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Looking to the Future: Considering the Educational Transitions of Deaf Youth in Ontario

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Graduate Program in Sociology
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts
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**LOOKING TO THE FUTURE:
CONSIDERING THE EDUCATIONAL
TRANSITIONS OF DEAF YOUTH
IN ONTARIO**

Monograph

by

KAITLYN A.W. BLAIR

Graduate Program in Sociology

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts**

**The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada**

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Abstract

National and provincial policy development reflects increased attention to inclusivity for all Ontarians in education and work. However, academic and government literature examining educational and employment transitions, fails to effectively address the experiences of those who are deaf. The limited research that does exist suggests that deaf Ontarians have lower educational and occupational attainment levels than their hearing peers (PALS 2006). Drawing on four qualitative case studies of deaf youth, this study analyzes participants' planned transitions from high school to post-secondary education. Findings suggest that high levels of perceived self-efficacy are helpful in motivating transitions to higher education. The life course perspective illustrates the importance of interconnecting influences of family, peers, community participation, and educational setting, on the development of efficaciousness and goal setting behaviours of respondents. Though this research does not allow for generalization, this study does seek to motivate further academic research with this population.

Keywords

Deaf, Higher Education, School-to-School Transitions, Life Course Perspective, Self-Efficacy, Resiliency

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Preface

There are times in your life when you have the opportunity to look back and reflect on the experiences that have been most important to you. For some, these thoughtful moments might include school graduations, weddings, birthdays, and even when we lose those closest to us. Certainly, these times stand out in my mind. But so too does a time of quiet and calm reflection - alone next to a lake that has become a familiar and comfortable place that will forever hold a special place in my heart.

I have called the Bob Rumball Camp of the Deaf (previously the Ontario Camp of the Deaf), my summer home for nearly a decade. Here, I have not only learned a new language, but have met some of my closest friends and learned so much from the many campers and staff with whom I have been fortunate to work.

I think that I most enjoyed my position as a summer counsellor – a volunteer position that I took on each summer as I moved through high school, looking to my own future with nothing but excitement and optimism. I remember one day, sitting with one of my campers by the same lake that would one day inspire this thesis. I asked her what she wanted to do when she was older – where would she go to school? What courses would she take? What career did she see herself in? She looked at me, her eyes big and signed back (slowly – because I was still learning sign language!) – that she didn't think she could go to university and though she would love to work in medicine, that was not something a deaf person could do. She then looked at the ground in between us and then quickly back at me. She smiled just briefly and then ran off to swim with the other campers. I remember sitting, thinking about her words over and over. I was on the cusp

on planning to apply to universities myself. Not making this transition was something that I could not even imagine. Not becoming the teacher that I had always dreamed of being was a life outcome that seemed unfathomable. How could someone, just a few years younger than me, feel so limited? There were few differences between us – the only one I could readily identify was that I could hear and she could not.

I went home at the end of the summer, just like every year, fulfilled and wanting only to turn the car around and return to my favourite place. The words of my camper stuck with me though, echoing through my mind again and again. I shared my camper's story with my mom when I got home, asking her why she thought this girl might have said what she did. She too, was struck by the camper's open and honest conversation. Summer became fall, fall to winter, winter to spring, and then finally summer! I returned to camp – this time, only ten weeks away from starting my undergraduate degree at the University of Western Ontario.

The next four years were a blur! I went to camp each summer when I could; often just for a week at a time - sometimes even just for a weekend. I counted myself lucky to see my campers, always another year older and another year bolder. The girl I had talked with by the lake so many years ago was a teenager now. I remember talking with a group of volunteers (many of whom had once been my campers) during a weekend visit, the same girl among them. They asked me about school and I gushed over my experiences. I loved it! I asked them if they had started to think about their plans. My former camper seemed to go back in time. Her eyes were open wide and she signed back at me that she didn't think she could go to university. She wanted to. But she couldn't.

Again, I went home after my weekend away and was struck by the same girl's words. Little did I know – a year later, I would return to camp, thesis in hand and inspired by my camper who once sat with me by the lake six years before.

A few days into interviewing participants for this thesis, I was encouraged and discouraged all at the same time. I was enjoying talking with each of my respondents but I was feeling overwhelmed. Where was I going to take each of these life stories? Why me? What role did I have to play in all this? Sitting by the same lake I did all those years ago, I was calmed.

As a hearing person, the research I do could be seen as overstepping. I am not part of the Deaf Community and cannot claim to know what it is like to live as a deaf person in Ontario. Accordingly what I write would be my mere perception of the life stories that my respondents have shared. In a sense, this notion provided me with comfort. I don't wish to make absolute claims or even to 'help' deaf people overcome the many challenges that this study will discuss. Rather, it is my hope that this thesis provides the four driven and talented young people who spoke with me, an opportunity to share their experiences. I do not seek to generalize or to provide ground-breaking research. I instead, share their stories and hope that *they* will inspire all of us to keep talking and to work together to make a more accessible Ontario.

So, when I reflect on my life, the momentous occasions that have made me who I am are important. Often though, I think back to the many times I have sat by the lake at camp. Alone or with others - that special spot has provided me opportunities to think and to clarify - to panic (!) and to calm myself. That place is what has inspired this thesis. That place is what has brought us all together.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The past decade has seen considerable change in the Canadian labour market. Today, competition for jobs is intense and the credentials needed to vie for these positions – frequently increasing. Canadians, for the most part, have been keeping pace with these requirements by attaining higher levels of education than ever before (Lehmann & Adams 2016; Conference Board of Canada 2013).

This focus on education reflects a national shift towards a knowledge economy. A knowledge economy is one that values ‘intellectual capital,’ and focuses on information, technology and learning. This type of economy is most commonly observed in developed nations where educational and training credentials are used to rank candidates for competitive positions (Powell & Snellman 2004; Kennedy 2012; Livingstone 2012). As such, attaining higher levels of education (i.e. college diplomas, university degrees, apprenticeships, and field specific training) has become more important for individuals seeking employment in Canada (Livingstone 2012; Lehmann & Adams 2016).

Data from Statistics Canada reflects the nation’s sustained trend towards higher education, indicating that enrolment in apprenticeship programs, colleges, and universities continues to grow as students seek to develop skills and attain qualifications that will distinguish them from others when they start to apply for jobs (Statistics Canada 2009; Conference Board of Canada 2013). As more Canadians increase their educational aspirations, post-secondary institutions have also expanded considerably (Statistics Canada 2009). Without any advanced training, potential candidates are at an automatic deficit as they compete against their highly educated peers for coveted positions across

the country (Lehmann & Adams 2016; Statistics Canada 2013; Livingstone 2012). In fact, it has been argued that the increase in the number of degrees being awarded in Canada has meant that “[p]ost-secondary education no longer guarantees access to a good job” (Lehmann & Adams 2016: 1; Livingstone 2012).

Not all Canadians have experienced similar educational gains. For example, those with some disabilities continue to be under-represented at national educational institutions. Employment and Social Development Canada recently reported that of Canadians with disabilities (that do not prevent them from working), almost half have some type of post-secondary training (Employment & Social Development Canada 2013). Though these figures suggest noticeable gains for this group, ‘disability’ as an encompassing term is problematic and does not effectively highlight the diversity among disabled Canadians.

Specifically, deaf Canadians show very low levels of post-secondary attendance. The Participation Activity Limitation Survey (2006) reported that only 20.1% of Canadians with a “hearing condition” held a college diploma and only 7.5% were university graduates. By comparison, nearly four times as many Canadians hold a university degree and more than half the population “have now completed some form of post-secondary education” (Lehmann & Adams 2016: 17; Conference Board of Canada 2013). Given the strong relationship between educational attainment and employment, the Canadian Association of the Deaf expressed concern that “the unemployment rate of Deaf people is unacceptably high” and that “there are few Deaf Canadians employed in “high level” positions” (Canadian Association of the Deaf 2012c). These figures not only

highlight the necessity of further training, but also make clear the disparities in access to higher education for those with differences in ability.

Unfortunately, limited scholarship focuses on explaining and countering these problematic trends. Little is known about the Deaf community, and particularly why their post-secondary enrolment continues to be far below that of the hearing population. It is therefore important to explore the social barriers that inhibit opportunities for deaf people. Moreover, few studies consider the *successes* of deaf people. While it is recognized that high levels of educational attainment are not common for this population, there are many deaf students who aspire to and achieve degrees and diplomas in Ontario (Canadian Association of the Deaf 2012c; PALS 2006). Learning more about these individuals can also help to inspire further research and inform important educational and social policies.

1.1 Encouraging Accessibility

Challenging inequality has been a long-time focus of both the provincial and national governments. The Ontario Human Rights Commission introduced the first Human Rights Code in any province in 1962. The code seeks to provide “equal rights and opportunities, and freedom from discrimination.” Specifically, the code advocates inclusivity and accessibility in domains including “employment, housing facilities and services” for those with differences in abilities (Ontario Human Rights Commission 2015). The federal government echoed the provinces’ sentiments with the introduction of *The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982). Under this legislation, “[e]very individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination

based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or *physical disability*” [emphasis added] (Government of Canada 1982).

The above-noted commissions express some of the earliest commitments to supporting those with disabilities (Shuey & Jovic 2013). More recently, the Ontario provincial government took another step towards accessibility by enacting the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (2005), which seeks full accessibility province-wide by 2025. This mission has been supported by the introduction of workplace and organizational training and policy evaluations, infrastructure improvements, and continued collaboration between ministries (AODA 2005).

