

HANDS OVER OUR EARS:  
TENSIONS IN THE LIMINAL SPACES CONCERNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND  
LANGUAGE EDUCATION FOR d/DEAF NEWCOMERS TO CANADA

ARI BLACK

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Faculty of Education  
University of Ottawa

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### Abstract

Cette thèse par article étudie les discours (re)produits par les documents de politiques et les administrateurs concernant les programmes d'anglais langue seconde pour les nouveaux arrivants sourds au Canada. La monographie qui encadre la thèse débute avec une description du contexte de la recherche suivi d'une revue de la littérature pertinente. Des observations finales suivent l'article. L'article contient une version condensée du contexte et de la revue de la littérature, de la méthodologie, de la discussion, des conclusions et de la pertinence pour le domaine de l'éducation. L'étude utilise l'analyse du discours pour examiner les documents fédéraux, provinciaux et d'un conseil scolaire, ainsi que des entrevues avec deux participantes, une sourd et l'autre entendante. Tous deux administrent des programmes d'anglais langue seconde pour les nouveaux arrivants sourds. Les résultats suggèrent qu'autant les documents de politiques que les participantes sont aux prises avec des tensions entre le discours majoritaire et le discours de la communauté sourde. Ce domaine de recherche est pertinent pour l'enseignement de la langue seconde pour les nouveaux arrivants sourds, une population en croissance à la suite de migrations massives.

This thesis by article investigates the question "What discourses are (re)produced by policy documents and administrators relating to ESL programmes for Deaf newcomers to Canada?" The surrounding monograph begins with a description of the research context and a review of the relevant literature and ends with concluding remarks. The article contains a condensed version of the context and literature review, the methodology, discussion, conclusions, and relevance to the field of education. The research uses discourse analysis to examine federal, provincial, and schoolboard documents, and participant interviews. There were two participants, one Deaf and one hearing, who both administer ESL programmes for Deaf newcomers. The findings suggest that both the policy documents and the participants exist in tensions between the majority Discourse and the Deaf community Discourse. This area of research is pertinent to second language education for Deaf newcomers, a growing population in the wake of mass-migrations.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

AODA – Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act

ASL – American Sign Language

bi/bi – Bilingual/bicultural Deaf education

CLB – Canadian Language Benchmarks

ESL – English as a Second Language

LINC – Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada

MLA – Multilingualism Act

OLA – Official Languages Act

## Introduction

Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools begins:

We have come a long way towards realizing our vision of equity and inclusive education in Ontario schools. However, realizing that vision must be understood as a journey, not a destination. The work must be ongoing to ensure that our schools continue to provide caring, inclusive, safe, and accepting environments that support the achievement and well-being of every student. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 5)

According to this vision, equity and inclusive education is a process that requires shared commitment and leadership if the school system is to meet the ever-evolving, complex issues and concerns of the communities it serves (Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools, 2014). Although I am exploring a context of an adult rather than a K-12 population, I position my thesis within a vision for inclusive education similar to that of the Equity and Inclusive Education document cited above, which I will explain in greater detail later on in the monograph.

The Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa offers M.A. theses both by monographs and by article (with at least one publishable article). I selected the second option, so my thesis is comprised of an article embedded within a monograph. The monograph provides an expanded literature review and a theoretical framework, as well as, a discussion of some methodological issues encountered during the research. The article was written to be submitted to the TESL Canada Journal. It is self-contained and has a condensed version of the literature review and framework, a complete methodology, and the thesis' data analysis and discussion. This is followed by the conclusion to the thesis as a whole.

Throughout both the thesis and the article, I draw on my own experiences and other anecdotes that represent my ongoing examination of the thesis' issues as they emerged in the world around me. These are made explicit through story boxes, each set apart from the main text in a border with a unique title, and act as context for my explorations and help to elucidate my perspective. When I reference these anecdotes, I use the title from the story box to draw the reader to the relevant passage.

While reading this thesis, it is important to bear in mind that I recognize English as a Second Language and French as a Second Language programmes as equivalent and equally important, with similar issues arising from the inclusion of d/Deaf immigrants. However, as an Anglophone Ontarian who knows ASL, I focused my research on the programmes and peoples

that are linguistically accessible to me. A note on orthography, using a capital 'D' is a common convention to differentiate people belonging to the culture/community (Deaf) from the idea of hearing difference (deaf). When both apply, 'd/Deaf' will be used.

### **Purpose of Research**

My interest in, and appreciation for, inclusive and equitable education began during my undergraduate studies and continued to develop throughout my masters and my teaching. While studying for my B.A. in Applied Linguistics at Carleton University, I had the opportunity to fall in love with American Sign Language (ASL), intrigued by its full-bodied expressiveness and unique communicative modality. I also became ideologically-mobilized by the complex cultural and linguistic issues that surrounded Deaf education and the Deaf community. During my undergraduate studies, I conducted research relating to Deaf history, which informs but is not covered in this thesis, and an honours thesis on hearing students of ASL, which is explained briefly here. The analysis of the interviews conducted for the honours thesis suggested that university students of ASL, even after several years of language study and cultural exposure, still struggle with understanding the Deaf community in terms of culture, the Us and Them divisions of normal and not-normal, and the ignorance that the Deaf community struggle with. These particular issues are explored further in both the monograph and the article.

I completed my undergraduate with a minor in American Sign Language, granting me a strong fluency with the language, and a Certificate in Teaching of English as a Second Language. I also left with a sense of the contradictions and complexities of Deaf culture and education, some of which are explored in the later English as a Second Language and Deaf Learners, The Deaf in Canada, and Hearing Discourses and Normalization sections. The varied social dynamics between the hearing majority and the Deaf (e.g. some hearing people are completely unaware of ASL and the Deaf community whereas others are active participants in the community, some hearing people are strong advocates for ASL education where others encourage medical interventions and oral education) are what drove me to conduct this research; I see research as a means of transforming those majority views which are problematic to the continuation of the Deaf community and culture and work against the growth of ASL.

Close to the end of my B.A., a former colleague told me they were teaching English as a Second Language classes for d/Deaf immigrant adults. Though I had explored Deaf history, culture, and education during my undergraduate studies, I had never been exposed to, or even

considered, the issues relating to d/Deaf immigrants. I offered to volunteer in one of their classes, hoping to assist the teacher, while exploring this fascinating area as a possibility for my M.A.

The English as a Second Language class, in which I volunteered for eight months, was focused on English reading and writing using ASL as a medium of communication, which required teaching ASL to the students simultaneously with English's written form. The linguistic abilities of the students varied widely. Some had arrived in Canada with some signs from their home countries and some experience with education while others, deaf from a young age, had never attended formal schooling and had acquired neither a complex spoken nor signed language. After beginning this research, I took over as teacher of the class for two years. During my time as teacher the class had five students of vastly varying communicative abilities and needs. This research also draws on my personal experiences before becoming and as teacher in that environment.

Initially, I intended to conduct research directly with the students of adult English as a Second Language classes for d/Deaf immigrants, however, after discussing the context with the chair of the faculty's Humanities Research Ethics Board it became clear that, due to communicative barriers, trying to obtain informed consent or assent from the students directly, or with the use of a Deaf Interpreter, would be ethically problematic. Despite this, ethical concerns demand that the issues of vulnerable populations, especially those who have little-to-no means of having their issues brought into focus and understood, should be explored through critical research as "[t]he welfare of groups can also be affected by research. Groups may benefit from the knowledge gained from the research" (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2014, p. 7) and that there is an:

obligation to treat people fairly and equitably. Fairness entails treating all people with equal respect and concern. Equity requires distributing the benefits and burdens of research participation in such a way that no segment of the population is unduly burdened by the harms of research or denied the benefits of the knowledge generated from it. (p. 8)

As an alternative, I shifted my focus to the policies and administration related to these programmes. Policies and administrators play a crucial role in the education of d/Deaf immigrants in that, as Power and Leigh (2011) write, "the real learning experiences are not found in the intended curriculum but in the attitudes and actions of professionals that are consistent

with their particular perspective on deafness” (p. 41) which requires that “the dominant ideologies of both programs and individuals within those programs ... be considered as part of a formal process of analysis” (p. 41). Thus, this research is intended to play a part in that “formal process of analysis” by engaging in questioning and discussion of a specific Deaf context and the actors and policy texts involved with it.

As I spent more time in the classroom, with this new focus in mind, some questions arose; Which ideologies underlie administrative decisions with regards to language education programming for adult d/Deaf immigrants? What is the best language environment for these students? Should ASL be taught first and then used to teach English? Should ASL and English be taught simultaneously? Who should decide and on what basis? At their core, I believe, these questions pertain to the valuing/devaluing of and recognizing/not-recognizing specific groups and languages. They are touched on through the thesis but also inspired the main research questions and the key assumptions on which those questions are based; that identity and ideology are intertwined and mutually co-constructed; that “[i]dentity is performed, or constructed if you will, in particular language interactions” (Deckert & Vickers, 2011, p. 10); and that these performances both control and are controlled by discourses (see Discourses in the Framework). Assumptions which will all be discussed later.

With this in mind, the focus of this study then became the production of discourses by policies and administrators related to education for d/Deaf immigrants. To address this, I look closely at what discourses are present in current policy documents and in the discourses produced during interviews with administrators. The questions guiding this analysis were:

- What discourses are (re)produced by policy documents and administrators?
- How do these discourses fit within the larger discourses of disability?
- How do these discourses fit within the larger discourses of Deaf culture and identity?
- How do these discourses fit within the ongoing struggle between these two larger discourses?

The article contained in this thesis will explore the questions, however, before doing so, it’s important to understand the broader context they are being examined in, namely that of Canadian Citizenship, Canadian Multiculturalism, and Deaf identity. This broader context forms the backdrop to a complex intersectionality between English as a Second Language/LINC classes

and d/Deaf learners, between local language choice and high-level policy, and the special circumstances faced by d/Deaf learners. Both the background information of the broader context and the specific details of this intersectionality are outlined in the next section and the Literature Review that follows it. In the next section, I present the broader context of English as a second language teaching and learning in Ontario as a step towards Canadian citizenship and a problematization of this context for d/Deaf immigrants. This is followed by a literature review which situates my study in the broader area of Deaf education.

### **Context**

Placed in a framework drawing on research in the areas of language education, generally, and Deaf education in particular, my study leads to a consideration of the production of discourses related to d/Deaf immigrants. My study is positioned within the overlap of two ongoing debates, oral- vs. sign-based education for d/Deaf people and mono/bilingualism vs. multilingualism in Canada. In the sections that follow, I review some of the positions taken, both political and educational, concerning the best approaches to d/Deaf education, and their ideological underpinnings, and place the debate in its historical context. As well, to present a broader context not found in the article itself, I examine the current dialogue concerning Canada's official languages, multiculturalism, and English as a Second Language policies.

### **English as a Second Language Instruction in Ontario**

Public English language instruction in Ontario is either federally- or provincially-funded. The federally-funded programmes are referred to as Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada and the provincially-funded programmes are called English as a Second Language. Classes under the English as a Second Language and Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada labels may also focus on skills (computers, sewing, personal support worker, childcare worker, etc.) and may also offer adult literacy instruction. This structure, and the available programmes, will differ from province-to-province and this thesis only focuses on Ontario's programmes. Though the Ontario Ministry of Education dictates the provincial English as a Second Language curriculum for K-12 students, it is less specific when it comes to adult learning. A thorough search of the ministry website resulted in little-to-no information for adult English as a Second Language programmes. Instead, references to adult learning redirect to the Citizenship and Immigration Canada website which also provided little in the way of specific

details of how English as a Second Language programmes are administered and funded, whether there is an official curriculum, and how students are assessed and by what criteria.

Both Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada and English as a Second Language use the Canadian Language Benchmarks as guidelines for language assessment and curriculum design. The Canadian Language Benchmarks are a framework organized by communicative contexts, language skill (reading, writing, listening, and speaking), and performance markers on a 12-level scale. Level 1 is, generally, considered the beginning stage of English instruction and level 12 the most advanced<sup>1</sup>. For example, at benchmark level 1, a learner would be able to “understand short greetings and simple goodwill messages” in a very short text that was limited to everyday words and phrases and supported by visual clues (Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2012, p. 76). Whereas a benchmark level 8 learner could “understand moderately complex social messages (such as those conveying general opinions, assessments of current events or situations, and responses to complaints or sympathy” in moderately long texts that are “factual, descriptive or argumentative; with opinions, explicit and implied meanings... with a range of concrete, abstract and specialized vocabulary and idiomatic language” (Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2012, p. 94).

As learners advance in levels, they move to a new class that fits their new proficiency. Within this framework, it isn't unusual to see multi-level classes of levels which are close numerically, such as 1-2 or 3-4. As learners become more proficient, they may be enrolled in classes of levels 5-9. As every learner is unique, instructors of classes devoted to a single CLB level must still adapt to a variety of skill levels. Instructors of multi-level classes must do the same but to a greater degree. However, in my experience, it is rare to see multi-level hearing classes that mix low-proficiency students with their high-proficiency peers as these contexts are extremely difficult to run effectively.

Currently, the government of Canada requires proof of listening and speaking ability in English at a Canadian Language Benchmark level of 4 or higher. It's also important to note that, in Ontario, Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada classes are only available to those who have yet to gain Canadian citizenship. As such, English second language instruction is simultaneously about citizenship and immigration and about education; it sits in a tense border

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<sup>1</sup> There is a level before 1, sometimes referred to as Foundations, but the CLBs are not designed for instruction at that level and so it must be dealt with separately.

space between these two forces (see the Bittersweet story box for one example). Within this framework, certain groups experience more barriers than others, one of which being d/Deaf immigrants. This is addressed in the next section.

