deaf children, because they use sign language in a natural way and that’s how Deaf children can learn well. Especially in the early school years, Deaf children should learn with Deaf teachers because they are going to start learning their language for the first time.*

Simultaneously she acknowledges that hearing teachers are invaluable in Deaf schools and that their presence should continue.

*All of the Deaf up to now were taught by hearing teachers and today I am a teacher through the hearing teachers. I will not forget that. … Not all Deaf teachers are able to do what our past teachers did. … How will we communicate with parents and department officials? How will we be able to attend meetings and workshops? How will we appoint new teachers? … It will be too expensive to have sign language interpreters for each of us all the time.*

A healthy sense of reason and balance prevails in her attitude. Deaf culture has the potential to be patriarchal and dominating in its influence but through her rationality she can participate simultaneously in both the hearing and D/deaf discourses.

Despite the fact that she has a good professional relationship with hearing teachers, when it comes to socializing Violet aligns spontaneously towards those who sign all the time.

*We Deaf teachers … sit together, and at lunch time we mostly socialize with the teacher aides who are Deaf and few hearing, only those who can continue signing all the time. … but when I’m with hearing they forget about me. Their lips only move and I have to remind them to sign to me. But I’m patient with that and it’s not their fault … they depend on hearing and not on the eyes.*

Perhaps through having two hearing children herself, she is not judgmental or critical of hearing colleagues when they forget to sign in the presence of the Deaf. She understands that the faculties of the hearing are different and signing is not natural to them. Therefore the occasional omission to
sign should not be considered as an affront to the Deaf and should be overlooked in deference to their overall support. To Violet there is a simple uncomplicated solution to the ‘Deaf teacher versus hearing teacher’ contention.

*Hearing must support the Deaf and Deaf must support the hearing. Hearing staff don’t know signed language so the Deaf will assist and the Deaf don’t speak so hearing must help.*

Her view is that both groups can work together and complement each other.

When she was first appointed and taught in the Junior Primary Department Violet exuded sympathy towards the learners positioning them as Deaf first, then as learners.

*But often I see them as Deaf first. My heart pities them because I thought of when I was a child and all the difficulties that I had.*

This was the spontaneously compassionate approach of a Deaf adult interacting with Deaf children. As she gained experience, empowered herself with effective teaching skills and began positioning herself as a teacher, her relationship with the learners evolved.

Violet is of the view that there needs to be a barrier between the space of the teacher and the space of the learner. However, such spaces are intersecting and Violet who was once a Deaf learner is aware of the challenges that pervade this relationship.

*As teachers we can’t be friends with Deaf pupils. I always know my profession of teaching. My relationship with the pupils is excellent ... give them instructions to do, allow the pupils to explore and learn. ... I challenge them all the time and don’t treat them with sympathy. I always ask them about their homes and families and I link their home life and school life and this helps me to understand them. I feel my relationship with Deaf pupils is excellent because of communication in sign language and what I know as a Deaf teacher, I never tell a pupil to be quiet and I’m not interested in your story. I’m patient to communicate with them because at home there is no one to communicate with them.*

In this simple description of her professional values and beliefs she extolled the virtues of a good teacher. Rather than homogenize learners, she contextualizes them within their peculiar home and family circumstances and foregrounds their unique complexities. Every learner is unique, with independently different character and dynamic identity. This is what defines her as a teacher.
In addition to her agency, there were also structural opportunities and resources availed by the school, that supported her professional development. Initially she taught Grades 0 and R for five years.

*I was excited in the beginning. … then I felt I’m doing the same work over and over. I wanted to do more with myself by sharing skills that I know… My management at school moved me to the high school. … I always wanted to teach the Deaf learners skills to give them employment and make them independent and to achieve something for their future. … and get a job quickly. I feel the Deaf who are not clever - I don’t look at them as stupid. I see them as clever using their hands. They have skills in their hands. Their hands can be magic …*

The management offered her an opportunity to teach skills to D/deaf learners that would prepare them for employment. These were the D/deaf learners who were not sufficiently competent to undertake the secondary school academic programme. She set standards for her performance as teacher and aligned herself to the school’s transformative culture. She has conceptualized that possibilities for the Deaf can only materialize if there are fundamental shifts from conventional academic learning towards skills related learning. *When I was in school I only thought about paper and pen but now it’s about skills. Now in the high school I am involved in a team which teaches many skills like cooking, baking, sewing, craft, hair-care and hair braiding, and nail-care. We teach food from different cultures and how to do traditional décor. I’m happy that I got the good opportunity to share my skills with the pupils. … I am eager because I know that it can help the Deaf learners. I want to have more advanced training in skills so that I can teach better.*

From her experience learning theoretical subjects was challenging for the Deaf, because the teachers did not sign effectively. In recounting her own school experience, she explained:

*I would ask the teacher why it’s so hard, can’t you change it and make it easy but they would get angry and tell me - you have to understand. Some teachers used to speak to us and not use any signing. I did not know what they were saying. … I could not learn. The teachers were hearing and I was Deaf. They used to look at me like I was stupid and I felt insulted.*

Through her agency she experienced the desire to be different and make a difference. Other structural resources that were available in her professional environment were superb role-models that had a positive influence on her life as a teacher.
... this person was my teacher and always told me not to give up hope. She gave me a gift for my wedding and said this glass I'm giving you – you must be strong and shine like this glass. I know you will be happy. ... She used to always say don’t let people oppress you. Many teachers told me the same thing but there was something special about her and her vision for the Deaf.

This teacher had a vision for the Deaf that was matchless. Violet tried to emulate the way she served the Deaf, her constructive love for them and the spirited way in which she has lived her life. About 2 years ago this teacher succumbed to a terminal illness. Violet cherishes her memory, and upholds her values and enthusiasm for teaching and for improving the lives of the D/deaf learners. The unwavering compassion of her teachers has also inspired her.

I remember the love, caring and support of most teachers and lecturers and who made sure the Deaf succeed. I appreciated those who motivated the Deaf to take a challenge. ... These people never looked down at us. ... They encouraged us to do it. I have pleasant memories of many good teachers and lecturers.

Role models are an essential experience in the shaping of our identities. Violet used them and the qualities they offered as resources at various phases in her life, and they moulded her own individuality.

Violet is eager to undertake post-graduate studies. She wants to undertake further study but there are logistical obstacles. The post-graduate course is only accessible for the Deaf at Wits University in Johannesburg, where there are sign language interpreters and studying out of this province has cost implications for travel and accommodation.

I’m looking forward to doing my B.Ed Honours. That course will help me to achieve further. If I do my B.Ed, I will have the opportunity to become a HOD (Head of Department). Her other aspiration is lofty but given her passion and will to accomplish, this could be achievable.

My aspirations are to achieve and progress and become a principal.

Her level of contentment to her work as a teacher is a measure of her success.

Yes I think that my life is successful because I am enjoying my life and I never regret anything. There is nothing that I think I want to change about my life.
There is an exceptional micro-narrative within the master-narrative of Violet’s experience of teaching which she recounted. While reading the transcript of the interview for the analysis I could not help noticing how this story connected so intricately with her identity as a teacher and how it represented the very essence of her being as a teacher.

In my class there was one Deaf child who had Down’s syndrome. He was about 6 years old. It was difficult to teach that child. He was very attached to his mother. When he came into the class his mum ran away, then he started crying. I left him to cry and said to myself this child needs to be independent. He needed help all the time. It took me two months to change that child. He was a lovely child and I used my knowledge on him, a Deaf child with other disabilities. It was a good challenge for me… He died recently …. I made him independent, made him eat himself and dress himself. When he died I was sore and depressed. His mind was strong and he was becoming independent but his body wasn’t strong. But I promised myself that if another child comes then I will be able teach him because I have the experience and I know what difficulties such children have. I saw many teachers give up with Ashaan. They thought the child can’t do anything. But this child is slow. But I took the child and took a try. I took him and trained him with signs showing him signs like eat, hungry, toilet, cup, plate, car and many others. I had the help of the teacher aide because that time I had to balance myself. I had the other Deaf too and I could not neglect them. Ashaan loved everyone. I used all his own things to teach him – his photographs, his toys and his lunch box. I used to also teach his mum how to teach him at home.

Violet was a fledgling teacher with far fewer years of practice than her colleagues. She identified a child who needed help and responded to a young mother’s desperation for direction on how to manage a Deaf Down’s Syndrome child. But she courageously took on the challenge of Ashaan when her colleagues had given up, holding the view that their efforts would be wasted on a child who could not learn anything. But to Violet, even getting him to perform elementary skills such as eating and dressing was an accomplishment. She taught him basic signs to be able to express his needs and she extended her competence to educating his mother as well, to ensure that she could respond to his needs. She loved him gently but diplomatically and exercised her inflexibility to ensure learning, even when he resisted. She was both innovative and creative in her teaching approach using resources that were recognizable and familiar, and to which the child would be
responsive. For a protracted period she immersed herself in teaching Ashaan but cautiously not to the exclusion of the other children in her care.

Through all of this Violet emerged as a teacher with a *DARE-TO-BE-DIFFERENT* identity. As the author of a self-story, her narrative reflects a teacher who is unconventional, has a strong will to transform and improve the lives of those she serves, surpassing all obstacles in her path. She is imaginative and resourceful in her teaching style and demonstrates willingness to teach and in addition, try new approaches. She disrupted conventionality and the normative context of teacher and opened new spaces for transformational teaching and learning. She is not intimidated by powers that be and is assertive and dynamic, in her continuous search for the ever-evasive success. She is a self-interpreting subject with agentive identity. She has reflexive capacity as she brings subjective power to bear over her objective experiences and she redefines herself through disciplined action.

As seen in her narrative the construction of her identity as a teacher was a process in which there were many selves and many voices, constantly trying to reorganize the self towards achieving coherence. Through repeated self-investigation and scrutiny of her person, she was able to construct her identity of being a different, transformative teacher. In her sense of difference there are manifestations of power and dominance and the display of power is set in motion in the narration through the way in which she determined what gets told, how it gets told and what is not told. Through all of the experiences in her life story, Violet discovered her own personal strength and positioned herself as powerful and empowered. She intentionally navigated within and between the various resources and the tensions which constituted her being, and through acts of negotiation, learning and interpretation she gave meaning to her professional practice.

### 6.6 TRUE TRANSFORMER

Wilson was 30 years old when he was interviewed and claimed that he was uncertain whether he was born Deaf. While attending the junior primary phase of a hearing school he recalled having difficulty with hearing. He found speech sounds to be inaudible and his conversational ability was compromised. His learning was impeded since he could not hear the teacher. This became progressively worse and eventually in Standard 1 (3rd year of junior primary phase), his teacher
identified that he was experiencing audibility problems. On the advice of his teacher, Wilson’s mother took him to a hospital, where he underwent a series of audiological and speech tests. It was then confirmed that he had moderate to severe hearing loss, and was referred to a school for Deaf learners. The professionals who treated him were perplexed and were unable ascertain the cause of the hearing loss. His parents were similarly astounded as he did not present with symptoms of hearing loss as an infant. Wilson had a twin brother who died shortly after birth, owing to a chronic illness. His mother recalled that Wilson was also ill at the time and attempted to attribute the gradual onset of his deafness to this early illness.

The family lived in Johannesburg. Wilson attended a school for the Deaf up to junior secondary phase and thereafter completed secondary schooling in KwaZulu-Natal. The sign name that he acquired is indicated by the letter W on the forehead with the right hand facing left, using the finger-spelling alphabet. When he qualified as a teacher he was appointed to a state school for Deaf learners in Northern KwaZulu-Natal and served here for almost 8 years. His passion to extend his service to a broader spectrum of the Deaf community lead him to a town in the midlands of KwaZulu-Natal where he serves as a facilitator for basic education and training for the adult Deaf community. In addition he teaches at a special school, administered by a non-governmental organization, for learners who are variously disabled, including the multiply disabled. Here Wilson teaches children who are intellectually challenged and who can hear but cannot speak. These learners communicate and access learning through the medium of sign language.

6.6.1 Experiencing deafness

Even though Wilson could not hear well, he was not significantly affected by this while he attended a school for hearing learners.

*It was okay to be with the hearing because most of the time we played a lot. When you’re small you don’t understand lots of things.*

Generally at this phase teaching, learning and communication take place around play resources that are aimed at motor co-ordination, and tactile and perceptual development. This is a context in which compromised auditory capability can easily go unnoticed.
I went to hospital for a speech test and then they found out that I cannot hear, they did all the tests and said I needed to change my school. They said that I cannot learn at a hearing school but I should go to a school for the Deaf.

Wilson was 8 years old when he discovered that he was Deaf and obviously did not realize the ramifications of the condition. His only concern then was to attend school, irrespective of whether it was a school for the Deaf or for the hearing. When he was admitted to the school for the Deaf, he met other Deaf children like himself and integrated spontaneously.

I never thought there are people like me. … When I entered a school for the Deaf things became perfect. I saw there’s people same like me that I did not see before. I started learning sign language. I had audio tests and was fitted with hearing aids and I also had speech therapy. And gradually he progressed. He was aware that all the other Deaf children here emerged from different spoken language backgrounds but what was common was the use of sign language. Some talked Xhosa and some talked Tswana and some talked Zulu, but all used sign language.

He knew then that he was entering the realm of a new world and willingly accepted the D/deaf identity within the commune of other Deaf learners. Without any resistance he positioned himself within the discourse of deafness and integrated the D/deaf identity as part of his self.

I had the feeling that I lost my relationship with hearing people when I moved to the Deaf world. It was something new for me and I learnt how to go through it and then I felt good about being with Deaf people.

His transition to the Deaf world was facilitated by the hospitable ease with which he was accepted by his new friends.

Yes! The Deaf accepted me well. I developed many relationships with the Deaf. They did not ignore me.

While at the school for the Deaf, Wilson enjoyed sport and revelled in his achievements. He participated in athletics, long distance running and soccer, all of which affirmed his new D/deaf identity. His relationships with other Deaf competitors were warm and cordial. As his reliance on sign language grew he disparaged his experience with hearing teachers at the Deaf school attributing this to their lack of proficiency in signing.
But when it comes to learning with hearing teachers it’s not perfect and I don’t know where I’m going in the future. The relationship and communication with the teachers was only to give me work to write and write and write. They did not explain deeply what they were teaching. … Many of them had no sign language and that was the problem.

He had accepted his new D/deaf identity but tensions were emerging and the teachers’ lack of proficiency in signing caused him to be uncertain about his future as a Deaf person. His access to learning was compromised by the hearing teachers’ lack of proficiency in signing and he doubted his ability to complete secondary school. If this was to be the case then his career prospects would be limited.

His alignment to a Deaf identity coincided with disintegration in family relationships. Wilson had become increasingly attached to using sign language while his family remained verbal with him. No accommodations were made to use gestures or attempt to sign to him. There was far more communication with family members when he was positioned as a hearing person and this added to the tension that he was experiencing as a result of ‘becoming Deaf’. His subjectivities are foregrounded here as an emotional binary. He felt included within the Deaf community and excluded by family members.

When I was growing up with my family, I did not have good relationships with them. I was always alone. My sister and mother would talk to me but not so much like when I was a hearing person. … it was difficult for me to communicate with hearing people, because I can’t hear. Sometimes my family would talk very loud because they wanted me to hear, but it did not help.

Volume enhanced speech is not acceptable to culturally Deaf persons. However, Wilson accepted his family speaking loudly to him because he recognised their denial of the new culturally Deaf reality that he constructed for himself. He was positioned in a self affirming way in the Deaf cultural discourse and negatively positioned within the family structure. There were tensions between these two identities as the subjectivities in each subject positioning varied. As a child he was expected to confront and manage this contradiction.

There was a deeply rooted bond between Wilson and his sister. He was able to educate her about deafness and influence her to accept his new identity. He convinced her to learn to sign to him. When his sister learned to sign, communication with his family improved with access through her.
I have a good relationship with her because I taught her sign language. I also taught her what kind of a person I am. I know she can help me with everything like when I have problems looking for an interpreter.

For Wilson having his sister as his sign language interpreter was affirming of his deafness. That makes me happy and positive. I like going to church, the priest speaks and my sister interprets for me. … Sometimes it’s boring to go to church without an interpreter; you just sit and watch the priest. You don’t hear anything … She signs what’s happening on the radio, sometimes if she does not know the signs, she will write down what people are saying and she will show me and I will teach her the signs. The support and encouragement that he got from his sister inspired him. She motivated him to study and to aim for higher achievements and has always been enthusiastic about his success. Through the signing support that he received from his sister, Wilson was able to position himself positively within a religious discourse and he integrated this identity as one of several layers in his sense of self.

The significance of role-models in shaping identity cannot be underestimated. Childhood experiences, role-models and critical incidents and relationships are some of the variables that come together to shape self-image and identity. There were two German teachers who visited Wilson’s school on an exchange programme and imparted invaluable life-skills. … that’s how I learnt positive things about life and what’s important for my future. I started to study seriously and think about my life. Before that my aim was to become a road construction worker.

Prior to his encounter with the foreign teachers the expectations and standards that he set for his performance as a learner were mediocre. When he did not believe that he could advance any further than a labourer, they encouraged him to have more pride in his identity as a Deaf person and set higher goals. Every success that he achieved motivated him to want to achieve further. He was resolute that his deafness would not be a limitation.

When I finished matric and went home, I thought if I fail then what will I do? … When I passed I became positive and wanted to do better.

Another person who influenced Wilson’s ambitiousness was a teacher from secondary school, who supported him in advancing his English writing skills.
Then I was not able to write good English - my English was broken English. …Mr G made us focus on English and reading a lot. He made us focus on the structure of English. … He helped me to develop my English. That was good for me. English is an international language - it helps people to get jobs … (and) communicate with different people.

Wilson’s disillusionment with the signing proficiency of the hearing teachers and anxieties about his future were alleviated by Mr G who helped to improve his English writing skills. He anticipated that he would now be able to secure better employment after school. He reconstructed his identity as a D/deaf person. With enhanced confidence in himself he gave new definition to his D/deaf identity. Identity researchers Benwell & Stokoe (2006) confirm that identities do not have essential character. Identities are not fixed, stable, rational projects that have a constant inner core. The same identity can alter continuously as subjectivities change and repositionings in discourses take place. Wilson’s identity as a D/deaf person was reconstructed as he repositioned himself in the discourse of deafness and according to the way in which he identified himself in the discourse. The repositioning is determined by his agency.

Wilson’s acceptance of his Deaf identity has not been without emotional anguish and humiliation. He remembered lucidly the behaviour of insensitive hearing friends and family members who treated his deafness with derision and ridiculed him at every opportunity. He described several such incidents with contempt.

Like when I’m walking with friends and they are a little far away and they want to call me. They would throw a stone at me to get my attention and that is what I hate ….

Also, when I went with my cousins to visit Lions Park …. They made fun of me because I am Deaf. They would force me to go in front everywhere, so that I experience the danger first. Then I am in trouble first and they are safe. …

When everybody is swimming and they come out of the pool. Then when I want to come out of the pool, I cannot get their attention to help me to come out of the pool because they deliberately won’t look at me.

Also when we go on the train, they force me to hang and swing on the rail then jump out just before the train stops. That time I fell and got hurt and they all laughed at me. They make me stupid, and have fun and laugh at me because I am Deaf.
All of the negative experiences initiated by his hearing counterparts served to provide for their entertainment and amusement while he was the humiliated victim. Wilson has remained contemptuous of their acts of mockery and ridicule but he is not contemptuous of the hearing provocateurs themselves.

**Some respect me as a Deaf person, others don’t respect me. … you can’t be with Deaf all the time. You have to socialize with hearing communities also because all Deaf don’t stay near each other – they are far away.**

Amongst his repertoire of identities, his identity as a hearing person prevails. Identities are temporary attachments to subject positions, according to Benwell and Stokoe (2006), and when he is with his hearing friends he invokes his hearing identity. He is compelled to socialize with hearing peers as there are no Deaf friends in the community in which he lives. Wilson experiences tensions as he is dialectically positioned in his hearing and D/deaf identities, with each producing a different subjectivity. In post-structural understanding subjects can be conflictually positioned but identities intersect and through agency subjects can transition fluidly between layers of identities.

Perhaps owing to their treatment of him Wilson has become distrustful of his hearing friends and he has intentionally not disclosed to them that he qualified as a teacher. *I think that my friends will be jealous of me. Their parents will also be jealous of me. … They thought that because I am Deaf, I cannot achieve anything. That’s why I know that they will be jealous of me.*

It is clear that he no longer sees himself as one of them and has positioned himself dialectically in their relationship. He has distanced himself from his hearing friends, their way of thinking, their realities and their values. He has elected to detach from them since they now live in two very different worlds and continued attachment could perhaps be adverse to his preferred Deaf identity. De Fina, Schiffrin & Bamberg (2006) inform that identity is also constructed through engagement with other interlocutors and can be contingent on the conditions of the interactional context. Through interaction with various interlocutors, conflicting versions of the self emerge, creating ‘repertoires of identities’. This view of identity represents a conceptual shift towards newer accounts of identity as being socially actioned. His distancing from hearing friends and allegiance to D/deaf friends would shape his respective identities as a friend of the hearing and as a friend of the D/deaf.
There are several identity markers that flag the identity of a person and one of these is located in language. As an adult sign language has exceptional significance in Wilson’s life. **Sign language is very important for me because it’s the only language I can use to communicate. I’m an adult now and when I try to use my speech, sometimes it can be broken. It’s better for me to use sign language. This makes communication with anyone easy and comfortable.**

Wilson felt that he should have the freedom to use the language of his Deaf culture irrespective of whether he is communicating with Deaf or hearing people. His agency in his positioning in Deaf culture is evident. He is not prepared to restrain his language when in the company of hearing people and use the language of the majority culture.

**It does not matter if it is a Deaf or hearing person, my sign language must not be suppressed. Hearing must also learn to sign to communicate with me. My feelings are important also. My culture is very important to me. I’m proud of my culture.**

Theoretically language is known to be a means of solidarity, resilience and identity formation within a culture or social group. Since language is integral to culture and identity, attempts to change a person’s language and alter identity could be emotionally and psychologically detrimental to the persona.

Wilson has come to realize that sign languages are the same with all Deaf people even though they may have different verbal languages.

**Sign language is the same with all Deaf people. We have different speaking languages at home like Zulu, Afrikaans, Pedi, Sotho, Tswana. … we cannot speak those languages but we are all linked together because we know sign language … When you ask where you live in sign language the signs are the same, but in speech it will be different …**

There is an inimitable commonness about sign language when compared to spoken languages and this propagates the bond amongst Deaf people irrespective of the country of their origin. Language use impacts group membership and Wilson’s use of sign language is an act of identity through which he has integrated himself with the Deaf community. He identifies himself as Deaf ontologically, and identifies with other Deaf culturally in a categorical association. Hence the locus of his existence rests in both his agentic decision to be a culturally Deaf person and in the cultural influence of the Deaf community.
Wilson acknowledged that Deaf Culture is entirely dissimilar from hearing culture. His family have tried to convince him that since he was not born Deaf, he should follow the culture of his hearing family but he disagrees since he has not been sufficiently exposed to his family culture. *Also, when I was growing up I did not learn too much about home culture, about slaughtering sheep and all that. I only saw them do that but I don’t know why. … I grew up learning about my Deaf Culture and my sign language and I am proud of my language and culture.*

The traditions of his family culture are foreign to him since he lived away from home in school residential facilities. It was here that he learnt sign language and imbibed the traditions of Deaf culture. In all communities, including the spoken and sign language communities, there is a close relationship between language and cultural identity and it is not the physical absence of hearing, but rather their use of a common signed language that unites Deaf people in a social community (Hauualand & Allen, 2009).

At no time did Wilson wish that he was a hearing person even when he was younger and ridiculed by his friends.

*I told myself I accept who I am, I’m proud to be what I am.*

He is firmly entrenched in his Deaf cultural identity. For the Deaf adult and school going communities, the use of sign language is the basis upon which a culturally Deaf identity is constructed and social cohesion and integration are engendered. Other identity markers such as race, ethnicity, social class and gender are significant but perhaps secondary in the realm of the Deaf World.

Despite the esteem and pride that he enjoys as a culturally Deaf person, there are tensions and dilemmas. Seeking medical attention and communication with medical personnel is a serious challenge.

*It takes time to communicate to him* (the doctor) *because we have to write, write, write.*

He also feels that people are distrustful of the Deaf and do not believe that they are credible citizens who can own credit cards and passports.

*When I go to a shop and I want to use my credit card, some don’t believe that it’s my credit card, they ask for my ID. They look at my ID and then they look at my face and look again. I feel that they don’t trust me. … One day, I went to Home Affairs to apply for a passport. They looked at me suspiciously and asked me many questions. …*
Wilson gets extremely disillusioned when he does not get the respect that he deserves. *I'm an educated Deaf person, when I fill a form where I want to open an account, I put ‘SMS only’ next to my number but still the company phones me. … They show no respect that I am Deaf. This makes me so angry.*

Wilson endures these challenges and indiscretions with resilience. However, he expressed the feeling that in the public space where Deaf and hearing intersect there should be reciprocity. The hearing should also make accommodations to cater to the needs of the Deaf. They should learn sign language and should adapt their attitudes to the Deaf. Their attitudes must reflect the recognition that the Deaf have personal needs, can be professionals, are capable and are citizens whose rights also deserve to be acknowledged.

**6.6.2 Experiencing teaching**

What emerged prominently in Wilson’s narrative about experiencing teaching is the presence of an intense and passionate desire to help the senior adult Deaf community. He feels that they were sorely neglected as Deaf persons and disadvantaged by not being given the opportunity to attend school. For those that did attend, schooling was aborted before advancing to secondary school. Possibilities for learning skills were non-existent as a result of which many adults are now unemployed while others are in poorly paid exploitative employment. Generally they are illiterate and have difficulty managing the formal and financial aspects of their lives. There is a disposition of restlessness about Wilson’s identity as a classroom teacher. He appears to be agitated and wants to do more than teach youngsters in the classroom. His success in becoming a teacher prompted the urge to achieve more.

Wilson was succinct and honest about his experiences at college while training to be a teacher. He was disappointed that the curriculum focused on hearing rather than Deaf learners.

*It was not so much about Deaf. Mostly we concentrated on hearing a lot, but we needed to learn about the Deaf.*

He was perceptive and recalled that certain lecturers at the college showed genuine interest in the Deaf, their plight and their cause.

*There was a lady Mrs KC - she inspired me all the time. She involved us in activities that made us interested. She made me feel good about myself. Miss P was another lady that gave us good support.*
On the other hand there were those that he recalled with little fondness.

*It depends how interested the lecturer is, how the lecturer teaches and gets himself involved with the Deaf. For example my English lecturer, I never saw her smile. … There is no chance to say that you are lost or you don’t understand.*

There were no opportunities for integration with hearing students at College.

*Mostly I was with the Deaf, not hearing. We were separate …. I did not have hearing friends. They did not show interest to join the Deaf.*

His overall experience at college was neither memorable nor significant in influencing his work as a teacher. Nevertheless achieving the qualification in teaching was a significant accomplishment.

*That was the best thing that happened in my life. I felt that doors opened for me. I felt that now I had many opportunities. I felt positive because now I’m able to help my family, my people.*

This was a reference to the Deaf community and he referred to them as his family. He was selfless in his achievement at becoming a teacher and was determined to use his attainment to uplift their lives. His accomplishment was not an opportunity for himself but an opportunity to enhance the lives of less fortunate Deaf counterparts and elders.

At the outset Wilson indicated that it was not his ambition to become a teacher because he had negative perceptions of teachers and the profession.

*Because when I was growing up I always see teachers like to hit, hit, hit all the time. Then I thought that if I am a teacher I will be the same.*

His personal experiences and his memories of teachers when he was a young learner were unpleasant, and he could not envisage himself in the same profession. Perhaps it is this experience that spurs him to want to transform learning for the Deaf. He envisioned a career that involved constructing houses or roads since he enjoyed and was talented at drawing. This would also bring him closer to achieving his ambition of working with underprivileged communities and transforming civil society.

*I thought if I do something like drawing and computer designs, I can be involved in different communities. I thought if I become this then maybe I can make a difference in South Africa. But one teacher told me that a Deaf person can’t do all this.*
In retrospect Wilson has no regrets about becoming a teacher since this allows him to fulfil his desire to work with and support Deaf people and improve the quality of their lives. *When time goes on I feel its good because when I see Deaf people, I want to help them and make them different.*

He indicated in jest, that if he were a not a teacher, perhaps he would have been engaged with work of a lower status.

*... maybe I would be someone like a cleaner. (Laughs) Maybe I might be a drunken person, drinking juba and waking up all the neighbours or doing the job of emptying the bins.*

Wilson is conscious of the status that is associated with being a teacher and this informs the way in which he identifies and positions himself in the teacher discourse. He is aware of the image that he has as a teacher amongst D/deaf and hearing peers and he sustains this image in the subject position that he occupies as a teacher.

Wilson enjoys a good relationship with the principal and management at his school. He appreciates their professional support and the opportunity for him to contribute to the curriculum. He serves on the committee that addresses environmental issues and he enjoys this. On several occasions the principal and management encouraged him to enter the learners in art competitions, many of which his learners won. However he does not get much professional support from some of the hearing teachers. They are temperamental in their attitude towards him.

*But some hearing teachers have respect .... Then I give them respect. Many times I help hearing teachers with sign language and sports. But when I ask them for help they tell me later, later and they always say that they are busy.*

His approach is mature and complacent and he does not harbour ill-feelings towards them for not assisting him. However he does not appreciate their condescension towards him.

*I hate just picking up information. I want them to respect me and give me full information like a professional person, equal to other hearing teachers.* Wilson is adamant that he does not want to receive information incidentally. The information that is intended for him must reach him with purpose. Identities are ‘othered’, that is, they are contrived in relationships with others. There is no doubt that the attitudes and relationships with his colleagues would certainly influence Wilson’s construction of his teacher professional identity and the personal meaning that he accorded to his professional self.
Wilson has great respect for a particular hearing teacher at school with whom he has developed a close bond. When he first came to the school he did not know how to sign and Wilson taught him diligently and painstakingly.

*I found a person who can be linked perfectly with me. … He interprets well for me (now) and gives me all information clearly. Now he can sign perfect like a Deaf person. At one time I was very desperate. … But now Mr S helps me.*

It is clear that the connectedness that has emerged between Wilson and Mr S is rooted in sign language and their mutual commitment to the learners.

*He helped me to make a portfolio of all my art work. Together we made new things and we taught pupils and some teachers to be creative. We showed all the teachers how to make portfolios for pupil.*

He is a hearing person but Wilson has developed an emotional attachment to him since he is able to sign. They can now communicate using a common language and Wilson has accepted him into his Deaf world and Mr S has included Wilson in his hearing world. Theoretically we know that identities cannot be exclusive and distinctly compartmentalized. Identities and there respective subjectivities will intersect to shape existing identities and construct new overlapping identities.

Wilson’s relationship with the learners is firm yet approachable.

*… they respect me as a Deaf teacher. After work I can talk to them in general but not sharing about my deep personal life. I separate my friendship from my work. I share information about life and about what is in the newspaper.*

Even in his informal association with the learners he feels the need to improve and enrich their lives. From his personal experience as a learner Wilson knows that Deaf learners prefer Deaf teachers because of their natural signing proficiency.

*Most Deaf pupils like Deaf teachers because of the sign language. They learn better with the Deaf teachers. Me they see me like a role model – they feel they want to be mature like me. … If you show understanding and caring and love, then they like you. But if you are strict all the time then they don’t like you.*

He empathizes with their emotional needs and knows how to respond appropriately. He is also aware of the status image that he presents as a teacher and he intentionally upholds this role model image to
the learners. Through the image that he presents, learners can construct their own positive and self-affirming identities as Deaf persons and in turn the learners shape his identity as a teacher.

In addition to Social Studies and Natural Science, Wilson also teaches Visual Arts to secondary school learners. He is enamoured by his own drawings and paintings and refers to himself as an artist. He prides himself on still-life art and capturing the splendour of nature in his work. Through participation in several local and international art competitions he has enhanced his professional identity. Winning has brought material rewards to the school and personal acclaim to himself.

Yes I had positive experiences at school. One was winning the art competition for Peace Day. I learnt art from my brother when I was small. I still like drawing and I’m still an artist. Even today I can draw beautiful things.

Wilson exudes contentment in his performance as a teacher but only in the context of his delivery of the curriculum and his relationship with the learners. The facets of teaching are not limited to these and he is deeply perturbed by other aspects of his profession. Firstly he feels that there is unfair distribution of work between Deaf and hearing teachers and this exploitation frustrates him.

Hearing teachers give Deaf a lot of work to do. Some times they use Deaf teachers too much. I have many responsibilities and then they give me more work. That means that I must carry your responsibility also and you do nothing. I am not negative about them but they must be fair and share the work.

Wilson feels that the Deaf are subsumed by the large numbers of hearing teachers in Deaf schools, and they are disadvantaged in being the minority.

They take advantage when we are few Deaf teachers. … When there is few then we get oppressed.

He bemoaned the lack of opportunities for him for professional advancement and for involvement in the governance of the school.

I never get opportunities because hearing teachers control Deaf. I am a qualified teacher. I have more education than the learners. But hearing (teachers) think I’m same like pupils. …They don’t see my education.

In the school context he is stifled and unable to engage his personal agency. He feels belittled by his hearing colleagues and not treated as a professional counterpart. He is perceptive and aware that they
accord respect to Wilson as a teacher, only when they need to engage his services personally or need him to benefit the school in some way. He slated the established teachers for their resistance to adapting their teaching to make learning accessible to the Deaf learners. He feels strongly that Deaf teachers in Deaf schools should be recognized and acknowledged for the transformation that they can introduce and for other potential benefits they can offer in participatory management because they know the needs of the Deaf intimately.

But there is no Deaf in SMT (Senior Management Team). A school for the Deaf must be managed by the Deaf also. … We try to change things and introduce new things. But the people who are there for many years they reject our ideas. … We are new. All the ideas and the knowledge we have are new ideas and now they must put new ideas in place. But they are too stubborn to learn from us.

Much time and effort is invested using orthodox teaching methods and the returns do not reveal commensurate change in learner achievement outcomes. They waste our time. I’m thinking of a Deaf child’s future. … He must make sure that the Deaf learn and understand what he is teaching. If they don’t understand, then he must teach again and use new ways to make them learn. The teacher must know that the Deaf is a human being. He has rights, rights to education, even if he is Deaf.

There is no doubt of Wilson’s passion for righteousness and for there to be integrity in educating the Deaf. They are not lesser beings and their right to education must be upheld. And finally he disparaged the Department of Education for disregarding his special needs as a Deaf teacher. As a teacher he is expected to attend professional development and curriculum workshops. But no provision is made for a sign language interpreter to make the information accessible to him. Then I have to try to lip-read the facilitator who is speaking. Then if he turns his head and talks away from me then I am lost and I get left behind.

In the community, Wilson wants to be respected both as a teacher and as a Deaf person. I don’t need them to call me teacher but expect them to call me by my name. And still they must respect me.

There are many biographical indicators, such as gender and race, which contribute singly and collectively towards shaping identities and Wilson’s deafness is one of these fundamental markers.
The different role positions that he occupies as noted in the narrative, as teacher, colleague, artist, hostel supervisor, pastoral-carer, brother and son are in fact layered extensions of deafness, which is one of several personal biographies. Of his many role positions it is for his Deaf identity that he advocates respect and reverence.

There are tensions arising from subjectivities associated with his teacher identity and Deaf identity. There is attendant dissatisfaction in his teacher role as Wilson found the need to go out in search of new coherence. He extended himself beyond the realm of the classroom and the school and reached out to the adult Deaf community in the hope that here amongst Deaf counterparts he would secure recognition of his Deaf identity foremost, and thereafter recognition for his teacher self. Wilson was anxious about young Deaf adults and how they would manage their lives since most are not well-advised and can be irresponsible.

*Sometimes I try to help some Deaf who never have education like me. I only advise them to think before you do something. … think about saving money, must think about their future, … to raise the child, must not think about … drinking and leaving no money for transport and food and for the children and for the future. I also advise them how to budget their money and not to spend the money on useless things.*

Having come through various complexities with his own deafness, Wilson was now in a position to help other Deaf, with their challenges.

*I meet Deaf adults outside (school) who don’t know how to write. We must have ABET (Adult Basic Education and Training) for adults. Most depend on me now. I help a lot with Deaf adults. It’s very important for a Deaf person to plan for the future. … If a family member dies I also help them to claim the money for funerals. I show them what benefits they have when they are in permanent employment.*

Often the Deaf are forced to seek assistance because they are illiterate.

*I try to teach them to be smart Deaf people, and learn to read and write to be independent*

Wilson has translated his personal challenges into beneficial experiences.
Yes I learnt and the challenges gave me experience, made me mature. … All of us have problems. But when I compare them to my life I can see me as a better person but I never leave them there. I try to pull them up, encourage them to be equal like me. I help them to make good CVs.

In his personal life Wilson has well-thought, concise plans. For the better part of his life he conformed to the conventions prescribed by his parents. Now as a mature adult he has the desire to assert his independence and agency. When I was in school I did everything that my family wants. My family mostly wants me to marry a hearing person, not a Deaf person. But I do not want them to make my choice because I want to make my own choice about which person I like - hearing or Deaf person. It depends on me. The possibility of having hearing children has been well-considered. If I have children and they are hearing then they will know their mother and father are Deaf people. Then my children will become CODA’s. They will interpret and help the Deaf world.

(CODA’S refers to ‘Children of Deaf Adults’. This is a community of hearing children who belong to the Deaf community. They are introduced to sign language before they learn to speak since their parents are Deaf. They are reputed to be excellent sign language interpreters through natural acquisition of a spoken and a signed language.)

There are several aspects of his childhood and youth that Wilson regrets. If I had better opportunities when I was younger, then maybe I will be someone today. I will have better things. Maybe I could have a nice house, nice car. Maybe I can have my own company to employ lots of Deaf people. I can develop life for Deaf people and develop my life as a Deaf person.

His status as a Deaf teacher is now a mediocre accomplishment. He would like to study Education Management and advance himself professionally.

I feel that I can improve education for the Deaf. That is why I’m studying management so I can change the system in Deaf education.

Wilson is determined to aspire to greater heights.

I can’t say I’m completely successful … It does not mean that now I am a teacher that I must stand still. My success must flow like water and go all over. I want to try to succeed more. … One day I want to become a principal of a Deaf school.
Embedded in his personal subjectivity is the intense desire to transform the lives of Deaf adults who were not privileged with schooling. This desire is not a linear culmination of his performance of teacher. It is a plot which is layered into and shapes the various other discourses in which he participates. These refer to his positions as carer, helper, supporter, counsellor and other like positions. His actions and intentions are embedded in these positions. If he has hearing children then they would be sign language interpreters. If he had more lucrative opportunities when he was younger then he could have had his own company and create employment for the Deaf. Now he plans to undertake further study in Education Management to improve schooling and education for the Deaf. He is the author of many selves with many voices and he has written the same plot into multiple texts.

Wilson’s transcended the restrictive microcosm of the classroom to work with and improve the lives of the adult Deaf community, opening a new space to perform his identities as a Deaf person and as a Deaf teacher. His intervention with the adult Deaf community has been selfless and noble with no remunerative gain. But the reward for him, though indefinable has been priceless. Through a common language and a common purpose he has negotiated a position of symbolic power in his countenance with the adult Deaf. For Wilson the exercise of empowering the Deaf community outside the realm of his school context is a political opportunity since it supports the notion of the interconnectedness between who he is as a teacher and how he uniquely and strategically gives meaning to his professional identity. There are several intangible resources at play here including his personal experiences of advantage and disadvantage, subjectivities, power and agency and the challenge of participating in a self-empowerment project. For Wilson power derives from his agency in the act of transforming disadvantaged others and in doing so he gave new definition to his identity as a Deaf teacher. He consciously asserts control over his actions in such a way that he acts deliberately and reflectively, with intent to achieve coherence in his teacher identity project.

Wilson was seduced by his personal desire and the challenge to explore the adult Deaf world. He shaped his teacher identity as he positioned himself in opposition to the hearing colleagues who did not give him recognition as a Deaf teacher. His attempts to foreground his individualism and perform his agency as a teacher, at his school, were futile. The more innovative ideas and strategies that he proposed for teaching were rejected by his colleagues. He believed that there should be
democracy in managing the school and that the Deaf staff should have a voice in management decisions since this was essentially a school for Deaf learners but he confronted resistance in his efforts to secure representation in the School Management Team.