Further, the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities similarly supports gains towards an accessible province by recently allotting six million dollars to funding provided to students with disabilities in June 2015. This money will be used in a variety of ways, including to aid transition programs that help students move into higher education and to fund further support services (including note-takers, interpreters, and technological aids) that help students in the classroom (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities 2015).

The transition to post-secondary education will be the main focus of this study. As the province continues to pursue full accessibility (see AODA 2005), exploring this significant educational milestone becomes important. We know that the influence of credentialism is felt strongly in the Canadian labour market. Accordingly, colleges and universities across Ontario have turned their attention to recruiting and supporting those with differences in ability in order to provide them with the credentials they need to remain competitive in a knowledge economy (Ministry of Training, Colleges and

Universities 2014). Although these efforts have seen positive gains, government reports (i.e. PALS 2006) make clear that there is still significant room for improvement. Most importantly, action needs to be taken *earlier*. As well as focusing on interventions and supports in universities and colleges, we must also look at which social forces shape these transitions and explore *why* youth with disabilities are not making them as frequently as non-disabled Ontarians.

1.2 Important Terminology

The following terms will appear throughout this study. Important delineations between these concepts exist and are foundational to the research that will be presented. Though there are many different interpretations of these words, definitions provided by Paddy Ladd, in his influential work with the Deaf community, *Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood* and the Canadian Association of the Deaf (2012), will be the basis of this study's interpretation of each concept (see Ladd 2003: xvii – xxii; The Canadian Association of the Deaf 2012a,b).

American Sign Language (ASL): The official language of most North American Deaf communities.

Audism: Prejudice and discrimination toward deaf people because of their hearing loss. This is often reflected by the assumption that deaf people are 'unable' and should 'fix' their deafness to become like a hearing person and/or to disempower deaf people by assuming control over them.

Signed English: Signed English Words (English Grammatical Structure)

Deaf (capital D): Refers to individuals who were born deaf or who lost their hearing who identify with the Deaf community. These individuals have embraced the language, culture and connection to the Deaf community.

deaf (lower-case D): Refers to those who view their deafness (primarily) as a medical diagnosis. These individuals do not commonly associate with the Deaf community.

Deaf Community: The community of deaf individuals (and in some cases, the community's supporters) who share a unique culture, language, and social network.

Hard of Hearing: A term commonly used to identify those who have some residual hearing and for whom medical intervention may amplify sound (i.e. by use of a hearing aid or cochlear implant).

Hearing Impaired: An encompassing term used in the medical community to identify those who experience hearing loss (i.e. hard of hearing, deaf, profoundly deaf, etc.).

1.3 The Current Study

This study will present the life stories of four deaf Ontarians between the ages 17 and 20 who plan to pursue higher education. These young people share their experiences - reflecting on their families, education, peers, and their involvement with the Deaf community. Each young person's projected transition to post-secondary education is reviewed. The purpose of this thesis is to add to Canadian-based literature that explores the education transitional experiences of deaf people. The United States is home to Gallaudet University (Washington, D.C.), the only university in North America that offers classes in American Sign Language (ASL) and English. Most research that reflects the dynamic of the Deaf Community has come from this research centre, generally incorporating American data sources and research participants (see Gallaudet Research Priorities 2007). Without similar research facilities north of the border, scholarship that explores the educational patterns of deaf Canadians has been limited. This study hopes to motivate increased attention toward this unique community, specifically in regard to social influences that shape the post-secondary transitions of deaf youth in the province of Ontario.

By incorporating the life course perspective, it will be made clear that these decisions cannot be analyzed cross-sectionally, but rather reveal the lifelong culmination of trajectories, turning points, and shaping social forces. Specifically, it will be argued that respondents show resiliency in their day-to-day lives, but that their resiliency is not what has motivated their projected transition to higher education. Rather, it will be advocated that high levels of educational self-efficacy provide respondents with a sense of ‘*can*’ that is not characteristic of all deaf students (at least in the words of this study’s respondents). This notion of self-efficacy is foundational in planning educational, social, and community-based programming for young deaf Ontarians that encourages further education.

The next chapter will contextualize this study by reviewing the literature pertinent to school-to-school transitions and the development of the knowledge economy in Canada. Further, studies that discuss the experiences of deaf people (mainly developed by research centres in the United States) will be used to operationalize pertinent terminology. Scholarship that addresses self-efficacy will then be presented and complimented by the introduction of the life course perspective. Chapter Three will discuss methodological considerations and Chapters Four through Seven present the life stories of the study’s four case-study respondents. Chapter Eight will discuss the findings from these four case studies. The final Chapter of this thesis will address research limitations and propose directions for future study and policy intervention with the Deaf community.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Transition to a Knowledge Economy and Educational Attainment

The *Learn Canada 2020* declaration supports "the direct link between a well-educated population and (1) a vibrant knowledge-based economy in the 21st Century, (2) a socially progressive, sustainable society, and (3) enhanced personal growth opportunities for all Canadians" (Statistics Canada 2009; Council of Ministries of Education 2008: 1). These sentiments echo the shift towards a knowledge economy seen throughout most of the Western world (Livingstone 2012). The *knowledge economy* is defined as:

Production and services based on knowledge-intensive activities that contribute to an accelerated pace of technological and scientific advance as well as equally rapid obsolescence (Powell & Snellman 2004: 201).

Accordingly, knowledge and "intellectual capabilities" are valued in positions that presumably require advanced training and ongoing learning (Powell & Snellman 2004: 201). This replaces the former economic structure that was based on "physical inputs or natural resources" with a new focus on intellectual and more abstract conceptualizations of potential worker input (Powell & Snellman 2004: 201; Kennedy 2012).

This shift toward a knowledge economy has led to calls for greater access to higher education. Today, Canadians are achieving higher levels of education than ever before (Statistics Canada 2009; Conference Board of Canada 2013; Uppal & LaRochelle-Cote 2014; Miner 2014; Lehmann & Adams 2016). These numbers reflect a growing sentiment that higher education is necessary for labour market success, particularly in

high status and highly competitive professional occupations (Livingstone 2012; Lehmann & Adams 2016).

This notion is well supported by *human capital theory*, which claims that labour market success is based upon the acquisition of human capital (or socially valued knowledge/credentials). In this meritocratic framework, those who achieve the highest levels of education or occupational training are expected to be the most successful (Livingstone 2012; Lehmann & Adams 2016). There are well-understood problems with the basic premises of human capital theory (e.g., for a discussion of underemployment of highly qualified workers, see Livingstone 2012), but even if we accept them, human capital theory cannot account for inequality in access to educational opportunities. There is no shortage of evidence about the lower levels of educational attainment of Aboriginal Canadians (White & Beavon 2007), some ethnic and racial minorities, (Davies 2004; Boyd & Vickers 2004; Geschwender & Guppy 1995; Hou & Balakrishnan 2004), working-class students (Lehmann 2005; 2007; Davies 2004; Krahn 2004), and persons with disabilities. The latter group will be the focus of this thesis.

2.1.1 Disability and Educational Attainment

Persons with disabilities experience difficulties pursuing higher education. Research in this area shows that many students consider the implications of their disability on their education and end up making decisions about their academic and eventual occupational futures with these limitations in mind (i.e. disclosure of disability to others, personal and social perceptions of ability, etc.) (Shuey & Jovic 2013; Hernandez et al. 2008). For example, many students worry about the opinions of others and question their ability to successfully integrate into their campus communities. Often,

these perceptions are based on previous high school experiences, which commonly reflect isolation and perceived difference from their peers (Hodges & Keller 1999). Students also worry about interacting with their professors and classmates who might know little about their disability. This can have important implications for learning experiences, particularly in the accommodations and supports provided to students by their professors. For some students, physical accessibility can make the pursuit of higher education difficult. Though some strategies have been put in place to ensure that campuses are accessible (i.e. AODA 2005), many students still experience difficulties navigating their schools and communities, which can amplify feelings of isolation and difference (Stanley 2000). Finally, financial considerations are also impactful in the decisions that disabled students make. Many students with disabilities do not finish their degrees on time or require extra support services that may create added costs, in addition to their tuition fees (McCloy & DeClou 2013).

Scholars and policy professionals suggest that providing students with disabilities resources to aid their post-secondary decisions will be helpful to encouraging more students to pursue higher education. Motivating students to take tours of the campuses that they are most interested in so that they can familiarize themselves with the environment and become aware of the support services available at the school is considered a most helpful strategy (Gartin et al. 1996; Hodges & Keller 1999; McCloy & DeClou 2013). Inspiring transitions to higher education is especially important as the early choices that disabled students make have clear implications for the subsequent transitions and pathways that they will face throughout their lives. Without further education, many disabled individuals are forced into lower income, part-time/temporary

positions that afford little stability or possibility for workplace advancement (Shuey & Jovic 2013; Hernandez et al. 2008; Blackorby & Wagner 1996).

The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario summarized that in 2006, 31.5% of the population with disabilities aged 25- 44 attained a college credential, compared to 32.1% of those without a disability. Yet, only 22.4% of the population with a disability aged 25- 44 have a university degree compared to 36.1% of Canadians without a disability. The authors of this report concluded that students with disabilities are less likely “to persist to graduation and those who do persist take longer to complete.” They are also less likely to attain more advanced credentials that make them eligible for ‘high status’ positions (McCloy & DeClou 2013: 26; PALS 2006). Problematically, such figures focus on *disability* as an encompassing term, overgeneralizing degree and diploma attainment to a very diverse population. If we look more closely at post-secondary enrolment patterns, we see that type of disability also impacts higher education attendance and completion. Particularly, deaf students have one of the lowest attendance rates of any disability group in Canada (McCloy & DeClou 2013). This thesis will build on general studies of disability; focusing specifically on the educational plans of deaf students in Ontario by highlighting the social influences that shape patterns of educational attainment.

