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PERCEPTION OF THE SCHOOL EXPERIENCES OF  
FIVE GENERATIONS OF DEAF STUDENTS

by

CHARLES DEPEW

(Under the Direction of Delores Liston)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate deaf participants' perspectives of their educational experiences within the last 50 years. The study was comprised of five deaf participants educated in the public school setting, and four deaf participants educated in the residential setting. The qualitative study utilized three in-depth interviews, a survey, and the researcher's reflections/notes. The findings suggest deaf students' educational experiences are impacted by low academic expectations. Sign language can be a powerful learning tool or a barrier for deaf students as deaf students depend on sign language and visuals to support their learning. Both spoken and written English are likely to be a struggle for deaf students. Emotional difficulties were associated with public and residential settings for the participants. Personal motivations, family members, and the type of setting had powerful influences on the participants. Freire's (1993) theoretical framework of liberation was utilized in this study to engage participants in dialogue about the perceptions of their educational experiences.

INDEX WORDS: Audism, Certified Interpreter, Professional Interpreter, Coda, Deaf, Little "d" and Big "D", Inclusion, Mainstream, Phonocentrism, Public, Residential

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FIVE GENERATIONS OF DEAF STUDENTS

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty  
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DOCTOR OF CURRICULUM STUDIES

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### **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my deaf grandmother and deaf relatives who were the inspiration for this study. It is also dedicated to my family and friends who have had to hear about my struggle with my study almost every day for the last seven years of my doctoral program. Also, to my dog, Betty, who has pushed her ball in my face many times wanting me to play with her while I was working on my dissertation.

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## **CHAPTER 1: THE ABSENCE OF DIALOGUE WITH DEAF STUDENTS**

### **Background of an Ongoing Problem**

Deaf students' education has predominantly been shaped by the mainstream hearing population, and as a result, the deaf population's ability to communicate their educational needs has been marginalized. According to Luis Moll (2010),

In education, power is transmitted through social relations, representations, and practices, which determine whose language and cultural experiences count and whose do not, which students are at the center, and therefore, which must remain in periphery (p. 454).

In general, deaf students have been provided a public education more congruous to that of their hearing peers over the past 50 years because of the education laws passed. However, even with educational laws, the educational experience of deaf students has greatly contrasted that of their hearing peers. Such differences include adverse outcomes for deaf students because of an education system in the United States that has historically evolved predominantly around the mainstream population, including social relations, representations, and practices of language and culture. As a result, the educational needs of deaf students across the United States have largely been overlooked. The lack of effort to get input from the deafs' perspective on ways to remedy their educational differences and deficiencies in their education has added to the problem.

Although the deaf community has not historically been invited to give their opinions on the educational planning of deaf students, the argument can be made that the past 50 years should have nonetheless helped to diminish some of the disparity in the educational outcomes between deaf and hearing students. Such an argument could draw support from the diverse school options, assistance with communication, and numerous educational laws that have made

resources available to deaf students. However, a significant gap continues to exist in academic achievement between deaf and hearing students. The panacea sought for deaf students to have academic achievement equivalent to that of their hearing peers has failed to materialize.

While there appears to be no quick fix to the recurring disparity in education between deaf students and mainstream hearing students, there fortunately exists a way to counter the traditional mainstream population's narrative of the deafs' education through Freire's (1993) theoretical framework of liberation. Liberation is an element that is attainable for the deaf through what Freire described as having a "voice." According to Freire, populations like the deaf who have been oppressed can only attain liberation from their oppressors by having a voice. Therefore, the deaf becoming the participants in the narrative of their education allows them to fill the void of communication in their education.

While deaf students' ability to communicate their authentic educational needs has typically been disregarded by researchers, a way to offset the trend of ignoring the deaf is accomplished by implementing a process in which Freire's theoretical framework of liberation is utilized in research. In this study, nine deaf students educated in five different decades were given the capability to communicate, and in essence, be provided with a "voice" to detail their educational experiences.

The prospective intent and goal of this study was that by providing deaf students with the ability to share their perceptions and communicate their needs, there would be new insights into what deaf students' perceptions have been regarding their education at the respective time they attended school. This qualitative narrative research study provides an atypical perspective of the deaf student's educational experience. To a great extent, this study contrasts the usual line of

research of the deaf student's education that is frequently examined and defined without the deaf community's input.

### **Statement of the Problem**

While deaf students historically have made up only a small portion of students educated in the United States education system, their authentic experiences have commonly been overlooked. Deaf students' sharing of their own personal stories of education has frequently been marginalized due in large part to the fact that the education system has been shaped to serve the needs of a mainstreamed population generally made up of hearing students. Padden and Humphries (2005) observed, "Today, as in 1913, deaf people struggle with the problem of voice, how to make themselves heard over a powerful other voice of hearing people who define them and their needs differently" (p. 76).

Padden and Humphries (2005) mentioned that deaf students are brought up in the conversation of academic achievement when the objective of viewing their educational experience is to use them as an academic group to be compared with the performance of their hearing peers, or when trying to account for their inconsistent levels of achievement in the different school settings. The inclination to continually stay focused on the deaf students' lower levels of achievement and performance in schools has, in most instances, led to a missed opportunity for researchers to research and discover the deaf students' communicated perceptions of the time they attended school in conjunction with how the school setting impacted their education.

As an educator, it is apparent that academic achievement is an important factor; however, achievement is only one component of education. There is also a need to look at the human

component of deaf and hard-of-hearing students' experiences from their perspective. By and large, deaf students have not been queried to share their viewpoints, and researchers in the educational field have missed out on deaf community's perceptions of its educational experiences. Therefore, there is a need for researchers to seek the genuine perspectives of the educational experiences communicated by deaf students.

As a result, the researcher of this study sought deaf participants' genuine perspectives of their educational experiences. This qualitative study contrasts with the usual research by focusing on the deaf students' dialogue by using the kind of questioning posed by Patton (2002), that asks, "What is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this event for this person or group of people?" (p. 104). Using this type of questioning gave the current study's deaf participants an opportunity to expose their lived experiences, and prevented the hearing population from solely providing the narration. As a result of using phenomenological questioning, the deaf participants in this study were given an opportunity to communicate and achieve a sense of their own individual liberation in the context of the study by having a "voice," according to Freire (1993).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The primary purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the perceptions of the nine deaf students that attended school in the past five decades in Upstate New York. Those nine students shared first-person narratives of their educational experiences and took part in the discourse of research in deaf education. This approach contrasted the usual myopic focus that is commonly sought by researchers that typically relies solely on quantitative data.

The nine participants in this study provided their own first-person narratives of deaf

education that spanned five decades. This enabled them to be contributors to the field of deaf education by having told their stories of the beneficial experiences that enhanced their education, as well as those barriers that negatively impacted their educational growth. In addition, the researcher recognizes deaf participants' communicated stories of their education as having the potential to contribute to deaf education by potentially using the information they provided to benefit future practices in deaf education. Moreover, this study will hopefully allow for greater understanding and appreciation with regard to researchers, ensuring that they consider, value, and include first-person accounts of deaf students' experiences in educational research.

In this study, the Deaf participants gave first-person accounts and participated in dialogue, which is especially significant according to Freire (2010), who described "dialogue" as the conquest of the world for the liberation. Thus, the nine participants individually shared narratives of what positively and negatively impacted their lives during the respective decade they attended school (1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s). This study allowed the participants to obtain a form of liberation that Freire described as "dialogue."

The liberating theoretical framework of Paulo Freire (1993) provided the platform for the participants in this study to have a medium through which to present their own personal shared stories about their perceptions of their educational experiences from their own unique perspective. There was no pervasive control over the responses of the participants, nor were they swayed from providing negative or positive responses in their stories about their education experiences during the years and setting they attended. Through their stories, participants were allowed to give their genuine recollection of how their education impacted their lives, and were provided the chance to engage in dialogue to communicate what they wanted others to learn

about their educational experiences. Essentially, they were given the power of discourse.

Through the theoretical framework of Freire (1993), study participants were able to reconstruct their stories utilized for this study to help create a better understanding of the nine deaf participants' educational experiences. The "voice" (communication) given to the participants has the possibility to start a larger discussion about deaf education, which strikes at the core of this study's theoretical element of liberation. According to Freire, the conversation between the researcher and the participants of this study made it feasible for the participants to achieve their own personal liberation through the dialogue they provided.

### **Theoretical Framework of Liberation**

The mainstream population has historically shaped the education needs of the deaf, without seeking their participation in the conversation about these needs. The problem with that pattern, as Freire (1985) described, is that it results in a relationship in which one group is silenced by another group functioning as the director society. The director society—the mainstream hearing population—has the dominant social context, that in turn results in the deaf population, the group which is dependent, being silenced from their dialogue. In the United States, the mainstream population's status of director society has commonly left the deaf community's dialogue out of their own education. Nonetheless, there is a way for the deaf to counter the dependent place in that they lack communication. According to Freire,

Only when the people of a dependent society break out of the culture of silence and win their right to speak—only, that is, when radical structural change transforms the dependent society—can such a society as a whole cease to be silent toward the director society (p. 73).



Even though components of education by the mainstream society have shaped the deaf community's education, and the oppressive elements would likely be communicated by the deaf participants in this particular study, the oppressive elements were not the focus of this study. Instead, the focus was Freire's liberating theoretical framework, which is achieved by the ability to communicate and attain what Freire (1993) referred to as having a "voice." Therefore, the use of dialogue in this study provided a degree of personal liberation for the participants by providing them a chance to share their personal narratives of education through the means of a survey and three separate conversations about their educational experiences during three in-depth interviews.

The significance of providing the prospect of dialogue to the Deaf in this study was acknowledged by Freire (2008), who concluded that the exchange of ideas is the only way to truly communicate. The momentous prospect that communication presented to the former students in this study was inferred to by McLaren (1998), who described communication as the vocabulary that is brought into the conversation of emancipation which can result in the components of social justice, equality, and empowerment. Having the components of social justice, equality, and empowerment available to Deaf students in this study, along with the prospect of liberation through providing their personal narratives about their perceptions of education, appeared to offer a stark contrast from what has been the deafs' typical experience in education. The implication for dialogue provided to populations such as the participants in this study is mutually shared by both McLaren (1998) and Freire (2008). Dialogue's influence was described by McLaren as having the ability to be emancipatory, while Freire considered discourse to have a liberating effect.

The deaf community's educational experiences of the last 200 years have predominantly been influenced and communicated by the hearing population, and ironically, this study was also communicated by the researcher, a hearing person. However, even though the researcher of this study is a hearing person, the researcher has been directly exposed to and is experienced with deaf culture. As the child of mother whose parents were Deaf, the researcher happened to grow up with Deaf grandparents who lived in the upstairs of his two-story house and with whom he had daily interaction. The researcher also has a Deaf aunt and two Deaf cousins, and was exposed to the Deaf culture at a very young age by attending family events where a large portion of those attending were deaf. Therefore, while the idea of having a hearing person conduct this study could be viewed as problematic in regards to providing an accurate presentation of the deaf participants' experiences, the researcher believes that his experiences in the deaf community diminish the likelihood of that occurring. With that said, the communicated educational experiences of the deaf participants in this study were provided by them, and were not merely a hearing person's personal description of their education.

The mainstream population, which happens to be predominantly made up of those that can hear and speak audibly, has fashioned an education system to meet the needs of that population. However, there is a need to involve the minority deaf population in the conversation and decision-making regarding their education by involving them in the discussion about their educational needs, as done in this study. Freire (1993) did not specifically mention the deaf community in his statement, and the deeply rooted influences the mainstream population has had on the deaf community's education can be inferred by his explanation of the paradoxical relationship of those who want liberation, but are themselves influenced in an environment with

a climate of dehumanizing power. However, Freire's description of an environment with a climate of dehumanizing power parallels the mainstream population's influence over the deaf students' educational experience. The mainstream population has shaped the deaf community's education in the United States over the past 100 years to fit the desires communicated by the hearing population without allowing the deaf to communicate their own needs.

The mainstream population communicating what it thought was best for the deaf community, instead of the deaf community having equivalent authority in their educational decisions, was expressed by Freire (1993), who explained that emancipation and liberation are not analogous for groups like the deaf community because of a dominant group like the mainstream population having the social control over the education system. An illustration of the mainstream population overlooking the deafs' educational needs happened at the onset of deaf education with the first permanent school. The American School for the Deaf, established in 1817 in Hartford, Connecticut, was formed with what the mainstream population thought was the appropriate school structure for assimilating the deaf community into society and educating them (Burch, 2001). However, the opposite effect transpired from what was originally intended. The boarding school structure prevented the deaf community from fitting into society, as placing the deaf students in the boarding setting resulted in deaf students not making roads into the hearing society. Another consequence of the boarding school structure was that there was no inquiry or communication regarding whether the deaf community was receiving an appropriate education for assimilation into the general society of the hearing.

That phenomenon of making the deaf community nonexistent by educating deaf students at the same school setting continuously took place for 50 years without any exchange of ideas

between the hearing and the deaf as to whether it was a good choice academically (Burch, 2002). While the deaf community was routinely overlooked until the latter half of the 1900s, the fact that debate began to develop about the education of the deaf is disconcerting because the discussion did not center on the isolation of the deaf. Instead, the focus on the deaf community's form of communication was criticized.

The critique of the form of sign language used by the deaf community was once again a way for the mainstream population that hears and speaks to communicate that their educational values should be used as the moral compass of education. The result of the decision was the criticism of the deafs' communication. Regrettably, the mainstream population was degrading the deaf community by considering their way of communicating through sign language as inferior and primal in comparison to those who orally spoke English (Vickery, 2002). Nevertheless, while the deaf community was given attention by the mainstream population, it was only to communicate the deaf community's supposed inferior differences and weaknesses.

Unfortunately, the trend has not been to provide the deaf community with any discourse for real social justice. The deaf had not been given genuine attention until in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when educational laws came to the forefront. The reality of any equality for the deaf community only began to occur during the time of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and with the 1975 law for a least restrictive environment. At that point, deaf education was looked at through a lens that sought a more equitable education for the deaf community (Gurp, 2002). The stark reality is that it was only because of laws and financial assistance mandated by Congress that deaf students were afforded equitable educational opportunities. However, the deaf community's discourse in their education is still missing by and large. It has only been in

the last 50 years that the terms equality and empowerment for the deaf community in their education have actually become a tangible possibility. Nonetheless, even with increased opportunities for the deaf students due to the passage of laws, it has still been difficult for the deaf to be liberated within education because of the societal values communicated and placed on them by the dominant hearing population.

The deep rooted past inequalities have been manifested in the deaf students' education, but there is still a way to foster the deafs' liberation out of the oppressive educational environment. One of those ways has been utilized in this study. This study uses the element of liberation which can provide the means for the deafs' emancipation. Freire (1993) stated, "Liberating education is not shifting information, but acts of cognition" (p. 79). In this study, the participants had the ability to use acts of cognition through individual narratives to communicate their perceptions of the educational setting they attended during the time period (or decade) that they attended school.

### **Liberating Settings**

Although this study used Freire's (1993) theoretical framework of liberation, in order for real emancipation to take place for students in schools, the researcher realizes that the school itself must be the main part of the emancipatory foundation. It is important to recognize that the reproductive nature of schools themselves is part of the imbedded problem that has contributed to the predicament of deaf students not being able to communicate and attain liberation. According to Freire (1993), the ability of students to attain liberation by communication is almost impossible because schools have continued to use the banking concept of education where students are treated as receiving objects of information. As a result, students are most

often receivers of information, rather than givers of information by communicating their authentic perceptions of their educational experiences and having the ability to communicate and provide what Freire (1993) referred to as a “voice.”

However, the reproductive nature of schools is not inevitable and can be curbed by the use of critical pedagogy. As Wink (2002) described, “Critical pedagogy is a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming relationships among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structures of the school, and the social and material relations of the wider community, society and nation state” (p. 30). Thus, critical pedagogy provides the possibility for the transformation of schools. However, it ultimately is the job of educators to counter the cultural forms of dominant ideology that may lead to oppression by having students question, reflect, and interrogate the patterns of dominant ideology that emphasize a greater value of a person based on achievement, excessive competition, sexism, and racism (Kanpol, 1997).

Thus, the ultimate responsibility lies in the hands of deaf teachers that have the incredible task of breaking the pattern of the reproductive nature of schools for deaf students. For teachers to break the typical mode of schools reproducing, a dialectical understanding is needed to change the dominant cultural forms for students such as the deaf. Dialectical understanding provides the capability of assisting schools with progressing from a reproductive mode to allowing for the opportunity of utilizing a dialectic approach which provides a means to counter the reproductive nature of schools. Dialectical understanding is described as the back and forth exchange of thoughts, ideas, values, and beliefs (Wink, 2000). In other words, it provides an exchange of ideas which results in communication. Dialectical understanding provides an act in the spirit of

what Freire (1993) described as a means for liberation.

With dialectical understanding, schools can become liberating places that allow students to have the opportunity to be freed from the hegemonic reproductive approach, and as an alternative, schools can transform and become places that liberate instead of oppress (McLaren, 1998). By means of dialectical understanding, Wink (2000) and McLaren (1998) pointed out that the power of discourse provides a chance to share thoughts, ideas, and values. The back and forth discourse was an expectation and part of this study, which allowed the nine participants a chance to communicate and potentially materialize the effect of language mentioned by Hooks (1994), which is that language is a way to heal the splitting mind and body by having marginalized and oppressed people attempt to recover themselves in experiences in language (p. 175).

### **Research Questions**

This study included nine students considered as lower case “deaf” and capital letter “Deaf” adults who were past students that attended school during the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s in New York State. All nine of the participants have the condition of being deaf that makes them lowercase “deaf” (Padden & Humphries, 2005). However, one of the participants has had a cochlear implant and would no longer be considered “lowercase deaf” related to the condition of being deaf. Seven of the participants would be classified as the capitalized “Deaf” because of their cultural practices of marrying another deaf person and communicating almost entirely with other deaf people in the deaf community (Padden & Humphries, 2005). All nine of the participants are capitalized “Deaf” as substantiated by their use of American Sign Language as their preferred form of communication, and the participants’

engagement in activities that done predominantly with other Deaf people in their Deaf community.

The participants were educated predominantly in either a public or residential school; however, several of the participants attended school in a variety of settings such as the public, mainstream, and residential classroom settings. The study allowed these former students to share their perceptions about how the time and school setting in which they attended impacted their lives. The chief questions that guided the study were: (1) What are deaf students' perceptions of their school experiences in the particular educational setting in which they attended school, and how have these experiences impacted their lives? (2) What experiences did the deaf students go through? (3) What deaf students' voices are not heard in the classrooms?

### **Significance of the Study**

As an alternative to a quantitative research study, this study was done within a curriculum studies perspective using Paulo Freire's (1993) theoretical framework of liberation to understand the former individual deaf student participants' points of view about the time and place of their education. The routine lens of achievement for deaf students has more often than not focused on the relationship between academic achievement and the contrasting school settings, with little attention paid to the perceptions of the students themselves. Such a focus has created a missed opportunity to look at the individual students, which are the most significant piece of the educational outcome. This study provides an alternative look by using a curriculum study's approach that considers how education was impacted for the deaf from the deaf participants' points of view.

The curriculum studies approach to this study did not rely on the typically used research



method that depends on a scientific and quantitative method, but instead focused on the research being viewed through a lens that considers the individual deaf participants' narratives from a qualitative research approach. Having used the curriculum studies approach for the research in this study, it was possible for the researcher to obtain newly generated knowledge created by the study's participants, as opposed to the knowledge produced in the study being shaped solely by scientific data, interpreted by the researcher. With the curriculum studies approach taken for this study, the individual student's perceptions were considered the most significant part of the equation, as opposed to the typical mode of research in deaf education that has myopically focused on examining the achievement gaps and outcomes between whole groups of deaf students and their hearing student peers.

The real significance of this study is that it provided the deaf participants an opportunity to share their individual narratives, which enabled them to communicate the human elements of each of their experiences. In addition, the study allowed the participants to provide their authentic perceptions, lived experiences in education, and the impact of their educational experiences. Freire (1993) impeccably described the significance of a study that solicited participants input with his description, "If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings" (p. 88). The expectation for this study was that it would provide deaf participants with the chance for such a dialogue. It also sought to enable the participants to achieve the objective of communication which Freire described as the way to achieve significance as a human being.

Although achieving communication for the deaf participants was the most significant

component of this study, there was a second area of significance. A secondary goal of this study was to provide the researcher the capability to reflect on the deaf students' authentic perceptions of the specific elements in school that impacted their education, and to offer a chance to reflect on what areas of relevance in deaf education mentioned by the participants may need to be addressed for deaf students in our current education system.

This study's intent was to obtain an in-depth insight of deaf education based on the narratives provided by nine former Deaf students that attended schools in Central, Western, and Downstate New York during the past five decades. They were given an opportunity to communicate their perceptions of how their educational experiences during the specific periods of time in which they attended school coupled with how their educational setting influenced their education.

The aim of the research was to give the nine participants in the study an ability to communicate their experiences, which provided them with a "voice," which literally means the deaf were provided the ability to communicate their educational experiences. Freire (1993) acknowledged the significance of communication by stating, "Yet only through communication can human life hold meaning" (p. 77). Freire's idea that human life holds meaning through communication is what guided this study. Most significant, in this study, was that the participants' dialogue in which they narrated their perceptions and experiences provided them with liberation, which, according to Freire, results from having the capability to communicate.

A questionnaire and a series of three open-ended in-depth interviews were used as the means of inquiry for study. This approach provided the participants with the ability to freely communicate their educational experiences. Although the study was a narrative inquiry, it

utilized phenomenological questioning to obtain the desired result of giving Deaf participants a voice by communicating their perceptions of education.

## **CHAPTER II: THE DEAF EXPERIENCE RETOLD**

### **Literature's Relevance to the Deaf Study**

The focus of the review of literature is on aspects of education that might have possibly influenced the Deaf participants' experiences and perceptions in schools for five decades. Over the past 50 years, there have been a number of changes and numerous factors in education that have impacted deaf students' education. Taking into consideration the possible areas that may have impacted the deaf students from five different generations was the motive for the review of literature in the areas of historical perspective, deaf culture, educational placement options, educational laws, and the forms of discrimination faced by the deaf due to their differences from the hearing population. Each individual topic could have had a significant impact on the participants in the study, or the topics covered in this literature review could have collectively had a profound effect on the participants.

### **Historical Preface**

The last few hundred of years of education for the deaf in the United States has had a number of profound intricacies. According to Winzer (2002),

The experiences of those who were deaf is far more complex than a mere educational journey. For this group, the persistence of interplay between residential schools, the deaf community, and educational reform movements is striking throughout the different eras.

(p. 157)

The description by Winzer (2005) clearly illustrates the historical, complex, and profound core of what has made up the educational experience and journey of deaf and hard-of-hearing students throughout the generations. There has undoubtedly been an inimitable educational journey for deaf students which first commenced with an educational experience

that took place exclusively in the residential school setting because it was viewed by the dominant hearing population as the most suitable setting to educate deaf students (Burch, 2001). Subsequently, the expectation for the deaf to be educated at a residential school was the hearing population's deliberate plan up until after the Civil War (Moore & Meadow-Orlans, 1990). Consequently, the outcome of the deaf students intentionally being solely placed in the residential setting has had the paradoxical effect of secluding deaf students from their hearing peers in the classroom setting, and at the same time, the residential setting has provided those deaf students with the positive aspects of a communal cultural and educational experience.

Nonetheless, the shared school setting that initially provided deaf students with a shared common culture and homogenous educational setting ended up being short lived as a consequence of the imminent historical changes in education law that would inevitably transpire. These changes that have emerged in the educational journey of the deaf community have taken place without any reservation, and the transformations in education have undeniably taken the deaf students as well as their parents on a tumultuous and complex journey. That journey has not been without problems for both parents and deaf students, and it has encompassed several intricate components that have manifested and immensely influenced the deaf community's educational experiences.

The educational experience of the deaf is unique because they were the first special education students offered interventions in the 1800s (Winzer, 2005). Even though deaf students were designated as the first special education students to be provided interventions, there has not been any obvious explanation as to why it has not resulted in an increased

academic performance for the students. The lack of increased academic proficiency has been substantiated by the deaf and hard-of-hearings' performance on the Stanford Achievement Test over the past three decades. Qi and Mitchell (2011) mentioned that over the last three decades, the historical trend has been the continued achievement gap between the deaf and hard-of-hearing students and their hearing peers on the Stanford Achievement Test. This is evident by the deaf having performed lower than their hearing student peers for the last three decades, and the deaf students continually having a gap in reading that is greater than math. The gaps between deaf and hard-of-hearing students and hearing students have not lessened over the past three decades, with the exception of mathematics problem solving (Qi & Mitchell, 2011).

As a result of the continued low academic performance of deaf students, a myriad of questions have been raised about deaf students' education. For example, Woolsey (2004) asserted that the lack of an increase in the academic performance of deaf students is unquestionably paradoxical, bearing in mind that deaf education is the oldest field in special education, and explained that it would not be expected that such significant gaps resulted in academic achievement for deaf students.

Those in the deaf education field have continually struggled with the academic achievement gap and the disproportionate academic achievement that has continued to exist for deaf students (Scheetz, 2012). Despite the fact that the achievement gap has been disconcerting, the source of the gap has been enigmatic to a great extent. Even though research has offered various explanations for the achievement gap in deaf students, there is still not an obvious explanation for the recurring problem of this lower achievement.

However, those in deaf education and researchers have primarily focused on the gap in deaf students' reading levels, which have continually been lower than those of their hearing peers (Traxler, 2000). Unfortunately, even the early detection of deafness in children has not had the expected result of providing deaf students the probability of entering school with the same language skills as their hearing counterparts (Hoffmeister & Shantie, 2000).

The lower level of language skills is therefore recognized as one possible dynamic that has contributed to the lower achievement gap for deaf students. Nonetheless, a pattern of lower-level language skills for the deaf does not seem shocking when one considers that 90% of deaf/hard-of-hearing children come from hearing parents with no experience with sign language (Shantie, 2000). As a result, hearing parents are not typically good role models for language, which makes it difficult for deaf students to acquire language skills early on (Hoffmeister & Shantie, 2000; Marschark, 2001).

Therefore, as a result of the communication barrier at home, research has suggested that deaf students also frequently arrive at school with lower levels in functional language than their hearing peers because they are less apt to have had a great amount of communication at home. Such a finding provides a rationalization for why deaf and hard-of-hearing students consistently have significantly lower reading scores than their hearing peers (Furth, 1964; Mindel & Vernon, 1971). Although lower levels of language skills manifested at birth are a possible source of lower achievement skills in deaf students, there are many other potential suggested reasons that may be the cause of lower academic achievement for deaf students. This population already usually arrives in school with huge deficiencies in language and gaps in their experiences, and it is a significant hardship for teachers of the deaf

to try and figure out how to effectively teach them (Woolsey, Harrison, & Gardner, 2004).

Even with the deaf students' language gap in school and ensuing adversity faced by teachers as a result, teachers are also mentioned as a possible contributing source to the deaf students' poorer levels of academic achievement in schools. Teachers are given part of the blame for the deaf students' gap in achievement because of the large emphasis that has historically been placed primarily on language, and the large focus on communication that has been used as an alternative to academic coursework for the deaf (Woolsey et al., 2004).