Disillusioned, he turned to and formed an alliance with the adult Deaf community. Here he was able to claim power both as a Deaf person and as a teacher. He created the space to exercise his agency productively through developing their personal capacity and teaching them employment related skills. He felt secure in this space as he could freely perform his identity in familiar territory and with a community with whom he was emotionally bonded. The adult Deaf community became the discursive resource through which he reconstructed a more desirable identity as a TRUE TRANSFORMER Deaf teacher. In the context of this preferred teacher identity, Wilson set the stage to validate and celebrate his performance as a Deaf teacher. His role positions of being Deaf and being teacher have merged harmoniously and he now practises power and agency as a Deaf teacher in a new surround.

About 18 months after the interview, Wilson resigned from state paid employment at the Deaf school and took up a position in a school, administered by a non-governmental organisation, for learners who are variously disabled. Here he teaches the group who are intellectually challenged, can hear but cannot speak. This combination of disability is usually taught through the medium of sign language. For Wilson the key benefit of the new position is that it has given him the opportunity to facilitate an education and training programme for an adult Deaf group. To this group he teaches basic literacy and numeracy skills and to those more advanced, he facilitates skills training, personal development and general capacity building. And for now he appears contented.
CHAPTER SEVEN: IS THERE A STRUGGLE FOR SPACE?

7.1 Introduction

The final interpretation which takes place horizontally across the storied narratives will be articulated in two parts since this research journey has been steered by two seminal questions. The first critical issue pertained to how the five participants constructed their identities as Deaf persons. How do they explain their existence and experiences as people who cannot hear? How did they come to know and understand themselves, and give meaning to their lives, as Deaf persons? Given their distinguishing identity as Deaf persons, the second issue at the centre of the exploration would address how they negotiated their identities as Deaf teachers? How do they perform the meaning of teacher within the context of their Deaf identities? How does their deafness inform ‘being’ teacher or ‘doing’ teaching? Although the issues are contextualised and addressed independently they are intricately connected by the premise that their performance as teachers is guided, amongst other narrative resources, also by their unique deafness aligned identity. In fact their articulation as teachers is informed variously and collectively by several layers of identities. But the essence of this exploration relates to how their lives as teachers are deliberated given the condition of their deafness.

In the previous chapter, each participant was indexed by the storied peculiarities that each narrated. This included experiences and relationships associated with their personal biographies such as race, gender, ethnicity and social class. In addition they have been indexed across various phases of their lives including childhood, familial history, dynamics of schooling and adulthood and teaching. For each there emerged a uniquely branded illustration of D/deaf identity and D/deaf teacher identity. This chapter hopes to integrate the individual narratives and capture their identities as D/deaf persons and their presentation as D/deaf teachers. In other words this will be my story of the cohort of Deaf teachers in concert. The story will reflect my meanings, interpretations and perceptions of the Deaf teachers as a group linked by the common phenomenon of deafness. It is not my intention to extrapolate meaning from this group to other Deaf teachers since every story is uniquely personal and that meanings across narratives may be senseless. However the latitude and the temptation to generalize will always remain the prerogative of the reader.
7.2 “I am Different”

Each participant in this exploration is set within frameworks of patently diverse childhoods, emerging from dissimilar social, economic and cultural contexts. The origin of deafness for each participant also varies distinctly. These include deafness emanating from genetic conditions, illness at birth, illness acquired post-lingually and deafness due to ear malformations that was recognized by participants at different at various stages and ages in childhood. Despite the difference in genesis it is remarkable and almost enigmatic, that each participant becomes aware through his/her own respective intuitiveness that they are different and identities are constructed around difference. They were neither aware of nor understood that they were Deaf but they were instinctively cognizant of and recognized that they were different.

Violet became aware of being different by the way in which she communicated differently relative to her siblings. She could not speak while other family members talked to one another. She noticed a sense of connectedness between her parents and her siblings while she remained peripheral. Angel was confused at the frequent sight of her mother crying and sensed discord between her parents, which lead her to feel and believe that something was ‘wrong’ with her. Patience recalls that she was a quiet, docile child. She could not talk and instead used gestures and pointed to draw attention to her needs. Wilson’s teacher identified that he could not hear and referred him for assessments and therapeutic intervention while Troy was unable to respond naturally to his teachers and was forced to mimic the responses of peer learners in his attempts to feel integrated and to avoid drawing attention to his inability to hear.

For each of the participants their understandings of themselves in the relational contexts described above instantiated an identity of difference. In their peculiar ways participants discerned their identities of difference relative to the communication and interaction of other interlocutors in their immediate environments. Their difference amounted to a subtractive condition regarding what they could not do and what they did not have. This included not being able to hear and concomitantly not being able to speak coherently. The innocence of childhood shadowed the conceptualization of deafness as a physiological limitation. Although at this stage their difference does not have positive definition and inherent meaning, the difference has
however concretized itself into an identity. At some stage later the identity of difference reconstitutes itself and emerges as D/deaf identity.

The subsequent construction of their identities as D/deaf children or D/deaf persons is founded firstly on their recognition and acknowledgement that they are different. The participants invoke their subjectivities in the repositioning process. Woodward (1997) explains that subjectivity involves personal thoughts and emotions which are brought to the different cultural positions we hold, and which constitute the sense of self, resulting in ‘this is who I am’. Although subjectivity involves innermost thoughts and emotions, this is experienced in a social context. For the participants the discourse of ‘difference’ becomes known through their emotions and self-reflexivity in the social context of family and familiar others. This gives meaning to the way in which they experience themselves and subsequently, to the identities that they assume.

Foucault (1984) and Laclau and Mouffe (1985) account for identities as the product of dominant discourses that are linked to social arrangements and practices. Benwell and Stokoe (2006) elaborate that identities are given meaning in the context of each of the individual’s several subject positions, memberships in different structures, the intent with which the self is performed and in the framework of the individual’s beliefs, values and ideologies, as these intersect with the biographical projects. Hall (2000) counteracted the views of the above theorists with the view that in order for a subject to position itself in a discourse there had to be some kind of cognitive coherence that existed prior to the discourse. This is effectively the agency of the subject. Agency, which is the personal and self-determining project of the self, initiates the reflexive capacity of the mind, bringing subjective power over objective experiences (Taylor, 1989). Hall saw the need to create a balance between identities that are discursively constructed, and identities that are self-deterministically processed. The subject is not passively placed in a discourse; the subject reflexively identifies and invests in the position.

For the D/deaf participants as well, identity is a matter of being subjected to a discourse, taking up a position in a discourse and being active in the discursive process of engaging with other interlocutors. Investigating the participant’s subjectivity, agency and discursive positioning through a post-structural lens is thus a way of gaining access to the various overlapping and
intersecting discursive practices through which they are constituted as subjects and through which the silent world they live in is reified. Within the framework of this theorizing I will challenge the understanding of the participants that their Deaf cultural identities are fixed, stable, separate and exclusive identities, in favour of Deaf and deaf identities that have heterogeneous character.

7.3 Disrupting Deaf/deaf Identities

There is an imaginary boundary between meaning and construction of Deaf and deaf identities. At different times people may identify as Deaf or as deaf. Furthermore self-identity and ascribed identity as Deaf or deaf can change over time and over different spaces. The idea to use the dual representation “D/deaf” to reflect this fluidity of identity, and to render any discussions inclusive of the different identities and positionalities articulated by research participants, emanated from the work of British writers, Seldon and Valentine (2003). Their view is that “D/deaf” provides a context of equivalence of meaning and importance for both definitions of D/deafness. It also recognizes and captures the tensions and differences in identities claimed by the participants in the research project.

As indicated, all participants acknowledged realizing in childhood that they were different. They came to realize that they were different through relational circumstances, that is, by comparing their communication strategies to that of others in their familiar environments and through recognizing that people related to them differently. Each narrative records that participants emerged from different social and cultural backgrounds and as a result each experienced their individual dissimilarities differently. For each participant the differentness was uniquely framed owing to intersecting biographical factors, and represented contextually exclusive meanings. I would now like to turn briefly to how each participant reconstructs difference into a deafness related identity and integrates this phenomenon as part of his/her personhood. This section is significant in this research as it addresses the first of two critical questions, which is, how participants construct their identities as culturally Deaf persons. I will also explain, through the participants’ narratives, how they position themselves as culturally Deaf persons rather than as audiologically deaf persons. Thereafter I will contest deafness as a cultural construction and argue
that participants continuously reposition themselves between Deaf, deaf and hearing identities and create a hybridity of identities relating to deafness.

When Angel was admitted to the school for the Deaf, she was confronted for the first time with other children who pointed and gestured as she did since they were also unable to communicate conventionally using speech. Her inability to hear speech and other sounds was no longer significant. Meaning rested with the power of sign language. ‘As a Deaf person, I feel that sign language makes me feel like a complete person. Sign language helps me to feel like a normal person.’ Subjectivities associated with abnormality were soon annihilated from her experience. For Patience as well the path to realization was somewhat similar. When she transferred to a school for Deaf learners she began to experience her deafness. ‘I felt a big difference here. I felt like I was in another world’… ‘The other children were also signing and I watched them. I started to realize that they are like me. And that I am in their situation.’ Her identity as a Deaf person was constructed as she interfaced with her D/deaf peers and through their communication with their hands which is the language that she contrived as a child. Violet understood for the first time that her difference was deafness when she went to the school for Deaf learners at about the age of 9 years. ‘When I entered the school for the Deaf, I saw them using their hands a lot and I realized I am in the right place, … I knew that this was where I belong’. Here she learnt how to communicate in signed language. Being at the school for the Deaf, amongst learners similar to herself, prompted Violet to assume her identity as a Deaf person.

Troy finally experienced a sense of affirmation when he and his mother visited a school for Deaf learners where he was happy to be admitted. ‘I felt accepted here… and started learning sign language’. Since he became Deaf as a result of illness post-lingually, Troy had fairly comprehensible speech. However he made deliberate attempts to subvert his speech and sign like the other learners in his school as he was now beginning to identify with them. ‘I wanted to be same like the other Deaf children. … I was embarrassed that I had some speech’. As he began his integration into the D/deaf world, Troy began to internalize his identity as a Deaf person.
Wilson’s teacher noticed that he was experiencing challenges with hearing and recommended that he have tests to assess the level of his hearing. The tests confirmed significant hearing loss and on admission to the school for the Deaf, he met other Deaf children like himself. ‘I never thought there are people like me. … When I entered a school for the Deaf things became perfect. I saw there’s people same like me that I did not see before.’ Without any resistance he positioned himself within the discourse of deafness and started learning to sign. ‘The Deaf accepted me well.’

As noted with all the participants there has been a similar pattern leading to the point where they assume a D/deaf identity. The identity of difference remains as one of several layers of identities but emerges in reconstructed form as a D/deaf identity. The new D/deaf identity is strong and powerful and subverts the identity of difference. The first stage is the awareness that they are different relative to family members and other significant persons in their environment. This is followed by attending a school for Deaf learners and being exposed to others who are similar in communication and responsiveness. The child identified with them and enhanced his/her personal D/deaf identity. In this phase of the process there is understanding and subtle internalization of deafness and its implications, almost as if the young child has been given a rational explanation about his/her condition and why he/she has to attend this very unique school. There is a bi-directional identity construction process that follows. The child (participant) constructs the ‘deafness identity’ as he/she agentically positioned him/herself within the discourse of deafness. The D/deaf identity is also constructed by the discourse which is constituted by ideologies, values, beliefs and behaviours that are associated with deafness. In this way the identity is both agentically and discursively constructed. In the Deaf school the young Deaf learner (participant) gained confidence in the self and there was affirmation of D/deaf identity through association with other similar learners in the school and residence. During this stage there was spontaneous learning and progress through the use of sign language. As the subject positioned him/herself individually in the D/deaf discourses there was simultaneous overlapping with the collective identity of D/deaf people.

Their narratives revealed that participants are positioned within the discourse of deafness as a culture. Seminal publications on Deaf culture, such as *Deaf in America: Voices from a Culture* by Padden and Humphries (1988) referred to this as the ‘Deaf centre’. Deafness as a cultural
phenomenon appears to have been the prevailing discourse at the schools for the Deaf that the participants attended as learners. Instinctively they aligned themselves to the hegemony of the dominant Deaf cultural discourse as opposed to the discourse of deafness as an audiological condition. Participants expressed their veneration for sign language as the distinctive feature that creates a subjective attachment amongst Deaf people. Sign language unites them as a cultural group, and through sign language Deaf people embrace a collective D/deaf identity. The ability to communicate is a distinguishing facet of the human project and just as spoken communication is a function of hearing persons, sign language became a natural part of the lives of the participants as an instrument of communication. Wilson elaborated in his narrative that irrespective of the diversity in their written languages and the vernacular languages of their respective ethnicities, sign language was a powerful amalgamating force amongst D/deaf people.

Hearing children are raised in the cultural image of their hearing families and their own identities take shape and become established as the values, norms, beliefs, customs and religious and traditional practices of their hearing families are inadvertently transmitted to them. Owing to the absence of effective communication with their hearing families, the participants were unable to access the nuances of the cultures of their respective families. As a result their acquisition of an individual and collective cultural identity was delayed until they attended a school for the Deaf. Wilson recalled that while growing up there were no explanations offered to him about the practices of the culture in which he was raised and therefore this remained foreign to him. It was only through learning sign language that he was able to access and achieve an understanding of Deaf cultural practices. For the other participants as well, the acquisition of their cultural identity is delayed until the time they attend a school for Deaf learners which is actually their first exposure to Deaf culture.

For the participants deafness is not about hearing loss or not being able to hear. Rather they view the world from a ‘Deaf world-view’, one that reflects a different type of normality. As they are positioned within the cultural discourse participants subscribe to the belief that they function within an exclusive cultural system of social beliefs, behaviours, art, literary traditions, history and values. Most importantly in the context of their shared institutions, they use sign languages as the main means of communication. Since they are constituted as a culture, they are referred to as
"big D Deaf" in speech and sign. Participants perform their deaf identities in accordance with the conventions and practices of the traditions of Deaf culture. However from a post-structural perspective the fixed, circumferenced and prescribed Deaf identity of participants cannot remain stable and coherent. Post-structural accounts contest this view and present identity as being fluid, contingent, multi-layered and discursively constituted. As illustrated in the theorizing, identity is not an autonomous and unified entity. Identity has discursive, agentic, subjective and seamless character and the self is a fusion of the multi-layered and multi-faceted identities that emerge from the diverse subject positions that people occupy within myriad contexts.

In theorizing identity formation through a post-structural lens, culture and discourse gain ascendancy. Attention is drawn to the importance of studying identity in cultural and political contexts where the formation of identities is constantly at stake. In addition, the post-structural perspective embraces plurality in meaning and an integrated notion of identity rather than a dichotomy between individual functioning and socio-cultural processes, providing an approach that refutes the singularity of either 'component' of identity formation. And finally, the use of a post-structuralist analysis of identity formation creates spaces for the Deaf participants to claim agency in their lives and to construct identities by engaging strategies of power, resilience and resistance, and position themselves in whichever discourse they may elect. From the post-structural lens, I will challenge the cohesiveness of the participants’ notion of Deaf cultural identity.

Deaf Culture is recognised under article 30, paragraph 4 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which states that "Persons with disabilities shall be entitled, on an equal basis with others, to recognition and support of their specific cultural and linguistic identity, including sign languages and deaf culture." In response to the Convention, Mindess (2006) noted that there can be no singular homogenous Deaf culture. There are many distinct Deaf communities around the world, which exhibit different cultural norms and communicate using different sign languages. She states also that homogeneity cannot prevail since Deaf identity also intersects with other cultural identities. Deaf culture intersects with nationality, education, race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, and other identity markers, leading to a culture that is quite small as it is and also tremendously diverse. The extent to which people
identify primarily with their Deaf identities, rather than with their membership in other intersecting cultural groups also varies.

In this context, Smiler and McKee (2007) undertook a study of Maori Deaf people within the New Zealand Deaf community. Framed within the theory of identities being contextual and pluralistic, their objective was to ascertain how Maori Deaf perceive and express their identity in both Maori and Deaf communities, in which they have heritage membership rights. Participants described how they were often expected to choose a primary affiliation as either Maori or as Deaf, in solidarity with the agenda of each group. The view of the participants was that the two identities were not separable and that framing it as a matter of choice was inappropriate. Reference is made in this study to ‘identity salience’ which refers to the probability that an identity be invoked contingently, contextually or across persons in a given situation. For the participants Deaf and Maori are inseparable parts of self, and subjectivities and behaviours associated with each aspect are foregrounded differently in Deaf and Maori settings. Interviews reveal experiences of enculturation into Maori and Deaf communities and how they negotiate identities in each context. Significant in this study is that subjects are always multiply positioned and can express fluid identities. The multiple identities can all be significant but foregrounded differently in the contextual interactions.

Mindess (2006) informs of an African American study which found that 87 percent of African American Deaf people who were polled identified with their Black culture first. Participants explained that they were not necessarily identifying in the culture, but were placing themselves in the order of social acceptance. African American Deaf people believe that society sees them as Black first because of high visibility of skin colour. Deafness is an invisible condition. Padden and Humphries (2005) also noted the powerful and conflicted legacy of the education of African American Deaf people. For more than 100 years African American Deaf students in at least 15 southern states were schooled in inferior facilities completely apart from their white Deaf peers. Some state schools, according to Padden and Humphries (2005) subdivided their campuses, maintained two sets of dormitories and two infirmaries, employed different teachers and even conducted separate graduation ceremonies. This legacy of segregated education has had far
reaching effects on the lives and D/deaf identities of African American Deaf people. This has impacted their tertiary education and employment opportunities. It is intriguing that not many detailed accounts of this segregated history are available today. These studies support the notion that culturally Deaf identities are not compartmentalized and isolated. They continuously merge and intersect with other cultural identities and with identities embedded in biographical discourses. The Deaf identities of the African American students in these studies were also racialized and constructed in discourses of racial segregation. Within an already marginalized community there was further segregation – segregation firstly from hearing students and also from white students. Segregation from within creates further categories of interconnecting identities.

In her work on ‘Deaf Transitions’, Corker (1996) explored, through original writings and interviews, how culturally Deaf people position themselves in the context of family and community and forge their own unique Deaf identities. She drew subjects from a cross-section of Deaf people in a British society that broadly encompassed variations in gender, race, culture and sexual orientation. One of the Deaf subjects was Krishna, who lived in the UK and was of Asian descent. Krishna’s feelings about the deaf part of her identity were expressed in relation to her other identities. She acknowledged that deafness had been and remained an important part of her life. However it could be separated from her other identities. She mentioned in particular that her deafness was intricately embedded in what she referred to as her ‘Asian character’ and her Asian identity was embedded in her Deaf identity. Krishna appropriately described her self as a cluster of ‘flashing lights’, with each flash light representing an identity. The cluster of lights remained connected and is continuously at work as identities flash individually and in little clusters. There is on-going foregrounding, receding and overlapping as certain lights become powered contextually and contingently.

Corker (1996) emphasizes through Krishna’s narrative that identity construction is incessant work-in-progress. Her Deaf identity and national identity traverse imaginary boundaries. There are no boundaries between identities and if these do exist then they are illusionary. In this context Krishna was discoursed by both her Deaf identity and national identity. These may work separately and inter-connectedly. Corker elaborates that all Deaf people experience different
subjectivities, such as, oppression, marginalization, resistance, resilience and others. In addition there are biographical and structural markers that call for on-going change in subject positioning and identities. Deaf culture offers a fixed notion of identity and does not take into account the origins and onset of deafness and the particular image that the subject may have of him/herself. The question that arises then is that given the immense propensity for variability, how can Deaf cultural identity be considered essential.

Mindess (2006) raised the paradox of membership within the culturally Deaf community. The community may include hearing family members of Deaf people and sign-language interpreters on account of their ability to sign and who identify with Deaf culture. However the Deaf community does not automatically include all people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. One of Troy’s greatest challenges was not knowing which world he belonged in – the Deaf world or hearing world.

In the beginning I did not know if I was in Deaf world or hearing world. I did not know where I belonged. When I was younger I used speech. I can still speak a little. But going to the Deaf school I was forced to Sign. But the Deaf knew that I could speak and some did not want to accept me in the Deaf world. … But there will always be a difference between a person like me and a person who is born Deaf. According to Mindess, it is not the extent of hearing loss that ought to define a member of the Deaf community but the individual's own sense of positioning within the community. As with all social groups that a person chooses to belong to, a person is a member of the Deaf community if he or she identifies him/herself within the discourse of the Deaf community.

Troy’s dilemma raises the issue of admissibility into Deaf culture. Does the Deaf cultural community only allow Deaf sign language users into fold and reject Deaf speaking persons? What about hard-of-hearing and Deaf persons who are positioned within the ‘Deaf world-view’ but who attended oral education schools and as a result have speech capacity? If admissibility into Deaf culture is contingent upon the use of sign language and the deliberate and forced suppression of oralism, then the spontaneous identity of speaking hard-of-hearing and Deaf persons will be stymied. Post-structuralism rejects this type of structuring based on dichotomies and leans towards the construction of fluid and shifting bi-cultural identities. Leigh (2009) states
that the in today’s complex society, the fluidity of identities takes on greater meaning as people are exposed to and learn different ways of being, whether positioned in auditory or signing discourses. Opportunities to interact with various D/deaf, hard-of-hearing and hearing communities will allow for these individuals to discover identities that fit their particular needs.

From Bartha’s (2005) study of the Hungarian Deaf community, she revealed that hearing and Deaf culture are not mutually exclusive social-cultural constructions. The Deaf population can always be characterized by inherent heterogeneity. Different sections of Deaf groups use communication modes differently, each having a set of cultural and linguistic rules, norms and expectations, negotiating different identities. Padden and Humphries (2005) also clarify that sign languages are classed as human languages, but that are many different sign languages around the world, each with its own structure and history. There is Japanese Sign Language, Australian Sign Language, American Sign Language and one for every country in which D/deaf people live. In American society there are several American sign languages, including Canadian Sign Language, Maori Sign language and others.

America is known to be the home of Deaf culture but according to Leigh (2009) only 3% of the d/Deaf population uses ASL exclusively. Other modes of communication include Signed Exact English, Manually Coded English (a variation of ASL signs established into correct English order), Pidgin Sign English (a rough fabricate of signed English many deaf employ when communicating with the hearing), speech and Total Communication (a combination of speech and effect language in which a person mouths words or speaks while signing). In addition there are some D/deaf individuals who do not communicate in sign language and rely on speech, reading and writing when interacting with others. The Deaf community claim sign language to be the single most unifying force and most observable facet of a fixed and unwavering Deaf identity. What veracity is there in this claim if sign language is so diversely applicable to deaf, Deaf and hard-of-hearing persons?

In South Africa Sign Language as well there are provincial and regional dialects and even variations amongst the different schools in each province. The participants themselves have been subjected to sign language variations as they were raised in different provinces and have attended
different schools. They are aware of variations and have integrated these into their social networking. Several variations of sign language are embedded in their Deaf identities. There is contradiction therefore in the claim that sign languages are consistent and essential within the context of the cultural conceptualization of deafness. In South Africa there are twelve officially designated spoken language groups, each with its own contingent of D/deaf people. For these twelve diverse groups South African Sign Language is perhaps the one unifying language. Even though sign languages are nationally appropriated, they have the essential quality of creating connectedness amongst Deaf people on an international scale. Heap and Morgans (2006) inform that sign languages exist as mother-tongue languages for D/deaf cultures internationally. There is no is no universal sign language. As there is a national language in every country, so too there is an indigenous sign language as long as there are Deaf people in that country.

The long-term study by Heap (2003) on the D/deaf in Cape Town, South Africa, examined the notion of community as “sign-deaf spaces” from the perspective of adults who were born deaf or who became deaf as children and whose first language is SASL. A signing space or a network of social relationships based on signed communication was identified as a key strategy in creating community and constructing identity. The network established over time extended from including Deaf-signing individuals only to hearing people who could sign. Through the signing spaces, the D/deaf and hearing people made social life meaningful for themselves and whom they interacted with. Within the realm of signing spaces D/deaf people assumed layers of social roles and accompanying identities in courtship, marriage, parenting, working and other roles creating networks of shared language and communality.

Heap’s study is aligned to post-structuralist understandings that identities can be constructed from a multiplicity of discourses and layers of meanings can derive from intersecting discourses. In this ethnographic study, Heap (2006) conceptualized the Deaf community as a ‘diasporic’ community. Like other diasporic minorities, the Deaf in this instance use the “sign-deaf space” as a tactical means to deal with marginalization, destabilization and discrimination. They construct a ‘diasporized’ South African and Deaf identity, that allows for an affirming expression of their Deaf identity despite the prejudiced attitudes that they encounter from the broader hearing community.
Languages cannot be seen to be exclusive markers of particular identities. This is the claim of Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004), in their investigation of language/multi-lingualism, in supporting the poststructuralist approach to the negotiation of identities. They argued that identity options are not necessarily imposed by language choice or use. Language use may however enhance or solidify cultural identities. In fact linguistic and identity options may be negotiated, as these are continuously contested and reinvented. Furthermore individuals are agents of change of their own identities, and use their linguistic resources to negotiate, resist or accept identities depending on how the identities position them in social structures and discourses. In Weedon’s (1997) understanding language is dynamic since it is the site where meaningful experience is constituted, and where possibilities for change may be created.

The conceptualization of minority cultures is interesting yet ambiguous. Ladd (2003) argues that the characteristic that distinguishes minority cultures from majority cultures is ‘minority positioning’. Minority cultures exist within a polarized framework where their own cultural foundation is subject to fragmentation by an opposing larger cultural force. Minority individuals are continuously and contextually pulled either towards or away from each extreme, which is described as the tension between resistance and compliance. The example of the ‘American Negro’ is cited in the context of the broad overarching American culture and the minority ‘Negro’ culture positioned on each end of the bi-polar framework. The ‘American Negro’ is contextualized as two separate unreconciled souls set in strife and striving to attain a merged or blended identity and an overall true self. From this perspective, Ladd explains that the reality of minority cultures is that their existence prevails in opposition to the wider culture. This framework in which the minority culture attempts to remain separate and autonomous while simultaneously being drawn in by the powerful forces of the majority culture may serve to ‘ring-fence’ the minority. However there is also the possibility of destabilization of the minority. Given the latter possibility the proclaimed cohesiveness of the minority culture is questionable. As with ethno-linguistic groups, many Deaf people may not only be bilingual but may have a preference for being bicultural, negotiating multiple social identities, participating in both worlds and belonging to hearing as well as Deaf social networks. The Deaf community may be a good analytic tool for describing the contradiction in the linguistic-cultural dimensions of Deafness.
Scott-Hill’s (2003) starting point is the hearing world-view which is referred to as the ‘phono-centric world-view’. He refers to Deaf people as that group of people with deafness that is excluded from the dominant areas of social and cultural reproduction by the perpetuation of a phono-centric world-view. They may feel excluded from the disability movement since the movement is socially organised around phono-centric language norms. The description of the Deaf community should in fact include people with hearing impairments who, with the use of hearing aids or surgically implanted devices, are able to participate fully in a phono-centric society.

The issue of technology is yet another means through which to contest the confined and homogenous and character of the Deaf cultural community. Technology in this context includes hearing enhancing devices such as hearing aids and cochlear implants. The use of hearing aids is based on the assumption that these are capable of conveying environmental sounds and speech, facilitating communication and alleviating the effects of a silent world (Murray, 2008). Although the participants in my study profess to being positioned with the Deaf cultural discourse, they all admit to wearing hearing aids to overcome their sense of exclusion from mainstream society in the face of their physiological deafness. One participant extensively explored the possibility of cochlear implant technology. Murray (2008) describes this as an advanced surgical procedure that facilitates interaction with hearing persons and improved educational opportunities, and potentially denies audiological deafness and concomitant disability status. Contact with mainstream communities is inevitable and necessary in hearing families, hearing dominated workplaces and other hearing centric essential social spaces such as shops, hospitals, police and welfare services.

Hearing aided technology has clashed with Deaf identity constructions creating a battleground for conquest. Leigh (2009) states that the use of hearing aided technology is rejected by the Deaf cultural community as it is an antithesis to the use of sign language and encourages oralism. This has created an ‘artificial’ hearing identity and has reinforced ‘outsider’ status through more frequent integration with hearing people. Leigh balances this with the view of a technology aided culturally Deaf person. The subject, ‘Tucker’, aged 52, empathized with the frustration and anger of D/deaf people who have experienced discrimination and marginalization. In her view, rejecting
such technology only perpetuated their challenges. She asserted that her use of technology actually served to alleviate day-to-day audiological challenges rather than fragment her Deaf identity. What is significant is that hearing aided technology has generated multiple forms of communication, has influenced the ways in which D/deaf view themselves and has fused the lifestyles of D/deaf people.

Leigh (2009) records that hearing aids and cochlear implants will not necessarily create a group of D/deaf people wedged between Deaf and hearing worlds and who lack any clear identity. Rather they appear to be getting comfortable in shifting identities, through bi-cultural positioning. This supports the post-structural orientation towards identity construction where dichotomies are rejected in favour of amalgamated, but not necessarily obscure identities. Leigh writes of the state of hybridity which she describes as blending of two diverse cultures. The reality is that cultural dichotomies are relenting to the process of cultural interchanges, resulting in new forms and practices that show aspects of both cultures. Hybridization can be reflected in a person with a cochlear implant being a part of Deaf culture. This process suggests that bi-culturalism can mutate into some kind of hybridization that illustrates the fluidity and crossing over of specific identities, thereby rendering the notion of a rigid, well-defined Deaf identity that is devoid of technology, to be fragile and somewhat flimsy.

_The parenting, schooling and socializing of deaf children has been written and talked about for more than three centuries but the prospect that deafness may actually fit the model of a cultural entity was only introduced in the 1970’s. This notion is new, is highly contestable and the contradictions to the cultural model, as have been elucidated here, are gaining establishment. The simplistic views of cynics, says Ladd (2003) is that ideological development of a Deaf identity has stemmed from a passive desire to rebel against paternalistic attitudes, benchmark norms based on hearing society and structures that represent power such as hearing parents and oralist residential schools. Also, the theory that like attracts like applies when Deaf meet other Deaf, especially those from hearing families. The use of gestural language was an attempt to rebel against the hearing. With a cult-like beginning emanating from being reactionary, bonds were developed and these groups developed ideologies based on shared experiences, beliefs, a variable but nevertheless manual language and unique behaviour patterns._
Notwithstanding the way in which the conceptualization has emerged, the notion of deafness as cultural construction that has shaped a concise and definitive Deaf identity is contradictory. Using a post-structural lens, I have attempted to deflate this claim through illustrations that the culturally Deaf identity is intersected by several other identities including racial, national and ethnic identities. In addition I have challenged the all-embracing virtual divinity of sign languages to show that its fragmentation cannot hold together a culture. The issue of technology has been addressed as being applicable to deaf, Deaf and hearing groups to facilitate integration and educational advancement. I have argued that deaf, Deaf, hard-of-hearing and hearing categories cannot exist as bounded entities. There are inevitable interfaces between hearing status identities and these are shaded by personal life experiences and biographies. There is an endless array of variables and its intersections that continuously confront the expression of identities, refuting its essentiality and enabling its fluidity and pluralistic character.

7.4 Deaf Teacher Identity: A Discursive Doing

This second part of the analysis will address how participants negotiate their identities as teachers given the contextual framework of deafness. I will deconstruct the Deaf teacher identities as I have narrativized them in the previous chapter, into the various the various accounts and theorizations that underpin identity construction. The review of identity construction theorizations in Chapter 3 is broadly based on typical or mainstream populations. In this section I will explore the applicability of the theorizations to a specific group of D/deaf participants and the construction of their identities as D/deaf teachers. I will explore their identity construction as D/deaf teachers through various post-structural conceptualizations that present identity as being fluid, contingent and contextual, multi-layered and co-existing through discursive subject positioning. This view is in opposition to essentialist understandings that identity is an autonomous, unified, fixed and stable entity.

Firstly I will examine identity as a discursive doing that alters continuously as subjects diversify positioning in discourses and subject roles. The concepts of agency and subjectivity will also be explored for the way in which these inform positioning and subsequent identity construction. I will examine the notions of power and how power is negotiated through language in the search
for identity. I will also examine the possibility that the identities that the subjects present as D/deaf teachers are identities that are performed through discourses and in interaction with others. And finally the search for knowing devolves upon narrative constructions of identity and the phenomenon that identities are submitted in the stories that we tell and the selves that unfold in the telling.

Discourse theorists Foucault (1984) and Laclau and Mouffe (1985) share the view that identities are situated in discourses and that identity is about identification with the particular subject positions that one assumes in a discursive structure. They dismantle the more common understanding that identity is founded on an essential core that has potential expression across contexts. On a concrete level the explanation is that there are several diverse role positions in which subjects are positioned at any particular time. For the participants these role positions may include being teacher, church-goer, spouse, parent, counsellor, colleague and community soccer player. Within the context of the role positions there are more abstract biographical diversifications based on age, gender, race, ethnicity, language and sexual orientation. This can be further deconstructed as the biographical diversifications may apply to each role position. For example a participant may be contextualized within the description of a teacher who is a D/deaf, 32 year-old, African, isiZulu speaking, male SASL user.

The discursive structure is a multiply-layered and multi-textual enterprise. The structure is constituted by several discursive practices and the subject acquires identity through the way in which he/she positions and presents the self in the different discursive practices within the larger discursive structure. The self is therefore not the essence, but the description or the representation of the way it presents in the different discourses in which it participates. Laclau and Mouffe (1985) claim that identity must be managed as being discursive since it is constituted relative to the way in which the self is represented in various discursive practices. It is in the way in which the subject performs these positions that identities are accepted, refused and negotiated.

This form of theorizing decentres the subject and focuses on the discourse as the contingent and contextual means through with a particular identity is constructed at any given time or context. Within the social structure of family, participants encountered several discourses including
disability discourses, religious affiliation, traditional and spiritual healing, family hegemony and family expectations. Although discourses have the potential to remain stable, participation in the discourses can be of unstable character causing identity to be fragmented and transient. Troy submits to the authority of traditional and spiritual healers as a child, during which time he presents with a medically discoursed identity of illness that can potentially be cured through alternate forms of healing. Later he resists positioning in the discourse of alternate healing and accepts the D/deafness.

As a child Angel was aware that her mother was always sad and cried often. She felt that there was ‘something wrong’ with her and fantasized about being a hearing person. Later as her deafness related experiences became more affirming she repositioned positively herself in the D/deaf discourse and no longer wished to be a hearing person. Identity may be continually re-shaped and reconstructed as participants reposition themselves in discourses. Although the material and social worlds are experienced by most individuals as objective realities, its meanings are subject to change and always fluid and precarious, causing the nature of reality to be continually reconfigured through new interactions and changed ways of knowing.

Similarly the school is also a complex discursive space and the site of production of several identities based on a host of prevailing discourses. The discourse of relationships is prominent in schools. The teacher has a relationship with the school’s management, with colleagues, learners, parents, the curriculum and the community in which the school is located. Each relationship is a site of production of the teacher ‘self’ and of particular teacher identities. In the relationship discourses there are further discourses Walker (1996) explains that discourses are always inscribed in relation to other discourses so that every discourse is part of a ‘discursive complex’. At various stages the participants’ lives as teachers are simultaneously embedded in diverse, multiple discourses that can potentially cause lack of coherence and instability in selfhood. In her relationship with the hearing principal and teachers, Patience experienced marginalization, exclusion and oppression. However as a teacher and in her relationship with learners she positions herself as social rights activist with power and influence to effect change in the behaviour of learners. She takes up their cause and acts meaningfully to create enabling and accessible learning environments.
She experienced conflicting teacher identities instantiated by her relationship with her colleagues and learners. The identities intersect as each produces the other in a bi-directional response. Identity therefore prevails as fluid, fragmentary, contingent, multi-layered and most significantly, constituted in discourse. Hall (2004, p.51) argues that “an individual’s self-consciousness never exists in isolation … it always exists in relationship to an ‘other’ or ‘others’ who serve to validate its existence”. Her oppressed teacher identity is validated by her relationship with colleagues and learners while her activist teacher identity is authenticated by the way in which Patience relates to learners. Hall’s theory of connectedness between the self and an ‘other’ presumes that identity does not merely originate from the individual but emerges from the processes of negotiation with the other and with the ‘content’ of the relationship. The dialectic nature of discourses is also evident as Patience is both constrained and enabled through relational structures of her school. In the context of power discourses, Patience was produced by power discourses but also engaged power as a means to produce altered teacher subject positions.

Benwell and Stokoe (2006) offer a further dimension of the discursive view of identity construction. They contend that identities can be realized as ideological discourses interact with biographical discourses. Biographical discourses, as I have come to understand through reviewing the literature on identity, may be loosely defined as existing discourses of the self that have stable character and that remain relatively consistent although the potential to change is always present. These may include nationality, race, ethnicity, gender, religion and sexual orientation. I would like to add the discourse of ‘D/deafness’ to these biological markers. It appears more appropriate to classify ‘D/deafness’ as a biological marker rather than as an external structural variable. This view attempts to capture the side of the self where existing discourses intersect with external structures. For the participants D/deafness, like other biographical markers, intersects with the socio-cultural structures of family, school, community and social networks, and with associated discourses based on ideology. There is also overlapping within various biographical markers as D/deafness connects with nationality, race, ethnicity and gender.

The intersections between biographical markers and external structures and within biographical markers account for new, altered and mutating identities. The intersections regulated power and
determinism upon identity as the participants were subjected, structured and produced through identifications in discourses. Davies (1993) states that the positions which we identify with in the subjectification and shaping process constitute identity. In other words their identities became meaningful in the context of each individual’s membership in several subject positions, the intent with which the identity is performed and in the framework of the individual’s beliefs, values and ideologies, as these collectively and individually intersected with the specific biographical projects. For the participants D/deafness presents as a dominant discourse that informs several realities that constitute the D/deaf self. In his ‘discursive production of the subject’, Foucault (1984) accounts for identities as the product of dominant discourses that are linked to social arrangements and practices. Each of the multiple selves of the participants is framed within the D/deafness discourse.

This paradigm in which identity is situated in and constructed through discourse implies an anti-essentialist view of identity, since it presumes meaning to be situated not within the self as an essence, but as a description in several different discourses. Through interaction with various interlocutors and socio-cultural discourses, multiple versions of the self are possible, creating ‘repertoires of identities’. Despite their claim that identities are discursively produced, Benwell and Stokoe (2006) are critical of identity being produced by discourse. If this is so then discourse takes on the attributes of being prescriptive, deterministic and limiting. The discursive framework prejudices agency in identity construction and denies autonomous investment.

The implication of this model is that if our identities are inscribed in discourses, then the constitution of the self will be founded on ideology, and the development of the individual devolves to becoming a process of acquiring a particular ideological version of the world, serving whichever ideology is dominant at the time. The post-structural bias leans in favour of Hall’s (2000) view that in order for a subject to position itself in a discourse there had to be some kind of agency or cognitive coherence that existed prior to the discourse. Hall saw the need to create a balance or harmony between identities that are discursively constructed, as elucidated by Foucault, and identities that are psychoanalytically processed. For Hall identity is the point at which there is a transient but live connection between the subject and the subject positions.
constructed by discursive positions. The subject is not passively subjectified in the discourse; the subject reflexively identifies and deliberately invests in the position.

The prominence of agency and discursive structures in accounting for identity construction has been widely contested (Hall, 1992a). In the previous section I have outlined extensively how discursive structures are theorized as being integral to identity construction. Alongside discursive structures, agency is also theorized as being instrumental in identity construction. If free will prevails, then the individual is described as having agency, is an agent of his actions or is able to exercise agency. The opposing view is that identity construction is informed by various other structures that have greater power than the subject in the construction of his/her identity. Where there is agency then the subject has been self-determining in positioning him/herself in discourses. However where positioning within discourses has been imposed upon individuals, then subjective agentic influence has been restricted, and social and cultural structures are foregrounded as the instruments of identity construction. Taylor (1989) supports this position in his theorizing and presents the individual with agentive identity and as a self-interpreting subject. There is emphasis on the reflexive capacity of the mind, bringing subjective power over objective experiences with identity emerging as a project of the self.