2.2 Defining and Understanding Deafness

Reagan (1995) highlights two commonly accepted models of deafness used to explore hearing impairment in academic literature. The *medical (pathological)* model of deafness is arguably the dominant model used across academic disciplines and in social conceptions of hearing impairment. In this model, deafness is viewed as an *impairment*.

Deafness is a medical condition that is diagnosable and to which medical intervention can and *should* be applied. Here, capitalizing on residual hearing through the implementation of cochlear implants, hearing aids, verbal speech, and lip reading is most common. Essentially, this model advocates the ‘remedy’ of hearing loss so that individuals can participate fully in the hearing world.

The *sociocultural* model of deafness has become more widely accepted and stands in stark contrast to the medicalized understanding of hearing loss. Those who embrace the sociocultural model of deafness argue that being deaf is not a deficit. Rather, it is a cultural condition that is central to a Deaf person’s identity. Accordingly, medical intervention is not required and language acquisition typically focuses on the accessibility and development of sign language skills. The sociocultural model is most commonly accepted by members and supporters of the Deaf community (Reagan 1995; Ladd 2003). Shuey and Jovic (2013) similarly address the *sociopolitical model* of disability, which they summarize, “removed the focus on the individual pathology and understood disability as a social injustice resulting from the attitudes and discriminatory practices of the larger society” (180). These viewpoints have been impactful in refocusing accessibility efforts and the educational tools used to support disabled students in their many different learning and working environments (Shuey & Jovic 2013; Scheetz 2012; Ladd 2003).

Greater acceptance and awareness of deafness has afforded a growing number of deaf young people the opportunity to pursue higher education. For example, schools with predominantly hearing populations sometimes offer programs to deaf students. There are also segregated schools for the deaf where students are taught predominately, in

American Sign Language. Similarly, in the United States, Gallaudet University provides deaf learners with post-secondary educational opportunities tailored to their specific needs (Ladd 2003; Call 1992; Menchel 1995). Yet, young deaf people continue to face unique barriers in their access to higher education and their educational attainment remains significantly lower than that of their hearing peers. I will turn to the educational attainment of deaf Canadians next.

2.3 Deaf Canadians and Educational Attainment

Surprisingly little is known about the school-to-school and school-to-work transition patterns of deaf Canadians. As outlined earlier, The Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (2006) shows low levels of post-secondary attendance amongst those with “hearing limitations” in Canada. These sentiments are echoed by the Canadian Hearing Society that claims that “there has been a significant decline in enrolment of Deaf and hard of hearing Canadians at post-secondary educational institutions since 2000” (Canadian Hearing Society n.d.: 1). Unfortunately, there is almost no Canadian-focused literature that explores the persistence of these patterns. We therefore know very little about *why* deaf students in Canada choose not to pursue higher education in a knowledge economy where credential attainment has become so very important. There is, however, more research on this issue in the United States. This study will therefore build on American scholarship, assuming that it is relevant to better understanding the experiences of deaf Canadians. The hope is to develop a basis from which future studies can continue to explore the educational aspirations and school-to-school transitions of deaf people in Canada.

2.3.1 Challenges Facing Deaf People in School-to-School Transitions

Like hearing students, deaf students consider many different factors when planning for their futures. Financial considerations and academic ability are central to deaf students' decisions to pursue higher education in the same ways that they are for other students (Davies 2004; Menchel 1995; Call 1992). The following section, however, explores some of the more unique considerations that face deaf students as they plan for their post-secondary participation.

2.3.2 Schooling Environments & Program Availability

The United States is home to the only bilingual (English/Sign Language) university in North America and many smaller community college programs that offer courses and programming options to deaf students (Ladd 2003; Menchel 1995). Such developments have seen enrolment numbers surge south of the border, as more deaf students are supported in their pursuit of higher education in a variety of different environments (Call 1992; Menchel 1995).

Unfortunately, the same resources are not found in Canada. Canadians do not have access to a domestic bilingual university and must travel to the United States if they wish to pursue their studies in this more accessible learning environment. Though financial support is available to Canadians planning to attend one of these schools, high international student fees can be problematic for many students and may deter them from making the move south (OSAP 2015- 2016; Gallaudet University 2015-2016; Canadian Hearing Society n.d.). In their recent report entitled *Canadian Hearing Society's Position Paper on Challenges and Issues Affecting Access to Post-Secondary Education for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students* (Canadian Hearing Society n.d.), the Canadian Hearing

Society emphasizes that Canadian enrolment in American institutions has fallen since 2000, and participation in domestic schools is similarly low. In Ontario, deaf students can pursue ‘deaf upgrade’ programs at the college level which help them to develop their English, math, and computer literacy skills. Aside from these opportunities, deaf students are required to complete their degrees in hearing classrooms with support from interpreters and note-takers if they choose to stay in-country (Council of Educators of Toronto 2014; Canadian Hearing Society n.d.). These limiting options make pursuit of higher education less likely, as such environments are inaccessible and unappealing to many deaf students.

2.3.3 Communication Barriers and Social Attitudes

Communication barriers also impact the educational pathways of deaf students (Call 1992; Canadian Hearing Society n.d.). Firstly, deaf students who are reliant on American Sign Language (ASL) may find it difficult to communicate with faculty, staff, and peers in environments where sign language is not the primary mode of communication. These students must find interpreters to help support them with their studies - particularly in the classroom.

Finding an interpreter can be very difficult. Availability of interpreters during scheduled class times is not a given. Scheduling conflicts can arise and may force some students to miss out on important classes from time to time or to attend them without an interpreter and get less benefit from their attendance. Although most North American deaf people use ASL, variations of many signs can occasionally make communication confusing. Accordingly, finding an interpreter that signs similarly to the student can be difficult (Call 1992). Moreover, the Canadian Hearing Society emphasizes the

importance of finding a *qualified* interpreter. These individuals are few in Canada and often have very busy schedules (Canadian Hearing Society n.d.). Many deaf students also require note-takers in the classes as those who watch their interpreters may find it difficult to take notes at the same time. Although these supports are often easier to assign, they are yet another consideration deaf students must undertake as learners in “hearing” schools (Call 1992). For these reasons, supporting deaf students effectively in mainstream environments can prove challenging.

Although many of these barriers can make pursuit of higher education seemingly impossible, there are a few sources of support that mediate the impact of some of these barriers.

2.3.4 Familial Acceptance and Parental Encouragement

Not surprisingly, family acceptance and encouragement are instrumental in motivating the pursuit of higher education (Cawthon et al. 2015). For young people who are born deaf or lost their hearing early in their lives, acceptance by their families of their hearing impairment is essential to their development as children. This is particularly true for the majority of deaf children who are born to hearing families with little previous exposure to hearing loss. Literature suggests that acceptance in the family is strongly related to language-use choices made by parents. It has been found that hearing families who facilitate communication in sign language foster greater feelings of acceptance in deaf children, which affects how young children understand their deafness. Parents who try to force lip-reading and verbal speech may create communication barriers between themselves and their child(ren), which may, in turn, negatively impact children’s bonds

with their families and their feelings of acceptance (Bat-Chava 1994; 2000; Jambor & Elliott 2005).

Such feelings of acceptance and encouragement are also important as children grow older, and ultimately look toward moving into higher education. Parents, who are encouraging and supportive of their children's academics throughout their formative years, regardless of their deafness, are found to strongly positively impact the attitudes that young people hold toward their own education (Cawthon et al. 2015; Gecas 2003; Zimmerman et al. 1992; Michael et al. 2013). Particularly, parents who are able to find a balance between accepting their child's hearing loss, providing them with support, and encouraging them to freely explore different educational and vocational options, will be most effective in motivating their children to pursue routes of higher education that are most fitting (Michael et al. 2013).

2.3.5 Teachers and Role Models

Teachers, counsellors, and high schools can also shape the post-secondary transitions of deaf students (Gartin et al. 1996; Menchel 1995). Particularly, educators play an important role in affirming academic attitudes and providing information about future schooling options (Garbergolio et al. 2014; Canadian Hearing Society n.d.; Obrzut et al. 1999; Call 1992). Institutions that are able to support their students in a variety of different pursuits, for example by providing access to information about both bilingual schooling options and hearing mainstream environments, offer students the tools that they need to make informed decisions about their futures (Gartin et al. 1996; Call 1992).

2.4 Looking Towards Higher Education: Factors that Motivate School-to-School Transitions

The foregoing discussion presents research that explores the many barriers that are encountered by those with disabilities in their pursuit of higher education. Much of this research is concerned with structural and institutional forces that emphasize difference and *inability* (Shuey and Jovic 2013; Reagan 1995). Many of these studies focus on the experiences of those who *do not* choose to pursue higher education – stressing their disability and its effects on this transition. Limited research explores stories of success. The remainder of this section will incorporate literature that explores ways in which more common conceptions of deaf educational attainment can be challenged. Agency, capital acquisition, and finally, personal attributes - including resiliency and self-efficacy will be discussed.