According to Woolsey et al. (2004), the continued focus on language has shaped an educational environment where deaf students' mediocre academic achievement may have possibly resulted from less rigorous academic aptitude demanded because of the larger focus on language by teachers. The time spent on language development by teachers has equated to taking away from time spent on tasks in the classroom, which is considered detrimental to deaf students' academic achievement because research has found a correlation between hearing students' academic achievement and time on task in the classroom (Woolsey, 2004). Consequently, if deaf students have not been pushed by their teachers to focus on tasks that are academically challenging, it is likely that they would not be able to perform at the same level as their learning hearing peers.

Even assuming that teachers may have contributed to deaf students not performing as well as hearing students, one also needs to consider that before formal education in the school setting begins, deaf students usually possess lower language level skills than their hearing peers. Without question, deaf students start with the disadvantage of language skills at birth, but this is not the only factor that has impacted their language skills. It has been suggested



that deaf students need good role models to be able to sign and learn to sign, but in many instances, they have had teachers who are not able to properly communicate with them, or who have felt sorry for them. The scope of the problem was referred to by Shantie (1999), who stated that in some educational settings, only 33% of teachers understand sign language as well as their deaf students. Teachers' inability to sign can have a significant impact on deaf students (Shantie, 1999).

Shantie's (1999) thoughts about the achievement gap correspond with those of Moore (2001), who explained that the potential achievement gap of deaf students may be the result of deaf students' teachers not having the sufficient skills to properly teach deaf students. A further problem with teachers of the deaf not being able to sign in K-12 classrooms is that deaf students are still learning language and need competent language models when there is usually little access to interpreters capable of providing communication comparable to that of their hearing peers experience in schools (Winston, 2005). In order to resolve the issue of ineffective communication taking place in deaf classrooms, teachers are required that can effectively communicate with the deaf students and be good role models of language (Winston, 2005).

The challenge of finding teachers that are good language role models has been the historical pattern, and in many instances, teachers of deaf students have ended up learning sign language from their deaf students. The tendency of teachers to learn from the deaf students they are supposed to be teaching is considered a backwards approach to teaching deaf students. The backwards approach of learning sign language has, in many instances, provided deaf students with teachers that were unqualified to assume the responsibility of

being a good role model of language. Consequently, Shantie (1999) mentioned the effect of teachers lacking the signal skills of American Sign Language discourse, which has resulted in a failure to achieve the desired outcome—the promotion of reading and writing success for deaf students.

Many teachers of deaf students have not been able to fulfill the responsibility of using sign language, which would provide deaf students the opportunity for increases in academic performance. Nor have many parents of deaf students done their part in sharing the responsibility of using sign language with their deaf children. For example, when parents have shared the responsibility of using American Sign Language (ASL), research has demonstrated that higher academic levels in reading and math have resulted for their deaf students (Hoffmeister & Shantie, 2000). Therefore, it is suggested that there is a strong need for a bilingual education to be implemented for deaf students, coupled with a strong American Sign Language program that will promote deaf students' growth in achieving better grammatical and constructive language with fewer errors (Hoffmeister & Shantie, 2000). The logic behind having a strong American Sign Language program is that deaf students using American Sign Language have performed better than deaf students not using American Sign Language, and those deaf students not using American Sign Language have continued to display lower levels of achievement than those using American Sign Language (Hoffmeister & Shantie, 2000).

What has further compounded the problem with deaf students not having a bilingual education is that there was a historical focus on the deaf being taught with the oral method, which is verbalizing and not using American Sign Language. Hoffmeister and Shantie (2000)

mentioned that the lack of language skills in deaf students has been enforced by the ineffective use of the oral method since the 1960s, and the resulting widespread fallout of the language deficiency seems to be evidenced by deaf students graduating from high school with third and fourth grade reading levels. While deaf students have had to contend with the hearing population's demands of how the deaf should communicate and be taught to communicate by using the oral method, it is only one of the many issues that deaf students have had to inevitably encounter due to the influence on education by the dominant hearing population.

Deaf students have also had to face the involved task of being educated in a public education system that has been shaped for the mainstream hearing population. The problems that exist today for deaf students seem to be ignored, even though they were pointed out 23 years ago by Tharp (1989), who emphasized that the American school system has traditionally used a one-size-fits-all approach to education in which the organization of teaching, learning, and performance is compatible with the social structure of dominant society. Hearing and deaf students have unfortunately been treated as a homogenous population in schools, and incongruously, the approaches that have been taken by school systems to educate students, including deaf students, have astonishingly been expected to work. The big setback with the notion of a one-size-fits-all education system is the supposition that the learning methods used for the hearing are sufficient for the deaf; therefore, it seems quite presumptuous that the methods used for the hearing are adequate, considering the diversified learning needs of deaf students.

Ironically, the unchanged educational approaches and standard approaches used to educate deaf students have continuously resulted in an outcome where deaf students'

achievement levels have consistently fallen below the achievement levels of their hearing peers. Moreover, the recurrent myopic educational approaches taken to educate deaf students appear to be flawed when taken into consideration that deaf students across the United States have often graduated from high school, but are not up to par with their hearing peers. The lower achievement levels of deaf students and the substandard academic results of the deaf and hard-of-hearing students being educated in a mainstream education system designed for hearing students have resulted in a host of considerations that students and their parents have had to deal with when evaluating public education or alternatives.

A significant factor that parents and their deaf children have had to consider is the choice of a school setting. Parents have had the difficult choice of choosing the correct school setting for their deaf children, which can be quite convoluted because of the mixed results of academic achievement in the different school settings. There are a variety of school settings currently available for deaf students that were not an option prior to the changes which resulted from educational laws. For example, the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, Section 504 provided deaf students an opportunity to go to an inclusive setting (Gannon, 1981). A subsequently enacted law that followed, 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, better known as IDEA, enabled deaf students to attend public school (Katzman, Gandhi, Gruner, Harbour, & Larock, 2005). Although educational law has increased the different types of educational settings deaf students can attend, it has also introduced a whole new set of obstacles for parents and their deaf children when contemplating the choice of a particular school setting.

The quandary of choosing a school was illustrated by Hoffmeister and Shantie (2000), who explained that choosing the correct school setting can be an especially difficult undertaking

for parents, considering that 90% of deaf children are born to hearing parents. The predicament presented for the hearing parents of a deaf child is that they lack background or experience in the educational decision-making process regarding the options for their deaf child's school setting. As a result of their inexperience with their child's hearing loss, hearing parents go through an emotional pendulum of different feelings like anguish, guilt, vulnerability, denial, and uncertainty (Steinberg, 1991; Steinberg, Bain, Li, Delgado, & Ruperto, 2003). Furthermore, the decision-making process for an educational placement for the hearing parent of a deaf child becomes influenced by emotions, values, beliefs, and expectations (Eleweke & Rodda, 2000; Steinberg & Bain, 2001; Steinberg et al., 2003). Consequently, parents often make educational placement decisions without the most sound and complete information (Moores, 1987; Young, Carr, Hunt, Skipp, & Tattersall, 2006).

An additional complex and weighty decision for parents is choosing the best educational setting for their child, as there are assorted outcomes of achievement for deaf students in the different school settings. As a result, parents end up having the mounting pressure of choosing the best school setting for their deaf and hard-of-hearing child, even though there have been conflicting findings of which school setting produces the best academic achievement. For that reason, choosing a school setting presents a significant challenge for parents.

Although choosing the best school setting is important for deaf children and their parents, the decision regarding which setting would be best is still just one small piece of the puzzle of education for the deaf and hard-of-hearing and their parents. In addition, parents are faced with the multifarious task of becoming familiar with the plethora of educational laws that could impact their child's education. It is especially difficult for parents considering that educational

laws have continually evolved and changed over the last 50 years. These changing educational laws have greatly altered the educational landscape, and the transformation in laws has made it necessary for parents and their deaf and hard-of-hearing children to take note of the resulting educational alterations.

The bona fide launch of the educational transformation for deaf and hard-of-hearing students occurred in the 1960s, in unison with the onset of the Civil Rights Movement. Ramsey (1997) pointed out that up until the 1960s, the majority of deaf students were still being educated in residential schools. In fact, in the 1950s, 85% of deaf children attended residential schools (Padden & Humphries, 2005). Unexpectedly, the catalyst for an alternative school setting for deaf students resulted from the 1963-1965 rubella epidemic, which produced an increasing number of deaf students that could not be placed in any of the existing residential programs due to lack of space. Concurrently, the Civil Rights Movement had taken foot, which in due course led to the metaphorical door being opened with options for the way that deaf and hard-of-hearing students would be educated. The mechanism that opened this door for deaf students was the federal laws and amendments that have taken shape and emerged in the last 50 years, which have provided parents and their students with disabilities several additional resources that were not historically accessible.

The launch of present-day educational laws was undertaken by the Federal Government in 1965 with the implementation of P.L. 89-10, The Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965. Hereafter, P.L. 89-10 is the cornerstone of a foundation of laws and amendments that have helped to establish the future laws for schools, as well as rights for parents of the deaf and hard-of-hearing children. As a result of the law, deaf students were labeled as having a disability.

The passage of P.L. 89-10 consequently set into motion the legal foundation for early special education (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, 1998 as cited in Cerney, 2007).

P.L. 89-10 was historic because it permitted state institutions and schools to be the recipients of federal grants to educate students with a disability, including the deaf (Cerney, 2007). A momentous supplemental law to P.L. 89-10 was carried out by Congress in 1973 for deaf students with the Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, which meant that in addition to the money provided by P.L. 89-10, deaf students would also be provided with the opportunity for equal access and a chance for inclusion (Gannon, 1981). Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act was a milestone in educational law for students like the deaf because it not only provided money for schools, but also enabled deaf students to get equal access and be provided with interpreters in public schools.

While Section of 504 of the Rehabilitation Act was monumental, the landmark law was P.L. 94-142, passed in 1975 (Welch, 1993). With its passage, P.L. 94-142 presented a real paradigm shift in educating the deaf because it provided parents an opportunity to be involved in their children's education process, which has profoundly affected deaf students' educational experience and school placement (Welch, 1993). While the effectiveness of P.L. 94-142 cannot be measured, P.L. 94-142 did have an impact in increasing the number of deaf or hard-of-hearing attending regular schools in 1984, with reported numbers at 83% (Burch, 2002). While P.L. 94-142 and similar amendments have certainly been advantageous to deaf students and their parents, parents of deaf students continue to face many challenges regarding the alternatives provided by the laws that are most beneficial to a particular student.

Despite the fact that it can be a considerable challenge for the parents of a deaf child to keep up with educational laws, the education system has continually evolved in assisting the deaf with their needs. While laws have undoubtedly been beneficial to deaf students, the problem is that the laws typically view the deaf students' needs as either being met and not being met, as opposed to considering the past and present; there has been a lack of focus on the heart of the situation of deaf education, as communicated by the deaf students themselves. Deaf students themselves are a core part of the educational equation, but their individual participation and communication in the education process continues to be overlooked in a majority of instances when seeking solutions to the lower levels of achievement. To avoid overlooking the deaf community in educational solutions, a good starting point for the hearing population would be to become cognizant of the fact that there is a deaf culture that should be recognized by the hearing population.

### **Deaf Culture**

The hearing population has historically shaped the deaf community's educational values in accordance with its own opinions on what is considered suitable for the deaf community. Nevertheless, even with the hearing population's values influencing the deaf community, a distinct deaf community with its own historical cultural values exists. The profound idea of the deaf having a deaf culture was confirmed and pointed out by Padden and Humphries (2005):

Deaf people have long lived under the benevolence and care of others whose plans and aspirations often isolated Deaf people from each other and labeled them in ways that left them uneducated and alone. Culture offers the possibility of making Deaf people whole. It assumes lines of transmission of ways being from generations past, as long ago as



hundreds of years. Culture provides a way for Deaf people to reimagine themselves as not so much adapting to the present, but inheriting the past. It allows them to think of themselves not as unfinished hearing people but as cultural and linguistic beings in a collective world with one another. It gives them a reason for existing with others in the modern world (p. 161).

Despite the deaf community's longstanding cultural past in the United States, the idea of a deaf culture was not introduced into the mainstream until the 1970s. Ladd (2003) mentioned that the term *deaf culture* did not emerge in the majority of hearing academic circles until the 1970s. While it became part of the hearing academic circles in the 1970s, it really did not take off as a mainstream term until the 1980s. Padden and Humphries (2005) described that the idea of a deaf culture encountered resistance with deaf people themselves who argued whether or not American Sign Language was an authentic language, and whether deaf culture was really a culture or subculture. Padden and Humphries (2005) mentioned that Deaf people initially rejected the new vocabulary out of anxiety and fear of change. However, Padden and Humphries (2005) stated that, from the 1980s until now, *deaf culture* has become part of the vocabulary of the hearing as well as of the Deaf.

It is, however, imperative to recognize that a person being deaf does not necessarily mean he or she is part of deaf culture. Deaf culture does not refer to the condition of deafness. Padden and Humphries (2005) referenced the description by James Woodward that decodes the difference between deaf and Deaf culture by considering the cultural practices within a group as the capitalized "Deaf," while the lowercase "deaf" is simply related to the condition of being deaf and having hearing loss. With that said, Deaf people can be profoundly deaf or hear well

enough to carry on a conversation, or be hard of hearing and able to use a telephone (Padden & Humphries, 2005). With the clarification of the capitalized “Deaf culture,” it is apparent that the deaf have a vast historical past in the United States.

Holcomb (2013) mentioned that the historically perceived concrete images by deaf scholars have been the representations of Deaf culture portrayed by residential school, American Sign Language, and participation in Deaf clubs, but explained that those are not necessarily the “core values”. At the same time, Holcomb (2013) explained that it does not mean that Deaf culture does exist, but rather that deaf culture has evolved. Holcomb (2013) described the evolution of Deaf culture into modern society as follows: “Instead, the core of Deaf culture consist of solutions for effective communication, access to information, validation of the Deaf experience, and complete acceptance of being Deaf as a normal existence” (p. 102).

### **The Continued Debate of Academic Setting**

Understanding deaf culture and involving the deaf community in educational decisions can have a great impact, especially on the area of education that is most commonly scrutinized and examined for its correlation to the academic achievement of deaf students, which is the specific placement option that is chosen for deaf students. There certainly are many different placement options to consider that are available to deaf and hard-of-hearing students, including mainstreaming, inclusion, and Deaf residential schools. Over the past 20 years, researchers have formed different opinions about academic placement and its impact on the academic achievement of deaf students.

Allen and Osborn (1984) found that only 1% of achievement scores were accounted for by placement, and the placement itself had little to do with achievement. In addition, the idea

that placement is not the cause of a certain academic outcome was reported by Kluwin and Moores (1989), who described that deaf students' characteristics and the quality of teachers, not school setting, were the reasons for score differences and achievement outcomes (Marschark & Spencer, 2003).

The inclination to look at the school setting as the explanation for the differences in deaf students' academics was also studied by Powers (1999), who pointed out that a student's gender, amount of hearing loss, additional handicaps, and age are much more predictable factors of academic achievement than educational placement (as cited in Marschark & Spencer, 2003). In agreement with Powers, Marschark, Lang, and Albertini (2002) articulated that academic success is connected to variables such as the deaf student's understanding language, social development, personality development, academic preparation, and academic performance, and that these are better explanations for the academic achievement of deaf students. Yet again, Marschark and Spencer (2003) expressed that the educational placement that parents choose for their deaf student has rather little influence on academic achievement when compared to the deaf student's individual differences, which ultimately explained 95% of the variance in students' academic achievement. Overall, students' academic achievement in the mainstream population is most impacted by the quality of teachers, as described by Aaronson, Barrow, and Sander (2007), who expressed that teachers have the biggest impact on student achievement.

In the *Oxford Handbook Deaf Studies, Language, and Education*, the authors Marschark and Spencer (2003) included an article by Micheal S. Stinson and Thomas N. Kluwin, "In Deaf Studies, Language, and Education Consequences." Through their research, the authors made the argument that educational achievement does not vary due to the type of educational placement.

Instead, Marschark and Spencer explained that educational achievement might be a product of the deaf and hard-of-hearing students' personal strengths and weaknesses that were already present prior to being placed in a certain educational setting.

Unfortunately, the answers to those questions by parents regarding placement are not easily deciphered. Deaf students' academic achievement in the different school settings varies, with no conclusive evidence that one setting is better than another. The quandary of the academic setting faced by parents was pointed out by Marschark and Spencer (2003), who expressed that there is difficulty and uncertainty for parents when trying to effectively make a decision regarding the best educational placement for their deaf and hard-of-hearing children, as research has not entirely revealed the cause of discrepancies in academic achievement for deaf and hard-of-hearing students in the school settings.

Marschark and Spencer (2003) described difficult decisions that parents need to consider regarding educational placement, and emphasized that parents have to stay vigilantly focused and reflect on the different options available for their deaf children to ensure the placement provides the best possible advantages. Although questions still exist regarding whether the type of academic placement for the deaf really contributes to the differences in achievement, the diverse educational placements for deaf students do possess their own distinct advantages and disadvantages (Marschark et al., 2002).

While in a residential school, students have access to a wide range of resources such as audiologists, counselors, and psychologists (Marschark & Spencer, 2003; Scheetz, 2012). Also, deaf students who attend residential schools have an ability to reap the benefits of being exposed to deaf students as role models, as well as fluent signing, competent peers, and an

educational environment where the playing field with their classmates is comparable (Marschark et al., 2002). On the other hand, the inclusion classroom setting requires the regular classroom teacher to make adjustments to meet the needs of all the different learners, including the deaf and hard-of-hearing who receive special services, rather than having the special education teacher make all of the adjustments (Jenkins, Pious, & Jewell, 1990).

Deaf students are at higher risk in the mainstreamed setting, where they are underprepared compared to hearing peers in regards to learning strategies, their knowledge of the world, and course content (Marschark, Sepere, Covertino, & Seewagen, 2005 as cited in Moores and Martin, 2006; Marschark, Sapere, Covertino, Swagen, & Maltzen 2004). Furthermore, in the inclusion setting, academic experience with access, achievement, and socialization equivalent to those of hearing peers does not always happen (Antia et al., 2002; Carlberg & Kavale, 1980; Foster, Long, & Snell, 1999; Guralnick, 2001; Wang & Walberg, 1988). However, attending a residential school may not be a possibility for some deaf students, as many do not have a residential school within the proximity of where they live (Scheetz, 2012).

Unfortunately, for parents of deaf children, research itself cannot inform which placement is best for their deaf or hard-of-hearing children, and no one placement is best for all students (Marschark & Hauser, 2012).

### **The Launch of a Least Restrictive Environment**

While diverse educational placements are available and each has its own distinct advantages and disadvantages, the result of the passage of the 1975 law for the least restrictive environment has resulted in special needs students like the deaf being swayed toward getting an education in the regular mainstreamed classroom (Gurp, 2002). The placement of deaf students

into the mainstreamed public school setting has become the most dominant placement option chosen by parents for their deaf and hard-of-hearing children as a result of the mandate for a least restrictive environment (Watson, Gregory, & Powers, 1999).

However, Stinson and Antia (1999) mentioned a problem with the law for a least restrictive environment, which is the inclination to mainstream students when there is confusion about what defines mainstreamed education, as the terms of placement can easily be confused in many instances and are often used interchangeably. For instance, parents might choose mainstreaming for their deaf and hard-of-hearing student to receive their education in the regular public school; however, the student would not automatically be educated in the regular classroom for the majority of the day (Stinson & Antia, 1999). If parents decided that they really wanted their student to be educated in a regular classroom all day, they would need to do the alternative to mainstreaming, which is the inclusive setting where students are educated in the regular class for most of the day (Stinson & Antia, 1999). Although the idea of least restrictive environment sounds positive, there is the drawback of not knowing the type of general education classroom in which the deaf student will be placed.

An additional drawback of the mainstreamed, or labeled, “least restrictive” environment for deaf students is that they have continued to be placed in the mainstream setting because the law for a least restrictive environment has been interpreted as an implicit fact that deaf students should be placed in the mainstream setting, although the law does not overtly advocate the mainstream setting (Ramsey, 1997). The premise of the least restrictive environment is the assumption that deaf students need to have hearing students as models of appropriate conduct and of standard language and usual communication (Ramsey, 2007).

While the concept of permitting deaf students to be educated in the regular classroom with hearing students might appear beneficial, it is not always necessarily considered the best option. The needs of each individual deaf student must be taken into consideration. There is the potential benefit of being mainstreamed so that deaf students can attend regular or special classrooms (Marschark et al., 2002). However, the positive assumptions of the mainstreamed setting are likely to never come to fruition and may have a negative impact on students (Moore & Martin, 2006). For example, deaf students taught in mainstream nonacademic courses and core curricula courses in separate classes waste time with transitions or a commute to a different school setting (Marschark & Houser, 2012). Furthermore, deaf students have more difficulty with social and academic integration because of the potential inclination of schools to have deaf and hard-of-hearing students taught in two different settings as opposed to one educational setting (Kluwin & Stinson, 1993; Mussleman & Mootilal, 1996 as cited in Marschark et al., 2002). In addition, deaf students will not have the opportunity to communicate and interact with other deaf students in the classroom, and this lack of communication will ultimately end up eroding the deaf students' confidence (Brinkely, 2011).

Furthermore, the potential ramifications of placing students in the least restrictive setting were pointed out by Ramsey (1997), who suggested that it is often done without any careful forethought regarding the individual deaf student's success in such a placement. Consequently, the least restrictive setting, having been taken literally as a physical placement of deaf students in the mainstream setting, has produced additional problems, such as when placement decision is made without any real consideration given to what the specific student's individual needs are regarding learning and teaching (Ramsey, 1997).

Similar to Ramsey (1997), who stated that there is a problem with the specific needs of the deaf students not being considered in the least restrictive setting, Mowl (1996) mentioned that the placement of deaf and hard-of-hearing students in the least restrictive environment has resulted in a more restrictive environment because deaf students do not share a common language with their hearing peers. In addition, Stinson and Antia (1999) mentioned an additional impediment that has resulted from the law calling for a least restrictive environment. This impediment is the increased chance that deaf and hard-of-hearing students may never attend school with other deaf students, as the least restrictive environment law has resulted in the closing of numerous residential schools. An added consequence of the widespread closing of residential schools is that the choice of a placement for parents has been narrowed because the number of residential schools closed has resulted in a decreased proximity of residential schools available.

Moreover, the least restrictive environment has created an additional convoluted process for parents in that they are required to choose the best school placement for their deaf and hard-of-hearing children because of the several options offered. Parents end up needing to choose whether to have their deaf students attend mainstream schools that serve the whole community versus attending residential schools that serve students that are exclusively deaf and hard-of-hearing. Whether the parents end up deciding on the public school or the residential school setting, they need to become familiar with the different options available to their deaf and hard-of-hearing children. The decision where to place students can be an exigent task for parents because parents might have many questions themselves regarding which option is the most beneficial for their children.



A positive element of the least restrictive environment is that it does offer deaf students placement options in school. However, there remains the added complexity of all the options involved and ambiguous results of the least restrictive environment, which make it that much more of a difficult decision for parents.

### **Present-Day Mainstreamed Education/Least Restrictive Environment**

In 2009, the majority of educated deaf and hard-of-hearing students attended public schools. Public schools are where the bulk of students with hearing impairments were placed, and public schools accommodated a total of 86.3% of the students with hearing impairments. Of the 86.3% of deaf and hard-of-hearing students, 59.3% of students spent less than 21% of the time outside of general education classrooms. While 17.6% of students spent 20% to 60% outside of the general education setting, 8% of hearing impaired students spent more than 60% of time outside of the general education setting. Only 4.3% of hearing impaired students stayed in a residential setting, and 1.1% were in a private setting (Digest of Education Statistics, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).

Mainstreaming is one possible option for the placement of deaf students, where they can be placed in the regular public school classroom and attend a few special classes (Marschark et al., 2002). Although mainstreamed education takes place in a regular public school, the concept of what defines a mainstreamed classroom today remains confusing, because in many instances, mainstream programs place deaf students in regular classrooms only for nonacademic courses, with their core curricula being taught in separate classrooms or schools (Marschark & Hauser, 2012).

Even when considering the popularity and potential benefits of the mainstreamed setting,

it is apparent that it has the potential to create an environment where deaf and hard-of-hearing students have more difficulty with social and academic integration because of the inclination to teach these students in two different educational settings as opposed to the consistency of one setting (Kluwin & Stinson, 1993; Musselman & Mootilal, 1996 as cited in Marschark et al., 2002). The problem with the inconsistency of mainstream programs is that deaf students placed in regular classrooms only for nonacademic courses and taught their core curricula in separate classrooms or separate schools are likely to commute to a different school setting, which becomes a waste of valuable time (Marschark et al., 2002). The commute and constant transitions take away from time that could be used for instruction.

Instead, mainstreamed classes should provide deaf students with opportunities that are equivalent to those of their hearing peers, and should place them in effective classrooms where the mainstream experience provides the appropriate academic supports and services for the best educational experience possible (Marschark et al., 2002). Successful mainstreamed classrooms should be open to integrating students in the social and academic processes of the classroom, as this would be a much more valuable use of time (Kauffmann, 1993 as cited in Marschark et al., 2002).

As a result of the ambiguous benefits of a mainstreamed classroom, researchers have sought to find whether it really is the best placement option by parents for their deaf and hard-of-hearing students. According to Moores and Martin (2006), the positive assumptions associated with mainstreamed schooling are most likely never going to come to fruition, and in the end, will result in negatively impacting the deaf student in the mainstreamed placement. Therefore, the authors concluded that the mainstreamed setting was not always the best school placement

option (Moore & Martin, 2006).

Research has found that a mainstreamed setting can be disadvantageous for deaf students and can have a profound impact on them. Winston (2005) mentioned that deaf students usually have had little access to interpreters capable of providing communication comparable to that of their hearing peers, even though K-12 classrooms are a place where deaf students are still learning language and crucially need competent language models (Winston, 2005 as cited in Moore & Martin, 2006). An additional problem that might be encountered in the mainstreamed classroom is that deaf students make up a very small portion of the total student population and, as a result, are less apt to be placed with other students who can use sign language and communicate with them (Brinkley, 2011).

The predicament deaf students may encounter in the mainstreamed setting was pointed out by Brinkley (2011), who found that the lack of other students that deaf students can communicate and socialize with ends up eroding the deaf students' confidence. Moreover, deaf students are likely to end up in mainstream classes with someone who can go through the motions of sign, but who does not appropriately use American Sign Language (Brinkley, 2011). Having someone in class who signs, but who does not sign properly, negatively impacts the students because they learn to sign from someone who is simply going through the motions. Signing promotes a deaf awareness; however, someone simply going through the motions of sign is not equivalent to an authentic deaf awareness where students are being educated in a majority deaf education setting where the classroom environment is constructed with a top-down approach and an educational focus on deaf students (Brinkley, 2011). The missing element of communication is a common quandary faced in the mainstreamed classroom, and difficulties

with communication are especially troubling considering the fact that even with highly-skilled interpreters, deaf students have scored lower on tests of lectured content.

In a 2006 study, Moores and Martin concluded that deaf students placed in mainstreamed classrooms were not playing on a “level playing field” in regards to academic achievement. The root of the problem was linked to deaf students who received instruction that was not relevant to their prior knowledge, learning strategies, and language comprehension skills (Moores & Martin, 2006). Furthermore, deaf students are often underprepared in comparison to their hearing peers regarding learning strategies, their knowledge of the world, and course content, which has put them at high risk in the mainstreamed setting (Marschark et al., 2005; Marschark et al., 2004). While there are many negative effects of deaf students being educated in the mainstream setting, the deaf students who have been integrated into the mainstream have performed better linguistically and academically than their deaf peers in the residential setting. It is important to recognize that in the mainstream setting, personal and social problems regularly exist for deaf students.