### **English as a Second Language Instruction and Deaf Learners**

English language instruction for d/Deaf newcomers to Canada is a very specific area that stands at the intersection of three purposeful but different policy domains; federal policy, provincial policy, and local pedagogical policy. Ideally, Federal policy would provide an overarching ideological vision; an ideal to strive for, provincial policy would lay out action statements within the federal framework, and, finally, local pedagogical policy would attempt, as best as possible, to implement the provincial action statements with practicable procedures. However, as citizenship is an area of federal jurisdiction and education an area of provincial jurisdiction, the linkages cannot be assumed. Within this intersection, there are a number of important issues that must be understood regarding instruction for d/Deaf adult learners; language delay, a lack of available resources, and a gap in assessment approaches.

As different countries and communities have different approaches to how they treat and educate their d/Deaf citizens, adult d/Deaf English learners, depending on their educational and linguistic background, may have some exposure to a signed or spoken language, or may be fluent in a signed language. However, others may not have been previously exposed to an accessible primary language. This can pose direct learning challenges as Akamatsu and Cole (2000) explain:

#### **Bittersweet**

At the school where I worked, there are only two Deaf classes, one LINC and one ESL. The LINC class is only available to students who are not yet Canadian citizens. Around eight months after I took over as teacher of the ESL class, one of the students in the LINC class passed their citizenship test. As they were no longer permitted to be in the LINC class, they were transferred to the ESL class. I believe the shock of being taken out of the class that was so much a part of their formative experiences after arriving in Canada and being placed in a class that was run very differently and had a different purpose was one of the main contributing factors to their leaving the ESL programme shortly after.

ASL appears to have a critical period similar to that of English (Fischer, 1994, 1998; Mayberry & Eichen, 1991), and therefore we might expect that immigrant and refugee deaf children who arrive without a first (signed) language will be disadvantaged in ways similar to hearing children who have not acquired a solid first language. (p. 5)

Though the notion of a critical period for first and second language acquisition is still being debated and others present arguments that it is the complexity of the socio-dynamics and issues with our approaches to second language learning that are more responsible for the success of language learners (Norton, 2000), there is still the reality of barriers to learning for d/Deaf students. Whatever the case, their contexts are nowhere near optimal.

Some of these adult students may be young enough, or may have enough previous language exposure, that they can overcome these barriers. Others may have so little systemic language that learning even the foundations of American Sign Language will be a long and difficult journey. These differences in d/Deaf learners are brought into sharp focus when they are placed in multi-level classrooms rather than a class specifically for their level.

However, this is exactly the situation in the Deaf Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada and English as a

Second Language classes that form the context of this research. As there are few American Sign Language/English as a Second Language instructors, the classes are necessarily mixed from the most-foundational level to the highest-fluency signers. As there are only two classes, these learners will always be in the same class and will not benefit from differing teaching styles and a variety of peers (see *There's Only One of Me*). Promotion also poses a difficulty. Though their language proficiency levels may increase, they will still be in the same environment and, apart from a change in citizenship status, this means they will remain with the same peers in the same

### **There's Only One of Me**

In my class, I had a very quick and studious learner who knows some Arabic, some Arabic Sign Language, and is rapidly acquiring both ASL and written English. At the same table, I had a learner who has very little systemic language who will take a long time to learn even basic conversational ASL that their peer mastered soon after arriving. The two both need scaffolded and focused instruction but can't be easily paired for work as one won't understand and the other will be unchallenged. The more advanced student often complained about a lack of peers at their competency level.

class. These issues apply to both their learning of ASL and to English. Adding to this is the gap in the current Canadian Language Benchmarks and assessment systems for d/Deaf adult immigrants.

As stated in the previous section, the Canadian Language Benchmarks is divided into general expectations of language learners' abilities in the skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Though a project exists to produce a working document of Canadian Language Benchmarks for the Deaf, at the time of writing, there is currently no official framework for Deaf

### **Do You Read Me?**

Spend any extended period of time with Deaf people and you will inevitably end up in a store or café where they will need to use pen and paper or a cell phone to communicate with a non-signing hearing person through written language. The language used will resemble less traditional prose and more the common spoken language used in these contexts. For Deaf people, written language takes the place of spoken language when interacting with the hearing world.

learners. This poses a real problem for curriculum design and assessment in a number of ways. First and foremost, the skills of listening and speaking do not apply to Deaf learners in a sign-based educational setting and, although some transfer easily, many of the statements of expectations in these two skills cannot be applied to Deaf learners. Additionally, Deaf adults need both sign and written competencies, when an interpreter is not available, to effectively interact with the hearing majority. This means that most, if not all, of the expectations outlined in the speaking and listening skills of the Canadian Language Benchmarks would need to be moved into the reading and writing skills for the Deaf learner (see Do You Read Me?). These differences significantly change the expectations of each level and would also likely make the meaning of these levels different for the Deaf and hearing. This only touches on the issue of assessment once the learner is in the classroom; before enrolling in a class, they must first

be assessed by an external group and given their initial proficiency level (see the Methodology section of the monograph for more discussion). Akamatsu and Cole (2000) raise concerns related to the reliability and validity of assessment tools:

[O]ngoing measures of language-related abilities (whether in signed or printed language) are necessary for formulating a comprehensive view of a deaf immigrant or refugee student (Akamatsu, 1998; Marschark, 1993), although ... performance on standardised

nonverbal measures may be tainted by a lack of experience with the materials used in the assessment... What holds true for assessing immigrant/refugee or language minority students may hold doubly true for immigrant/refugee deaf students. (pp. 9-10)

These various issues occur within the tension between grassroots language choice and policy priorities. American Sign Language is used as the language of instruction within both the English as a Second Language and Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada programmes where I worked because the most senior instructor is Deaf and because, based on my personal impressions, the current teaching staff considers aural training to be ineffective for d/Deaf learners. The use of ASL also provides clear advantages in that it is accessible and comprehensible to the learners and, in time, provides access to the local Deaf community.

However, this language choice is an ad-hoc solution to a local problem, as neither the provincial nor federal governments have codified this specific language choice in policy. This poses a difficulty for teachers, students, and stakeholders in the Deaf community. First, as the use of ASL is not the accepted standard, the language used in these classes remains the discretion of the current administration. Second, unlike with English, which has a surplus of materials that can be used in English as a Second Language classes—even disregarding the plentiful English as a Second Language-specific texts—, there aren't many ASL texts and resources that can be used with these specific learners. Creating these resources would first require a plan of study for these learners so that level-appropriate material can be designed and produced. Lastly, the lack of a specific policy mandate makes obtaining funding for resource development difficult and the development of an appropriate set of Canadian Language Benchmarks a side-project rather than a requirement. This educational and linguistic overlap outlined above occurs against a backdrop of a larger national context which is explored in the next section.

### **Literature Review**

Though the article has a much tighter focus, the over-arching context of this thesis is Canadian bilingualism and multiculturalism, which runs as a thread through the following sections. This section covers the Deaf community in North America and Canada specifically, their educational history, including deficit model interventions and Deaf-ideological interventions. It concludes with a brief examination of the relationship between language and Canadian citizenship and how American Sign Language is addressed in immigration policy.

### **Canadian Bilingualism and Multiculturalism**

According to Haque (2012), The Bilingualism and Bicultural Commission divided the Canadian populace into four groups English, French, Aboriginal, and 'Multicultural' and points out that this division simultaneously conflates culture, ethnicity, and language, glossing over the linguistic and cultural uniqueness of those peoples subsumed by the English (e.g. British, Irish, and Scottish), French (e.g. Acadians, Franco-Manitobans, Fransaskois, and Québécois) and Aboriginal (over 60) labels. Including the Multicultural label with these groups simultaneously strips those who fall under it of their linguistic uniqueness while juxtaposing them to these ethno-linguistic groups. By placing Multicultural (and Aboriginal) in opposition to English and French, these two languages are explicitly legitimized and set up as the national ideal (p. 18). Following a study, Ricento (2013) also found that this socially-constructed positioning is reflected in public policy:

...in both policy and practice, multiculturalism has come to mean 'cultures and languages other than English and French', and ..., functioning as the bedrock of Canadian language policy, continues to inform and influence public attitudes about the role and place of 'other' languages and cultures in Canadian society, which in turn has an impact on public policy, including educational policy, especially at the federal level. (pp. 475-476)

This four-way division leaves little room for the complex spectrum of people living in Canada and, as will be discussed in the next section, makes defining the place where the Deaf belong especially difficult.

### **The Deaf in Canada**

Within this research, I take the position that there are many cultural groups subsumed by the label Multicultural just as there are many groups of people, the Deaf being only one, who are caught under the umbrella term disabled. The multifaceted context of the Deaf community makes their cultural uniqueness difficult to represent in simple terms and lends itself to misunderstandings and, often unconscious, prejudices. Like most, any Deaf individual is intersectional; most Deaf people in Canada are neither foreign, as the majority are born in Canada, nor are they from a single cultural group, since they come from many different families with a plethora of different places of origin. The nature of the Deaf as a cultural group is examined in greater detail in the Framework, however, it's important to discuss the key aspects

of Deaf history in North America and how it informs current perspectives and debate. This section briefly covers the development of the Deaf community in North America and how it interacts with the hearing majority in both the medical and educational domains. It is important to note that, although the monograph examines the Deaf as a cultural group, the scope and focus of the article does not allow for a discussion of the definition of culture, so it refers to the Deaf as a community<sup>2</sup>.

**Communities.** Though the official history of the Deaf in North America only goes back to the mid-1700s, records suggest that Deaf people have been gathering and using sign languages to communicate in Western and Middle-Eastern countries for at least 7000 years. Sign language use in First Nations groups may go back even further (Woll & Ladd, 2011, p. 159). Though technology, educational policies, and medical interventions have altered how many modern Deaf people live their lives, the Deaf community today shares a clear link to its historical, yet relatively recent past:

Deaf social and cultural lives [are] ... underpinned and driven by forms of communication that differ from those of the majority society. The centrality of these languages is reflected not only in the social and political organization of these communities, but in their strong cultural tradition of sign-play, jokes, storytelling, and poetry. In the most practical sense, then, the central fact of Deaf community membership is seen as linguistic membership. (Woll & Ladd, 2011, p. 162)

Beyond this linguistic focus, self-identification and acceptance by other community members is a key aspect of membership in the Deaf community. Though physiology may play a strong part in separating the Deaf community from the hearing majority, Woll and Ladd (2011) note that some members of the Deaf community may have only minor hearing loss whereas some people with profound hearing loss may not identify with the community at all. It's not uncommon for hearing children of Deaf parents to sign fluently and be considered members of the Deaf community.

In modern Western societies, there are two major centres of Deaf community life: residential schools and Deaf clubs. Residential schools provide Deaf children a place to learn sign language through immersion and curriculum and access to the larger Deaf community.

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<sup>2</sup> Even leaving out the notion of culture, the Deaf as a linguistic community is just as varied as an English-speaking community.

Residential schools have, since the early 1800s, been the primary means of transmission of Deaf history and community membership from one generation to the next. Beyond residential schools, Deaf clubs are a hub for Deaf adult life; they maintain linguistic and social connections and extend the Deaf culture and community into all of adulthood (Woll & Ladd, 2011).

Alongside the construction of Deaf communities, a parallel perspective has developed; that of deafness as a physical deficit which needs to be remedied to make the d/Deaf as physically alike to the hearing majority as possible. The deficit model is expressed most clearly through the interventions created in response to deafness, as explored in the next section.

**Deficit model interventions.** Hearing aids have been available, in one form or another, since the 17th century. Their purpose is to increase the volume of and enhance ambient sounds to assist people who have reduced hearing. More recently, the invention of the cochlear implant, which transmits electrical signals directly to the audio centres of the brain but destroys any residual hearing when implanted, and the bone-conduction implant, which vibrates the bones of the skull to stimulate the inner ear, have provided an alternative method of intervention that avoids the limitations of external hearing aids. A combination of the move towards mainstream education for d/Deaf students and the disabling stance of the medical profession on hearing impairment had more than doubled the number of cochlear implantations in children and youth between 1999 and 2008 (Mitchell & Karchmer, 2011, p. 21).

In the case of the Deaf, both kinds of technological interventions have linguistic and social ramifications. External hearing aids have limited applications for those individuals who have little-to-no residual hearing<sup>3</sup> as they act in tandem with the person's physiological capabilities. For those with some residual hearing, hearing aids don't always provide the full spectrum of sounds that are used for human speech making natural acquisition of spoken language difficult. Cochlear and bone-conduction implants do not, as yet, provide access to the full range of human speech sounds. Thus, no matter which technology is used, acquiring spoken language generally necessitates extensive audiological therapy and leaves the person dependent on the technology for communication.

The issues that arise from these technological interventions straddle both the linguistic and cultural domains. Interventions like hearing aids express the societal bias towards spoken

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<sup>3</sup> *Residual hearing* itself is a construction of the deficit model but, at the same time, has a varied expression in the Deaf community.

language and reproduce the deficit views of deafness. With the current trend of implanting cochlear devices in infants, this viewpoint is pushed even further by actually physically removing the marker as a means of allowing, or forcing, them to conform more closely to the ideal. Furthermore, interventions, in the case of infants, removes all possibility of choice for those humans. This act can be likened to altering a person's facial features or skin colour to make them appear more Caucasian. Although these devices were and are mainly used in the spirit of assisting d/Deaf people, their use legitimizes the larger society's view of deafness as a marker of disability rather than community. This can be seen all the more clearly in regards to the Canadian Citizenship waivers that are discussed in the later Citizenship and sign language section.

Sign-coded systems, spoken languages expressed by mapping each morpheme to a gesture for use in educational environments, are another intervention used to encourage compliance with social ideals. This has repercussions beyond simple communication as “in schools..., the variety of language deemed legitimate... [is the] settlers' language” (Kubota, 2015, p. 9): Sign-coded systems make sign-based communication subservient to the structure and ideology of spoken language, ignoring the natural grammars of sign languages and their use of space to represent meaning. Despite the use of gestures, sign-coded systems legitimize a spoken language over a natural sign language (such as American Sign Language or British Sign Language) in the same way that hearing aids bias towards spoken language. For example, the meaning “You and I are friends.” in ASL would be expressed with three signs “YOU ME FRIEND” or two signs “TWO-OF-US FRIEND” (ASL is a zero-copula language) whereas in a sign-coded system it would take six “YOU AND I ARE FRIENDS” requiring the use of English grammatical ordering and the injection of new signs to represent the verb “to be” and the plurality of FRIEND. Just as with technological interventions, sign-coded systems are reproductions of a socially-constructed disability. These examples of educational interventions from a hearing perspective are just a small facet of the way the history of the Deaf in North America is intricately tied to the debate over educational methods for the d/Deaf, of which language was the crux.