2.4.1 The Role of Agency: Agency In Structure

Sociologists continue to debate how best to define agency. More recent studies advocate an agency within structure model, which assumes that an individual's actions are shaped by their environment. Further, agents also actively participate in the creation and maintenance of structures of which they are a part (Emirbayer & Mische 1998; Settersten 1999; Bandura 2000; Hitlin & Long 2009).

Agency is characterized by the human capacity to think about our past actions (the iterational dimension of agency), to think creatively about responses that differ from traditional or habitual behaviours (the projective dimension of agency) and finally, the ability to purposefully evaluate and implement change (the practical-evaluative dimension of agency) (Emirbayer & Mische 1998). Together, these dimensions prepare

individuals to act in meaningful ways as they consider their past experiences and project plausible consequences and reactions to their actions. Numerous studies go on to discuss how structures influence individual opportunities to engage in these thoughtful processes and the actions that are subsequently motivated (Bandura 2000; Hitlin & Long 2009).

In exploring school-to-school transitions, Settersten's (1999) conceptualization of "agency within structure" is evident. Future plans are influenced by the social forces that have shaped individual experiences in academic spheres and beyond (Gecas & Schwalbe 1983; Eastman & Marzillier 1984; Bandura 2000). Actors think about and plan for their futures, considering the benefits and challenges that they will face in taking different avenues towards their ultimate goals (Bandura 1977; 2000; Bandura et al. 1980; Hitlin & Long 2009). Hitlin and Long speak of the objective and subjective elements of agency, suggesting that structure determines what social opportunities are accessible to individuals as they navigate their educational trajectories and as they plan for their academic futures (objective elements). Moreover, these *objective experiences* impact the *subjective notions* of agency by shaping the beliefs that young people develop toward their abilities to be successful at school and at work. The resultant attitudes of continued action (the subjective dimension of agency) are foundational to the ongoing decisions (and ultimate actions) that individuals take, but are shaped by social forces (the objective dimensions of agency) (Hitlin & Long 2009).

2.4.2 *Social and Cultural Capital*

The social opportunities and resources available to an individual influence their experiences and their perceptions of their social world (Hitlin & Long 2009). Pierre Bourdieu's cornerstone work in education has focused on inequalities in schools and other social settings (Bourdieu 1986; 1977; Seidman 2013). For example, he suggests that the acquisition of different types of capital will benefit some and disadvantage others. His discussion on social and cultural capital is of particular relevance in considering the social opportunities and constraints that affect the school-to-school transitions of deaf youth.

Social capital is defined as an individual's social networks and connections that an individual possesses. It is within these bonds with others that important resources lay (Bourdieu 1986; Seidman 2013). Bourdieu's conceptualization emphasizes that those who are well connected (by virtue of their families, their peers, or their communities) will have access to important opportunities and social supports that facilitate access to resources and further opportunities for personal gain, perpetuating existing social inequalities (Bourdieu 1986; Lehmann & Adams 2016).

Further, *cultural capital* is most commonly defined as the ability to adopt the cultural norms and practices associated with a social group; in addition to the access that one has to 'cultural resources' (Bourdieu 1986). Bourdieu emphasizes that schools are reflective of middle-class values and cultural practices; accordingly, children from middle-class homes tend to do better in these environments than those from the working-class. Middle-class children (commonly) have access to cultural capital from a young age (i.e. travelling, language acquisition, reading/writing skills, etc.) that facilitates academic

success during their formative years (and beyond). Working-class families may have fewer of these resources or opportunities to develop these capacities, and thus, may not do as well at school (Bourdieu 1986; 1977; Lehmann 2007; Lehmann & Adams 2016).

Together, social and cultural capital emphasize Settersten's (1999) notion of 'agency within structure'. Capital acquisition is a lifelong negotiation (Bourdieu 1986). These 'objective' elements of agency are reflective of structural factors (i.e. familial resources, socioeconomic status, school environment, workplace, etc.) that shape how people act within their social settings (the subjective element of agency). These types of capital will facilitate different opportunities and predict different outcomes for social actors across the life course. These considerations might be particularly important when studying deaf people, many of whom identify with the Deaf community and its unique culture, apart from the 'hearing world' (Ladd 2003). Different opportunities and experiences are likely within the Deaf community, facilitating greater access to social and cultural capital. On the other hand, structural and communication barriers may hinder access to these forms of capital in the 'hearing world', which may make education and employment more difficult outside of the Deaf community.

2.5 Resiliency

In Hitlin & Long's (2009) conceptualization of agency, resiliency could be considered a subjective notion of agency. The important role of objective elements of agency in shaping the life course are evident (i.e. the influence of social and cultural capital acquisition), but so too are the ways in which social actors interpret their position in the social world.

Most studies of deaf people that look at resilience focus on those who are ‘exceptionally’ successful in the face of challenge. For example, Charlson et al. (1999) suggest that each of their study’s deaf participants reflected resilience which was characterized by “independence, assertiveness, a good nature, and good problem solving abilities” and that resilience is a trait that could be developed in students through ongoing intervention (234). Similarly, in a study that explored resilient deaf adults, resiliency was presumed characteristic of those who:

Felt comfortable with themselves in solitude, enjoyed secure and meaningful attachments with others in supportive homes, and appreciated many of their own strengths. They were aware and managed many of their own feelings and were willing to persist in their efforts to achieve the worthy goals they had set for themselves (Rogers et al. 2003).

Young et al. (2008; 2011) suggest that this view is problematic and affirms pathological views of deafness as a ‘disability’ that must be overcome. They advocate instead for a view of resilience that supports “the successful navigation of the experience of being deaf in a world which creates risks that might impede self-fulfillment, safety and achievement” (Young et al. 2008: 49). More specifically, they define resiliency as “what enables people to bound back despite numerous setbacks; it forces us to understand how and why children might succeed despite adversity; and it offers the hope that early disadvantages, harm or pain do not determine a negative trajectory for children’s futures” (Young et al. 2011: 3). This view asks us to pay closer attention to the social and institutional forces that problematize deafness and frequently place the onus on individuals to overcome challenges associated with not fitting into the ‘hearing world’.

This study will follow Young et al.’s (2008; 2011) understanding of resilience. Instead of focusing on the remarkability of participants, I look at how they have

successfully adopted a Deaf identity and in turn, have been able to navigate the ‘hearing world’ in a way that has been effective in their own personal narratives. This is not to suggest that my participants have not experienced challenges, barriers, and limitations in their lives – most of which can be related to their hearing loss. Rather, these individuals have been able to find ways of accepting being deaf and consequently, to simply live their lives.¹

As previously stated, scholars have paid close attention to how social characteristics (i.e. race, ethnicity, income, gender, and disability) impact school-to-school transitions and labour force participation. Additionally, some have explored the barriers that disabled (and deaf people particularly) experience in planning for their futures. Further scholarship has added to these debates by incorporating discussions on social resources and personal attributes that can motivate educational attainment, such as capital acquisition and resiliency. Each of these helps to explain the educational experiences of deaf people and the persistent patterns of under-education that we continue to see amongst this population. While these discussions are influential in understanding the attitudes that deaf individuals hold toward their education, I argue that they alone cannot explain the school-to-school transition of my participants. Rather, these discussions help us to recognize the general social conditions that impact the lived experiences of deaf people in Ontario. I therefore suggest that while deaf people may be resilient, (which has been well documented by recent scholarship concerning this population; see Zand & Pierce 2011), this resiliency is not what motivates their decisions to pursue higher education. In addition to studying their resiliency, I will explore the

¹ Further investigation into these generally resilient attitudes would prove insightful, but unfortunately, is beyond the scope of this study. Particularly, further consideration on the social influences that impact resiliency would be interesting to pursue (see Zand & Pierce 2011).

importance of self-efficacy in shaping school-to-school transitions. While a deaf person may be resilient, I suggest that students must personally achieve high academic self-efficacy to make the pursuit of higher education plausible.

2.6 Self-Efficacy

Coined by psychologist Albert Bandura, self-efficacy has been widely applied in social science research for the last forty years. The term was motivated by social cognitive theory which explores the role of observation, modelling, and social experience in the development of behavioural patterns and personality (Bandura 1977; Gecas 2003; Tenenbaum et al. 2014). Foundational studies have explored the growth of efficacious attitudes in relation to specific life tasks or challenges (see Bandura 1977; 1981; 2000). Social scientists have since attempted to apply efficacy more broadly and sought to better understand its development by considering the social factors that are instrumental in shaping different degrees of efficacy over time (see Gecas 1989; Bandura 1997; Tenenbaum et al. 2014 for examples).

Self-efficacy is defined as:

An aspect of the self-concept critically relevant to agency and motivation. It refers to the perception of oneself as a causal agent in one's environment, as having some control over one's circumstances, and being capable of carrying out actions to produce intended effects (Gecas 2003: 370).

Psychological studies have shown that high self-efficacy is consistent among individuals who deal with stressful situations effectively and who can reduce personal arousal (Bandura 1977; 1980; 1997; 2000). Sociologically focused literature has added to these findings, suggesting that high levels of efficacy are beneficial and predict “academic and occupational achievement, recovery from illness, general physical and mental health, [and] life satisfaction” (Gecas 2003: 370; Hitlin & Long 2009; Bandura 1997).

Bandura defines self-efficacy by drawing on psychological traditions that emphasize the role of observational learning and motivation. He argues that human beings learn to behave by modelling the actions of significant others, closest to the individual. This, of course, begins very early in life and continues throughout the life course. In time, actors develop the capacity to consider their past behaviours and possible further consequences to their actions by reflecting on feedback from their significant others. If there are large discrepancies in how individuals act, want to act, or the outcomes they perceive for themselves, individuals will be motivated to change their actions to more accurately reflect their desired outcomes (Bandura 1977).