### **Deaf Students’ Views of Mainstream Classrooms**

While the recurring focus of researchers has been to look at the deaf students’ school placement and achievement in schools, the concept of viewing these factors as areas detached from the individual deaf students themselves is common. Doing research about deaf and hard-of-hearing students without examining the individual students’ needs and perceptions has been a frequently missed opportunity that would enable all the components that make up the deaf students’ educational experiences to be incorporated.

The continued debate about the different educational settings for deaf students has

actually motivated some researchers to inquire about the educational experience of deaf students by interviewing them and having the deaf students analyze their own particular academic settings. Obtaining deaf students' interpretations of which educational setting provided them with the best potential for success in school does seem necessary. From the existing research on the views of deaf students, it is now possible to see the school placement from a whole different viewpoint.

A groundbreaking example of exploring students' views was accomplished in a study by Foster (1998). In the study, Foster interviewed deaf students who gave their interpretations of how the school setting they attended affected their education. The results were compelling. With the mainstream setting considered to be the least-restrictive environment, one would expect that the deaf students would mention their placement in it with high regard. However, when deaf students were interviewed and provided their interpretations about the mainstreamed setting, they expressed difficulty keeping up with notes in class due to the language barrier and the absence of an interpreter (Foster, 1988).

Although deaf students reported that hearing peers and administrators tried to provide more support in class, the support provided was described as inadequate (Foster, 1988). While a language barrier existed between the deaf and hearing, an unexpected language barrier existed in regards to deaf students who communicated with other deaf students in class who were taught through the oral method and not American Sign Language (Foster, 1988). Deaf students viewed the language barrier encountered in the mainstream class as a major impediment that thwarted any attempt to build strong relationships with their hearing peers in class. Deaf students also described the language barrier as causing feelings of isolation from genuine classroom peer

interactions. The effect of the deaf students' communication barrier and difficulty fitting into the mainstream classroom was that the deaf students skipped classes and cheated on tests. In addition, several disconcerting, recurring issues commonly reported by deaf students in the mainstreamed setting were feelings of loneliness, rejection, and social isolation (Foster, 1988).

On the other hand, deaf students mentioned there were some beneficial actions taken in the mainstreamed classroom by students and teachers who helped them with getting notes and assistance (Foster, 1988). Deaf students also considered the mainstream setting positive because of the interest paid by parents in this setting, as well as blackboard illustrations and hands-on exercises in math and science as modes of learning that were helpful. All of these components enhanced the students' academic achievement in the mainstreamed setting (Foster, 1988). Furthermore, deaf students described that the benefit of the mainstreamed setting was that it equipped them for achievement in higher education. Even though there were several obstacles and hardships for the deaf students in the mainstreamed classroom, they still expressed great pride in their capabilities to withstand the obstacles, and that pride appeared to supersede all of the difficulties encountered by the deaf students in the mainstream setting (Foster, 1988).

Eight years later, a second prominent study done by Stinson, Liu, Saur, and Long (1996) provided deaf students the ability to communicate their perceptions of education at the college level. In the study, 50 male and female deaf and hard-of-hearing students enrolled in the National Technical Institute for the Deaf and cross-registered at the Rochester Institute of Technology filled out a Classroom Communication Ease Scale that included positive and negative feelings about communication in mainstream secondary education (Stinson et al., 1996). The study's results about the communication preference of the deaf students were quite

revealing, considering that of the 50 students who participated, 21 used speech to communicate with their peers and professors, and the mixed communication group of 29 students used sign, speech, writing notes, or an interpreter to communicate with peers and professors (Stinson et al., 1996).

In the study, several common themes were found among the 50 deaf students. An unexpected result of the research gathered and analyzed was that communication was a difficult challenge for deaf students in the mainstream setting, regardless of the modality used by the deaf and hard-of-hearing students in the classroom, or by the students with teachers, or with other students (Stinson et al., 1996). In the study's completed communication scale, deaf students confirmed that communication was difficult for each of them in the mainstream setting; therefore, it was not unexpected that the deaf and hard-of-hearing students also described that it was essential and desirable for them to have an interpreter as a resource in class regardless of what modality they used.

In addition, deaf students in the study expressed that good communication was contingent on the cooperation of all persons in the class. The deaf and hard-of-hearing students viewed the teacher as the one most responsible for communicating, and believed it was essential for the hearing students in the classroom to be sensitive and learn about the deaf students' needs. Those deaf and hard-of-hearing students who were successful in class described that the development of their individual strategies to get help in class is what enabled them to communicate with teachers and students in and outside of the classroom in an array of situations (Stinson et al., 1996).

In the Stinson et al. (1996) study, deaf students communicating their perceptions was

quite valuable because, ultimately, deaf students are the ones that have to live the school experience and acclimate themselves to the particular educational setting. The study concluded that students' opinions combined with their characteristics and personal needs were the most valuable of dynamics that should be looked at when parents and schools seek deaf students' success in regard to achievement in a particular school setting. For that reason, the educational placement decision needs to be done with great consideration by the parents, coupled with the deaf students' participation in the decision-making process.

### **Inclusion**

While mainstreaming has been the most popular option for deaf students, inclusion was another educational placement that gained popularity in the mid-1980s, as it was also viewed as a least restrictive environment (Winzer, 2005). While many deaf and hard-of-hearing children attend schools in inclusive classrooms, a problem arises in that there is a scant amount of literature on students' participation in the inclusive setting (Borders, Barnett, & Bauer, 2010).

Another predicament with inclusion is that it is supposed to be a beneficial educational setting where deaf and hard-of-hearing students receive most or all of their education in the general education setting (Stinson & Anita, 1999). However, researchers have found that there has been a common flaw apparent in the assumption that deaf students' placement in the general education setting equates to an equal academic experience with regard to access, achievement, and socialization, which is not always the case (Antia et al., 2002; Carlberg & Kavale, 1980; Foster et al., 1999; Guralnick, 2001; Wang & Walberg, 1988).

While the inclusive setting does not necessarily equate to an equal academic setting for deaf students, the concept of inclusion still necessitates that certain components exist in such a



school setting to make it function as an inclusive classroom. For example, the inclusive classroom setting is theoretically supposed to have a regular classroom teacher make adjustments to meet the needs of all the different learners, like the deaf and hard-of-hearing who receive special services, as opposed to a special education teacher making all of the adjustments (Jenkins, Pious, & Jewell, 1990). Also, for the inclusive classroom to function properly, it calls for teachers and special education teachers to work collaboratively to ensure that the curriculum and educational setting makes the needed adaptations to promote learning for all of its diverse learners (Friend & Bursuck, 1996). In addition, the inclusive setting is supposed to make such adaptations necessary to meet the needs of all the students in the classroom, regardless of the disability (Stinson & Anita, 1999).

While the concept of inclusion initially sounds awe-inspiring, the inclusive setting has presented with various problems. In the milestone study that first looked into the impact of the inclusive setting for deaf students, Leigh (1999) described the reality of those difficulties. Leigh pointed out that the push toward inclusion for deaf students within educational settings means that a critical mass of deaf peers will sometimes not be available to provide social choices and facilitate connections with the deaf community. This may be partly because of the practices that place deaf students in a local school in which they are likely to be the only deaf student. As noted earlier, successful connections with hearing peers are possible, but fraught with difficulties. Meanings of sameness and differences, the process of defining the self as related to hearingness and deafness, perceptions of communication skills as adequate or inadequate, and the nature of personal development are bound to be influenced by this type of school experience (Leigh, 1999).

Leigh (1999) wrote of the inclination to place deaf students in the inclusive setting in the United States, a tendency which presents these students with many potential difficulties. In the inclusive setting, students such as the deaf and hard-of-hearing could potentially miss out on opportunities to share the educational experience with someone whose similar deaf identity, communication skills, and personal development could have a profound constructive influence on their school experience through the bond of being deaf.

In addition, through a questionnaire, Leigh (1999) gathered the opinions of 24 hard-of-hearing students in public school and concluded that a supportive and structured school environment is what was needed most to enhance the inclusive classroom for deaf and hard-of-hearing students. In the study, it was revealed that merely having deaf and hard-of-hearing students placed in an inclusive school environment is not enough, but that a conducive school environment is needed that strongly considers molding the identity, self-perceptions, and perspectives on life for the deaf students in the inclusive setting (Leigh, 1999). Social isolation occurs if deaf and hard-of-hearing students' social needs are not properly addressed in the inclusive setting, and if they are not provided opportunities for socialization with hearing peers (Stinson & Leigh, 1995 as cited in Leigh, 1999).

As a result of the study, suggestions were made in order for the inclusive setting to be a positive experience for deaf and hard-of-hearing students. One suggestion was that teachers need to ensure the inclusion of the deaf students in meaningful social activities with the hearing students in the classroom. In addition, teachers should allow deaf and hard-of-hearing students the opportunity to develop a positive sense of self without being singled out in class (Leigh, 1999, p. 234). A further suggestion of the study was to have deaf adults come to the classroom

to serve as positive role models for students (Leigh, 1999).

Another one of the handful of studies done on the inclusive setting was by Foster et al. (1999), who researched deaf students in postsecondary education from 1996 to 1997. The study looked at students who received inclusive instruction at the Rochester Institute of Technology. The study exposed several issues that questioned the effectiveness of inclusion at the time. One was that the majority of instructors who taught courses with deaf and hard-of-hearing students in them felt it was not their responsibility to accommodate students in the inclusive setting, but that it was the responsibility of the students, the interpreter, and other support services in place for the students (Foster et al., 1999). Another potential problem was identified in an instructor's comment, that written work was graded differently for hearing-impaired students; the instructor's comment suggested that lower expectations were held for hearing-impaired students in comparison to their hearing peers (Foster et al., 1999).

The perceptions of instructors were troubling considering that they mentioned that deaf students lacked preparation and motivation, were over dependent on assistance, had poor study skills, and had poor English skills, and expressed their belief that mainstreaming was only done because of political correctness (Foster et al., 1999). Making matters even worse was the fact that most of the instructors that taught deaf students had little experience working with them, and they did not feel the need to get training because they knew deaf students made up such a small portion of the students in their course (Foster et al., 1999). The results suggested that teachers at the Rochester Institute of Technology did not consider themselves an integral part of the inclusive classroom setting because they expected the deaf students' interpreter and support services to provide accommodations.

In the study, deaf students and hearing students also expressed their thoughts of being taught in the inclusive setting at Rochester Institute of Technology. Hearing students expressed stronger feelings of belonging at Rochester Institute of Technology than deaf students (Foster et al., 1999). However, deaf students viewed the pace set by teachers in class in a positive and acceptable way, while their hearing peers considered the pace less optimal for learning (Foster et al., 1999). Both deaf and hard-of-hearing students agreed that participation was the greatest common denominator of feeling like part of the class (Foster et al., 1999). When help was needed in class, both mentioned getting assistance from peers, but deaf students were more apt to get help from a teacher or tutor (Foster et al., 1999). Both hearing and deaf students mentioned that the teacher's pace in class had the biggest impact on communication, and about half of the deaf students mentioned the interpreter as having a significant impact on in-class communication (Foster et al., 1999).

Studies by both Foster et al. (1999) and Leigh (1999) provide a wealth of information on deaf students and their perceptions of education. However, these types of studies are an anomaly, as there is a dearth of research on the deaf in the inclusive setting.

In a study by Borders, Barnett, and Bauer (2010), the researchers found positive effects for five elementary students with mild-to-moderate deafness in the inclusion setting. The students that participated in the study were directly observed by trained individuals to detect any difference between them and their hearing peers in the classroom while working on various academic activities. An observation of the activities that the hearing and mild-to-moderately deaf students engaged in were examined to determine: (a) the amount of time it took for their response to practice and prompts; (b) the amount of time required to follow classroom directions

and routines; and (c) the differences in level of engagement.

While results of the differences between responses to practice and prompt opportunities were similar for the mild-to-moderate deaf students observed and their hearing peers, the mild-to-moderate deaf students did require more verbal prompting than their hearing peers, but the accuracy for some of mild-to-moderate deaf students in the study increased (Borders et al., 2010). Rates of engagement for the mild-to-moderate deaf students were close to their typical hearing peers (Borders et al., 2010). The study confirmed the overall success of the mild-to-moderate deaf students in inclusive classrooms, and it was concluded that inclusive settings can work with effective practices put into place in the classroom (Borders et al., 2010).

While the most recent study of an inclusive setting is encouraging, there is still a great deal of work that needs to be done in researching the impact of inclusion on deaf students. The lack of research on the inclusive setting makes it difficult for parents to make an educated choice regarding this setting, given that other settings such as residential and mainstreamed have more information available.

### **Residential Option**

While the inclusive setting is a new concept with a scant amount of research, the residential setting for deaf students has a long history and has been around since the beginning of deaf education. The residential setting is an option that parents may currently choose for educating their children. While residential schools have several positive features, there are also issues that could emerge if the residential option is selected. For example, if parents choose the residential school setting for their deaf children, they may not have a residential school in close proximity to where they live. Scheetz (2012) mentioned that residential schools were conceived

with a low-incidence population in mind and have had the goal of serving a small and scattered deaf population residing outside of metropolitan areas. Consequently, the limited access to residential schools needs to be strongly considered by parents as most states have only two residential schools which are typically located in outlying areas (Marschark et al., 2002). However, if parents feel strongly about their deaf and hard-of-hearing children attending a residential school, there is the option for those who live too far away to commute to stay at the school during the week and come home on weekends and vacations (Marschark et al., 2002).

On the other hand, if parents happen to live close enough to the residential school, they can have their deaf and hard-of-hearing students go back and forth from the school on a daily basis without the need for the children to stay away from home. Children whose schools are too far away from home can stay during the week at the residential school setting, but they need to take into account that their deaf and hard-of-hearing child may encounter separation anxiety from his or her family at the start of the transition (Marschark et al. 2002). Although there are some negative aspects of residential schools that might be encountered, such as proximity and student separation from the family, they are offset by several positive aspects that parents of deaf and hard-of-hearing children have to take into consideration.

Schools for the deaf typically provide an excellent range of special resources, such as audiologists, counselors, and psychologists (Marschark & Spencer, 2003). Residential school classrooms provide structured classroom settings with the deaf students in mind, including small groups, seating that allows deaf students to have a clear view of the teacher, and an environment that provides deaf students with the ability to use expressive language (Marschark et al., 2003). Class sizes are usually small (Scheetz, 2012). The schools themselves are typically small, with

150 to 200 students. Furthermore, within residential schools, there are several vocational and academic courses that are available for deaf students (Marschark & Spencer, 2003; Stinson & Kluwin, 2003).

Likewise, residential schools enable deaf students to flourish in a deaf culture where they feel at home (Marschark et al., 2002). In the residential setting, there are a variety of communication methods such as American Sign Language, total communication, or a bilingual-bicultural approach (Scheetz, 2012). In addition, the deaf students who attend residential schools have the ability to reap the benefits of being exposed to deaf students as role models, fluent signers, and competent peers (Marschark et al., 2002). Deaf students in the residential school are placed in an educational environment where the playing field with their classmates is comparable (Marschark et al., 2002). In addition, deaf students have opportunities for socialization in the cafeteria, dormitories, and during athletic events, and have interactions and encounters with deaf adults; all of these interactions and encounters provide students with social, cultural, and linguistic models (Sheetz, 2012). It is imperative to note that the residential school was the original foundation of deaf education and provides an environment that has been beneficial because of the effortlessness at which deaf students are able to communicate and its connection to the deaf community and culture (DeLuca, Leigh, Lindgren, & Napoli, 2008).

### **Deaf Students' Views of Residential Setting**

Deaf students spoke about the residential setting in a study by Foster (1998), in which they described the beneficial and negative consequences of being educated in the residential setting. In the residential setting, deaf students interviewed reported concerns of attentiveness to academics as a result of using the oral method, and expressed that too much of the time in class

was spent on communication. Subsequently, deaf students reported that in the residential setting, students' hands were slapped for using sign language, and the slow academic pace in residential schools for the deaf was years behind the hearing school's curriculum (Foster, 1988).

In addition, evidence of the lack of academic rigor in the residential setting was given in accounts by students interviewed who expressed that high school science courses were progressing at an extremely sluggish pace. For example, only a quarter of the material for each course was covered by the teachers before the end of the year exam (Foster, 1988). The information provided by deaf students about the lack of academic rigor and the slow-paced instruction in science revealed why deaf students had such difficulties with the end-of-year science tests, and therefore it came without shock that the examinations had a high rate of failure.

Nonetheless, even considering the lack of academic rigor for deaf students in the residential setting, they still felt like a legitimate part of the social setting. These feelings were expressed as the product of residential settings having various opportunities in which they were able to take part, such as plays, drama, and interactive educational opportunities, as well as afterschool activities. Mentioned as most significant by deaf students in the study was that the residential setting provided an environment in which they shared cultural similarity, and was made up of deaf students that shared a common language, which made it possible for them to break down barriers of social communication.

In the study, Foster (1988) revealed that students shared thoughts and experiences in the different types of educational settings which allowed for a broader understanding of the actual experiences of deaf and hard-of-hearing students in a specific educational setting. The shared thoughts of deaf students shed some light on what it would be like to step into the shoes of the



deaf students. In addition, the study provided the deaf students an opportunity to share their plight of facing the challenges of learning with a hearing disability.

<b>School Settings Lists of Pros and Cons</b>	<b>Horizontal Lists of Pros and Cons</b>			
Mainstream Pros	Mainstreamed students can attend regular or special classrooms (Marschark et al., 2002).	Positive assumptions unlikely to come to fruition and negative impact on students (Moores & Martin, 2006).		
Mainstream Cons	Underprepared deaf students compared to hearing peers in regards to learning strategies, their knowledge of the world, and course content places them at a huge risk in the mainstream setting (Marschark et al., 2004; Marschark et al., 2005 as cited in Moores & Martin, 2006).	Deaf taught in mainstream nonacademic courses taught in mainstream and core curricula courses in separate classes which wastes time with transition or commute to a different school setting (Marschark & Houser, 2012).	Deaf students have more difficulty with social and academic integration because of the potential inclination by schools to have deaf and hard-of-hearing students taught in two different settings as opposed to one educational setting (Kluwin & Stinson, 1993; Mussleman & Mootilal, 1996 as cited in Marschark et al., 2002).	A study by Moores and Martin (2006) concluded that deaf students placed in mainstream classes are not on a “level playing field” in regards to academic achievement because instruction was not relevant to prior knowledge, learning strategies, and language comprehension skills.
Mainstream Cons	Even with highly skilled interpreters in a mainstreamed classroom, the deaf students still scored lower on tests of lectured content than hearing students (Brinkley, 2011).	Deaf students will make up less of the total student population, and as a result, are less apt to be placed with other students who can use sign and communicate with them (Brinkley, 2011).	Lack of deaf students to communicate with and have social interaction with in the classroom ends up eroding the deaf students’ confidence (Brinkley, 2011).	A study by Moores and Martin (2006) concluded that deaf students placed in mainstream classes are not on a “level playing field” in regards to academic achievement because instruction was not relevant to prior knowledge, learning strategies, and language comprehension skills.

Residential Pros	Excellent range of resources like audiologists, counselors, and psychologists (Maraschark & Spencer, 2003; Scheetz, 2012).	Deaf students have opportunities for socialization, interactions, and encounters with deaf adults. All the interactions in and out of class provide students with social, cultural, and linguistic models (Scheetz, 2012, 154).	Has provided an environment that has been beneficial because of the effortlessness at which deaf students are able to communicate and its connection to the deaf community and culture (DeLuca et al., 2008).	Deaf students who attend residential schools have an ability to reap the benefits of being exposed to deaf students as role models, fluent signing, competent peers, and the deaf students are in an educational environment where playing field with their classmates is comparable (Marschark et al., 2002).
Residential Pros	Deaf flourish in a deaf culture with a variety of communication methods like ASL, total communication, and bilingual-bicultural, and deaf socialization, activities present everywhere (Sheetz, 2012).	Structured classroom settings with deaf students in mind by providing small groups and setting that allows deaf students to have a clear view of the teacher and class room environment where deaf students can use expressive language (Marschark et al., 2003,).	Deaf flourish in a deaf culture with a variety of communication methods like ASL, total communication, bilingual-bicultural, and deaf socialization, with activities present everywhere (Sheetz, 2012).	Provides an effortless environment where deaf can communicate and connect to the deaf community and culture (Deluca et al., 2008).
Residential Cons	Deaf students may not have a residential school within the proximity of where they live (Scheetz, 2012)	Class sizes are usually small (Scheetz, 2012).	Residential school has a low incidence of population in mind and serves small scattered deaf population outside in metro areas (Scheetz, 2012).	
Inclusion Pros	Is supposed to have the regular classroom make the adaptations necessary to meet the needs of all the students in the classroom regardless of the disability (Stinson & Anita, 1999).	Calls for teachers and special education teachers to work collaboratively to make sure curriculum and educational setting have needed adaptations to allow learning for all of its diverse learners in the setting (Friend & Bursuck, 1996).	Is supposed to have the regular classroom teacher make adjustments to meet the needs of all the different learners, not just the special education teacher (Jenkins et al., 1990).	

Inclusion Cons	Equal academic experience with access, achievement, and socialization equal to hearing peers doesn't always happen (Antia et al., 2002; Carlberg & Kavale, 1980; Foster et al., 1999; Guralnick, 2001; Wang & Walberg, 1988).	Social isolation will occur if deaf and hard-of-hearing students' social needs are not properly addressed in the inclusive setting in regard to chances for socialization with hearing peers (Stinson & Leigh, 1995 as cited in Leigh, 1999).		
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Figure 1. School setting pros and cons.

### Federal Legislation and Deaf Education

Parents of deaf and hard-of-hearing children and the children themselves have a complex and weighty decision regarding the best school placement because there are so many different educational placements available. While the availability of several different placement options can make the decision difficult, the variety of options should be viewed positively.

Parents have the right to look out for the best interest of their deaf child's individual needs and to be involved in the educational placement of their deaf and hard-of-hearing child because of the federal legislation that has made it compulsory. However, deaf and hard-of-hearing students were not always provided with equal educational opportunities, and deaf students have had their individual educational needs overlooked for a very long time. It was not until federal legislation was passed that deaf and hard-of-hearing students were offered the possibility of educational fairness. Deaf and hard-of-hearing students, parents, and schools were profoundly impacted. As a result of the laws intended for students with disabilities, such as the deaf, significant legal benefits have resulted. However, it was a long time in the making to enact laws that provided this population with our attempts at equality in education.

While the change has been welcomed, reforms have unfortunately only taken place

during the past 50 years. However, there is no denying that the vast amounts of modifications that have taken place in the past 50 years have profoundly altered the way deaf students have been educated in schools. The launch in the deviation of the way students were educated happened to take place in the 1960s, at the same time as the Civil Rights Movement, which happened to be beneficial because it was a time when the country was going through changes that provided more prospects for equal opportunity. The initial steps for equal educational opportunity for students like the deaf were taken in 1965 by the Federal Government, which helped create the cornerstone of the laws that established rights for the parents of the deaf and hard-of-hearing, which provide the basis for the current laws in place at schools.

The passage of P.L. 89-10, The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), made it possible to label deaf students as having a disability. As a result, deaf students could be considered an essential group that would have financial resources provided to schools that educated them. The significance of the ESEA was that it was an extension of civil rights, and it was a law which put federal money into targeted schools to ensure equal funding for disadvantaged children living in low income areas (Cawthon, 2011).

As a result of the law's passage, federal grants were given to state institutions and schools exclusively for educating students like the deaf with disabilities (Cerney, 2007). Later, in 1966, an amendment to the ESEA provided grants to schools at the local level for students like the deaf with disabilities (Cerney, 2007). The 1966 amendment was significant because it provided assistance at the local school level to make it easier financially to accommodate students with disabilities such as the deaf. ESEA and the 1966 amendment initiated an enormous stride in the right direction for students such as the deaf that needed extra services.

In 1973, Congress took further steps which provided increasing optimism for students such as the deaf in the form of Section 504 (Gannon, 1981). It presented an opportunity for equal access for deaf students, and a chance for deaf students to be provided an education in an inclusive setting. From a theoretical standpoint, the inclusive setting would provide deaf students with the ability to gain equal access in schools along with a greater extent of needed services, such as interpreters in public schools. The ability of the deaf to obtain interpreters and have equal access in schools made public schools an even more accommodating consideration for deaf students.

However, there was some disagreement by critics regarding the educational laws and the optimism placed on Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act and the P.L.-142 component of least restrictive environment approaches because the laws were simply viewed as additional examples of the United States Education System providing ideas, but not solutions, for meeting the real needs of students like the deaf. An example of the ideas, but no solid solutions, was illustrated by the fact that one fourth of the deaf students in 1992 attended deaf or public residential schools. Such a fact spoke volumes about Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act really not having a substantial effect on inclusion and equal access (Bulletin, 1992).

Although there were critics of the effective achievability of the laws, the engine had been started to change the way students like the deaf with disabilities would be educated, and more beneficial laws would eventually be passed that would impact the way deaf students would be educated. For example, in 1974, P.L. 93-280, The Education Amendments of 1974, made it law that students with disabilities like the deaf would be able to have a free and appropriate education. The appropriate education component of the law gave parents like those of deaf and

hard-of-hearing students the right to be supportive figures in their child's education by giving them the right to examine their child's file and records at school (Cerney, 2007). The law was groundbreaking because for the first time, parents, like those of the deaf, had a legal right to share in their child's education.

Then, in 1975, P.L. 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, was passed for students with disabilities and established rights that remain in contemporary education. Although it was passed almost 40 years ago, this is a profound landmark law for students with disabilities because it has manifested itself today in schools under the title IDEA. IDEA has resulted in millions of children with disabilities who were previously segregated or not educated at all in public schools to be served in public schools (Katzman et al., 2005). The initial phase of the law provided momentous rights to parents and students in special education, such as the deaf. The law was groundbreaking because it made it mandatory for all children with disabilities to have a free and appropriate education (Cerney, 2007). While the law was groundbreaking and beneficial to students like the deaf, several concerns needed to be addressed in instituting the law that expanded its scope to include all special needs students under one umbrella. This meant that there were different legal, economic, political, social, and technical issues that needed to be addressed. An even more challenging issue was that school systems and teachers would not necessarily be prepared to implement the aspects of the legislation (Winzer, 2005).

Although there were issues associated to the law, the magnitude of the law could not be disputed because it provided four major provisions contained in P.L. 94-142 that would have an enormous impact for those students with disabilities, like the deaf, to get an education. The first

major component was that special education would be provided free for any student who needed it. Second, it provided that the least restrictive environment would be fair and appropriate for all students. Third, it required management procedures for special education at all levels. Lastly, it provided supplemental funding to state and local governments' special education programs (Winzer, 2005). The law provided the deaf, for the first time, the ability to have a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment.