**Deaf-ideological interventions.** Though sign-language-based education addresses many of the issues raised in other educational approaches, there is a caveat; while learning ASL is useful for membership in the Deaf community and as medium-of-instruction in signing classrooms, English reading and writing must also be learned at a high level (Akamatsu & Cole,

2000) (see the English as a Second Language and Deaf learners). It is this necessity of having skill with multiple languages that has been the impetus for bi-lingual/bi-cultural (bi/bi) education gaining favour in Deaf education.

If sign – either formal or familial – is the first language of the Deaf, then the ideal way for Deaf students to be exposed to and learn English is as English as a Foreign Language students. However, since Deaf students, no matter where they live, can never truly experience the immersion environment that other English as a Second Language students do, their exposure must be through written texts using ASL as the medium of instruction. This requires their English teacher to be highly fluent both in ASL and English reading and writing as well as being aware of the contextual meaning and purpose of the texts used. This approach shares aspects of both English as a Second Language and English as a Foreign Language teaching and is supported by a study of six deaf children by Suzuki & Notoya (1984) who write:

- (1) Acquisition of written language is not dependant on oral language;
- (2) Written language teaching can be initiated at about one year of age; and
- (3) Written language is easier to learn than oral language. (p. 10)

In this practice, any authentic text is useful as long as it is appropriate for the age of the students. The teacher acts as both language instructor and communicative bridge between the texts and the students. Through the teacher, students have access to the full meaning and purpose of the texts and can be reasonably expected to perform reading and writing tasks at the same level as their hearing peers. At the core of this model is the assumption that d/Deaf students should, from the very start, be considered part of the Deaf community and encouraged to explore both sign language and the multifaceted culture of Deaf people.

The bi/bi educational model founded on this view is an attempt to grant d/Deaf students as much access as possible to both languages and communities, allowing them to straddle the boundary between groups and languages. It takes the stance that, for any Deaf person to have access to all the opportunities and services available to members of the hearing majority, they must be able to move as freely as possible in both groups and communicate as well as possible in both languages. Unlike other methods, bi/bi education's goal is fostering the attitude that English and ASL are different but equal, both serving important communicative and social functions for the Deaf. In anglophone societies, it considers American Sign Language to be the natural language of any d/Deaf person: crucial for personal, social, cognitive, linguistic, and cultural

development. English's role is for clear communication with those who cannot sign and for educational and employment mobility. This linguistic balancing act is also required of d/Deaf newcomers and points to a key aspect of this research, the relationship between language and citizenship, which is touched on in the next section.

**Citizenship and sign language.** Arguably, one of the main purposes of providing English as a Second Language programmes to newcomers is to allow for equitable access to society, employment, and as an inroad to citizenship. Though full societal and financial access are still debatable for d/Deaf newcomers, recent changes in regards to the language requirements for citizenship suggests a more inclusive view of the Deaf and sign languages. These changes allow Deaf people, who can respond to a citizenship officer's questions by writing in English or French or by using ASL or Quebec Sign Language to apply for citizenship (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2014, Language – paragraph 5(1)(d) section). In “relaxing” the language requirements for citizenship, the ideal of citizenship is reimagined as either independent of the official languages or, perhaps, as more inclusive to American Sign Language and Quebec Sign Language. Conversely, these choices, may be an indication of the continued conflating of American Sign Language with English and Quebec Sign Language with French, which are four distinct languages that influence each other but are not the same. In either case, there is an overlapping and contradictory change:

Applicants who are deaf and can provide one of the upfront proofs of language ability for citizenship are instructed to do so on the application form. However, if they are prevented from submitting such evidence, they can self-identify on the application form and must provide other supporting documents to assist decision makers in understanding the basis of their claim. Acceptable supporting evidence is an audiogram issued by a Canadian audiologist, with a letter issued by the same audiologist attesting that the individual is deaf and has severe to profound hearing loss, with little or no residual hearing, including an explanation as to whether, and to what extent this impacts their ability to listen and/or speak. (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2014, Language – paragraph 5(1)(d) section)

This section is listed under the larger heading “Ministerial discretion to waive some of the requirements for a grant of citizenship on compassionate grounds“ (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2014). This notion of compassion is mentioned a number of times throughout the policy

document. Just as with the deficit-model interventions discussed previously, the motives behind these compassionate waivers are good but, by conflating the impairment with the people, they maintain the medical view. Here two modes of thinking about the Deaf collide; the medical and critical models. These models, hinted at in earlier sections, are explored in greater detail in the Models of Disability section of the Framework and form the foundations of the competing discourses that are analyzed and discussed throughout the rest of the thesis. In the following section, I explain the context specific to my research and the questions I explored through the data and discussions.

### **Framework**

The framework is divided into three main sections. The first focuses on the notion of ideology and how it relates to identity construction and perception. The second focuses on discourse, specifically how it overlaps with, and expresses, ideology. The third expands on the second in exploring discourses and their normalizing effects on identity, which I use as a starting point in creating a lens for examining some of the ideological aspects of the perception of difference. The last is more specific and is centered on the Deaf and examines issues of disability, minority group membership and rights, and introduces the terms physionormative, physionemic, and physionetic, which I use throughout the article.

### **Ideology**

In structuring my definition and use of ideology, I summarize the insightful explanation from Connolly (2017) which states that:

an ideology is an integrated set of beliefs about the social and political environment. It purports to tell us how the system is organized, which desired goals can be promoted, what agencies and channels can most effectively be employed to forward the goals in the given setting, and what the required action will cost various groups in the short and long run in terms of status, power, happiness, wealth, and so on... A system of accepted political beliefs, often needed to orient political activity in problematic situations, also tends to be organized in ways which protect the higher-level commitments of its supporters. (p. 2-3)

It is, in a sense, a model of how a social context is structured and functions. This, Connolly (2017) suggests, implies that differing ideologies will inspire different social and political actions. As well, ideologies that relate to issues of great import, he cautions, will likely contain

assumptions and beliefs ‘which have not been reliably tested but are in some degree “accepted on faith”’ (p. 2).

Ideologies are foundations for social and political decision-making which reflect the decision-makers’ own values and perspectives rather than a more complex understanding of the situation; “[i]n this sense, ideologies are “value-impregnated” systems of social and political belief... An ideology assimilates information in ways that preserve its basic integrity; it consists of a system of mutually reinforcing beliefs which appear plausible when viewed from within” (p. 2). The ideology is invisible and is only accessible through examination of discourse. Discourse, as the production of our ideologies, is examined in the next section.

### **Discourse**

Discourses are expressions of our ideologies. Ideologies are the foundations of our social models; mental tools that simplify complex social dynamics so that human beings can make reasonable decisions in response to social contexts.

In that sense, we are all both “beneficiaries” and “victims” of ideology, thanks to the fact that we [sign/]speak a language and live in culture. But we can—or at times are morally obligated to—interrogate our cultural models and replace them with others... (Gee, 2008, p. 29)

Gee (2008) differentiates between discourses, the varied ways that people communicate, and Discourses, which are ways we represent our identities and shape the identities of others through language choices. Discourses are the observable expressions of our social models in that “Discourses are ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, ... that are accepted as instantiations of particular identities (or “types of people”) by specific groups” (Gee, 2008, p. 3). From this point on, I will be using Discourse in Gee’s (2008) sense of a way of performing an identity, or identities, in a particular context. Where the previous section presented ideologies as internally-consistent sets of beliefs with a, potentially, unified set of supporters or adherents, an individual, in contrast, can be the intersection of a number of differing and contradictory Discourses. Gee (2008) suggests that:

[e]ach of us is a member of many Discourses, and each Discourse represents one of our ever-multiple identities. These Discourses need not, and often don’t, represent consistent and compatible values. There are conflicts among them, and each of us lives and breathes these conflicts as we act out our various Discourses. (p. 4)

In Gee's (2008) case, the focus is on words, both written and un-written, and how their associated meanings shape and are shaped by people using them in differing contexts. What's crucial is that these words are not arbitrarily chosen but are, instead, made to fit situations and change the shape of those situations in the making. Despite the complexity and variability of meaning, Discourse functions:

because in many cases and for many parts of their lives people have come to agreements about what words will mean in different situations. These are "conventions." We take them for granted until someone proposes to break them or we find areas or situations they don't really cover. We become party to these conventions by leading our lives with other people, by being parts of shared histories, groups, and institutions. (Gee, 2008, p. 14)

We use Discourses to communicate meaning and rely on the correct choice of Discourse to match context to carry that meaning to those who we wish to receive it. In plural contexts, a lack of the right Discourse, or poor Discoursal choices, can lead to misunderstanding, frustration, and emotional damage. Yet, even in familiar contexts we struggle with these decisions and our final choices:

are very often a compromise or "balancing act" between several different Discourses. One Discourse is not just influencing another, ... [we are] actually trying to be in two or more Discourses at the same time... We all pull off such matters quite deftly at times, and at other times we "blow it". (Gee, 2008, p. 195).

To illustrate with an example pertinent to this research, take the phrase "English as a Second Language student". The meaning of the phrase is constructed on the foundation of the assumptions, views, and beliefs that make up the Discourses in which people use the term. An English as a Second Language student, conventionally, is a hearing and speaking person. Even now, as I write this argument, my dominant Discourse generates an image, a "story" if you will, of an aural classroom. This description is an example of a normalizing hearing Discourse. When we have an English as a Second Language student who can't hear or speak, the convention, the constructed story, is upset. When policy, experience, and curriculum does not provide for this difference in meaning, for a story of this kind, we struggle to adapt, to redefine, to make normal. Suddenly, we feel incompetent in our jobs. We don't even know where to look for solutions.

This perspective on how we communicate and how Discourse affects and is affected by our beliefs, thoughts, and feelings is a linchpin to understanding how Discourses related to

power. Power is exerted “not by right but by technique, not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control” (Foucault, 1978, p. 89). Within this societal structure, “people are judged not by the intrinsic rightness or wrongness of their acts, but by where their behaviors place them on a normalized scale that compares them to others” (Moon, 2011, p. 77). The next section’s discussion of how Hearing Discourses normalize a particular worldview is an example of how Discourse and power interacts.

### **Hearing Discourses and Normalization**

Multiple Discourses, overlapping not only within an individual but also between people while they are interacting, create a nexus of stories that are used to explain the world, create expectation, and negotiate meaning. Adichie (2009) discusses the danger of a single story as she explores her own skewed perspectives and those of others. The notion of “one story” isn’t literal, there are always many stories, but it is illustrative of one set of ideas strongly superseding all others. Growing up in Nigeria, she was the “recipient” of a British education. She learned British English and read British books. The stories she wrote then all had protagonists that matched the British ideal but were dissimilar to herself; she only had one story. It was only when she grew older, when she encountered the works of African writers, that she could see herself in the literature.

#### **At The Desk – Part 1**

During my B.A., one of my ASL teachers misplaced his mobile phone and I joined them in the search. At one point, they approached the counter of the university’s lost and found and tried to ask the person if their phone had been left there but struggled as they would normally type on their phone when they needed to communicate with someone who couldn’t sign.

When she attended university, Adichie’s roommate asked to listen to her “tribal” music and was surprised when she put on a contemporary North American performer; her roommate only had one story. Later, when she wrote for her teachers, she was accused of writing “inauthentic” African characters, because they weren’t depicted as starving or poor; her teachers only had one story.

When the person in *At The Desk* couldn’t conceive of communicating in any way other than speaking, they were playing out a story; their one story. A more apt description would be “living out” their story, one they had learned through repetition. Similarly, in Gee’s (2008) Discoursal balancing act, people are both the producers and victims of their Discourses. This

same rationale can be reasonably applied to the languages, even the language modalities, of the Discourses themselves. So entrenched was the desk-worker in their socially-reinforced mentality, and so shocked by the unfamiliarity of the encounter, that they were unable to think of communicative possibilities outside of their lived story.

As we critique the world, we must also be empathetic to the subject being critiqued. As we can rarely know the full complex depth of a subject's personal stories, we must temper our judgements with understanding. The desk-worker's shock at the unfamiliarity of a Deaf person has a two-fold cause. First, the worker's life is likely comprised, primarily, of communication in an aural modality: even when interacting with immigrants and international students, even when

### **At The Desk – Part 2**

I watched as this person, my teacher, who I respected, who, during the day, worked in a respectable position in the government, who knew more languages than I did, turned to me with a look of awful pleading because the person behind the counter couldn't adapt, couldn't shift out of their aural world enough to grab a piece of paper and write something down so that the Deaf person in front of them could communicate. Full-time civil servant, part-time university language teacher, and they had to look to me, a student, to intervene on their behalf.

communication breaks down, the basic assumption of communicating through mouth and ear is maintained. Second, and here we must look to ideas about normalizing judgement, the worker was reacting based on an implicit standard used to make judgements of others. Normalizing judgement, Moon (2011) contends, "happens through binary oppositions, including normal/abnormal, abled/disabled, 'body/soul, flesh/spirit, [and] instinct/reason' (Foucault, 1977, p. 78)" (p. 77). This encounter normalized the Deaf teacher as abnormal or disabled.

The experience took the worker "off-script", as it were, and they were left dangling without a means of responding to the new communicative context. This isn't the fault of the worker. Instead, it is one example of the way power structures are created and maintained through social Discourses that reinforce normalizing judgements (Moon, 2011).