Bandura (1977; 1993) argues that behaviour is developed through *outcome expectancies* and *efficacy expectations*. The former refers to the actors' estimates that their actions will lead to a specified outcome while the latter explores the personal belief that an actor will successfully engage in behaviours that will result in a desired result (Bandura 1977; 1993; Gecas 1989; Eastman & Marzillier 1984). Accompanied by the skills necessary to engage in activities fruitfully, efficacy expectations can determine individual's actions, goal setting behaviours, and plans (Gecas 2003).

Bandura explains that the higher one's self-efficacy, "the higher the goal challenges people set for themselves and the firmer their commitment to them" (Bandura 1993: 118). Although one may project high levels of self-efficacy in one life domain, this does not guarantee high levels in all other life domains (Bandura 1977; Gecas 2003).

Differences in efficacy development are related to four different interactive forces. Bandura argues that performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal are each instrumental in shaping self-efficacy

(Bandura 1977; 1993; 1997; Gecas 2003; 1989; Hitlin & Long 2009). First, *performance accomplishments* are of great importance as they reflect personal mastery. Repeated successes will positively impact self-efficacy development whereas frequent failures will negatively impact perceived efficacy. Next, *vicarious experiences* refer to experiences in which individuals do not take part but are a basis for comparison. Bandura uses the example of others completing a scary or challenging task. Individuals will look to the accomplishment of other people and project their own abilities toward similar activities based on their self-comparison with participants. Those with high self-efficacy will be more likely to assume that they too could successfully complete a challenge. Thirdly, *verbal persuasion* can help to develop efficacious attitudes. The opinions of others can be internalized and when positive, can make people believe that they are capable of completing a particular task. Finally, *emotional arousal* can motivate (or hinder) self-efficacy development. Here, Bandura explores the impact of the emotional states on efficacy development, advising that different moods and emotions can impact perceptions of efficacy and influence the development of efficaciousness. For example, “[s]ymptoms and feelings such as anxiety, stress reactions, tension and excitement can be interpreted as signals of failure and debility” whereas “[a] positive mood state” may strengthen someone’s self-efficacy (van Dinther et al. 2011: 98; Bandura 1977).

Notably, not all individuals will be exposed to the same social forces in the same ways. Some may experience greater performance accomplishments than others. Many may be reliant on the verbal persuasion of others and some will be exposed to greater life challenges that they have to successfully overcome, developing efficacious beliefs over

time. As such, structural factors and *opportunities* to engage with efficacious attitudes explain differences in individuals' development of self-efficacy.

The earlier-discussed notion that agency develops within structure (Settersten 1999) is also important in the growth of self-efficacy. Social characteristics including race, ethnicity, gender, and age, all affect opportunities for efficacy development. Though an explicit discussion of each of these impactful factors is beyond the scope of this study, it is important to note that these statuses offer differential access to resources, and thus, distinctive experiences for the development, affirmation, and challenge of efficacy beliefs (Gecas & Schwalbe 1983; Eastman & Marzillier 1984; Gecas 1989; Bandura 1977; 2000).

Gecas (1989; 2003) points out that it is important to take into account historical and cultural contexts in evaluating the development of self-efficacious attitudes. In considering the different educational and occupational dynamics within distinctive historical epochs for example, we see the influence of time on the opportunities afforded to young people growing up in different eras. Moreover, cultural considerations illustrate disparities in identity development. For example, in North America, personal achievement and independence is valued. As such, this culture may be more conducive to the development of efficacious attitudes, which motivate personal gains and success. These considerations may also be particularly important in work with deaf populations. Social attitudes toward those with hearing impairments have changed drastically - especially in the last fifty years. Educational, occupational, social and cultural concerns have all transformed significantly (e.g. accessibility in education and work or challenging audist views) and thus, have changed how Canadians living during different periods

experience deafness and education (Ladd 2003; Tenenbaum et al. 2014; Schieman & Turner 1998).

Further, it is commonly assumed that those who experience disability might have lower levels of self-efficacy. Schieman and Turner (1998) summarize that, “disabled individuals ... may be disadvantaged with respect to education, employment, income, and marital status because their impairment creates barriers to advancement” (172) (also see Turner & Noh 1998; Saunders et al. 2000). Presumably socially limited by their disability, individuals feel as though they do not have control over their life and that this is largely impacted by their difference in ability (Schieman & Turner 1998). These views are consistent with the notion of *learned helplessness*, which postulates that a chronic state of inefficacy comes from the realization that personal actions, more often than not, do not result in desired outcomes. Those with a disability may come to believe that such outcomes are because of their disability (a perceived personal deficit), rather than the impact of structural influences (Seligman 1975; Gecas 1989).

More recent studies have challenged some of these individualistic assumptions, introducing a more holistic approach to studying how disability impacts self-efficacy. For example, Tenenbaum et al. 2014 emphasize the role that age plays in relation to disability. Their recent work suggests that those who experience disability later in their lives actually experience lower levels of efficacy. Those who are born with their disability or develop it early in their lives, often are more accepting and acquire coping mechanisms that result in the minimized impact of their disability on their perceived efficacy. Schieman and Turner (1998) also explore the impact of age, highlighting how disability shapes the experience of normative social transitions and behaviours. Their

study questions whether or not young people who experience disabilities have less control, as they do not experience transitions and life events in the ways that their peers do. In contrast, older people with disabilities may feel less affected as more people their age have a disability and are comparably influenced by it (Schieman & Turner 1998).

Personal perceptions of disability are also particularly important to consider and could impact the development of self-efficacy. How individuals understand their disability will determine how they identify its influence upon their life and subsequently, their ability to complete certain tasks (Schieman & Turner 1998). For example, many deaf people do not view their hearing impairment as a disability. Rather, deafness is part of their identity and foundational to their membership in the Deaf community (Ladd 2003; Jambor & Elliott 2005). In this case, disability may have a less negative impact on perceived self-efficacy, as the individual is accepting of the circumstances and has adopted workable coping mechanisms over time (Schulz & Decker 1985).

Finally, efficacious attitudes are not stagnant. This is to say that one may develop efficacious attitudes in one life domain but not in others and can experience diminished efficacy towards different tasks throughout the life course as well. Self-efficacy is constantly in a state of flux, being shaped and challenged by the many different social situations in which people participate through their lives. Accordingly, perceived efficacy in these many spheres is never fixed and will motivate different behaviours over time (Gecas & Schwalbe 1983).

2.6.1 Differentiating Self-Efficacy From Other Social Concepts

Sociological literature has challenged the validity of the term self-efficacy as it has been used in social science research (Eastman & Marzillier 1984; Hitlin & Long

2009). According to Hitlin & Long (2009), who compare and contrast different terminology used to study human agency and behaviour, most studies that seek to apply self-efficacy do not define the concept effectively.

Bandura (1977) bases his conceptualization of self-efficacy predominantly on a single (or 'discrete') task (Gecas 1989; Hitlin & Long 2009). Bandura's (see 1977; Bandura et al. 1980) original work focuses on how study participants experience and deal with stressful (or phobic) situations. These studies explore a specific task and behavioural change. Many of his findings have been problematized by social thinkers who have been quick to point out the assumptive nature of his claims (Eastman & Marzillier 1984). For example, Eastman and Marzillier (1984) critically evaluate Bandura's application of self-efficacy, suggesting that his experimental settings offer limited possible responses for participants to consider, affecting the outcomes that they can conceptualize, and thus the attitudes they project towards the tasks they are asked to complete (also see van Dinther et al. 2011). Accordingly, many scholars question whether similarly efficacious attitudes may be found in more natural settings and if such perceptions can be generalized to other life domains.

Further, while widely cited throughout social scientific research, self-efficacy appears to lack consistent operationalization. Sociologists have been instrumental in trying to focus this discussion in a new direction, advocating for the implementation of a more consistent and far reaching concept that can help to explain human agency and motivation. Table 1. depicts many of the commonly cited terms that appear in social science research and that can be confused with self-efficacy.

2.6.2 Table 1. - Self-Concept Definitions

<u>Term</u>	<u>Definition</u>	<u>Focus</u>
Self-Efficacy	Personal perception of being able to successfully carry out actions to produce an intended outcome in regards to a specific task or domain.	Task Specific
Personal Control	Personal belief that one is in control and the director of one's life.	General
Mastery	The degree to which individuals believe that life outcomes are of their own making OR shaped by social forces.	General
Self-Esteem	Personal perceptions of self-worth; how one feels about themselves	General

Adapted from: van Dinther et al. 2011; Hitlin & Long 2009; Stajkovic & Luthans 1998.

First, Mirowsky and Ross' notion of '*personal control*' (Mirowsky & Ross 1998; 2003; 2007), elaborated on by Hitlin and Long (2009), encompasses the belief that individuals "master, control, shape, and direct their own lives" (Hitlin & Long 2009: 145). Similarly, advocates of *mastery* examine personal perceptions of control, considering the "extent that an individual views their life chances as being under their control rather than predetermined" (or structurally shaped) (Hitlin & Long 2009: 146). In addition, *self-esteem* is commonly used to help understand agency. Though similar to self-efficacy in many ways, self-esteem "is often portrayed as a global construct that represents a person's self-evaluations across a wide variety of different situations" and is presumed, "more stable" across the life course (Stajkovic & Luthans 1998: 67).