In Marschark et al.'s (2002) book, *Educating Deaf Students*, the authors pointed out that P.L. 94-142 and its amendment, P.L. 99-457, are within the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and the laws have successfully achieved the goal of putting the responsibility of deaf students in the hands of their parents. The law demonstrates that the government took the necessary steps in acknowledging that they had a responsibility to their citizens. While the government had taken responsibility for educating disabled students by the passage of laws, the real burden to ensure that deaf students received a proper education was ultimately placed in the hands of their parents and local school systems. Parents were given responsibility by the means of the Individualized Education Program, which also enabled parents to make the decision whether their children participated in an inclusive or other type of educational setting.

While parents are able to choose what is considered the least restrictive environment, the mainstreamed setting is viewed by some critics as not being the most beneficial placement for some deaf students. For instance, within the P.L. 94-142, there has been some disagreement as to the effectiveness of the least restrictive element of the law due to its partial implementation, which ultimately does not equate to any real concrete evidence of its effect on education of the deaf. Even though the effectiveness of P.L. 94-142 cannot be measured, Burch (2002) wrote that

P.L. 94-142 has had a major impact on students like the deaf and hard-of-hearing because it provides an option for attending regular schools. In 1984, a remarkable 83% of students attended schools for a general education (Burch, 2002).

Although P.L. 94-142 already had the least restrictive environment component, which provided parents varied options for their students' school placements, the law went even further on September 1, 1978, protecting students like the deaf and hard-of-hearing by not allowing educators and their administrators to exclude deaf students on the grounds that they could not learn, or their handicap was too severe, or there were no programs to address their needs. The broad scope of P.L. 94-142 was so far-reaching because it ensured due process rights, mandated Individualized Education Programs, and required the least restrictive environment, which had become a central component of federal funding for special education (Cerney, 2007).

Although P.L. 94-142 was comprehensive, Abeson and Zettel (1977) pointed out that under P.L. 94-192, there was not a guarantee to place every child with a disability into a general classroom. For example, Goldstein et al. (1989) concluded that if a student who is deaf is placed in a public school with a sign language interpreter, but there is not any other student in the building who signs, the student will have been placed in the least restrictive environment. Furthermore, another possible impediment of the law is that its intention of an improved education does not guarantee that educational programs and services provided in the educational environment will enable individual students to fulfill their potential (Goldstein et al., 1989). Therefore, it is important to view the law as a tool which is not always used to its full potential, as the end product is dependent upon the skill of those involved in using the tool, namely the parents and educators (Goldstein et al., 1989).



The further extension of protecting students with disabilities, such as the deaf, occurred once again in 1983 with another amendment, P.L. 98-99, Education of The Handicapped Act Amendments of 1983. This amendment established services to support students with disabilities and their parents by providing training and information centers, as well as transitions from school to a job (Cerney, 2007). The importance of the amendment is that it encouraged the establishment of early childhood special education and early intervention programs for students like the deaf (Cerney, 2007). P.L. 98-99, Education of The Handicapped Act , extended its services by becoming law in 1986. P.L. 99-457, Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1986, stated that services would be provided and extended to preschoolers, and that statewide systems of early identification were required (Cerney, 2007).

Subsequently, in 1990, P.L 101-476, Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1990, was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). In IDEA, transition services and defined assistive technology for students with disabilities like the deaf were no longer an option, but a mandate (Cerney, 2007). The result of the educational laws was that one fourth of deaf students in 1992 attended deaf or public residential schools (Bulletin, 1992). Only one fourth of deaf students attending deaf or public residential schools spoke volumes about the prior Section 504 law of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act not having a substantial effect on inclusion and equal access (Bulletin, 1992). Most alarming was the data contrast between the different educational settings of the hearing and deaf. For example, deaf students in high school read at an average third grade reading level, but are able to hear read at a level seven years higher. The results not only showed a stark contrast in educational outcomes, but also demonstrated the limits of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Seven years later, P.L. 105-17, The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997, made the deaf parent's role even stronger by: (a) guaranteeing parents' access to the normal curriculum; (b) promoting the focus on instruction and education; and (c) supplementing educational agencies with the expenditures of providing special education services (Cerney, 2007). The focus on instruction and education was significant, and the offshoot of that focus happened years later in The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, P.L. 107-110, which attempted to close the gaps in achievement for students like the deaf by having accountability, flexibility, and choice (U.S. Department of Education Web Site [No Child Left Behind Law]) as cited in Cerney, 2007). As a result of The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), schools were required to perform mandatory state testing to ensure that students in those schools were making adequate yearly progress. Consequently, schools had to be accountable by giving assessments, offering standards-based curriculum, ensuring teacher quality, and providing resources to students such as the deaf who do not meet benchmarks.

The No Child Left Behind Act was followed by P.L. 108-446, The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, which was passed to reduce paperwork, provide early intervention, gives parents a choice, and ensure that students with disabilities like the deaf were learning. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 passed with the intent of making special education stronger for the students and parents. In addition, its goal was to ensure school safety, support teachers, and reform special education funding. The other intended benefits of P.L. 108-446 were to reduce unnecessary lawsuits and litigation (U.S Department of Education, 2004 as cited in Cerney, 2007).

At present, deaf students are included in The No Child Left Behind Act, which sets high

expectations for students with disabilities. The law required all students to be proficient in all core school subjects by 2014 (Winzer, 2005). The law required all states to monitor improvement of students' achievement through state and district assessments from standardized tests. The intent was to ensure that 95% of students in grades 3 through 8, regardless of disabilities, are tested in reading and math, which is viewed as high-stakes testing. Under The No Child Left Behind Act, students like the deaf were required to be tested with certain expectations.

Katzman et al. (2005) pointed out that despite special education law and a policy based on the premise of all students achieving at a high level, many view the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 as incompatible with the supposed congruent IDEA because NCLB is based on standards and accountability. Katzman et al. (2005) shared this sentiment regarding NCLB, and stated that special education policy and pedagogy view flexibility, individualization, and collaboration with students and families to address the educational needs of students as most important, not standards.

The standards movement effect has been to increase the use of standard assessments; it has narrowed the curriculum and resulted in a top-down management of educational practice (Katzman et al., 2005). Under NCLB, educators are confronted with an environment of rigorous standards and high-stakes testing that needs to be implemented (Katzman et al., 2005). Opponents of NCLB view the law as inflexible, as they feel it does not take into account individual students' particular needs and/or disabilities (Winzer, 2005).

While there has been some dispute of the benefits of educational laws, including NCLB, federal legislation has beneficially impacted the way in which deaf students are educated.

Federal legislation in education has offered many reforms which have resulted in students and their parents having rights and protective measures mandated by the federal government. Those guarantees and fairness through the laws for deaf and hard-of-hearing students in education are of great value. A chronological chart of laws is displayed to provide a visual of federal legislation affecting deaf education.

<i>Federal Legislation Affecting Deaf Education</i>
P.L. 89-10, The Elementary Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), was an extension of civil rights and the first time deaf were labeled with a disability and could receive financial resources (Cawthon, 2011).
ESEA of 1965 was the foundation of special education that provided local districts with federal grants, and in 1966 an amendment to the law provided money to local schools to educate students like the deaf (Cerney, 2007).
In 1973, The Rehabilitation Act Section 504 provided deaf students an opportunity to go to an inclusive setting and get equal access by having interpreters and accommodations (Gannon, 1981).
The groundbreaking law in 1974, P.L. 93-280 made it law for an appropriate education for deaf students, and parents had the legal right to share and examine their child’s student file of records at school (Cerney, 2007).
The Historical Law, P.L., 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, passed and is still present today as IDEA. It resulted in millions of children like the deaf with disabilities going to public school (Katzman et al., 2005).
P.L., 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, required a free and appropriate education (Cerney, 2007).
P.L., 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, put special needs students under one umbrella, which meant legal, economic, political, social and technical issues would have to be addressed (Winzer, 2005).
P.L., 94-142 did not guarantee that deaf students would fulfill their potential (Goldstein et al., 1989).
The Education of the Handicapped Act of 1983 encouraged early special education and early intervention programs for those like the deaf (Cerney, 2007).
The 1986 P.L. 99-457, Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1986, stated that services would be provided, and state wide systems of early identification were required (Cerney, 2007,).
The 1990 P.L. 101-476, Education of the Handicapped Act, mandated assistive technology (Cerney, 2007).
The 1990 P.L. 101-476, Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1990, renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) defined assistive technology for students with disabilities a mandate (Cerney, 2007).
P.L. 105-17, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 made the deaf parent’s role even stronger because it guaranteed students’ access to the normal curriculum, promoted focus on instruction and education, and provided educational agencies with costs to provide special education services (Cerney, 2007).
The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, P.L. 107-110, sought to close achievement gaps by accountability with assessments, standards-based curriculum, teacher equality, and through providing resources to students that did not meet benchmarks, as well as school choice. (U.S. Department of Education Website as cited in Cerney, 2007).
Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004 sought to make education stronger by early intervention (U.S. Department of Education Website as cited in Cerney, 2007).

*Figure 2. Chronological chart of laws.*

Legislation and laws have not been the panacea for deaf students. It still takes the teamwork of parents, students, and schools to create the most conducive environment for deaf and hard-of-hearing students to do their individual best in education. Furthermore, even with laws and amendments, deaf and hard-of-hearing students still have to face the prospect and reality of hardships within other areas, including communication. They also have to face the reality of various forms of discrimination based on their differences with regard to their inability to hear and communicate like hearing students.

### **Language Barrier**

Language can be a substantial barrier for deaf students throughout their educational experience. It is hard to fathom that this is the case, as deaf children are usually diagnosed as deaf at birth. However, even with that diagnosis, they will most likely never enter school with the same language skills as their hearing counterparts (Shantie, 1999). Part of the problem is that deaf children are usually born to hearing parents 90% to 97% of the time, and their hearing parents most likely will not be knowledgeable about how to effectively communicate with their deaf child, such as by using sign language (Shantie, 1999). Hearing parents are usually not good language role models for their deaf children and, as a result, contribute to their communication difficulties. Hearing parents do have some justification for not being good language role models for their deaf children because they more than likely are not fluent in American Sign Language. However, schools do not have any good justification for failing to provide good language role models for their deaf students because they are aware that there is always a possibility of educating deaf students.

Even though schools have prior knowledge of the responsibility of developing

communication skills for deaf students, schools have appeared to ignore that responsibility and have further contributed to the communication difficulties of deaf students. Historically, half of the teachers that have taught the deaf have lacked the ability to use sign language as proficiently as their students (Shantie, 1999). Complicating matters further, historically, only 33% of teachers who have taught deaf students have understood sign language as well as their students (Shantie, 1999). The thought of teachers who are supposed to be language role models for the deaf lacking signal skills themselves is disturbing. There has been a real missed opportunity of the potential good that could have been done with regard to deaf students' achievement if those teachers had been good language role models. For example, American Sign Language discourse and the ability to use it have been shown to promote reading and writing success for deaf students. Therefore, it is imperative that deaf students have a strong teacher as a role model of a first language because without one, deaf students are faced with an even bigger struggle with communication and further complications.

Deaf students are not left with a great prospect of getting a bilingual education because a solid first language is a prerequisite. It has been accepted that deaf students should be taught a bilingual education which will ensure their success with better language skills and academic achievement (Shantie, 1999). However, because most deaf students are born with hearing parents, the importance of a bilingual education is most often neglected at an early age by their parents. Shantie (1999) suggested that the best option to help alleviate the absence of a bilingual education at home at an early age is by providing preschool teachers as American Sign Language models for the deafs' first interaction in school with language. Placing teachers who are knowledgeable and competent in American Sign Language would

serve to foster the deafs' first experiences in language and could result in deaf students becoming more knowledgeable of a first language, which could improve their degree of learning in a second language (Shantie, 1999).

Without schools taking the measures to lessen the gap in a first language for deaf students, it has and could potentially lead to further gaps that most likely will not enable them to have equivalent language skills to those of a child with a strong native language (Shantie, 1999). The good news is that the initial setback with deficiencies in language for deaf students could be remedied at an earlier age by decreasing the time they need to wait for exposure to sign language. However, sign language needs to become a reality for deaf students at an early age, and it needs to take place in the school setting. While the school setting does need to be part of the equation in exposing students to sign language, in the past there has not been a good record of sign language being used in class. Moores (2001) described that in the past, part of the problem with sign language has been with teachers of the deaf not successfully teaching the deaf sufficient skills.

In order to curb the language barrier for deaf students, teachers are needed that can properly teach the deaf by being good role models of language. The trend of having teachers learning sign language from the students is a backwards approach and must end. In addition, deaf parents need to do their part and become part of the solution in curbing the language barrier by using American Sign Language. Research has demonstrated that students whose parents used American Sign Language with high skill showed higher academic skills in reading and math (Shantie, 1999).

When a bilingual education is implemented for deaf students and is coupled with a



strong American Sign Language program, it promotes student growth in achieving better grammatical and constructive language with fewer errors. This strongly contrasts with deaf students not using American Sign Language, as in that scenario, students continue to have lower levels of achievement (Shantie, 1999). Although a language barrier has repeatedly existed for the deaf, there are many potential remedies that can resolve the language barrier. However, the solution can only come to fruition and be remedied by those directly involved, including students, parents, teachers, and schools.

Even though a language barrier exists between the hearing and deaf populations, contrary to the general view of the hearing, deaf people view their language, American Sign Language, as a part of their culture and not an impediment or impairment. Yet, while the deaf have certainly had to contend with the language barrier, there are other obstacles overlapped with the language barrier that are tied directly to discrimination of the deaf because they do not hear and speak like the hearing population.

### **Ableism**

Deaf students might have to encounter different types of discrimination based on their differences from the mainstream hearing society. The deaf community's inability to hear and speak like the hearing population has been the basis for several types of discrimination, termed *ableism*, as illustrated by Rauscher and McClintock (1996):

Ableism is a pervasive system of discrimination and exclusion that oppresses people who have mental, emotional, and physical disabilities.... Deeply rooted by beliefs about health, productivity, beauty, and the value of human life, perpetuated by the public and private media, combine an environment that is often hostile to those whose physical,

mental and cognitive and sensory abilities...fall out of the scope of what is currently defined as socially acceptable (p. 198).

Katzman et al. (2005) wrote that the ableist preference is to devalue a disability which is different than societal values. The ableist view leads to the deaf being devalued because the societal value is that speaking orally is superior to speaking with signing, and that associating with students who are not disabled is preferable to associating with those who are disabled (Katzman et al., 2005). While one might hope that the ableist view is not manifest in schools, it is indeed present. Its presence is demonstrated by many educators and a society that believes that disabled students should do things the same way as nondisabled students, and the societal values that have created the school environment reveals ableism by educators in classrooms (Katzman et al., 2005). The impact of the persistent ableist assumptions in education promotes an environment where prejudices against disabilities are reinforced, with ableism in the classroom contributing to low levels of educational attainment (Katzman et al., 2005).

Lauren et al. (2005) pointed out that the continued negative cultural assumptions about those with disabilities have continued to have a negative impact on children with a disability. For example, instead of deaf students performing activities in a way that may be more efficient for them, such as sign language, deaf students have had to use oral speaking, which has added to educational deficits (Lauren et al., 2005). Consequently, the ingrained prejudice of the hearing towards the deaf has resulted in time taken away from deaf students' learning academic material (Lauren et al., 2005). While ableism subjects the deaf to discrimination, the deafs' inability to speak or hear is also the cause of other forms of discrimination labeled as *audism* and *phonocentrism*.

### **Audism and Phonocentrism**

Discrimination by the hearing against the deaf can be both implicit and explicit. Some hearing people do not even recognize their acts as a type of discrimination. In part, this could be due to the fact that the concepts of phonocentrism and audism are not usually included in discussions by the hearing population. Phonocentrism is the notion that speech is the most fully human language (Bauman, 2004). Within this view, it is presumed that not using speech equates to not being fully human. This leads to phonocentrism, creating what is viewed as ethnocentrism in the context of the alphabet, considering speech is linked to writing, which is closely linked to speech (Derrida, 1974 as cited in Bauman, 2004). The stigma that results for the deaf is that they are inferior to those that can hear because they cannot speak; therefore, they use sign language.

Phonocentrism is coupled with another form of discrimination that creates even more prejudice toward the deaf due to the fact that they lack the ability to hear and speak. Bauman (2004) stated that the term audism should be added to the discussion along with phonocentrism. While phonocentrism considers speech a superior language to American Sign Language, audism considers hearing superior to the inability to hear. The term audism stems from the discussion of language being the orientation that links a person to having a human identity; therefore, language is defined as speech which links people to being considered human (Bauman, 2004). Therefore, not being able to hear is considered not human.

Audism is a type of discrimination faced by deaf and hard-of-hearing students. It was first brought to the forefront by Bauman (2006), who addressed the topic in a film titled *Audism Unveiled*, which was made as a project by students at Gallaudet University. The significance of the film was that it revealed how often deaf people face discrimination by hearing family

members, teachers, and their communities (Bauman, 2006 as cited in Benedict & Sass-Lehrer, 2007). While the film revealed how often deaf people face discrimination, more importantly, it brought attention to the discrimination against deaf people and a spotlight on the word audism, which had previously mostly been overlooked, although it was reintroduced decades earlier.

The idea of discrimination based on a person's inability to hear was addressed several decades earlier by a deaf scholar, Tom Humphries (1975), who coined the term audism. Audism describes discrimination of the deaf and hard-of-hearing, and the profound effect of the word's exposure by Humphries was that it would become part of the discussion in human rights and in deaf education (as cited in Bauman, 2004). Humphries (1975) defined audism as the notion that one is superior to another human being based on one's ability to hear or behave in the manner of someone who hears (as cited in Bauman, 2004). In other words, audism could effectively be described as "a system of advantage based on hearing" (Bauman, 2004). The article by Bauman (2004) titled "Audism: Exploring the Metaphysics of Oppression" further detailed the context of the definition of audism developed and described by Humphries (1975):

Audism appears in the form of people who continually judge deaf people's intelligence and success on the basis of their ability in the language of the hearing culture. It appears when the assumption is made that the deaf person's happiness depends on acquiring fluency in the language of the hearing culture. It appears when deaf people actively participate in the oppression of other deaf people by demanding of them the same set of standards, behavior, and values that they demand of hearing people (p.240).

Bauman (2004) pointed out that audism is not isolated, but rather an institutionalized form of discrimination. Bauman suggested that in order to be truly defined, audism should be

expanded by interchanging the word hearing with race. When defining the hearing and deaf population as different races, audism and phonocentrism are forms of racism as expressed by David Wellman (1993), who defined racism as “a system of advantage based on race.” The implication of audism is that hearing people’s ability to hear and communicate differently than deaf people makes it theoretically possible for hearing people to demonstrate an apparent manifestation of racism towards the deaf through audism. Therefore, deaf students in the hearing classroom have a possibility of facing racism by the hearing students who have a system of advantage by possessing the ability to hear and speak, whereas the deaf are unable to do both in the same manner as the hearing.

Regrettably, deaf students have been subjected to audism and phonocentrism in the educational setting, and it is unfortunate that those hearing participants who have taken part in such forms of discrimination have likely been unaware of the forms of discrimination to which they have inadvertently subjected deaf students. Fortunately, that tide is turning in respect to hearing people being exposed to the different terms which describe the discriminatory acts they might exercise inadvertently on the deaf. The increasing exposure of those different forms of discrimination was affirmed by Bauman (2004), who pointed out that words that describe discrimination toward the deaf community should and will be as familiar as other terms such as racism, sexism, and classism, due to hearing people becoming involved with the language, culture, and lives of deaf people, and words like audism being disseminated.

### **Making Sense of the Literature**

Whereas deaf students’ different school settings, services, and communication have increased in response to education law, a real effort to understand deaf students by providing

them with a voice to communicate their educational needs continues to be a missed prospect. Instead, the repeated pattern of downplaying looking at the deaf student in a human way has been the customary pattern in educational laws and policies for deaf students. Still, the researcher believes that only when deaf students are viewed in human terms, will the educational laws, school policies, and practices result in the ideal results. The hope is that this study of five generations of deaf students will shed some light on the significance of providing deaf students with a chance to communicate and to have a voice in helping to understand their academic experiences as well as what they believe is needed to advance academic achievement for deaf students.

While the real intent of the changes in educational laws for deaf students has been to offer deaf students with increased academic achievement a more level playing field with their hearing peers, the desired outcomes have not come to fruition. Understanding why the change that was expected to happen academically for the deaf has not produced the results desired is the essence of this research. Therefore, the qualitative research method used for this scholarly work is essential to provide deaf students with the chance to give a narrative of their perceptions of their educational experiences. This qualitative study hopes to have students describe the elements which contributed to their academic performance. The interplay of the deaf students and their academic environment is applicable and interconnected in the critical theoretical framework's tenets of liberation and emancipation that were used in this study to provide the deaf students the chance to communicate their perceptions of the time and setting in which they attended school. In essence, this inquiry allowed the deaf students to have a voice, and made it is possible to examine and understand the impact of their experiences and interactions in school, in

their own words.

### **CHAPTER III: PERSONAL DISCUSSIONS ABOUT EDUCATION**

#### **The Power of Conversation**

This study's methodology was guided by Freire's (1993) theoretical framework of liberation which necessitates communication. In this research, the essential dialogue mentioned as mandatory by Freire for liberation was provided by the participants' communicated perceptions of how the time and the school setting in which they were taught impacted their education. The researcher facilitated the participants becoming contributors in the liberating theoretical framework's component of this investigation by having a discourse about their education that is discussed in the subsequent subheadings of the methodology.

The first section contains an overview of the methodology. The second section provides details about the site and participants in order to describe the setting and the reason for selection of the research participants. The third section specifies the data sources and collection methods. The fourth and final section includes the data analysis and details on the procedures that were used for analyzing the data collected.

#### **Methodological Overview**

Qualitative methods were used in this research to explore Deaf participants' perceptions of school during the decade they attended school. The research was exploratory because little was known about the specific Deaf participants' experiences in the study during the particular period of time they went to school. In this study, qualitative research allowed the researcher to understand and interpret how the various participants in their social setting constructed the world around them to some degree (Glesne, 2006).

The participants' perceptions of their educational experiences were used for this qualitative study because of the prospective components pointed out by Merriam and Associates



(2002). Merriam and Associates (2002) delineated that qualitative research has significant components allowing researchers to observe: how participants interpret their experiences, how they construct their world, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences. Furthermore, the utilization of a qualitative research method for this study provided great potential because it permitted the researcher to introduce new occurrences, and new orders of curiosity with potential significance into educational debate (Freebody & Freiberg, 2006). One such finding of this study was in the case of John, a deaf student who received early interventions in the area of English, and the only participant who did not view English as problematic. This finding regarding early interventions could be potentially significant for future deaf students and become part of the educational debate in deaf education.

### **In-Depth Interviews**

This study used in-depth interviews so that the researcher could to some extent understand and interpret how the various participants perceived their school setting at the time they attended. Also, by use of a qualitative study, the participants were able to communicate their educational experience so that the researcher could personally relive their experience of what it was like to be participants in the different settings and times in which they were educated (Glesne, 2006).

Seidman (2006) described that in-depth interviews are primarily done with open-ended questions. In addition, Seidman (2006) pointed out that the task of the in-depth interview is to get the participants' responses to the questions and build on them. An open-ended question format was used to accrue information from the interviewees in the study. Of the nine participants in the study, questions were asked to seven of the participants by a professional

interpreter. A professional interpreter is educated in American Sign Language, has experience signing, and takes a certification test to be certified. The remaining two participants were questioned by a certified interpreter. A certified interpreter has a bachelor's degree, takes a written test, is interviewed, and takes a performance test for the National Interpreter Certification. The interviews conducted by the researcher were audio recorded, with the researcher asking the questions on a tape player. In addition, all of the participant interviews were audio and video recorded with a digital camcorder. Seidman (2006) suggested the use of three separate 90-min interviews in order to have something to build on in each interview. During the interview process, there was a series of three separate interviews with each of the participants (Seidman, 2006). Between the first, second and third interviews, the participants were given time to reflect on their interviews. However, due to time constraints, of both the interviewer and some of the interviewees, and scheduling conflicts, several interviewees had to have their second and third interviews on the same day, but still had a break in between the interviews in order to rest and reflect. However, as Seidman (2006) noted, a short break is not ideal, as the second and third interviews should be three days apart. Nonetheless, the participants in the study still met the criteria set by Seidman of having some time to reflect on the prior interview in order to be able to make connections.

Seidman (2006) mentioned that the first interview's task is to put the study's participants' experiences in context. Therefore, the first interview entailed the researcher asking questions about the educational experiences of each of the participants through the use of an interpreter who conveyed the questions in American Sign Language. Each of the participants was asked to share his or her perceptions of the educational setting and time period in which they attended

school. This was followed by a second interview, which Seidman (2006) stated should focus on the details of the participants' lived experiences regarding the subject matter of the investigation. Rather than the researcher asking questions about the participants' opinions through the interpreter, the participants were asked by the researcher to give specific details. In addition, the participants were asked by the researcher through the interpreter to talk about their relationships with students and teachers, as well as the community (Seidman, 2006). The participants in the inquiry were also asked to reconstruct memories of their experiences as students in school.

Finally, the third interview's objective was for the participants to reflect on their intellectual and emotional connections that provided meaning in their educational experiences (Seidman, 2006). Therefore, it was essential for the researcher to ask questions through the professional and certified interpreters that were able to elicit an understanding of the participant's experiences and to make meaning of them.

#### **Selection of the Research Participants: The Interviewees and Interviewers**

This research took place in Upstate New York. There were a total of nine adult participants, all of whom were deaf and had a wide-ranging degree of education, include a GED, high school diploma, bachelor's degree, master's degree, and juris doctor degree. The researcher's aunt and two cousins are relatives with whom the researcher interacted fairly often while growing up in a larger city in Upstate New York. The researcher's relatives' connections in the deaf community greatly assisted the researcher in the recruitment of other participants that were of no relationship to the researcher. The Upstate New York area was specifically chosen because the researcher grew up there. In addition, the researcher's great rapport with relatives that had connections within the deaf community made it easier to find other potential deaf

participants for the study.

All of the participants shared the common factor that they were educated in New York State for the majority of their K-12 education; however, not all of the participants were educated in the same type of educational setting. While it is common to seek similar types of participants for a study, the researcher found it extremely difficult to find deaf participants that attended the same school setting for their entire K-12 education. Most of the participants were educated in several types of educational settings for periods of time during their K-12 education. However, the nine participants identified for this study were required to have attended either the public or residential setting for the majority of their education. Five of the participants attended schools in the public/mainstreamed setting for the majority of their education, while the other four participants attended residential schools for the majority of their education.

All participants were asked to volunteer for this qualitative research study. Although the setting was a great distance for the researcher, the unparalleled benefit was that the researcher had already established rapport with some of the participants, and the setting provided access to all the research participants in one geographic area once the travel was made to a larger city in Upstate New York. The research started with providing a consent form indicating each of the participants' willingness to participate in the deaf education study and ensuring their confidentiality. After the initial questionnaire, three in-depth interviews were conducted and analysis of the participants' questions was performed. The responses were examined by the researcher using qualitative coding for data analysis in areas emphasized the most in the questioning and revealed by the participants in the interviews.