Moon's (2011) study, however, argues that these basic assumptions are far too simplistic and ignore both the social context of the social events and the sheer complexity of individuals within the spectrum of their culture's set of behavioural norms. It could be suggested that misconceptions of groups are caused not only by societal Discourses but also by a lack of

personal exposure on the part of the individuals involved; experience can bring a greater appreciation for the gamut of individual identities.

These same preconceived notions could be said to exist within hearing societies. The Discourses —the modality of Discourses, as well— embed normative assumptions regarding how people communicate (i.e., they use their mouths and ears). Hearing society expresses these normative views both explicitly and implicitly. By explicitly subdividing citizens into binary groupings of abled/disabled and hearing/deaf and then conflating the terms, abled/hearing and disabled/deaf, the concepts become ideologically synonymous. This labelling ignores the role social context plays in the significance of the labels themselves; while interacting with other members of the Deaf community, Deaf people are in no way disadvantaged, it's only when they are held against the expectations of the hearing majority that a difference presents itself and is constructed as disability. Built on these, often unexamined, ideological foundations, social Discourses also express these beliefs at the subconscious or implicit level. Idioms, “falling on deaf ears”, for example, are embedded with social beliefs but also, through their repeated and unexamined use, re-embed those beliefs in societal Discourses, and so the minds of individuals (see Bath, 2012). Our Discourses are the medium of a cyclical and self-creating system of worldviews; our societal “story”.

Just as Adichie's (2009) childhood imaginings produced characters restrained by the framework of her societal Discourses, so too is our daily life ruled by the overlapping imagined worlds described and delineated by our Discourses. Rizvi (2000) places imagination at the centre of these social structures:

Imagination is the attempt to provide coherence between ideas and action, to provide a basis for the content of relationships and the creation of categories with which to understand the world around us. What is imagined defines what we regard as normal. (as cited in Kanu, 2003, p. 68)

As will be described in the next section, part of the struggle for the Deaf community is gaining recognition as a separate group and having a separate identity, a vision of the world which conflicts with the dominant story or Discourse of them as a group of disabled members of the recognised cultural group that they were born to. The societal story, as described in this section, defines everyone caught in its web in simple and manageable terms that puts little onus of effort on its hearing members. To imagine a new story, the Discourses our society uses to discuss

physical norms and cultural groups must be re-examined and redefined. These issues are laid out in detail in the next sections and are the foundation of my particular use of *physionormativity*.

### **The Deaf**

This section outlines the main perspectives on the Deaf community — namely, the notions of disability and culture— and how they interact to create some of the tensions of the Deaf context. The context in which the Deaf community exists is a complex intersection of social definitions and forces Gee (2000) suggests a difference between an individual possessing a physical aspect and them being thought to have an identity tied to that physical aspect. The physical aspect can only be part of an identity when it is constructed, either by the individual or others, in such a way that it is thought to be part of what kind of person the individual is. Gee (2000) illustrates with a farcical but pertinent analogy:

Thanks to "nature," I have a spleen, but this (at least, for now) does not constitute anything meaningful, for me or others, in terms of my being a certain kind of person.

Thus, ... [physical aspects] must always gain their force as identities through the work of institutions, Discourse and dialogue, or affinity groups, that is, the very forces that constitute our other perspectives on identity. (p. 102)

That many Deaf people possess a physical aspect that differentiates them from others is not in argument. However, what kind of identity is constructed from that aspect, what kind of person they are imagined to be, is deeply contested. It is on this debate that this section focuses, beginning with the different models of disability.

**Models of disability.** The idea of disability has been argued from many different perspectives. Here, only four will be used: the medical, rights, social, and critical models. The *medical model* describes disability as “a medical issue, a problem emerging from deviant anatomy... Under this framework, disability is based in the body, normal is constructed as ideal, disabled people are dependant” (Withers, 2012, p. 31). This position places “the fate of disabled people solely in the hands of professional experts, particularly doctors, rehabilitation and social care staff” (Barnes, Mercer, & Shakespeare, 1999, p. 67).

The *rights model* is tied to human and citizenship rights and is focused on making sure that people labeled as disabled have equal access to rights. These are broken into two categories: negative and positive rights. *Negative rights* cover “equality of treatment” whereas *positive rights* are those “that require special treatment... rights [that] are associated with accessibility

and accommodations” (Withers, 2012, p. 82). The rights model focuses on people, rather than the body, and describes people labeled as disabled as minority groups entitled to the protections and treatment of any other minority in society. It “is a vitally important infrastructure for addressing the discrimination faced by disabled people... [and] establishes a framework of relationships in which employers and public institutions have a responsibility to facilitate the social integration of people with disabilities” (Withers, 2012, p. 82).

The *social model* frames disability as a social construct and thus disabled people are not disabled by their impairment, but by the barriers they face in a society (Oliver, 2013, p. 1024). Disability is “something imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society” (Oliver, 1996, p. 33). Withers (2012) elaborates:

Under the social model, disability is the oppression that people with impairments face. A common illustration of this point is if your impairment is not having legs, your disability is that you can’t get in a building because there is a flight of stairs. (p. 86)

There is an assumption implicit in the medical model, and unaddressed by the rights and social models, that all people wish to fit the medical definition of normality. In critique of this, the *critical model* of disability suggests the possibility of the positive co-existence of impairment and disability in one’s experience (Oliver, 2013, p. 1025). Withers (2012) expands:

People like Christopher Reeve and Rick Hansen are given extensive media coverage in their quest for the cure. However, those disabled people who do not want a cure and are happy with their bodies are ignored. Many disabled people like all or part of the things that earn them disabled labels, and many disabled people are proud to be so and would not choose to change. Carol Gill (1994: 46), a disabled psychologist, wrote of her frustration with non-disabled people’s “need for us to be non-disabled” and with people who “either wish I could be normal or who need to see my disability as an unimportant part of me.” (p.47)

The medical model focuses purely on the body and a need to make it conform to an ideal. The rights model, though important to maintaining individual rights, doesn’t address the individual directly, rather addressing them only as part of a minority group. The social model is focused entirely on the individual in society but denies the notion of disability as a part of positive identity, instead creating an antagonistic relationship between the individual and the society

around them. It is in the critical model that these tensions can overlap and coexist. The critical model doesn't deny impairment —nor does it remove the responsibility of societal Discourses in the creation and maintenance of the medicalized perspective of disability— rather, it allows for these forces to also exist in the individual as part of a positive identity, creating a Discourse between the individual and society. It is within the critical model that I frame my descriptions of the Deaf community and the terms physionormativity, physionemic, and physionetic as defined in the next section.

**The Deaf as a minority.** Language is fundamental, not only because it is one of the first human activities we experience as individuals but also because all human institutions are built upon it (Reagan, 2010). Nations, societies, cultures, and communities are configurations of individuals with complexly interwoven social structures held together by the threads of language. As Rampton et al. (2004) put it, “language and the social world are mutually shaping” (p. 2).

The Deaf are a cultural and linguistic group in that they have their own “system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours, and artifacts that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning” (Bates & Plog, 1990, as cited in Holcomb, 2013, p. 16) in Deaf families or through Deaf cultural mediums. Though they share many cultural attributes with the hearing members of the broader community, they are separate. Ladd (2003) explains that in assessments of societies where most members used sign language in day-to-day interactions, sign language continued to be used even when no Deaf people were present: “[t]here is little suggestion that Deaf people in those societies gather separately from the hearing people and produce their own culture” (Ladd, 2003, p. 254). This suggests that, for a distinct Deaf culture to arise, there must be places in society that deaf (in the purely audiological sense) people can't or are prevented from accessing. These “linguistic vacuum[s]” (p. 254) supersede other notions of ethnicity with these societies. These linguistic vacuums occur because the Deaf can't conform to the constructed societal norms of using oral language. Marginalized by this norm, they find themselves separate, in a vacuum. This is the effect of normalizing hearing Discourses (as seen in the previous section).

Importantly, this raises issues with how majority groups (the hearing) define and engage with minority cultures (the Deaf) with which they coexist and how these definitions and interactions can lead to damaging, but possibly invisible, prejudices. The Deaf is an intersectional group; they are a culture, so they are vulnerable to racism, and they are, often,

differently-abled, so they are vulnerable to ableism. To reflect this, Deaf issues must be explored from both perspectives. For example:

The way racisms [prejudices] work as exclusions is that people who are included do not need to engage with the meanings, experiences and life challenges of the excluded. We are insulated from the human consequences of racism, even as people around us live it.

This perpetuates racisms, even if we did not create them. (Stanley, 2017, slide 59)

Stanley's (2017) suggestion that those in the majority aren't required to engage with minority experiences plays out in the Deaf context:

Most European and North American Deaf communities in the past 200 years can be described as existing ... [in nations where] hearing status defines access to society, with consequently lower socioeconomic status and educational achievement of deaf people; the rate of marriage between deaf people is high; and the hearing community has little or no awareness of the Deaf community. (Woll and Ladd, 2011, p. 161)

Unlike other linguistic minorities in Canada –Ojibwe, Cantonese, or German, for example–, the Deaf receive little political or social recognition. This can be seen in the lack of support for the creation of Deaf community associations, language classes, and mentions within multicultural or linguistic policy documents. Though the inclusion of sign languages as a first language in the Canadian census (Statistics Canada, 2016) suggests some de jure recognition of sign language as part of Canada's multilingual tapestry, it doesn't translate to consistent de facto recognition "on the ground" (see CBC News, 2012). Though there is a need to discuss Deaf issues from both racial and ableist perspectives, it is difficult to use the familiar notion of racisms to discuss societal prejudices towards the Deaf as they do not, as a group, fit easily into traditional notions of race and focusing solely on ableism would unjustly ignore the cultural issues. Instead, this research proposes a more applicable umbrella term, physionormativity, as detailed in the next section.

**Critical Physionormativity.** In focusing on the construction of racism, Martinot (2010) used the term *tags* which he primarily associated with physical appearances. In a similar fashion, Gee's (2000) approach of separating physical aspects from the identities associated with them recognizes the physical reality of a person as separate from a society's response to it. It is only through interaction between these physical realities and hegemonic identity constructions that they take on any societal value, for good or ill. With the exception of medical interventions (as

discussed in the Deficit model interventions section of the Literature Review) and the use of sign language, associations with the Deaf culture are generally invisible. Despite this, prejudices exist against them and so I propose the term *physionormativity* as an access point to discuss these prejudices. This section is labeled Critical Physionormativity because physionormativity itself is merely a description of a perspective lacking a stance. Through the rest of the thesis, I will be using physionormativity through a critical lens, supported by critical discourse analysis, as a means of encouraging social change through conscientization (Freire, 1970). Conscientization requires cultural action through the creation of a dialogue, between those with greater power and those who have less, that is resolved only when the power dynamic has been dissolved entirely and a new order replaces the old. The new order, however, can't be a mirroring of the old with a new balance of power but must instead be one where the issue of power is no longer relevant.

Physionormativity is demonstrated most strongly in socially-constructed concepts of disability (see Models of disability above), where the hegemonic group reaffirms the normalcy of its discursively-constructed identity through a performance of social and structural disablement of the other. I argue that the majority model of the Deaf is just such a physionormative view. This view disables the Deaf by relating their physiological difference to a social expectation so hegemonic it is, essentially, nameless in the broader society:

Since both Deaf and hearing people are governed by the social constructions of the other, Deaf people's models of themselves and hearing people's models of Deaf people are different (Basso 1979). While Deaf people have a model of themselves (DEAF in ASL) and a concept of hearing people (HEARING in ASL), hearing people have a model of Deaf people ("deaf" in English) and a model of themselves (no name in English), and none of these four models are the same. It is no wonder that in public Discourse between Deaf and hearing people, there is a constant convergence and divergence of these four models of self and other. (Humphries, 2004, p. 32)

Using the previous definition of physionormativity as a lens to examine the case of the Deaf in North America, we see that labels—which ones are used, legitimized, and in which contexts—are a key access point to understanding. Physionormative views are common to any physiological difference, however, they are often exaggerated in the case of the Deaf, as Humphries (2004) points out, in that the hearing hegemony's self-legitimization is buried so

deeply that they lack a self-referential label. With the Deaf, there is only a label for the other, none for the ideal that they are judged by.

This invisible label for the ideal has a direct effect on matters concerning the acknowledgment and legitimization of Deaf culture. Where other linguistic groups are often, at least, accepted as also cultural or ethnic communities, the Deaf as a cultural group or even a separate community is not as readily accepted by the hearing populace, more often being labeled as “disabled” or “special-needs” –physionormative bias against the d/Deaf is seen most strongly in the history of interventions utilized to “assist” d/Deaf people (see the Interventions section in the Literature Review). As with inclusion in the census (see The Deaf as a minority section), linguistic recognition is a first step not an end goal. Historically, Canadians from non-English linguistic or cultural backgrounds have had to struggle to be granted rights to maintain their cultures and languages, but not their right to call themselves a cultural group, the very idea denied the Deaf community; the right to self-definition, not even in terms of a linguistic group. The struggle for cultural autonomy takes place against a backdrop of what Kubota (2015) describes as “Canadian state-sanctioned multiculturalism” (p. 9) which “mainly functions to construct national characteristics of tolerance and accepting dispositions” (p. 9) but, at the same time, “state policies and popular practices [produce] certain subjects as exalted..., others as marked for physical and cultural extinction or utter marginalization..., and yet others for perpetual estrangement or conditional inclusion as supplicants” (Thobani, 2007, p. 6). Canadian multiculturalism obfuscates inequities behind illusions of inclusion, which demands that researchers “critically engage in open discussion on racial and other forms of inequalities that exist in our social system” (Kubota, 2015, p. 9) and it is through this lens that this research examines Deaf issues in Ontario English as a Second Language programming.

***Physionetic & physionemic.*** Borrowing from linguistics, Pike (1967) developed the anthropological terms *etic* and *emic*. He proposed that there were no objective descriptions of behaviour, only external (*etic*) subjective descriptions and internal (*emic*) subjective descriptions. *Etic* descriptions “are “alien” in view” and “are obtainable early in analysis with partial information” (p. 38) whereas *emic* descriptions “require a knowledge of the total system” and “represent to us the view of one familiar with the system and who knows how to function within it” (p. 38). In this same vein, I will be using *physionetic* as a label for views and behaviours that

belong to those who come from the hegemonic physionormative Discourses and *physionemic* for those which come from experiences within those proscribed by the physionetic majority model.