Notably, self-efficacy differs from all of these terms in its focus. Rather than presuming a 'general' state or perception of self, self-efficacy reflects personal beliefs towards a *specific* task. One may be highly efficacious in some areas of their life and not at all efficacious in others. For example, someone who is good at science might have high self-efficacy towards his or her science work. That same individual might not be very good at hockey, and thus, would be more likely to have low self-efficacy towards that sport. Mastery, control, and self-esteem, each project a more *general self-concept*, based on multiple perceptions of "intelligence, integrity," ability, self-worth, confidence, social influences, etc. (Stajkovic & Luthans 1998).

Though any of these terms would be helpful concepts to explore the educational patterns of deaf youth, I advocate the use of self-efficacy for the purpose of my study. Self-efficacy was chosen to reflect the personal transitions of participants because of its more precise focus, compared to the aforementioned terms, which consider similar self-perceptions more broadly (i.e. control over one's *life*). Specifically, I will pay close attention to perceptions of self-efficacy toward individual educational trajectories. Expanding on the general definition of efficacy provided earlier, *academic self-efficacy* would suggest that students perceive controllability in their educational outcomes, and most importantly, beliefs that they themselves, are able to perform at the level necessary to be academically successful. This is to say that students who exude high levels of academic self-efficacy will assume that their hard work and continued commitment to their schoolwork will result in success (however they might personally define achievement). Those with low self-efficacy tend to feel as though their performance is beyond their personal control and that they will do poorly on academic tasks assigned to

them because they may feel that they are not ‘smart’ or ‘able’ enough to compete at the same level as their seemingly successful peers (van Dinther et al. 2011; Pajares 1996).

Specifically, students must believe that they are capable of transitioning to post-secondary education successfully. These self-efficacious attitudes are not automatic. Rather, they are developed within academic trajectories over time (i.e. experiences of mastery, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional states; see Bandura 1977). As such, those with high self-efficacy may perceive themselves as more capable of pursuing higher education than those who experience lower levels of self-efficacy. These individuals may assume that they would not be successful and thus, are less likely to enrol in a post-secondary program.

Most research that explores self-efficacy has been quantitatively based. Commonly, researchers use scales that measure efficacious attitudes, applying their findings to different social situations (ex. Bandura’s work with phobias; General Self-Efficacy Scale; etc.) Rather than measuring a degree or level of efficacious attitude, qualitative studies provide respondents with platforms from which to explore their own experiences and views. In so doing, efficacy may be recognized and discussed by the participant; rather than captured by a quantified measure. Personal accounts of efficacious attitudes (and their development) can help to explain the more concrete evaluations offered in quantitative applications, and taken together, can inspire a deeper understanding of social activity.

Finally, to establish plans to pursue further education (apprenticeship, college, university, field-specific training), individuals must perceive that they are prepared and that they *can* transition to post-secondary education (van Dinther et al. 2011; Pajares

1996). Perceptions of self-efficacy are developed over the life course and influenced by a host of social factors – both inside and outside of the classroom. It is this notion that will be the basis of this study.

2.7 The Life Course Perspective

The foregoing discussion explores the development of personal perceptions of self-efficacy and some of the social forces that shape transitions to post-secondary education more generally. This important transition cannot be understood without considering all that came before. Exploring what motivates school-to-school transitions and how self-efficacious beliefs are developed *across the life course* becomes very important in understanding the choices of those planning to pursue higher education.

This study will therefore incorporate the *life course perspective* to support the analysis of the case studies that will be presented in the coming pages. The life course perspective has been instrumental in developing sociological research that not only focuses on the social structures and institutions that impact life outcomes, but also the important role that individuals play in shaping their own life narratives (Elder et al. 2003; Settersten 1999; George 1993; Clausen 1986). The life course perspective embraces the aforementioned notion of ‘agency within structure’ (Settersten 1999) by encouraging scholars to think about the influence of history, time and place, social timing, linked lives, and personal agency (Elder et al. 2003). Together, these considerations illustrate the interconnectivity of trajectories, transitions, and turning points – each of which characterize individual (and collective) lives (Elder et al. 2003; Settersten 1999; George 1993).

Life course concepts will be used throughout this study to frame the participants' lived experiences. First, a *trajectory* is defined as a "sequence of roles and experiences" (Elder et al. 2003: 8). For example, trajectories may include education, family, and work (Settersten 1999). Trajectories are often "long patterns of stability and change" and are made of multiple *transitions*, or changes that produce some degree of change in a trajectory (ex. identity, social, or behavioural) (George 1993: 358; Elder et al. 2003). *Turning points* are more "substantial change[s] in the direction of one's life" (Elder et al. 2003: 8). These events are drastic and usually either change the direction of the trajectory completely (ex. the birth of child) or terminate a trajectory altogether (Settersten 1999). Each element of the life course (i.e. trajectories, turning points, transitions, etc.) is complimentary; you cannot consider one without the others. As applied to school-to-school transitions (which would take place in the educational trajectory), the fluid nature of multiple trajectories (i.e. family, work, community, etc.) across the life course must be considered.

Glen Elder and his colleagues suggest that the life course perspective is a response to increased social change, a shifting population composite, and a new academic focus on longitudinal research that follows cohort samples for a long period of time (Elder et al. 2003). The life course perspective has been instrumental in challenging the notion of socially constructed normative sequencing and timing of life events by studying the interplay between individual lives, macro-level structures, and historical context.

Finally, the life course is well utilized in both quantitative and qualitative work. This study will use qualitative in-depth case studies to build a better understanding of the school-to-school transitions of four deaf youth in Ontario. George emphasizes that micro

studies focus on the “explication of the process by which early transitions exert enduring influences on life patterns” (George 1993: 361). This analysis will make use of these tools, reflecting on participants’ past experiences to better understand their projected post-secondary plans and the development of their uniquely high self-efficacy over time.

2.8 Research Questions

This study seeks to (1) develop an understanding of the school-to-school transitions of deaf people in a Canadian context (Ontario specifically) and to (2) contribute to scholarship that investigates resiliency in education by incorporating a holistic discussion of the role of self-efficacy in motivating post-secondary transitions.

The following research questions will be addressed:

1. How does being deaf shape the educational and vocational goals that students set for themselves?
2. Which social factors contribute to the shaping of the ambitions of deaf students (ex. familial influences, peer groups, institutional policies, etc.)?
3. How do social influences impact individual views of self-efficacy and the subsequent goal setting behaviours of deaf students?

CHAPTER III – DATA COLLECTION & METHODS

3.1 Scope of Study

This study explores the structural, social and personal factors that shape the educational aspirations of deaf Canadians. In-depth interviews were utilized to develop four case studies, each highlighting various aspects of the lives of deaf Ontarian youth between the ages of seventeen and twenty years old. The participants were asked about their academic experiences, their schooling environments, their access to resources (i.e. in-classroom supports, career counselling, government support systems), and their families, peers and local communities. Further, they each reflected upon interacting in both the hearing and Deaf communities and offered their views on social perceptions and knowledge of deafness/Deaf culture. Finally, each respondent was asked to explain his or her plans for further education and/or their transition into the workplace. These discussions consider how structural, social, and personal factors, together, impact the educational goals of the interviewees over time.

3.2 Study Participation Criteria

Eligibility for the study required that participants be between the ages of seventeen and twenty years of age at the time of the study. Only youth who defined themselves as *culturally Deaf* could be interviewed. Medically, degree of hearing loss is measured on a fluid scale; diagnosis of deafness and hearing impairment can often change over time (Winzer, 2005). Accordingly, without a conclusive definition of deafness, accurate recruitment of *exclusively* profoundly deaf individuals (as per medical diagnosis) was problematic and unlikely within the limited population of study.

Culturally Deaf youth are those who identify with their Deaf community. The Deaf community is identified using a capital 'D.' This community challenges the medicalization of deafness and members share language, beliefs, values and traditions in the same manner as other cultural groups in North America (Ladd 2003; Higgins 1980). Children who are born deaf with deaf parents typically identify with the Deaf community early in their lives while those who are born to hearing families often learn more about the community later in their lives by attending schools for deaf and hard of hearing students or interacting with other deaf individuals (Obrzut et al. 1999; Scheetz 2012). It should be noted that:

Deafness is not a sufficient condition for membership in deaf communities ... membership in the deaf community is *achieved*... through (1) *identification* with the deaf world, (2) shared experiences that come of being hearing impaired, and (3) *participation* in the community's activities (Higgins 1979: 6).

As such, not all those with hearing loss identify with the Deaf community or understand their deafness in the same way as those who are part of the community. For example, young children who are born with significant hearing loss and given a cochlear implant as children to modify their ability to hear may not identify with the Deaf community or ever learn to communicate using sign language. Further, individuals who lose their hearing later in their lives or because of an accident may not associate with the Deaf community by virtue of their hearing loss alone and continue to identify more with their hearing community (Higgins 1980; Scheetz 2012).

Respondents in this study each identified with the Deaf community and had to have experienced significant hearing loss (as medically diagnosed) before the age five. Further, each participant had to be enrolled in a Canadian high school (either mainstream or deaf environment) or have completed his or her provincially mandated high school

graduation requirements within the last two years at the time of study. Deaf individuals who attended school outside of Canada or experienced a comorbid condition to deafness (ex. Paralysis, Blindness, Cognitive Limitations) were not eligible to participate in this research project.