Identity, according to Giddens (1991), is the person’s own reflexive understanding and interpretation of his/her set of biographical-structural narratives. For the participants, biographical-structural narratives refer to the various positions that each holds in the different categories of life. Each participant is constituted by sets of biographical narratives. The participant’s identity as teacher is constituted by a set of related biographical-structural narratives such as African D/deaf teacher, colleague, hostel supervisor, sports co-ordinator, pastoral caregiver and chairperson of parent support group. The complete self of the participant is constituted by various unrelated, but overlapping sets of biographical-structural narratives that may include, for example English speaking female, parent, spouse, sibling and community activist. The individual deliberately seeks coherence and balance of identities as part of an ongoing, reflexive, identity project. According to Giddens (1991) in the process of composing a biography, a person continually integrates and internalizes events which occur in the outside world into the ongoing
narrative of the self. The self therefore refers to an amalgamation of multi-layered identities that we hold with each connecting variously to the roles that we occupy at different junctures in life.

As indicated, identities apply when subjects position themselves in social and cultural discourses. Benwell and Stokoe (2006) recognize this positioning as temporary attachments and not essential cores. Owing to the transient nature of these attachments, identities remain unfixed, unstable and continuously in the making. The participants’ narratives show that they are positioned within D/deaf discourses. But Hall (2000) argues that participants are not naturalized into discourses and that positioning in discourses does not occur complacently. In order for them to have made the attachment to the position there had to have been self-determined, individual action. There is a cognitive and psychoanalytic process by which a subject invests in a position or engages with the act of positioning. This renders identity construction a discursive, as well as a self-determining, process.

In the case of the D/deaf participants all intentionally positioned themselves in D/deaf discourses. The fact that they did not resist positioning in the D/deaf discourses is also a self-determined act. The extent to which they subscribe variously to the Deaf and/or deaf regulations and their decision to relinquish speech in deference to sign language shows their cognitive doing. All of the above was undertaken amidst struggle against parents who even sought the help of traditional and spiritual healers to alter their state of deafness and to make them hearing. To the parents and community the normative script was aligned to being hearing and deafness was considered to be contrary to the norm. The participants exercised their agency by resisting the normalcy discourse and the expectations of parents and self-willed their participation in the D/deaf discourses. It is through their agency that they identified with the D/deaf discourses and acquired D/deaf identities. There will always be contestation about whether the steadfast culture of the Deaf community imposes an identity on the D/deaf participants that subverts their agency, control and self determination or alternately whether participants embrace the conventions of D/deaf culture voluntarily. Even if participants did concede to the overwhelming influence of the D/deaf discourse, their very submission to the discourse could only have been effected through their sense of agency.
On an individual level the participants expressed their agency in other different ways in the context of their personal and relational circumstances. Violet married her D/deaf partner, while she was a student at college, against the wishes of her parents. She showed fortitude and determination in the way in which she contended with her alcoholic husband. When all the teachers at her school succumbed to the ineducability of the Down’s syndrome learner, Violet took him on as if it were a challenge and demonstrated the will to want to teach him. Patience’s positioning in the discourse of religion is deep, intense and unwavering. The conviction that she shows here guides her sense of morality, her social rights actions and herpastoral commitment to the D/deaf learners. There was firm resolve in her determination that the needlework teacher would not oppress and stifle the successful-learner identity that she desired for herself. In her first year as a teacher, Patience was successful in establishing why the learners were rebelling against school structures. Once established she set in place processes to transform the young minds.

Once Wilson had firmly positioned himself in the D/deaf discourses, he taught sign language to his sister so that she could be his interpreter at church and at state services. Later as a teacher he taught sign language to a hearing colleague at his school to benefit his attendance at school meetings and education department workshops. He exercises personal agency in his will to support the adult D/deaf community whom he knew were educationally disadvantaged. He continues to resist the influence of his parents in his choice of a marriage partner. Angel is intentional in her drive to live out her life in the image of her parents’ expectations. Later as a teacher she conceptualized an image of herself as a teacher that she wanted to present to the Deaf learners. She positioned herself as the teacher to be revered for her achievements, knowing well that for the majority this was remotely achievable on account of their disadvantaged social and economical circumstances. Her ambition was to be a popular teacher and she achieved this goal.

Despite positioning himself in the D/deaf discourse, Troy contradicted the cultural norm and elected to wear hearing aids. In the face of cultural adversity he contemplated cochlear implant surgery. Although he did not succeed he showed sincere attempts to teach sign language to members of his family to facilitate their reciprocal communication. The path to his D/deaf identification was traumatic and turbulent and Troy refuses to contemplate how his life could
have been, had he not acquired deafness. Instead he cognitively elected to sublimate these thoughts and move forward.

These are occasions in which participants asserted agency within the context of their individual circumstances. In each of these occasions participants have positioned themselves differently as young learners and later as teachers, and each position offers a different identity description. For example, as a D/deaf teacher Patience is positioned within the discourses of religion, social rights, pastoral care, oppression, success and transformation. What is significant about this is that in each position the participant has asserted agency and has made personal investment. In post-structural theory, discourses constitute rather than determine a teacher’s identity (Morgan, 2004). Morgan explains that the concept ‘determine’ presents teachers as being passive and produced by dominant discourses. The concept ‘constitute’, on the other hand, presents a fully autonomous, self-aware subject, who can elect identities to make up the self. Identity is constructed from the internal privacy of cognition and from external interpretations based on discourse and other continuous and dynamic processes that constitute meaning. In this sense, identity is located both within the individual, and in the social and cultural practices external to the individual. Identity formation is seen as being steered by society with the individual attempting to navigate predetermined passages (Cote & Levine, 2002).

Giddens (1991) rejects the dichotomy of agency and structure and instead posits the approach where agency and structure are intertwined in a structuration process creating a sense of equilibrium in the conjoined influences of personal agency and exterior structures. Structuration theory’s response, therefore, to whether the self constructs identity or identity constructs the self is that self and identity are mutually implicated in their co-construction. This latter view is aligned to the turn to post-structuralism that challenges identity formation as being either an individual or a socio-cultural phenomenon (Foucault, 1984). Both agency and socio-cultural processes have transient character subjecting identity formation to continuous re-definition. New features emerge constantly, by which an individual can either confirm or problematize his/her identity. With regard to the agency-structure debate my own conceptualization of the competing hegemony between individual autonomy and various social and cultural structures is that identity construction is the joint enterprise of both individual agency and socio-cultural discourses.
Closely allied to agency as an identity construct, is the construct of *subjectivity*. This is essential to understanding identity and cannot be conceptualized autonomously. The definition of identities as social category memberships or identification with role positions has far greater complexity. Venn (2006) argues that any complete account of lived lives needs to include both identity and subjectivity. He clarifies that identity is a response to what groups or categories and their relations make possible for subjects, while subjectivity tells the story of how a specific self lives those cultural positions, actively realizes them, takes responsibility and ownership of them as an agent, converting social category memberships and social roles into ethical, emotional and narrated choices. Similarly Hall (2004) explains that subjectivity which is founded on a post-structuralist discourse focuses on the making of the subject and the taking of subject positions, with emphasis on reflexivity. Subjectivity explains the emotions associated with the personal investment made in positions of identity.

Meaning is given by the psycho-emotional attachment that subjects offer to the respective membership categorizations and discourses. Woodward (1997) explains that subjectivity involves personal thoughts and emotions which are brought to the different cultural positions we hold, and which constitute the sense of self. We experience subjectivity in a social context where language and culture give meaning to the experience of ourselves and to the identities that we adopt. Subjectivity indexes the acting, thinking and feeling being and evokes the set of processes by which a self is constituted, this self being the result of an internalization of attitudes, values, expectations, memories and experiences discoursed in relationships and activities.

Through their subjectivities, the participants negotiated their identities as culturally Deaf persons and as D/deaf teachers. In their narratives participants revealed how they lived and realized the cultural positions, and took responsibility and ownership of the positions as active agents. Using their subjectivities they converted category memberships and social roles into emotional and narrated choices. Once the participants had positioned themselves within the Deaf and/or deaf discourses, they began to identify in the collective identity of others who share the same language. This resonates with social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1986) where identity is premised by individual identification within a group which takes place at the point at which the individual
constructs an emotional attachment to the group. There is both a physical and subjective investment in the identity positioning, hence the social-cognitive process.

Angel’s experienced a set of emotions, thoughts, attitudes, beliefs and values, as a result of her parents’ despondency and sadness. This set of experiences enabled her self-determined positioning in a series of success discourses aimed at earning her popularity – as a school learner, Gallaudet student, drama teacher and overall, as a D/deaf person. This set of subjectivities became a part of her biographical project and integral to her positioning as a successful Deaf person. To materialize these expectations she made deliberate personal investment and deployed her agency to be a successful person. The strength of the subject positionings explained her deep attachment to the particular identity. It is possible that Angel was not aware of her intense attachment to the position as subjectivity may include unconscious dimensions of the self and can be rational as well as irrational (Hall, 2004). Angel presented as being a clear-headed and rational agent but the powerful forces of her earlier memories and experiences shaped her identity construction as a successful and popular D/deaf person.

When Troy was told not to return to the hearing school, his self-worth as a learner was fractured. His emotions revealed that he lacked legitimation as a learner. Perhaps the other related identity as member of a learner peer group was also affected while other layers of identities such as gender, son, and youth club soccer player would have remained meaningful. In the several layers of identities that constitute the self, contradicting subjectivities can cause an individual to experience fragmentation in certain discourses while experiencing harmony in other unrelated discourses. As a teacher, Troy’s subjectivities altered from being compassionate, to being apathetic and then to being empathetic. These subjectivities are associated with diverse feelings of discontentment towards hearing teachers, changing emotions towards learners and experiences of his personal challenges with deafness and his aggrieved childhood experiences. He experiences a multiplicity of diverse but connected emotions towards the different interlocutors in his work space. Through the varying subject positions that he takes, and the conflicting subjectivities, Troy is at the intersection of a multiplicity of teacher identities and these are articulated in his narrative.
As a learner, Patience positioned herself alternately in hearing and D/deaf identities as she changed schools. Each time she repositioned, she experienced her subjectivities differently. From a post structuralist perspective, the repositioning would have generated new subjectivities and the new subjectivities would have constructed different identities. According to Blackman et al (2008) subjectivity is an active agent that shapes and is shaped by prevailing political spaces and in this account subjectivity is how she experienced the lived multiplicity of positionings at any particular time. There are deep and intense subjectivities associated with her positioning in the discourses of religion and morality. The moral identity that she espoused intersected with her subject positions in other discourses and has also merged into her teaching identity. She actions this identity as she moralizes over various issues. She fearlessly expressed value-laden beliefs and attitudes, and expressed judgments about colleagues and their undesirable behaviour. Through her subjectivities Patience distinguished and distanced herself from her colleagues, not because they are hearing and she is D/deaf, but because of their values systems, lack of professionalism and oppressive behaviour.

In her narrative Violet is variously positioned as D/deaf daughter, sibling, school learner, college student, wife, mother and teacher. In each relational position there are diverse sets of associated subjectivities that alter continuously and construct conflicting, overlaying identities. The subjectivities have positioned her in discourses of fierce assertiveness resilience, resistance, struggle and tenacity. Her life story is a long and arduous journey and years of struggle were overcome by her resilience, self-motivation and personal desire to triumph over the odds. In her narrative she is positioned as a wife who unconditionally. She defied her parents and married ‘DG’. She endured hardships and financial constraints while she had to travel a long distance from ‘DG’s’ home to college. She showed resilience in dealing with his alcoholism.

Her identity as a teacher is discoursed by deep affection and caring for learners and is nurtured by challenge. This was evident in the way in which she taught and managed the ‘Down’s syndrome learner’. Her empathy to the mother of the learner mirrors her own experiences and emotions of struggle. As a D/deaf mother she shared a hybrid relationship with her hearing children and maintained a balance of allegiances towards her D/deaf identity and their hearing identity. Her experience of this hybridity enabled a healthy respect for her hearing colleagues.
Violet fits appropriately into the post-structuralist version of subjectivity, which refers to how we understand and position ourselves within institutional practices and wider discourses.

Early in his positioning as a D/deaf person, Wilson’s subjectivities are foregrounded as an emotional binary. There is relational conflict as he felt included within the Deaf community and excluded by family members. He was positioned in a self affirming way in the Deaf cultural discourse and negatively positioned within the family structure. He remembered lucidly the behaviour of insensitive hearing friends and family members who treated his deafness with derision and ridiculed him at every opportunity. His D/deaf identity has been fraught with anguish and humiliation. Even as a D/deaf teacher there are conflictual identities. He is aware that he is respected and acknowledged as a teacher but this is not notable as a D/deaf person. There is potential for tensions as he is dialectically positioned in his hearing and D/deaf identities, with each discourse producing different sets of subjectivities. There are also tensions arising from subjectivities associated with his teacher identity and Deaf identity. In post-structural understanding, however, subjects can be conflictually positioned but identities intersect and through agency subjects can transition fluidly between layers of identities. There is an emotional attachment to the hearing teacher whom Wilson has taught to sign. The hearing teacher offers interpreting support to Wilson which in turn enhances his D/deaf identity. What distinguishes Wilson’s identity as a D/deaf teacher is his personal subjectivity that includes an intense desire to transform the lives of Deaf adults who were not privileged with schooling.

As noted the D/deaf participants are subjected to a multitude of discourses and to each of these discourses a certain set of subjectivities is associated. At different times in their lives, participants are recruited in contradictory discourses and complex subjectivities. The discourses and practices through which we are constituted are often in tension, one with another, providing the human subject with multiple layers of contradictory meanings their conscious and subconscious minds (Davies, 1993). Subjectivity therefore is known to be a site of disunity. Contrary to humanist notions of stable realities and the existence of rational subjects, poststructuralism theorizes subjectivity as a site of disunity (Weedon, 1997), produced through conflicting discourses, and rendering subjects as being continuously unstable. Weedon (1997) indicates that there are different forms of post-structuralism that have varying political
implications. However there is the underlying premise that language is the common factor in the analysis of social organization, social meanings, power, and individual consciousness. Weedon states that language is the site through which discourses and cultures are defined and contested and it is also the place where our subjectivities are constructed.

There are several identity markers that flag the identity of a person and one of these sites of identity is located in language. Language is known to be a means of solidarity, resilience and identity within a culture or social group and it is through language that they develop a unique understanding of the world (Lanehart, 1996). Bakhtin’s (1986) view is that primarily language is the means through which people express themselves and that its secondary function is communication. Weedon (1987) claims that the post-structuralist view is that language offers the discursive positions through which we consciously live our realities and gives meaning to social reality. We participate in discursive fields in which there are competing ways of giving meaning to social and cultural processes. While some discursive fields are more central and exude more power, others are not as significant. In the context of this research, ‘deafness’ would constitute a discursive field, which for the participants is central and exudes more power than other identity construction variables. Therefore given that language is the means through which we access discourses, language presents therefore as a site in which meaning may be contested as it can continuously produce new meanings.

Bourdieu’s (1991) theorizing on language offers an understanding of the relationship between language and power. The individual emerges through a process of acquiring a particular version of the world based on ideology that serves some hegemonic purpose. The dominant cultural group generating the discourse persuades those who are subjected of the essential truth and rationality of the discourse. For the participants the genesis of their Deaf cultural identity is in the D/deaf schools. It is here that they are exposed to the power of signing as a language form. As single D/deaf persons in hearing families, all the participants disclosed how they were challenged by mis-communication and the absence of communication, until they learnt sign language at their respective schools. Ironically the learning of sign language reinforced the communication schism between the participants and their hearing families. They were now powered with a language that was unknown to their families.
The participants equated exposure to sign language as turning-point experiences. Sign language made Angel feel like a complete person. When he started signing Troy began to feel accepted. Patience likened her experience to being in another world. When Violet saw the children at the D/deaf school signing, she knew immediately that she belonged here. In Wilson’s experience of signing things became perfect. These constituted life changing experiences and new beginnings that emerged from self determination and repositioning in D/deaf discourses. Language gave the participants power, meaning and a sense of knowing of their D/deaf existence. Through language and the power that language exuded, participants were able to objectify their experiences of deafness and concretize their identities as D/deaf persons.

Through language, individuals negotiate a position of power within the structure of a particular cultural field or social context. The extent of power is critical in any social context or ‘field’, since it determines the level of interaction, and the choice between inclusion and exclusion, where one group can decide who to include or exclude on the basis of language. Bourdieu (1991) refers to this as symbolic power. The practice of symbolic power in linguistic circles is determined by the use of a language of choice by a dominant group to oppress less dominant groups. Language converts ‘linguistic capital’ which is the tool that enables the individual to negotiate a position of power in the social hierarchy. By its very nature power is dynamic, unstable, and changes with context.

As teachers, participants reported feelings of oppression and exclusion in their relational experiences with hearing colleagues. However their D/deaf hegemony was embedded in their language. Through sign language they maintained positions of power and autonomy and their D/deaf identities. Relative to the hearing teachers, this was achieved through their natural competence sign language. Armed with the power of language, participants negotiated positions of primacy over hearing teachers. An invisible hierarchy was structured in their schools whereby the Deaf teachers gain ascendancy over hearing teachers owing to their language power. Sign language is the dominant language in the Deaf cultural setting and awards hegemony to its users, while those who are not able to use the language effectively, such as the hearing teachers, assume lower or outsider status in the Deaf community. Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004), in their investigation of language/multi-lingualism, claim that individuals are agents of change of their
own identities, and use their linguistic resources to negotiate, resist or accept identities depending on how these position them in social structures and discourses.

Sign language extends its supremacy in its role in the construction of Deaf identity and the ‘Deaf-World’ worldview, which is the way in which Deaf people make sense of the world around them (Schein and Stewart, 1995). Reagan (2002) claims that the signing worldview offers its role as linguistic mediator, and offers its significance as an identifying facet of cultural identity. In addition this world-view functioned as a language of group solidarity for D/deaf people, serving both as a badge of in-group membership and as a barrier to those outside the cultural community. The position of power that the individual is able to negotiate determines social identity, which is acceptance or rejection within the group. Taylor (1989) argues that individuals define themselves through conversations with people in communities. Taylor nurtures the idea that a self only exists through ‘webs of interlocution’ and that identity is shaped by a shared language through which the world and the self are interpreted.

This discursive model offers an anti-essentialist view of identity, since it presumes meaning not to be situated within the self but in representations mediated by language (Derrida, 1978). The essential reality is always represented through systems of language, and it is through language that the self is realized. For Bourdieu (1991) all human activity takes place within webs of socially constructed fields. For the D/deaf participants these would include: family, school where participant was a learner, community and religious structures, school where participant serves as a teacher, and D/deaf social networking structures, all of which are subjected to on-going change with time and context. The participant can be subject to one or more of these cultural fields or discourses in one day.

Issues of power, inclusion or exclusion informed by language choice and identity, become a new act for the performer of the identity and is aligned to the poststructuralist notion of performativity. As indicated, Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) point to the use of language as a series of acts of identity, while Weedon, (1997) indicates that performances of identity can vary with different languages and different discourses. In agreement, Pennycook, (2004) also indicates that meaning making in language is constantly changing and being re-negotiated, and that there are no essential categories upon which identity is founded. A linguistic performance
has the potential to reveal or expose a certain identity, but it is still not fundamental to the formation of that identity. In the association between language use and performativity, language choice and the way in which the language is used is seen as the medium through which an act of identity is performed.

May (2004) theorizes identity as performed by language and through language rather than identity existing prior to language. Language is the means through which the narrative or the story of the self is conveyed. The particular point of interest here for the interpretation of identity is succinctly conveyed by (Taylor, 2006), which is, that narratives are the foundation upon which identity is constructed; narratives are the sites in which identity is instantiated and negotiated. In other words the narrative is the means through which identity may be expressed, explored and understood. Cortazzi (2001) refers to the narrative as the primordial organizing and sense-making framework of social life and the vehicle through which people’s lives are made meaningful.

Narration is a process-orientated approach that focuses on examining selected themes from life stories to describe people and how their identities can be constructed from the discourses and interactions embedded in the themes. From the review of related literature and from the narrative experiences with my participants, it appears that the narrative is an all-embracing post-structural concept that includes and intersects with other post-structural concepts in its quest to contextualize people’s lives and construct their identities. Within a narrative telling there are discourses in which individuals position themselves. The position in which the speaker finds him or her self may be challenged, negotiated or even rejected by the speaker, depending on how the particular position presents the individual.

Another dimension, which is also characteristic in the narrative, is that identity is an intentional performance. Identities are seen not as merely represented in discourse, but rather as performed, enacted and embodied though various linguistic and non-linguistic opportunities. Integral to the notion of performance of identity is that identity is performed with subjective agency that is determined by the subject that choreographs the performance. Agency is also evident in the way in which the subject decides on how the performance is mediated. As indicated earlier, the
assumption of discursive approaches is that subjectivities, which include ideas, thoughts, emotions, recollections and meanings, prevail in social and cultural contexts. Subjectivity is occasioned as an individual takes up particular subject positions within discourses and is also constructed by the position that has been selected for occupation within a particular discourse (Bamberg, 2004). These constructs become the resources for talk and for making sense of subjects’ lives and the way they relate to the world.

In their narratives, the participants brought together the various discourses in which they are positioned and exhibited how they are positioned in these discourse. Using their personal subjectivities, they negotiated positioning in the D/deaf and other significant discourses that make their lives meaningful. Through the narrative they were able to illustrate how they lived the cultural positions, actively realized them, and took responsibility and ownership of them as self-willed agents. Each of the discourses, their respective positioning in the discourses, the power that the positioning offers and the subjectivities with which they live out the discourses, became the narrative resources that participants deployed to construct their multiple identities on the occasion of that particular narrative opportunity.

It is the notion of power in narratives that I wish to explore in this analysis. Krauss (2006) concisely explains that identity theorists are currently and increasingly more interested in the manifestation of power and dominance in self-stories and the theorizing that it is in the performance of narrating that the display of power is set in motion. The teller has ownership of the narrative experience and exercises complete agency in deciding what gets told and how it gets told. According to Bamberg (2004), through narrating their stories, people position themselves as powerful, powerless, empowered or disempowered. The speaker can refute, negotiate and adopt positions in the process of relating to the audience. Therefore any identity theory of the present day will be required to respond to questions of positioning and the negotiation thereof.

Through her narrative Angel disclosed the power that she experienced in deafness once she had positioned herself in the Deaf discourse. She narrated prolifically of her successes and achievements knowing how this presented her with the power that she desired. At Gallaudet her
Deaf identity flourished and she revelled in this experience. She claimed power in her position as a signing teacher and protested vehemently against teachers who oppressed culturally Deaf learners and forced them to speak rather than sign. Armed with her exceptional signing, Angel competed for dominance amongst hearing colleagues. She enthusiastically took up opportunities to showcase herself on public platforms and acquitted herself exceptionally. Her relationship with the Deaf learners is strategically configured to reflect her as a revered, admired, role-model teacher and advisor to the D/deaf.

Patience embraced the new-found identity as a D/deaf learner and enjoyed several notable achievements in dance, drama and sport at the D/deaf school. She gained foothold as a self-assured learner and was awarded several achievement certificates. She derived a sense of power and ascendancy through her religious conviction and used this power to moralize, express ethical values and beliefs, and makes value judgments about people in her environment, and their actions. Through the Deaf teacher she was empowered towards the cause for righteousness. She used her position as a teacher primarily to achieve justice for the D/deaf learners rather than as a professional project aimed at educating them. She expressed her role as a teacher that has power and influence and is able to establish discipline amongst unruly learners and effect positive social change. With her firm sense of moral judgment, Patience positioned herself apart from a group of hearing colleagues because she disapproved of their value systems, lack of professionalism and their oppressive behaviour.

After several unsettling school experiences, Violet’s first experience of power and self-worth was in learning to communicate in sign language. She presented herself in a position of power after having come through several personal challenging experiences which she overcame alone, through sheer dint of determination. These included dealing with an alcoholic husband while she was a college student. She acquired a driver’s licence owing to her husband’s frequent insobriety. She derives power from her teacher identity and asserts her sense of self as in her teaching and is determined that colleagues would not undermine her as a young D/deaf teacher. She experienced an elevated sense of her teacher identity when she was relocated from the junior primary department to the secondary school. Violet courageously took on the challenge of
teaching the Down’s syndrome learner when her colleagues held the view that their efforts would be wasted on a child who was not capable of learning.

Like the other participants, Wilson also experienced several sporting and curricular achievements which enhanced his esteem as a D/deaf person. To benefit his disadvantage, he experienced accomplishment at having taught sign language to his sister and a hearing colleague at school. With the help of Mr G, Wilson’s English writing skills improved tremendously. As a care-giver in the school residence Wilson takes on the pastoral role with young learners, offering life-skills and informing them of current events. Through participation in several local and international art competitions he has enhanced his professional identity as an art teacher. Winning has brought material rewards to the school and personal acclaim to himself. What emerged prominently in Wilson’s narrative about experiencing teaching is the presence of an intense and passionate desire to help the adult Deaf community. Wilson derives power and ascendancy in assisting them with finances, banking, insurance claims and other business related matters.

There are several reductionist discourses that framed Troy’s life experiences since the onset of his deafness. These served to disempower him and deny him of self-worth. However in his narrative Troy negotiated positions of power through resisting positioning in these discourses. He resisted positioning in the discourse of traditional and spiritual healing. He was disdainful of people that pitied him, owing to his deafness. The people in his rural village also earned his contempt. They had not seen a Deaf person before and looked on him very curiously. He did not understand the cultural beliefs that influenced peoples’ attitudes. It is possible that in his rural village, the prevailing culture was that hearing was the norm and deafness was contradictory to the norm. The village folk responded to him as if he were abnormal. Troy also argued value judgments against hearing colleagues whose teaching was motivated by monetary gain. In his narrative Troy refuted the above positionings and through it negotiated a sense of power.

These power invoking narratives spanned the life experience of participants and used resources of experiences, recollections, memories and emotions. Using the narrative research opportunity a particular set of identities was instantiated. Participants created identities that were desirous and appealing. In any particular narrative opportunity, the teller, whilst searching for meaning and
coherence, will assume a position which spontaneously maximizes the manifestation of power and dominance, thus performing an identity of autonomy. Similarly the participants set their power in motion through the narrative. The participant centralized him/herself in the narrative and through various discursive positioning, power was instantiated through acceptance, resistance and negotiation of positioning. Positioning, which is framed within post-structuralist understanding, is intricately allied to the narrative construction of identities where identity can be claimed in the relationship between the speaker and the audience (Bamberg, 2004). The identities that were performed in this narrative were constructed through the narrative within the context of that particular narrative opportunity. Given a different narrative context with a different audience, participants could have presented different identities.

I also wish to argue that identity is claimed in the space that is created between the speaker and the interactor, and in the relationship between the speaker and what is being said. The underlying significance is that each level informs the power that the speaker wants to claim or manifest. Bamberg (2004) confirms that identity is co-constructed in the space between the speaker and the audience. Armed with the capacity to perform as such there is support for the preservation and performance of agency in identity construction. The speaker performs a particular identity in the context of the given audience. In the context of another audience the speaker can alter the identity, using the same stable narrative text.

In the context of this research, both my position as researcher and the content of the narrative interview, would have informed the positioning and extent of power that the D/deaf participants claimed in the narrative. Given my years of experience and senior managerial position in a D/deaf school, participants would have wanted to position themselves favourably and exude power impressively, in narrating their life stories to me. The post structuralist view is that identities are contextual and contingent. If the content of the interview was altered and/or if the audience, which in this case is the interviewer or researcher, was different, new identity outcomes could be anticipated. Each participant would then perform new sets of identities based on the agendas of both the researcher and the participants.
The concept of ‘available narratives’ as demonstrated by Norick (2005) which explains how tellers negotiate ownership of experience, is also significant in this analytic context. The concept refers to the teller’s negotiation of what gets told and what doesn’t. The teller is the authority and through self-determination pronounces on what is told, what is withheld and manipulates how it is told. The tellability of these narratives is informed by the extent to which the event is acceptable or unacceptable to the teller. Each of the research participants narrated occasions of being subjectified in trauma discourses that were prompted by their deafness. Angel experienced oppression by hearing teachers who refused to allow her to sign, while Patience experienced being humiliated by hearing teachers on account of her deafness. Wilson was lessened by hearing family and friends who ridiculed him and had a sardonic sense of fun in social exchanges, at the expense of his deafness. Violet experienced extreme hardships and challenges through her deafness and other personal circumstances. Troy became deaf owing to unheeded illness and was further mortified by traditional healers and faith campaigns.

These are stories that should not have happened, rather than stories that did not happen. What is significant though is that the participants selected these stories to constitute their narratives, from a host of other available narratives. The participant, through agentic capacity claimed ownership of the experience and strategically integrated this into their biographies of the self. From a post-structuralist orientation narratives have several lenses, each affording a new perspective on an event or experience.

May (2004) argues that since the narrative involves the performance of identity, the narrator has the capacity to constantly reconstruct different versions of the self by telling different stories or by telling stories differently. The participants reconstructed and re-negotiated the trauma narratives as acquired, biographically relevant resources. In the narrative telling the ‘trauma’ resources produced a counter-identity that manifested as personal stories of power and resilience.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has inadvertently covered the storied lives of the Deaf participants in three layers rather than in three phases. Inherent in ‘phases’ is the essentialist and humanist implication that
identity construction is a linear, progressive evolving process. Instead I have elected to engage a post-structuralist orientation and to express their lives in layers. This is significant as layers are expressed in a co-existing framework where each layer is always present, but redefined. During the childhood layer, participants were unaware that they were deaf and did not attach meaning to the condition of ‘not being able to hear’. Participants were aware though that they were different relative to significant others in the environment. Later in childhood their difference amounted to a subtractive condition based on what they could not do and what they did not have. This included not being able to hear, accompanied by challenges in verbal articulation.

In the second phase, which coincides with admission to D/deaf schools, participants became aware of how deafness enabled and/or constrained their personal identities. There is cognitive understanding and acknowledgement of deafness followed by positioning in the dominant discourse of cultural deafness which is placed dialectically to audiologically deaf persons. From an analytical position I contested the claim of participants that deafness is a cultural construction and from a post-structuralist perspective I argued that participants cannot claim to have coherent culturally Deaf identities since they continuously reposition themselves between Deaf, deaf and hearing identities and as a result, have created a hybridity of identities connecting to deafness. In the context of this framework each participant then emerges as a multi-voiced or polyphonous self. There are multiple, overlapping and transient expressions of deafness related identities within the single self. In Bakhtin’s (1986) view there is a plurality of voices both complementary and contradictory. Despite our efforts at establishing coherence and stability, individuals will remain complex and contradictory.

The next layer storied their lives as learners and as teachers and how their D/deaf teacher identities are post-structurally constructed. I argued that the teacher identities that the Deaf participants presented were instantiated by that particular narrative opportunity and that given another narrative opportunity their identities as teachers could be differently presented. The teacher identities that emerged were performed by and through language. During the narratives the participants enjoyed the power and the entitlement to decide which narratives to embrace and which to resist. I explored the personal and external structures that the participants engaged as resources to tell the story of their teacher lives and the events in the participants’ lives that have
become biographically relevant to identity construction. And finally I argued for the significance of the particular position that the participant assumes in the narrative since the literature claims that identities are constructed in the space between the speaker and the audience. Identities are constructed from the power or powerlessness that the space offers and from the social and cultural context of the researcher-participant relationship.
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUDING WITH NEW BEGINNINGS

8.1 Circle of Selves

During the time when this research was in the process of materializing, I must admit to having had a limited purview of the broad, encompassing conceptualization of identities. My framework of understanding of the concept of identity was compartmentalized into distinctive categories of people that constructed identities differently. The challenge was to apply post-structural concepts to each of the people categories to explore how their respective identities were constructed. I was further challenged by having to merge the different categories into a broad conceptual framework of understanding. I experienced flashes of understanding which would disappear as quickly as they emerged. Having progressed through this exploration from reviewing literature to designing and implementing the research strategies and to recording and analysing the data, the picture has now become definable and patently unambiguous.

The overall category to which identity applies is ‘person’. In the context of this research ‘person’ translates to ‘participant’. The notions of ‘teacher’ and ‘D/deaf’ are discursive concepts which constitute the participant. The notion of ‘teacher’ is a role-position, like other role positions that the participant may occupy, such as wife, father, lay-minister, chess club member and community activist. The notion of ‘D/deaf’ is a discourse in which the subject has positioned him/herself. Other such discourses in which the participant is certain to be positioned include gender, sexual orientation, race, nationality and ethnicity. My personal theorizing is that deafness, whether audiologically or culturally conceptualized, ranks amongst the biographical resources that inform identity construction. Deafness has become biographically relevant for the participants.

From a post-structural lens deafness may be considered as a stable and consistent discourse. However propensity for variability arises as participants position themselves in the deafness discourses, contextually and contingently. I have metaphorized this conceptual framework as a ‘circle of selves’. My view in the context of my study is that all identities that constitute the self are positioned in a circle, with each being connected to the other and aware of the magnitude and hegemony of the other. The circle can expand exponentially as the self electively positions in
new and intersecting discourses and subject roles. As the self desires and determines, a particular identity will be invoked and becomes salient. These can be invoked separately or simultaneously, in harmony or in contradiction, as powered or powerless - the possibilities for transience and multiplicity are perpetual.

Each participant has ownership and autonomy of his/her own circle. In the circle of each D/deaf participant, the learner and teacher selves are foregrounded in their narratives while other selves remain seated but significant. Their storied lives as D/deaf learners, addresses the first of my critical questions, which is, how participants construct their identities as D/deaf persons. Their identities as D/deaf persons were instantiated through enculturation in schools for the Deaf from the point at which they became learners, as they interacted with other D/deaf learners and lived away from hearing families in Deaf school residential facilities. Prior to attending the school for D/deaf learners, participants’ personal identities were constructed around ‘difference’, relative to hearing people and predominantly around the way in which hearing people communicated. Through observing hearing people the participants became aware that they are different.

At the D/deaf schools they positioned themselves in Deaf and/or deaf discourses and assumed enculturation in deafness which informed their use of signed and/or oral languages, their distinctive behavioural patterns, use of technologies and artefacts associated with deafness, their social networking and their beliefs and values. In this analysis I argued that from a post-structural perspective the participants’ claim to positioning in either Deaf or deaf or hearing discourses is not fixed and rigid. Instead positioning overlaps fluidly and continuously between the three discourses with participants taking on character and conventions from both Deaf, deaf and hearing discourses. They transition consciously or unconsciously between the systems and create multiple and contradictory identities. In addition I argued that cohesiveness and coherence in the conceptualization of a Deaf cultural community and Deaf identity is non-existent, when viewed from a post-structural lens.

This investigation also sought to address the way in which they negotiated their identities as D/deaf teachers. The respective schools where the participants are teaching are the sites at which their identities as teachers are constructed through positioning in the prevailing cultural
discourses. The institutional resources that shape their teacher identity constructions include colleagues, learners, the parent community, the curriculum, and other micro-interactions. The institutional resources intersect with biographical resources of race, religion, gender, social class, childhood and later experiences, relationships, recollections, role-models and other signifiers. A multitude of intersections and permutations emerge, to create an inexhaustible inventory of teacher positions embedded in the general discourse of teaching and discoursed by teaching. In both instances, that is, as D/deaf person and as D/deaf teacher, the school is the site that instantiated the D/deaf identity and the teacher identity and the cultural discourses that prevail in schools are the sites of resistance, acceptance and negotiation of identities.

The micro-interactions and interpersonal spaces negotiated between the Deaf teachers and other interactors or interlocutors within the school and associated contexts, either challenged or produced power constructions. Teacher agency was actioned through intention to resist, accept or negotiate positions in discourses and identities are also constructed in the process of actioning teacher intentions. Schools and classrooms are the sites of resistance and incoherence for the participants, in which they perform not only teacher identities but a host of other identities as well, including D/deaf identities, racial identities, gender identities, parent and sibling identities, and others. Their narratives have revealed that in the performance of their identities participants invoked agency and power and positioned themselves in the dominant institutional practices in the form of resistance, acceptance and/or working around the practices. The personalized, agentic and subjective response to institutional practices averts essentializing teachers and demeaning their individualities.

In this dissertation, I have noted that the hegemony and integrity of the Deaf cultural community in the USA has been interrogated by Davis (2007) and Leigh (2009). The Deaf community in the UK has been subjected to similar rigor by Padden and Humphries (2005). In South Africa, Heap (2003; 2006) has drawn attention to the fluidity of the Deaf cultural concept in her research and writing on the Deaf community in Cape Town, South Africa. Here she makes reference to crossing boundaries and dispersing the cultural identity of the Deaf community in Cape Town, using a social network space as the site of her research. My research is significant and seminal in the sense that it contributes to the existing literature base, data that has been drawn from the
D/deaf community within the province of KwaZulu-Natal. The analysis draws attention to the norms, conventions and dialect of SASL that is experienced by the D/deaf community in KwaZulu-Natal. As indicated in the analysis the South Africa D/deaf community is provincially and regionally fragmented and in addition experiences variation based on attendance at different schools within the same province. The research is also seminal in that the Deaf teachers from KwaZulu-Natal are the only Deaf teachers from South Africa who have participated in an exploration of identity construction. The research has foregrounded and implicated the Deaf community in KwaZulu-Natal using data that has been drawn from Deaf teachers.

8.2 Talking Points

The research has highlighted the need for further research in the field of D/deaf identities. The issues outlined here are those that have been prioritized.

D/deaf Teacher Identity as a Resource for Constructing D/deaf Learner Identity

In post-structural theory, discourses constitute rather than determine a teacher’s identity (Morgan, 2004). Morgan explains that the concept ‘determine’ presents teachers as being passive and produced by dominant discourses. The concept ‘constitute’, on the other hand, presents a fully autonomous, self-determining subject, who is able to freely choose which aspects of his or her identity are of pedagogical value and of value in constructing learners’ identities. Teacher identity thus becomes a critical resource for enabling or constraining learners’ identities (Morgan, 2004) which in turn can cause continuous reconstruction and redefinition of their own professional identities. The chain of events described by Morgan confirms that the interpersonal relations generated between teachers and learners are not simply a context for learning. At times, they are texts themselves, produced through meaning that the school offers. Morgan argues the bi-directional relationship between learner identity and teacher text. Not only does text become identity: it is also the case that identity can become text.
The identities presented by D/deaf teachers needs to be explored to ascertain how this informs their lives and the meaning they attach to aspects of their lives. Some critical questions may include:

*How does the teacher’s D/deaf identity influence D/deaf identity construction in learners?*
*What is the effect of having D/deaf teacher role-models on the personal and D/deaf identities of learners?*
*How do learners experience power and/or powerlessness in the presence of a D/deaf teacher?*
*How does the D/deaf teacher influence the subjectivities of D/deaf learners?*
*How does the D/deaf teacher’s identity influence the way in which knowledge is received or rejected in classrooms?*
*How do D/deaf teachers mediate knowledge for D/deaf learners?*
*How do D/deaf learners experience the hidden curriculum when imparted by D/deaf teachers?*
*What is the relationship between the identity claimed by the D/deaf teacher and the identity that learners assign to the teacher (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002)? How does the dissonance experienced in this relationship enable or constrain learning?*

The possibilities for research interest in the influence of D/deaf teacher identities on the vulnerabilities of D/deaf learners are inexhaustible. The potential for research is secondary. What is critical however is understanding how D/deaf learners who are contextualized in classrooms with D/deaf teachers, position themselves in discourses and experience their multiple and complex identities and make sense of their lives.

**An Eclectic Approach to Understanding D/deaf Identity.**

An understanding of identity that has depth, extent and detail cannot be achieved using a single theoretical framework. A thorough and rigorous account of identity constitutes features that may be common to more than one theoretical framework. There are substantive issues in any research undertaking that differ widely in accordance with varied agendas embedded in the research. In addition there is an increasing range of methodological approaches, with interview data frequently being enhanced by observations, incidental data, data from other sources and data from participatory research techniques.
In my research the use of the post-structural lens only as a framework for understanding identity, is a notable limitation. The narrative data is laden with inferences from participants that their individual D/deaf identities are defined by their individual identification and sense of belonging within the community of D/deaf persons. There is solidarity, resilience and the potential for resistance in identity that is embedded in emotional attachment with others. This understanding is not post-structural but is instead situated in what Tajfel and Turner (1986) refer to as Social Identity Theory, based on the social-cognitive processes of membership and the way in which belonging is both initiated and sustained. Taylor’s (1989) emphasis on the importance of a defining community in the construction of identity is compelling and relevant when considered in the context of the D/deaf communities. Identity is shaped by a shared language and it is through this shared language that conversations with members of communities take place within ‘webs of interlocution’.