### **The Interview Process and Recording of Data Sources and Collection**

The data sources for examining the research questions included: (a) a questionnaire answered by participants and (b) three face-to-face in-depth interviews with participants. Data collection occurred in two stages. The first step in data collection was having the participants complete a questionnaire (Appendix B). The second step was having participants take part in a series of three in-depth interviews as a foundation to build upon, with follow-up questions as needed (Appendix C). To ensure the information was accurate for each interview, member checks were required by the participants. Each of the participants was provided with the typed transcripts of the interviews following each of the three interviews. The participants were asked to make corrections to any responses that were not correctly transcribed in the transcript. After participants reviewed and made any necessary corrections, each participant was asked to sign his or her transcript and return it in a self-addressed stamped envelope. In the process of member checks, there were feedback and requests for changes by some of the participants. Some participants changed spelling of words, phrases, and whole sentences in their responses that were transcribed from the audio tape. Corrections requested by participants in the member checks were made immediately by the researcher. The process of the researcher doing member checks for this study is significant. As affirmed by Guba and Lincoln (1989), member checks by the participants are the best way to establish credibility.

### **Data Analysis**

Coding was used to analyze the research data. According to Glesne (2006), the system of coding and categorizing as well as the theme-searching process can seem mechanical. However, in reality, the process provides the researcher the time to think about the data, reflect on what is learned, make new connections, and gain new insights (Glesne, 2006). Correspondingly, Glesne

(2006) stated that coding is a progressive procedure of organization for defining and sorting scraps of collected data that are relevant to one's research purpose, and coding helps to create an organizational framework for information received from research.

After the answers to the questionnaire were acquired, the finished and transcribed interviews were scrutinized to create a list of major themes and sub codes to group the responses of participants under categories. The categories and concepts stemmed from the participants' perceptions in the areas of education, and the participants' responses were listed as a positive, negative, or neutral view regarding perceptions of experiences in school. A two-layered system was used so that once a concept was identified, it could be placed under one of the three categories that matched the student's positive, negative, or neutral perception of the category.

Merriam and Associates (2002) mentioned that analysis of qualitative research can be time consuming and arduous work. The whole process was indeed time consuming, reviewing the transcripts and trying to find patterns that would be categorized and used for the study. In addition, the researcher had to determine which information obtained from students was most vital. The process of coding was difficult, especially deciphering the different categories that would become integrated into the study. Detecting a pattern in the participants' responses regarding what was either a struggle or benefit in their education assisted the researcher in deciding on a category for each response. However, there were some outliers that were not given by the majority of the participants, but which seemed too important not to mention under a category. At the end of the process, there were nine categories that stood out in the researcher's collection, analysis, and synthesis of data from the transcripts.

### **Role of the Researcher**

While growing up around Deaf grandparents, Deaf cousins, and other deaf relatives, the researcher was exposed at a very early age to people that communicated in a different manner. Deaf relatives communicated by lip reading and sign language. It was especially challenging to understand and communicate with Deaf cousins while playing with them. It was also a challenge communicating with deaf grandparents and a Godmother until later in life.

Over the years, there have been questions about what types of educational experiences Deaf relatives had as a result of their different form of communication and inability to hear and speak. Although the researcher has never any conversations with deaf relatives regarding their educational experiences, deaf education seemed like a good subject to research because it provided an interesting topic to explore for this study. Also, the topic presented an opportunity to learn about Deaf relatives' past educational experiences, as well as other deaf adults' perceptions regarding their educational experiences.

Glesne (2006) defined the second role of a researcher as that of a learner. The researcher's role as a learner perfectly fits the intention of the researcher's role in this study. This study has permitted the researcher to gain insight and learn about the perceptions and experiences of the participants in this study. In addition, Glense (2006) revealed that the role of a researcher and not that of an expert or authority will make it more likely that the participants will be as forthcoming as possible. The researcher's Deaf relatives' and the other Deaf participants' genuine narratives provided about their education during different decades was interesting and captivating.

Glesne (2006) mentioned that adopting the role of a learner and listener presents a

significant difference from the role of an authority who speaks. Certainly, the role of a learner was exciting; however, there was some anxiousness in the role as a researcher as well. Glesne (2006) stated that the role of a researcher entails data collection, which can create anxiety about the research fitting together and having meaning. The degree to which the researcher's role was stressful is now clear, especially when attempting to make sense of the coding and data analysis, as mentioned by Glesne (2006). As described by Glesne (2006), preparing to conduct the study was not the conclusion; rather, it was a means to the end of data collection.

### **Ensuring Trustworthiness of this Research Project**

Glesne (2006) described the need for triangulation in a qualitative study, which is the use of multiple data-collection methods to contribute to the trustworthiness of data. In this study, triangulation was accomplished by using the nine participants' three separate taped in-depth interviews, and the questionnaire. In addition, achieving triangulation in this qualitative study was accomplished by comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information (Patton, 2002). Member-checking by the participants was used to ensure the credibility of the participants' responses by making sure the researcher's interpretations were correct and did not provide a misinterpretation of the participants' responses (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). After the transcripts were completed for each of the interviews, the participants in the study were sent their transcripts in a preaddressed envelope and were able to reread them and make any corrections needed. Upon receipt of the transcripts, the researcher made all of the modifications requested by the nine participants' cross-checked interview transcripts.

In addition, a peer reviewer was used to enhance the trustworthiness of the study. The peer reviewer reread the interview transcripts and helped verify that the interpretations of the



findings were accurate. Furthermore, the peer reviewer viewed the next set of questions prior to the subsequent interviews to make sure they were appropriate questions for the interview process. The researcher also took some field notes following each interview to help with the credibility in finding the themes and patterns of the study. All the materials used for research, such as transcripts, digital video, and audio-recorded tapes, were kept as verification and will be destroyed within two years following the study.

The information gathered was categorized and code schemed and the data were arranged into categories that the researcher found within the transcribed interviews. After careful consideration, analysis, and synthesis of the information from the questionnaire and in-depth interviews, the headings were discovered from the information for each of the categories. The researcher was then able to dissect and break up each of the individual components of the transcribed interview with the category headings and determine which sub codes would be used under the main categories, with a number used to establish the data (Glesne, 2006). The results were placed in a table (Appendix E) which provided a frequency count that enabled the researcher to identify the patterns in the research (Glesne, 2006). Afterward, the researcher was able to consider, question, and see the problems and patterns that were identified in the research. After the patterns were established, there was a foundation of grouped research findings that provided credibility for the research.

Credibility is a necessity for qualitative research. In order to ensure credibility in a study, Glesne (2006) suggested that trustworthiness must be achieved by realizing the limitations and doing the best one can do under the circumstances. Consequently, in a qualitative study, there is not a statistical level of significance established to support findings; therefore, validity can be a

significant concern in qualitative research because statistical data is not available to examine for support. Instead, the data and their repetition must be used to determine the meaning of the research (Merriam & Associates, 2002). For that reason, it was the responsibility of the researcher to find meaning in the data, with the understanding that there might be difficulty with the findings, as the consensus of others with similar data would not be able to be relied upon due to the quantitative nature of the study (Merriam & Associates, 2002).

However, Merriam and Associates (2002) pointed out that it is ultimately the researcher's responsibility to demonstrate the validity of the research by showing that the data were collected in a thorough and authentic manner, and to meticulously complete the analysis. After completing the analysis, the researcher should be able to explain different competing meanings and reveal the steps of data transformation, and the path taken to develop the knowledge statement or outcomes (Merriam & Associates, 2002). By showing the integrity of the process used and the ability to explain opposing ideas, the researcher will have demonstrated validity for the phenomenological study (Merriam & Associates, 2002).

### **Influences on Education not Exclusively Illuminated by Literature**

A review of literature has exposed the reader to the school settings, educational law, and different forms of discrimination that could have possibly influenced the educational experiences of the Deaf participants in this study. However, the data from the literature review do not provide an actual person's voice or his or her perceptions and emotions in the experience. While the data have provided a concrete picture of the time and setting, the missing elements are points of view of the unique individual person that took part in the experience itself, and how that individual experienced it. The importance of including these points of view in the research is

evidenced by the failure of the typical quantitative research used for studying deaf students to effect true educational change sought for deaf students to make their educational achievement comparable to hearing students.

While quantitative research does provide insight into the deaf student's education, there is a need for a wider scope of research which should include a focus on the type of qualitative research used for this study. By using qualitative research for this exploration and providing the narrative of the deaf in this study, the process will include not just data as interpreted by outsiders regarding the deaf, but more significantly it will allow deaf students to provide their authentic interpretation and analysis of education by providing their perceptions about education. This study utilized what Patton (2003) described as phenomenological analysis that seeks to find, take hold of, and reveal the importance, structure, and real meaning of the lived experience of a phenomenon, person, or group of people. While there are limitations to this study, the researcher hopes that this qualitative study will promote greater understanding of what it was like being educated as a deaf student for the past five generations, and more significantly, that this study will provide practical information to ensure that greater consideration is taken when making decisions for the application of educational practice and policy for deaf students.

#### **CHAPTER IV: A FIFTY YEAR SPAN OF EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES**

Chapter IV is the core of this study reflecting the liberating theoretical framework influenced by Freire (2005) that recommends the notion of “voice,” which is presented in this chapter by the researcher’s examination of the nine participants’ communicated perceptions about their educational experiences. The discussion that was engaged in by the researcher and the participants is particularly significant in research, as Freire (2008) illuminated with his description of dialogue as having a transforming power:

Time spent on dialogue should not be considered wasted time. It presents problems and criticizes, and in criticizing, gives human beings their place within their own reality as the true transforming subject of reality. (p. 110)

Access to the type of dialogue that had some degree of “transforming dialogue” as mentioned by Freire (2005) was given to the researcher by means of three in-depth interviews in which participants shared the narratives of their educational experiences. The narratives of the participants regarding the decades of the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s allowed the participants to become the transforming subjects of their own educational reality, according to Freire’s (2005) criteria. The participants in this research had the ability to communicate their individual perceptions of the problems along with their criticisms of education during the time they attended school, allowing them to achieve a degree of personal transformation by sharing stories of their personal educational experiences.

Participants were primarily educated in central and western New York State. One of the participants was educated near the New York City area. Five of the Deaf participants attended public schools, while four of the Deaf participants attended residential schools for most of their

K-12 education. However, individual participants in the study experienced a variety of settings during the course of their K-12 education.

The participants in this study varied in age, gender, and education. The main focus of the interviews was the researcher's analysis of the students' common stories about the period of time and school setting in which they attended school and how it impacted their lives. The interviews focused on the following primary question of this study: What are deaf participants' perceptions of their school experiences in the particular educational setting in which they attended school, and how have these experiences impacted their lives?

Considering the diverse ages of the participants and the wide-ranging time between when the participants attended school, it was no surprise that each interview was unique. At the same time, it was significant that those who had attained the most education subsequent to their K-12 experience provided the most detailed stories about their perspectives of education. In addition, it was interesting that there were a host of similar perceptions regarding their education, even considering the differing periods of time in which the participants attended school.

This chapter is organized in the following order:

First, the researcher reports on the nine participants. The findings are sequenced starting with the two students who attended in the 1960s, and then followed with the students who attended school in the subsequent decades of the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. Each of the participants is introduced with some background information. This is a chart of the participants' backgrounds.

Background Information of Participants	Age	Gender	Educational Setting	Education	Occupation
Helen	67	Female	Public	9-12	Car Rental
Cole	65	Female	Residential	9-12	Works
John	61	Male	Public	Juris Doctorate	Professor of Law/Lawyer
Lea	61	Female	Residential	9-12	Housekeeping at a University
Ed	44	Male	Public	9-12	Supervising Mechanic Department of Transportation
Anne Marie	44	Female	Residential	Associate's Degree	Community Habilitation Part-Time Counselor
Mary	34	Female	Public	Bachelor's Degree	College Student/ Vet's Office
Ashley	43	Female	Residential	Master's Degree	Teacher
Anne	26	Female	Public	Bachelor's Degree	Full-Time Student

*Figure 3.* Chart of participants' backgrounds.

The second section contains findings relevant to the research question and theoretical framework. The participants' responses in the second section will be discussed by the classification of the finding and type of school setting. The findings were established by the researcher's analysis of the data from the participants' member checked responses to ensure the questions about their perceptions of experiences when they attended school were accurate interpretations of their communicated responses in the interviews.

### **Introduction of the Participants**

This section uses biographical information shared by the nine participants to introduce each of them individually. The participants and schools they attended have been provided pseudonyms to protect the students' identities and to maintain their anonymity.

Three separate interviews were performed with each of the participants in the study. Some of the interviews were conducted in the participants' homes or someone else's home with either a certified or professional interpreter, while other participants' interviews were conducted with digital television conferencing with a certified or professional interpreter for the deaf. The time at which interviews were conducted ranged between 7:30 a.m. and 9 p.m. Flexibility with times and dates was necessary to ensure that three interviews were conducted with each of the nine participants.

**Helen** identifies herself as deaf. She attended public schools her whole life in a larger city in Upstate New York. She started public school at 4 years of age in kindergarten at School A in 1950, and finished her public school education in 10<sup>th</sup> grade at a junior high school in 1969. Helen described that when she attended the junior high school, she loved home economics because she learned how to cook and sew. Helen stated that she was not permitted to sign at all during class. However, she was able to use some signs during lunch. Her real difficulty in class was with communication, and it transferred over to learning. She said she had to rely on lip reading to learn in class from her teachers and had to sit in the front of the class to focus on facial expressions. Helen explained that it was hard knowing what the teacher said.

While Helen described a public school experience that started in kindergarten to third grade without any academic issues, her fourth to 10<sup>th</sup> grade years were anything but tranquil.

She attended fourth, fifth, and sixth grades for two years each, and then proceeded to finish her public schooling up until the 10<sup>th</sup> grade in junior high. Helen described her public school experience as repetitive. However, her desire to graduate from high school encouraged her to stay motivated. Helen's mother even went so far as to hire a tutor for her because the school did not provide one.

While Helen had determination and a mother that encouraged her by hiring a tutor, Helen shared that being age 19 in 10<sup>th</sup> grade was "too much" for her because of the toll it took on her emotionally. She explained that there was an emotional burden of feeling uncomfortable and out of place because of her age and the fact that she was taller than the other students in class.

Therefore, even with Helen's and her mother's desire for her to graduate from high school and attend college, she decided at age 19 to follow the instruction of a school counselor to no longer attend public school because of her age. Since Helen could not attend public school any longer, she then went to BOCES which provides services for students with disabilities to earn her General Education Diploma (GED). At BOCES, Helen took educational classes that helped her get a job at Bank of America. Helen continually mentioned her regret that she was unable to attain her dream of going to college and getting a good job. Helen demonstrates a sense of independence and determination to be a productive, self-reliant person. She currently works for a car rental company in Upstate New York, checking returned rental cars and showing cars that will be rented to potential renters.

**Cole** identifies herself as deaf. She went to residential school in a smaller city in Upstate New York for day school from 1952 to 1967. She attended residential school until age 11, and then attended the deaf day school where she stayed in the dorm Monday through Thursday and



returned home every weekend from Friday through Sunday. Cole recollected starting residential school in kindergarten where she had struggles with communication at an early age. She mentioned that she was unable to communicate with anybody, and found it difficult to follow along in school because they were teaching her speech. Cole recalled that she was not signing, and that signing was not allowed and no interpreters were available.

Consequently, Cole pointed out that she did not actually learn to sign until 1963 because she was told it was better to learn the oral method so she could read and write. However, Cole indicated that she really started to progress in learning when she learned to sign and was able to start signing in class. Cole mentions the 1960s as a time when sign started being used, and the year 1964 was a turning point in her life because deaf teachers began teaching at her school. According to Cole, having two deaf teachers at that time “opened up a whole new world of learning” for her.

However, although Cole had two deaf teachers that altered her life, at the same time, Cole felt like most of her teachers were not very good in her deaf school experience. She expressed that school had actually taken an emotional toll on her, so it was great when she was done with school. Leaving school gave Cole a real feeling of independence. However, Cole expressed that following graduation from high school, she wanted to continue learning and enrolled in a larger Upstate New York city college that is an institute of technology for six months. She described that things started off well, and that she was independent and determined, but that this was thwarted by a job search. She indicated that it was difficult searching for a job, so she also attended a business school in a smaller city in Upstate New York where she received a certificate and diploma. A counselor helped her prepare a resume and cover letter to find a job. She

mentioned her frustration with the lack of employment opportunities in the larger city in Upstate New York, which led her to make a move to another larger city in Upstate New York. Kodak was one place of employment until she was laid off, and then she worked at CitiBank. She eventually ended up moving back to the other larger city in Upstate New York in which she previously resided because she found a job, and she currently resides there.

Now that Cole is living in the larger city in Upstate New York, she is close to her former residential school. Cole's discussion of events seemed ingrained in her mind as she told the stories like they happened yesterday. She embraces being part of the Deaf community. Even after all the years that have passed, she still participates and makes the trip to the smaller city in Upstate New York where the former residential school she attended hosts an annual alumni event.

**John** identifies himself as deaf. He attended public school up to third grade in a larger city in Illinois, and from fourth grade through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, he attended public school in a larger city in Downstate New York. He graduated in 1971 from a public high school in a larger city in Downstate New York, a suburb of Manhattan. The high value his parents placed on education was exhibited by their hiring tutors for him when he needed help in science and math. He described the subjects of science and math as "not being his strong suit." His parents paid for him to take speech therapy for 10 years from the age of 2 to 12. John mentioned and recognized that he was fortunate that his parents had the means to provide him with those resources. The high value his parents placed on education was also reflected in the decision-making process of what public school John would attend prior to his parents' move from a large city in Illinois. His

school placement was carefully preplanned and researched by his parents before his family placed him in a school.

John explained that his parents' attempts in the 1960s and early 1970s to determine what school placement would be best for him were significant, as this was before any federal laws like IDEA, ADA, or Section 504 were passed. John expressed that his mother knew that she could not depend on the law for a quality education, but instead had to depend on the school district itself to accommodate him as a deaf learner. John explained that his mother made a good choice, as the school he attended provided him with accommodations such as allowing extra time on assignments, and making sure he was prepared. While the school did make accommodations, John mentioned that communication was an obstacle throughout his school experience, as interpreters were not available until college. While John attended school, he was not provided any accommodations for assistance with communication or extra help with academic difficulties. John had to be self-reliant to learn, and had to read lips to communicate with the teacher and students in class. John had to advocate for himself and received help from his parents in regards to securing resources such as tutors to provide him with academic assistance.

John's family decision regarding school choice and the value they had and shared with John has had a vast influence on him and the value he places on education. He described with a humble pride the influence his mother, father, and grandfather had on him regarding education. John is an articulate, self-motivated, and well-educated gentleman who mentions with great pride that he has five degrees. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from a university in New York, a Juris Doctor of Law from a prestigious university in New York, and a Master of

Law degree from a very prestigious university in New York. He currently works as a deaf lawyer and is employed at a college in Upstate New York.

**Lea** identifies herself as deaf. She last attended residential school in 1971. She started school in the public school setting at School B in a larger city in Upstate New York where she attended for two years. She then went to a residential school in a larger city in Upstate New York because her parents could not afford to have her go back and forth on the train from one Upstate city to another Upstate city. Lea had to stay at school for long periods of time and only returned home for holidays like Easter and Christmas. Her inability to return home frequently was difficult for Lea. The difficulty of not being able to go home was compounded by the fact that her grandfather lived in the Upstate New York city where she attended school. Even though her grandfather lived in the Upstate New York city where she attended school, he did not assist her in getting back home to visit her parents, which proved to be emotionally difficult for her.

Lea seemed to have difficulty recalling events from school, which might be due to an emotionally difficult past which she does not want to remember or recall. She expressed that she would have rather gone to another residential school in a smaller city in Upstate New York, and not gone to the residential school she attended because she was not Catholic. She did eventually end up attending the smaller residential school in the smaller city in Upstate New York and mentioned that it was much more enjoyable. However, she expressed that she wished her teachers were deaf rather than hearing.

Lea mentioned that education is important to her. In her opinion, deaf school provided her with the ability to communicate and socialize. In addition, her ability to communicate is the result of belonging to the deaf club. Lea mentioned that she took a bus from school to a smaller

city in Upstate New York for a home economics class where she learned to sew, and that this prepared her for a job after school. Because she learned to sew in the class offered in the smaller city's BOCES program, she was able to get a sewing job making coats. However, Lea expressed that she wished her schooling had prepared her for a higher paying job.

**Ed** identifies himself as deaf. He attended residential school for kindergarten and elementary school in a smaller city in Upstate New York, and was educated in a mainstreamed school setting in a suburban school system of a larger city in Upstate New York in middle and high school. He was supposed to graduate in 1989, but was held back in sixth grade. He was one month away from graduating in 1990, but did not graduate. Ed attributes not graduating to having been placed in an Individualized Education Program (IEP) in the last few years of high school. He viewed the IEP as having lower standards and as not comparable to the higher academic standards of the regent's diploma that he desired to attain.

Ed described his transition from a deaf school to a hearing school as resulting in a great deal of confusion, which led to his having a low self-esteem because the first half of his education was in a residential school. He mentioned that the transition to a mainstreamed class was a learning experience. For example, he learned that his voice was too loud. He described communicating as quite difficult in the mainstreamed class even though he had an interpreter. Ed stated that he initially avoided communicating in the mainstreamed setting. However, he explained that through sports, he made friends and managed to communicate with his teammates. Overall, he described this as a good experience that lasted for four years.

Ed stated that sports and his mother were the external motivations for him to do well in school. The variety of sports at the mainstreamed school allowed him to join a number of teams

and make friends. Ed also described the mainstreamed setting as enabling him to communicate in the deaf and hearing world by lip reading and figuring out 70% of the information being taught by the hearing teachers in his classes. He explained that by being at the public school, he was able to communicate with the hearing world.

While Ed did not receive his high school diploma, he blames it on the “label” of an IEP which he thought would lead to a lower entry level job. He has found a job since school and with great pride expressed, “At work, my bosses who are hearing were really impressed on how I performed on my own.” Ed considers his education a minor part of the equation for his job success, and attributes most of his success at finding a good job to his own determination and being self-taught. Ed works for the department of transportation in a larger city in Upstate New York as a supervising mechanic.

**Anne Marie** identifies herself as deaf. She started residential school in 1974 and graduated in 1988. Public school was not an option for Anne Marie because her family wanted her to go to a residential school. Anne Marie described her mother as a very encouraging influence and someone who wanted to make sure Anne Marie received an education at the right place, which in her mother’s mind was the residential school. Her mother’s aspirations for her to go to college were also mentioned. Anne Marie did recall the huge rush to speak by the teachers when she started school in 1974. Because the oral method was used at that time, there was a push by schools for deaf students to speak aloud like the mainstreamed population. She also mentioned wearing a FM hearing aid system, which was a box worn on the chest. At the dorm where she stayed in a smaller city in Upstate New York, most of the staff were hearing, but some were deaf. She recalled the initial fear of being away from her parents at the residential school,

but she eventually adapted. Activities like sports helped her to feel more comfortable. Anne Marie found the residential school to be quite simple academically, and she mentioned her 4.0 grade average in seventh grade for all the different subjects she took.

However, she mentioned that the ease of middle school abruptly changed in high school when she had to go to a mainstreamed setting for some advanced regents classes in math and science. She started as a sophomore and continued through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. These classes were not offered in the residential school and had to be taken at the nearby High School C. She described it as a real challenge with the interpreter, course, tutor, and the note taker, but she progressed through her sophomore year and the last two years at High School C. Anne Marie did graduate and go to college, which she described as a culture shock coming from a Deaf family. Anne Marie was accepted to a prominent deaf college in Washington, DC following high school, but she decided to attend college at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID), a college of the Rochester Institute of Technology. She did not finish college at NTID and expressed regret at not earning her bachelor's degree and becoming a certified public accountant or school counselor. Her being a mother and having the responsibility of taking care of children made it difficult for her to further her education. She described that having four kids "can be a handful." She currently works in community habilitation on a part-time basis as a counselor. She has future aspirations of becoming a certified deaf interpreter.

**Mary** identifies herself as deaf. She attended mainstreamed public schools in the suburb of a larger city in Upstate New York from grades K-12. She attended an Elementary School D and High School E. Mary was part of the BOCES program, which is a program that coordinates support services for students such as the deaf. She ended up leaving her high school's BOCES

because they would not give her a high school diploma in 1998; therefore, earning her high school diploma took an extra year. She ended up moving away from New York and attended a residential school in a larger city in the state of Indiana for one year, earning her high school diploma in 1999. Her mainstreamed program in New York was the BOCES program where she had a small group of deaf classmates from ninth to 12<sup>th</sup> grades who stayed in two classes in the school of approximately 2,000 classrooms.

Mary stated that she felt more accomplished in sports at her public school because teams were comprised of both deaf and hearing students, and she felt more challenged and positive about her involvement. Mary described that there was a low level of education in the mainstreamed setting and felt that her teachers did not believe she could learn anything based on the fact that they thought she deserved an IEP certificate.

Mary reveals a strong determination and resentment due to her perception of the mainstreamed school that she attended, and the staff's low expectations of her. Those low expectations by the faculty motivated her to go far in education to prove them wrong. Mary believes that she has in fact proved those teachers wrong, as she furthered her education and graduated from the local community college in Upstate New York, and then received a bachelor's degree from a local college in Upstate New York.

**Ashley** identifies herself as deaf. She finished residential school in 1991. She started her early years of education in public school where she attended Elementary School F in a suburb of a larger city in Upstate New York until age 7. She began her education in public school due to a childhood hip injury, for which she needed to be close to home in order to receive physical therapy. She described her early years in public school as academically easy because they had a



deaf program. However, she described that she felt alone and left out because she did not have any friends.

After she left the public school, she described feeling complete while attending the residential school. Ashley's new residential school setting was described by her "as her world" because she could talk about whatever she wanted and did not feel limited like at the public school. Ashley expressed feelings of being thankful for the deaf school, and at the same time, being lucky to have a deaf family. Her mother sent Ashley to a residential school in a smaller city in Upstate New York from 8 years of age until 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

At the age of 15, Ashley decided it was in her best interest to attend a residential school in Washington, DC because she felt that the residential school in the smaller city in Upstate New York was too small, and she became tired of her independent study and the lack of an academic challenge. Ashley described the residential school in Washington, DC as being more diverse with students from different nations, a better quality of students, more challenges, and more choices for challenging courses.

Ashley regrets that her mother did not put her in a larger deaf school at an earlier age where she would have had more class choices. Since graduation from high school, Ashley has attended many different colleges. She has gone to a community college in a larger city in Upstate New York, a college in Maryland, a college that is an institute of technology in a larger city in upstate New York, and a prestigious deaf college in Washington, DC. She earned a Master of Arts degree from a college in Maryland for deaf education, and stated that she was lucky to finish her Master of Arts. She attributed finishing her degree to attending a deaf college that had a deaf program where there were no interpreters and just straight instruction. Ashley is

currently married with two hearing children, and works as a teacher at a deaf school in Washington, DC.

**Anne** identifies herself as deaf. She graduated in 2006 from a religious school that provides a K-12 education in a small town in Upstate New York. She received a mainstreamed education at the school and was the only deaf student at her school. Anne became deaf from meningitis at 3 months old. She mentioned that she went to deaf programs and they taught her sign language, but she protested and started to talk. She explained that she did not want to learn sign language. It was not until third grade that she found out she was deaf. She recollected a girl in third grade asking her about the metal device on her hand. Anne panicked and asked her mom about the device, and her mother responded, "I thought you knew you were deaf." She told her mother she thought she was hearing. However, Anne expressed that when she realized she was deaf because of the student's comment about her hearing aide, her whole life changed because she was able to understand why she was treated differently than the other students in her class. The revelation of her recognizing she was deaf appeared to open her eyes to how she was treated differently than her hearing peers in class with regard to not having the same chance of making friends and experiencing positive social interactions with the students and the teacher.