While it is recognized that future research would benefit from including more diverse study participants (i.e. those with accompanying disabilities, varied age groups, etc.), this study's attention to a smaller cohort reflects time and resource constraints. Additionally, the Deaf community, like other communities, is diverse (Ladd 2003). A specific population was chosen to reflect the opinions and experiences of a smaller (and restricted) cohort of students who by virtue of age and geographic location might be more likely to share similar experiences.

3.3 Recruitment

Participants were interviewed at the Bob Rumball Camp of the Deaf (BRCD) in Parry Sound, Ontario from July 4-16, 2014. BRCD is the only camp for deaf persons in Ontario and hosts both hearing and hearing impaired campers and volunteers throughout the summer months. Focused on providing equal opportunity, the camp has promoted inclusion and offered barrier-free camp experiences to young people for more than fifty years (Bob Rumball Organizations 2014).

I chose BRCD to host the interviews because of my long-standing relationship with the organization. As a former counsellor and senior staff member, I have been involved with the camp and Deaf community in a variety of capacities for many years. After speaking with the director of BRCD, I was encouraged to carry out my interviews during the summer months with campers and staff who would be in attendance in early

July. This location provided a safe and comfortable environment for the participants (and me) to interview, and moreover, afforded access to a diverse group of young deaf people that otherwise may have been unreachable by me.

Interviewees were each registered campers or staff (volunteers) during the ‘senior’ camp session that ran for the first two weeks of July. A letter of information was sent to registrants outlining the planned study and goals of the research project. By sending the letter to families before the camp session, potential participants had the opportunity to discuss their involvement with parents and guardians and to contact the research team with any questions or concerns prior to the beginning of camp.

When I arrived at the camp, participants were given the opportunity to meet with me to learn more about the study and to sign up for a time to be interviewed. Because of my previous involvement with BRCD, only participants that approached me of their own accord were given information about the study or given an interview time, so as to avoid the appearance of perceived pressure on campers and staff members to participate in the project. All steps were taken to limit interruption to camper/staff activities and it was emphasized that failure to participate would not affect the camper/staff experience in any way.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethics approval was obtained in Spring 2014 from the Non-Medical Ethics Board (REB) at the University of Western Ontario. While this population may be considered ‘double-vulnerable’ because some respondents were younger than eighteen and experience a ‘disability,’ it was argued that being deaf should not restrict the participants’ rights to have their stories heard. A letter of information was given to parents/guardians

before the 2014 camp sessions to provide information about the study. Moreover, although deafness is often understood as a ‘disability,’ many deaf individuals do not see their hearing impairment in this way (Ladd 2003; Reagan 1995). Deaf individuals do not always experience deficits in other areas (i.e. cognitive or physical), and therefore, can also provide voluntary informed consent. To ensure that participants could effectively consent to their participation, those with comorbid conditions were not eligible to participate in this study. Further, no interviewees would be under seventeen years old at the time of study, and therefore could effectively provide informed consent without their parents/guardians present.

In addition, I was not permitted to hold any camp position that put me in a role of authority for the 2014 camp year. This restriction was identified before I travelled to BRCD, ensuring that campers and staff did not feel pressured to participate in interviews because of my role within the organization.

3.5 Participant Interviews

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with respondents. Participants were asked a series of questions from an interview guide, but were free to elaborate and add to the discussion as they pleased. This method of data collection is most appropriate when working with a population about which there is limited knowledge (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2011). Although respondents were asked standardized questions that provided some consistency between interviewees, semi-structured discussion provided the opportunity to explore a variety of topics and more importantly, generated a forum for participants to share ideas and experiences that they believe were most important. Interviews lasted one to two hours. Interviews were conducted using

American Sign Language (ASL); the first language of most profoundly deaf Canadians (PALS 2006; Canadian Hearing Association 2013).

An interpreter who is fluent in ASL (and who signed a confidentiality agreement before participating in interviews) signed each question to the respondents and then verbalized their responses. A video recording device was used to capture both the verbalized and signed conversations between the researcher, respondent, and interpreter.

Interviews were conducted in a private room at BRCD with only the interviewer, interpreter and respondent present so as to maintain a confidential and anonymous atmosphere where participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences. Although programming staff members (including the director of BRCD) were aware that the interviews were taking place, they were not present during the discussion between the interviewer and respondents and subsequently, were not given access to recorded data, transcripts, or participant consent forms.

3.6 Interpreting Sign Language

Although I am proficient in American Sign Language, the assistance of a more qualified sign language interpreter was most beneficial. The interpreter that worked with me in each of the interviews is a graduate of an intensive interpreting qualification program in Ontario with many years of field experience and exposure to the Deaf community. With the aid of an interpreter, I was able to focus on recording important body language cues and creating ongoing and responsive dialogue.

While the use of an interpreter may be viewed as detrimental in many research settings as a third party consequently intercedes the communication between the interviewer - interviewee and slows conversation significantly, work with the Deaf

community challenges these more common assertions. Many deaf individuals have substantial experience working with an interpreter (both speaking to and receiving dialogue from an interpreter). Therefore, although communication is mediated, the flow of conversation was not inhibited in any way and the strict profession-specific protocol that prohibits the intentional misinformation of questions and responses by Canadian sign language interpreters, provides confidence in the interpretation given (Winzer 2005; Canadian Association of the Deaf 2012d).

The spoken words of the researcher and the interpreter were transcribed and analyzed upon completion of the interviews. To ensure the validity of interpretation (to the best of her ability), I also watched the video recording of each interview to ensure (to the best of my abilities) that interpretation was accurate and reflected my questions and the respondents' answers effectively.

3.7 Profile of Participants

Four participants were interviewed at the Bob Rumball Camp of the Deaf (BRCD) during the Senior Camp session from July 4-16, 2014. The respondents were all from Ontario and between the ages of seventeen and nineteen years old at the time of their interview. One boy and three girls were interviewed. Each identifying as culturally Deaf; the degree of hearing loss varied between participants. Two participants were profoundly deaf (did not use verbal speech and had little residual hearing), one respondent used a cochlear implant and could communicate verbally and also used American Sign Language, while the final participant was hard of hearing (could speak and read lips). All but one of the respondents were in high school at the time of study, each attending secondary programs for deaf and hard of hearing students (or taking a year

off), and were academically on track to graduate from their high school program in the coming years. Pseudonyms have been used in the place of the participants' names to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents.

3.8 Analysis of the Interviews

Interviews were transcribed by listening to (and watching) the video recordings. They were first read for key themes by identifying common structural, social and personal factors that impacted school-to-school transitions. Factors that were discussed most commonly by participants in their interviews, including schooling environment, family and peer influences, financial considerations, geographical restrictions, and involvement in the Deaf community, were identified as significant points of discussion. Interviews were then coded by identifying quotations that reflected each of the above factors, so as to systematically recognize commonalities and differences between each case study. By coding for key themes across interviews, I was able to reflect on our dialogue as objectively and methodically as possible.

I then visually outlined each participant's life course by depicting his or her educational and occupational trajectories and transitions. Further, I integrated the structural, social and personal factors (identified above) that shaped their pathways. In so doing, I could accurately identify similarities between the cases, but more importantly, could distinguish differences within transitions and the factors that shaped these variations.

3.9 Case Study Approach

Given the uniqueness of the participants and their stories (which were told in great detail) the case study approach was deemed most appropriate. The use of case

studies, which attempts to present a “holistic understanding of a problem, issue, or phenomenon,” allows each respondent to ‘stand on their own’ and significantly challenges traditional assertions of homogeneous life course experiences rooted in their disability alone (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2011: 256). Through the eyes of this study’s four interviewees, it is made clear that ‘deafness’ is experienced differently. Social factors (including structural, social and personal influences), craft the diverse trajectories of the interviewed youth. As case studies typically study a smaller sample, there is more opportunity to delve into the nuances of important life transitions and turning points.

Although generalization is not possible (or sought in this study), sociological analysis within *and* between cases is helpful in generating critical debate and inspiring future research in this area. The distinctiveness of each case brings to the forefront many important points of interest which can be further elaborated in future research.

CHAPTER IV – SETH’S STORY

Seth is eighteen years old and was born with degenerative hearing loss. According to his doctors, this hearing loss will continue to worsen as he grows older. Like most deaf and hard of hearing individuals, Seth was born to a hearing family. He did not learn to communicate using American Sign Language until high school and consequently, is able to proficiently read the lips of those to whom he is closest. He is also able to quickly learn to read the lips of new people he meets. He attended a mainstream hearing elementary school in his hometown and later moved away from his family to begin his high school studies at a school for deaf and hard of hearing students in Central Ontario. Now in the final year of his secondary studies, Seth hopes to study psychology at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., which offers programs bilingually in American Sign Language (ASL) and English.

When asked about his future, candid optimism, determination and excitement are evident in each word that Seth signs. It is as if he cannot share his ideas quickly enough to adequately convey what he believes his future will be. As Seth reflected upon his past with me, sharing the stories that have shaped him into the independent and forward-thinking person that he is today, it is evident that he now embraces challenges that face him as a result of his degenerative hearing loss *and* that he refuses to let them limit him in any part of his life. Notably, Seth’s enthusiastic and self-assured demeanour challenged many academic studies that have previously looked at deaf students and their plans for the future (PALS 2006; Scheetz 2012; Garberoglio et al. 2014). When asked about what makes him ‘different’, he explained to me that many of his deaf peers “are not very positive about education” and that he too, had not always had the confidence in himself that he does today. Discussing Seth’s past and hearing him speak about his ambitions, it became clear to me that there was no *one* thing that inspired Seth’s forward-reaching

character, but rather, each of his experiences together - his highs, his lows, and everything in between - made him into who he is today.