The use of post-structuralist theory alone to understand D/deaf identities offers a homogenous version of identity and neglects the material base of reality and of language itself (McLaren, 2009). Several so-called proponents in fact reject post-structuralism as a tool for the way in which individualities and narratives of difference are simplistically reduced to discourse. In addition post-structuralism favours and advances language as an analytical tool and privileges the researcher with the final word on deconstructing human solidarities and producing new selves. Howard’s (2000) proposal of ‘theories of inter-sectionality’ is appealing since this dispels homogeneity, in favour of increasing acknowledgement that multi-dimensional stories of the self can intersect to offer a broader yet more succinct understanding of identity.

The study of teacher identities is complex and multifaceted. To accomplish such a study Feyerabend’s (1988) stresses the importance of multiple theories because only in this way can we hope to gain a fuller picture of an immensely complex phenomenon such as teacher identity. The use of more than one theoretical approach opens possibilities of dialogue across paradigms. As different theoretical approaches are juxtaposed the complexities and intricacies of D/deaf identities can be more broadly understood. There is no doubt that the various theoretical approaches will have a common meeting point but what we anticipate is the multiplicity that can be conveyed up to that point. The point I wish to highlight is that ‘D/deaf’ and ‘teacher’
individually, invoke multifarious meaning and justifiably there would need to be a concert of theories to realize the combined identities of D/deaf teachers.

**Understanding the Personal Struggles of the D/deaf Teacher Participants**

Several personal struggles disharmonize the lives of participants. Those that I have elected to discuss are those common to all participants and are issues that have the potential for redress.

All the participants bemoaned hearing teachers’ ineffectual use of SASL. As D/deaf learners, participants were subjected to the same challenges in accessing the curriculum. The participants show empathy for the D/deaf learners whom they claim to be underperforming on account of hearing teachers’ poor signing skills. I argue that hearing teachers cannot be held accountable for their own lack of proficiency in signing owing to the lack of available learning resources and where forums for learning are available, the costs are prohibitive. I recommend that the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Department of Education makes available structured SASL learning programmes for hearing teachers in D/deaf schools. These need to be accredited and incentivized courses managed by tertiary institutions in the province. Each D/deaf school in the province could be a satellite site for learning SASL which could be mediated by the D/deaf teachers in the school. In the absence of implementing mandatory measures for hearing teachers to learn SASL, the scourge of illiteracy amongst D/deaf learners would perpetuate.

Aligned to the issue sign language, is the participants’ need for SASL/ spoken language interpreters. The participants claim their deafness to be affirming given that they have a language for communicating. But the narratives present their deafness as an extreme debilitation in the absence of SASL interpreters. The question that is raised here is of what use is sign language if allows access only to people who know the language. There are multiple contexts in ‘a day in the life of a D/deaf person’ where and when he/she needs to communicate with people who are unable to sign. The feasibility and practicality of people in public places being sign-language proficient is remote. But accessibility for D/deaf teachers can be enhanced if SASL interpreters are employed at schools for the Deaf. SASL interpreters could facilitate access for D/deaf teachers at school meetings, in interactions with parents, at education department workshops and curriculum training programmes. Presently D/deaf teachers are precluded from attending and
participating in meetings and workshops owing to the lack of interpreter facilities. This has stymied their professional development and challenged their delivery of the new national curriculum, and would obviously thwart any enthusiasm for professional mobility. The appointment of SASL interpreters by the KZN Department of Education should be mandatory so as to enable the functionality and practice of D/deaf teachers. Deafness can easily devolve to being a ‘handicap’ if D/deaf teachers are not adequately resourced.

The participants articulated enthusiasm to want to engage in further tertiary study as neither their respective schools nor the KZN Department of Education provided opportunities for their professional development. As indicated, the absence of SASL interpreters obstructed their access. Tertiary programmes for D/deaf teachers are currently only available at one institution in South Africa, which is University of Witwatersrand, in Johannesburg, Gauteng. Wits University, as it is more popularly known, offers the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) and the Bachelor of Education /Honors Degree to qualified D/deaf teachers. Both these educational qualifications, which are correspondence programmes, are mediated by a SASL interpreter present among a hearing lecturer and hearing students. There are Deaf Studies Modules, integrated as part of the coursework, which are taught by Deaf lecturers, and hearing lecturers who know SASL. For the participants in this research and other D/deaf teachers in KZN there are several logistical challenges incurred in studying at a campus out of the province.

There are financial constraints as the D/deaf teachers need to travel to Johannesburg to attend lectures during school term-end holidays and secure accommodation for a period of five to seven days. The programme offers mentors who are campus-based and who support and guide the D/deaf teachers with the assessment tasks required by the coursework. The D/deaf teachers in Gauteng benefit tremendously from the mentorship support, but distance disadvantages the teachers from other provinces. My recommendation is that the University of KwaZulu-Natal should offer in-service correspondence courses in education for D/deaf teachers in KZN. The courses need to be offered in conjunction with SASL interpreters which the University should fund. These are teachers that serve D/deaf learners in the province and should be offered opportunities, like other hearing teachers, to engage in further study to remain abreast of current practices in education and to enhance their professional development.
A Final Thought …

This identity exploration has been an amazing and incredible experience. I have worked with and for the D/deaf people in this province for almost three decades and their complexities continue to intrigue me. They are committed teachers of D/deaf learners and spirited in the face of personal and institutional impediments. They are young men and women who want to make their experiences, stories, and perceptions known. For the purpose of offering insight into their histories and for generating new knowledge from their histories, they allowed me to re-tell their traumatic and triumphant life stories. I lament their anonymity in this final text as they all deserve to be acknowledged in gratitude. My wish for the participants is that they continue to live in hope for dreams cannot remain unheard, silent and voiceless!
REFERENCES


APPENDIX 1: ABBREVIATIONS

**ASL:** American Sign Language  
**BSL:** British Sign Language  
**CSL:** Chinese Sign Language  
**SASL:** South African Sign Language  
**KZN:** KwaZulu-Natal  
**SA:** South Africa  
**USA:** United States of America  
**UK:** United Kingdom  
**UNCRPD:** United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities  
**COTEP:** Council for Teacher Education Policy  
**DEAFSA:** Deaf Federation of South Africa
APPENDIX 2: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Date: ______________

Ms A Ram
Student Number: 971164129
Faculty of Education
University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (Edgewood)

Dear Mr/Ms ______________________

I, Ansuya Ram, will be conducting research towards a PhD in Education. The research will explore the lives, identities and self-images of Deaf teachers and how this is connected to their practice. The research is entitled:

SPEAKING HANDS AND SILENT VOICES: Exploring the identities of d/Deaf teachers through narratives in motion.

By examining their personal and professional life histories, this study will explore how the Deaf educators who qualified from the pilot teacher training programme at Springfield College of Education, and are now practicing at various schools for Deaf learners in KZN, are negotiating their identities and experiencing their professional practice in schools for Deaf learners. The biographical, social, institutional, contextual and curricular factors shaping their identities will be probed in order to understand how these enable or constrain their teaching practice.

This study will address the complexities of practice and changing policy and how as mediators of policy the Deaf teachers view the way forward for the education of Deaf learners and assert the importance of their roles as Deaf educators. This research has the potential to provoke debates, amongst others, on comparative practices and outcomes of Deaf and hearing educators teaching Deaf learners.

The study hopes to bring Deaf educators’ histories together, and through these reflect on their lives, visualizing new foundations and new possibilities for Deaf education. I want to know through their stories about their multiple, fluid and layered identities, how these have been constructed and how these identities manipulate their practice. The research will draw from these educators’ own stories and hear their voices.

The research / interview processes will be:
- Conducted during the months September 2007 to March 2008.
- Conducted by the researcher through the medium of South African Sign Language.
- Video-recorded and signed responses will be trans-coded into English script.

As you were part of the group of Deaf teachers who participated in the pilot study, I would like to invite your participation in my proposed research. Please study the consent form below, and respond based on your decision.

Yours sincerely

_______________________   _________________
Ms A. Ram (Researcher)   Professor A. Muthukrishna (Supervisor)
Student Number: 971164129   Tel. 033-2606045 / 084 234 9096
Tel. 084 5898 446
APPENDIX 3: CONSENT FROM PARTICIPANTS
(Attached to invitation to participate.)

CONSENT FROM PARTICIPANT

I, ________________________________________________ have been approached to participate in the research to be conducted by Ansuya Ram.

I understand that:
- The research is about Deaf teachers, their individualities and their relationship to professional practice.
- My participation in the research is voluntary.
- My participation in the research will not affect my position as a teacher or my relationship with other colleagues at School.
- I can refuse to answer any questions asked to me.
- I can withdraw from the research process at any time.
- The researcher will use information from me in a way that will assure my continued respect amongst Deaf learners, colleagues and the wider fraternity.
- The information obtained will be used with the strictest confidentiality.
- My identity will not be disclosed in the dissertation.
- Photographs of my self will not be used in the dissertation or any display related to the research.
- Deaf Rights will be respected.
- The research interviews will not impact on my working time.

I agree to participate as a Deaf teacher in the research that Ansuya Ram is conducting.

Name: ____________________________________________
Signature: ______________________________
Date: __________________________

Or

I do not agree to participate as a Deaf teacher in the research that Ansuya Ram is conducting and I understand that this will not disadvantage me in any way.

Name: ____________________________________________
Signature: ______________________________
Date: __________________________

RESEARCHER:
Ms Ansuya Ram
Student Number: 971164129
Contact: 084 5898 446
APPENDIX 4: QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Describe yourself using the following identifying details:
   - Name
   - Sign name (describe)
   - Where were you born / raised?
   - School /s attended

2. What is the origin / cause of your Deafness?

3. Describe your family background. (parents, siblings, occupations / Deaf / hearing, etc)

4. How old are you now?

5. Are you presently in a relationship? (With whom - Deaf or hearing person?)

6. Do you have any children? (Deaf or hearing?)

7. Where do you live now?

8. Who do you live with?

9. What inspired or motivated you to become a teacher?

ABOUT MY SCHOOL

1. For how long have you been employed here?

2. How did you come to be appointed at your School? (interview, referral, etc.)

3. Describe your present school:
   - Name of School
   - Location
   - Number of learners
   - Residential facility
   - Grades
   - Staff structure
   - Demographics of staff and learners
   - School structure
   - Resources
4. What grade / subject / learning area do you teach?

5. Are there other Deaf members of staff at your school? Elaborate

6. In addition to your teaching responsibilities,
   - What co-curricular activities are you involved in?
   - What committees do you belong to?

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

1. What workshops have you attended?

2. What professional development training have you received?

3. Is there a Sign Language interpreter at your school?

4. Is Sign Language interpreting services available to you when you attend workshops / professional development training / school meetings? Who provides this service?

5. What support do you:
   - Receive from the KZN Dept of Education?
   - Expect from the KZN Dept of Education?

A. Ram (Student No. 971164129)
APPENDIX 5: UNSTRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

INTERVIEW 1: CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOLING

1. What are your earliest recollections of being a Deaf child? Describe the person or episode or event that made you realize that you were different? What was your understanding of deafness as a child? How did you experience deafness as a child and whilst growing up amongst hearing family members?

2. Describe your experience of schooling. You may wish to comment on meeting other Deaf children like yourself, hearing adults who could Sign, your achievements, high-points and low-points in your life as a scholar.

3. Describe any critical negative incidents or events relating to your deafness from your childhood or schooling years. Perhaps these incidents might have been embarrassing, awkward, self-defeating, when you experienced extremely unpleasant emotions. Tell me exactly what happened, where it happened, who was involved, what you did, what you were thinking and feeling and what impact this experience may have had upon you and your life. What change did this incident bring about in your life?

4. Describe any critical positive incidents or events relating to your deafness from your childhood or schooling years. Perhaps these incidents might have been motivating, encouraging, affirming and when you experienced extremely pleasant and joyful emotions. Tell me exactly what happened, where it happened, who was involved, what you did, what you were thinking and feeling and what impact this experience may have had upon you and your life. What change did this incident bring about in your life?

5. You grew up surrounded by hearing people. What were your feelings towards hearing people? While you were growing up did you ever wish that you were a hearing person? What made you feel this way? Why did you wish this?

INTERVIEW 2: ADULTHOOD

1. As a Deaf adult, you now know all about Sign language and Deaf culture. Explain the role of Sign Language and Deaf Culture in your life. Compare your understanding of “being Deaf” when you were growing up, to your understanding now as an adult?

2. Looking back over your life story and the various interactions that you have had, identify the single person, group of persons, or organization/institution that has /have had the greatest positive influence on your life. Describe this person, group, or organization and the way in which he /she /it has had an impact on your story.

3. Looking back over your life story and the various interactions that you have had, identify the single person, group of persons, or organization/institution that has /have had the greatest negative influence on your life. Describe this person, group, or organization and the way in which he /she /it has had an impact on your story.

4. Looking back over your life and the various experiences that you have had, describe some significant challenges that you have faced. How have you faced, handled, and dealt with these challenges? Have
other people assisted you in dealing with these challenges? What support did you need? How did these challenges impact on your life? What have you learnt from these challenges?

5. You are now a mature and responsible adult and soon you will marry and be a parent. Irrespective of whether your children are Deaf or hearing, describe yourself as a parent. How will you raise your own children? Will this differ from your own childhood? In what way will you be different from your parents?

6. In looking back on your life, what would you regard as a “turning-point”? What episode inspired you to make a change in your life? What change did you make in your life? How has this change impacted on your life?

7. How would you evaluate your life? Has your life been successful / unsuccessful? Do you have any regrets about the way in which you have lived your life? What would you change about your life if you could live it again?

INTERVIEW 3: BEING A TEACHER

1. How would you describe your experience as a student at the college, while training to become a teacher? Comment on the curriculum / training programme / staff of the College / their delivery of the curriculum. Did you integrate with hearing students? Were there any significant incidents / persons at the college that impacted on you as a teacher? How did you feel at graduation?

2. Describe the relationship that you have with your hearing colleagues at school. What professional support do you get? Do you socialize together? How do you feel as a Deaf person amongst many hearing colleagues? (respected, confident, threatened, superior, integrated, isolated)

3. Describe the relationship that you have with the Deaf learners. Do you see them first as learners or first as Deaf persons, like yourself? Do you know if the learners prefer Deaf or hearing teachers? Why do you think this is so? How do you feel about this?

4. What are the barriers or constraints that you experience as a Deaf teacher? Do you ever feel stifled or frustrated? What causes you to feel this way? How has this impacted on you as a teacher?

5. What are the strengths or opportunities available to you as a Deaf teacher? Is your presence as a Deaf teacher valued? Do you have a ‘voice’ at your school? How has this impacted on you as a teacher?

6. Are there any incidents in your experience as a teacher or persons that you met while teaching that have impacted on you as a person? This impact could have been a positive or a negative experience. Describe the details of the incident or the person. Why did this incident / person impact on you? How did this incident / person impact on you?

7. As a Deaf teacher how do you feel about the current trends in Deaf education? What would you change? How would this change benefit Deaf learners / improve Deaf education. What qualities characterize a good teacher? Do you have these qualities?

8. What aspirations do you have for yourself as a Deaf teacher? What are your plans for the future? What goals and dreams do you want to accomplish? (If you did not become a teacher, what would have been an alternative future in your life story?)
APPENDIX 6: RESEARCH / DATA COLLECTION SCHEDULE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>PARTICIPANT</th>
<th>VENUE</th>
<th>DURATION</th>
<th>DETAILS of CONTACT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thursday 10. 08.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Faxed invitation to participate in research - to identified participants - to their respective schools - through liaison person. Obtained informal consent to participate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday 17. 08.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Faxed letter to participants informing of meeting of all participants and researcher on Saturday 08. 09. 08 at my school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday 07. 09.07</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>All participants arrived at my school between 17h00 and 19h00. Dinner and social. Discussed arrangements for following day.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saturday 08. 09.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Discussed: 1. Purpose of interviews. Procedure-video recording in SASL, trans-coding into English. 2. Confidentiality, anonymity and ethics. 3. Formalized written consent. 4. Discussed questionnaire (Appendix 4). To be returned on day of first interview. 5. Prepared research schedule for each participant: date, venue, duration, accommodation, and subsistence and travel expenses.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>PARTICIPANT</th>
<th>VENUE</th>
<th>DURATION</th>
<th>DETAILS of CONTACT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saturday 06. 10.07</td>
<td>Participant 1.</td>
<td>Durban</td>
<td>09h00 - 11h30 2,5 hours</td>
<td>Interview 1. Childhood and Schooling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday 13. 10.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>09h00- 11h30 2,5 hours</td>
<td>Interview 2. Adulthood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saturday 20. 10.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>09h00 - 12h00 3 hours 13h00- 14h00 1 hour</td>
<td>Interview 3. Becoming and being a Teacher Participatory data collection – Ranking and Time-line</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saturday 05. 04.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>09h00 – 13h00 4 hours</td>
<td>Collaboration to authenticate English transcript of SASL interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday 03. 11.07</td>
<td>Participant 2.</td>
<td>Durban</td>
<td>09h00 - 11h30 2,5 hours</td>
<td>Interview 1. Childhood and Schooling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday 10. 11.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>09h00- 11h30 2,5 hours</td>
<td>Interview 2. Adulthood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday 17. 11.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>09h00 - 12h00 3 hours 13h00- 14h00 1 hour</td>
<td>Interview 3. Becoming and being a Teacher Participatory data collection – Ranking and Time-line</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saturday 12. 04.08</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday 03. 01.08</td>
<td>Participant 3.</td>
<td>Durban</td>
<td>09h00 - 11h30 2,5 hours</td>
<td>Interview 1. Childhood and Schooling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday 04. 01. 08</td>
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<td>09h00 - 11h30</td>
<td>Interview 2. Adulthood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday 05. 01. 08</td>
<td></td>
<td>09h00 - 12h00</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Tuesday 08. 01. 08</td>
<td>Durban</td>
<td>09h00 - 11h30</td>
<td>Interview 1. Childhood and Schooling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday 09. 01. 08</td>
<td></td>
<td>09h00 - 11h30</td>
<td>Interview 2. Adulthood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday 10. 01. 08</td>
<td></td>
<td>09h00 - 12h00</td>
<td>Interview 3. Becoming and being a Teacher Participatory data collection – Ranking and Time-line</td>
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<td>Saturday 26. 04. 08</td>
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<td>09h00 – 13h00</td>
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<td>Pietermaritzburg</td>
<td>09h00 - 11h30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saturday 02. 02. 08</td>
<td></td>
<td>09h00 - 11h30</td>
<td>Interview 2. Adulthood</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday 02. 02. 08</td>
<td></td>
<td>09h00 - 12h00</td>
<td>Interview 3. Becoming and being a Teacher Participatory data collection – Ranking and Time-line</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday 03. 05. 08</td>
<td></td>
<td>09h00 – 13h00</td>
<td>Collaboration to authenticate English transcript of SASL interview.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
30 August 2007

Faculty Research Committee
Faculty of Education
Edgewood Campus
University of KwaZulu-Natal

Dear Professor Muthukrishna,

Consideration of Ethical Clearance for student:
Ram, Ansuya - 971164129

Your student’s ethical clearance application has met with approval in terms of the internal review process of the Faculty of Education.

Approval has been obtained from the Faculty Research Committee, and the application will be forwarded for submission to the Ethics Sub-Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Both you and the student will be advised as to whether ethical clearance has been granted for the research thesis, once the Ethics Sub-Committee has reviewed the application. An ethical clearance certificate will be issued which you should retain with your records. The student should include the ethical clearance certificate in the final dissertation (appendixes).

Should you have any queries please contact the Faculty Research Officer on (031) 260 3524 or on the email buchler@ukzn.ac.za.

Yours faithfully

[Signature]

Professor R. Moletsane
Deputy Dean Postgraduate Studies and Research
APPENDIX 8: RE-SCRIPTED NARRATIVES

ANGEL’S STORY

INTRODUCTION

Angel is the elder of two Deaf sisters. She has a hearing brother who is a teacher. Her father retired as a teacher from a school for the Deaf and her mother is presently a teacher aide at this school. Her background and upbringing were relatively privileged compared to most of her Deaf counterparts. Angel was successful with entrance examinations and had the opportunity to commence with tertiary studies at Gallaudet University in Washington, USA. This is internationally renowned to be the university of choice for the Deaf.

Angel’s sign name is represented by the thumb of the A-handshape, touching the left side of the nose. The explanation for this is that her name starts with the letter A and she wears a nose-ring on the left of the nose. Angel, who is now 33 years old, has a hearing boyfriend whom she plans to marry next year.

PART ONE - EARLY EXPERIENCE OF BEING DEAF

Angel recalls her deafness from the time she was about 6 years old. She realized that she couldn’t talk when saw her family using gestures rather than voice when communicating with her. She observed that her family communicated with others using speech, but when they communicated with her they used hand movements. She was confused because she always saw her mother very sad and she cried often.

I didn’t understand why she cried but I knew that something was wrong with me.

She also recollects many people responding to her with pity and sympathy.

They said “sorry” or “oh shame” when they saw me!

Frequent visits to traditional healers, is also vivid in her childhood memories.

People told my parents that it was better for me to go to different temples, churches and mosques because maybe they could help me to hear like other people. My parents took me to many prayer places. Many priests blessed me and they tried to make me hearing.

Angel’s parents realised that she was Deaf when she was about 2 years old. They were astounded that she did not respond with alarm or fear to the sound of fireworks.

They were shocked when they saw me not crying while fireworks banged.
She turned towards people who walked on the wooden floors in their home. This confused family members and they thought that this was an indication that she could hear. But it was in fact the vibration that she was reacting to.

They thought that I could hear but I could not hear. My dad took me to a doctor and he examined me. He said that I was normal and that my parents must be patient.

Her parents were still not convinced and consulted another doctor. The doctor suggested that she be taken to Tygerberg Hospital in Cape Town to have her inner ear examined.

My parents drove to Cape Town when I was 5 years. The doctors examined my inner ears and the Speech therapist examined my speech.

It was then conclusive that she was profoundly Deaf.
My parents were shocked and mum cried. They thought that I was the only a Deaf person in the world. They felt embarrassed and tried to hide me from people because I was Deaf. Also they felt difficult to tell people that I am Deaf. They argued with each other about my Deafness. My parents started looking for a Deaf school. When they got a Deaf school for me, my parents realized that I was not the only Deaf person in the world.

Angel’s Deaf sister was born when she was five years old. There are no other immediate or extended family members who are Deaf.

At family functions, such as prayers or weddings, it was not easy for me when I went with my family there. Other families saw me and just said hello. They started feeling sorry for me because of my deafness. Nothing has changed.

Except for one of her cousins, who knows SL and communicates with Angel in SL, there was and still is no communication between her and these family members.

Now? No, my father’s family and mother’s family never change since my childhood, expect my one cousin, she knows SL well because she accepts the fact that Chandni (Angel’s sister) and I are Deaf. Also she loves using SL and she always wanted to teach at a Deaf school.
Other family members don’t even attempt to understand or to communicate with her.

Since her sister is also Deaf, her parents were compelled to learn SL.

When my parents realized that I am Deaf and my sister is Deaf too, they started using SL because of our deafness. There was lots of communication with family when we went out somewhere. We depend on our parents for interpreting. My brother also uses SL and now my sister-in-law has also started using SL too. Also my cute nephew who is 4 years old knows that we do not communicate verbally and he uses gestures with me and Casey (sister), not SL.

SCHOOLING

Her parents were advised about a school for the Deaf in PMB. Angel stayed at her aunt’s house in PMB for about a year while she attended school here.

I met many Deaf children. I felt uncomfortable when I met Deaf children because of new faces. They used gestures. It made me happy because they were Deaf like me! I joined them.

A year later, she returned home. Her parents missed her tremendously, because she was away from her parents and she was very small. It also became inconvenient and expensive to visit her every weekend,

When Angel was about 6 years old she attended a pre-school in a garage in Verulam, where they lived at the time. This crèche was established by the Verulam Regional Committee of the then Natal Indian Blind and Deaf Society. The teacher or care-giver at the crèche was Angel’s aunt. There were about eight Deaf children here and they were taught using speech and gestures. She recalls being very perplexed at this whole experience.

In 1983 VN Naik School for the Deaf opened in Newlands, established by Natal Indian Blind and Deaf Society. Angel, aged 8, was admitted at this school since its inception.

When I started at VN Naik, that time I realized that I was Deaf. There were many children there just like me because they used signs and gestures.
Here at VN Naik, Angel was exposed to proper, structured SL for the first time.

*It made me aware that I was a Deaf person. I was very happy and I felt like I was standing on the top of world when I saw so many Deaf children. Now I realized that there were many Deaf children and they all came to one big Deaf school from different smaller Deaf schools.*

**THE GALLAUDET EXPERIENCE**

When Angel was 19 years old, Mr Francisco who was the director of the English Language Institute at Gallaudet University (Washington, USA), visited her school.

*Mr Fransisco wanted me to write a composition about my life. Mr RR Pillay sent my composition to Mr Fransisco by fax. He read my compositon and he accepted me to enter Gallaudet University and he didn’t need my matric to be completed.*

*I went to Gallaudet University to become a teacher of Deaf children. I studied at English Language Institute (ELI) for one year. I needed to improve my English and focused on English structures and grammar. I studied English, Deaf Culture, American SL and Deaf Studies. I studied four subjects for one year. That year I was chosen to be president of ELI. I was actively involved with the group - traveling places and fund raising for what we needed at ELI. Gallaudet University is wonderful. When I entered Gallaudet Univesity, my life changed lots. My life was very different from SA. There were lots of Deaf students including hard of hearing, blind, hearing, and disabled people. There were about 2000 students.*

At the ELI at Gallaudet, there were about 50 students from different countries. These were all Deaf students with indigenous foreign languages. Those Deaf students, who were weak in English and needed to improve, registered with ELI. There was a purposeful and deliberate focus on enhancing English skills as a pre-requisite to being admitted to Gallaudet University.

Attending Gallaudet University was the turning point in her.

*Only Gallaudet changed my life because they made me more independent and made me become a strong Deaf person. I became more aware about Deaf Rights and Deaf Culture and Deaf language. Also Gallaudet gave me lots of confidence as a Deaf person.*

After two and half years, Angel was forced to leave USA and return to SA owing to lack of funds. The fees and accommodation costs were exorbitant and sponsorships were becoming increasingly difficult to secure. Her return to SA coincided with Springfield College opening its doors to Deaf students.

**PARENTAL SUPPORT**

Angel extols her parents for their support and the sacrifices that they made for her advancement.

*They motivated and encouraged me to be properly educated like hearing people. Also they wanted me to be equally qualified for jobs like hearing people. My parents showed hearing people that I could do anything, just like hearing people. They didn’t want me to go down. Now I am successful and my parents are happy and relieved. My parents are my role models because dad was a teacher at a Deaf school and mum is a teacher aide at a Deaf school.*
She has many Deaf friends and she is aware that they did not get similar support from their families. They didn’t encourage their Deaf children to progress. 

Few of my Deaf friends got support from their families. I encouraged my friend’s family to support her but she said they were not interested to motivate her or focus on a Deaf person. One of her siblings helped her a bit but she was not fully supported by her family, not like me.

**NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES**

There are painful memories of many teachers who did not use SL and instead forced learners to speak and to use voice. 

They wanted me to speak like hearing people. My hands were kept under my bum and they tried to make me speak like hearing people. My orals were not good because I was profoundly Deaf. There was another hard of hearing pupil there. The teacher admired her good oral ability.

I kept my hands under my bum and tried to speak but I failed. Teacher hit me and said “stupid” to me. I never forget……I tried again and still failed. Teacher said “stupid” and that the other child was better than me. That teacher didn’t understand that I was fully Deaf! I was upset and that time I wanted to be hearing and also I wanted to be like hard-of-hearing children because teacher hit me all the time because I could not say words and sentences. I never forget what happened to me.

Now as a teacher, Angel protests vehemently against Deaf learners being forced to try to use speech. 

I object! I don’t accept it. I don’t let Deaf children use orals because I had a bad experience about how a teacher treated me very bad. I don’t want Deaf children to suffer like me when I was in school. Teachers must not force Deaf children to use orals. With hard-of-hearing it can be possible to use orals but Deaf children must use SL because they are profoundly Deaf like me. I feel that I want to tell hearing teachers that they must understand and wake up about Deaf children. Sometimes I am still angry about what happened to me when I was small at school.

**POSITIVE EXPERIENCES**

Angel boasts several academic, sporting and cultural accolades whilst at VNNS.

When I was in VNNS, I came first in class when I was in Grade 2, 3, 4 and 5. I participated in athletics. I came first in running and long jump. I came first and second in swimming. I participated in creative writing and essay writing competitions on “the year 2000”. Different schools were participating. I wrote a story about batteries and how my I got fed up when the batteries in my hearing aide finished quickly. And I got an idea about putting the battery in chocolate and swallowing it into my stomach and suddenly, I could hear. My story was the best. I won the competition. I got an award from Old Mutual Creative Writing and won R200. I also won Miss Deaf Beauty contests three times.
HEARING PEOPLE

Angel recalls her feelings about hearing people and her silent longing to be a hearing person, when she was younger. However, these feelings changed when she began to have positive and affirming experiences as a Deaf person.

*When I was growing up, I wanted to be a hearing person. I asked God to make me a hearing person because of easy communication with people. I felt depressed and down. When I became an adult and was 16 years old, I realized I didn’t need to be hearing person because I got many achievements and opportunities. I was happy to be Deaf because there was a Deaf school. People from my community already knew about me. I was successful in my studies and went overseas to university and came back to South Africa and completed my studies and got the teaching diploma. Now I don’t feel that I want to be hearing person.*

She enjoyed her schooling years. The Deaf school opened doors for Deaf children. There were opportunities to participate in sport, excursions and studying. Through being at the Deaf school, learners are able to get jobs. Securing employment is a serious challenge for the Deaf. There was a time when Angel tried desperately to get a part-time job as a waitress.

*I could not work because they wanted a person who could speak. At Gallaudet University, I worked part-time as a waitress, afternoon and night. It was the first time I earned wages. I was happy. It was an easy job because in USA people can communicate in SL. People order drinks or foods and I get it for them. Sometimes I tried to get a job as a waitress here in South Africa. It was not possible.*

SIGN LANGUAGE AND DEAF CULTURE

Angel came to terms with and started to understand deafness when she was about 16 years old and whilst she was at VNNS. It was here that she realized that there are possibilities despite being Deaf. For Angel these possibilities lie in the power of SL.

*SL is important to me. Before when I was small when I used speech it was because I was instructed by teacher. Now I stopped using speech completely and I use SL all the time.
SL is very important for Deaf people. As a Deaf person, I feel that SL makes me feel like a complete person. SL helps me to feel like a normal person.*

To Angel Deaf culture has now taken its place amongst other known cultures.

*But there was Indian Culture and African Culture. Where was Deaf culture? There are many Deaf people and we know what we want. So now we have our own Deaf culture. Deaf culture is about our jokes, norms, customs, values, beliefs, behaviours, technology and most importantly, our own language – SASL.
The technology of our culture is about our hearing aids, flashing lights and vibrating alarms. Our behaviour involves hugging each other when we meet and for us it is not rude to tap a person on the shoulder. We believe in following the SL of Deaf people who were born Deaf from previous generations. SL also has its own differences- it can be bold, soft or feminine like voices. All this is what Deaf Culture is about.*
POSITIVE INFLUENCES

Acknowledgement of strong positive influence is awarded to her parents and later as she was growing up, VNNS and Gallaudet University also influenced her life.

*My parents were very significant in my life - they encouraged and pushed me to do everything that I have done.*

*Gallaudet University changed my life…. Deaf communities here use SL fully, no speech….. If Deaf people wanted to go for work and there was a barrier then Gallaudet University fully supported Deaf people to have access to jobs. They had opportunities to access whatever they wanted. Gallaudet University had lots of spirit for the Deaf! They involved us in everything like sports, functions, parties, studies.*

Angel cannot help comparing her experiences at Gallaudet University and in SA.

*When I came back to SA, my mind became depressed because of no support and accessibility for Deaf people. Before, when I was in Gallaudet University, I felt high because I got good experiences, good opportunities and learned lots of things from Gallaudet University. Now I am in SA, I feel uncomfortable because of lack of support for Deaf people and no services for the Deaf in South Africa. In Gallaudet University, there are lots of services for Deaf people.*

Once in Gallaudet, I was roller skating and I fell down and injured my hand. It was bad so I went to my doctor in Gallaudet University. He gave me an address of hospital and sent me for x ray. I went to hospital by bus. While riding in the bus I thought that my doctor forgot about an interpreter for me. I entered the hospital and the first person that came to meet me was the SL interpreter. She asked me if I was Deaf. I said “yes”. I was surprised and shocked that the hospital called the interpreter already before I even arrived.

*Remember, it’s not the Deaf persons’ job to remind any people about an interpreter. It was my doctor’s job to let the hospital know about the Deaf Person so that the hospital can arrange the interpreter for me. That was a wonderful memory for me!*

CHALLENGES

Returning to South Africa was a major negative event in her life.

* …… coming back to South Africa was a big negative thing for me. There are no interpreters to assist us in hospitals, government departments and meetings. I am lucky that I have my mum to assist me as interpreter.*

Although Angel has the benefit of her mum as her SL interpreter, there are challenges with this arrangement.

*She interrupts my conversations with the doctor with what she wants to say. She talks about personal life and family and other things to the doctor. She doesn’t talk to doctor about my health problem. She forgets about me and continues talking about family and other things. The point of topic is off. That is why I want to look for a qualified interpreter.*

Her other challenge is that in SA, there are no colleges or universities for Deaf people. Angel’s dream was to become a teacher in a school for the Deaf. She then resolved that since she would not be able to pursue teaching as a profession, she was prepared to settle for any other employment that she could secure. But studying at Gallaudet University changed her life and made her ….. *realize that job and*
study were very important in my life. But I was disappointed because I didn’t complete studying at Gallaudet University because of financial problems. For me that was the biggest challenge – what I would do with my life and how would I support myself.

Overseas travel also posed challenges. In most foreign countries the issue of communication for South African Deaf is exacerbated since the inhabitants of these countries don’t know SL and are not even familiar with the English language.

I was on holiday with my sister in India. Indian people were difficult for me to communicate with. I tried to write down but they didn’t know English language. They only knew Hindi Language. It made me feel worse because they didn’t know English and SL too! I was stuck! I tried to use gestures and act and draw. It worked but it was not easy. Luckily my sister’s internet friend was with us.

He was a hearing person, who understood us through gestures. When we arrived in India, we taught him the finger spelling alphabet. I described to him the dress I wanted using finger spelling and gestures. Then he would talk to the man and explain what I said. In India you need two interpreters. Communication was a big problem in India because they don’t know English language and SL.

It is also disconcerting there is no captioning on television and no technology for them to have telephone communication. Although the cell phone SMS is a boon to the Deaf, the shortcoming of this is that many hearing people don’t know how to use sms!

**SUPPORT**

Having a Deaf sister has been a tremendous source of emotional support.

*My sister gave me support because of her deafness. We supported each other. Maybe she had lots of knowledge and she gave me advice and she took my advice. We shared and motivated each other because we are Deaf! Parents didn’t have enough knowledge of Deaf. We used SL. My sister and I knew how we felt and we have a very close bond - we were connected through our Deafness.*

She was privileged also to have received support from her parents. She was able to watch TV soaps and other programs because her parents interpreted for her. Her father assisted her and ensured that she did school homework and read stories.

*If I didn’t, he would shout at me because he wanted me to develop English writing skills.*

Everyday they would enquire about what schoolwork she had done and if there was any work that she did not understand then they would teach it to her again. They were enthusiastic to learn SL to be able to communicate with her.

*They encouraged me to communicate with them by using SL so that they could learn SL. Whenever I was signing they observed at me.*

**MARRIAGE AND CHILDREN**

Angel has a hearing boyfriend. It does not matter to her whether she marries a Deaf or hearing person. She taught him to communicate with her in SL, starting with the finger spelling alphabet.

*When we met first time, I told him if he was not interested to learn SL then there was no future for us. He accepted to learn SL.*

Often he showed signs of frustration and wanted to give up. But she encouraged him and he persevered.
Now he signs well! He uses lots of signs! It is easy communicating with him wherever we go. Also, now he helps me with interpreting. Once, we went to the bank for my card problem. He spoke to the person at the bank then he signed to me. It was successful and we solved the problem.

Her boyfriend’s family have also accepted her into the family and they also use gestures and speech to communicate with her. And he helps with interpreting.

It also does not matter to her if she has Deaf or hearing children.

I cannot say that I want my children to be Deaf or hearing. Depends on God, but I will accept Him giving me Deaf or hearing children.

As a parent she will be responsible and will teach and treat her Deaf child the same way her parents raised her.

But I know that I will be a better Deaf parent than my hearing parents if I have a Deaf child.

I will find a good school for the Deaf for my Deaf child. Maybe I will go to different schools for the Deaf and research which school has got good educators and education then I would send my Deaf child to that school for the Deaf.

Angel is not confident about her Deaf child attending the Deaf School where she teaches. The reason for this is that there is no uniformity in the SL. Teachers use a combination of SASL and American SL and Signed English. This is certainly not suitable as it causes confusion for Deaf learners.

I don’t want my Deaf child to go through that. It is not a secure future for any Deaf child. Teachers must change their attitudes towards SL and use body language and facial expressions and hands.

PERSONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Angel measures her success through her independence and her accomplishments.

I have a good job, my own flat, my own car....

She is also involved in the KZN Provincial Language Committee and the SASL National Language Body in JHB. This committee creates signs and compiles SASL dvd’s. These are sent to the Deaf schools and communities. This is how SA Deaf people learn SASL.

Owing to her unpleasant experiences as a child in a Deaf school, Angel admits that she does not wish to be born a Deaf person again.

Yes, sometimes I feel that I had enough of being a Deaf person in SA. Maybe I want to be born hearing because in the past I suffered lots as I was growing up. I don’t want to look back in my past. I want to look forward to the future. It took so long to become a successful Deaf adult. When I was a small Deaf child, I suffered too much!

On the other hand, her experience at Gallaudet has been affirming and she promptly changes heart and feels that she would like to be born Deaf again.

If South Africa has lots of opportunities for Deaf people to do everything like Gallaudet University then I like to born Deaf again.

PART TWO - THE SPRINGFIELD COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

In December 1997 Angel was compelled to return to South Africa from Gallaudet owing to financial constraints.
*Gallaudet sent me a letter that I could not continue studying there unless I paid fees fully.*

During this year plans were underway in preparation for the inaugural Teacher Training Program which was to commence in 1998. Angel was invited to an admission interview.

It was noted that she did not meet the requirements since she did not have a South African Senior Certificate qualification, as a result of leaving school prematurely to attend Gallaudet University in America. This qualification was obviously not a pre-requisite for her admission to Gallaudet.

In lieu of not having a Senior Certificate qualification, Angel was required to write an essay about her experiences at Gallaudet and undergo a Psychometric test.

*I felt down and disappointed because I left Gallaudet. I thought that nothing was going to be good for me in SA. Luckily a few days later, the college accepted me. I had an opportunity to enter a college in South Africa. When I was in America, I felt not stressed because there were no barriers but when I came back to SA, I felt stressed and oppressed because of barriers of not having my matric certificate for entering the college. Now I was accepted by Springfield College. I was very happy! It was a good opportunity for me!*

Angel’s thoughts on the curriculum.

*The curriculum was good to train hearing teachers but there was nothing about Deaf education. There was English, Curriculum Studies, PE, Religious Education, Social Studies but there was nothing about Deaf education or teaching Deaf children. It was general education like for hearing teachers at hearing schools. We Deaf, needed to know the way to teach Deaf children at schools for the Deaf. Hearing education was not suited to Deaf students to teach Deaf children.*

Although the Deaf students benefited from the service of the SL interpreters, lecturers who could sign would have been preferred.