### **Methodology**

As implied by the introduction to this thesis, my goal is to enact social change by fostering greater understanding of the Deaf community by the hearing majority. Greater understanding requires critical examination and so critical tools. To create this toolset, I took inspiration from critical scholars in the areas of language policy and planning and critical Discourse analysis. Importantly, McCarty (2004) views language policies as constructs of ideology in that they “both reflect and (re)produce the distribution of power within the larger society” (p. 72). These ideologies, writes McCarty, are perpetuated through a “sociocultural process: that is, as modes of human interaction, negotiation, and production mediated by relations of power” (p. 72). The later article section will make clear how important this idea of ideologies is to my research. Of particular importance are the ways that Discourse reflect and promote “the ‘normalization’ of ideology” (Hart, 2014, p. 3). These ideologies must be exposed before they can be examined critically and I selected critical Discourse analysis (CDA) as a means to do so.

Discourse analysis is a varied field that, though primarily based on linguistics, draws from several different disciplines. van Dijk (1985) suggests that we should not be surprised by this since “it involves all the levels and methods of analysis of language, cognition, interaction, society, and culture... [as] Discourse itself is a manifestation of all these dimensions of society” (p. 10). This assumption is fundamental to CDA as “Discourse is instrumental in the construction of society” (Hart, 2014, p. 3) and in the distribution of power within societies, thus CDA “aims at illuminating the role that language plays in creating and sustaining those social relations. Ultimately, CDA aims at achieving social change” (Hart, 2014, p. 2). Since my goal is transformative research, I have chosen to blend the socio-cognitive model with critical linguistics. The socio-cognitive model, developed by van Dijk, posits a social cognition; a mental system that mediates between social and textual structures that, van Dijk suggests, must exist in order to explain how and why texts and social structures can be mutually-shaping (Hart, 2010, p. 15). This model presupposes that:

[d]iscourse structures and social structures are of a different nature, and can only be related through the mental representations of language users as individuals and as social members. Thus, social interaction, social situations and social structures can only influence text and talk[/sign] through people's interpretations of such social environments. And conversely, discourse can only influence social interaction and social structures through the same cognitive interface of mental models, knowledge, attitudes and ideologies. (van Dijk, 2015, p. 64)

Synergistically, critical linguistics is primarily focused on representations; “[i]t insists that all representation is mediated, moulded by the values ingrained in the speaker and the medium of expression itself” (Hart, 2014, p. 10). Both the idea of social cognition and the mediation of representation emerge in the article.

The participants, data sources, coding, and analysis are covered in detail in the article section but it's important to note here that many different themes emerged from the coding.

These include:

- Accountability: access to information by, and requirement of administration to provide honest reports to, stakeholders
- Rights: relating to personhood, individual, and community privileges
- Grouping of People: sectioning of a population, either by themselves or an external agent, based on a "unique" aspect of the population
- Language Promotion: access to, teaching of, use of, education in, and authorizing of specific languages or dialects
- Culture: shared beliefs, values, and practices by a community as well as varying senses of membership in that community
- Understanding: cross-cultural, cross-linguistic, cross-physical, and cross-ideological empathy
- Barriers: social, physical, and ideological obstructions to equitable access

Despite the numerous avenues of exploration available as shown above, the constraints of the article required me to limit my focus on a small area. As such, I selected an examination of the tensions between societal and community beliefs about the Deaf which derive from the culture, understanding, and barriers themes.

The specific focus of my research and the small number of actors in the field poses a number of difficulties. First, the original research design called for three trajectories of actors; a hearing administrator of Deaf programming, a Deaf administrator of Deaf programming, and a language and placement agent. These participants would represent differing perspectives and provide conceptual in-roads to a greater understanding of the educational context being explored.

Unfortunately, though a small summary was provided by email, I did not gain access to anyone at a local assessment and placement centre due to confidentiality issues raised by the centre. However, I was told that the assessment centre does not assess signing ability, only reading and writing ability of Deaf learners. The confidential nature of language assessment is a topic worth exploring in further research.

Second, the availability of participants is limited and, when one can't or won't participate, as was the case with the members of the language assessment and placement group, it severely hampers the available data. For those who did participate, the small cross-section makes concealing the identities of the participants problematic. Despite this, everything that could be done to ensure the highest level of anonymity possible was done. In recognition of these difficulties, and in deference to the reputations and livelihoods of the participants, any information that could cause them professional problems has been excluded from the final work. In addition, the participants were given the opportunity to review their transcripts and highlight any sections they wished to be excluded from the research or not identified as originating from any particular participant. Unfortunately, one of the participants did not respond to my repeated attempts to gain their confirmation of their transcript or their answers to the follow-up questions. The results of these choices and processes are shown in the article itself, which comprises all of the next section of this monograph.

**Article****Hands Over Our Ears: Tensions In The Liminal Spaces  
Concerning ESL Education For Deaf Newcomers To Canada***Ari Black*

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*Cet article présente les résultats d'une étude examinant les discours produits par les documents de politiques et les administrateurs concernant les programmes d'anglais langue seconde pour les nouveaux arrivants sourds du Canada. L'analyse du discours est utilisée pour examiner des documents fédéraux, provinciaux et d'un conseil scolaire, ainsi que des entretiens avec deux participantes, l'une sourd et l'autre entendante. Toutes deux administrent des programmes d'anglais langue seconde pour les nouveaux arrivants sourds. Les résultats suggèrent que les documents de politiques et les participantes sont dans un espace liminal créé par les tensions entre le discours majoritaire et le discours de la communauté sourde. Trois nouveaux termes, physionormativité, physionétique et physionémique, sont créés pour discuter de ces tensions. Des explications de ces tensions et de la manière dont elles sont exprimées à travers les discours des documents et des participantes sont fournies.*

*This study investigates the Discourses produced by policy documents and administrators relating to ESL programmes for Deaf newcomers to Canada. Discourse Analysis is used to examine federal, provincial, and schoolboard documents as well as participant interviews. There were two participants, one Deaf and one hearing, who both administer ESL programmes for Deaf students. The findings suggest that both the policy documents and the participants exist in a liminal space created by tensions between the majority Discourse and the Deaf community Discourse. Three new terms, physionormativity, physionetic, and physionemic are coined to discuss these tensions. Explanations for these tensions and how they are expressed through the various Discourses of the documents and participants are provided.*

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**KEYWORDS:** ESL, Deaf, American Sign Language, Ideology, Policy

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Dehumanization, which marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, is a *distortion* of the vocation of becoming more fully human.

- *Paulo Freire*

The focus of this study is the production of Discourses, and the tensions created by antagonistic Discourses, by policy documents and administrators involved with education for d/Deaf immigrants. These agents play a crucial role in the education of d/Deaf immigrants in that, as Power and Leigh (2011) write, “the real learning experiences are not found in the intended curriculum but in the attitudes and actions of professionals that are consistent with their particular perspective on deafness” (p. 41) which requires that “the dominant ideologies of both programs and individuals within those programs ... be considered as part of a formal process of analysis” (p. 41). Thus, this research is intended to play a part in that “formal process of analysis” by engaging in questioning and discussion of a specific Deaf context and the actors involved with it.

This article explores the ideologies which underlie administrative decisions with regards to language education programming for adult d/Deaf immigrants. To address this, it looks at how federal and provincial policy documents play a part in creating the context in which the perspectives of ESL administrators are formed and expressed. These perspectives are also influenced the administrators’ knowledge about and experiences of the Deaf community. It also draws from my own experiences as an instructor in an ASL-based English as a Second Language class in a primarily-hearing school system with a small Deaf staff and other relevant anecdotes which are shown in story boxes throughout the article. It is my hope that this analysis will add to our understanding of the link between policy and practice, as well as, bringing to the field a view that will foster understanding and a desire to bridge communicative and cultural barriers.

In the next sections, I provide necessary background information and briefly explore the literature associated with the issues, consider some of the ways the Deaf are constructed in Canadian policy, and how administrators of ESL programming for Deaf newcomers perceive the context in which they work and their actions within it.

### **Background and Literature**

*Deaf Community, Language, and Barriers*

The multifaceted context of the Deaf makes their unique community difficult to describe in simple terms and is beyond the scope of this article (see Black, 2019). Instead, this section will focus on the importance of language to the Deaf and how historical language choices have represented both solutions and barriers, both in Canada and elsewhere.

Language is fundamental, not only because it is one of the first human activities we experience as individuals but also because all human institutions are built upon it (Reagan, 2010). Nations, societies, cultures, and communities are configurations of individuals with complexly interwoven social structures held together by the threads of language. As Rampton et al. (2004) put it, “language and the social world are mutually shaping”.

From a hearing normative perspective, explored in a later section, physiology may play a fundamental part in separating Deaf individuals from the hearing majority. In Deaf communities, however, the social takes precedence; some members of the Deaf community may have only minor hearing loss whereas some people with profound hearing loss may not identify with the community at all (Woll and Ladd, 2011). It’s not uncommon for hearing children of Deaf parents, for example, to sign fluently and be considered members of the Deaf community. Though the physiological aspect plays a role, self-identification and acceptance by other community members is a key aspect of membership in the Deaf community and that identification and acceptance is constructed strongly through the unique languages used by Deaf groups:

Deaf social and cultural lives [are] ... underpinned and driven by forms of communication that differ from those of the majority society. The centrality of these languages is reflected not only in the social and political organization of these communities, but in their strong cultural tradition of sign-play, jokes, storytelling, and poetry. In the most practical sense, then, the central fact of Deaf community membership is seen as linguistic membership. (Woll & Ladd, 2011, p. 162)

As a hearing signer, my experience of the Deaf community is mediated through my own conflicting Discourses. I have grown up within the majority hearing context and so have biases towards spoken language and embedded concepts of hearing being good and non-hearing being bad. At the same time, through my studies of ASL and my exposure to Deaf culture and the Deaf community, those hearing Discourses have been, and continue to be, challenged by my new

experiences and understand of the Deaf as a group constructed as physically-handicapped by normative Discourses. For the most part, my experience of the Deaf Discourse is that of signing being good and non-signing being bad and hearing and non-hearing being, generally, unimportant. As an activist researcher, my challenge is to balance and critically-assess my conflicting Discourses. Through this continuing process, I have come to understand that, as a non-ethnic, but cultural and linguistic group, the Deaf community struggles for recognition within Discourses which shape Canada as a bilingual and multicultural society. Given this understanding, the tension between integration and inclusion became a foundational concept on which I build this article.

### *Integration and Inclusion*

The distinction between integration and inclusion is especially important in regards to conflicts in social dynamics and perspectives between the majority group (the hegemonic viewpoint) and minority groups. My uses of integration and inclusion in this article are derived from Dalley (2019). *Integration* is a recognition—sometimes a celebration—of and a respect for the differences between two groups. They are held apart; two separate spaces that may interact but remain distinct. These differences are maintained as a sign of respect but this maintenance may act to fossilize the differences and the seeming respect may, in turn, silence the power imbalance inscribed in the difference. *Inclusion*, on the other hand, is a change in the status quo where the hegemonic perspective shifts to include ideas and perspectives from other groups, thus forming a new common perspective. An overlapping and sometimes liminal space may exist, which includes both the majority and minority knowledge, makes fuzzy the boundaries that integration maintains so sharply. I find illustrative analogies helpful in understanding these kinds of concepts so I present the case of washroom signage as such an exemplar (as seen on the following page).



*Table 1 - Integrative vs. Inclusive*

In the table above, you can see three attempts to mark gender-neutral washrooms. The leftmost is an integrative approach; it clearly maintains the distinctions between the hegemonic perspective (male/female) and the Other, which is, itself, defined by reference points used by the majority. Here the washroom is marked for whOM and not whAT it's for. The rightmost does away with the concept of associating a washroom with gender completely; the hegemonic perspective has changed to include the worldviews of a minority and has been transformed by the inclusion. The middle represents a liminal, or changing, perspective; the concept of gender is still present but is not defined as starkly as in the integrative example and is used to present a more-inclusive view. This middle example, and its liminal quality, is very important to the rest of this article as both the policy documents and the participant interviews are analyzed as being in their own liminal, transitional, state.

The difficulty of inclusion vs integration occurs in many contexts where there is tension between a majority and a minority demanding recognition and equity. Newcomers to Canada can be seen as a diverse minority group, most often also members of a minority group organised around one language and one culture – Somali-Canadians, Mexican-Canadians –, who must learn the language of the majority in order to be included or granted Canadianness. In addition to learning the majority language, Deaf Canadians and newcomers are also a linguistic minority

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<sup>4</sup> Image retrieved from: <http://www.cbc.ca/beta/news/canada/ottawa/gender-neutral-washrooms-ottawa-high-school-1.3768914>

<sup>5</sup> Image retrieved from: <https://signaids.com/default/facility-signs/washroom-signs/all-gender-washroom-sign.html>

<sup>6</sup> Adapted from: <https://www.signmedia.ca/entro-develops-inclusive-washroom-signage/>

whose integration into society depends on the majority's willingness to accommodate their specific communicative circumstances. Indeed, if there was a surplus of ready employment that only required American Sign Language (ASL) available to the Deaf community in Canada or a thriving Deaf city where ASL was the primary language used, then their minority status would not be as much of an issue. Since this is not the case, Deaf citizens and newcomers alike are faced with the barriers created by the majority's assumption that everyone can and should speak. Acts of inclusion and integration are navigated through individual and group perspectives. How these perspectives are expressed and affect socio-dynamics is discussed in the next section.

### *Hearing Discourses and Normalization*

Multiple Discourses, overlapping not only between people while they are interacting but also within an individual, create a nexus of stories that are used to explain the world, create expectation, and negotiate meaning.