While Anne earned good grades in school, she mentioned that the social component of school was missing. Anne explained that she always felt like she was treated differently by her peers and teachers. Her peers did not communicate or try to socialize with her. Teachers "talked small" (very slowly) to her and close up in her face, and the way in which the teachers tried to communicate bothered her, as she felt they treated her like she had a mental handicap. Anne's favorite subject in school was math, and she stated that she could have done math all day long.

Anne's other passion in school was sports. Anne excelled in sports and had friends on the field. However, they were only friends on the field, as the friendships did not transfer into the classroom.

While Anne was offered assistance in school, she did not like it because she felt singled out. It made her feel like she was inferior to the other students in class; however, she knew she was very capable of doing well academically. She expressed that she wanted to learn on the same level as the hearing students. Anne felt like her being deaf was the reason why the teachers continued to push her to get help and earn good grades. However, she felt it was counterproductive and did not feel that it motivated her to do well in school. When she graduated from high school, she was told she could graduate with an Individualized Education Program. She was hurt by the label of an Individualized Education Program because she felt that it suggested she was not smart enough, which she knew was not true. That Individualized Education Program hurt her emotionally, and she said that is why she did not give up.

Following graduation, Anne attended a college in a larger city in Upstate New York that is an institute of technology and described her experience at college "as very good and a second world." She mentioned with great pride the 3.3 GPA she earned. Anne has earned a bachelor's degree and is currently seeking her master's degree.

### **Reflective Findings**

The participants' narratives regarding their K-12 educational experience in their specific school settings during the time they attended school are significant in this ensuing section. The process of examining the transcripts of participants' stories in this study allowed for an analysis

of the participants' narratives of their education and a synthesis of the conceptualized qualitative data found in the transcripts into nine findings that are provided in this section.

**Low academic expectations irrespective of the school setting or time attended:**

**Finding 1.** Despite the 50-year time span in which the participants attended school, all (9 of 9 [100 %]) of the participants in both residential and public school educational settings indicated similar occurrences of low academic expectations.

One primary finding of this study is that regardless of the school setting or years attended, participants did not describe an educational experience filled with high expectations.

All four residential participants communicated memories of the residential school setting at some period of time as boring, repetitive, not challenging, far too easy, and as having low expectations.

Cole, who last attended residential school in the 1960s, painted a picture of being bored and uninterested in class with her description:

*And we would get bored, and not want to put up with it because it was just like, it was the same old thing. (Cole)*

Cole expressed being bored and having a repetitive education, while the 1970s residential participant, Lea, described shifting expectations in school. Lea described run-of-the-mill expectations by teachers when she was asked about her educational perceptions in her residential school education:

*I felt like they (academic areas) were average. Some were easy, and some were hard. It was up and down. (Lea)*

Yet, while one would think that educational expectations would increase for the residential students educated in the subsequent decades, the other two residential participants who attended in the 1980s and 1990s did not describe a transformation of higher expectations. Instead, participants Anne Marie from the 1980s and Ashley from the 1990s described similar experiences of frustration from a lack of higher expectations in their residential schools. Each of the participants had to seek alternate educational settings for the latter part of their residential schooling to attain the higher expectations desired.

Anne Marie, the participant from the 1980s, was quite disappointed that she did not have advanced courses, like regents, at her residential school. To participate in higher level courses like regents, she had to travel to the mainstreamed school next door:

*I wish my residential school provided more regents courses that were more challenging instead of having to go to the mainstreamed school for regents classes. (Anne Marie)*

Again, the recurrence of low expectations in the residential setting continued in the 1990s with Ashley, who decided to attend residential school in another state due to her local residential school not being challenging. Consequently, Ashley had to get permission from her mother to leave the state of New York to attend the school in Maryland. Ashley explained that Maryland Model Secondary School in Washington, DC had a larger student population and more challenging courses available. However, her transfer did not happen until 10<sup>th</sup> grade, so her educational experience up to 10<sup>th</sup> grade was unchallenging, as evidenced with her expressed sentiment:

*At the deaf school, we were all doing the same thing, however when I was in sixth grade, I felt like the deaf school was very easy. (Ashley)*

Ashley provided a further explanation as to why she thought she was not challenged:

*There was not any challenge, and why the students were leaving (The New York School for the Deaf in Rome, NY) is because everybody was going to the mainstream, and they were not really challenged. I felt like I wanted more challenges. (Ashley)*

Ashley mentioned she had grown tired of having a one-on-one study from sixth through 10<sup>th</sup> grade, and because of her being academically ahead of the small pool of classmates in Rome, New York, she ended up leaving.

*So, because of the one-on-one, that is why I went to Model Secondary School for the Deaf in DC, and the students there were just like me. So I took some challenging courses; for example, I took some precalculus, physics, and different things. (Ashley)*

Analogous with the residential school participants' descriptions of low expectations in their academic setting, the public school students from the 1960s to the 2000s also expressed low expectations. All five public school participants (100 %) educated within a 50-year span described low expectations in their education experience.

No participant expressed their frustration with low expectations more emotionally than Helen, educated in the 1960s. She gave a description of an education that was basic and repetitious throughout a lengthy period of time. Helen expressed frustration in her public school education because she felt she had to repeat several grades multiple times because the school had

low expectations for her because she was deaf. She felt like she was capable of keeping up academically in school, but was not provided with the challenging grade level material by teachers because they had little confidence in her to complete the necessary grade level material because she was deaf. As a result, she explained her dismay with her public school experience:

*They did things very simple, very basic. I wanted something more challenging, but I was really bored with my education because I wanted some advancement. But the teachers kept me in grades for a couple of years just teaching basic things because that is the only way they thought teaching should be because we were deaf. (Helen)*

The basic education with lower expectations was poignantly expressed by Helen who explained that it was the only way teachers thought the deaf should be taught. However, the 1970s public school student, John, expressed that high expectations were not something he could assume from the school. He viewed himself and his family as the ones responsible for creating a quality education:

*I created my own quality. So I consider myself well-educated, because I and my parents instilled the love of learning, the desire and hunger of knowledge, because school didn't do it at all. (John)*

While John described the quality of education as a manifestation of himself and the value placed on education by his family, the 1980s participant, Ed, did not feel the public school would provide a setting that would allow him to achieve high expectations. Nor would he be able to provide high expectations for himself inside the public school setting because of the circumstances of his IEP. Ed expressed that lower expectations became very evident in the 11<sup>th</sup>

grade, and described that time as being pigeonholed with an IEP. He understood that both the low expectations and getting an IEP were occurring specifically because he was deaf.

*One year, I was on regents, and in the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, they said let's make it easy for you, so they sent me to a counselor two times a week. I was saying I am confused; I would rather have regents like hearing people, and they said, "No, no, we are going to put you in IEP." (Ed)*

While Ed viewed the lower expectation as beginning in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, he specifically mentioned the lower expectation of being given an IEP as the reason he did not graduate. The 1990s public school participant, Mary, described her frustration with the school's view that she was unable to learn:

*They thought I was at a low level of education and that I couldn't learn anything.*  
*(Mary)*

Those low expectations described by Mary were a pattern for her all the way through her K-12 education:

*As far as learning anything, what I found in my education everything was basic. From kindergarten to high school, I was part of the BOCES program, so the education was to me very repetitive. It was like taking the same math, English, and science. That's how I felt. I didn't really learn much. (Mary)*

Mary's public school experience of low expectations was once again mirrored by Anne, the 2000s public school participant. Those low expectations are provided in her statement with expressed frustration:



*I used to argue with the teacher. I wanted to be in your class to learn, and they said you are not ready. You are not smart enough for U.S. History or Advanced Placement English. Like I said, they said you are not smart enough and worried I would get Fs. Most of the classes I didn't take normal classes. (Anne)*

**The power of sign language and visuals to support learning: Finding 2.** The majority (8 of 9 [89%]) of participants reported that the most beneficial support for learning in class was sign language and a clear visual. In the residential setting, communication through sign language was described as the most influential element to support learning. All (4 of 4 [100%]) residential school students mentioned that the most beneficial support in class was a teacher that could clearly communicate with sign what they taught, while (4 of 5 [80%]) the majority of public school students mentioned other clear visual cues and demonstrations as the most helpful supports in learning.

When asked what the biggest support was for her education, Cole described the significance of clear communication with the first two deaf teachers with her statement, “Again, those teachers.” Here, she refers to the clear communication and the ease of learning because there was no barrier. She went on to clarify that the deaf teachers were able to explain things with sign language, and they used visuals and demonstrations which were essential for someone who could not hear.

*I think it was both the teachers how they would explain things, there were pictures, it was more interesting. They do experiments in front of the kids. That makes it more interesting. (Cole)*

Similarly, the 1970s residential school student, Lea, also described the importance of having a teacher that was easy to understand:

*I loved the home economics teacher because I could understand her. (Lea)*

Lea, like Cole, stressed how significant it is to have a teacher that can sign, and went even further by stating that it is better to have a teacher that signs rather than an interpreter.

*I would rather be one-on-one with a teacher deaf signing than an interpreter going back and forth. I can't emphasize the importance of signing. (Lea)*

The value of communication was also described by the residential participants that were educated in succeeding years. Anne Marie, the 1980s participant, and Ashley, the 1990s residential participant, also described communication as a vital support that assisted them in learning.

*The communication was 100 %. I could see everything and understand everything. (Anne Marie)*

Anne Marie also described other visuals as supportive:

*We had a blackboard with an overhead projector in class, and the teacher would show us what instructions. It would be in signing, and it was a challenge. But, the visual certainly helped. (Anne Marie)*

*What helped me was direct communication with the teachers, just signing. (Ashley)*

Ashley also explained the importance of having direct communication in an interview:

*What I loved about the deaf teachers was there was straight instruction. You didn't need an interpreter. You didn't need a note taker. I felt normal. I could*

*ask the teacher questions, and have group discussions because they were deaf and could understand. (Ashley)*

The pattern of residential participants mentioning the value of visual aids to facilitate learning continued with the public participants who attended during the same time periods. However, Helen, the 1960 public school participant, did not mention communication as a vital support because sign language was not allowed. Instead, she stated that the most beneficial support she received were visual materials used in class.

*The teacher would show us things in books. We would write. We would learn spelling and learn words. (Helen)*

Like Helen, John did not have access to communication with sign language and was not provided with the option of an interpreter. Therefore, he did not mention communication in class as a vital support. Instead, he expressed the importance of visuals such as books as a way to learn. Fortunately, he loved reading.

*The materials that helped were books, reading books, the books that were assigned, and the books that were not assigned. (John)*

The 1980s participant, Ed, described using notes from a note taker so he could pay attention to the teacher as the biggest support:

*I had a note taker in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade when I was a sophomore, and one girl was a note taker for me, so I could actually pay attention to the teacher. (Ed)*

The 1990s and 2000s public school participants had supports available and offered to them, but both participants developed negative attitudes about their educational experiences and used the supports sparingly, or not at all.

Anne, the 1990s public school participant, did not describe using any supports offered by her teachers because she said she had a negative attitude and refused any kind of help.

*The teachers tried to support me, but I pushed them away because I felt their support was negative. (Anne)*

Her refusal to use any visual and communication supports is evidenced in the following explanation:

*At BOCES they offered me tutoring, and I turned it down. (Anne)*

Anne also refused the aid of an interpreter in class because of her perception that she was being taught with lower repetitive expectations.

*They had an interpreter for gym class after school if I played softball, did activities, or cross country running. But as far as classes, I said no because it was repetitive. (Anne)*

Mary, the 2000s public school participant, described not liking the support in school because she felt too much was offered, and a lot of help put extra pressure on her. Even though she thought the extra help was demeaning and made her feel like the teachers thought she was stupid, she still mentioned that there were some visual resources in class that were beneficial:

*Closed captioned, a teacher for the deaf, and speech. (Mary)*

Although the 1990s public school participant did not describe sign language or clear visuals as a beneficial support, she mentioned that they were accessible in school. Her bad experience in school inevitably led her to decline the aid of an interpreter. However, 8 out of 9 participants mentioned that the most beneficial supports for learning in class were the use of sign language and a clear visual.

**Lack of sign language was the biggest barrier to communication and learning**

**Finding 3.** The majority (8 of 9 [89 %]) of participants described the biggest obstacle that hindered learning in school during the time they were educated as the inability to clearly understand what was being communicated in the classroom because of a lack of sign language.

The 1960s and 1970s residential school participants both expressed a challenge of learning in school because they were not able to clearly communicate with sign.

*I didn't know, as I said, sign language, and it was culture shock. But being unable to communicate, it was a struggle. (Cole)*

*What I found challenging was trying to get the understanding of what they (teachers) were trying to explain to me. (Lea)*

“Was communication a barrier that made school a struggle?” (Researcher)

*Yes. The teachers didn't want sign. (Lea)*

Likewise, the 1980s residential school student, Anne Marie, described communication as a struggle, and she currently feels so strongly about the communication barrier that she encourages deaf students to go to residential school.

*But, I think they should encourage more deaf kids going to residential school because all the deaf would be using the same language (ASL). (Anne Marie)*

Ashley, the 1990s residential student, also described communication with English as the biggest obstacle in learning.

*I was having a hard time with any English, things like grammar, geometry, and math, and why, because it actually requires English. (Ashley)*

Like their residential peers, the public school participants also described their inability to understand what they were being taught as the biggest obstacle in their education.

When asked to describe the biggest obstacle in school, Helen, the 1960s public school participant, responded:

*Academically, what I found really hard was knowing what the teacher was saying.*

*(Helen)*

Again, the 1970s public school participant, John, also described the problem of communication, and having the ability to access communication in class like the hearing students. He went even further to pinpoint that the inaccessibility to communication was tied to a lack of educational law.

*Well, I knew that I couldn't access the classroom the way everyone else could like hearing children. I knew that, right, you know a gut level. I didn't know sign language at the time, so even if I did, they didn't have interpreters. That was before the laws. (John)*

John also described that he was the only deaf student, and did not have peers with whom to communicate.

*Of course, I was the only deaf person, and the fact that the environment was not communication accessible. There was no captioning, not one-on-one. It was tough. (John)*

The pattern of communication between the teacher and deaf student being a struggle and obstacle for learning continued with the 1980s and 2000s public school participants who stated:

*I would miss what was trying to be done. It was a challenge trying to visually follow what the teacher was doing. They really didn't explain things fully. There wasn't much clarity. (Ed)*

*Not having a teacher of the deaf speech teacher. (Anne)*

The 1990s public school student, Mary, was tangled in her own educational obstacle of being disengaged with teachers. Her discontent stemmed from the poor rapport between her and her teachers. Therefore, her real obstacle in school was the lack of trust and poor relationship established with teachers.

*All the teachers in the BOCES program, what I felt as far as hurting me is how they treated me. (Mary)*

**Difficulty with the English language: Finding 4.** The majority of public and residential participants (7 of 9 [78%]) reported that the subject of English was not easy in school, regardless of the different years they attended school and irrespective of their academic school setting, whether residential or public.

English was an academic subject area that stood out in participants' narratives, as it was the greatest challenge for the majority of participants in both the public and residential school setting. It was the only mutual subject area, regardless of the time attended or school placement, which the majority of participants specifically viewed as problematic in their education. In addition, English was the only academic subject area that participants described as being biased toward the deaf.

Three out of four (75%) of the other residential school students that attended school in the 1960s, 1980s, and 1990s mentioned English as problematic. Repeatedly mentioned by

three of the residential participants was their view of English as not being the language of the deaf, but rather the language of the hearing. The three residential participants had similar portrayals of their difficulty with English, as conveyed in the following accounts:

*English was very hard. It was a challenge. You know, it is based on hearing.*

*(Cole)*

*What I noticed is my weakness in English because math was my strongest subject for me. But, English not really because English is our second language.*

*American Sign Language is our first language. So, it was like verbs and nouns and past/present tense. (Anne Marie)*

*I was having a hard time with any English things like grammar, geometry, and math. Why, because it actually requires English. The sentences I couldn't understand. My English was fair. I do American Sign Language, and I express more in that language. And I could do whatever, but in English, I feel limited.*

*(Ashley)*

The 1970s residential school participant was the only one who did not describe English as a problem. However, the researcher is inclined to believe the 1970s participant may not have fully recollected her experience in school regarding English considering her brief description:

*It was fine. (Lea)*

Similarly to the residential school participants, the public school participants shared that they too had difficulty with English. Four out of five of the public school participants (80%) described difficulties with the subject area of English. The overriding finding was that the public school participants also found English challenging.



The only public school participant that did not mention English as being problematic was John whose parents had the financial resources to provide him with educational supports outside of the classroom setting. The resources afforded by his parents assisted him in learning English at a very young age. John, the public school participant from the 1970s, provided details about his experience with language at a very young age that would seem to explain his difference in success with the English language as compared to his other public school peer participants:

*Well, put it this way, when I was 2, I started to break the code of English. I learned the mechanics of English very young. From 2 on, I started learning speech and seeing print associated with speech. I was taught to read and write very young. You know, and from 2 on I was getting that kind of one-on-one instruction. And that's the most difficult task of any child to try and break the code of English without sound. You know most of it's based on phonetics. You know, and then people pick it up in natural conversation and hearing it, you know babies, learn naturally. But for me everything was all visual, it had to be taught to me by reading people's lips and practice learning how to speak.*

*Phonetically was through speech training. (John)*

While the other 4 out of 5 participants did not describe English as the subject they mastered, they described it as challenging and an area that they could have used assistance with to do well. The participants from the 1960s, 1980s, and 2000s expressed that English was difficult and assistance would have been valuable in their descriptions:

*I wish I had help in social studies, English, and math. (Helen)*

*Math was really complicated and so was English. (Ed)*

*I had a problem with that (English). (Anne)*

Although the 1990s participant did not directly express that English was difficult, the repetitive nature of the education she described does not imply she did not have difficulty, given that she did not actually consider herself proficient at English until she left her residential school after her senior year to attend another residential school.

*So education was like taking the same math, English, and science (public school). It was all repetitive. I am good with English thanks to the teacher at the deaf school (senior year deaf school). (Mary)*

**Students' emotional challenges with their school settings: Finding 5.** The overwhelming majority of participants from the residential and public school setting (8 of 9 [89%]) recounted feelings of depression or isolation.

It was not surprising that 3 out of 4 of the residential participants mentioned feeling either sad, depressed, or scared considering they were very young when they were separated from their parents. The majority of residential students described it as being emotionally taxing leaving home. In the residential setting, Cole (1960s), Lea (1980s), and Anne Marie (1990s) all mentioned missing their parents while having to stay in the dorm at a residential school in their accounts:

*Well you know, I cried easily. I would get depressed and cry. I was away from my family. I would get mad. (Cole)*

*I told them I wanted to go home. I missed my parents. I had to stay there a long time. (Lea)*

*What I remembered when I first went to school is I was so scared because my parents were at home. My parents were actually 45 minutes away from my dorm. And the dorm was a scary experience, and I was crying for my mom and dad. (Anne Marie)*

Ashley's experience in the residential school was unlike the other 3 out of 4 residential school students that had an experience entailing an emotional burden. Ashley's contradictory feelings of jubilation appear to have something to do with her experience of attending public school until the age of 6 and experiencing isolation in the mainstream at an early age before attending the deaf school where she was elated after her years of social isolation in the public school. When she finally began attending the residential school, she felt overjoyed to be surrounded by other students who were similar to her:

*When I went to the public school, they had a deaf program, so it was easy for me. I was all alone with the mainstreamed kids. I felt like I was all alone. I kind of felt left out. And, then I went to the deaf school. I was seven, and thought wow! Now I am feeling complete. This is my world. (Ashley)*

While the residential students mentioned their emotional distress resulting from being away from their parents, the public school students' emotional distress was caused by being deaf in a setting predominantly made up of hearing students. Five out of five mainstream participants of the public school setting mentioned an emotional weight placed on them.

The public school participants from the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s overwhelmingly shared a similar experience of having feelings of isolation that took an emotional toll. That feeling of isolation was attributed to being a deaf student in a public school setting where the majority of the students could hear.

*Heavy, it was tough. I was the only deaf person in school. My speech to other people, I know I sounded very different. It was different, and I knew that people knew I was deaf. So that was a heavy burden to carry in the public school, the feeling of being different.*

*(John)*

*At first going to mainstream, I stayed away. I didn't know how to communicate. (Ed)*

*The bad part is being isolated especially with the hearing world. You kind of feel left out. (Mary)*

*They don't really have an interest to communicate with me, communicate with my deafness, or with sign language. During lunch, I mostly ate with my mom. She is a kindergarten teacher in the same school. The reason why I ate lunch with my mom is in the cafeteria nobody wanted to talk to me. (Anne)*

Helen, the 1960s public school participant, described an emotional burden of being embarrassed in the public school setting because of her age.

*One thing I do have to admit that my age being older was embarrassing because I was older. In seventh grade, I was 16 or 17 years old. In 10<sup>th</sup> grade, I was 19 years old, and I couldn't stay any longer. (Helen)*

So, regardless of the setting, and although the students were educated at different times, the vast majority of participants struggled with feelings of isolation or depression.

**The positive effects of greater acceptance and availability of signing and use of interpreters: Finding 6.** All of the participants educated in the residential and public schools during the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s described added resources that allowed them to communicate with their peers and teachers in their school setting as opposed to those participants

in the 1960s and 1970s in the same settings that had limited availability of communication. The time between the 1960s-2000s certainly presented a vast transformation for those participants that were students in both the public and residential school settings in regards to greater availability of options that made it possible for deaf students to communicate with their peers and teachers.

The accounts of the residential school students portray the huge transformation in communication from the 1960s to the 1990s. The first residential participant from the 1960s mentioned the lack of communicative opportunities in class, and her disengagement with communication between herself and the other students, and herself and the teacher in class.

Cole, the 1960s residential school participant, expressed that sign was not an acceptable form of communication for a considerable amount of time inside of her residential classroom.

*Sometimes, I would remember when the teacher was not looking, and on the other side of the desk we could quick sign to each other and then when she comes back we would act like we weren't signing at all. (Cole)*

Cole's frustration at not being able to openly communicate with sign in her class was apparent, but you could sense her excitement at being able to use sign in the lunchroom and outside.

*When outside the building and lunch room, we could sign with each other. We could sign. Yes, we could sign. You imagine what it was like. So we were able to communicate with each other. (Cole)*

The limited ability to have conversations with the teachers was also described by Cole as a problem as the teachers did not sign and there were no interpreters.

*No, no, no, there were not interpreters. (Cole)*

There was a change with the 1970s residential student's interaction with other students. She described a different world of communication with regard to interactions between students:

*We signed. We were all deaf. (Lea)*

However, the challenge of communicating with teachers still presented itself in the 1970s.

*Yes, the teachers, they didn't sign. At that time, a long time ago the teachers didn't really sign, so it was really hard understanding. (Lea)*

A sweeping change permeated the residential school setting with regard to student socialization opportunities in the classroom for the participants that attended residential schools in the 1980s and 1990s. The residential school participants from the 1980s and 1990s had opportunities for communication available to them that other participants that attended school in the past did not. For example, the 1980s and 1990s participants had access to deaf teachers, interpreters, and the ability to use sign, whereas the same resources were not readily available to the participants that attended in the 1960s and 1970s. The 1980s participant, Anne Marie, and 1990s participant, Ashley, both described social interaction with students and teachers in their accounts of education.

The 1980s residential participant, Anne Marie, stated that her residential setting did not offer challenging classes. As a result, she needed to take additional classes at the public school, which also offered an environment where communication was possible between her, the students, and the teachers.

*At the residential school, we didn't have an interpreter because the teacher signed. Most of them weren't signed English; it's called Pidgin Signed Language.*

*That is what they actually used. So it is American Sign Language, mixed with Signed English. In residential school, my hand was always up. (Anne Marie)*

Anne Marie went on to describe the resources provided for communication in the mainstreamed class:

*But at the hearing school, oh yes, they had tutoring, a note taker, interpreter was available. (Anne Marie)*

However, her ability to become a participant in classroom conversations was not possible.

*Everything was limited. The teacher didn't give me a chance to participate in discussion due to the fast pace. (Anne Marie)*

While the fast pace of conversations in classes did not allow Anne Marie to participate in discussions, fortunately she still had various resources to assist her with communication. Ashley, the 1990s residential school participant, described feeling satisfied with the communication opportunities presented to her in the residential school, which is a stark contrast to the communication opportunities that were almost completely missing for her 1960s and 1970s residential school counterparts when they attended residential school.

*What I loved about the deaf teachers was there was straight instruction.*

*You didn't need an interpreter. You didn't need a note taker. I felt normal. I could ask the teacher questions and have group discussions because they were deaf and could understand. (Ashley)*

While the 1980s and 1990s residential participants had an educational environment that was conducive for communication, the 1960s and 1970s residential participants' educational environment failed to provide any options or resources that would enable them to communicate.

The residential school participants and the public school participants both reported having little or no communication between themselves and their classroom peers and teachers during the same time period in the 1960s and 1970s.

Helen, the 1960s public school participant, provided her recollection of the difficulty with communication in her public school setting at the time:

*We really didn't sign. We weren't allowed to sign at all. We were actually punished if they caught us using our hands for communication. We could sign, but our hands would be slapped if we used our hands. Then when the teacher left the room, we didn't really sign like American Sign Language. We used home signs, and we used gestures. (Helen)*

When asked again about communication, you could tell Helen felt anxious and frustrated with the communication options offered to her when she attended school in the 1960s. Helen's method of communication with teachers was difficult. She described that she had to speak orally although she couldn't hear, and she had to lip read to understand the teacher and students.

Helen's limitations and struggle with communication is illustrated with her reply:

*I felt shy, sometimes, and sometimes I would talk, and sometimes I would not. There would be questions. What did they say? Because we had to rely on lip reading, we would take our fingers to indicate exactly what words were said in the book. There was not signing, and we were expected to lip read. It was really hard reading lips and getting 100% accuracy. (Helen)*



Helen's description of the difficulty in understanding what the teacher and students were saying in class indicates that communication was quite limited in her experience, considering that she never knew for sure what was being communicated by her teachers or peers.

Once again, John, the 1970s public school participant, described social isolation with regard to communication with his student peers. In reference to communication in class with students, John explained:

*I had very little interaction, if any, with other kids. (John)*

With regard to discussion with his teachers in class, John described that the opportunity for teacher interaction or communication was absent:

*Class discussions I could not be a part of. The discussion, the teacher was not available to me. There was not captioning, not one-on-one. It was tough. (John)*

While John in the 1970s mentioned lack of availability for communication and no interpreter available, Ed, the 1980s public school participant, was provided with an opportunity to communicate easily with his teacher, unlike his 1970s public school peer. He conveyed his ability to communicate with his teacher:

*And with the teacher, obviously I had to go through an interpreter to talk to the teacher. (Ed)*

In addition to communication with his teacher, Ed mentioned communication with his hearing peers. Remarkably enough, he mentioned:

*I actually socialized with the hearing more than I did with the deaf. As far as with the students, it was fine. (Ed)*

By playing sports, Ed was able to build a rapport with those same students outside of class. The researcher's supposition as to why Ed had the experience of communicating with hearing peers more than his deaf peers resulted from him participating in sports with hearing students.

Mary, the 1990s participant, also described a communicative environment in school with the resource of a tutor and the ability to use sign language. Her experience was different than that of the public school participants that attended school in the 1960s and 1970s. The difference is evidenced in Mary's description of communication that occurred between teachers and deaf students by the use of sign language.