*Lecturers spoke without using SL but there were two interpreters. Sometimes, the lecturers spoke fast and interpreters could not catch up with the lecturers. The interpreters could not sign fast enough. But at other times the interpreters signed slowly because of lecturers who spoke slowly. It progressed ok. Sometimes we felt that interpreters were not signing everything that lecturers were saying. But how do we prove that? It is always best to have Deaf lecturers, lecturing to Deaf students. Yes, but if there were no interpreters, it will be difficult.*

Angel recalls that there were three lecturers that showed genuine interest in the Deaf.

*They learned SL while they were lecturing to us. They were very motivated to use SL.*

At Springfield College, interaction and integration between the Deaf and hearing students was minimal.

*There were only Deaf students in our group. After school, we socialized with hearing students including sports, fun run day, meetings and SRC activities, but it was very little. The Deaf stayed with the Deaf and the hearing with the hearing.*

Winning the Miss College Freshman contest in first year of study was a memorable event in Angel’s experience at college. She competed amongst Deaf females only, because only the Deaf were in first year. But she competed with hearing women when she participated in the Miss India Sari competition.

*I was chosen in the first five. When I was interviewed, I lost because of problem with interpreter. She did not interpret well for me.*
Angel had great admiration for one particular lecturer who was enthusiastic to learn SL and loved using SL.

*She asked me many words for signs. She was eager to learn and sign all the time when she met Deaf students. She told me that she wanted to continue studying SL then she could lecture to us using SL without interpreter. I waited for that but I didn’t see her using SL without interpreter because I left college after completing three years study.*

On completion of her diploma, Angel was both proud and ecstatic.

*Finally! I was on top of the world again and my dream came true because for many years I struggled to study with hearing staff at School and Springfield College. I followed my dad’s step because dad got a teachers’ degree and his graduation picture was against the wall. My picture of graduation was now against the wall. I felt happy! Now my Deaf sister and brother also have their pictures on the wall. They are teachers too!*  

**PART THREE - BEING A TEACHER**

**Relationship with Hearing Teachers**

Angel enjoys a good relationship with the hearing teachers at her school, but this does not include socialization.

*During break time, most of the time I join Deaf staff because we use SL. Often hearing teachers always talk when I am present. I felt like left out. That time I stopped joining hearing people because I felt that they were leaving me out and I decided to join the Deaf teachers’ group.*

Presently Angel only socializes with hearing teachers who use SL when they are with the Deaf staff. *When I am present with hearing people, they sign to me but they also talk with each other while I wait for them to sign to me. Often the interpreter forgets that she is interpreting for me and continues using speech. I prefer to be with Deaf staff because we use SL as we know the stories at the same time. I feel comfortable and accepted to be with Deaf group.*

Angel acknowledges that certain hearing teachers supported her with her ACE studies. They assisted her with assignments and projects but they did not give her support with classroom work, even though she appealed to them for assistance. She reminded me of the one occasion when she came to me for assistance.

*I cried and felt stressed because AKS would write a report about my work. That is why I asked you for help to explain something (how to write lesson plans) to me. I felt satisfied after you showed me. Hearing teachers don’t have time to be interested in us Deaf teachers.*

There were times when Angel felt insecure and lacked confidence as the only Deaf teacher amongst so many hearing teachers.

*I didn’t feel confident because I was the only Deaf teacher around many hearing teachers. A few months later a new Deaf teacher appeared at school. Then Deaf teacher aides appeared and now I have company. I am happy. We support each other as a Deaf group. It makes me feel confident!*  

She also feels that the hearing teachers discount her as a Deaf teacher.
If I have a nice idea about some activities, the hearing teachers don’t accept my idea. Hearing teachers want their ideas to be accepted. Sometimes, I can see teachers act funny towards me. I feel not comfortable with hearing teachers because they still neglect the signs that I teach them and also their attitude towards me is not good. Since many years, I gave new signs but they didn’t accept signs – they continue to use old signs. I feel that they don’t appreciate me teaching them to change signs. A few teachers already changed to new signs from old signs a few years ago. Most of teachers never change.

Teachers and learners seek help from Angel with signs especially for special events that are being hosted at the School. Many Deaf children come and ask me for help with signs during class time. Some children ask me for help with signs when they are doing special programs in the hall. I felt good to help the Deaf children. This shows me that some teachers respect and have confidence in me. I feel proud and popular when any children and teachers still ask me for help with signs.

I offered Angel the explanation that perhaps the hearing teachers do not feel confident and instead feel threatened about their signing in the presence of Deaf staff. In the past there were only hearing teachers and they made decisions about the signs to be used but now that there are Deaf staff there is the natural tendency for them to want to have the upper-hand about decisions about signs.

**Relationship with Deaf Learners**

The Deaf learners see Angel as a role-model and seek to emulate her accomplishments. .....

She notes however that when she teaches the learners don’t pay attention and do not accord her recognition as a teacher. When I give them questions about my lesson they say they didn’t understand. Sometimes when I write on board, pupils start talking to each other and make noise because they take advantage of me as Deaf person. Many times, I see hearing teachers in classes, pupils are quiet and doing work when teachers start working. When I ask pupils why they talk, make noise and not start working when I start working. Why? Pupils said they are Deaf like me and we are friends because of our Deafness. That is hard for me and I don’t know what to do about that. I also don’t want to hurt them. I tell pupils, that is wrong and I am a teacher and pupils are pupils. Not friends!

Angel responds to the learners first as Deaf persons and secondly as learners. Yes, I see a Deaf person first - then pupil.

Even outside of the school context, she identifies first with the deafness then other identifying features.

Angel explains that most of the Deaf learners prefer Deaf teachers because of their SL competency.
Learners understand Deaf teachers better in class. They feel free to talk to or question Deaf teachers. Pupils feel incomplete when hearing teachers finish teaching quickly. Deaf pupils feel confused and misunderstood. I encourage pupils to inform hearing teachers that they are not happy with hearing teachers’ lessons but they refuse because they are afraid that hearing teachers would be cross or angry with pupils or shout at them.

Because of the bond that the Deaf learners share with Angel, they frequently seek her assistance with personal challenges that they may experience. Pupils ask me about many different kinds of problems like family, relationships with partners, pregnancy, grant, problem with parents, jobs, etc. My one pupil complained about her dad who stole her money from her grant because he wanted money for drinking. I told her I didn’t know much and gave her advice to meet you. Later she solved problem then she came to me and was very happy and thanked to me.

Barriers at School

The issue of lack of interpreters for the Deaf teachers appears to take precedence over other obstacles. We don’t have full time interpreter at school. All the time I have to ask hearing teachers to leave their classes and interpret for me. We Deaf teachers, steal teacher aide’s time to interpret for us when we have meetings. One person who is a teacher aide, she interprets for me when I go to workshops. Sometimes I have to go for a week and she has to leave her work at school for a week. When Education Dept has workshops they have no budget for paying the interpreter – they invite the Deaf teachers but they don’t think about interpreters for us. Sometimes I have to hire my own interpreter and pay from my pocket. It is also difficult to have one interpreter all day for a week - they get very tired and after a while they stop interpreting well. Of course, some teachers complain when the teacher aide is not present in class. This is not easy.

Not having an interpreter is a major barrier to communication for the Deaf teachers. Once, I planned to take pupils for excursion to watch movie “BLACK”. I asked one teacher for help to call Computicket office to book movie tickets for pupils. She said she will phone later. I reminded her to phone but she was very busy with her own reasons. I tried to ask reception for help to call but she was busy because management wanted her to do things. There are always barriers of communication for me!

There is no designated person at her school to assist with communication. She is left to her own devices to network with hearing people and organizations when the need arises. Invariably this leads to delays and frustrations. Such barriers to communication impede her performance as a Deaf teacher. The presence of a SL interpreter is imperative to their optimal functioning.

I believe 100% if interpreter will be with me at all times at school then it will be fine! In my experience, when I was at Gallaudet University I wanted to buy a ticket to fly to South Africa. I contacted travel agent through TTY to ask how much ticket cost. We communicated in about 30 minutes. A few days later, I went to travel agency to pay and pick up tickets. Everything went well. There was no barrier of communication in Gallaudet University.
The issue of SL and in particular, its use by hearing teachers is yet another source of indignation for Angel.

They still mix up signs at school! Many times, I tell hearing teachers to change signs. They agree but later they ignore me! I remind them when they forget to change signs but they ignore me and they never change! It makes me frustrated and fed up because Deaf pupils complain to me about hearing teachers. It irritates me and also makes me angry!

She is convinced that the poor academic levels of Deaf learners are due in large measure to the lack of SL proficiency of hearing teachers.

Also they perform poorly in subjects because of hearing teachers who use SL differently. And sometimes they even fail but the problem is with hearing teachers whose SL is not good. SL is very important for Deaf pupils and it is not their fault.

Of serious concern to Angel is the impact that this SL barrier has on the Deaf learners.

I feel very disappointed because I can see some are good pupils and they become bad pupils – in their attitudes and behaviour. They lose interest in schoolwork because of poor SL of hearing teachers. The Deaf pupils are frustrated because of SL. Hearing teachers who sign differently – this influences the Deaf pupils to not care about the importance of education. I can see pupils are not interested in studies. They don’t do their homework for many days.

**Deaf Education**

Angel sites failure on the part of the Department of Education to provide professional development and training for her to enhance her performance, as debilitating to the Deaf learners.

The department requires teachers to do FET when we have had very little training. The Deaf pupils are confused about it. Also I am confused. Also there are details and more work and lots of information in texts, files, portfolios. There is too much bookwork to worry about and no time to teach and Deaf children need us to teach them. I myself don’t understand about FET!

Even the texts and other resources from the Department of Education for the new curriculum are not suitable Deaf pupils?

When I read texts, it does not suit the Deaf pupils. They do not understand because the language in the texts is for first language learners and we Deaf are second language learners. The activities in the texts cannot be done by the Deaf – it is for hearing learners. Deaf schools must protest and not participate in the new FET curriculum.

She feels that the Deaf learners are not at the receiving end of the promised benefits of the new FET curriculum.

New curriculum does not suit me for teaching because I am Deaf and I teach at Deaf school. What about Deaf education for Deaf pupils? Department should think about Deaf education for Deaf pupils. Many Deaf pupils are failing FET and they move to Pre vocational classes.

She envisions a skills-based and practically orientated curriculum that would be suitable for learners in Deaf schools?

There must be lots of skills and subjects that can help the Deaf to get good jobs and be independent. It is useless to do the FET subjects because the Deaf cannot go to University or College with since there
are no interpreters. Education Dept must consult Deaf groups and teachers and discuss ideas for a Deaf curriculum. Department should also think about Deaf schools and hearing schools – and should plan two different curriculums separately.

She feels that the Department of Education can support Deaf education by recognizing that Deaf learners have special needs and teachers and learners need specialized support. The education program for hearing learners cannot be implemented for Deaf learners without adaptation.

I can see that Education Dept does not improve me as a Deaf teacher because of no resources for Deaf schools for many years. There is no curriculum designed for Deaf education. SL is not a recognized subject in the new curriculum. There is only hearing education and the Deaf have to follow that. Department needs to wake up for Deaf schools. They must pay for hearing teachers to learn SL and get qualifications then Deaf pupils can have teachers who know how to sign.

In Angel’s opinion, the ideal teacher for Deaf learners is one who is proficient in SL. They must be able to communicate through body language, facial expressions and clear hand movements. They must know about Deaf culture, SL and behaviour of the Deaf. If hearing teachers don’t want to be a part of Deaf culture, then Deaf pupils feel frustrated and stressed. Deaf teachers and Deaf children relate well because of deafness and SL. They must also have compassion and understanding for the Deaf.

**Opportunities**

Teaching Drama to the Deaf learners has not only boosted their self-worth, it has also augmented Angel’s self-motivation as a teacher.

My school gave me the opportunity to teach drama through SL. The pupils do well in Drama. Also in Grade 10, 11 and 12 pupils passed in Drama exams. They feel confident and are building their self-esteem when they are involved in Drama. Many people in public places admire them and enjoy watching their good skills in body language and movement. They performed at Sibaya Theatre and Playhouse Theatre. It is good opportunity for me and pupils! This also motivates me and makes me want to work harder to help the Deaf.

My school also gives me opportunities to be MC for different functions - Award’s Day and Communication Skills Contest. It is a good experience for me to be a Deaf MC and I have a hearing person speaking what I am signing. It is different and people like it.

In addition Angel teaches SL to the staff and this position is inspiring to her. Some of the teachers are excited to learn more signs from me. Most of the teachers, their attendance at SL is not good. I will be happy if they come often. I can see some teachers are not interested in learning SL because they know ASL but I try to ignore them. I focus on teachers who are motivated to learn SL then I teach. Sometimes some teachers ask me for help with signs then I feel good! I feel good, because many of the teachers were my teachers when I was a pupil. Now I am teaching them.

In response to the person who is her role-model at school, I was pleasantly astonished to learn of her deep admiration for me, for which I am indeed proud.

I admire you because from a young age you had important management jobs. You are very committed to your job, to the Deaf teachers and the Deaf children. All the Deaf like you. Now you are
doing research and still studying. My dream is to do Phd also. But, it is not easy for me. If I have an interpreter, I would study. If there is no interpreter then I cannot study. At Wits University there are full time interpreters for the Deaf. But, transport to JHB all the time is too expensive and difficult.

**Television Experience**

Angel is fortunate to have enjoyed much acclaim as an interviewer and presenter on various TV programs for Deaf viewers.

* I was a Deaf interpreter on TV as a part time job, signing what the hearing person was saying. I worked for almost six months and it was a paid job. Also I was a Deaf presenter on the program Signature. I went to different places to interview Deaf people. Nice! I enjoyed it. I wish I could continue but the company collapsed because of budget problems.

* I interviewed Terrence Parkin who is the Deaf Olympic swimmer. I visited his home and also interviewed him about his swimming skills and personal life. I interviewed a Deaf Coloured man who was a ballet dancer in JHB. Also, I interviewed Karl Reddy – he is a SA Deaf accountant who qualified at Gallaudet. And many others ….

**The Future …**

Although it is not her dream to become principal, if she was principal of her school she will focus on promoting SL.  

* I make sure that every person that comes to teach at this school knows SL first before getting the job. I will do everything to make the life of the Deaf learners easy and comfortable.

She is optimistic that in the future, there will be opportunities for her advancement at school.  

* Maybe I like to apply to become a HOD because I want to get more experience becoming HOD - but I can’t predict my future.

* I don’t know when I will get married? And I like to have a baby. I am curious to see if my child is hearing or Deaf because my sister and I were both born Deaf.

Since childhood, Angel always planned to work as fashion designer.  

* When I was teenager, I told parents that I wanted to study a fashion designing course after leaving school. My parents said no and they said I must become a teacher at a Deaf school. Fashion designing was not easy for Deaf persons to enter because of no interpreter. I still want to study fashion designing if I can get an interpreter to help me. My parents changed my dream. Luckily I got an opportunity to become a teacher. Now my dream is to study fashion designing and teach other Deaf who want to learn.  

* I will really enjoy that!
PATIENCE’S STORY

INTRODUCTION

Patience is 35 years old and was raised in a large family with grandparents, uncles and aunts in Umtata in the Eastern Cape. She is divorced from her hearing husband and has a 12 year old daughter who is hearing. Her sign name is described by the P and R manual alphabet hand shapes on either side of her nose. The explanation for this is that the sign for rose, the flower, is indicated with the R manual alphabet hand shape near the nose. Patience is the only Deaf child amongst seven siblings. Her father is deceased and her mum recently retired as a school teacher. Three of her siblings are professionally qualified – one of whom is a medical doctor – and the other three are university students, studying chemistry, law and journalism at university. Patience cannot hear any sounds in the right ear. She has about 20 % hearing capacity on the left, but on this side she does not have an ear canal, an ear opening or an ear lobe. She does hear sounds in this ear, but the sounds are vague. She is currently in her 5th year of teaching at Indaleni School for the Deaf.

PART ONE - EARLY EXPERIENCE OF DEAFNESS

Patience recalls being exceptionally quiet when she was young. She did not talk and cried only when she was sick or when she needed food.

*I did not talk – nothing. I always point, point, point when I need something.*

Her parents knew that she was Deaf in one year since she was born without the right ear and she observed that they communicated differently with her.

*I remember one day they took me to a doctor. The doctor said that I must go to hospital in East London - Frere Hospital. The audiologist tested me. He said that I was Deaf but not profoundly Deaf. I remember when I was inside the booth with the audiologist, I had to raise my hand to show when I could hear.*

Her parents were unaware of a School for the Deaf that she could attend. She remained at home while other children went to school. She was lonely and bored at home so her parents only took her to the crèche for hearing children.

*The school was very near my home – about 5 minutes to walk. And my mother was a teacher in the junior primary section. I was just there playing with the children – not too much involved in learning. I did not follow the school times – I used to come home and go at any time I wanted to. They just accepted me and allowed me to play there because my mother was working there.*

Four years later, Patience was admitted to a school for hearing learners in the community.

*When I sit with the other children and the teacher speaks out in the front of the class, I cannot hear what she says. All the time when she is spelling words, I don’t hear any words. I have to ask the other children what she is saying. And they used to laugh at me because I cannot hear. They used to also tell me that I am speaking too loud, but I felt that I was speaking soft, not*
loud. I could not hear my own voice well. I know that I am not allowed to disturb anyone when the teacher is teaching. Then I just sit there and I don’t know anything the teacher is saying. My mother and father knew that it was not good for me. She still did not realize or understand that she was Deaf.

I was worried. I still did not know that I was Deaf. To me I was normal but I know that there is something different between me and other children. Because sometimes the children in the hearing school used to act strange and do things and show me that I am not like them. But I was not nervous.

After several enquiries, her parents learnt of Effata School for the Deaf in Umtata and she was admitted here.

I felt a big difference here. I felt like I was in another world. I did not know what happened here. The children around me in that school made me feel very nervous.

It is strange that Patience did not feel comfortable amongst the Deaf learners.

No at first I did not feel like I was same like them. I felt like I was lost. I have no idea why they bring me here to this school. I cried for the whole day. Even the house-mother tried to pacify me and tried to make me like the school. She tried to show me that the other children were like me. But it did not help.

It was only when she got involved in the classroom activities with the other that she realized that she was similar to them.

I never talk anything to anyone or ask anyone anything. I did some drawing and this girl started to sign and I knew that she was also not talking. The other children were also signing and I watched them. I started to realize that they are like me. And that I am in their situation. I started to feel a bit happy and I understood why my parents brought me here to this school.

Then I understood that I was Deaf. I felt strong and confident and achieved many things. I was challenged here. When I came to this School, I knew how to write. I used to also write things on the board for the teacher. Going to the hearing school did help me. And also my mother- she used to teach me reading and writing and do schoolwork with me all the time. So when I came to Effata School I always achieved. I also achieved a lot in art work.

Patience felt comfortable and accepted growing up as a Deaf child in a hearing family.

Yes it did not matter much to me – being Deaf in the family. There was something inside me that made me feel confident. But the problem that I experienced was attitude from other neighbors’ children. Most of the time they left me out of playing but when my sister was there, they would accept me and allow me to play and participate in their games. She used to support me and explain the game to me.

Patience’s religious commitment is deep and intense and this emerges frequently in the interview. The strength and self-assurance that she draws from religion is profound.

As I was growing up, I read the Bible a lot. I remember reading the Bible and there was a verse about Deaf people. Then I felt that it is not a shock to be Deaf. It is not a bad thing. I read in the Bible that there was a Deaf person and Jesus accepted that person. And also in Effata school there was Bible class. Everyday in the classroom and every Sunday in the morning, they used to preach to us about the Bible in Sign Language. That made me strong when I was growing up. I believed in myself and was able to do many things. I felt that God was with me and I did not feel bad about myself. I did not blame anybody or be angry with anybody about why I was Deaf. I saw myself as being able to do things like other people.
Schooling at Effata presented Patience with many exciting opportunities. *I participated in dancing and drama. We went to many places to do our dancing and drama. I got many certificates and awards and I did well in the classroom. It was good and I enjoyed it very much. I was very proud of myself because I achieved a lot.*

**NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES**

Patience’s stay at this school ended abruptly when her father died. Her mother could no longer afford to keep her at Effata because since she had no money for school and residential fees. There were many other children in the family whose needs she had to attend to. She was now forced to return home and attend a hearing school near her home. The death of her father necessitated her having to leave the comfort and security of the Deaf school to attend a school for hearing learners, which was fraught with negative experiences.

*I think my worst negative experiences were about the way I was treated in the hearing school. When I came to the hearing school, I was very, very frustrated. I loved the Deaf school and I was doing well there. The environment made me feel comfortable because of SL, and Deaf Culture and everybody was very much friendly. We did many things together and this made me feel part of a group. We understood each other and knew each other and we were happy together. But going back to the hearing school was not good. The teachers here did not understand about Deafness. They used to shout at me and mock me. There’s one teacher who will always say to me “you are Deaf – you cannot do that”. In her mind she thinks that a person who is Deaf is not capable of doing many things. She believed that Deaf are not normal and that they cannot do normal things like everybody else. So I kept quiet and I cried outside.*

There were several similar incidents and Patience complained to her grandmother each time. Eventually her grandmother could not endure this any longer and approached the school principal. She discussed these repeated incidents of exclusionary practices that Patience was experiencing.

*Then the principal called the teachers together and told them that they must teach me with respect and they must treat me same as the other children. And after that they were good. They started to treat me better. They tried to help me and support me. They called me to sit in the front. When they were teaching oral, then they helped me by writing on the board for me. Whenever they asked a question, they always made sure that I understood the question. They used to write on the board for me and I used to write my answers in my book.*

Patience was determined that she would not allow any teacher to humiliate her on account of her deafness.

*There was one teacher who was teaching general science. She asked a question and I did not understand the question. The following day, in the morning, the teacher shouted and shouted at everyone in classroom. I did not know why she was shouting. I did not know what happened. She hit everyone that day and she hit me the most. She hit me more than everyone else. She said that I’m dumb and many times I don’t do what she says. I was shocked. And she knows that I’m Deaf and that I can’t hear. I was very upset that she insulted me like that. I*
was embarrassed too much. School was not finished but I went home during break time. My grandmother saw me crying and she forced me to tell her what happened. I told my grandmother what happened and told her please she must not go to my school and tell them anything. I was afraid of the teacher. I thought that maybe she will hit me more. Indeed her grandmother was enraged at this incident and sought recourse with the principal once again. That same afternoon several teachers went to her home and apologized to her. The next day even the learners came to and offered support and comfort. After that learning continued and her life at school improved.

Patience describes a subsequent incident during which she was humiliated by the needlework teacher. She enjoyed this subject because she liked working with her hands. However in this incident, she is bolder and more confident and deals with the challenge independently. 

She used to shout at me and embarrass me because I was Deaf. And in her subject the other children used to laugh at me. She thought that she could say anything to me and abuse me. But now I was frustrated. I became brave and I started to challenge her. If I did not understand then I asked her to repeat. I was not frightened of her anymore. She was shocked and she started to respect me. I was strong and I was confident because I was not involved in anything naughty at school.

Patience confirms that her life in the school for hearing learners was demeaning and at times unbearable but it was her faith in God which helped her cope.

I never stopped reading the Bible. I had 2 Bibles – one in English and one in Xhosa. I used to read and read and look in the dictionary for the meanings of words. I improved my English through reading the Bible and that also helped me to improve my schoolwork. I worked very hard on my own.

I was also involved with the organization named School Christian Movement. We learnt about behaviour, to be confident. I believe that if you are a committed Christian, you can learn and achieve many things. You can stand on your own feet and be brave. I also did a lot of reading. I used to read newspapers and magazines. My mother used to buy me books to read. That also helped me to grow and develop.

In general, Patience’s experiences at this school were turbulent. This was also the period when students were militant and strikes and protest action were the order of the day. In a sense, her deafness offered her protection against such realities.

I never knew of strike before – I didn’t even know the meaning of strike. I did not understand anything about strike. There was a lot of noise outside. The boys and girls were shouting and screaming. Some were also crying. I just prayed to God to help me and save me from danger. One girl told me that we must run home because it is dangerous.

Yes that part of my schooling was not good for me. It was very sad – that violence. And also they hit us a lot in school. And also when you get punished, you don’t have the feeling to continue to learn. It was difficult.

**SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENTS**

Patience attributes her school success to her own determination, commitment and diligence.
My biggest achievement was to pass matric in a hearing school. In that year 1990 there were many strikes. We were many children – about 400 in that school. And after the strikes there were only about 100 and something. And when I saw the results, my position was 35. The school was closed for about 3 months. They told us to listen to the radio, about when to come back to school. But lucky in October they told us to come back to school. There will be soldiers and police to protect us. There were few of us went back. We stayed at school. We put some mattresses in the classroom and we used to sleep at night. The people in the community used to cook for us. It was too dangerous to go home. The strikers did not want us to come to school. But we wanted to continue. We were fed-up. I studied on my own and I succeeded. For me that was a big achievement.

I was also involved with majorettes and dancing. I was good in that. For me it was a good achievement as a Deaf person. I also played netball very well. Many times my team won because of me. I was a strong person and I played well.

FAMILY LIFE

In addition to prompting her to have to leave the school for the Deaf, the demise of her father was distressing and heartrending.

That was very, very painful for me. He was the one that supported me and gave me the full, full love. My mother favored the other children more than me. She pretended to love me when I was with her but most of the time she just left me at grandmother’s home. But grandmother gave me a lot of support, love and sharing. Many good things happen when a grandchild is with grandmother. (Her grandmother, aged 92 years, is still alive today.)

Her father’s death has left a void in her life. He was instrumental in admitting her at the school for the Deaf and attended to her needs while she was at school.

He helped put me in the Deaf school and when I was there, he always visited me. He always visited me and brought me food and something to eat and clothes. He used to check if I’m alright in school. He will come to meet my teachers and check about my schoolwork. The teachers will tell me that my father came. After he died I was very shocked. I felt all alone. I used to think about him all the time.

She recalled his final moments with a painful sadness.

But I saw for a long time that he was sick. My father was 34 years old and he was diabetic. He was lying on the bed. I remember one night my father called me to comb his hair. The weather was very cold and he was near the heater. The room was warm with all the children. And early the next morning my mother chased us all out of the room. Get out. Get out of the room. All of you get out. I remember all the noise because all the people were crying loudly. I was confused what was happening. Nobody told me anything. They knew that there was a strong bond between me and my father.

There was evident tension and discord between Patience and her sisters, who took advantage of her deafness making her once again the subject of mockery.

My sisters fight with me a lot and my mother always favors my sisters. She always takes their side. Most of the time they do the wrong things and when my mother finds out, my sisters would blame me. And I could not hear that they were blaming me. But I could see my
mother’s face that she was angry with me. Then I understood that the girls blamed me for something because I could see the shouting. I would tell her that I did not do it. She will not listen to me. Then I just keep quiet. Sometimes I confront my sister in the other room, but they won’t change. Because I am Deaf, they make me stupid. They make me accept the trouble all the time.

Sometimes my mother will ask them to do some house work, or make some tea or go and fetch something from some other place. They will tell me that mother said that I must do it. I will do it and bring it to them and they will take it to mother. My mother will think that they did it. Then later I found out that my mother asked them to do that job and they made me do that it. That was my life – I learnt a lot.

Patience recalls with fondness the love and support that she received from relatives and elders in the community.

All the grandmothers in the community were also very kind and caring to me. They used to tell me about growing up. When you are a Deaf person, you don’t learn anything just like that – somebody has to tell you these things. Even my uncles, they used to observe my behaviour, they used to call me to visit them and teach me how to be a good lady when I grow up to be an adult, what will happen if get too much involved with boys. My grandmother used to talk to me about other girls and what happened to them because they got involved with boys. Maybe she will say: “That girl is bad. She is pregnant. No future for her. She would advise me about a lot of things. Sometimes she would bring a magazine and show me things and make me learn. She wanted me to read and open my mind about life.

She wanted me to learn about life, be independent, and solve my own problems if anything happened and if my family was not there for me. When school was closed and we were on holiday, there are lots of parties everywhere. Even if I don’t want to go to the parties, my grandmother would force me and take. She never wanted me to be alone. They will encourage me to go out and enjoy myself and not stay alone at home. She wanted me to meet people and socialize. There was a netball club in the community – she encouraged me to join the club and play netball for the club. She also involved me in all church activities in the evenings and weekends. Together we went on outings to far places with the church group on weekends. She was good and made many good things happen for me.

RESPONSE TO HEARING PEOPLE

Patience was sensitive to the way in which hearing people stared at her because she only had one ear.

Most of the time I ignored how they would look at me because I have one ear I also ignored what they would say about me. I just put my faith in God and continued with my life. I just joined them in everything. If they sing, I sing. What they do, I do. My idea was to show them that I am normal, like them.

Her friends shared parts their lives with Patience and she learnt about what it was like to be a hearing person. Her response to this was: “thank you God, that I am Deaf.” She became aware of the profanities and gossiping that went on amongst her friends.

I never felt that I wanted to be a hearing person. The only one thing I felt that I wanted to hear was music and singing. I love to sing and listen to music. I wanted to sing like a hearing
person and also to have a beautiful voice. I always watch people singing on TV and wish that I
could be like them. I love to sing like a hearing person at church.

Patience confirmed her contentedness as a Deaf person.
Yes I'm happy. In my mind I planned to accept what God has given me. We have nothing to do
with our lives. We have no control. It is all His creation. We cannot challenge God. But we
can only pray to God to help us to survive, to cope and to think positive.

ABOUT SIGN LANGUAGE AND DEAF CULTURE

If it were not for SL, Patience would not have achieved as much nor would she been as
successful.
SL has made it possible for me to become a teacher. Sign Language has a very big role in my
life. Because of SL I am able to communicate. I can be like other people. I can ask questions
and get knowledge. Through SL I learnt about Deafness, Deaf culture and Deaf education.
Through SL, I can be part of Deaf Culture.

Attending a hearing school after having learnt SL at a school for the Deaf disrupted her
allegiance to SL. Now as an adult, Patience has a clear and concise understanding of SL and
Deaf culture.
When I was a child I was confused. I did not know what happened to me then. Now I am an
adult, it is clear what it is to be a Deaf person. When I went to College and also to Wits I learnt
a lot about Deafness, Deaf culture, Deaf education and SL. For a few years I was in the
primary school for the Deaf where I used SL. Then I went to a high school for the hearing
students and I could not use SL here. I had to try to be like a hearing person. Everybody used
to speak very, very loud to me and I used to try to say words. But most of the time I used to
communicate in writing.

At Springfield College and Wits University, Patience met Allison, whom she still reveres.
She was my role model not only to me but to many other Deaf also. She taught me to stand up
and fight for my rights, fight against oppression at school and not accept anything that was
not good for the Deaf. She taught me to tell the truth about how I feel about anything or any
person. She taught me to tell the person: you are wrong, this is wrong and this is right. She
taught me about my rights as a Deaf person. She taught me that hard-of-hearing people also
have rights. She taught me about misconceptions that hearing people have about the Deaf and
that we must change it. Many things are wrong in our school - they think that the Deaf cannot
do this and this and this. Now when I see all this happening, quickly I step in and tell the
hearing teachers that first they must give the Deaf the opportunity. I ask the Deaf teachers to
tell me about their problems and I try to share with them and solve the problems. I give them
advice and help them to understand the Deaf children.
Allison shared with us about her life and marriage because she married a hearing man. There
were many problems in her marriage. She did not hide anything from us. She used her
problems to teach us. When I saw that I felt good and was aware. She encouraged us not to
give up what we want, maybe we need something and we must fight for it and not give up. If
we believe that something is right we must not be afraid to talk about it.
CHALLENGES AS A DEAF PERSON

Access to tertiary education after completing matric was a major hurdle to Patience. After I finished Std. 10, for 2 years I stayed at home – doing nothing. No college allowed me to enter because I was Deaf.

Communication with government departments is always problematic. Also with Dept of Social Welfare and other depts, I have challenges with communication. Sometimes they tell me to write what I want to say, but that takes a long time. In all the govt. depts. there is a glass blocking us and we don’t know what they say.

Taking an interpreter to assist her to communicate with a doctor compromises confidentiality. Communication with doctors also is a big problem – if I take interpreter, then they know about my private problem.

She believes that the most effective way to overcome communication challenges for the Deaf is for all people to know SL. This solution supersedes having a SL interpreter. Government must offer workshops and training in SL in private companies and public departments. They must encourage all people to get involved in learning SL. When there are meetings and workshops for teachers the Educ. Dept must provide SL interpreters for us. There must also be SL interpreters in conferences, rallies and big meetings.

Through all these impediments Patience’s resolve was to remain calm and patient and be positive all the time. She was determined that this would make her a better person. I try not to be angry with other people, or blame other people or point fingers at other people. I try to read good books and watch good movies that teach me something about life and how to help my self to solve problems.

Patience has decided that she will marry a Deaf person. She was once married to a Deaf person and she now has a 12 year old hearing child. Her marriage to this hearing person was fraught with discord. Because she was a self-assured and confident person and socialized frequently with hearing persons, her husband was always suspicious of her and accused her of infidelity. He thought that maybe I have a hidden agenda because I can socialize with hearing people. Because I can socialize with hearing people some think that Patience is having affair with the hearing people and they get jealous.

Patience tries to verbalize conversation with her daughter since she is hearing. I try to speak. But we also communicate with lip reading, gestures and sometimes SL. She loves to use SL.

Patience claims to be an understanding, loving and caring parent. She has established a strong, sound bond with her child as a single parent. I always help to solve her problems and understand what she feels. I’m a good listener and I understand her problems and I try to solve her problems. I always teach her about life. I teach her about reading, how to be safe and go to church. She is same like me – she loves to listen to gospel music.

There is no contact with her child’s father. Her separation from him has made her independent, strong and mature. She has no intention of rushing into another relationship.
PART TWO - BEING A STUDENT AT COLLEGE

When Patience completed senior certificate, she remained at home for two years before securing employment as a teacher aide at a special school in Matatiele.

*I didn’t know about college. And I really wanted to study further. I was frustrated because the years are going on, and I was not making any progress. I wanted to look for another job.*

Then the principal of Efata School for the Deaf contacted her and informed her to attend an interview for college admission in Durban, the following day.

*I had to travel to Durban and I didn’t know Durban well. I prayed and knew God will guide me. First I went home to tell my husband, mother, and aunt about all this. They got shocked. I didn’t know how to tell them about money. I knew that my family did not have enough money to send me to Durban. I told my aunt I have to go to Durban; my aunt told me not to worry and to have faith and the money will come. I had to take the bus at 6pm - the only bus from Eastern Cape that goes to Durban and arrives in Durban at 5 in the morning. I asked relatives for help to give me money. I got the money and bought the bus ticket and I took the bus and arrived in Durban. I asked people for help to show me where Kwa Mashu is. People helped me and dropped me off at VNNS. I walked to school and I thanked God that nothing bad happened to me.*

For Patience the opportunity to be able to go to College was a dream came true, since for many years there were no hopes of the Deaf furthering their education. She attributed this to God’s intervention. She recalls the disbelief expressed by lecturers that the Deaf will be able to achieve. *They can not believe that a Deaf person can become a teacher one day. We can see this in their face, in the way they respond to us and their approach to us. But later they realized that we are normal because when we have our interpreters.*

She described an incident during which there was an argument between the lecturer and the SL interpreter. The Deaf students knew what had happened and defended the interpreter. The lecturer was curious about how the students knew that there was a problem. *We told her we can see their faces, their actions, and body language and face expressions. We are not children we are adults and some of us are hard of hearing and she was shock. She couldn’t believe that we are like normal people. She never expected us to be so smart. She expected us just to come here and try to learn and achieve nothing.*

The curriculum that the students were exposed to was not suitable for the Deaf. *It’s difficult to follow the curriculum because it does not suit the Deaf. When the officials wrote that curriculum, they never thought about the Deaf children. Most of the activities and resources and methods are difficult for Deaf children. It’s for hearing children.*

Opportunities to socialize and integrate with hearing students, did not present as the Deaf and hearing students were taught separately. There was incidental socialization but SL actually separated the students and kept them apart. There was also no genuine initiative for integration from the hearing students. *They just stayed away from us but they did not show that they were interested. The only time they were interested was when there was a problem with management or security. Then they*
called us to fight against management. When there was Beauty Contest they wanted us to participate. In sports they cheated us because they wanted to go home with trophies. They called us to participate but we didn’t know the rules.

**INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE AT COLLEGE**

Two people from Springfield College appeared to have had a positive influence on Patience, and these are Mrs V. John and Mr P. Ram.  
*Those people – I will never forget. Mrs. V. John was a person who gets angry. She was an H.O.D. She wanted us to do well and encouraged us to pass.*  
*Mr. Ram was a very patient and understanding person. He taught us good and he understood our way of learning because he understood our Deafness. He was a very wonderful and friendly person. When he teaches he used to joke and makes us enjoy the lecture. He encouraged us to read a lot and to improve our English level. He treated us like adults not like children. He respected us as Deaf adult students and did not take advantage and treat us like we could not learn anything. He treated us in a very professional manner. I’m proud that I passed his subject with a good mark.*

Patience has fond recollections of college and enjoyed her experience as a student.  
*I enjoyed college and missed college very much when it was over.*

**PART THREE - BEING A TEACHER**

**Encounter with negative influence.**

Patience is critical of the Principal of the previous school where she taught, for having had a negative influence on her life. Through observation and through interaction with learners at the school, Patience discovered that the Principal was biased in favor of Indian children and prejudicial towards Black children. She would reprimand Black parents for not paying school fees but she was friendly and polite towards parents of Indian learners.

*But one person she did not like most was me because I changed the lives of the children in that school. The behaviour of the children was bad, they have no manners, and they had no respect for adults. There was always fighting and arguing between teachers and children. I called all the children and told them to sit down and I asked them: What is your problem? Why is your behaviour so bad? When they told me, I cried, because no other teacher asked them about their feelings and their problems. I asked them many questions about why they were always failing and why their level of education was so low and not improving. They told me many things – it was bad. After that I talked to two teachers. These teachers were very bad. They went to the principal and told her about what the children told me. These children did not understand why I did that.*

Patience’s motive in questioning the children was to help them. The learners seemed to be very frustrated and she wanted to foster understanding between the teachers and learners. Patience lived in the school hostel and after school she had the opportunity to be with the learners. SL was
the main reason for the discontentment of the learners. The teachers did not know SL and could not communicate with the learners. The children don’t understand the teachers and they are frustrated.

But the teachers refused to believe that SL was the issue. The teachers are quick in showing the children’s books and everything is correct, correct, correct. But the children say that they don’t understand what they are writing – the teachers are giving them the answers because they are afraid of the principal. Then in the tests and exams they are failing. The Principal and the Deputy check the books and see that the work is good and they think that everything is fine. There is no problem.

On discovering that the learners had been speaking to Patience, the Principal became confrontational.

She hated me! She started to clash and fight with me. The teachers also were angry and shouted at the children because they told me that they don’t understand the teachers and the teachers don’t know SL. The children told the teachers that they needed my help to solve their problem. I confronted the teachers about why they scolded the children – it their right to be taught in SL and to understand and to learn. The children must grow up knowing what to do and how to solve problems in school, home and in the community. The worst thing for Deaf children is when their school does not support them.

Altercations with the principal caused Patience to feel very unhappy and dejected at school. But this did not break her spirit. In fact she became stronger and bolder and showed even greater determination to protect the rights of the Deaf learners.

The Principal – she really made me want to leave that school. I liked the children very much but I was not happy there. Maybe she thought that I want to overtake her position. But I was not interested in that – I was only interested in the children. What I did was for sake of the children – all children, not only Black children. You know the Indian children used to also tell me about their problems and I used to try to help them too. The children are innocent. Also she never wanted us Deaf to get too clever. She never informed us about circulars from Education Dept. Sometimes she used to inform us but she will change the information and not give us correct information. Then when we read we see different information. She always warns us not to go to Education Dept. district office. She always wants us to stay in the dark about information. She hated me because I was not afraid of her. I always challenged her. I used to go to her office and ask her to explain things in the circular and then I tell her that she is wrong and gives us wrong information. One day I told her that I will complain to Education dept. She oppressed everyone like old apartheid days. There was no freedom. She knew how we – the Deaf teachers - changed the lives of the Deaf children. She knew now that the children had confidence in us and they were close to us. She was afraid that we will become strong with the pupils and that we could control everything. They (the management) did not like me because I was not easy to control and influence. She thought that she knows everything and she can control my mind. She was not aware that I’m working for the government and I’m doing my job for justice, for the children, not for myself because schools are not about who you are, not about yourself and not about people. Schools are about children. I wanted the children to have a good life and a good future and be able to
identify the problems that happen in their lives when they become adults. But instead the children suffered a lot and I saw that and I did not keep quiet.