Adichie (2009) discusses the danger of a single story as she explores her own skewed perspectives and those of others.

The notion of "one story" isn't literal, there are always many stories, but it is illustrative of one set of ideas strongly superseding all others. Growing up in Nigeria, she was the "recipient" of a British education. She learned British

English and read British books. The stories she wrote then all had protagonists that matched the British ideal but were dissimilar to herself; she only had one story. It was only when she grew older, when she encountered the works of African writers, that she could see herself in the literature. When she attended university, Adichie's roommate asked to listen to her "tribal" music and was surprised when she put on a contemporary North American performer; her roommate only had one story. Later, when she wrote for her teachers, she was accused of writing "inauthentic" African characters, because they weren't depicted as starving or poor; her teachers only had one story. When the person in *At The Desk* couldn't conceive of communicating in any way other than speaking, they were playing out a story; their one story. A more apt description would be "living out" their story, one they had learned through repetition.

#### **At The Desk – Part 1**

During my B.A., one of my ASL teachers misplaced his mobile phone and I joined them in the search. At one point, they approached the counter of the university's lost and found and tried to ask the person if their phone had been left there but struggled as they would normally type on their phone when they needed to communicate with someone who couldn't sign.

Butler (1993), in discussing gender identities, suggests that they are constructed through socially-mandated repetitions of “gender Discourses”. People, in Butler’s (1993) view, are the result of their Discourses, not the source of them (as cited in Moon, 2011, p. 76). This same rationale can be reasonably applied to the languages, even the language modalities, of the Discourses themselves. So entrenched was the desk-worker in their socially-reinforced mentality, and so shocked by the unfamiliarity of the encounter, that they were unable to think of communicative possibilities outside of their lived story.

As we critique the world, we must also be empathetic to the subject being critiqued. We must temper our judgements with understanding. The desk-worker’s shock at the unfamiliarity of

### **At The Desk – Part 2**

I watched as this person, my teacher, who I respected, who, during the day, worked in a respectable position in the government, who knew more languages than I did, turned to me with a look of awful pleading because the person behind the counter couldn’t adapt, couldn’t shift out of their aural world enough to grab a piece of paper and write something down so that the Deaf person in front of them could communicate. Full-time civil servant, part-time university language teacher, and they had to look to me, a student, to intervene on their behalf.

a Deaf person has a two-fold cause. First, the worker’s life is likely comprised, primarily, of communication in an aural modality: even when interacting with immigrants and international students, even when communication breaks down, the basic assumption of communicating through mouth and ear is maintained. Second, and here we must look to ideas about normalizing judgement, the worker was reacting based on an implicit standard used to make judgements of others. Normalizing judgement, Moon (2011) contends, “happens through

binary oppositions, including normal/abnormal, abled/disabled, ‘body/soul, flesh/spirit, [and] instinct/reason’” (p. 77). The worker, in respect to themselves, normalized the Deaf teacher as abnormal or disabled. The experience took the worker “off-script”, as it were, and they were left dangling without a means of responding to the new communicative context.

This isn’t the fault of the worker. Instead, it is one example of the way power structures are created and maintained through social Discourses that reinforce normalizing judgements. Power is exerted “not by right but by technique, not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control” (Moon, 2011, p. 77). Within this societal structure, “people are

judged not by the intrinsic rightness or wrongness of their acts, but by where their behaviors place them on a normalized scale that compares them to others” (Moon, 2011, p. 77). Moon’s (2011) study, however, argues that these basic assumptions are far too simplistic and ignore both the social context of the social events and the sheer complexity of individuals within the spectrum of their culture’s set of behavioural norms. Thus, it could be suggested that, misconceptions of groups are caused not only by societal Discourses but also by a lack of personal exposure on the part of the individuals involved; experience can bring a greater appreciation for the gamut of individual identities.

These same preconceived notions could be said to exist within hearing societies. The Discourses —the modality of Discourses, as well— embed normative assumptions regarding how people communicate (i.e., they use their mouths and ears). Hearing society expresses these normative views both explicitly and implicitly. By explicitly subdividing citizens into binary groupings of abled/disabled and hearing/deaf and then conflating the terms, abled/hearing and disabled/deaf, the concepts become ideologically synonymous. This labelling ignores the role social context plays in the significance of the labels themselves; while interacting with other members of the Deaf community, Deaf people are in no way disadvantaged, it’s only when they are held against the expectations of the hearing majority that a difference presents itself and is constructed as disability. Built on these, often unexamined, ideological foundations, social Discourses also express these beliefs at the subconscious or implicit level. Idioms, “falling on deaf ears”, for example, are embedded with social beliefs but also, through their repeated and unexamined use, re-embed those beliefs in societal Discourses, and so the minds of individuals (see Bath, 2012). Our Discourses are the medium of a cyclical and self-creating system of worldviews; our societal “story”.

Just as Adichie’s (2009) childhood imaginings produced characters restrained by the framework of her societal Discourses, so too is our daily life ruled by the “imagined” world described and delineated by our Discourse. Rizvi (2000) places imagination at the centre of our social structures:

Imagination is the attempt to provide coherence between ideas and action, to provide a basis for the content of relationships and the creation of categories with which to understand the world around us. What is imagined defines what we regard as normal. (as cited in Kanu, 2003, p. 68)

The hearing societal story, with its normalization of certain communicative modalities and its disabling of others, defines everyone caught in its web in simple and manageable terms. These descriptions, as a likely unintended side effect, also put little onus of effort on those the story describes as hearing. To imagine a new story, the Discourses our society uses to discuss physical norms and minority groups must be re-examined and redefined. These issues are laid out in detail in the next sections and are the foundation of my particular use of *physionormativity*.

#### *Models of disability and physionormativity*

Alongside the construction of Deaf communities, as discussed previously, a parallel perspective has developed; that of deafness as a physical deficit which needs to be remedied to make the d/Deaf as physically alike to the hearing majority as possible. This viewpoint is expressed most clearly through the medical interventions created in response to deafness, such as hearing aids, cochlear implants, and bone-conduction implants. Their purpose is to utilize some part of a person's physiology to provide them with auditory input. The combination of the push to place d/Deaf students in predominantly hearing classrooms, rather than provide them with an exclusively sign-based education, and the disabling stance of the medical profession on hearing impairment had more than doubled the number of cochlear implantations in children and youth between 1999 and 2008 (Mitchell & Karchmer, 2011, p. 21). In the case of the Deaf, technological interventions have linguistic and social ramifications. Medical interventions express a societal bias towards spoken language and deficit views of hearing impairment. Although these devices were and are used in the spirit of assisting d/Deaf people, their use legitimizes the larger society's view of hearing impairment as a marker of disability. The notion of disability has many facets, which are explored further in Black (2019), for the sake of brevity, only two will be discussed here: the medical and critical models.

The *medical model* describes physical impairment as "a medical issue, a problem emerging from deviant anatomy... Under this framework, disability is based in the body, normal is constructed as ideal, disabled people are dependant" (Withers, 2012, p. 31). This position places "the fate of disabled people solely in the hands of professional experts, particularly doctors, rehabilitation and social care staff" (Barnes, Mercer, & Shakespeare, 1999, p. 67). There is an assumption implicit in the medical model; that all people wish to fit the medical definition of normality.

The *critical model* of disability suggests the possibility of the positive co-existence of impairment and disability in one's experience (Oliver, 2013, p. 1025). Withers (2012) expands: People like Christopher Reeve and Rick Hansen are given extensive media coverage in their quest for the cure. However, those disabled people who do not want a cure and are happy with their bodies are ignored. Many disabled people like all or part of the things that earn them disabled labels, and many disabled people are proud to be so and would not choose to change. Carol Gill (1994: 46), a disabled psychologist, wrote of her frustration with non-disabled people's "need for us to be non-disabled" and with people who "either wish I could be normal or who need to see my disability as an unimportant part of me." (p. 47)

The medical model focuses purely on the body and a need to make it conform to an ideal. Other models of disability (discussed in greater detail in Black, 2019) don't address the individual directly, rather, addressing them only as part of a minority group or focus entirely on the individual in society but deny the notion of disability as a part of positive identity, instead creating an antagonistic relationship between the individual and the society around them. It is in the critical model that these tensions can overlap and coexist. The critical model doesn't deny impairment —nor does it remove the responsibility of societal Discourses in the creation and maintenance of the medicalized perspective of disability— rather, it allows for these forces to also exist in the individual as part of a positive identity, creating a Discourse between the individual and society. It is on this critical model that I base my descriptions of the Deaf community and the term *physionormativity* as defined in the next sections.

#### *Critical Physionormativity*

Gee's (2000) approach of separating physical aspects from the identities associated with them recognizes the physical reality of a person as separate from society's response to it. It is only through interaction between these physical realities and hegemonic identity constructions that they take on any societal value, for good or ill. With the exception of medical interventions (discussed briefly in the previous section), which are not used by all Deaf people, and the use of sign language, associations with the Deaf community are, generally, invisible. Despite this, prejudices exist against them and so I propose the term *physionormativity* as an access point to discuss these prejudices. This section is labeled Critical Physionormativity because *physionormativity* itself is merely a description of a perspective lacking a stance. Through the

rest of the thesis, I will be using physionormativity through a critical lens, supported by critical discourse analysis, as a means of encouraging social change through conscientization (Freire, 1970). Conscientization requires cultural action through the creation of a dialogue, between those with greater power and those who have less, that is resolved only when the power dynamic has been dissolved entirely and a new order replaces the old. The new order, however, can't be a mirroring of the old with a new balance of power but must instead be one where the issue of power is no longer relevant.

Physionormativity is demonstrated most strongly in socially-constructed concepts of disability, where the hegemonic group reaffirms the normalcy of its discursively-constructed identity through a performance of social and structural disablement of the other. I argue that the majority's perspective of the Deaf is just such a physionormative view. This view disables the Deaf by relating their physiological difference to a social expectation so hegemonic it is, essentially, nameless in the broader society:

Since both Deaf and hearing people are governed by the social constructions of the other, Deaf people's models of themselves and hearing people's models of Deaf people are different (Basso 1979). While Deaf people have a model of themselves (DEAF in ASL) and a concept of hearing people (HEARING in ASL), hearing people have a model of Deaf people ("deaf" in English) and a model of themselves (no name in English), and none of these four models are the same. It is no wonder that in public Discourse between Deaf and hearing people, there is a constant convergence and divergence of these four models of self and other. (Humphries, 2004, p. 32)

Using the previous definition of physionormativity as a lens to examine the case of the Deaf in Canada, we see that labels—which ones are used, legitimized, and in which contexts—are a key access point to understanding. Physionormative views are common to any physiological difference but, as Humphries (2004) points out, for the Deaf, the hearing hegemony's self-legitimization is buried so deeply that they lack a self-referential label. With the Deaf, there is only a label for the other, none for the ideal that they are judged by. This invisible label for the ideal, the physionormative ideology underlying the majority Discourses, has a direct effect on matters concerning the acknowledgment and legitimization of the Deaf community.

Bisecting the broad notion of physionormativity, I propose two separate but related viewpoints: *physionetic* & *physionemic*. Borrowing from linguistics, Pike (1967) developed the

anthropological terms *etic* and *emic*. He proposed that there were no objective descriptions of behaviour, only external (*etic*) subjective descriptions and internal (*emic*) subjective descriptions. *Etic* descriptions ‘are “alien” in view’ and “are obtainable early in analysis with partial information” (p. 38) whereas *emic* descriptions “require a knowledge of the total system” and “represent to us the view of one familiar with the system and who knows how to function within it” (p. 38). In this same vein, I will be using *physionetic* as a label for views, behaviours, and social models that come from the hegemonic physionormative ideologies and *physionemic* for those which come from experiences other than the “norm” proscribed by the majority standpoint.

### **Study Design**

My research examines an educational context that rests at the intersection between cultural and linguistic policy and local pedagogical practice. As such, it required examination from multiple viewpoints “on the ground” contextualized in and compared with the macro-level policies. This called for data from national policies, provincial policies, and qualitative interviews with actors having experience with the specific context.

#### *Policy texts*

Three policy texts that can be thought of as a starting point and a trajectory for policy change in Canada and were included in the data set for this study: The Citizenship Act, The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, and Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools. These documents help to construct the context of the participants, their programmes, and students. These were critically analysed as Discourses and contrasted to the analysis of the qualitative interviews.

#### *Participants*

Both participants are administrators for their programmes, which include ESL programmes for Deaf newcomers. Dana is hearing, and though she’s had exposure to ASL in the past, no longer signs. Sara is Deaf, is fluent in both ASL and British Sign Language, and teaches in a programme for Deaf newcomers as well. Sara had fluid cohesive Discourse, with clear collected ideas, suggestive of a person well-versed in the issues being discussed. Dana had to grapple with the ideas when answering my questions.

#### *Interviews*

The interview protocol (see appendix A) and the interview process were inspired by Seidman’s (2013) approach to phenomenological qualitative interviews. In the case of my

research, a first interview was video recorded in person. A second interview was presented to the participants as an opportunity to review the transcript of the first and address follow-up questions in the form of a written conversation. This technique was chosen as it allowed the Deaf participant to review the English word choices of the interpreter and both participants the opportunity to reflect on their interview data in general. However, only one participant opted to respond to the follow-up interview questions.

### *Procedures*

As a hearing scholar researching a Deaf context, my goal is to enact social change by fostering greater understanding of the Deaf community by the hearing majority. As such, my methodological choices stem from a transformative position. Before helping others to understand more, I must first understand more, so I began with an exploratory investigation and then analysed the collected data from a critical stance.

My analytical lens is based in Critical Discourse Analysis, which is founded on the assumption that “Discourse is instrumental in the construction of society” (Hart, 2014, p. 3) and in the distribution of power within societies, thus Critical Discourse Analysis “aims at illuminating the role that language plays in creating and sustaining those social relations. Ultimately, CDA [Critical Discourse Analysis] aims at achieving social change” (Hart, 2014, p. 2). Of particular importance to my research are the ways that Discourses reflect and promote “the ‘normalization’ of ideology” (Hart, 2014, p. 3).