*Some of the teachers knew some signs the old-fashion way of signing and the students they were deaf. There were 12 students who were deaf, and they knew signing because they were deaf. (Mary)*

When she was asked about communication with the hearing students in her class, she replied:

*Writing with hearing students. (Mary)*

Anne, the 1990s participant, had resources available to her in the academic setting which facilitated communication, like her public school peers in the 1980s and 1990s. While she used an interpreter to communicate with the teacher, she unfortunately felt ostracized from her hearing peers. As a result, she described a poor social environment with no communication between her and her hearing classroom peers.

*No one talked to me, or said hi. They treated me like I was invisible. Don't talk outside in the hallway or anything. They just acted different to me. (Anne)*

Although the 1990s participant expressed a complete lack of communication between her and her peers, the cause was not identical to that of her public school peers from the 1960s and 1970s, as they did not have resources such as an interpreter available to help facilitate communication with their teachers or peers.

**Personal and family motivations to learn: Finding 7.** The majority of participants (5 of 9 [56%]) reported that a leading motivation for them getting an education was their family members. Participants that attended school spanning from the 1960s to the 1990s shared similar accounts of family members influencing them to attain an education.

The 1960s, 1980s, and 1990s residential school participants described family as their primary motivation for learning. The 1960s residential student, Cole, described her aunts and uncles who were successful in business as her motivation to do well in school.

*Well, I was very motivated because I wanted to learn a lot for my future. My aunts and uncles had their own business, and I saw that. (Cole)*

Family also encouraged Anne Marie, the 1980s residential school participant, to do well in school, so she could reach the further aspiration of going to college.

*Of course, my family encouraged me since I was first a child as far as going to residential school and trying to reach my goal to go to college. (Anne Marie)*

The 1990s residential school participant also mentioned her family as encouraging her to do well in school, but the real motivation to learn came when she was finally challenged.

*There was not motivation until I went to MSSD, and finally I felt challenged. (Ashley)*

The 1960s and 1970s public school participants (2 of 5) expressed that family was a chief motivation to do well in school.

*My mother she motivated me. (Helen)*

*My grandfather always asked, "Did you do your best?" and that has always been on my mind. (John)*

However, the public school participant from the 2000s communicated that her only motivation in school was the subject of math, which she relished.

*Some, it was math. The only thing I wanted to do is math all day. (Anne)*

Ed, the 1980s public school participant, and Anne Marie, the 1980s residential school participant, both described sports as an inspiration for learning.

*Sports did a lot. (Ed)*

Besides sports as a motivation, Ed stated:

*I needed to know about things about math and history. (Ed)*

Anne Marie also explained sports as a motivation:

*By playing sports, it made me do well academically. (Anne Marie)*

Lea, the 1960s residential participant, and John, the 1970s public school participant, both described their own personal motivations in learning.

*Education for myself made school important for me. (Lea)*

John had several thoughts regarding motivation:

*Well, two things, one is self-development, self-realization, and self-growth. And the second is more pragmatic, a job, money, standard of living, a body of life. Those two things are mutual. You can't have one without the other. (John)*

Mary, the 1990s public school participant, mentioned that learning about deaf culture and how to write were her motivations to learn, so she could prove to the hearing world that she was smart.

*When I learned more about deaf culture, and learned how to write essays. Yes, that's when I realized education was important to me. If I didn't know how to write essays as far as communication, to the hearing world, they would look at my writing and say oh, you can't write. Sentences would not make any sense. That my essay be read and that's fine, and they wouldn't say she is deaf. That I am actually smart. (Mary)*

**Security in a familiar setting: Finding 8.** Based on their personal experiences in a public or residential setting, the majority of participants (7 of 9 [78%]) were more apt to recommend that other deaf students go to the same school setting in which they were educated.

When asked about their preferred educational setting, students overwhelmingly recommended the setting in which they attended school. While some students expressed that a placement choice for a student needs to be carefully considered, other students gave their opinion or reasons why the school setting they chose was best suited for deaf students.

Four out of four (100%) of the residential school participants expressed that they thought residential school would be the best placement for other deaf students:

*The residential program for the deaf absolutely. That had good clear education that I could understand. (Cole)*

*I say it was better going to a deaf school. (Lea)*

*I would encourage them to go to residential school, but today it is different due to downsizing, so the education might be better so far as residential may not be enough.*

*(Anne Marie)*

In addition, even though the 1980s and 1990s residential participants suggested that residential school placement should be chosen over the public school setting, they suggested that students should consider numerous factors before choosing their placement. Anne Marie, the 1980s residential participant, mentioned her preference for the residential school setting; however, she cautioned against deciding on a type of school setting without considering all of the factors involved.

*My advice is to try and do your best to make sure your needs are met. And go visit the residential school and see what they have to offer and as far as the public school being convenient where they could go home every day. (Anne Marie)*

Ashley, the 1990s residential school participant, expressed her strong conviction that the residential setting is the best educational setting option for deaf students.

*Remember, I mentioned, I wish all the deaf kids would go to deaf school, and they would all have American Sign Language. (Ashley)*

While none of the residential school participants suggested the public school placement, there was one public school participant that mentioned that residential school would be a better choice for deaf students. However, the majority of the public school participants, like their residential counterparts, did not suggest going to a different school setting.

Because Helen had an experience of repeating several grades in the public school and essentially became too old to go to school and graduate, it is no surprise that she expressed that she would not have attended public school.

*I wish I could have gone to residential school because there would be more communication, and I could have interacted with my peers. (Helen)*

John, an analytical thinker, did not give a specific setting of preference, but instead offered advice for deaf students.

*So it is hard to decree public school for all deaf children, and you can't say all deaf children should go to a residential program or school for the deaf. It depends on each child. Many deaf schools fall short of the social mission to educate children for college. Even though communication would have been easier in deaf school, I prefer public school because of the quality of education, much higher expectations, and the demands are higher. (John)*

However, the 1980s and 1990s public school participants explicitly proposed that deaf students go to a mainstream school to learn to communicate with hearing people.

*I would say I wish all the schools would have mainstream. I wish they had it so all schools be called mainstream where all deaf people would go. (Ed)*

*They (mainstream) should socialize deaf students and have the same education equally, or have them go to deaf school. (Mary)*

Although the participant from the 2000s did not make a specific recommendation, she mentioned that she wished she had attended a different public school or maybe a deaf school.

From her comment, the researcher presumed that the participant could have offered either setting as a suggestion.

While some of the participants recommended that deaf students consider the setting opposite from the one which they attended, the majority of participants leaned toward the setting they attended themselves with more conviction. The only participants that did not have a strong conviction of going to the same setting were the 1960s and 2000s public school participants. With that said, the 1960s public school participant was the only one that mentioned, without hesitation, that she would have attended a residential school if her mother would have allowed it.

**Education's impact on students: Finding 9.** All of the participants (9 of 9 [100%]) believe that their education has had a positive influence on them.

All of the residential participants felt that their residential school education provided them an opportunity for success. Cole from the 1960s and Lea from the 1970s strongly believed that their education enabled them to get a job and be productive citizens.

*Growing up in a school for the deaf that really influenced me a lot. I learned a lot. It helped me learn about a future. (Cole)*

*Yes, because while in Poughkeepsie, when I got married I worked for a company. We sewed coats. We made coats. So, that was a skill, I learned from going to school. (Lea)*

While the 1980s residential participant, Anne Marie, believed school prepared her for her future, it did so only up to a certain degree.

*Yes and no. Like I said, I wished there was more. It is really hard to explain why.*

*There were not enough courses to meet our level, so that's why we went to mainstream. I wish I had taken accounting. (Anne Marie)*



At the same time, the 1990s residential student identified her deaf education as the foundation and reason for her successful completion of college.

*Really, if it wasn't for the deaf school, maybe I would have never finished school.*

*The deaf school kept me going and let me be involved. I was very lucky that I finished and got my MA. And why, because it was a deaf college, and deaf program so the key is the instructions and that made the big difference and that is the key. (Ashley)*

Analogous to the residential school participants, all of the public school participants considered their education as the foundation for their present success.

*My typing helped me. One of my first jobs I got was Bank of America. (Helen)*

Although Helen, the 1960s public school participant, explained that the transition from leaving school led to her getting a job and being independent, she still remorsefully regretted not getting a higher education degree. Looking back, Helen expressed regret.

*I wished I could have gone back to school. I wish I could have gone to college.*

*(Helen)*

John passionately credited his public school background with providing a robust foundation for that which he has achieved.

*I credit public school for where I am today. I have five degrees all because of public school. Public school gave me a good grounding. (John)*

Like his 1980s public school peer, Ed credited his education for his current success, but also expressed that there were some glitches with his education.

*It has and it hasn't. I got some education, and I am self-taught on things. When I went to work, my bosses who were hearing, they were really impressed on how I performed on my own. (Ed)*

Mary described that her education did prepare her, but learned “the hard way” after school what it meant to be successful.

*I learned a lot on my own. I learned it the hard way. There was a class at the Indian School for the Deaf, but BOCES didn't offer it. The class was about economy, politics, about the world, what was happening, how to be independent, and write checks. (Mary)*

And it prepared you? (Researcher)

*Yes, it did... Looking back, I wanted to push for college education and my master's degree. (Mary)*

Although the 2000s public participant described bad memories about school, she had success with higher education.

*I would say badly, it's not what I expected. I didn't have good memories, good experiences, and good relationships with those people. After high school, I went to RIT. The high school was not teaching me reality. They were teaching me religion. They didn't teach me about taking care of myself. I learned about independence. I did homework very well with no help and at RIT my average was 3.3 that made me feel really good myself. (Anne)*

### **Summary**

While the participants' stories about their education reveal their experiences in the years and the setting in which they attended school, it is important to keep in mind that the students'

recalled accounts do not provide their complete stories. With that said, the dialogue was significant between the participants and the researcher, which allowed participants to be contributors in the conversation related to their education. As a result of the participants' "shared dialogue," the researcher was able to delineate the themes that will be presented in Chapter V.

## **CHAPTER V: REFLECTIONS OF EDUCATIONAL PERCEPTIONS**

The primary focus of this qualitative research project was to gain insight into the perceptions of the nine participants and have them recount their school experiences based on the public and residential school settings and the time during which they attended school. It was the researcher's goal to use the liberating theoretical framework of Freire (1993) so the participants could have a chance to communicate their right to speak on a topic they have mostly been denied. The participants' real influence in providing their shared stories is described by Freire's (1993) statement, "If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings" (p. 89). As a result of the shared stories (words) of participants, there is an opportunity that lies within the proceeding themes of this chapter of the study for transforming the way further research on the deaf is done by involving and considering deaf students in the conversation about research on them and their educational experiences.

The researcher hopes that this research will be useful for deaf students, teachers, and people making educational decisions for deaf students. In the following chapter, the research will be summarized under the following category headings: (a) Reflective Findings; (b) Implications; (c) Recommendations for Future Research; (d) Limitations; and (e) Concluding Summary of the Researcher.

### **Review of the Study**

The intention of this study was to collect the perceptions of nine participants at the particular school setting and time they were educated. Deaf education became an area of interest for this research while the researcher was taking a course at Georgia Southern University with Dr. Liston. In the class, there was a task of writing three historical papers on a topic of choice.

The topic of deaf education was chosen by the researcher because of personal early childhood interactions growing up with deaf family members in a larger city in Upstate New York. That background was a catalyst to conducting this study and including participants from Upstate New York. The participants answered the following research question that guided this study: What are deaf students' perceptions of their school experiences in the particular educational setting they attended school, and how have these experiences impacted their lives? Prior to undertaking the research with participants from the deaf community in Upstate New York, a literature review was completed to understand some of the potential experiences that the participants in the study might have encountered during the time they were educated.

It can now be substantiated that the research findings for this study share similarities to the researchers' findings presented in the Chapter II Literature Review. The literature exhibited a direct relationship to the findings and had a direct correlation to the themes presented in Chapter IV. The different themes that were assembled through analysis of the participants' narratives were similar to those themes found in the literature reviewed on past deaf students' (K-12) school experiences.

The themes generated by the researcher from the participants' responses bring to fruition Freire's (1993) theoretical framework used in this study. In the process of decoding the participants' perceptions, the researcher has come to perceive the reality of the participants' perceptions differently by extending my perspective of their perceptions provided by dialogue in this study (Freire, 1993). By viewing their communicated perceptions of the time in which they were educated, I have achieved what Freire (1993) described as "decoding" and discovered new

perceptions and knowledge from the participants' perceptions (Freire, 1993). Also presented is the literature reviewed and its corresponding relationship revealed in the following themes:

1. The trend of low academic expectations for deaf students irrespective of the school setting or time attended.
2. The power of sign language and visuals to support learning for deaf students.
3. Lack of sign language in the classroom as the biggest barrier to communication and learning for deaf students.
4. Deaf students' struggles with the English.
5. Deaf students face emotional challenges based on the type of school setting.
6. Deaf students' personal and family influences as inspirations to learn.
7. Deaf students are more likely to advocate the educational setting they experienced.
8. Education's positive influence on students at the present time.

**1. The trend of low academic expectations for deaf students irrespective of the school setting or time attended.** Deaf education is the oldest field in special education with a trend of continued poor academic performance for deaf students (Woolsey, 2004), and such an outcome might be expected based on all of the participants' perceptions of low academic expectations regardless of the time or setting in which they were educated. Such expectations were confirmed by residential schools participants' descriptions of an education that was boring, repetitive, and not challenging, and the public school participants' descriptions of a low level, basic education. The participants' descriptions are reflective of Freire's (1993) description of the banking concept of education where students are not called to know, but to memorize

contents recited by the teacher. That type of learning is reflected in the participants' descriptions of their teachers.

For example, in the residential setting, there appeared to be a disconnect between the participants and the teachers. Participants described that they were capable of doing a lot more than the teachers in the classrooms believed they were capable of doing academically. The participants overwhelmingly perceived the teachers as having low expectations. The low expectations viewed by the participants might also be in part due to what Moores (2001) described as deaf students not having teachers who have the sufficient skills to properly teach deaf students, the result of which is a gap in academic performance that exists for deaf students (Moores, 2001). Moores' explanation that teachers responsible for teaching the deaf are unprepared at different levels shines light on Ashley, the 1990s residential participant's, predicament. Ashley implicitly suggested that there was a missed opportunity for teacher instruction in her residential experience that mostly consisted of having a self-directed, one-on-one education with no real challenge.

The low expectations described by the majority of participants in this study correlated with those described by students in a study by Foster (1998). In Foster's study, deaf students described a slow academic pace in residential schools that was years behind the hearing school's curriculum (Foster, 1998). The study by Foster is analogous with Anne Marie, the 1980s residential participant's, predicament of having to leave her residential school to take more challenging courses off campus. The predicament Ashley faced was shared by students in a study by Foster (1998), in which students described a lack of academic rigor in the residential

setting and reported that high school science courses were progressing at an extremely sluggish pace.

The researcher believes that public and residential schools and their teachers have not provided enough challenging educational activities. It appears that teachers of the deaf might possibly lack the proper training and resources to truly create a stimulating environment where all deaf students within the classroom are provided with an education that is challenging and produces similar academic achievement levels to those of their hearing peers. Therefore, if the teachers, support staff, and administrators do not raise academic expectations, build a rapport, and expect more from the deaf students they are responsible for educating, how can the deaf students have any chance of graduating at similar educational levels as their hearing peers?

The real solution might rely on Freire's (1993) suggestion, which is to solve the low expectation dilemma for students by doing problem-posting education where students are posed with a problem related to themselves and the world. In response to the challenge of a problem relating to the world, Freire proposed that obstacles will evoke new challenges in students and be followed by students understanding and being committed to learning.

**2. The power of sign language and visuals to support learning for deaf students.** A theme revealed by the overwhelming majority of participants in residential schools was that sign language was the most beneficial support in learning.

Residential schools are the original foundation of deaf education and provide an environment that has been beneficial because of the effortlessness at which deaf students are able to communicate and its connection to the deaf community and culture (Deluca et al., 2008). Residential participants considered teachers that clearly communicated in class to be the most



significant support for learning. For example, Anne Marie explained that while the use of an overhead projector partially assisted with learning, a teacher who could sign and provide direct communication was perceived as an unequivocal support when it came to learning. The power of a teacher who can clearly communicate with deaf students also means direct instruction where students can be involved in classroom discussion to enhance learning. Clear and direct instruction helps to prevent the meaning of what is being taught from getting lost in translation through an interpreter or note taker.

The 1990s residential student, Ashley, stated that a teacher who could clearly communicate meant having direct instruction where the students were able to be part of the classroom discussion. Clear communication in class adds a whole other beneficial dimension of education that is absent when a teacher expected to teach a class cannot clearly communicate and interact with students. As pointed out by Marschark et al. (2002), deaf students who attend residential schools have an ability to reap the benefits of being exposed to deaf students as role models, fluent signers, and competent peers.

Public school participants' perceptions were that visual aids were the most beneficial supports for enhancing their education. In part, public school participants Helen and John, who attended school in the 1960s and 1970s, really had no choice but to depend on visual aids, as Section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act had not mandated communicative supports such as interpreters that signed in their public school classrooms (Gannon, 1981). The later educated public school participants in the study still described visual supports as most helpful, notwithstanding that they had access to an interpreter.

In summary, the researcher feels that the most significant influence on deaf students'

learning is clear communication. Deaf students with teachers who could communicate with ease in the classroom not only had more opportunities for learning, but also a greater motivation to learn. For example, Lea stated that her interest and motivation to learn in home economics was partly due to the teacher of that class having the ability to provide a classroom in which Lea was able to understand what was going on. In regard to public school students, they also need clear communication describing what they are learning in class. Visual aids also provided support for learning.

**3. Lack of sign language in the classroom was perceived by deaf students as the biggest barrier to communication and learning.** It was evident among all of the participants that the lack of sign language in the classroom was a significant barrier to learning. Residential participants educated in the 1960s and 1970s did not have access to teachers that used sign language to communicate in class, which hindered communication and learning. Gannon (1981) shed light on the 1960s and 1970s participants' experiences of not having teachers that used sign language in their classroom, stating that there was little chance of having an interpreter until Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act mandated that deaf students have access to interpreters in class. Gannon's mention of a mandate for deaf students to have access to interpreters through Section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act also explains why the 1980s and 1990s participants had access to teachers that used sign language in their residential classrooms.

However, the ease of communication that Anne Marie, the 1980s participant, had with her teacher in the residential school was not analogous with her experience in the public school setting. Anne Marie described having an interpreter who did not effectively assist her with communicating with the teacher or students in the mainstreamed class. Winston (2005)

elucidated the likelihood of the 1980s participant having a competent interpreter by articulating that deaf students usually have little access to interpreters capable of providing communication comparable to that of their hearing peers, even though K-12 classrooms are a place where deaf students are still learning language and crucially needed competent language models.

The difficulty with communication in class was also emphasized by the 1960s public school participant, Helen, who described having no opportunity for an interpreter because during the time which she attended school, there was not a mandate to provide interpreters for deaf students. Furthermore, sign language was not a permissible form of communication for Helen to use with the other students in class or with her teachers. She had to speak orally and depend on lip reading to understand what was being taught. The use of “oralism” for deaf students during the time the 1960 public school participant attended school could have a profound effect on students, as Hoffmeister and Shantie (2000) concluded by stating that the use of oralism led to a lack of language skills in deaf students in the past because of the enforced and ineffective use of the oral method since the 1960s. The widespread fallout of the language deficiency caused by the oral method seems to be evidenced by deaf students graduating from high school with third and fourth grade reading levels (Hoffmeister & Shantie, 2000).

The public school participant from the 1970s, John, was the only participant privy to the reason why he was not offered a chance for communication in the classroom. As John recalled, he was told that it was not law at the time to have an interpreter. While an interpreter was not a guaranteed option for participants of the 1960s and 1970s, the other public school participants that attended in the 1980s and 1990s did have the option for an interpreter. Even though some public school participants were offered teachers with whom they could communicate in class,

there remained problems. Shantie (1999) illuminated the point that deaf students have historically had only 33% of teachers that understand sign language as well as their students, and half of the teachers that have taught the deaf lacked the ability to use sign language as proficiently as the students they have taught (Shantie, 1999). It was not shocking, then, that the 1990s public school participant, Mary, described that her teacher in the room at the public school where she had class with other deaf students was using what she described as “old fashioned sign language.”

Mary also reported that she had to write notes to communicate with hearing students. Brinkley (2011) expressed the high probability of Mary’s challenging experience with communication in her classroom by explaining that deaf students in mainstreamed classrooms are likely to make up less of the total population, and as a result, they are less apt to be placed with other students who can use sign and communicate with them. Mowl (1996) also delineated that deaf students in the least restrictive environment do not have a common language with their peers, so it not surprising that all of the public school participants expressed a barrier with communication and social isolation. John and Ed, the 1970s and 1980s public school participants, stood out because they described some success with communication between themselves and their hearing peers, but it was only because they reached out to hearing students who became close friends.

The research undertaken suggests that that difficulties deaf students encounter with communication need to be improved. There are a number of options for such improvement. For an improvement in communication to occur, there are several intricate parts of the puzzle that need to work collectively. Parents need to play a part by being good language role models for

their deaf children by learning American Sign Language. When students' parents use American Sign Language with high skill, higher academic levels in reading and math occur (Shantie, 1999). Schools also need to do their due diligence by making sure the interpreters and teachers in mainstreamed and residential schools are fluent in American Sign Language in order to establish a learning environment where clear communication is accessible to assist in learning. Communication difficulties taking place in deaf students' classrooms require teachers who are able to effectively communicate with the deaf and be good role models of language for the deaf (Winston, 2005). When parents and teachers work together to support American Sign Language, it is likely there will be opportunities for improvement in communication and academic performance.

**4. Deaf students' struggles with English.** A theme of this study was that the overwhelming majority of participants considered the English language to be problematic. A possible cause of the participants' difficulties with English could relate to the fact that 8 out of 9 of the participants were born profoundly deaf, and one participant became deaf shortly after birth. Five of the nine participants had hearing parents. Shantie (1999) delineated that deaf children are born to hearing parents 90% to 97% percent of the time, and that their hearing parents will most likely not be knowledgeable about effective communication, such as sign language (Shantie, 1999).

According to Marschark (2001) and Hoffmeister and Shantie (2000), the parents of deaf children face the challenge of becoming good language models, as being inexperienced language models makes it difficult for their children to acquire language skills early on. To illustrate this

problem, Shantie (1999) stated that most deaf children are unlikely to enter school with the same language skills as their hearing counterparts.

Another credible cause for the participants' reported difficulties with English may possibly be explained by the 1980s and 1990s residential participants' view that English is their second language and American Sign Language is their first language. The position taken by the two participants that American Sign Language is their first language appears to be foretelling on their part, considering it could have possibly assisted them with the problems they described with English.

Shantie (1999) shed light on the prospect of American Sign Language taught as a first language to deaf students, proposing that teachers who are knowledgeable and competent in American Sign Language foster the deaf students' first experiences in language. This would result in deaf students becoming knowledgeable of a first language. American Sign Language improves deaf students' degree of learning in a second language as supported by research (Shantie, 1999). Subsequently, the implementation of a bilingual education for deaf students coupled with a strong American Sign Language program promotes student growth in achieving better grammatical and constructive language with fewer errors (Shantie, 1999).

The researcher considers that deaf students are likely to encounter circumstances that can become obstacles in becoming proficient in English. Deaf students often arrive in school with huge deficiencies in language and gaps in their experiences (Woolsey, Harrison, & Gardner, 2004). Deaf students inherently, as a result of being born deaf, appear to start behind the eight ball in regards to their development in English. Likewise, deaf children born to hearing parents face an extra obstacle in becoming proficient in English.

While being born deaf to hearing parents likely presents a challenge with language for children, there appears to be beneficial supports that can be put in place and implemented by hearing parents that might possibly enable their child to have a chance of becoming proficient in English. This was supported by the experience of the 1970s participant, John, who was the only participant in the study whose parents were proactive by hiring a speech teacher and tutor to help him with English at a very young age. Those early supportive interventions that were put in place for John appeared to foster his English skills adequately enough for him to be the only one of nine participants who reported being proficient in English.

However, the researcher acknowledges that all parents might not have the financial resources to hire a speech teacher and tutor like John's parents. At the same time, John's experience with grasping English seems to provide hope for deaf students having success with English proficiency. While all deaf students might not have the possibility of getting the early support that John received, there are still an increasing number of services and supports that have been made available to deaf students. However, the researcher acknowledges that unfortunately, it might not be enough.

**5. Deaf students face emotional trials in residential and public school settings.** A theme that a majority of the participants in the study described was the emotional challenge involved in the setting they attended. Residential students might have trouble and end up experiencing separation anxiety from their family at the start of the transition (Marschark et al., 2002), which was the case with the majority of residential participants. The quandary for deaf students attending a residential school was explained by Scheetz (2012), namely that residential schools were conceived with a low-incidence population in mind and have had the goal of

servicing a small and scattered deaf population residing outside the metropolitan area. This was also the case for 3 out of 4 participants who had to leave home for school. Those participants described feelings of being sad and missing their parents when they were away at the residential school.

Marschark (2002) pointed out that if one happens to live close enough to the residential school, one has the option to commute back and forth daily. After several years of staying at the residential school, Cole was one of the three participants originally residing at the residential school that was eventually able to commute back and forth. She was fortunate enough to have parents who lived near the residential school in Rome, New York. However, Lea, the 1960s residential participant, never got to go home because her parents could not afford the transportation cost back and forth from Syracuse and Buffalo. Lea's costly commute and inability to attend a residential school close to home is related to educational law that was meant to positively impact deaf student's education, but ironically made it more difficult in some instances. Stinson and Antia (1999) pointed out that an impediment resulting from the law calling for a least restrictive environment was the closing of numerous residential schools. Therefore, the limited access to residential schools needs to be considered by parents, as most states have only two residential schools that are more often than not located in outlying areas (Marschark et al., 2002).

Even though the majority of deaf students viewed going away from home as emotionally traumatic, residential school resident Ashley did not experience sadness while away from home. Ashley's educational experience was quite different than that of the other residential participants because she started out in a public school where she described feelings of extreme social



isolation. The residential school offered Ashley a chance for incessant communication for the first time in her schooling, and it is likely that this helped in dealing with being away from home.

All five public school participants described a different type of emotional anxiety than their residential counterparts. All public school participants in this study shared analogous feelings with those deaf students in Foster's (1998) landmark study who stated that the mainstreamed setting triggered feelings of loneliness, rejection, and social isolation (Foster, 1998). The feelings of isolation stemmed from their perceptions of their inability to communicate with other students and their teachers.

Deaf students in the mainstreamed setting are likely to make up a very small fraction of the total student population and, as a result, are less apt to be placed with other students who can sign and communicate with them (Brinkley, 2011). An inability to sign and communicate with other students was the described experience of three of the public school participants. John, Ed, and Anne all mentioned that they were the lone deaf students in their classes, which prevented them from communicating in the classroom the majority of the time. Descriptions by the participants from public school reveal emotional pain. For example, John lamented, "Heavy, it was tough. I was the only deaf person in school," and Ed stated, "At first going to mainstream, I stayed away. I didn't know how to communicate." Mary pointed out, "The bad part is being isolated especially with the hearing world. You kind of feel left out," and Anne stated, "They don't really have an interest to communicate with me, communicate with my deafness, or with sign language."