Fearlessly and without hesitation, Patience also disparages Black teachers. Black teachers – they are bad, very bad. They know that the children are collecting grants and that because they are staying in the hostel they don’t need their money. They tell the children that they will keep their money, and when the children want their money to go home then the teachers won’t give them. There are many times children ask me for money to go home. When I ask them where about their grant they tell me that the teachers took their money. Most of the children in that school are very unhappy, very sad. They tell me that they have problems at home and at school, but the problems at school are worse.

She did her best to motivate the learners and improve the quality of their lives. I try to motivate them, teach them what life is about – problems, poverty, different people’s attitudes and how to deal with these problems. I taught them how important it is to focus on education while growing up. It is important for their future. If they cannot solve a problem, they must not keep quiet. They must speak out and ask for help. Talk to someone.

When she left St Martin’s and came to Indaleni, her resolve continued…. I told myself that I will continue fighting for what is right.

Her opinion of hearing teachers in general, is that: when they socialize they are very good. They smile, talk, joke a lot together but when it comes to do work they are horrible - they argue, argue, argue a lot. They are always gossiping, insulting, fighting with each other and jealous of each other. They do all this in front of children, they argue with bad attitude. They have negative attitudes about how the Deaf children learn. They don’t give the Deaf opportunity to learn on there own, to think and understand the work.

Patience is tactical in the manner in which she challenges the hearing teachers. Through her experience at her previous school, she was not intimidated by hearing teachers. I smile and show them in a friendly way. Because I want to make them understand what it means to be Deaf. I help them to understand why the Deaf child is frustrated and fights with the teachers.

Patience is aware that the teachers respected her but they avoided her because they did not want to be confronted by her. She constantly questioned them and tried to share her ideas.

As a fledgling teacher, she did not have the benefit of professional support from hearing teachers at her school. On the contrary, she gave them support, by altering the behaviour of the learners. She was able to inculcate discipline in the learners, encourage them to respect the teachers, focus on schoolwork and do homework tasks.

She feels that the hearing teachers have difficulty accepting that the Deaf are qualified, capable teachers. When I organize SL workshops only one person will show interest. I meet every one and tell them one by one, to come to the workshop to learn SL and teach the Deaf children properly. They all tell me yes, yes they will come but they never come. Always making excuses like, they
going for meeting, doing this, and doing that. There is always conflict and fighting about promotions. One person gets the position and the others continue arguing about it. They will not give up. They don’t think about children. Sometimes they allow children to go home early, or leave the children and go home or let the children go to hostel. And the management are not interested in Deaf Education.

The final grade at her school is Grade 9. Patience is concerned about the learners who leave school thereafter, since she is aware that they are at home.

I worry about these children. I fight for these children who are staying at home. I know that they will be abused at home. The teachers just say that their marks are low and that other schools won’t accept them. But I blame the teachers because they did not work hard and teach the children and give them support.

There is now a good understanding that prevails between Patience and the Deaf learners, although initially they did not like her.

Because I’m strict and I shout at them when things go wrong in the class. I don’t accept their behaviour, attitude and no respect for adult people. They want to do what they like, for example, they come to school any time. Also they don’t like to have lot of homework because other teachers give them easy work.

She relates to the learners as learners first, then as Deaf persons.

Not important to see Deaf first. Education is more important even if person is Deaf or not Deaf.

Patience cites several reasons why she thinks that the Deaf learners prefer Deaf teachers.

They like Deaf teachers because they learn a lot from us. They also see us as role model. We help them to build confidence. But when they are with us, we teach them not to be afraid to say anything and to bring out what they feel. We teach them that it is their right to say what you want to and what you believe. They like us Deaf teachers because we share with them about our experience, about our life, how we became teachers, how to deal with problems as a Deaf person.

She also advances reasons why she believes the Deaf learners don’t like hearing teachers.

They don’t give the children love, proper care and encouragement. Yes they care but not properly. They don’t participate in activities with the children, extra curricular activities such as sports. They don’t do coaching, for example, netball, with the children, like showing the children the actions and the rules for the game. They shout and say to the children that they are stupid. They pretend to do a lot of things for the children but all the time they are swearing. I can see their face is not satisfied. All the time they use bad words with the children.

**CHALLENGES AS A DEAF TEACHER**

The absence of support from hearing teachers poses a challenge to Patience.
I experience negative attitudes from the hearing teachers. Some pretend that they want to help me but in the meeting when I ask them to interpret for me, they interpret for a short time then they make some excuse.

The KZN Dept. of Education is also insensitive the the special needs of Deaf teachers. When they have RNCS workshops they don’t give us interpreters and we the Deaf suffer a lot in workshops so we have to come with our colleagues to interpret for us. But it’s not fair because they are also teachers and have their own classrooms to teach at school. Also we don’t have time to write down notes because we watch the interpreter for long the whole day. We get tired because our eyes only focus on the signs. When it comes to group work it becomes difficult because that teacher who is interpreting moves to another group there is no one to help interpret for me.

Hearing teachers do not attend SL classes. Patience expects some intervention from the management in this regard, but they do not give her support. I want the hearing teachers to come to my SL classes. But they won’t come. But I don’t give up. I have to try to find other ways to convince them to come. Maybe I must get support from the management. The management is supposed to influence and convince the staff to come for the SL classes, to advise them it’s very important to learn SL for the children. Managements support is very important. But they just stay away and keep quiet. Many times I have meeting with them to discuss my concerns. They call me to sit down and tell them my problems. After 1 or 2 days I come back to the office to ask them for reply, they say they are busy and no time to solve the problem. They say yes we know your problem, we now what you said.

Patience feels that the lack of support from the management precludes her from progressing in her work. Her HOD permits her to go directly to the principal if her issues are not resolved. But when she does go to the Principal, she is reprimanded for not following the correct protocols and addressing the Principal via the HOD. She is fed-up with their pretences of being polite to her and their appeals to her to be patient.

One of the issues that she approached the Principal about was the way in which they sanctioned learners. Maybe a child is found sleeping in the hostel. Maybe found with drugs. There are many ways to solve the problem but the way in which they solve the problem is wrong. I tell them that maybe the child needs counselling, but they don’t do it. They just punish (suspension for a month) and after that there is no other process. I tell them that advice and counselling is important for that child to be aware in the future so he won’t do it again.

**OPPORTUNITIES AT SCHOOL**

Recently Patience had a discussion with the management regarding the reasons for the decrease in the number of learners at their school. She informed them that learners are moving to other schools because of problems with the management.
All the girls have left because the house mothers don’t take care of them everyday. No support from the management. Nobody helps them to solve problems. Hostel food is always not good. There is no water.

Patience was glad that the management heeded her call and shortly afterwards renovations commenced and plans commenced for the laying of pipes for water. Soon there will be running water inside the toilets and dormitories.

The hearing teachers ask the Deaf for advice but often this is ignored. They never take the same time to use the idea. When the problem happens then they remember that idea and later they regret why they did not take our advice. If they accept our advice then maybe the problem will not happen.

ADVANCING DEAF EDUCATION

There is a lot that needs to be done to advance the education of the Deaf. The Dept of Education must work with Deaf teachers and hearing teachers in Deaf schools. Universities need to work together with the Dept of Education and teach teachers about Deaf education, provide workshops and develop Deaf education. Patience is concerned that nothing is happening to improve teachers in the Deaf schools and this will impact on the learners. And finally the curriculum for the Deaf also needs to change. The Dept of Education should consult with DEAFSA, Wits University and Gallaudet University in America who are the leaders in Deaf education and introduce changes that can improve Deaf education.

If there are many resources you can achieve many things because Deaf children will learn quickly through seeing things. Theory does not help them to learn. To see and do practical things will be easy for them to pass. Resources for Deaf children are very important. Most of the times we buy the textbook but still its does not help. There must be practical activities. Studying up to grade 10, 11 and 12 won’t help them. After that they will get a certificate and sit with it at home. They have a certificate but don’t understand what it means. It is difficult for them to get a job. There’s lot of theory but still no practical skills. I think that the curriculum for the Deaf must have few theory subjects and more practical skills subjects that teach them how to do a job. Deaf people like to work with their hands and do activities with hands.

Yes, like nursing. They can do nursing but the theory must not be same like the course for the hearing because that theory is very difficult for them. In fact I think that the theory is useless for them but to do practical will be good. The doctor can tell them what to do to the patient.

Patience feels that a good teacher of the Deaf must be: confident, must have a positive attitude and must be able to work together, must be patient, must have understanding. Also must help and not criticise all the time, very important to point at the problem and not to the person. If you confront a person, try to forget about the person and talk about the problem.

Patience’s goals for the future have been well thought through. I want to do my B.Ed. at Wits but everything is very expensive. Before when I studied ACE there were many of us but now very few. I like to study here at this University – UKZN in PMB.
- but how? Wits Univ. is too expensive and also we have to pay a lot of money for travelling and accommodation and food. I need an interpreter also.

My plans for the future are for the Deaf school leavers. There are many Deaf school leavers staying at home. I want to gather all the Deaf school leavers. Maybe the Dept. must build a big place for them to study skills and become independent and open their own business. Also I like to do welfare work to help Deaf families with their problems and with abuse in the family. They must have a place to make them comfortable to feel at home, they must have professional people like social workers to counsel them. I will like to start a place like that where the Deaf can live. One day they can move out and they can. There are many Deaf people who cannot do anything themselves. Some Deaf people depend on their families, whether they married or not. That’s why I wish the Dept or any company should build a big place for a Deaf community like the one in the Eastern Cape and in Western Cape. There are quarters for married people, an education centre and another place to learn skills and work and get income to support your self. Kwa-Zulu Natal has nothing like this. I wish that I can start something like that here.

Patience recalls that when she was at high school, she wanted to be a social worker and not a teacher. 

Still in my heart I want to be a social worker.

When the learners have problems, I teach them how to solve the problems, how to be a good person. Maybe their home is poor and parents and siblings have bad attitude, I always advise them how to deal with that and also take the Bible and read with them. Most of the time, I am calm and patient.

I advise them how to study. Sometimes I meet their parents and talk about their child’s problems, I advise them what is good to do. I thought many times I can become a social worker.

Patience feels that her life has been positive and successful. 

If you believe in yourself you can become successful by doing things that you believe are right. You must face the challenges that come in front of you. I believe that you must not avoid the problem. Myself I believe that I’m strong, I’m confident and I believe I’m successful. I also believe prayer is powerful. When I pray I feel Jesus comes down and I feel better. I am positive and I believe that I am successful.
TROY’S STORY

INTRODUCTION

At the time of this interview in 2007, Troy was 29 years old. He was born in Umtata in the Transkei and attended school here. He was raised in an extended family with grandparents, parents, siblings and other paternal family members. At the age of 10, Troy contracted acute bacterial meningitis and spent several months in hospital. During this time it was discovered that he became Deaf as a consequence of this illness. Subsequently he attended a primary school for the Deaf in East London and secondary schooling was completed in Kwa-Zulu Natal.

Like all Deaf people, Troy has a ‘sign name’. This is described by the three middle fingers of the right hand touching and moving downwards on the right cheek followed by the letter T hand-sign, with the same hand. The stroking on the cheek highlights the scars of three lesions which represent his belonging to the Xhosa clan. (The issue of sign names will be detailed in the chapter on Deafness and Deaf Culture in the thesis.) He is presently in a relationship with a young lady who is hard-of-hearing.

As a Deaf, Troy experienced difficulty learning from and understanding hearing teachers. This motivated him to become a teacher, in the hope that he will be able to teach deaf learners more effectively. He is presently in his 5th year of teaching in Vuleka School for the Deaf, in Nkandla in Northern KZN. He teaches English, EMS and Office Practice in the Secondary School. Troy lives in the residential facility for staff and assists with supervision of resident learners.

PART ONE - EARLY EXPERIENCE OF BEING DEAF

Becoming Deaf

Troy recalls that he became sick while he was attending school (for hearing learners). His body was in excruciating pain and he felt very cold. He vomited and his body became very weak. Repeated complaints to his mum were not heeded.

I can’t remember too much detail but I know that I could hear when I was born. Then when I was about 10 years old - I was attending a hearing school at this time - I became sick. I did not feel well and although the weather was hot I started feeling very cold for many days. I did not feel well. I complained to my mother but she did not believe me - she thought I was lying. We lived on the farm and the hospital was far away. Same time we can’t go when we are sick. I remember vomiting everything that I ate and my body was getting very weak. My whole body was in pain. I continued to vomit everything I ate. Then I stopped eating. I did not know what was happening around me. I was like a dead person. Then my mother took me to a sangoma. The sangoma gave me lots of things to eat and drink but still I vomited everything. After many days my family knew that the sangoma failed then they took me to hospital. There I can’t remember what happened but after many days I woke up again. I was confused I did even know how I came to the hospital. Everything around me was strange. It was very quiet.
There was no sound. I could not understand what was happening. The nurse that was responsible for me came to me to talk to me but I could not hear anything. I could not identify with myself. When she asked me anything I answered wrong. They thought that I was playing and teasing them.

Troy’s attempts to convince the nurses that he could not hear were futile. The nurses thought that he was deliberately not hearing them. Yes I tried to tell them but they did not believe me. One day in the hospital I walked to the window. Everything was silent. I was standing and looking outside - some children were playing outside. The nurse called my name from behind but I did not turn to look. I was still concentrating on outside the window then she walked up to me and tapped me on the shoulder. She asked me - you did not hear me calling you? I said no, I cannot hear anything. For the first time she listened to me seriously. She identified with my problem. Then after a few days I was moved to another hospital.

Yes it was a very longtime. Then in the other hospital the doctors started to investigate my problem to see why I was not hearing, what was the problem with my ears. They started to do many tests. Then they found out that I was Deaf. Before that I did not know that I was Deaf. Now everybody in my family knew that I was Deaf after the doctors told them. I came out of hospital and I was feeling better. My family sent me back to school again.

Going to School

He returned to his school with all the hearing learners, despite not being able to hear. He was unable to hear anything that the teachers taught, nor was he able to follow their instructions. The same school I went to before with all the hearing children. Before I used to sit into the back but now because I could not hear the teacher told me to sit in the front of the class. The teacher was teaching me but I heard nothing. She talked to me, she asked me questions but I did not know what she was saying. She used to ask the class questions and the other children put their hands up. I used to just copy them and put my hands up also. The teacher used to ask me if I heard her. I used to say no but I am putting my hands up because the others are doing that. I was not feeling right so my mother decided to take me back to hospital to see if I could get better. But I did not want to stay for a long time. Then the hospital gave me a big bottle of tablets and everyday I must take the tablets. I came back home. I went back to the same school again where I was before with all the hearing children. The teacher told me to sit (pause).

One day the teacher was teaching us. Then she gave us a test - it was a spelling test. The teacher said the word and we must write. I am sitting with the hearing children. The teacher calls the word and all the children put their heads down and write the word. I could not hear the word. I looked into my friend’s book and copied all the words that he wrote. When the teacher marked my work she asked me if I heard the words. Then quickly the other children told her that I copied the words. Then the teacher wrote a letter to my mother to say that I must stay at home. I must not come back to school. I think she was angry when she gave me the letter. The next day I woke up in the morning and had a bath and dressed up. I wanted to go to school. I saw the other children walking to school. Why mother told me about the letter.
She said that I must change and stay at home. I got worried and confused about why must I stay at home? I knew that the normal children were laughing at me. Everything in my world changed. I felt all alone. I hated hearing people for that.

Troy was extremely despondent at not being able to go to school. He felt that he was no longer a normal person and compared himself to when he could hear. When I was normal I felt good. I could hear. I could hear everything and everything was good. Everything was fine but after I became Deaf I felt like waste. I felt all alone in the world. Before this I did not know about Deaf people. I never heard of Deaf schools. I knew about the school in Eastern Cape - Effata School for the Deaf. But I did not really know for who, what it was about. When I went to the school I felt lost and alone. In my school I heard Xhosa language and Xhosa words. This was different.

His mum took him to a School for the Deaf in Transkei and for the first time he saw children signing.

One day me and my mother visited Effata School. We saw all these children. They could not talk. They were signing with their hands but I did know what they were doing. I only saw their hands moving. I laughed at them and they laughed back at me. I thought it was funny. I asked my mother what they were doing and she said that they were communicating. She told me that I must come to this school then I can communicate like them, because I am also Deaf like them. I knew that I had to accept this.

However, Troy was not accepted at this school because ….. They accepted children who were Deaf, who could not speak and could not hear. If suppose you were Deaf but could speak then you were not accepted in the school. Me also I was not accepted because even though I was Deaf, I could speak. I was upset because they did not want to accept me. My grandmother worried them but still they did not accept me so I had to stay at home.

He remained at home for six months, until his mother heard of Deaf School in East London.

I stayed at home for about 6 months- I stayed in the farm. Then my mother moved to East London. I stayed on the farm because I was Deaf. My mother heard about the school for the Deaf in East London. She took me there to St. Thomas School for the Deaf. Here this school accepted me. I felt very happy because of my previous experiences when I was rejected at the other school. Here also I saw all the children. And I felt happy to be accepted here. I came home and took all my clothes and went back to the school. I started learning to sign and socializing a lot with the other children in the school. I felt accepted here. I copied everybody and started learning Sign Language.

Before when I was hearing, I enjoyed socializing with hearing children. When I became Deaf I felt alone and excluded. Now that I am Deaf I accept that I belong in the Deaf world. I enjoy meeting and socializing with the Deaf. I enjoyed playing sport with other Deaf schools, visiting other Deaf schools, communicating and socializing with the Deaf. When hearing people sign to you they use gestures, for example, they point to the stomach to ask if you are hungry. That’s ok, but real SL with the Deaf is better.

He was happy and felt accepted here. He started learning to sign, socializing and playing sport with the other children in the school. He understood that he belonged in the Deaf world and
enjoyed integrating with the Deaf. He learnt Sign Language quickly because his Deaf friends used Total Communication, i.e. a combination of Sign Language with Xhosa.

When he came to the School for the Deaf in East London, he accepted being a Deaf person. There were others like him and he felt positive. The people in East London treated me like a normal person and this is how he wanted to be. Now his family understands that he can be independent.

Now they treat me like I am a normal adult. And I like that.

Having attended both Deaf and hearing schools, Troy is able to compare the quality of education in both types of schools. In Schools for the Deaf, Education is dependent on the level of Sign Language proficiency of the teachers.

In hearing schools there is a lot of education. Children learn a lot not only from the teacher. In Deaf schools I think the teachers choose certain things to teach. I think they teach only what they can teach, only what they know how to teach. Sometimes they don’t know the SIGN LANGUAGE to teach certain things. Then they don’t teach that. In the hearing schools if you don’t understand something the teacher will teach it again. But in the Deaf school the teachers don’t listen if the children say that they don’t understand. In the Deaf school the information that is given is not full it is little. Now as a Deaf teacher myself, I know what is happening. I know how the learners are struggling to learn because once I was also a Deaf learner. I can identify with the Deaf learners. The teachers always say that the Deaf learners can’t do this, they can’t learn this, and they won’t manage this. I think that the teachers must try to teach and see if the learners fail. They must see where the problem is first. That is why I think hearing teachers are better.

For himself personally, in the hearing school he got good skills, good education, good communication and he learnt his mother tongue. In the Deaf school he learnt Sign Language and learnt how to be a Deaf person. In the hearing school sport was focused only for senior learners. However, in the Deaf school he was chosen to represent the school in Rugby, and he won many table-tennis matches. He was also involved with soccer and volleyball and won many matches.

The school gave him a hearing aid and he thought that this would make a hearing person again. He was excited and he used to wear it all the time, but it did not work like when I was hearing. He stopped wearing the hearing aid, because he could hear sounds, but it was difficult for him to identify what sound it was. I was disappointed because this gave me hope that I will hear. But when he met the Deaf teacher and she explained to him about deafness, then he accepted being a Deaf person. I like being Deaf.

**Communication**

Troy enjoyed healthy communication with family members as a hearing person, but everything changed when he became Deaf.

Before when I was hearing there was good communication with my family. I communicated well with my grandmother, mother, brothers, sisters – we all got on well together. Everything was perfect. But after I became Deaf I feel that everything is lost. I feel excluded. I feel like an outsider. I am alone - we don’t communicate. They don’t start communication with me.
They don’t face me, look at me – they turn away. Then I don’t know what they are saying. I know SL communication is very important for me. I took a SL book home to teach my family – but they are not interested. They laugh when I try to teach them. My family doesn’t see the importance of learning SL to be able to communicate with me. When I go home for the holidays, I spend all the time with my friends. I only go back home at night to sleep. Communication and socializing with family is poor. We only communicate if we need something but we don’t sit and have conversations.

I am eager to meet my other Deaf friends. We have lots to communicate about. When I go home I greet my family, they give me some food, I eat then same time I go to visit my friends. I come back home, sleep, and then in the morning I go to my Deaf friends again. Most of the time my family ignores me.

Accepting Deafness

When Troy lost his hearing, I did not get angry and try desperately to become hearing again. He quietly accepted that he was Deaf. He often reflected on how he became Deaf and on the different sounds he used to be able to hear – radio, TV, music, cars, people talking. He used to think about what went wrong with me inside. This helped me to accept and understand that I was Deaf.

It was not easy for Troy to accept that he was now a Deaf person. He did not understand what happened to him. Before it was not easy for me to accept. I did not understand what happened to me. Nobody explained anything to me. I tried to lip-read what they were saying but it was difficult but now I understand that I am Deaf because I was sick. It was when I went to Deaf schools and saw other Deaf children – and they accepted me, they did not laugh at me like the other hearing children - them I accepted myself as being Deaf. I was not alone here - I was just like everybody here. I felt part of everybody here. I started to progress and change my idea (perception) of myself as a Deaf person. Now I don’t see myself as a person who cannot hear or cannot speak. I see myself as a Deaf person who uses Sign Language. I accept that I am Deaf because I have a language to use.

Although he felt accepted here, his confidence was low because he was born hearing and it took him time to adjust because he had a spoken language first. When I first went to Effata School, my confidence was low because I was slow in learning Sign Language. Those children in the school who were born Deaf learnt Sign Language quickly, they grasped knowledge quickly. Even hard of hearing children were better than me. They also learnt quickly. But me I was slow slow in everything. Because I was born hearing it took me time to adjust because I had a spoken language first. Many times I was embarrassed about this. I wanted to be same like the other Deaf children. They were quick in using Sign Language. I was embarrassed that I had some speech. I could not stop using my speech. Sometimes the teacher used to hit me because I was using voice.

Troy was disillusioned that there was discrimination between the Deaf and the hard-of-hearing. He was considered to be part of the hard-of-hearing group.
What was embarrassing me and made me feel not good was that there was discrimination. The Deaf were separate and the hard of hearing were separate. I was with the hard of hearing. Our group was oppressed and the Deaf groups were better treated. The Deaf are like special and they don’t involve you with them because they don’t know where you are - if you are Deaf or hearing and because you have speech, you can’t be a full Deaf person. Many times when I was with Deaf people, I used to go off the topic because I did not know the Signing well. Then they used to all laugh at me. I knew and I felt that I was not one with all of them.

Because I had a spoken Language and I was not born Deaf, I could not enter the Deaf world completely. I had to go slowly, slowly in and only when I learn’t Sign Language really well, then I felt confident. Then the Deaf took me in.

Troy disliked the charitable attitudes of hearing people. He felt that he was being pitied. The worst thing was when I became Deaf; hearing people used to say shame, shame, all the time. They used to touch me like petting and feel sorry for me. I was sensitive and did not like this. They treated me differently. Whenever my mother took me shopping or took me to visit anyone – people always wanted to give me money or give me something because they felt sorry for me. The made feel like I was an old person who was only getting a pension. Everyone feels sorry and wants to give them more money to make them happy. I was always embarrassed. I did not like that.

The other not good experience for me was in my farm, my village, I was the first person to be Deaf. The people here never saw a Deaf person before. They used to look at me strangely. They looked at me like I was different – asked me funny questions. Is your ears paining? Is there something stuck in your ears.

He also detested the fact that his mother took him to many sangomas to correct his deficiency. When I went to East London my mother took me to many, many sangomas. They tried to make me a hearing person again. The sangomas used to mix lots of medicines for me to eat and drink. They also gave my mother things to wash my ears. They put things inside my ears. I did not like all this.

When I came to St Martins (secondary school), I accepted being a Deaf person. There were others like me. I felt positive. I wanted my mother to stop taking me to sangomas and hospitals. I was fed up and I wanted to stay like a Deaf person. I explained to my mother that the sangoma was not going to change anything. I will learn Sign Language and be like the other Deaf people. It doesn’t matter. I don’t want to change to become a hearing person. One day my mother even took me to a church campaign where she heard that if they prayed for me then I would be able to hear. But it failed - it did not work. At the church the man told my mother to take some paper, fold it, and put it on my ear and bang the ear. And my mother did that. She banged my ears and head many times. But nothing happened. It did not make me hear again.

I feel bad that I accepted to be Deaf and my mother did not want me to be Deaf. She tried everything to make me a hearing person again. I got very frustrated. She took me to many different places for the same reason. I told her to please leave it. Accept me that I am Deaf. She continued to protest. I refused to go anywhere again. I told her she must accept, accept, and accept.
When Troy felt strong about being Deaf he understood that Deaf people and hearing people are same.

*Because I became Deaf late, it took me some time to accept that I was Deaf. But I did accept it late. When I felt strong about being Deaf I understood that Deaf people and hearing people are same. But Sign Language is for Deaf people and Spoken Language is for hearing people. I do not feel that hearing people are higher (superior). I am not afraid of meeting hearing people. If I meet a hearing person in town or in the shop, I have no problem to say that I am Deaf. For me it helps me. Then the hearing person knows how to communicate with me. I feel confident to be with hearing people or Deaf people. That is because I accept myself as a Deaf person. I feel positive. Maybe if I did not accept me as a Deaf person then I will not like hearing people. I feel that I can have access to Deaf and hearing people.*

Although he doesn’t have a problem associating with hearing people, he clearly indicates a preference to be with Deaf people.

*I think 30% with hearing and 70% with Deaf people.*

Troy is believes that Deaf people can experience Deafness in a positive way.

*Deaf people can experience Deafness in a positive way if they understand and accept their Deafness. They must be respected like hearing people and they must get education like hearing people. People must understand that the Deaf can also do jobs like hearing people. If all this happens then you can lead a normal life as a Deaf person. Deaf people can also go to university if they want to and be successful. A Deaf person is not a disabled person. Being Deaf means they cannot hear and that they use Sign Language to communicate Deaf people can do anything that they want if they are given the right opportunity.*

Troy’s most positive experience at the Deaf school was having a Deaf teacher (unqualified).

*She taught us in the high school up to Matric. Her teaching was perfect and because her Sign Language was good we understood her clearly. She motivated me. She was very special to me. Yes very much and that was when I decided that I wanted to be a teacher just like her. She motivated me to become a teacher. And it is because of her that I went to college and now I am a teacher. Maybe I would not have managed high school if she did not teach me.*

The school gave him a hearing aid and he thought that this would make a hearing person again. He was excited and he used to wear it all the time, *but it did not work like when I was hearing.* He stopped wearing the hearing aid, because he could hear sounds, but it was difficult for to identify what sound it was.

*I was disappointed because this gave me hope that I will hear.* But when he met the Deaf teacher and she explained to him about deafness, then he *accepted being a Deaf person. I like being Deaf.*

There are however times when laments the fact that he became Deaf. He wishes that he could have been hard-of-hearing so that he could hear some things. *There was a time when I was very determined to have the cochlear implant surgery.* He researched this at length and discovered that it was not going to make him hear like a normal person again so he no longer pursues this. *I don’t want it anymore. I accept myself like this. Its fine.*
When Troy compares himself now to when he was a hearing person, his only longing is to be alert to the sound of cars and vehicles.

Yes sometimes it can be dangerous for us. When I was hearing, I was a very confident person. I could be alone even when I was small. But on the street nobody knows that you are Deaf. How will anyone help you? Also I cannot ask for help. In the Deaf world we want to be proud and independent. One day I was walking on the road going home. I was not aware of one car that was coming behind me. Maybe the car would have knocked me, because I did not hear the hooting. A hearing person quickly came and pushed me out of the way. I did not feel good about myself that day. I felt that I could not be an independent person. I felt that I was not smart. Maybe it was ok for the hearing person to help me. But as a Deaf person we don’t feel comfortable about that. It is not easy.

About Sign Language and Deaf Culture

In response to the importance of SL in his life Troy, informed that SL was as important to him as any other spoken language was to a hearing person.

Sign Language is important to me like any other language is important to a hearing person. SL is the way of communication for the Deaf. Without SL a Deaf person is nothing. In my heart I feel strong about SL and Deaf Culture. Deaf Culture is about using SL and belonging to the Deaf group. It is important as a Deaf person to understand and know things about SL eg. the rules of the language, the structure the space and other things. SL is different from other languages. SL involves the hands, face and body. Other language involves voice.

When he was in school, he had much exposure to Total Communication. This involved the simultaneous use of speech and signs based on the English language. This was typical of most Deaf Schools.

Now as adults we have a challenge. Now we are full Deaf people and we must use only SL. We must use only SASL. We use no speech because speech is the hearing people’s language, not Deaf people’s language.

Troy considers himself fortunate to have attended several schools for the Deaf, so his knowledge of SL is vast. From province to province and also in different schools there are variations in the SL, although the main vocabulary of SASL remains uniform.

For Troy, Deaf Culture is a way of life for the Deaf.

Deaf Culture is a way of life for the Deaf. It does not involve hearing people, because the culture of hearing people is different. Culture is about language and the hearing people do not use SL. They use speech. Those who belong to Deaf Culture use SL. Deaf people follow the Deaf way of life – it is natural

There is a different way that Deaf people behave compared to hearing people. With Sign Language – Deaf people use SL different from how hearing people use SL. Deaf people use SL in a natural way. To get a hearing person’s attention you can call the person’s name but to get a Deaf person’s attention you can touch the person. The Deaf Accept that. Hearing may not accept that – to be touched.
If you have a Deaf child and I have a Deaf child, you will raise your child different against how I raise my child. The Deaf way and hearing way are different.

Positive Influence

The biggest positive influence on Troy’s life was St Martins School in Port Shepstone. This school helped him to build confidence and esteem and gave affirmation to his deafness. Before I went to St Martins I had no idea about my future. I did not know where I was going – what was going to happen to me. But after going to St Martins I progressed, I learnt, I became motivated. I achieved, I got support and encouragement. I realized that Deaf people can do things. I learnt about everything that was important about the Deaf. I became experienced and learnt proper SL. I knew that I could achieve many things. Now I am a teacher, I am proud of myself.

It was the Deaf teacher at St Martins that motivated and inspired him. The Deaf teacher wanted us to write Education Department Exams. The hearing teachers said no - we must write school exams. We will not understand the English in the papers. It will be too difficult for us. We will not be able to answer the questions and we will fail. But the Deaf teacher said that we must, must write the Education Department Exams. And we did and we succeeded and we have a certificate from the Education Department.

Until then he could not conceptualize the idea that there could be Deaf teachers. I thought that it was impossible for a Deaf person to become a teacher. I thought that only hearing people became teachers.

Troy knew of Deaf members of staff in the other schools that he attended, but they were not teachers….…. they were given low quality work like sewing and being responsible for the small children. But in St Martins the Deaf teacher taught in the high school. She even taught the matric class. I was shocked when I knew that the Deaf teacher was teaching us in matric. I knew that many schools have Deaf staff who are clever and good in SL but they are given low work maybe because they have no qualifications. They are oppressed and pushed aside.

Very significant in Troy’s life is the support of his grandmother even before he became Deaf. My grandmother always said to me if you want to achieve something, you must work hard for yourself. When he was young and hearing, he and his brother used to admire what other people had. My grandmother used to say if you want that, if you want to achieve that then you must work hard and you will get it. I keep that in my head all the time.

Troy repeatedly acknowledges the support, enthusiasm and innovativeness that he got from Wits Centre for Deaf Education. At Wits Centre for Deaf studies, Troy studied theoretical and practical modules. The modules that pertained directly to the Deaf and Deaf related issues appealed to him. It is about SL, about the Deaf psychology, how to teach the Deaf, how the Deaf learn. There is a lot of practical work and this is interesting and also for these courses we have Deaf lectures, so it is better.
Negative Influence

Troy slates hearing teachers as having had the greatest negative influence in his life. *When I was in St Martins school before matric, when I was in grade 10 there was one teacher, he was the HOD. He told me after grade 10 I must leave school and find a job. I accepted this. There are no opportunities for the Deaf to progress. He always made me feel that the Deaf have no rights. He and the Deaf teacher used to argue a lot. She used to say that the Deaf can do a lot – and many hearing teachers said Deaf cannot do anything. The Deaf teacher said that she was given the opportunity and she succeeded. This one Deaf teacher used to challenge all the others. I felt guilty because many times I supported the hearing teachers. I also thought that the Deaf could not do anything much. But the Deaf teacher used to say that the Deaf can do this and this and this. The hearing teachers did not give us support and encouragement. They made us have little confidence in ourselves. They gave me low identity. They always told us all the things that we cannot do. I am proud of this Deaf teacher that succeeded. I know that the hearing teachers knew that she was good.*

Which World?

One of Troy’s greatest challenges was not knowing which world he belonged in – the Deaf world or hearing world. *In the beginning I did not know if I was in Deaf world or hearing world. I did not know where I belonged. When I was younger I was forced to use speech. I can still speak a little. But going to the Deaf school I was forced to Sign. But the Deaf knew that I could speak and some did not want to accept me in the Deaf world. Now they know that I am a strong signing Deaf person and I feel part of the Deaf world now. But there will always be a difference between a person like me and a person who is born Deaf. You live in the hearing world because you speak and sign sometimes. But people in the Deaf world sign all the time. They have only one language.*

PART TWO - TRAINING TO BE A TEACHER

It was not Troy’s ambition to become a teacher. He knew that he wanted to study but had no concrete plans. *My experience of teaching was not good. The teachers used to argue a lot about what the Deaf can do and can’t do.*

Despite this achievement of becoming a teacher under tremendous odds, he does not consider himself as being completely successful. There is something more I still want to do, still want to achieve. But this was not disclosed during the interview.

Now as a qualified teacher of Deaf learners, Troy is critical of the curriculum. He is of the opinion that the curriculum at Springfield College had little relevance to Deaf education and to the teaching of Deaf learners. The curriculum pertained more to mainstream hearing learners. *The curriculum taught me how to teach, how to be a teacher – but what kind of children? Not Deaf children. It did not teach me how to be a teacher of Deaf children. The curriculum also*
did not make me aware of the different kinds of children in one classroom. Different special needs. Nothing about that.
Hardly anything for the Deaf. Why I say that is because now I am a teacher and I am learning through my experience. After college I was stuck. I and not know how to teach the Deaf children.

The staff at college was positive and encouraging most of the time. However Troy did not appreciate the manner in which they related to the Deaf students. They were positive. But most of them treated us like kids. I did not like that. There gave us too many rules. They said the same thing many, many times. “if you are absent, you are late – your responsibility not mine”. If you are in college and you are late, they must not ask me why I’m late. This is not school. There was too much control like school.

Opportunities to integrate with other hearing students at the college were rare. Opportunities were poor. At the time when we were there at the college the Deaf were on their own. But once when there was a problem at college – over the college name – Springfield or SACOL – the students did not want to change. They said something about Department wanting to close college, then we all move to UNISA. That meant that we would be together with hearing students in the same lectures. But that did not happen. Everything remained the same. We were still separate.

There was no person in the college that particularly influenced his life or that influenced him to be a good teacher? He makes the point that he did not plan to become a teacher but when he started to train as a teacher it was interesting and he enjoyed it.
I meet Alison who was lecturing to us at Wits. For the first time I had a Deaf lecturer, lecturing to us in SL and about how to be a Deaf teacher teaching Deaf children. She was very interesting and motivating.

Although there were SL interpreters at Springfield, Troy was of the opinion that this compromised the lecturing.
It was not the same. The quality of information was not good, a lot was left out. Sometimes I know that the lecturer was talking but the interpreter was not signing. Even when they were signing, it was not structured SL. They were signing English. And I know it is difficult for an interpreter to catch all the information. It is always better to have a Deaf Lecturer. Not good, not the same with interpreters.

PART THREE - BEING A TEACHER

Troy shook his head with disillusion when he described his relationship with hearing staff at the school where he is teaches.
Relationship is poor. There are lots of challenges in the school. Sometimes I get fed up. The hearing teachers don’t take SL seriously. Some think that the Deaf children are stupid and there is no need for them to have the right to lots of information. A school for the Deaf means that the school is especially for Deaf children and all must show respect for the rights of the Deaf staff and Deaf children. But this is not happening…
But Troy does not show any intent to resist or alter this attitude of the hearing teachers. He accepts this situation and decides to continue his practice, notwithstanding.

*When I first arrived at Vuleka I saw that things were not right but I decided that I must just focus on the reason very I came here. I concentrate on me and my work and not other staff.*

He is explicit that he does not get support professional support from the hearing teachers at his school.

*Professional support? No nothing. I give them support with SL, if they ask me, but they don’t give me support. I get support from Wits - Wits centre for Deaf Education gives me professional support, lots of support.*

Troy does not socialize much with the hearing teachers at his school. There appears to be a courteous working relationship with hearing teachers while at school but clearly no socializing outside of school.

*I prefer to be with the Deaf. We are not completely separated. We come together every time at school. But socializing is not too much.*

Troy expresses the feeling that hearing teachers do not respect Deaf teachers. There is unfair distribution of work and the Deaf teachers are given too many responsibilities.

*When a Deaf teacher comes to the school many hearing teachers give their responsibilities to the Deaf teacher. The Deaf teachers do all the work and the hearing teachers do a little.*

He also criticized the hearing teachers for repeatedly calling the Deaf teachers out of their classrooms to solve problems that they encounter with the Deaf learners. The hearing teachers don’t even attempt to resolve the issue. Instead they call on the Deaf teacher to do this.

*I am busy with my teaching, but they disturb me. I must leave my teaching to solve his problem. Yes they use the Deaf teacher to their work.*

His relationship with the Deaf learners has both positive and negative aspects. *Relationship is both negative and positive. Example of positive is that they respect me as a teacher, they understand me, they like the SL. But negative is that they all see me as a Deaf teacher, with low qualifications. They try to test us and think that the hearing teachers are clever than me. They see the hearing teacher with more authority. They cannot believe that we have same qualification. How the hearing teachers treat the pupils, the pupils treat the Deaf teachers in the same way. Not right*

Despite this Troy, shows great concern for the welfare of the Deaf learners – because they are Deaf like him. Whenever they have grievances he support them.

*I worry about the Deaf a lot. When they have a complaint, I want to support them. Some times I also feel it doesn’t matter, just leave them. But most of the time I give them a lot of support. I know how difficult it was for me when I was growing up, because I can compare my life as a Deaf and hearing person.*

Troy believes that both Deaf and hearing teachers have contributed to Deaf education.

*I think they like both Deaf and hearing teachers. It is not fair to say that only the Deaf teachers are good for the Deaf pupils. Because before we Deaf teachers were qualified all Deaf children were only taught by hearing teachers. And they all made some progress. In the*
junior classes I think they like the hearing teachers. But Deaf children in high school like Deaf teachers. The Deaf teachers are good with SL and the hearing teachers have good knowledge, so both are good.

**BARRIERS / CHALLENGES**

**Department of Education**

There are definite barriers that Troy experiences in the course his practice. Yes I do find barriers. Whenever there are workshops, when the Education Department is having workshops, all teachers from the different school go to the workshop. My principal tells me to go. I get excited. But when I get to the workshop there is no SL interpreter for me. Then they phone to my school and ask them to send another hearing teacher. This makes me angry because this teacher is now leaving his work to come to sign for me. When the hearing teacher is signing for me the facilitator from Education Department tells the hearing teacher not to move his hands about too much because it is disturbing him. If he signs small, then it is not clear for me. Then it is useless that I am there. I cannot learn anything. The Education Department is not aware of Deafness and my needs as a Deaf person. It frustrates me because they not interested in me. They not bothered. I am a Deaf teacher for nothing. They think that the Deaf is not a person. I am sitting there but not involved in the workshop. I don’t know why they tell me to come.