Since my goal is transformative research, I have chosen to blend the socio-cognitive model with critical linguistics. The socio-cognitive model, developed by van Dijk (1985), posits a social cognition; a mental system that mediates between social and textual structures that must exist in order to explain how and why texts and social structures can be mutually-shaping (Hart, 2010, p. 15). This model presupposes that:

[d]iscourse structures and social structures are of a different nature, and can only be related through the mental representations of language users as individuals and as social members. Thus, social interaction, social situations and social structures can only influence text and talk[/sign] through people’s interpretations of such social environments. And conversely, discourse can only influence social interaction and social structures through the same cognitive interface of mental models, knowledge, attitudes and ideologies. (van Dijk, 2015, p. 64)

Synergistically, critical linguistics is primarily focused on representations; “[i]t insists that all representation is mediated, moulded by the values ingrained in the speaker and the medium of expression itself” (Hart, 2014, p. 10). Using this approach required both the selection of appropriate sources and the careful elicitation of those sources for relevant data, both of which are addressed in the sections that follow.

#### *Data mining and coding*

To both locate data relevant to my study and allow for the emergence of unexpected data or themes, my mining and coding followed a process of generative analysis. This process is based on Tesch’s (1990) approach to developing an organization for data:

1. Get a sense of the whole by reading all source texts thoroughly and taking notes on the ideas that come to mind.
2. Read each text for major topics, not specific content, note the topics associated with each text.
3. Create “clusters” of related topics and label each one. Separate these labelled clusters into major topics, unique but relevant topics, and others.
4. Using the topics from step 3, label appropriate sections, creating new labels when relevant data is encountered but doesn’t fit any of the pre-made labels.
5. Rephrase the labels with a wording most appropriate to the data that is matched to them. Group the labels by how many documents they cover, unique but still relevant, and others. If the data associated with labels match or overlap, reorganize them into sub-categories.
6. Create codes for each of the new labels and sub-categories and fully code the source texts with these new codes.
7. Each category at a time, identify and summarize the associated data, searching out commonalities, unique content, contradictions, and missing data.
8. Repeat the coding based on the preliminary analysis in step 7. (pp. 142-145)

This process encourages an open-minded approach to data mining and provided a solid foundation on which to base my analysis and construct my interpretations.

#### *Analysis*

All stages of my analysis paid careful attention to the ways the participants express their views. Using van Dijk’s (1985) socio-cognitive approach, I was able to examine conflict in

finding the right word or phrase as possible representations of a struggle between internal views and outward expectations. Contradictions in phrasing and word choice could suggest both unconscious views in conflict with conscious choices and the influence of socially-derived labels. Here critical linguistics was the tool of choice for analysis. The dialogic context (current topic, distance of topic from participant, etc.) was important in recognizing these occurrences and is included in the analysis.

My results, what Frost et al. (2010) call a “reading”, must be acknowledged as my own privileged interpretation in that it “silences possible others” (p. 444). To produce results that are qualitatively rigorous, I struggled with this subjective perspective throughout the research. This continuous act of turning my critical eye on myself helped me improve my awareness of my actions, feelings, and perceptions, which assisted me, as Darawsheh (2014) suggests, in controlling my own biases and generating research that is a synthesis of my own perspectives and those of the participants. Throughout the research process I have struggled to balance my aim of transformative research with my inclination towards activism, to draw needed attention to important issues without drowning out the strength of the data with my own voice. The reading I offer is one that points to a tension between physionormative perspectives, between integration and inclusion, as indicated by the liminal Discourses of federal and provincial policy and the participants in their interviews.

### **Results and Discussion**

Through analysis of interview transcripts and policy documents many overlapping themes emerged. However, discussing them all, even superficially, would go beyond the scope of this article. Instead, I have chosen to focus on an aspect common to both the policy documents and the participant interviews; that of the liminal space they emerge from, created by the tension between the physionetic and physionemic. This tension is the main thrust of the discussion. Within this discussion, the policy documents are considered representations of macro-level Discourses, national and provincial scope, and the participant interviews micro-level Discourses, the everyday or grassroots scope. This distinction is useful but misleading as both Discourses are intertwined and mutually shaping. This is especially true with the participants as they must grapple with the intersection of these multiple Discourses, and their ideological roots, within themselves. I have thus separated the discussion of results into two sections, Policy Documents and Participants, for ease of comparison.

*Policy Documents*

Canada's national relationship to language is in tension. In regards to the Deaf, the push and pull of the physionormative forces is demonstrated by the multiple stances seen in Canadian Citizenship Policy in regards to language requirements. On the one hand, it represents a physionemic perspective in that "paragraphs 5(1)(e) and 5(2)(d) of the Citizenship Act require that the knowledge of Canada and the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship be demonstrated in either English or French or in ASL or LSQ" and "ASL and LSQ interpreters are allowed at the citizenship knowledge hearing with deaf applicants (aged 14–64)" (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2016, Knowledge hearings with deaf applicants... section). On the other hand it maintains a physionetic stance where it relies on a medical model and the reports of audiologists,

Applicants who are deaf ... can self-identify on the application form and must provide ... an audiogram issued by a Canadian audiologist, with a letter issued by the same audiologist attesting that the individual is deaf and has severe to profound hearing loss, with little or no residual hearing, including an explanation as to whether, and to what extent this impacts their ability to listen and/or speak. (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2014, Language – paragraph 5(1)(d) section)

The physionetic perspective is emphasized by this section being listed under the larger heading "Ministerial discretion to waive some of the requirements for a grant of citizenship on compassionate grounds" (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2014). This notion of compassion is mentioned a number of times throughout the policy document. I suggest that the painful difficulty in this tension is that both the language recognition and the medical accommodation are positive and important. For Deaf communities, the recognition of sign languages as a parallel route, not one subordinate to spoken languages, to citizenship is, at least in some small way, a recognition of the authenticity of the communities associated with sign languages and demonstrates a more inclusive view developing. However, for some newcomers who have experienced extensive language delays and who struggle in acquiring any language, the medical accommodation is crucial as the complex language, whether signed or spoken, required to succeed in the citizenship process may not be reasonably obtainable regardless of the educational practices used in ESL programmes. A clear example of this is provided during one of

the participant interviews; “it took two years for this individual to learn everybody’s names” (see pages 52-53 for further context).

Like the federal citizenship policy above, the physionetic/emic tension can be read in provincial documents. For example, The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2005) (AODA) presents as a policy in keeping with the critical model, an arguably physionemic model, in that it doesn’t shy away from acknowledging physical difference but also acts to invoke societal responses. For example, it states that an accessibility standard will:

set out measures, policies, practices or other requirements for the identification and removal of barriers ... and for the prevention of the erection of such barriers; and ... require the persons or organizations named or described in the standard to implement those measures, policies, practices or other requirements. (p. 3)

However, it still expresses the physionetic stance when it defines disability as:

any degree of physical disability, ..., blindness or visual impediment, *deafness or hearing impediment* [emphasis added], muteness or speech impediment, ... a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or *spoken language* [emphasis added]. (p. 2)

This physionetic stance constructs one model of ableness as the term of reference from which DISableness is defined; the greater the DIStance from this ableness model, the greater one is DISabled by it. Working backwards, we can see that the implicit ableness, the societal norm, is constructed of the opposite of what is explicitly stated, namely, hearing, speaking and seeing fully. I propose that we are trapped by the necessity of using language, and thus definitions, to promote equity; we must define and describe a source of barriers before we can prevent them but in the defining we delineate one group of difference from another. This process is the same as seen in the struggle between inclusion and integration; in respecting differences, we fossilize them.

At the level of the school system, the issue of ableism is of particular concern to the Ministry of Education and its policies:

The ministry remains firmly committed to the elimination of racism and of discrimination on the basis of disability. Although much good work has been done, and continues to be done, the presence of discriminatory biases and systemic barriers remains a concern... As noted in the strategy document (p. 7), the Supreme Court of Canada in 2005

acknowledged that racial[/ableist] prejudice against [in/]visible minorities is so notorious and indisputable that its existence needs to be treated as a social fact... Educators, administrators, and school staff must maintain their focus on racism and disability to address these issues. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 12)

As part of its push to eliminate discrimination, equitable and inclusive education mandates culturally-representative pedagogical approaches:

All the board's policies, guidelines, programs, practices, and services should reflect the diverse viewpoints, needs, and aspirations of the broader community. Discriminatory biases and systemic barriers to equity and inclusive education should be identified and addressed so that students can see themselves represented in the curriculum, programs, culture, and teaching, administrative, and support staff of the school. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 18)

This physionemic stance recognizes difference and its importance while promoting the need for appropriate societal responses. At the same time, the document provides a particularly telling physionetic definition in that disability is described as “[a] term that covers a broad range and degree of conditions, some visible and others not (e.g., physical, mental, and learning disabilities; hearing or vision disabilities; epilepsy; environmental sensitivities)” (p. 85). Like the Citizenship and AODA documents, this policy is pulled in more than one direction and, very much like the AODA, is trapped by definition.

In these three documents, we can see tension between the integrative physionetic Discourses and inclusive physionemic Discourses working at the national and provincial levels. At the federal level, we have seen necessary changes to language requirements which are inclusive in nature, allowing for newcomers to hold true to their, or claim new linguistic, identities. At the same time, needed accommodations are couched in integrative language that continues to other and condescend.

Provincially, the AODA presents a physionetic (i.e. medical) model of the Deaf through its maintenance of hearing difference and spoken language dysfunction in its definition of disability. A more inclusive definition of disability, if such a thing weren't a contradiction in terms, would require the removal of deafness<sup>7</sup> and the broadening of language dysfunction from

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<sup>7</sup> Though the focus of this article is on the Deaf, these same issues apply to other groups similarly labelled as disabled.

spoken language to language, regardless of its modality. Similarly, the educational policy, though clearly positive in both motivation and approach, still use definitions that are problematic.

Through their Discourses, these documents present inclusive physionemically-sensitive perspectives while silently creating and maintaining the space of the hegemony. This promotes the Us (the broader hearing, seeing, speaking society) and Them (Deaf and other physionemic minorities) worldview, continuing the othering and segregation. Put another way, the only special interest group that isn't called a special interest group is the majority. This is the trap of categorization in a nutshell; those in power use categorization as a tool for dividing society, sometimes to enable equitable treatment, while their own category remains an unnamed ideal. The Deaf community's reactionary response of seeing themselves as a separate group, as we will see in multiple ways in one of the participant interviews, inevitably acts to maintain this same Us and Them worldview, albeit from a reasonable self-protective stance. The participant interviews show a similar tension between the physionetic and physionemic through their, sometimes contradictory, Discourses. These are discussed in the next section.

#### *Participant Interviews*

This section is divided into a section for each participant. It is clearer to examine each as an individual and then compare them to each other and to the documents examined above. I begin with Sara.

#### *Sara*

Sara is very clear and explicit in stating her personal perspective:

I was born with Deaf culture, it is the inherent Deafness and the feeling of unity, the friendships that you develop within the community, being involved in Deaf schools, Deaf heritage, the same experiences that everybody has from being Deaf, it's an identity, it's who I am.

This is supported by the strength of her reaction to the choice of the word "deafness" in my first interview question; "I view that as a negative word, "deafness", it focuses on that we can't do anything, it feels offensive, it brings us lower, I don't feel it's an appropriate word to use". Both in her vehemence against an ableist description and in her use of "we" in staking claim to the Deaf community, she positions herself in the physionemic community view. Despite this, she presents signs of tension between the competing physionemic and physionetic Discourses with

her later uses of “disability”<sup>8</sup> to describe Deaf and other people. For example: “my feeling is that there isn’t care given to Canadian people, and especially Deaf people, they [the government] don’t care about people with disabilities that need things ... and helping them to be successful” and:

ASL and LSQ are fine as recognized languages but I feel it’s more important from a cultural perspective for Deaf to be understood or really any disability group. Different disabilities have different needs in terms of language, would you talk to a deaf person about someone in a wheelchair and what they’re disability is?

Further examples of this appear in the rest of this section. These tensions are not always internal, however; Sara relates how these views are often expressed explicitly:

Sometimes our hearing staff they think like, “Why can’t you speak? Did you swallow your tongue?” that’s what they say, they just don’t understand, some people can’t speak at all, anything to do with the mouth and linguistics, they’re just not able to. And it’s important to understand that speaking isn’t important; can you write to somebody? Do you have language? Can you gesture? That kind of thing is more important than the expectation of being able to speak... If I signed and they spoke, we’d both be working as hard and sometimes I use that approach; I’ll respond in sign language and then they look at me like “Woah, what did she say?” and I’ll say, “Sorry, you can’t sign and I can’t read your lips, this is how we’re going to communicate.” Sometimes hearing people need to be shown that to understand where we’re coming from, that we really work hard at trying to understand things every day and they have the mentality of “they’re stupid” and then just walk away but if they’re put in our shoes and they have the patience to try to understand and they get it, then we can progress in communicating but if they just give up and quit then...

Beyond the interpersonal, the physionormative struggle continues at a provincial level:

For now, the provincial school boards, there are protests going on currently because they decided to hire a hearing individual as the director for provincial schoolboards instead of a Deaf individual and there’s been 145 years of hearing directors and we’ve struggled

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<sup>8</sup> It’s important to note that I verified the interpreter’s word choice personally and made repeated attempts to clarify the choice with Sara but received no response.

with this, we've struggled with the communication barrier and the language barrier and now, again, they've taken that position away from us once again and the government won't listen and it's the same thing with Prime Minister Trudeau;

Here we can see both Discourses overlapping in one narrative. At the start, Sara is expressing from a physionemic view, arguing for the necessity of inclusive hiring practices. However, Sara then switches to a physionetic description mid-reply, in a self-contradictory use of disability:

I'm hoping that he's willing to take a look at education, to take a look at literacy, to take a look at immigration and see the people who are in need and take a look at the Deaf community and other individuals with disabilities and their needs and if they're able to see that then we're able to teach our students to be successful because we can tell them that Prime Minister Trudeau cares.