Helen, the 1990s public school participant, faced a different form of isolation which was the result of her not being allowed to communicate using sign language in class because her

teachers had the expectation that she would talk and speak using oralism. Therefore, she had to rely on lip reading, which she described as difficult to decipher and understand. Although residential participants initially described feeling sad in their setting, these emotions were ephemeral. The negative emotional state diminished shortly thereafter due to a whole new world of opportunity for social interactions. In contrast, the participants who attended public school were never able to experience that same deaf culture established within their school community. All of the public school participants but one felt isolated throughout their K-12 education in the presence of only hearing students and staff in the classroom. Their opportunity to reverse their emotional state of isolation due to communication was not accessible to them because they had no other students that communicated in the same manner as them in their setting.

**6. Deaf students' personal and family influences as inspirations to learn.** A theme of this research was the significance of the relationship between the participants' motivation to learn due to family and personal influences. The dynamic of family was the most prevalent response among participants as a motivation to learn in school. The participants of the study cited two primary motivations for learning. The majority of participants (5 out of 9) stated that their family was their primary motivation for learning. Although all of the participants desired to make their families proud, the participant that expressed his need for and ultimate success in academic achievement was John. He proudly spoke of his five degrees, including a law degree. His statement about taking his grandfather's advice to "always do his best" resonated in his story about his educational journey. Although he, like most deaf students, did not have deaf parents, his parents were proactive in his educational decisions. They also reached beyond his mandated public school requirements to provide him with additional resources.

The next motivation for learning was cited by the remaining (3 out of 9) participants as personal motivations. The personal reasons focused on proving people wrong and/or proving to themselves that they could be successful. A common feeling of being considered academically inferior to their hearing peers existed among several of the participants. A number of the participants noted the stigma associated with having an IEP. For example, Ed described the IEP as a stigma that equated to him being perceived by his teachers as less intelligent than his hearing classmates. Mary also described the IEP as her motivation to prove to the teachers at the school that she was intelligent and could graduate and further her education. Neither participant wanted a label, but both craved a challenge. The sentiment of a personal motivation to learn was also expressed by the 2000s public school participant who felt an internal motivation to prove her teachers wrong by going to college and earning a bachelor's degree.

Several participants sought college degrees because they knew they were more capable than they were made out to be due to the low expectations placed on them in their prior school experiences. It is interesting to note that in addition to one participant (1 out of 4 [25%]) from the 1960s and 1970s that earned a higher education degree, 5 out of 5 (100%) of the participants from the 1980s to 2000s earned higher education college degrees, which amounts to a total of 6 of the 9 students attaining higher education.

It is ironic that the IEP, which was designed to meet students' needs and assist with learning, was considered a negative by students because it made them feel intellectually inferior. It is also ironic that these feelings were the impetus for the participants seeking higher education to disprove a label of inferiority. The strength of parents' influence on their child's education was another interesting finding, as 5 out of 9 participants considered their parents as the main

motivation for education. Parents described as the main inspiration to do well in school by the majority of the participants might be the product of the parents having considered the best educational placement available for their deaf children to ensure the placement provided the best possible advantages (Marschark & Spencer, 2003). Hence, all of the participants were motivated to learn and were passionate about their family or own personal motivations, which ultimately led to their success.

### **7. Deaf students are more apt to favor the educational setting they experienced.**

Another significant finding was that the majority of participants, 7 out of 9 (78%), considered the same school setting in which they were educated to be the best option. All residential school participants pointed out that they thought residential school was the best placement for other deaf students. Residential schools enable students who attend them to flourish in a deaf culture (Marschark et al., 2002). The four residential participants thought the residential school setting was the best fit for deaf students because they would have peers and teachers with whom they could clearly communicate. Deluca et al. (2008) wrote of the ease with which deaf students are able to communicate with others when permitted to use American Sign Language in the class. Cole described the experience of a residential school as follows: “The residential program for the deaf absolutely...had good clear education that I could understand.”

The 1980s and 1990s residential participants displayed a strong conviction for deaf students going to deaf school. Ashley went so far to state that she wishes all students could attend residential schools. However, both participants recognized that there are limited options when it comes to choosing a residential school, as they both acknowledged that residential schools have closed due to an emphasis on mainstreamed education. Therefore, while both

participants strongly favored a residential education for deaf students, they suggested that parents and their children consider all factors before choosing an academic setting.

The majority of the public school participants, like their residential counterparts, did not make the suggestion of attending a different school setting. While none of the residential school participants suggested the public school placement, one public school participant mentioned that residential school would be a better choice for deaf students. Helen, the 1960 participant, had the experience of repeating grade after grade in the public school, coupled with her inability to communicate clearly in class because she had to use oralism. Lauren et al. (2005) pointed out that the continued negative cultural assumptions about those with disabilities have continued to have a negative impact on children with a disability. For example, instead of having deaf students perform activities in a way that may be more efficient for them, such as through sign language, deaf students have had to use oral speaking, which may add to educational deficits (Lauren et al., 2005). The negative cultural values of the deafs' inability to speak and listen like the hearing, as expressed by Helen, seems to have strongly influenced her suggestion that deaf students should attend a residential school rather than a public school. A study by Moores and Martin (2006) might explain Helen's dilemma, with their finding that deaf students placed in mainstreamed classes were not on a "level playing field" in regards to academic achievement because instruction was not relevant to prior knowledge, learning strategies, and language comprehension skills.

Interesting enough, John, the 1970s public school participant, credited the public school setting for his success, but did not suggest his education setting as the best placement for students. He expressed that school placement is not a one-size-fits-all situation and stated that

parents and their deaf child have to find the setting that best fits their needs, which was the case in his situation.

Ironically, the 1980s and 1990s public school participants specifically proposed that deaf students attend a mainstreamed school to learn to communicate with hearing people. As inferred by both participants, it is important for them to fit in with the hearing world.

The only participant that did not make a specific recommendation was the 2000s public school participant, Anne. Despite her negative experience in the public school setting, she did not rule out this setting as an option. However, she also considered the benefits of the residential setting.

Residential schools are the original foundation of deaf education and provide an environment that has been beneficial because of the ease with which deaf students are able to communicate, as well its connection to the deaf community and culture (DeLuca et al., 2008).

**8. Education's positive influence on students presently.** A theme shared by all nine of the participants was that their education had a positive impact on them presently. Two of the participants, Lea, the 1970s public school participant, and Helen, the 1960s residential participant, described that skills gained through their K-12 educational experience had an immediate positive impact on their lives soon after their K-12 education. Both participants were able to gain employment specifically because of classes that they took in school. Lea described how learning to sew in her home economics course helped her gain employment at a coat manufacturer. Helen mentioned that the skill of typing she learned through her public school education helped her secure a job at Bank of America. Both credited their education as leading to employment, and both are still productive working citizens.

Two other participants stated that their K-12 education was the springboard that provided the foundation for a higher education and secure employment. As stated by John, “Public school gave me a good grounding.” He further credited his public school education with helping him in his great achievement, which he described in his statement, “I have five degrees all because of public school.” Analogous with John’s public school experience, Ashley confirmed that her residential education also influenced her in seeking a higher education. Ashley stated, “Really, if it wasn’t for the deaf school, maybe I would have never finished school,” “The deaf school kept me going and let me be involved,” and “I was very lucky that I finished and got my MA degree.” Both considered their K-12 education a catalyst for their higher education and success. Their present success is obvious considering that John works as a professor of law and a lawyer while Ashley works as a teacher at a deaf school.

Three of the other public school participants credited both their education and themselves as the factors for their present-day success. Ed, the 1970s public school participant; Anne, the 1990s public school participant; and Mary, the 2000s public school participant all achieved success that they believed stemmed from their education and their own personal hard work. Ed described the influence of education with the statement, “It has and it hasn’t. I got some education, and I am self-taught on things.” Mary shared the same sentiment about education’s influence on her future along with her own hard work and her desire to prove others wrong with her description, “Looking back, I wanted to push for college education and my master’s degree.”

All participants described a certain level of influence their K-12 education had on them presently. While the majority of participants viewed education as an extremely strong catalyst

for future success, some mentioned that it was their education coupled with their own personal learning that lead to their present-day success.

### **Implications of the Study**

Deaf students are largely influenced by the quality of communication provided by teachers who are proficient in American Sign Language and interpreters that are fluent signers, as well as the degree of expectations implemented in their academic setting. As a result of their dependence upon the resources provided by the schools they choose to attend, parents and deaf students have to do their due diligence in researching schools. They need to ensure that their expectations of a high quality education are a possibility. From the present study, the following implications are recommendations for practice:

1. A consistent curriculum for deaf students needs to be formed for their K-12 education that is aligned with the same expected learning standards and results as those of their hearing peers.
2. A student being deaf does not impede his or her intelligence, so the same expectations should be placed on deaf students as hearing students across the board in all academic settings. There is no coherent reason for deaf students not to be challenged, so higher expectations should be placed on all deaf students, regardless of subject or academic setting.
3. Early interventions are needed for deaf students in the subject of English to help alleviate the difficulty with English that deaf students commonly face. The reality is that more than 90% of deaf children are born to hearing parents (Shantie, 2000). As a result, they might not have good language role models at home because hearing parents, through no



fault of their own, are not ready or prepared to communicate and be language role models for their deaf child.

4. Deaf students that are mainstreamed should have other deaf peers in their mainstreamed classrooms with whom they are able to easily communicate, so as to not feel emotionally and socially ostracized.
5. Teachers who teach deaf students must be fluent in American Sign Language to provide direct and clear instruction to students. A teacher fluent in American Sign Language would decrease the time it takes to convey what is taught and enable more efficient and meaningful instruction to deaf students. Using a secondary source such as an interpreter or a note taker that provides feedback about what is being taught can lead to loss of meaning through interpretation, falling behind in class, and minimal academic growth.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the findings of the current study, the researcher makes the following recommendations for future research.

The researcher proposes expanding the current study to include a more diverse sample of deaf students in New York or in other areas of the country. A larger sample would offer a clearer picture of the impact of the school placement and the time attended. It would also allow the data to be generalized to New York and other states. To fully obtain the information needed, individual interviews would need an interpreter and researcher to guide and conduct the interview collaboratively, which would be very costly and time consuming. Gaining access to deaf student participants could also be difficult considering they are a protected group, and a

great deal of trust and rapport might be needed in whichever respective deaf community was going to be studied.

The current study had a variety of degrees of education that deaf students obtained following their secondary education. The researcher proposes recruiting students that have all obtained the same level of education post K-12. The researcher believes the educational influence following the K-12 school experience has the capacity to impact deaf students' perceptions of their K-12 education.

The participants of this study had both hearing and deaf parents. The researcher proposes conducting a study that includes deaf students with either both parents who are hearing or both who are deaf. The researcher believes that the comparison between the deaf students who had either hearing or deaf parents would provide insight into whether the parents' ability to hear or not affects their children's perceptions of their K-12 education.

The participants of this study had different resources available to them at an early age. The researcher proposes conducting a study that would include deaf students that were provided educational interventions at an early age. The researcher believes that a study of deaf students that had educational interventions would provide insight into the degree to which the early interventions influenced the students' education and achievement.

The participants of this study had varied levels of communication with students and teachers in class. The researcher believes that a study of deaf students that had similar levels of fluent communication with students and teachers in class could provide insight into the degree to which fluent communication impacts the emotional element of education.

The participants of this study had varying levels of communication due to the different quantities of American Sign Language offered to them in their classrooms. The researcher believes that a study of deaf students that had fluent teachers and interpreters of American Sign Language would provide insight into the degree to which the fluency of signers impacts deaf students' education and achievement.

### **Limitations**

First, the small size of student participants is a drawback of the study. The study consisted of only five public school students and four residential school students, which represents only a small quantity of the participants that attended school at their respective times. As a result of the small pool of students, the study's results cannot be generalized.

Second, some of the participants' shared experiences and their perceptions of those experiences might have been imprecise, considering that a significant amount of time has passed since their K-12 education.

Third, during their member checks of transcripts, the participants had only their memories about the time they were educated to rely on.

Fourth, some of the participants could have been influenced by the relationship with the researcher or interpreters, and the participants might not have accurately or completely shared their experiences. However, to lessen the likelihood of participants not sharing their authentic perceptions of experiences, participants were assured of the confidentiality of what they shared.

Fifth, the information obtained was received from in-depth interviews, and other methods such as observations were not used or possible as the time had already passed.

Sixth, what the students relayed in the interviews was not presented in American Sign Language, nor were the entire verbatim conversations presented in the paper. Therefore, there was a risk of the exact meaning and interpretation not being presented. Even considering the chance of misinterpretation, the interpreter, researcher, and participants all took part in measures taken by the researcher to ensure that the most accurate portrayal of the information was given.

Seventh, the use of an interpreter as a mediator in the exchange of language for the study might have changed the tone or meaning of the questions asked by the researcher and answers given by the participants. Even considering the change of tone or meaning in questions, member checks were done to ensure accurate interpretations of the information provided in the transcripts from the interviews.

### **Concluding Summary of the Researcher**

Too often, research in deaf education is performed without seeking authentic input from those participants in the deaf community being researched. As a result, deaf students like those in this study are not usually sought after or are missing altogether in research related to them.

However, the researcher is hopeful that the trend of missing out on input from nonmainstreamed populations like the deaf will change in future research. As an alternative to the usual approach taken by researchers in the deaf community, researchers will come to realize the value of including the deaf community in the conversation on deaf education. Including deaf communities in the dialogue about their education, and ensuring they are provided with the ability to have authentic input in studies about them, provides the possibility for a whole new wealth of knowledge to come to fruition with the possibility of benefiting future students, schools, and policymakers involved in deaf education.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Request for Volunteers

Charles DePew, a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University in Statesboro, Georgia, in Curriculum Studies, needs volunteers for my dissertation research study that seeks to better understand how deaf students' beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes in relation to how their academic performance and the instruction in class were influenced by the academic setting and the time period in which they attended school. While researchers are cognizant that there are differences in academic achievement for deaf students in the varied academic settings, historically most classroom settings and a significant amount of teachers of the deaf have not engaged in the pedagogical process of planning and instructing in the classroom taking into account the deaf students' different academic needs. The potential benefit of the research is it will be a catalyst that may construct an awareness of how much impact and influence educational instruction during a certain time period coupled with the type of classroom setting could have had on deaf students. Results of this research could lead to a better understanding of the significance in considering the authentic individual deaf students' perceptions of the elements in school that impacted their education, and provide some valuable insight into areas of relevance that might need to be addressed in education for deaf students in our current education system.

Charles DePew is seeking former deaf students who were taught in public, mainstreamed, and residential schools. During the data collection and in the final report of former deaf students your identity will be kept confidential by placing names with pseudonyms. Each former student participating will be asked to complete a questionnaire and participate in a series of three face-to-face interviews, at an agreed upon location, which will approximately take one hour. You will



be given an opportunity to read the transcribed interviews to insure your information is accurately provided in the final report. If you are willing to participate in the research, please send me an e-mail through school e-mail at [depew.charles@mail.fcboe.org](mailto:depew.charles@mail.fcboe.org).

**Appendix B: Students' Questionnaire****Questionnaire:****Deaf Study QUESTIONNAIRE****(Deaf Students)**

*To Participants of this study:*

*The purpose of this survey is to better understand former deaf students' beliefs and perceptions about their school experiences. Thank you very much for your cooperation.*

**Directions: Please answer all questions that apply to you.**

**SECTION I: BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

## 1) School Setting

- A. public school
- B. mainstreamed/ public school
- C. inclusion/public school
- D. deaf residential school

## 2) Time Period Attended School

- A. 1960s
- B. 1970s
- C. 1980s

## 3) Education

- A. K-5
- B. 6-8
- C. 9-12
- D. associates degree
- E. bachelor degree
- F. masters degree or higher

4) Degree of hearing impairment:

A. hearing impaired

B. hard of hearing

C. deaf and hard-of-hearing

D. deaf

5) Gender of Student:

A. Female

B. Male

*Thank you for completing the questionnaire! If you have any additional comments or questions regarding this survey, please use the space below.*

**Appendix C: Interview Questions**

1. When did you last attend school at a k-12 school?
2. Tell me about the type of school setting in which you were educated?
3. Tell me about your memories of your school experience in k-12?
4. How do you think you performed academically in your class?
5. Explain the types of interactions you had with teachers and students, and how helpful and unhelpful were they in class?
6. Do you believe all the students in your class were treated in the same way? Explain.
7. Were there any areas in school where you believe you differed in achievement from your classmates?
8. Were there any academic achievement differences you believed were connected to being deaf?
9. Were students in class treated differently?
10. What were your perceptions about the type of instruction from the teachers, and how did the teacher affect your academic performance in your class?
11. What types of adjustments did you have to make with your beliefs about instruction and your academic performance in class?
12. What aspects of being deaf do you think make it necessary for different attitudes of learning when it comes to school?
13. Were any accommodations made by teachers in your class to make sure you were successful in school? For example, were you provided with an interpreter, tutor, or given extra help by the teacher?
14. How did you communicate in class with peers and teachers?
15. Did you feel like part of the classroom? Explain why or why not.
16. Did you regularly participate in class? Explain.
17. Explain the type (ex. excellent, good, fair, or awful) of education you received and why you categorized your education as such?
18. What struggles did you have in school and in your school setting, and what components did you enjoy?
19. If you could change and keep something about your school experiences what would they be?
20. Are there any components of your education you would like to share that I did not ask about?

**Appendix D: Second Interview Questions**

1. What type of schools did you attend in elementary, middle, and high school (public, residential)?
2. Describe the (residential, public) school you attended.
3. Describe what materials in the classroom helped you learn?
4. Describe your emotional, social and academic experiences as a deaf person in the school setting you attended?
5. In your opinion, was the setting that you attended the best classroom setting for you as a deaf student? Explain.
6. If you could go back in time and choose what kind of school you would have liked to go to, what would it be and why?
7. Is there anything you would you have changed about the way you were educated?
8. Did you feel prepared for life after attending a public/residential school? Please explain.  
Do you feel this was the best setting for your education? Explain.
9. At the time you went to school, what would have made it easier for you to learn?
10. As a deaf student, what bothered you the most about school?
11. How did the type of school (public, residential) affect your life socially and emotionally?
12. In what ways did attending this type of school (public, residential) impact your life from the time you finished up until the present time?
13. Are there any other experiences in your education you would like to share?

**Appendix E: Third Interview Questions**

1. What things in your life made school important to you? What provided your motivation to do well in school?
2. What do you feel would be important for other deaf students to know about the school setting you were educated in? Explain the pros/good and the cons/bad, so other deaf students and hearing people can learn from it.
3. From your time in school, as a deaf student, what advice would you give deaf students based on your school experiences?
4. How could your experiences in school, the good and the bad, be helpful in providing meaning to deaf students currently in the school setting you attended or another?
5. What meaning has education played in your personal and professional life?
6. What does it mean to you, to be a deaf learner?
7. Reflecting on the three interviews, are there any stories or personal educational experiences that you would like to share that you feel other deaf students or hearing people should be made aware of to be successful in life?
8. Are there any other stories that you would like to share?

**Appendix F: Data Summary Tables**

**Data Summary Table: Finding 1**

<i>Low Academic Expectations for Deaf Students Irrespective of the School Setting or Time Attended</i>		
Name	High Expectations	Low Expectations
Residential School Participants		X
Cole 1960s		X
Lea 1970s		X
Anne Marie 1980s		X
Ashley 1990s		X
Public School Participants		X
Helen 1960s		X
John 1970s		X
Ed 1980s		X
Mary 1990s		X
Anne 2000s		X
TOTAL 9		100%

**Data Summary Table: Finding 2**

	<i>Power of Sign Language and Visuals to Support Learning</i>					
Name	Teacher that Signed	Interpreter Helpful	Notes Helpful	Overhead Helpful	Books	CART
Residential School Participants				-		
Cole 1960s	X			-		
Lea 1970s	X			X		
Anne Marie 1980s	X	X -	X	X		
Ashley 1990s	X					
Public School Participants						
Helen 1960s						
John 1970s					X	
Ed 1980s		X	X			
Mary 1990s						
Anne 2000s	X					X
TOTAL 9	56%	22%	11%	22%	11%	11%



**Data Summary Table: Finding 3**

<i>Lack of Sign Language in the Classroom the Biggest Barrier to Communication</i>						
Name	Sign Language between the Teacher and Participant Offered	Sign Language between the Teacher and the Participant Not Offered	Interpreter Available To Assist With Communication	Interpreter Not Available For Assistance With Communication	No other students who signed in class.	Sign Language Not Allowed Between Students
Residential Participants						
Cole 1960s	X	X		-		X
Lea 1970s	X	X		X		
Anne Marie 1980s	X	-	X			
Ashley 1990s	X					
Public School Participants						
Helen 1960s		X		X		X
John 1970s		X		X	X	
Ed 1980s		X	X		X	
Mary 1990s		X	X			
Anne 2000s	X	X	X		X	
TOTAL 9	56%	78 %	44%	33%	33%	22%

**Data Summary Table: Finding 4**

	<i>Deaf students' struggles with English</i>		
Name	English Difficult	English Not A Problem	English Not Described
Residential School Participants			
Cole 1960s	X		
Lea 1970s			X
Anne Marie 1980s	X	-	
Ashley 1990s	X		
Public School Participants			
Helen 1960s	X		
John 1970s		X	
Ed 1980s	X	-	
Mary 1990s	X		
Anne 2000s	X		
TOTAL 9	78%	11%	11%

**Data Summary Table: Finding 5**

	<i>Deaf Students Face Emotional Challenges Based on the Type the of School Setting</i>			
Name	Scared	Depressed/Sad	Isolated	Lonely
Residential School Participants				-
Cole 1960s	X			-
Lea 1970s		X		
Anne Marie 1980s	X	-		
Ashley 1990s				
Public School Participants				
Helen 1960s		X		
John 1970s		X	X	X
Ed 1980s		-	X	
Mary 1990s		X	X	X
Anne 2000s		X	X	X
TOTAL 9	22%	56%	44%	33%

**Data Summary Table: Finding 6**

<i>The Positive Effects of Greater Acceptance and Availability of Signing and Use of Interpreters.</i>				
Name	Teacher of Sign Language Available	Teacher of Sign Language Not Available	Interpreter Available	Interpreter Not Available
Residential School Participants				
Cole 1960s		X		X
Lea 1970s		X		X
Anne Marie 1980s	X	-	X	
Ashley 1990s	X		X	
Public School Participants				
Helen 1960s		X		X
John 1970s		X		X
Ed 1980s		-	X	
Mary 1990s		X	X	
Anne 2000s		X	X	
TOTAL 9	22%	67%	56%	44%

**Data Summary Table: Finding 7**

<i>Deaf Students' Personal and Family Influences as Inspirations to Learn</i>			
Name	Family Was A Factor That Influenced Learning	Personal Motivation Was a Factor That Influenced Learning	A Motivation That Influenced Learning Was Not Mentioned
Residential School Participants			
Cole 1960s	X		
Lea 1970s		X	
Anne Marie 1980s	X	-	
Ashley 1990s	X		
Public School Participants			
Helen 1960s	X		
John 1970s	X	X	
Ed 1980s	X	-	
Mary 1990s		X	
Anne 2000s		X	
TOTAL 9	67%	44%	

**Data Summary Table: Finding 8**

<i>Deaf students are more likely to advocate the educational setting they experienced</i>				
Name	Participant Would Recommend The Setting Attended	Participant Would Not Recommend The Setting Attended	Participant Would Recommend The Same Setting With Thought	Participant Did Not Share A Recommendation
Residential School Participants				
Cole 1960s	X			-
Lea 1970s	X			
Anne Marie 1980s	X	-	X	
Ashley 1990s	X		X	
Public School Participants				
Helen 1960s				
John 1970s	X		X	
Ed 1980s	X	-		
Mary 1990s				
Anne 2000s	X			
TOTAL 9	78%		33%	

**Data Summary Table: Finding 9**

	<i>Education's Positive Influence on Students Presently</i>		
Name	Believes Education Had A Positive Impact On Them Presently	Does Believe Education Had No Impact On Them Presently	Believes Education Had A Small Impact On Them
Residential School Participants			
Cole 1960s	X		
Lea 1970s	X		
Anne Marie 1980s	X	-	
Ashley 1990s	X		
Public School Participants			
Helen 1960s	X		
John 1970s	X		
Ed 1980s	X	-	
Mary 1990s	X		
Anne 2000s	X		
TOTAL 9	100%		

### **Appendix G: Consent Form**

**What are deaf students' beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes in relation to students' academic performance and instruction are influenced by the academic setting and time period they attended school?**

#### **Faculty: A Qualitative Research Study**

Dear Participants:

You are invited to participate in my qualitative research study. My name is Charles DePew, and I am a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University in Statesboro, Georgia, in the Curriculum Studies Program. While researchers are cognizant that deaf students have historically had varied level of achievement in the different types of educational classroom settings, most classroom settings and the majority of the teachers of the deaf have not engaged in the pedagogical process of planning and instructing in the classroom with the deafs' students differences being considered. The purpose of this study is to conduct research to investigate students' beliefs and perceptions influenced by the classroom setting and the period of time in which they attended school. This research will occur with two separate phases:

(1) During the first phase a questionnaire will be provided to each former deaf adult student participating in the study to find out their beliefs and perceptions about how the academic setting and the time period in time which they attended school impacted their education.

(2) During the second phase an interpreter will be provided for each former deaf student that is now an adult participating in the study to ask questions in three separate face-to-face to face



interviews. I will audio and video tape the interview and later transcribe it for the participant to review.

The data collected from the questionnaire and the interview will be pulled together and categorized into subcategories and analyzed with your identity not being revealed. I will place a pseudonym during coding to keep your name confidential. The questionnaire, taped interview, and coding will be securely place in a file cabinet. The information you provided will only be used for the purpose you provided with your written consent. At the close of this study, the taped interview and files will be safely put away for future analysis. Your participation will be confidential, and there are no risks involved. Your responses will be anonymous and your name never written in any report for my research project. To insure that the data you provided me is accurately presented I will let you review the final report which will provide a summary of what I collected. You will be able to provide input, corrections and clarification of anything you do not feel was accurately portrayed with regard to your input.

Some potential benefits of the research is it will be a catalyst that may construct an awareness of how the academic setting and period of time deaf students attended school might have influenced and impacted instruction and classroom environment. A better understanding by teachers of the deaf in identifying and planning for classrooms that provide an opportunity for instruction in a classroom environment that is more appropriate for deaf students. Moreover, this research could also lead to a better understanding in the significance of taking into consideration the authentic individual deaf students' perceptions of the elements in school that impacted their education, and provide some valuable insight into areas of relevance that might need to be addressed in education for deaf students in our current education system. Furthermore, it could

also possibly provide and initiative for school administration to think about staff development on the issue of deaf education.

If you have any questions about the study, you can contact me by school e-mail at [depew.charles@mail.fcboe.org](mailto:depew.charles@mail.fcboe.org) or by telephone at 678-542-5489. This research will be submitted for my dissertation study at Georgia Southern University in Statesboro, Georgia.

Your signature indicates that you have read the information in this letter and have decided to participate in this research study. You may withdraw at any time. Please notify me in verbally or in writing to withdraw from my study. If you are willing to participate, please sign your name and date in the space provided, and place the document in my mailbox, and make a copy for your records.

I agree to participate in the study.

Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_