He expresses apprehension about why he is even invited to attend the workshop since these only address the concerns of mainstream education and do not have any relevance for Deaf learners or Deaf education. But these workshops are only for teaching hearing children nothing about Deaf children. They cannot give us guidance on teaching the Deaf children. Nothing for us. They have many, many meetings but nothing about the Deaf. I feel frustrated. I feel not worth it. Now I don’t like to go to any workshops because it is wasting my time. I don’t learn anything. It is not for me. I rather just continue my work at school.

Troy denounces the Education Dept. for the way in which it denigrates Deaf people and SL. Yes the Education Department thinks that we are playing with our hands. They don’t know that this is my language. We learn through SL. They make me feel that we are not important, our language is not important. Why don’t they know it is the language of us Deaf people? SL gives us access to knowledge and to learning. But when Department thinks it is not important, then I feel what am I doing here. Why I waste my time.

He feels that if the Education Department cannot give credence to SL, then concomitantly there is no respect for the Deaf and their education. Alternately, if the Education Dept. recognizes the importance of SL and the education of Deaf learners, and supported Deaf teachers, then he will feel appreciated and esteemed and this will enhance his practice as a Deaf teacher. If Department gives me support and teaches me then, I will be happy and give that knowledge to the Deaf children that I teach. They don’t help me to change and to progress I am lucky that I get support for teaching from Wits centre for Deaf Education. They give me ideas. They cannot give us guidance on teaching the Deaf children. Nothing for us. They have many, many meetings but nothing about the Deaf. I feel frustrated. I feel not worth it. Now I
don’t like to go to any workshops because it is wasting my time. I don’t learn anything. It is not for me. I rather just continue my work at school.

I feel that there are no opportunities for me as a Deaf teacher. I get no support from Education Department - nothing, nothing. They give me nothing. They don’t help me. I am a special teacher. I need special help. But I get nothing.

“Deaf have no voice”

The other barrier that he experiences is that in his school the Deaf teachers have ‘no voice’. He admits that this is a source of infuriation and frustration for him, since nobody ‘listens to the Deaf’.

Also what makes me angry in my school? Nobody listens to the Deaf. If we want something then a hearing person speaks for me. Why can’t the principal listen to my words? It is not fair. I don’t feel like I am important. I feel oppressed and excluded.

Resources

Teaching in my school can be positive but negative at the same time so it cancels.

Troy feels positive in the sense that he is willing to work hard, educate the Deaf learners and enhance the quality of their lives. But his enthusiasm is thwarted since the school does not provide the resources for him to be able to undertake his profession effectively. In addition, Schools for the Deaf want Deaf teachers because they augment the image of the School. The natural signing ability of the Deaf teachers is empowering for both hearing staff and Deaf learners. But the School does not enfranchise them as fully-fledged, integrated members of staff. Neither does the school offer them professional development opportunities.

Many schools want us Deaf teachers to be there. It is good for the school. They want us to give them power. But they don’t give us opportunity. We don’t feel integrated in the school.

Teaching Sign Language

Troy cannot overemphasize the importance of SL as the foundation for the education of the Deaf. He is acutely aware of how the Deaf struggle with many subjects because the SL of hearing teachers is inadequate.

If the Sign language were better then they would cope better. If they don’t know the words then how would they learn structure and grammar? A person must know SL well to be able to teach the Deaf. Sign Language is a problem for hearing teachers in the Deaf schools.

At his school, the learners struggle to learn because of poor SL as the teaching and learning medium. Troy is adamant that SL is not the same as English. Some hearing teachers say that SL is like Deaf people’s English. But it is not, it cannot be the same. English and SL are two different languages. It is important that hearing teachers know about how the language was established, the rules, the grammar and the structure. Only then will one be able to use and teach the language correctly and only then will the Deaf learners be able to learn the language and engage the language as the medium through which they can learn other subjects. Hearing people
know about their spoken language, its history and its rules and that’s how they learn their language.

_Some times the hearing teachers make me feel useless, when I tell them about SL. They don’t care to take my advice. It is like our language is not important. Also when they are using SL, I know that they get stuck but they don’t ask me. They know that I am Deaf and I can help but they don’t ask me. If I need help with English, then I will ask them, but they don’t ask me, they don’t worry._

Troy feels that hearing teachers are apathetic and indifferent towards learning and using SL for teaching. Their lack of interest in making learning possible for the Deaf through effective use of SL is of great concern for Troy.

In recent years there is greater confidence in Deaf learners and the assurance that they can learn and can achieve given the opportunity and appropriate access to education. He believes that: **The hearing learners’ progress better because the teaching is better.** However the level of education in schools for the Deaf is compromised because of hearing teachers’ lack of competence in signing. He expressed concern that _a grade 8 Deaf person was not like the same as a grade 8 or 9 hearing person_, and this he attributes to the poor SL proficiency of hearing teachers.

His discontentment with the level of SL efficiency amongst hearing teachers and the way in which teachers were using SL to teach the Deaf learners, prompted him to initiate weekly SL classes for these teachers. This included showing the teachers creative ways of teaching through SL and showing them how to make learning accessible for the children. However, to his dismay, the teachers were resistant to his ideas and suggestions for teaching the Deaf learners.

_They argue with me. Like I tell them if they don’t know Sign Language well, then they must try to be active and demonstrate and be energetic. But immediately they tell me that they are too old now. They cannot be active. They don’t even try what I am suggesting. They always make me lose confidence._

Troy battled against opposition and argument repeatedly and eventually he felt that his attempts were futile and he discontinued the SL lessons.

Troy is aware that _the hearing can socialize and learn anywhere all the time. But the Deaf can only socialize and learn at school, where there are other Deaf people and teachers who know SL and how to communicate with them._

He believes that the knowledge that the Deaf acquire, is informed directly by the deliberate teaching- learning process, rather than through incidental learning.

**Job satisfaction**

Troy does not enjoy complete job satisfaction. He feels that he is not given full respect as a Deaf teacher and that his opinions are not valued. Often he feels despondent and discouraged but he elects to continue as a teacher because ……

_If I leave then I will be hungry. Where will I find another job? How will I get money?_

He admits to remaining in the job only for the monetary gain.
**If I continue I will get my salary and that keeps me satisfied. If I get another job, maybe my money will be low, because I must start from low and slowly go up.**

**Improving Deaf education**

Given the opportunity, how would Troy improve Deaf education? He feels that for quality Deaf education all hearing teachers ought to know SL. Hearing teachers should only get jobs in Deaf schools with knowledge SL as a pre-requisite. In fact they should only apply for jobs in Deaf schools if they know and are able to use SL fluently. *They say that they will learn it when they come to the school, but when they get the jobs; they are not interested to learn SL. They do nothing.*

Also the hearing teachers must be genuinely interested in supporting, motivating and teaching the Deaf. They must be positive and believe in the Deaf. It is ironic that Troy says that: *They must not come and just work for money.* Contrary to what is conventional, he advises that the learners are the best critics to judge teacher performance and effectiveness. *If they are learning well from the teachers, if the teachers are involved in everything in the school, if the children feel that the teacher is good, then the teacher must get a permanent job.*

Signing skills, experience in teaching the Deaf, a positive attitude towards the Deaf learners, and good social skills – these are the qualities of a good teacher for Deaf children.

The ability to socialize with the Deaf is important to Troy. In this way teachers will be able to accept the Deaf irrespective of their condition, get access to the Deaf through their language. *You can’t say that the language is funny or stupid and be embarrassed to use the language for. eg y-o-u. the sign is the finger pointing at you. That is the sign, accept it. It is not rude or poor manners. It is the language of the Deaf, it is ok.*

**About the future.**

Troy’s immediate plans include completing the ACE program. Thereafter he would like to attempt B. Ed. in Deaf Education. His long term goals include the Deaf. *I want to make Deaf children proud of themselves, and proud of their language. I don’t want them to be embarrassed about their Deafness and their language. In my school I have a challenge. I am teaching 3 learning areas – Life sciences, Life skills and Sign Language. I try to use different methods with Sign language to make them learn. I notice that some Deaf don’t accept Sign Language. They say that their families at home on the farm laugh at them when they use SL. There Sign Language is oppressed because they are embarrassed. So I want them to accept their language and be strong for the future.*

Troy doesn’t have any current plans to marry and he has not as yet decided whether he will marry a Deaf or a hearing person. *I have not decided that yet. It depends on who I meet – it does not matter if it is a Deaf or hearing person.*
He also indicates a preference to have both Deaf and hearing children. He will raise his children differently compared to the way in which he was raised.

*Everything is different now. Children are given lots of rights. When I was young, we had no rights.*

Although he will be flexible as a parent, he expects his children to accord him respect. He emphasizes the importance of communication between parents and children, making decisions together.

There is a calm contentedness about his life. He does not reflect on how his life would have turned out had he not become Deaf.

*I don’t know what would have happened in my life if I did not become Deaf. I cannot keep thinking of the past. I want to forget and move forward.*

He feels that he is fortunate that he can do many things and that he has accomplished much. He is focused and knows what he wants. There is definite certainty that there is nothing in his life from the past that he wants to change?

I thanked Troy for this wonderful interview and for the opportunity to learn about his life. I was indeed astonished when Troy thanked me for the interview.

*Your questions were good. It gave me a chance to express myself.*
INTRODUCTION

The cause of Violet’s deafness in unknown, but her parents are aware that she was born Deaf. She has two brothers and a sister and the family lived in a rural suburb called Darnall on the KZN North Coast. She is married to a Deaf person who is a teacher aide at a school for Deaf learners and they have two hearing children.

Violet started using hearing aids when she was just three years old. In addition her father used to take her for speech therapy to a private audiologist in Stanger. The speech therapy and the use of hearing aids from a very age supported her speech development.

PART ONE - EARLY EXPERIENCE OF BEING DEAF

Violet’s earliest memory of being Deaf was her awareness that she was different. When I was with my family I realized that I don’t fit because they only talked and when I was born I had no speech and I could not hear. My remembrance was when I asked my mum for something and my mum would shout and say “What you want?” I would look at her and try to understand what she’s trying to say, it was difficult as I used to point my finger only. That reminds me of today being a teacher, I can see a Deaf child coming from a rural place where they have no language and their first language is pointing and that makes me remember. It’s difficult when it comes to communication...

She noticed from an early age that there was a relationship between her parents and her siblings. She observed this relationship through their communication. In my family my brothers and sister, I observed they have a bond with my mother and father, I saw that they always speak but I realized I’m different because I could not talk. I realized that was different about me.

Violet only understood her deafness and difference when she went to the school for Deaf learners. She realized then that she was not same as her family members. I’m not same like my brothers and sister. When I entered the school for the Deaf, I saw them using SL and I realized I am in the right place, a school for the Deaf and with my Deaf friends. I knew that this was where I belong.

She recalls that in her family, what was prominent to her was the lack of communication. She often argued with her mum because she did not use SL. Her father was able to communicate with her in SL, but he was hardly at home because he spent long hours at work. Most of her childhood and schooling years were spent away from her family since Violet stayed in the school residence. Much of the communication with her siblings turned out to be quarrelsome because they misunderstood one other. She described an incident which occurred when she was about seven years old. When my father takes us to the shop he always asked my brothers and sister what they wanted first and leave me last, sometimes they forget about me, sometimes they say I can’t talk and they know what I like, but whatever they buy is not what I like. I remember one day when my father bought a new car and he told me not to mess the car, he was signing to me trying to make me understand, I
said ok. My father bought juice for my brothers and sister and he got me a chocolate, I told him I
don’t want the chocolate but he said I have to eat it. I was so upset, what I did, I ignored the
chocolate and left it on the car seat and it melted, the paper was even opened and the car was
messed, that time my father was angry and he hit me. He said he told me not to mess the car.

GOING TO SCHOOL

Initially her family was not aware that there were schools for Deaf children. Her parents first admitted
her at a training centre in Stanger. Communication was a challenge to her here and she did not feel
comfortable.

*There they spoke and I did not have the courage to communicate and make friends. You know why?*

That special class was for blind, cripple and slow learners. In class I used to catch up quick and my
teacher told my dad that I don’t fit in that school.

Her other experience of being misplaced was when she was admitted to a special class in a mainstream
school. Again her parents were advised by her teacher that her capacity to learn was more advanced
than the others in the class. The teacher suggested that she attend a mainstream school to ascertain if
she could cope here, since she was doing well in school, she could also hear a little and could lip read
very well.

*Then they thought why not try to put me in a mainstream school. My father was motivated and
wanted me to pass my matric there but he did not expect me to suffer.*

Her family then moved to Newlands in Durban and Violet started to attend a mainstream school here.
She did not anticipate the difficulties that she experienced here.

I didn’t know that the language will be difficult in a mainstream school, but I felt I should take the
challenge. The teachers and learners were fast speakers, they never have patience to let me see and
hear what they saying. That time I was really emotional and frustrated too, but I never blame them
because they never saw a Deaf person before. In that school I was the only Deaf learner.

Later her father learnt of VN Naik School for the Deaf and Violet was admitted here after several
bouts of being inappropriately placed. The first day she went to VNNSD, she felt connected to the
school and she knew that she belonged here.

*When I entered the school my heart was beating fast and I realized that I am linked to the school
and also belonged here at VNNS. That time when I entered VNNS I felt that my language is here, I
was happy, the teachers were so motivated to teach the Deaf and they had warm hearts, they showed
love that’s best for Deaf children.*

SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENTS

Violet enjoyed acclaim with all her achievements when she went to the school for the Deaf.
*I was really good in academic as well good in sports. I had a good name and my behaviour was
good in the hostel. I used to participate in beauty contests and drama, which was a highlight. This
made me confident because when I was in the hearing school I did not have these opportunities like*
participating in a communication contest. My greatest achievement at VNNS was being in the first group of Deaf to matriculate 1996.

I participated with all Deaf competitors who were good in drama and modeling, that time I was not so good but I had to practice hard to bring the trophy back to VNNS. Out of all the competitors I was the youngest. I was only 18 and the rest over 20, the oldest was 23. But I made it and became Miss Deaf Kwa Zulu Natal. When it came to the questions the judges said they realize VNNS woman are intelligent.

Learning theoretical subjects was challenging, because the teachers did not use SL. I would ask the teacher why it’s so hard, can’t you change it and make it easy but they would get angry and tell me - you have to understand. Some teachers used to speak to us and not use any SL. I did not know what they were saying – I could not understand anything and I could not learn. The teachers were hearing and I was Deaf. They used to look at me like I was stupid and I felt insulted.

There were also incidents that caused her to feel negative and embarrassed about her Deafness. I remember I was chosen to attend the Children’s Rights Summit in Durban. There were many hearing children from different schools. I was selected to represent our school at the summit. We had to form a circle and all of us had to debate about children’s rights. One teacher from a hearing school asked all of us questions but she forgot to ask me. I raise my hand and told her that she forgot about. She looked at me angry and said in a loud voice, “You missed your turn. You did not pay attention in the last round.” Everyone was laughing. She did not know that I was Deaf and she thought that I was rude. That time was most embarrassing for me.

Incidents such as these occur frequently when socializing with hearing people. They often forget about us and we feel excluded because we don’t hear them. But where I am today, I know the people around me respect me and I respect them too. If I don’t like something I tell them straight and they respect it. Now I feel confident.

Her self esteem was low when she was at the various hearing schools. But now despite the impediments that she experienced, Violet is a proud and confident Deaf person and Deaf teacher, inspired by being in the Deaf school. Compared to when I was in a hearing school I did not have confidence being Deaf but I had a strong belief that one day I’ll become hearing. But when I entered a school for the Deaf, that’s where I started to build my confidence and I had to accept how I am. I felt I had to change myself because God can’t make me hear again. He is the one who made us and where we are today is because of Him. Its good being a Deaf person –but you have to be positive, keep to your Deaf culture and language.

She even cherished the hope that one day she will be hearing. When I saw how children used to speak to their parents and teachers, that’s the time I wished to be like them.

It was not easy growing up with many hearing people around her. It was difficult because every time I would ask them to look at me and talk. Sometimes my hearing aid is not loud, sometimes my battery gets dead. Not all hearing people are sensitive. I remember
one day in the hearing school a teacher told me to say a word in Afrikaans and I looked at him and said how must I say it? He said I have to learn it. But I don’t know Afrikaans. He used to force me to say words that I could not pronounce and the other children used to laugh. Some hearing people look at me with a funny expression and speak with mouth and eyes wide open. I don’t like that way because it makes me laugh and I think of a clown.

BEING DEAF

SL is invaluable in her life, because it creates …. …. a strong bond in the Deaf community and between Deaf adults and Deaf children as the medium of communication. SL is the way of making Deaf build confidence. Through SL we are able to communicate with other Deaf people and with hearing people today. Some Deaf adults who are profoundly Deaf only know SL because they are profoundly Deaf and they can’t lip read.

Deaf culture is when we socialize not only with Deaf people but hard of hearing people as well. There are rules in our culture, and we have to respect Deaf culture. Hearing people can also be part of our culture, must know how to respect us, our language and our culture. In our culture we can tap you on the shoulder to get attention, communicating in bright places, never talk fast also always remember Deaf people will accept you only if you understand them well, and know SL and you communicate with the Deaf in their language.

Compared to when she was younger, her understanding and acceptance of Deaf Culture is better now that she is an adult. As Deaf children, they spent more time with hearing families and relatives. There were not many opportunities to socialize with Deaf peers. Also …. …. there were no Deaf couples and Deaf socializing. We did not have good role models who could teach us to build our confidence and to learn what’s our culture and language. Today being an adult, we do have people who are the authority. Presently we have DEAFSA, and they show us that Deaf have a strong bond and they can share their views and opinions in the Deaf community.

The principal of her school where she was a learner has certainly had a strong, positive influenced on her life. She is also grateful to the teachers for their motivation. We had a hearing principal who had a strong belief in the Deaf and he believed that one day this group will become Deaf teachers. He influenced us to do our matric and also to do part time jobs. It’s true that R.R. Pillay was the one to make sure Deaf get the opportunities, get jobs, not for him but for us; some of the teachers from VNNS know this. They thought positive about us of becoming professionals. They also had a vision of us but we never expect it. They also found a place where we could fit; I can say these people really worked hard to make us what we are today.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

The negativity that she experienced in her adult life was associated with her marriage. She married in the first year that she was at college and met with disapproval from her parents, siblings, relatives and lecturers.

When I got married some of the lectures were shocked they said I’m too young to be married and one person told me that she thinks I won’t make it. That made me feel like not going back to
college. That person made me feel depressed and she thought negative about my marriage. She said Dersegan will make me stay at home and be a housewife. The person who gave me negative feelings made me feel I should not get married because she was looking at other students who were not married and they are older than me. I told her, if you want to think like that, its fine. I never let the negative thoughts affect me because I wanted to show that I am able to achieve what I want and I make sure I get it. Through my years of studies and traveling from PMB to college Dersegan was there to support me and he wanted me to accept the challenge and also make the negative thoughts change to positive.

Her parents also did not support her marriage, so she eloped from home. Initially her parents accepted that she would marry Dersegan. But somebody disparaged him causing her father to change his mind. I told my father to please tell me the name of this person because I want to ask that person if it’s true but my father refused. In the end I realized it’s my life, my right and my choice. If the person is right then better I suffer, be happy or sad but it’s a good experience. My dad felt that I was clever and he said that I going to become a teacher and Dersegan was an ordinary worker working in Credit Indemnity and that I should marry someone higher than me. That time they were worried about my career and my dad worried about status. When I left home I felt heart sore because my parents brought me up and gave me education. In that year I had a difficult life because my parents didn’t accept my husband.

Nobody from her family, besides a few of her friends, attended her wedding. Even her brother whom she was close to did not attend. That time it was difficult. But my brother asked “why did I do this”. He also said that I must come back home and tell my parents but I refused. I think I was stubborn. She did entertain some thoughts of returning home, but she knew that her father would still not accept her marriage to Dersegan in the future. Once again she confirmed her determination to marry him.

When she married, she relocated to her in-laws’ home in PMB. There were many obstacles but sheer determination helped her to overcome. The first year I was absent often because there were many problems at home and also trying to arrange transport to college. I was staying in PMB and college was in DBN. It was really difficult because I had no transport and no place to stay. That year I was absent for about three months and I missed a lot of work, but I made sure I got all notes from my friends. I remember one lecturer Mrs John, told me that she felt sorry to see me traveling everyday, but she had to give me assignments because its part of the assessment. I tried my best. No one helped me because that week was teaching practice and I couldn’t meet my tutors, but I worked on my own. Mrs John called me and showed me my mark which was 97%.

Amidst her studies, she was also forced to contend with an alcoholic husband without help. She congratulates herself for having done it alone. In my years of college I needed someone to help me balance my marriage and studies. My problem is personal but I like to share it with you because you are doing your research. That year my husband was an alcoholic and I used to arrive home at seven in the evening from college and when I arrive he’s not at home. I was looking for someone who could support me to change my husband and make him stop drinking. I balanced my marriage and studies. When I’m in college I forget about home, when I go home I forget about college. That year I made sure I get my driving license
because when Dersegan is drunk I know I have to drive. I needed someone to be with me but I was alone and I did it alone. Congratulations Violet you did well, you changed Dersegan, and you did it by yourself. There was no one to encourage me. I needed support and encouragement that time.

Her in-laws were happy that she was studying to be a teacher, but they had financial concerns. They were happy but worried because everyday they had to give me money for petrol, lunch and my books, but my father organized a bursary from the company where he worked (Hullets). My in-laws were very supportive, they made sure when I reach home, food is ready because they know when Dersegan comes he’ll ask me to do things. When I used to come home tired, my in-law would say Dersegan is here, drunk, I would always have patience because I married the man and I love him. It took me one year to change him.

Violet did not plan or visualize that one day she would marry a hearing person. She is resolute that she knew that she would marry a Deaf person.

Yes! I only thought it will be a Deaf person. I never experienced a relationship with a hearing person. I once did when my brother had his matric farewell. He asked me to be his friend’s partner, I was not ready to be a partner but for the sake of my brother I did and later I realized I was not comfortable with a hearing person.

VIOLET’S CHILDREN

Violet has two hearing children. She disclosed that she did wish that her children would be hearing. Yes! I wished but I couldn’t be selfish, maybe God had a reason for them both to be born hearing. Maybe He wanted me to respect my children’s hearing culture also. I wished I had a Deaf child but growing up from birth it’s really difficult. If I had a Deaf child I’m sure I would go through all difficulties because there are no good schools for the Deaf where they offer only Deaf teachers. Presently in schools for the Deaf there is 3% Deaf teachers working and the rest are hearing teachers. I know from my experience when I was in a hearing school, what a difficult life I had with communication and that should not happen to my child if he was Deaf. Also most importantly, there are no job opportunities for the Deaf. If I wish my Deaf child becomes a doctor, there are no Universities in South Africa where they can educate Deaf to become doctors. Now there’s new technology that will decrease Deaf population, when a mother is pregnant they do a lot of tests to check if the baby is normal before birth with the new technology.

She communicates with both her children through the medium of SL. She described the typically valid concerns of a Deaf mother and Deaf father raising hearing children. When my first child was born, I was worried because I thought if it’s a hearing child then how will I tell him to look at me and talk but I tried it. I remember when my child was born and I used to breastfeed and talk to him, I used to say that mummy and daddy are Deaf and you have to learn SL. I used to say all funny kinds of things. Now my child is growing up and has started developing SL skills. He knows that his mother and father are Deaf.

I used to try to say words, but the words were not right and everyone said that his speech was bad because he was saying the words same like me. So we decided that we, the parents, will sign to them and the grandparents and other family members will talk them. But they use signs, for
example: if they want food (he puts his fingers in his mouth) and if he’s thirsty (he puts his
thumb in his mouth)

Both the children are aware that that they are hearing while their parents are Deaf. They are aware
because they have observed their parents communicating with their each other and with their Deaf
friends. In addition they talk to each other and also talk to their grandparents but when they
communicate with their parents, they use signs.

Yes, he understands because when he was around Deaf people he watches how they use signs. My
ever son learnt signs from his father. His father signs and uses some speech with him; my smaller
son also does the same. My point of view is that my children must socialize with hearing people to
develop their speech. My speech is not clear, what I mean is mine and my husband’s speech is not
like a hearing person’s speech. With our speech we can’t pronounce words clearly because it’s
difficult. I remember one day when people were laughing at me because I did not say a word
correctly.

The word was “properly” - it was funny. My husband and I accepted it but it is sensitive. Also it’s
not a joke that I cannot say words correctly. That is why I feel my child is hearing and should not
learn speech from us.

I want them to learn my SL not my speech because when they are with their friends then they
will laugh.

I always felt when my children are 2 years old they need to go to school. They will develop speech
and language at school because they cannot learn speech and language from me. My children stay
with the maid during the day. One day my child was talking in Zulu and I started to laugh. I asked
my maid why you teaching him Zulu? She said she never teach him. He just learns Zulu by
listening to the maid. Now he is 4 years and I leave him because its same with my mother in law,
she talks to him in Tamil.

The children are simultaneously learning all the languages that they are exposed to including Sign
Language.

When they were little, his father and I used to make them look face to face with us and see our lip
movements. We forced them to do this all the time and we never gave up. One day I brought my big
son to school and I was carrying him. He was crying and crying and I was busy signing to my
friends, he was crying for something. Mrs. P Moodley was standing on the top floor of the building
and was watching. She saw how my son turned my face and said, mummy look at me, I’m talking to
you. I said oh! Sorry and asked what you want? Mrs. P Moodley saw me and said, Violet I have to
tell you something, I saw how your child wanted your attention by turning your face to look at him.
She said that it,s good because for a hearing child to communicate with a Deaf mother, they must
look. I practiced that from the time my first son was born. And it was amazing that when my second
son was born, my first son taught him how to communicate with us.

PART TWO - GOING TO COLLEGE

Violet felt that the curriculum at college was not appropriate for Deaf teachers to teach Deaf learners.

During my college times, I saw the curriculum was not linked to the Deaf. Most of the subjects were
for and about hearing children. What I admired about the lecturers was they were trying their best
to find out what methods are available for the Deaf children in the classroom. They made easy methods for teaching in the classroom. I remember one subject - Arts & Culture - one lecturer was surprised to hear that we Deaf have our own culture and she asked us all about our culture. When she asked us about our culture she thought that we were going to give answers about Tamil, Christian, Hindi, Xhosa and Full Gospel. She thought we all knew about this but we didn’t. All we knew was to go to church or temple to pray. So she thought we should know about the beliefs, customs and values of our hearing families. We did not know about this. We knew about this but only with our own culture – Deaf culture.

What she learnt from us was about Deaf culture. There is no one to lead us and teach us during our childhood and youth to know about our home values and beliefs, because we don’t hear anything and nobody talks to us because they don’t know SL. So when we come to the Deaf school we start to learn for the first time about Deaf culture and beliefs.

What I admired about the lecturers was they never give up learning about Deaf culture and SL. We experienced difficult times in college when there’s no interpreter because sometimes the interpreter goes to the toilet. We have to wait for the interpreter to come back or we were forced to try to understand what ever the lecturer said with no interpreter. The lecturers did their best and I tell you that I praise them because they did their best to teach us.

Violet served as the representative of the Deaf students on the college SRC and this presented her with the opportunity to integrate with the hearing students.

When I was in college I was chosen to be a SRC member and when I got involved I felt good to integrate with hearing people. When I was in school I only joined Deaf and never got the chance to learn from hearing people about their culture. I felt it was a good way, where we can socialize with hearing and share our culture. I also tried to get them involved in SL.

Some of the final year students, they tried to go to Deaf clubs where SL classes were provided, but they make sure during their lunch times they meet us in the café to learn SL and our culture.

Violet extols all lecturers and acknowledges most of them as having had a positive influence on her life as a student.

Most of my lecturers were my inspiration. For example: every lecturer wanted the Deaf to become teachers in schools for the Deaf. They also influenced us to work hard, do well and study hard. What’s good is that they said it’s a good chance to become teachers. Not all colleges have special needs education for the Deaf. They also said now in every school or workplace, there must be an opportunity for Deaf and disabled people. They also influenced us not to give up, if you want to do something then do it and also show our skills. We must not hide but show ourselves and what we can do.

There was an incident that occurred in college that Violet still remembers to this day. It is an incident that caused her to feel hurt and marginalized.

It was between the students and lecturers. The lecturers were kind and very understanding. They really helped us a lot. What I was hurt about and feel awful to think about, was when I got married. I was the only married student in my class and my classmates were older than me. I felt I should not be involved in their discussions. What I’m trying to say is, they feel free to do anything but I was not free to do anything. They know I was married and they respected me for that but I felt I should not be involved. Once they wanted to go for a camp to PMB and they said my husband was not allowed
to visit. It was sensitive I thought. I should not be involved in all those fun activities. I felt isolated and alone from my friends.

Because that time I was married. I also asked SRC president if my husband could accompany us but she said no because it's only for the students. Then I told her I'm sorry but I can’t come. That time I felt I should have gone but I had to ask permission and I knew my husband will say no. I did (ask) but he refused.

Her graduation was deservedly one of the highlights of her life.

I felt I was an important person there. There were thousands of people sitting in the hall. I felt it was an important day for me because of my hard work and my hard life, my daily traveling from PMB to DBN for 3 years. When it came to teaching practice I had no accommodation to stay in DBN. So I had to stand on the freeway to wait for the school bus to pick me up. I also used to stand in Queensburgh, near the church by the robot, about 6:30am. I must thank the drivers for picking me. I used to plead with him to not forget me and if I’m late please wait for me.

There was three years teaching practice. First year was at VNNSD. Second and third year was at Durban school in Isipingo. Unfortunately I wanted to go to Fulton school but it was my fault because I did not give my name early. The lecturer phoned and asked which school I want to go to, so I thought of Durban school to make it easy for transport.

On my graduation day I felt proud receiving my Diploma. I would like to share something with you. All the Deaf were looking at the brochure at all the achievement awards – one of the awards was for teaching practice. I thought that all of us will be getting it and told my friends we going to get lot of awards.

Honestly I never thought they will announce my name because they supposed to start in number order. I was looking at Sharon (the interpreter) she said to me from the stage, yes it’s you, come up. I got congratulated by the Dean of the college and the Minister of Education. I received my certificate and was thinking what an achievement this was. When I looked at it, I was shocked for receiving the merit achievement award for teaching practice. I was so happy. It was the biggest achievement I got through all my hard work and all the lecturers knew how hard I worked. When I went back and sat down, I said to myself, this is what I deserved not only my diploma. I looked at Dersegan and he said well done, he was happy and proud of me. My parents were (also) there.

Angel’s mother was sitting there and she thought her daughter will get it. She never expected me to get it. Only two of us got it - me and Bheki. All of us thought she was getting it. When I went to collect my certificate I looked at my parents with tears of joy, when I looked at that person she had a cold look, but I didn’t bother about it. I was shaking. Sharon was shocked and she said congratulations and that she didn’t expect me to get it. I told her, well, my hard work helped me. Vanessa and all the others hugged me at that time, but my friend Angel was gone. I felt depressed because I don’t know if she was angry with me or upset. Everyone congratulated me - Bheki, Malcolm, Melissa, Vanessa, Purity and Peggy because they knew how hard I worked and struggled and sacrificed. They told me I deserved it. When I was studying, Dersegan told me that if I worked hard and study to pass I will get not only a diploma but something different. You have to do well to get the best certificate or whatever. Then you will get what you want.
**BECOMING A TEACHER**

Violet described her anxieties at the first interview she attended at VNNSD, for the position of SL teacher in the secondary school.

*I remember waiting in the foyer for my turn for the interview. The lady walked to me and said I pray you don’t get it. I looked at her in a calm way. I said, why you said that? She said in this school her children worked hard and they need to get it. I told her you right but at that time I felt low. Then you saw me and came to speak to me and you said that I must not walk away from the interview and I must be confident and wait here. You said that I will do well and also the interview is a good experience. I was crying but then realized I should not bother. The interview was in the boardroom and I saw serious faces and didn’t see any happy faces. I knew few people sitting in the interview panel, wanted me to get the job.*

*I looked at everyone. I was happy and the questions they asked were so difficult. But I was able to answer. When the interview was over, I said thanks. When I walked out the door I felt cold and the vibes were not good.*

Violet was not the successful incumbent for this position. Fortunately another vacancy for a JP teacher was advertised a few months later, in 2001, and this time Violet was appointed.

**The second interview I applied and got it. Everything was fine and the questions were easy at that time. When I entered the work environment for the first time, I said to myself that I’m V. Govender, not a pupil anymore. I will do my best to teach the children. When I came I saw surprised faces because some did not expect more Deaf young teachers to be coming.**

*Her relationship with hearing colleagues at school has improved since the time when she was first appointed as a teacher.*

**The relationship with all the staff at work, I can say was 60% perfect and 40% thumbs down, because when some of them look at me they think I’m still a pupil. That was when I started work. It took time to progress. Now I get on very well with all staff, from teaching to non-teaching staff. My relationship with the staff in school is perfect. If I want to say something then I’m ready to be open. When I moved to the high school from the JP dept, I thought no one will help me but there were teachers to support me. They helped to show me what curriculum is required, what to do in the classroom and what equipment needed to be used in the Home Economics Dept. I had a lot of support from them.**

Despite the fact that she has a good professional relationship with hearing teachers, when it comes to socializing Violet converges spontaneously towards other Deaf staff and hearing staff who sign all the time.

**We Deaf teachers like Angel and Ms Zungu sit together, but at lunch time we mostly socialize with the teacher aides who are Deaf and few hearing – only those who can continue signing all the time. Because communicating in SL is easy, but when I’m with hearing they forget about me. Their lips only move and I have to remind them to sign to me. But I’m patient with that and it’s not their fault because they are with us for few hours and with their families for plenty hours, they depend on hearing and not on the eyes. I understand the hearing community; they only rely on the ears. When they come to a school for the Deaf they forget there are Deaf children and staff and they have to sign.**
Violet is not intimidated by the hearing staff that she works with. She is aware of her position as a teacher and she gives herself voice and claims her space.

When it comes to a meeting with the management, H.O.D’s or anyone, I feel I’m well fitted because some of them know that Deaf are here and they make us feel part of the school. They make sure we’re not left out. I have confidence in myself and I have a voice to say what I want and what my idea is, but I’m always careful. Today I said something in the meeting about the vision of our school, it just came out of me and then I sat back and thought what everyone will be thinking about what I said. But I make sure that I go to the principal and ask him if I said anything wrong and ask him to please tell me now, then he asks why? I said I don’t fell comfortable for what I said, but he said it was good for what I said, he also added what I said is team work. I said thank you and walked out. Why I said that because some hearing not all, think about themselves and don’t think about the learners regarding the skills development program. When I’m always in a meeting I make myself feel included. I say what I have to say. If I don’t say what I feel then I know later I will regret.

Sometimes I am afraid of the principal because I respect him a lot and when I see his face expression, its looks frightening.

Violet is far more comfortable with the hearing teachers.

Because when I do anything I ask them if I’m wrong or right. I’m a person who asks for help because it’s the first time I am experiencing teaching in the high school. I did not know anything but had lot of support from the hearing teachers and I have a good relationship with them.

Violet is empathetic towards the Deaf learners and this defines her as the teacher.

As teachers we can’t be friends with Deaf pupils. I always know my profession of teaching. My relationship with the pupils is excellent because it’s same like how you talk to a hearing child all the time, give them instructions to do, allow the pupils to explore and learn. Its same with a Deaf pupil, I don’t wait for them to ask me and give me the same answer that I give them. I challenge them all the time and don’t treat them with sympathy. I always ask about their homes and families and I link their home life and school life and this helps me to understand them. I feel my relationship with Deaf pupils is excellent because of communication in SL and what I know as a Deaf teacher, I never tell a pupil to be quiet and I’m not interested in your story. I’m patient to communicate with them because at home there is no one to communicate with them. Their home life is difficult and yes their family loves them but when it comes to SL, they feel their family knows little so they have to communicate with their teacher. They feel excited to sign what they want to someone who understands them.

In her relationship with the learners she positions them as Deaf children first, then as Deaf learners.

I would like to see both ways because the child is a pupil and the child is Deaf that’s why I must see both ways. But often I see them as Deaf first. Because when I started working for the first time in JP dept I was working with small children, I said this is my first day of teaching and asked God to please give me strength to teach them. My heart pitied them because I thought of when I was a child and all the difficulties that I had. Sometime I can still vision myself that I’m among them. I’m a teacher and I’m there. I have the feeling to see myself there because I had a special bond with those little children.
She believes strongly that Deaf teachers are best for Deaf learners, but the status of hearing teachers is still prominent.

I think that Deaf teachers are best to teach Deaf children, because they use SL in a natural way and that’s how Deaf children can learn well. Especially in the early school years, Deaf children should learn with Deaf teachers because they are going to start learning their language for the first time. There is no one to teach them SL before they come to school. In my opinion I feel that in a school for the Deaf it’s good to have 50% of Deaf teachers and 50% of hearing teachers. We need hearing teachers because they have experience of teaching. All of the Deaf up to now were taught by hearing teachers and today I am a teacher through the hearing teachers. I will not forget that. I can’t say its better to have only Deaf teachers to teach a Deaf child. Not all Deaf are able to do what our past teachers did. It’s important to have a hearing teacher to work there because imagine for example me in school and all the staff are Deaf. How will we communicate with parents and dept officials? How will we be able to attend meetings and workshops? How will we appoint new teachers? We also need to order food for the children in the hostel? It will be too expensive to have SL interpreters for each of us all the time. How will we Deaf communicate with them? Hearing must support the Deaf and same time Deaf must support the hearing. Hearing staff don’t know SL so the Deaf will assist and the Deaf don’t speak so hearing must help.

CONSTRAINTS AS A DEAF TEACHER

In school sometimes it has to do with English. When you read English, you read it in the hearing way. Maybe I try to be like the hearing teachers but I find difficulty reading and writing English. English is the problem in this school and most of the Deaf are not motivated to read books. I see Deaf children also are not interested to read because of English. Recently Fulton school and UK offered a new coursessss called Thrass. I was looking forward to it and I saw with my own eyes how it can help us Deaf. I saw how teachers communicated with the Deaf children. I feel that’s good.

When it comes to interpreting, we have to ask and beg people. Sometimes we get funny looks, sometimes a smile. We feel bad to be begging people all the time to help us with interpreting. It’s difficult because in our country training interpreters is developing slowly but the department is taking its time to give the answer yes to go on. It’s a matter of money and the resources we need are few.

We need fulltime interpreters. In meetings it will improve my understanding. When parents visit school, it will improve communicating with parents. Also I need an interpreter when I go for workshops. If I have an interpreter, it will help me to participate in discussions. Also helps to communicate over the phone. Having an interpreter will help to do everything quicker – sometimes it takes me a long time to arrange my class outings or communicate with my subject advisor.

STRENGTHS OR OPPORTUNITIES AS A DEAF TEACHER

In the past, I was teaching only grade 0 and grade R. I was excited in the beginning. I stayed in grade 0 and grade R for about 5 years doing the same thing - that time I felt I’m doing the same work over and over. I wanted to do more with myself by sharing skills that I know teaching older children. My management at school moved me to the high school, it was lovely because I was offered an opportunity where I can try it and do it. I always wanted to teach the Deaf skills to give
them employment and make them independent and to achieve something for their future. Presently we are offering a skills development program and we are working hard to train the Deaf for jobs. I only see 30% of the Deaf working today. As a Deaf person I feel it’s a good idea, a good set-up for the Deaf to get trained well and get a job quickly. I feel the Deaf who are not clever; I don’t look at them as stupid. I see them as clever using their hands. They have skills in their hands. Their hands can be magic and I’m sure you saw some of their hand work. When I was in school I only thought about paper and pen but now it’s about skills. Now in the high school I am involved in a team with teaching many skills like cooking, baking, sewing, craft, hair-care and hair braiding, and nail-care. We teach food from different cultures and how to do traditional décor. The pupils are excited because they thought that I’m going to teach them only English and Indian food. We made pap. They were shocked because I knew and they asked me something in Zulu. They were shocked that I knew. Children want to know different culture foods and I did that food menu. I learnt it from my maid and asked her to show me how. She was excellent and taught me a lot. She shared a lot that helped me share with the pupils. Now when I’m with the adult children I know what they need. I’m happy that I got the good opportunity to share my skills with the pupils.