Above we can see Sara's liminality expressed literally as a transition within one utterance. Her physionemic perspective, with its recognition of a difference in perspective and experience and a desire for that difference to become part of the greater whole, transitions to physionetic language. I suggest this related to a shifting mental stance; in the first half, she is expressing from a personal stance situated in the Deaf community but, in the second, she is mentally taking on the stance of the Prime Minister with a projection of his perspective as she imagines it.

As discussed briefly in the previous policy section, there are some learners who may struggle to acquire ASL as a first language. Sara describe two such examples from her programme:

[N]ot all of our students have language, some students stayed at home their whole life and never went to school. For that group of people, it is difficult to teach them, it's hard, it takes a lot of time for them to progress and be successful. We have a student here who has cerebral palsy and had never been to school before, it took two years for this individual to learn everybody's names, now they are able to spell them, have a very basic vocabulary, are able to help their parents do chores around the house. I have another student who is, I think, 68 years old and has had no language their whole life. They're from Jamaica, I did an assessment on this individual and they're not able to read at all, so I decided to do an oral assessment where I could show pictures and ask the individual to describe them and so like a tree for example and they're able to gesture, they're correct, they know what it is and I'll show them another picture and it's of a car and they're able

to gesture correctly what that is and that's important. Now learning the formal language of American Sign Language, they do struggle because at home they have no communication and they're 68 years old, their memory is not great, they should have had some sort of language foundation but they didn't when they were younger so it's difficult.

From these two stories, we can see why the option to have the citizenship language requirement waived is so important and the thoughtful and patient approach Sara uses to understand and communicate with the students in her programme. At the same time, there is a strangeness embedded in her telling of the stories; namely, the use of "oral assessment" to describe a process that was in no way oral.

Sara, so confident in her position on Deaf identity, still must contend with the influence of the majority perspective and with its effects on her communicative choices. Sara, in her own way, straddles these two perspectives and their related Discourses; she argues strongly against language that demeans but, when discussing interactions with the hearing community, uses that same demeaning language. Her uses of "disability" and "oral assessment" suggest that she is influenced, at least at the level of language, by the physiognomic view that permeates the world around her while, at the same time, arguing for a greater understanding of the Deaf as a community all their own. Alternatively, these uses could be interpreted as part of the process of forming a positive critical identity (in line with the Critical Disability model) through re-appropriation of the negative label (Galinsky et al., 2013); this re-appropriation would not be a contradiction. Either interpretation requires the resolution of the tensions between the differing Discourses.

*Dana*

In her own fashion, Dana reiterates Sara's position that "it's important to understand that speaking isn't important". While discussing the options available to Deaf learners after they've left ESL programmes she said:

I think it's like any other learner; the sky's the limit. I think attitudes are changing a lot about any kind of disability or any kind of impairment that people might have. You see

### **Nehiyo - Part 1**

A Member of Parliament recently highlighted an issue with respect to non-official languages in parliament: in this case in regards to First Nations MPs who want to use their own language. Robert-Falcon Ouellette, who is part of the Red Pheasant First Nation and is also representative of Winnipeg-Centre, took the floor in parliament and delivered a prepared one-minute statement in Nehiyo, the Cree language

(<http://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/mp-argues-in-cree-for-indigenous-languages-in-parliament-1.3452161>).

He had provided translations of the statement in both English and French in advance of his speech but there was still no simultaneous translations provided to the other members despite these facilities being in place and used for all English and French spoken in parliament, prepared or not.

people talking about having ADHD or not being able to read when they were a child and how they accommodated and worked around it. People do manage to be very creative and resourceful in terms of being able to communicate and get their messages across and being able to live their lives and so I think it's changing. Certainly, they should have the same opportunities, we can give them some of the training if that's related. One of the things we do offer in our programmes, (though) I don't think any of the Deaf learners go to is we offer classes like sewing with ESL, but again those teachers are hearing teachers, so I don't know if we've actually had any of the Deaf learners go and try some of those classes.

Dana expresses from a liminal space; demonstrating influences of both the physionemic and physionetic. She believes in the overall capability of the Deaf learners, "the sky's the limit", and is complimentary about people being "creative and resourceful" in overcoming barriers. At the same time, she still

places the onus of responsibility to communicate on the Deaf individual and groups them into the broader category of disability<sup>9</sup>, re-enacting the medical model that is the core of the physionetic perspective: likening ADHD and illiteracy to being Deaf, Dana falls into the same trap as the AODA's (2005) definition of disability, ignoring, most likely due to a lack of awareness from a

<sup>9</sup> One of the results of this tendency is that there is little evidence that Deaf Canadians have anywhere near the social or economic mobility of other Canadians (Canadian Association of the Deaf, 2015; Enright, 2018)

lack of exposure, the sociocultural aspects of the Deaf identity. Dana realises as she speaks that there are issues with the hearing/speaking approach (see Nehiyo story box) in that resources are available, sewing classes in her example, but that those resources aren't provided in an accessible way. We see here an example of where the physionetic perspective informs administrative decisions. The assumption here is about ESL students; an ESL student is a hearing student so an ESL class is a hearing class. The issue with the sewing class is not a disability issue but a language issue. Despite this the physionetic ideologies influence the situation. The Deaf students can learn to sew, and most other subjects, just not from a non-signing instructor.

The tensions in Dana's liminal perspective are triggered by her work with the Deaf community and can be seen as she is beginning to gain a new perspective with unfamiliar Discourse patterns. For example, while discussing work opportunities for Deaf learners, Dana suggested that "if they are trying to work, what we can do to help them communicate with regular people who are not... I shouldn't use the term regular, just people who aren't d/Deaf or hard of

### **Nehiyo - Part 2**

Geoffrey Regan, current Speaker of the House, in ruling on the issues of privilege raised by Ouellette on the use of other languages in parliament, responded:

... given the House's current limited technical and physical capacity for interpretation, if members want to ensure that the comments they make in a language other than French or English can be understood by those who are following the proceedings and are part of the official record in the Debates, an extra step is required. Specifically, members need to repeat their comments in one of the two official languages so that our interpreters can provide the appropriate interpretation and so that they may be fully captured in the Debates. By doing so, all members of the House and the public will be able to benefit from the rich value of these interventions.

(<https://openparliament.ca/debates/2017/6/20/the-speaker-8/>)

hearing”. Dana exposes one of her embedded Discourses with her initial word choice but a competing Discourse triggers a re-examination of the choice. In responding to the follow-up questions, she discussed her struggle at that moment:

I realize I was using the wrong term. I am very much in favour of us doing a better job with our Deaf learners, but I am learning as I go what this means and what I/we need to do to make the programme the programme it needs to be to help our Deaf learners. I did not mean to imply that they are not “regular”...they are part of the school, they are regular students who happen to be Deaf. As a Deaf learner, though their needs are different and we need to know how we can support them better.

### Nehiyo - Part 3

Regan’s ruling superficially supports other languages while still placing emphasis on the official languages. Ouellette responded that “[w]ith a strict one-minute cutoff on member’s statements, ... he simply would not have had the time to say his speech in Cree and then repeat it in French or English”

([http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2017/06/29/robert-falcon-ouellette-house-speaker-missed-historic-opportunity\\_a\\_23008165/](http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2017/06/29/robert-falcon-ouellette-house-speaker-missed-historic-opportunity_a_23008165/)).

This self-reflection, both in the moment and after the fact, is important as it demonstrates that, though influenced by her embedded Discourses, Dana is not a slave to them. Through her awareness she is able to reflect. These reflections, and the choices she makes from them, will alter which Discourse, and its related ideology, holds the most power.

#### *Limitations*

A single interview, and follow-up by email, provided a good foundation for exploration but does not allow for the deep insight that can be gained from multiple follow-

up interviews. As well, the lack of follow-up from Sara, means that her original interview, with all the issues with word choice, must stand on its own.

#### *Implications for the Canadian ESL Context*

Taken together, the policy documents and participant interview all show signs of a struggle within a liminal space created by the tension between the physionemic viewpoint of the Deaf as a community and the physionetic perspective of the d/Deaf as a disability group. This pattern is visible in the policy documents even where their intent is inclusion. It should come as no surprise that Dana and Sara, whose Discourses emerge from the often-messy realities of practice, show this tension all the more strongly. Though Sara argues strongly for the Deaf

perspective, she must still navigate the physionetic Discourses of disability. Though Dana has been working with Deaf educators and Deaf students for a number of years, she is still at odds with the physionemic influences, using them in some places but also automatically falling back into the familiar physionetic Discourses of the majority.

These tensions are the warring of incompatible ideologies which act as guideposts to decision-making but, where strong empirically-based information is limited or non-existent: it often becomes exceedingly difficult to ascertain whether the accepted ideology is effectively describing and explaining the political environment or... [is] impaired by its tendency to obscure relevant but potentially disconcerting aspects of the environment from the consciousness of its supporters. A distorting ideology is unfortunate, for, once chosen, ... [it] shapes and conditions the political behavior of its adherents. (Connolly, 2017, pp. 2-3).

The tension in these Discourses show a glimpse of an attempt to deal with a liminal upset. Striking a balance between acceptance and reflection, between allowing for the stasis of the meaning of a label and the challenging of it, is a difficult but necessary component of navigating pluralistic contexts.

Importantly, this raises issues with how majority groups (the hearing) define and engage with minority groups (the Deaf) with which they coexist and how these definitions and interactions can lead to damaging but, possibly, invisible, prejudices:

The way racisms [prejudices] work as exclusions is that people who are included do not need to engage with the meanings, experiences and life challenges of the excluded. We are insulated from the human consequences of racism, even as people around us live it.

This perpetuates racisms, even if we did not create them. (Stanley, 2017, slide 59)

To improve this situation requires not just new policy language but an intentional act of exploring and surrendering of our assumptions to the unknown. As the Deaf community gains more visibility and recognition by the majority and, by extension, more people become personally aware of and interact with Deaf people on their own terms, the need for this surrender will only increase. This will require everyone to re-examine their assumptions, from federal policy makers down to individual educators.

### Conclusion

In the analysis, I argued that both participants responded while embedded in incompatible Discourses that they are not consciously analysing at the time of the interviews. This competition expresses itself through struggles with answering or contradictions between and within answers. These conflicts are pointed out to illustrate one way we are both produced by and produce Discourses and the difficulty of trying to discuss these issues when our Discourses are often contradictory and none adequately represent the complex socio-dynamics involved. Instead, these struggles with Discourse are suggestive of both participants expressing from liminal spaces; like the all-gender washroom sign, they are momentary snapshots of transition, possessing aspects of both their origin and the next step but not being wholly one or the other. These struggles can be framed as Sara and Dana both navigating the tension between the physionetic, the majority/medical perspective, and the physionemic, the Deaf identity/community perspective.

In this study, I sought to examine the Discourses produced by policy documents and administrators for ESL programmes for Deaf newcomers to Canada as discrete things. However, the conclusions I reached are more complex than a simple impact statement can describe. I found, instead, documents and actors in a complex and shifting liminality. One that suggests a context that is re-examining old assumptions and opening to new perspectives. This process should be encouraged and provided with forums in which to thrive and expand as its explorations will no doubt provide insight into how the future of Canada's pluralism may be formed.

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*Appendix A. Interview Protocol*

What is your experience with the deaf community and deafness?

What is your experience with deaf students?

How do you envision the end result of their education?

What methods of communication do you use with deaf students?

Why do you use those methods?

What do you feel is the most appropriate language for deaf students to use and why?

How do you see their place in Canadian society?

How would you improve the current situation?

### Conclusion

In the article previous, I explored the production of Discourses of policy documents and participants emerging from tensions in the liminal space created in intersection of the physionemic Deaf culture and community and the physionetic model that is often reproduced in the hearing majority. However, this notion of liminal tensions is a thread throughout the thesis. Again and again, we see examples of a struggle to nail down something that is actually fluid. The need to differentiate between deaf and Deaf is just one. Where mental models meet the outside world, individual perspective forms and acts to construct and is in turn constructed by both. The same is seen in the distinction between ideology and Discourse; they overlap and interact but remain distinct. Where does the majority end and a minority group begin?

Like many first-time master's students; I imagine– I struggled with approaching my research ethically and with rigour and with the need to be adaptable to changing my topic to follow where the research led. Despite this, my greatest challenge was engaging with the very real difficulty of trying to understand how to work within the areas of fluidity mentioned above. The first step and, to be honest, the endlessly-repeating step is to recognize that on-going tensions within my own ideologies and Discourses. The critical eye that I practiced and turned to the subject of my research also needed to be turned upon myself. Through many meetings with my supervisor, it became clear that this critical tool that I'd developed for issues relating to the Deaf didn't dissolve my ignorance of similar issues involving others groups (the blind, Francophones Canadians, and Black Canadians). Each jarring reminder of these gaps in my understanding of the world around me and how others experienced it differently from the way I did reinforced in my mind what Stanley (2017) meant; the circumstances of my life permitted me the opportunity to live without engaging with the experiences of those different from myself.

I could argue that I wasn't aware of my ignorance so how could I possibly be responsible for correcting it but that would simply obfuscate the painful truth. I allowed myself to remain ignorant. It isn't difficult to learn about others. There are numerous means, even if one is shy of asking others directly. It is clear to me now that it is all of our obligation to strive to lift ourselves from ignorance of others' experiences. A true multicultural society, a true pluralistic politic, doesn't permit any group to be hidden away or forced into exclusion. Though changes can come from national policy and social programming, the real work must be done by every single individual, each in their own way, to look beyond their own perspectives and experiences and

try, at least, to learn how others experience the world they share. Writing these words, I am reflecting on my own desire to avoid the shame I experience whenever I realize that I have been holding on to a belief, unconscious or otherwise, that I haven't explore critically. I'm as much a victim and perpetrator of my ideologies and Discourses as anyone I have discussed in this thesis.

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