POSITIVE INFLUENCE

Violet describes a teacher that had a good, positive influence on your life as a teacher. During my teaching time, this person was my teacher and always told me not to give up hope. She gave me a gift for my wedding and said this glass I’m giving you – you must be strong and shine like this glass. I know you will be happy. I thanked her very much and hugged her. She told me what I want I must not give up and must accept every challenge that comes my way. This person was D.D. Pillay. It’s sad to say that she died recently. She was a teacher who looked forward to the Deaf achieving. She was the one that influenced me to be confident and not give up hope. She used to always say don’t let people oppress you. Many teachers told me the same thing but there was something special about her and her vision for the Deaf.

I remember the love, caring and support of most teachers in school and lecturers and who made sure the Deaf get it. I appreciated those who motivated the Deaf to take a challenge. They made us confident because they know we are able to do it. These people never looked down at us. They know in the Deaf community and in schools for the Deaf, Deaf teachers are needed. They encouraged us to do it. I have pleasant memories of many good teachers and lecturers.

NEGATIVE INFLUENCE

There was a person who made me feel very low and depressed. She almost made me not get married. But now it does not bother me. I am strong now.

There was also a hearing teacher assistant who undermined her as a teacher. First day of my teaching I remember telling a child to pick up toilet paper and go to the toilet. The child understood me and went. That time I had a teacher aide, she was older but I had lot of respect for her. I can’t tell her name because it hurts me to remember it. I showed the children a picture of toilet paper, hands and soap. I felt the child must know the steps. That person told me no you have to put the words. I told her for little kids in the play group you don’t need words now. Maybe second
term we will include little words. I felt those children must learn SL first and see the picture then the words. We had an argument and she told me don’t you remember when you were in school she gave me words to learn. I felt depressed because she told the other teachers and made me look bad. I forgot about it but I achieved what I wanted by making the child be independent.

SPECIAL INCIDENT

In my class there was one Deaf child who had Down’s syndrome – he was about 5 years old. It was difficult to teach that child. He was very attached to his mother. I took him to my class. When he came inside the class his mum ran away then he started crying. I left him to cry and said to myself this child needs to be independent. He needed help all the time. It took me about two days to control him. It took me two months to change that child. I thought my teaching was wrong. It took me one month to train him to be a boy and not a baby. It was Avashin. He was a lovely child and I used my knowledge on him, a Deaf child with other disabilities. It was a good challenge for my as a teacher. Children can’t rely on their parents all the time.

He died recently this year in March. Normally I don’t go to funerals but this time I had to see his face. I forced myself to go. He was the best child and the child I worked hard with. He was a challenge to me. I made him independent, made him eat him self and dress himself. When he died I was sore and depressed. His mind was strong and he was becoming independent but his body wasn’t strong. Now I say to myself I don’t want to do this again because after he died it took me lot of time to forget him. But I promised myself that if another child comes then I will be able teach him because I have the experience and I know what difficulties such children have.

I saw many teachers give up with Avashin. They themselves thought the child can’t do anything. Like this child is slow. But I took the child and took a try. I took him and trained him with signs showing him signs like eating, hungry, cup, plate, car and many others. I had the help of the teacher aide because that time I had to balance myself. I had the bright ones too and I could not neglect them. Avashin loved everyone. Some thought he was a baby but did not think that he could learn anything. I used all his own things to teach him – his photographs, his toys and his lunch box. I used to also teach his mum how to teach him at home.

ABOUT DEAF EDUCATION NOW

Violet knows what changes must be implemented to improve Deaf education. Now, Deaf education is developing with the curriculum offered in schools for the Deaf. What I’m not happy about is the Education Department is not offering compulsory subjects like SL, for the Deaf. Just like English and Afrikaans for hearing learners, SL must be a compulsory for learning and teaching the Deaf. The Department should look at the Deaf education curriculum, what is required in every school for the Deaf. Also it would be good if the Deaf can be assessed in SL. It is not fair for them to write exams in English when SL is their first language.

In my experience when I was in a hearing school I saw how hard Afrikaans was and I didn’t know spoken language at that time. With that language our home language should be added. SL should be a compulsory subject even at matric level. It will help to show what is required in the workplace. SL helps develop English and this can improve our writing skills. If hearing people cannot sign,
then in an emergency we can write and have a conversation with them. It’s good to have a link between SL and English in the workplace. In college we learnt a lot about Deaf culture and I think that course should also be adapted and included as a subject in the curriculum from grade 1 to 12. Wits has all subjects that are linked to SL and also how it should be linked.

Teachers in schools for the Deaf - they must know SL. Number two – they must do a good job. Number three – they must follow the code of ethics for teachers, they must be professional. The relationship with the pupils must be professional. Teamwork is important - when you have problems you must share, help and support other teachers.

PERSONAL ASPIRATIONS

I’m looking forward to the skills development program that we are offering now. I am eager because I know that it can help the Deaf learners. I want to have more advanced training in skills so that I can teach better. I’m looking forward to doing my B.ED honors. That course will help me to achieve further. If I do my B.ED, I will have the opportunity to become a H.O.D. If it happens to me to become a principal or a rector of a college for the Deaf then I want to offer skills and academic programs where the Deaf can benefit. My aspirations are to achieve and progress and become a principal.

As an alternative to teaching, Violet would have wanted to be a CA. I thought about my job. I didn’t want to become a teacher, I wanted to become a CA but I realized there’s no access, no opportunity to study it. It took time for me to accept this. I wanted to become a CA and that will help to run the business from home. I would be helping in the family business. I do help in the business part time. I do a bit of accounting.
She has accepted her career as a teacher.
Yes! I’m happy and I enjoy teaching the Deaf children.
Her level of satisfaction with her work is a measure of her success. She is very enthusiastic and energetic as a teacher and it is this type of energy that motivates learners.
Yes I think that my life is successful because I am enjoying my life and I never regret anything. There is nothing that I think I want to change about my life.
WILSON’S STORY

INTRODUCTION

Wilson who is now 30 years old, was not born Deaf. Although he attended a school for hearing learners he recalls having difficulty with hearing speech and other sounds. His teacher in STD. 1 realized at the time that he was experiencing problems with hearing. He could not understand what the teacher was teaching because of he could not hear her well. In addition he was unable to engage in conversation with other learners.

PART ONE - EARLY EXPERIENCE OF BEING DEAF

When I was a child I was not born deaf. I was born hearing. I was moved to a hearing school and I had problems with my hearing, I did not hear properly. But I continued in the hearing school in 1981.

Even though he could not hear well, this did not affect Wilson significantly while he attended the school for hearing learners. 
It was ok to be with the hearing because most of the time we played a lot. When you’re small you don’t understand lots of things. The relationship was good and we played together a lot but we could not become deep friends.

I had problems listening to people and when I passed STD 1 I still had problems, then the teacher decided I should go to a school for the Deaf.

On the advice of his teacher, Wilson’s mum took him to hospital, where he underwent a series of audiological and speech tests and his deafness was confirmed with moderate to severe hearing loss. I found out that I was Deaf, was when my mum took me to hospital. I went to hospital for a speech test and then they found out that I cannot hear, they did all the tests and said I needed to change my school. They said that I cannot learn at a hearing school but I should go to a school for the Deaf. That’s how I found out that I am Deaf.

When he was admitted to the school for the Deaf, he met other Deaf children like himself for the first time and he was immediately comfortable. When I entered a school for the deaf things became perfect. I saw there’s people same like me that I did not see before. I continued learning sign language. I had audio tests and was fitted with hearing aids and I also had speech therapy. And slowly I continued to make progress.

He started to learn SL. After several further audiological tests he was fitted with hearing aids and also had regular speech therapy. He began to progress steadily, thereafter.

…… some talked Xhosa and some talked Tswana and some talked Zulu, and all the Deaf used Sign Language. I tried to communicate and get on with all of them.

Wilson was 8 years old at the time when he first discovered that he was Deaf. His only concern then was to attend school, irrespective of whether it was a school for the Deaf or for the hearing.
I never thought there are people like me. I was 8 years old and I was only worried about going to school and was not worried about how I became deaf or hearing or about going to a Deaf or hearing school. But I had the feeling that I lost my relationship with hearing people when I moved to the deaf world. It was something new for me and I learnt how to go through it and then I felt good about being with Deaf people.

His transition to the Deaf world was facilitated by the ease with which he was accepted by the other Deaf learners.

*Yes! The Deaf accepted me well. I developed many relationships with the Deaf. They did not ignore me.*

While at the school for the Deaf, Wilson enjoyed sport and revelled in his achievements.

*In sports I liked running and becoming a winner. I liked soccer and we won many times and I enjoyed it. I also enjoyed running long distance. Well in a school for the deaf when you participate in sports it’s a good experience and a lot hard work.*

However he disparages his experience with hearing teachers at the Deaf school. He attributes this to their lack of proficiency in SL.

*But when it comes to learning with hearing teachers it’s not perfect and I don’t know where I’m going in the future. Some teachers structure Sign Language with English; some use the old structure of Sign Language. There was no good Sign Language development. The relationship and communication with the teacher was only to give me work to write and write and write. They did not explain deeply what they teaching. Other subjects were okay but the teachers did not have full Sign Language and that was the problem.*

The onset of Wilson’s deafness caused disintegration in family relationships. There was far more communication with family members when he was hearing.

*When I was growing up with my family, I did not have good relationships with them. I was always alone. My sister and mother would talk to me but not so much like when I was a hearing person. And because I am Deaf, it was difficult for me to communicate with hearing people, because I can’t hear. Sometimes my family would talk very loud because they wanted me to hear, but it did not help.*

As a child, Wilson understood and accepted his family speaking loudly to him, although this is not acceptable to culturally Deaf persons.

*I know that my family wanted me to understand them and also I could not write well because I was small. They wanted me to understand how they feel and the communication that’s going on around the house, like what’s happening. They used to talk loud. They wanted to talk to me like a child.*

Later he developed a good relationship with his sister, because she learnt to sign and communicate with him.

*I have a good relationship with her because I taught her Sign Language. I also thought her what kind of a person I am. I know she can help me with everything like when I have problems looking for an interpreter.*
Wilson had a twin brother who was sick and died when they were small. I don’t know him very much but as I was growing up my mother and family told me that I had a brother. I feel my twin brother is always with me wherever I go but I can’t see him. Before I didn’t believe I had a twin brother but now I believe because I got the proof and I feel he is close to me all the time wherever I go.

NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES AS A DEAF PERSON

With abomination Wilson described the behaviour of insensitive friends who treat his deafness with disdain and ridicule.

There were many things that happened. Like when I’m walking with friends and they are a little far away and they want to call me. They would throw a stone at me to get my attention and that is what I hate.

When I was growing up with hearing friends when I was about 14 or 15 or 16 years old, and we would look for girls, sometimes it made me feel negative because hearing girls never accepted the way I am - that I cannot hear. Other hearing girls accepted me but they took a long time to understand me because I am deaf.

Also, when I went with my cousins to visit Lion Park. Many times there were problems with communication. They made fun of me because I am Deaf. They would force me to go in front everywhere, so that I experience the danger first. Then I am in trouble first and they are safe. They make me behave stupid and because I am Deaf I can come out of trouble easily.

When everybody is swimming and they come out of the pool. Then when I want to come out of the pool, I cannot get their attention to help me to come out of the pool because they have to look at me. I feel negative about it. Also when we go on the train, they force me to hang and swing on the rail then jump out when the train stops. That time I fell and got hurt and they all laughed at me. They make me stupid, and have fun and laugh at me because I am Deaf.

His hearing friends also provoked him to initiate fights and arguments for no reason. My hearing friends always forced me to do a thing that is not right. Sometimes hearing can tell lies, like if they have a problem with another hearing person and they are frighten to fight with that person, then they lie to me and say that the person is insulting me because I’m Deaf. Then I get angry and fight with the person but they never do anything wrong to me. The other person has the problem, not me. Then the person tells lies because he knows that I cannot hear. They tell me that the other person has insulted me. Then I decide to hit him. But it is the wrong person.

Wilson’s negative experiences, prompted by his hearing friends, provided for their entertainment and amusement. Despite him being the source of their mockery and ridicule, he is not contemptuous of his hearing friends. It made me feel not confident; I don’t feel something good about hearing people. Some respect me as a Deaf person, others don’t respect me. When you grow up at 14 or 15 years you can’t be with Deaf all the time. You have to socialize with hearing communities also because
all Deaf don’t stay near each other – they are far away. Many times I have to be with hearing people.

Often he was compelled to socialize with hearing people in his community because there were no other Deaf people near his home. 

_I chose to be with hearing people when I was growing up. I have good hearing people who are my friends who I grew up with. With some of my friends we still socialize, have fun together, and play soccer together. Others, I still don’t have a good relationship with._

Wilson socializes with his hearing friends, but he intentionally has not disclosed to them that he is a teacher. 

_I know some grew up and just left school, I never told them that I’m good and that I am a teacher. I told that I’m still studying …. I think that my friends will be jealous of me. Their parents will also be jealous of me. Sometimes they may put some muti medicine for me and make me have some bad luck. They thought that because I am Deaf, I cannot achieve anything. That’s why I know that they will be jealous of me._

**POSITIVE EXPERIENCES**

Having his sister as his interpreter is indeed a positive experience for Wilson, because this gives him access to communication.

Positive things in life are when I have an interpreter like my sister to help me to understand what people say. That’s makes me happy and positive like going to church, the priest speaks and my sister interprets for me. I’m a Christian and my sister likes me to know a lot what the priest says. Sometimes it’s boring to go to church without an interpreter; you just sit and watch the priest. You don’t hear anything that the priest says.

The support and encouragement that he gets from his family are inspiring to him. 

_Also at home my family likes to support me with studying and encourage me. It does not matter that I can’t hear but still they motivate me with education. All in my family are educated well and they want me to be the same. They like to see me develop and worry about what will happen in the future. They also encourage me to do art for my future. They want me to succeed._

Wilson thoroughly enjoys drawing and considers himself to be an artist, capable of capturing beauty in his art.

_Yes I had some positive experiences at school. One was winning the art competition for peace day. My school was the winning school in the competition. I learnt art from my brother when I was small. I still like drawing, up till now I’m still an artist. Even today I can draw beautiful things._

At no time did Wilson wish that he was a hearing person, despite his friends ridiculing him.

_I told myself I accept who I am, I’m proud to be what I am. I accepted to be Deaf, but there were some things that made me want to be hearing. Like when watching hearing people listening to music and dancing, watching movies and TV, I can’t hear what’s happening. Also when there are competitions on TV, I feel bad because everything on the program is for hearing people - nothing for Deaf people. We Deaf cannot participate in the phone competitions and answer the questions and win lots of money._
This comment from Wilson which is yet to be understood and interpreted by me, was not articulated in response to a specific question. Nevertheless it appears to have depth and meaning.

Now, growing up I realize that we must not give up in life because your life depends on the background or the society which u come from? There is a challenge with hearing people. For me life with hearing people is a challenge.

**BEING DEAF**

As an adult Sign Language and Deaf Culture have exceptional significance in Wilson’s life. *Sign language is very important for me because it’s the only language I can use to communicate. I’m an adult now and when I try to use my speech, sometimes it can be broken. It’s better for me to use SL – this makes communication with anyone easy and comfortable. It does not matter if it is a Deaf or hearing person, my SL must not be suppressed. Hearing must also learn SL to communicate with me better. My feelings are important also. My culture is very important to me. I accept this deeply because there are lot of things that are different between my culture and hearing culture. Because when I was growing up I never learn lot about home and traditional culture. But I’m proud of my culture.*

He acknowledges that Deaf Culture is different from hearing culture. His family has tried to convince him that since he was not born Deaf, he should follow the culture of his home. But he was not exposed to much of his home culture.

*Yes. When I compare, my culture is different from hearing culture. Sometimes my family or parents say I was not born Deaf, so you follow your home tradition like Zulu or Afrikaans then you have to follow the rules from home. Also when, I was growing up I did not learn too much about home culture. About slaughtering sheep and all that. I only saw them do that but I don’t know why. That means that I grew up the English way. I grew up learning about my Deaf Culture and my language SL and I am proud of my language and culture. So my Deaf Culture and SL is important to me.*

To Wilson Deaf Culture is about how a Deaf person lives. *Deaf Culture is about how a deaf person lives. Deaf people have values and norms that are very important to me also to Deaf Culture. Deaf Culture is created by Deaf people and we learn from adult Deaf people about the culture. Deaf Culture does not come from hearing people but from individual Deaf people like ourselves. There are differences between Deaf and hearing people. We live the Deaf way. I also accept when a Deaf person comes to me and I don’t feel sensitive thinking what kind of a person you are. I don’t feel racism to each other. We don’t feel separated. We feel linked to each other and we understand each other. What I see – I don’t see racism, but it depends what background you come from. Sometimes we can communicate with whites, some they are snobs but it’s easy for me to make friends with them. I don’t have problems with any Deaf person.*

As an adult, Wilson has come to realize that even though Deaf Culture and SL is the same with all Deaf people, they have different speaking languages. *Deaf Culture and SL is the same with all Deaf people, all use the same SL but later I found we have different speaking languages at home like example, you as Zulu me Afrikaans, Pedi, Sotho, Tswana. For us Black people it is easy, because we are linked together. It does not matter what is*
the language, we can’t speak those languages but it’s easy for us because we are all linked together - we know SL and it is easy to communicate. But for whites and Indians sometimes it gave me a challenge like before when I was in JHB I used BSL and SASL. This gave me links with other Deaf Schools.

There is a commonness about SL that cannot be compared to spoken languages.

I don’t see a difference in the SLs. For me all the speaking languages are different. When you ask where you live in SL the signs are the same, but in speech it will be different, depending which background you come from. Deaf who are near me in my province and Deaf who are from another place, that will make a difference but it is similar. The Deaf in their community also create their own SL. There may be some differences, but the main signs are still common.

**POSITIVE INFLUENCE**

The person who influenced Wilson in a good positive way was a teacher who supported him in advancing his English writing skills.

*From the time I moved from Katlahong School in JHB to a school in South Coast, there was a person who influenced me positive way. Then I was not able to write good English - my English was broken English. It was all mixed up. Mr G made us focus on English and reading a lot. He made us focus on the structure of English. That’s how I improved; he influenced me positively. He helped me to develop my English. That was good for me. English is an international language - it helps people to get jobs. People are able to communicate with different people. Because I see English is an international language - it helps people to get jobs. People are able to communicate with different people.*

There were also 2 teachers from Germany who came to Wilson’s school. It appears that these teachers taught him valuable life-skills.

*They came and taught us, that’s how I learnt positive things about life and what’s important for my future. Then I started to study seriously and think about my life. Before that my aim was to become a road manager but later I found that a Deaf person can’t do that job and its better to do teaching. But that time I was not interested about teaching.*

It was not Wilson’s ambition to become a teacher. Since he was good at drawing, he planned a career to do with building houses and constructing roads.

*I like technical drawing and designing with the computer. I thought if I do something like this like drawing and computer designs, I can be involved in different communities. I thought if I become this then maybe I can make a difference in South Africa. I can be involved in different communities. But that teacher told me that a Deaf person can’t do all this. Then after that I lost my confidence and I accepted to do something that I never expect to do.*

The other reason why Wilson did not envisage a career as a teacher was because he had negative perceptions of teachers and the profession.

*Because when I was growing up I always see teachers like to hit, hit, hit all the time. Then I thought that if I am a teacher I will be the same. Today we can get arrested if we hit a child. Before you can give a child a bust up and nobody will worry about that. That’s why I hated*
teaching before. Now I see with my own eyes what will happen when a teacher hit another student.

But Wilson is pleased that he became teacher because this allows him to work with and support Deaf people.

When time goes on I feel its good because when I see Deaf people, I want to help them and make them different.

NEGATIVE INFLUENCE

Wilson makes reference to a teacher who practiced favoritism and was selective about the learners whom he offered assistance to.

….. like when a teacher chooses then he chooses who he likes and he rejects the others, like in school a teacher chooses a person who he likes but he does not know the bad things the person does. That was a bad influence to my life.

There was also the teacher who discouraged Wilson and told him that he cannot do certain things because he is a Deaf person. However he no longer has negative feelings towards this teacher since he now realizes that that teachers intentions may have been in his best interest.

I never feel negative or bad about him. Maybe I thought the point is he wanted me to go there to be a teacher; he wanted to be a leader. It wasn’t a bad point. It was a good point to me but my aim was not to be a teacher.

CHALLENGES OF BEING A DEAF PERSON

One of Wilson’s greatest challenges was not having a SL interpreter. He was able to overcome this challenge by teaching his sister SL.

As an adult growing up with my sister, all the time we shared information deeply. I taught her SL, structure of SL, perfect like a Deaf person. She signs what’s happening on the radio, sometimes if she does not know the signs, she will write down what people are saying and she will show me and I will teach her the signs.

Wilson also feels that the respect that is accorded to him is due in large measure to the fact that he is a teacher, and that the respect is not given to him as a Deaf person.

Like sometimes when I work in my working place I’m a teacher but when I’m outside I feel different, I don’t need them to call me a teacher but expect them to call me by my name. And still they must respect me.

He wants people to respect him because he is Wilson- a Deaf person, and not because he is a teacher.

Yes. Yes. Because when people hear you are a teacher they change. They are afraid to tell you everything because you are a teacher. Maybe they want to discuss deeply about life and the future. They can’t tell you everything.

Wilson has anxiety about younger Deaf people and how they will manage their lives. He feels that most Deaf youngsters are not well-advised and can be irresponsible.
Sometimes I try to help some Deaf who never have enough education like me. Like to show them how about life but I don’t control them. I only advise them to think before you do something. Sometimes I influence them with good points like, must think about saving money, must think about their future, think about if they have children how will they manage to raise the child, must not think about going to a pub all the time and drinking and leaving no money for transport and food and for the children and for the future. I also advise them how to budget their money and not to spend the money on useless things.

Seeking medical attention and not being able to communicate with medical personnel is also a serious challenge for Wilson.

My life is difficult when I have to go for medical attention. It takes time to communicate to him (the doctor) because we have to write, write, write. I need to ask him what is the problem with me, and what is this medicine for, how will it help me?

He also feels that people are distrustful of the Deaf and do not believe that they are credible citizens who can own credit cards and passports.

When I go to a shop and I want to use my credit card, some don’t believe that it’s my credit card, they ask for my ID. They look at my ID and then they look at my face and look again. I feel that they don’t trust me. I inform them I'm Deaf - they take so long to believe that it’s true. They never saw a Deaf person have things like that.

One day, I went to Home Affairs to apply for passport. They look at me suspicious and ask me many questions. They make me wait for a long time and they talk to all other people.

Yes, they don’t believe that I am Deaf and I can have a credit card and can be a teacher. All the time you must show proof for everything. Sometime I want to do just like a hearing person do. For example when I want to transfer my money in the bank I fill all the detail. I want to do just like how the white people do in the bank but when I do they don’t trust me and make me feel negative. Wilson feels that he is doubly challenged, for in addition to being Deaf, he is also African.

I see people take a white person as the best person than an African person. African is no good.

Wilson gets extremely disillusioned when he does not get the respect that he deserves.

I’m an educated Deaf person, when I fill a form where want to open an account, I put ‘SMS only’ next to my number but still the company phones me. That is negative because they can see my information SMS only and they show no respect. This makes me so angry. If they want me to respect them then they must respect me.

Although he has relied on the support of others, it is much of his own initiatives that have supported him through his challenges.

As an adult I learnt to evaluate what a person says then I make a decision myself whether I accept his point or not. Sometimes I use that person’s idea to make my decision. Sometimes I see a positive idea, then I add mine and make my decision, but if I feel that it is negative, then I don’t accept it.

Having come through the complexities with his own deafness, Wilson is in a position to help other Deaf, with their challenges.

I meet Deaf adults outside who don’t know how to write. We must have ABET for adults. Most depend on me now. They come and tell me their problems with their wife, some have problems
with hearing people. I also get involved to support them, sometimes they ask me to come with them and solve their problem. I help a lot with deaf adults. It’s very important for a Deaf person to plan for the future. I help them with this. He must know because when you retire then you must balance your life with your money, doesn’t matter what job you did. If a family member dies I also help them how to claim the money for funerals. I show them what benefits they have when they are in permanent employment.

He also feels that the Deaf must be given the opportunity to take charge of their own projects. There is the tendency for hearing people to want to take control of the affairs of Deaf people. The Deaf can be responsible for their own projects. Hearing people in the Deaf world can be involved but they must not take over and control the Deaf. When there are govt. tenders for projects for Deaf people, the hearing take advantage. They use the Deaf. If they understand the Deaf, they know about Deaf Culture and know SL, then it’s fine.

All the challenges that he has experienced, have not caused him to be a bitter, angry person. Indeed he has translated these into positive, beneficial experiences. Yes I learnt and that challenge gave me experience, made me mature. I also understand that not only I have a problem. All of us have problems. But when I compare them to my life I can see me as a better person but I never leave them there. I try to pull them up, encourage them to be equal like me. I help them to make good CVs. Sometimes Deaf get a personal letter – maybe about a loan or something.

Often the Deaf are forced to seek assistance from hearing persons and in so doing they disclose aspects of their lives that are confidential. Then because they cannot read they have to take it to a hearing person. Then hearing people know about Deaf peoples’ personal lives. I try to teach them to be smart Deaf people, and learn to read and write to be independent. It’s very important for a Deaf person to plan for the future. I help them with this. He must know because when you retire then you must balance your life with your money, doesn’t matter what job you did. If a family member dies I also help them how to claim the money for funerals. I show to them what benefits they have when they are in permanent employment. I help them with investment to see which is the best.

MARRIAGE AND CHILDREN

Throughout his life, Wilson socialized only within the Deaf community. He feels that he has to know more about hearing people to make a decision about whom he would prefer to marry. His desire to assert his independence is evident. I can’t say a Deaf person is the best person for me, because I grew up with Deaf and never think of life and people outside the Deaf community. Maybe I want to also meet hearing people and then compare and then decide who I want to marry. When I was in school I do everything that my family wants. My family most wants me to marry a hearing person, not a Deaf person. But I do not want them to make my choice because I want to make my own choice about which person I like - hearing or Deaf person. It depends on me.
He has decided though that he wants to marry a Deaf person who is educated and mature, and his reasons for this are certainly well thought.

*If I have children and they are hearing then they will know their mother and father are Deaf people. Then my children will become CODAs. They will interpret and help the Deaf world. Also I think marrying a deaf person will help me with 5 keys to love – I can love her, I can communicate better, I can have sex and intimacy, there will be trust, and number 5 there will be deep understanding.*

Wilson understands that he cannot choose his children. He believes that whether he has Deaf or hearing children depends on God. For this reason it doesn’t matter whether his children are hearing or Deaf. He is determined that his children live a life that is different from and better than his own childhood.

*I want my children to know the home rules. I want them to respect their mother and their father. I want them to have the best future from the time that they are born. I want them to have good education. They must have investments from a young age. I like to send them to good schools like private schools.*

There are several aspects of his childhood and youth that Wilson regrets.

*... my mother never plan for my education. Like my mother never plan investments and save enough for my future and to study. She never looked for the best school for me like St Vincents or V/N Naik School. My mother ..... (pauses)I don’t want to talk a lot about this because it is too much painful.*

*If I had better opportunities when I was younger, then maybe I will be someone today. I will have better things. Maybe I could have a nice house, nice car. Maybe I can have my own company to employ lots of Deaf people. I can develop life for Deaf people and develop my life as a Deaf person. The president of Gallaudet University – must have had wonderful opportunities. That’s how he can be so successful. But I feel that I can become somebody too. Maybe I could have gone to a good school and my life would have been more successful.*

He then realizes that living under apartheid conditions must have been difficult for his mother and that she would have made many sacrifices to raise him.

*There were good things also. Because my mother was living under apartheid era - so I don’t blame her. I think it was very difficult and I have to accept how she raised me. So I never wish my children to live the life that I live before.*

**SIGNIFICANT EVENTS AND PEOPLE**

Most important in Wilson’s life were the various people that he met and what he learnt from these people.

*Like people working in VNNaik, they helped me to think positively about myself. They helped me to know that Deaf people can achieve a lot. These people are RR Pillay, FC Govender, A Appanna and you A Ram. Also Miss Princess Jona, a Deaf teacher from Eastern Cape.*

Achieving his qualification in teaching was also a significant event in his life.

*That was the best thing that happened in my life. I felt that doors opened for me. I felt that now I had many opportunities. I felt positive because now I’m able to help my family. Also feel like*
thanking all lecturers in Springfield College and all the people who inspired me for helping me to be what I am now.

Wilson is not prepared to rest on his laurels now that he is a teacher. He is determined to aspire to greater heights.

I can’t say I’m completely successful but I made a success. From now I want to add to make it more successful. It does not mean that now I am a teacher that I must stand still. My success must flow like water and go all over. I want to try to succeed more. So now my life is like half successful. I never see any Deaf in top, high jobs like national jobs and I wish to be there one day. I do not want to continue as a teacher all my life. One day I want to become a principal of a Deaf school.

Every success that he achieved motivated him to want to achieve further. He was resolute that his deafness would not be a limitation.

I am happy with some years of my life. From age 24 to 30 I am happy with my life. But before 24 years I am not happy because I did not plan what I’m going to become in the future. I never make a good, final decision about future for myself. When I was in matric in St Martins school. When I finished matric and went home and thought if I fail then what will I do? I thought maybe I’ll become a laborer or go to Deaf community office looking for job. When I passed I became positive and wanted to do better. Although I studied and wrote well, I was not sure that I passed. If my life was different, different - like today, maybe I would be far ahead now. If I had better opportunities when I was younger, then maybe I will be someone today. I will have better things.

PART TWO - BECOMING A TEACHER

The curriculum at Springfield College had little to do with Deaf learners.

The problem with curriculum was it concentrated mostly on hearing children. It was not so much about Deaf. Mostly we concentrated on hearing a lot, but we needed to learn about the Deaf. We needed someone who is Deaf and who understands full about curriculum for the Deaf to lecture us. Because a hearing person doesn’t understand about the Deaf, how we feel, how we think and learn. We did a lot of reading and writing in the books but I don’t understand because it was not about the Deaf. It’s not enough.

Wilson is perceptive and recalled that certain lecturers showed genuine interest in the Deaf and their cause.

There was a lady Mrs K Chetty - she inspired me all the time. She involved us in activities that made us interested. She made me feel good about the subject. Miss Pillay, was another lady that gave us good support.

On the other hand there were those that he recalled with little fondness.

It depends how interested the lecturer is, how the lecturer teaches and gets himself involved with the Deaf. For example my English lecturer, I never saw her smile. All the time she wants us to be early to class and she is strict with the subject. There is no chance to say that you are lost or you don’t understand. They only ask you to pay attention and continue with the lecture. They did not understand that we stayed far away. We have problem with transport. First they ask me why I come late to class. I did not feel good to be treated like small child.
There were no opportunities for integration with hearing students at College.  
**Mostly I was with the Deaf, not hearing. We were separate - on our own. I did not have hearing friends. They did not show interest to join the Deaf.**

What should have been the proudest moment of his life turned out to be the most disappointing. He liaised with other students in his group and learnt that their graduation was taking place at ICC. For some reason the group was split and Wilson was told that his graduation would be in Pretoria. 
**I was very disappointed for my graduation. I had a problem because I never go to a place like ICC. I was confused because end of the final year we thought we have to come to Durban to ICC. I thought I will be with the group. My school principal was very happy and he came with me. I borrowed my gown and everything. But on the day, they told me to go to Pretoria. Also when I go there, there is no interpreter for me? How will they know I’m a Deaf person when they call my name? How will I know where is my chair? I was disappointed about that. That upset me very much. I don’t understand why some of us were separated. But my parents and me were happy that I got my diploma which they posted to my home. You see because we graduated from UNISA, it was correspondence. Then we all graduate in our own province.**

**BEING A TEACHER**

Wilson enjoys a relatively good relationship with the principal, deputy principal, HOD and most of the male teachers at his school.

**Mostly I have good relationship with the principal, deputy principal and H.O.D. I mean males. I have good relationship with few females because with them I’m free to ask what I need to know. But with others it’s sometimes negative and positive.**

**The principal in School gave me professional support to get involved in making the school curriculum. He sometimes made me get involved in the dept of environment.**

He also motivated him to enter learners in art competitions, many of which they won.

He does not get much professional support from the hearing teachers. He acknowledges that he gets professional support from Wits University. Socializing with hearing teachers does take place but this is not spontaneous.

**Sometimes I socialize. But it depends on the status of the hearing teachers, who is high and who is low, their years of service and the teacher’s age.**

There is a teacher at his school, whom Wilson has developed a close bond with. This teacher did not know any SL and Wilson taught him SL.

**Then time went by and I found a person who can be linked with perfectly with me. You remember I told you about S’bu. When he came to Vuleka, he did not know any SL. He interprets well for me and gives me all information clear. Now he can sign like perfect like a Deaf person. At one time I was very desperate. I wanted to buy a recorder and tape the meetings. Then I can bring it back and play it and ask someone what they are saying. But now S’bu helps me.**

It is clear that the bond that has come about between Wilson and S’bu is rooted in SL. S’bu has had a profound influence on Wilson and he is appreciated for this.
He helped me to make a portfolio of all my art work. Together we made new things and we taught pupils and some teachers to be creative. We showed all the teachers how to make portfolios for pupils and put all their work inside it.

Wilson is adamant that he does not want to receive information incidentally. The information that he gets must be intended for him.

I hate just picking up information. I want them to respect me and give me full information like a professional person, equal to other hearing teachers. I was negative to the hearing before because I did not understand what happens in meeting.

The attitude of the hearing teachers towards him varies.

I can’t say that the hearing teachers don’t respect me. But some hearing teachers have respect, some hearing teachers get fed up when you ask for something and some accept and give you some help. Most of the time Principal and deputy and HODs give me respect. Then I give them respect. Many times I help hearing teachers with SL and sports. But when I ask them for help they tell me later, later and they always say that they are busy. I have to go after them many times and then I get fed up and just leave it. And I want to be independent and I try to do my own work.

Irrespective of their attitudes, Wilson does not allow this to affect his work performance.

Mostly in my life, I don’t worry about person who is in competition with me. Some people have competition with me. What I went there to do - my work - focus on my work and developing the Deaf children. I don’t worry about other people and their business. If some have competition with me I know where I can overtake you and I know where to stop it and not to continue.

His relationship with the Deaf learners at his school is far more serious to him.

I have friends with Deaf children but I separate that from my work. They know I am a teacher - they respect as a Deaf teacher. After work I can talk to them in general but not sharing about my deep personal life and things like about my money. I stay in a cottage near school and supervise children in hostel. I separate my friendship from my work. I can share information on what is in the newspaper. They know I like to buy newspaper and give them new information and watch movies together.

Wilson knows that most Deaf pupils like Deaf teachers only because of the SL.

They learn better with the Deaf teachers. Me they see me like role model – they feel they want to be mature like me.

He is also aware that the Deaf are perceptive about the image and character of teachers and this influences their attitudes to the teachers.

Most Deaf pupils like Deaf teachers only because of the SL. They learn better with the Deaf teachers. Me they see me like role model – they feel they want to be mature like me. Deaf have different taste or selection between the Deaf teachers. We come different background - like me I come from rural and you from urban and you look different and rich and the Deaf look at you and they like to identify with you. They also see your character. If you show understanding and caring and love then they like you. But if you are strict all the time then they don’t like you.
CHALLENGES AS A DEAF TEACHER.

Attending workshops conducted by the KZN Dept of Education is a major challenge. This is big challenge for me - workshops. Sometimes I come to the workshop alone with no interpreter. Then I have to try to lip read the facilitator who is speaking. Then if he turns his head and talks away from me then I am lost and I get left behind. I need a teacher to just come with me and tell the people conducting the workshop that I am Deaf. They must know that I’m Deaf. This is why I feel that there is no professional support.

Unfair distribution of work between Deaf and hearing teachers frustrates Wilson. Hearing teachers give Deaf a lot of work to do. Some times they use Deaf teachers too much. I have many responsibilities and then they give me more work. That means that I must carry your responsibility also and you do nothing. I am not negative about them but they must be fair and share the work. They treat us like their toys. The hearing are teachers too, or maybe they are useless teachers.

Some hearing depend on Deaf who has some speech so that they can learn SL. I feel the most hearing choose me because I have some speech and they leave out those who don’t have speech. They need to link with other Deaf also. The hearing teachers take advantage of me because I have some little speech.

Wilson feels that the Deaf are subsumed by the large numbers of hearing teachers in Deaf schools, and in being the minority they are taken advantage of. Some management doesn’t know how to manage well. They take advantage when we are few Deaf teachers. I feel a Deaf school should have 20 Deaf teachers and 20 hearing teachers. Then it will be fair. When there is few then we get oppressed.

There are no strengths or opportunities for him at his school. I never get opportunities because hearing teachers control Deaf. I am a qualified teacher. I have more education than the learners. But hearing think I’m same like pupils. They treat me same like pupils. They don’t see my education. They see me as Deaf like pupils.

Wilson is accorded respect as a teacher especially when they want to engage his services or need him to benefit the school. They wanted me to enter the art competition with pupils. Me I am not teaching art, but I help them to do posters and other things. I took 3 Deaf pupils to Kruger National Park and we won the art competition there. We bring the money, we bring the computer and we bring the certificate.

He feels strongly that the position of Deaf teachers in Deaf schools be recognized and advocated. But there is no Deaf in SMT. A school for the Deaf must be managed by the Deaf also. We do have a Deaf person on SGB, but he is not strong. All the hearing control him. We try to change things and introduce new things. But the people who are there for many years they reject our ideas. They still want to continue the old ideas then they can continue to control the school. We also introduce new system for teaching SL, but they don’t accept that because they know we are best in SL. We are new. All the ideas and the knowledge we have are new ideas and now they must put new ideas in place. But they are too stubborn to learn from us.
The Dept of Education needs to be a partner in Deaf education and the Deaf community and ensure that teaching is effective and the quality of education is appropriate. 

If a hearing teacher is appointed to a Deaf school then the Dept must be sure she/he must know SL well and know how to teach the Deaf. There is no time for this process to happen. When are you going to start teaching? Me, can I go start teaching in a hearing school? No I can’t do that. The teacher must receive training before going to Deaf school.

The other thing I wish for is if a teacher has long service in the Deaf school and doesn’t improve in SL, then Education Dept. must employ Deaf teacher assistants to help these teachers to improve in SL. They waste our time. I’m thinking of a child’s future. If you are hearing person, you cannot accept your child to have teacher who don’t know the language. When your child comes home you ask your child what did he learn. For Deaf children it must be same – they must have a teacher who knows SL.

A teacher in a Deaf school, irrespective of whether the teacher is Deaf or hearing, should have experience with the Deaf and some SL skills.

He must make sure that the Deaf learn and understand what he is teaching. If they don’t understand, then he must teach again and use new ways to make them learn. The teacher must know that the Deaf is a human being. He has rights, rights to education, even if he is Deaf.

PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

Wilson would like to study to improve his qualifications and also advance himself professionally but he needs people to support with interpreting and study materials.

I want to finish my ACE and further to do B.Ed. in Education Management. After that I want to do research for about 6 years. I’m still young. Education is not easy but difficult. If you feel you can do it then go and do and get it.

Maybe one day I like to become a principal and some teachers who I work with can see I can become a principal.

He is certain that if he improves himself then he can improve the quality of the lives of the Deaf colleagues he works with and the learners.

I feel that I can improve education for the Deaf. I know I can present workshops for Deaf. It is not enough to have only teaching experience. We must have some management skills also. When a post comes up, they need management – then I can apply. That is why I’m doing management so I can change the system in Deaf education. I need support for this, a lot of support.

Wilson jests that if he were a not a teacher, perhaps he would have been engaged with some kind of distasteful or destitute work.

I don’t know what I would be doing now; maybe I would be someone like a cleaner. (Laughs) Maybe I might be a drunk person, drinking juba and waking up all the neighbors or doing the job of emptying the bins.

On a more somber note, it dawns upon him that if he were not a teacher then he would not be in the Deaf world.
I would not understand the Deaf world. Maybe I will be thinking about myself only. Maybe I would be expecting other people to find a job for me. But in a positive way, maybe I would become an artist or have an art centre where I can involve many Deaf with me. Maybe I will be drawing road designs and house constructions or wall paintings. Maybe I would be a garden designer and do rock designs. But painting I like.

His overt interest in art is evident in these intentions.