4.1 Family

Like many deaf children, Seth was born to a hearing family (Bat-Chava 1994; 2000; Scheetz 2012). Because his hearing loss is degenerative, he was able to learn to speak and to communicate with his family verbally. He has also developed a keen ability to read lips - "I'm a great lip-reader!" he shared enthusiastically. Seth pointed out that, while there are situations in which he has difficulty following conversations because too many people are talking at one time, he has no problem getting "them [his relatives] all to stop and ask them to speak one at a time please and they're respectful of that because they know I want to understand. There is nothing wrong with that." Seth's abilities to lip-read and to speak allowed him to avoid traditional communication barriers that make interactions in families with deaf members more difficult. Seth was not exposed to American Sign Language (ASL) until later in his life and only "knew a few signs" from a school program that he participated in during his early school years. According to Seth, there was no need to learn another language since, "I was speaking to my parents all the time so it never came in handy... and they know a little sign but rarely used it."

Seth and his brother (who is hearing) were raised in a southwestern Ontario town by their mother and father. Seth's father did not graduate from high school but has worked as a successful jeweller to support his family - once employing Seth's mother who attended college. Noting that his parents will be able to pay for the high costs associated with his university education in the years to come, it is evident that together,

they have been able to comfortably provide for Seth and his brother and continue to support their sons' educational ambitions.

For hearing families, “their limited knowledge and basic understanding of what it means to raise a child who is deaf can initially be viewed as a frightening and overwhelming undertaking” as parents face “an onslaught of decisions” about how best to work with their child’s hearing loss. With so many options, including considerations to be made about hearing aids, cochlear implants, schooling, and even language acquisition, it should come as no surprise that “the choices parents will make are as varied as the individuals who make them” (Scheetz 2012: 90; Bat-Chava 1994). While significant debate surrounds which choices are ‘better’ than others, especially in regards to schooling (Scheetz 2012), the point of this study is not to look at the value of the decisions made by Seth’s parents, but rather, to explore how his family has shaped the person that he has become.

4.2 Schooling: Hearing School

Seth’s parents elected to send him to a hearing school in their community, initially registering him in “a small program for deaf kids.” Low enrolment forced the closure of Seth’s early educational support programming when he started grade school, and while many of his peers decided to attend a school for deaf students after that, Seth’s parents decided to continue his attendance at the hearing school until he finished grade eight. Able to communicate verbally and to lip-read, there did not appear an immediate need for Seth to transfer schools and although it was recognized that he could face some challenges because of his hearing loss, Seth remembers that his parents did not want him

to attend a school for deaf students because “they always heard negative things about the school.”

Seth began grade one in a mainstream environment. He was quickly identified as a student that required extra support and was assigned to a class for disabled students early in the same school year. Although working in a ‘resource’ or ‘support’ classroom is not uncommon for students with learning differences (Scheetz 2012; van Gurp 2001), Seth remembers, he would “just kind of wand[er] around doing nothing...” and would rarely get “homework or anything.” His placement in this classroom, he believes, reflected his teachers’ “huge lack of motivation when it... [came] to help[ing] me” and prematurely cemented his position as ‘disabled’ in his academic community. “They didn’t really give me a chance. So I grew up being in that class instead of actually participating in a normal classroom setting every day,” he remembers. Seth recalled his parents, who were advocates of his success, having many tense conversations with his teachers, commonly wondering, “why not give him a chance...” - “he has potential,” but rarely gaining any ground.

Seth’s teachers used an FM System to communicate with him during lessons in his learning environment. FM systems can be used in classrooms to amplify and transmit spoken words through a microphone to a student’s personal receiving device (Warick 1997; Winzer 2005). While these accommodations do assist many hard of hearing students in a variety of classroom setups, they proved ineffective and failed to address Seth’s individual needs as a student, including his type of hearing loss which makes it more difficult for him to hear different frequencies. As a result, the FM system provided became obsolete as “mak[ing] things louder doesn’t help...” and did little to ease

communication between Seth and his teachers. Without a tool to effectively interact with his teachers, Seth “missed a lot of what the teacher said” and was forced to “try and to watch a lot [lip read].” Often unsure of his lessons, it was not long before Seth noticed that he was falling behind and began to feel increasingly embarrassed asking questions in class about what he believed he should already know.

Seth’s parents continued to advocate for him and to work with him at home on his schoolwork. Though they encouraged him to practice reading and writing with them, Seth’s grades became a significant concern as he moved from one grade to the next. Unable to follow many of his lessons and feeling increasingly disconnected from his teachers and peers, Seth shared that “I only had grade four math and English and my school marks were very, very low” when he started his grade eight year. Although his teachers appeared empathetic to the situation, Seth and his family were frequently reminded that his “deafness will never let him... catch up” to other students at his grade level.

For Seth, the same communication barriers and perpetual marginalization that seemed ever-present in the classroom were also evident within his peer group. The students that he had grown up with, he shares, “weren’t really nice and respectful to me...” and treated him like he “was different.” As a result, Seth never joined any teams or clubs and continued to feel detached from his school community.

Given his negative experiences in elementary school, Seth became increasingly worried about transitioning to secondary school. He admitted that by the time he was close to finishing elementary school, attending high school was a daunting prospect and had become his “biggest fear”.

4.3 Catalyst for Change

In grade seven, Seth met with a psychologist to discuss his grades and school experiences. This routine meeting would quickly turn into an interaction that Seth commonly refers to as a turning point when discussing his plans for the future. He recalled:

They interviewed me and tested me to see how good I was at certain things... like vocabulary and what not... and so they asked me all these questions and it made me feel uncomfortable and then she [the psychologist] was asking me to be 'realistic' and I said - what do you mean by that? And she told me to be honest and truthful and that's when I told her I wanted to go to university and they told me - no, you're going to the workplace. You're not going to post-secondary. You don't really have a future there. You can't do that. You're not capable. So that's what she meant by realistic... and every time she said that, it made me mad. So I said I want to know what it would be like to be in your shoes - how do you live your life everyday telling kids to be 'realistic'?

Being told to be 'realistic' or that he 'couldn't' struck a chord with Seth. Knowing that teachers at his school had similar attitudes and feeling isolated, Seth decided that a change was necessary. Although his parents were not advocates of Seth's attendance at a school for deaf students in the past, the recent transfer of a deaf peer to a deaf school made Seth - now a teenager - consider new possibilities.

Many of Seth's teachers had told him that deaf schools in Ontario had "all closed down" and tried to convince him that his current learning environment suited his needs most effectively. Looking on the Internet during the final months of elementary school after hearing about the other student's move, Seth came across an elementary school for deaf students located just a few hours from his hometown. He continued his search, eventually finding another school for deaf students that offered classes at all grade levels in central Ontario - this one, several hours away from his home. Attending this school would require Seth to move to a new city, without his family. A significant step in any

young person's life, Seth was apprehensive but believed that moving to a new school was his opportunity for change. Seth's mother was also hesitant to let her son leave home at such a young age but agreed that a new environment might suit Seth better.

4.4 Schooling: Deaf School

Seth moved into his school's residence the following September and began classes in programs tailored to those with hearing impairments. His new school offered classes in ASL; a method of communication in which Seth was not fluent when he started school. He says that the language was not difficult to pick up and that he learned signs by "socializing with people," especially when he was in residence.

It was not long before Seth was thriving in his new environment and communicating with teachers and peers without the same barriers that made simple conversations difficult at his old school. Without the stress of earlier limitations and with a renewed sense of engagement in his classes, Seth's marks began to improve and a new confidence was quick to follow. No longer did he have to work just to follow his lessons; instead he could focus simply on learning and absorbing information. Though there were few classes to choose from at his new school (a sentiment that seems to be shared by many deaf students who attend deaf schools in Ontario, see Rushowy 2014a.), Seth believes that the classes that he has taken (and done well in) will be instrumental in shaping his future.

In addition to his classroom successes, Seth capitalized on the opportunity to become more involved in his school community. Feeling more self-assured and more connected to his peers, he joined as many of the sports teams as he could. He was no longer worried that he would be "rejected or labelled" by his teammates, sharing that, "I

felt like I was part of the team, I made a difference, I had [an] impact on others... [That is] what I enjoyed the most.”

Although Seth is now a strong student, attaining his high school diploma will require an extra year of study. Entering high school five years ago at such an academic deficit has meant an uphill climb. Although he cited being ‘lazy’ with a laugh, as one of the reasons he will continue at his school for another year, the improvement in his marks and his school involvement have made him much more confident as he now prepares for his high school graduation.

Seth’s commitment to his school and his own success have not gone unnoticed by his teachers who quickly recognized his determination and positive attitude. Many of them have become important resources, continuing to be some of the individuals Seth looks up to most as he plans for the future and works hard to achieve the marks necessary to apply to university.

Such positive attention stands in stark contrast to the attitudes of his elementary school teachers whom he remembers, “didn’t treat...me fairly, comparing [me] to other kids.” In a mainstream environment, Seth was a deaf student seeking to ‘fit into’ a hearing community. At the school for deaf students, Seth became merely one of many. This in no way reflects homogeneity within the Deaf community but rather suggests that at the new school, Seth was no longer the student who ‘could not understand’ or who was strikingly unlike his peer group because of his hearing loss. Instead, teaching techniques suited Seth’s learning style (and his classmates’ too) and communicating with others was no longer a laboured process.

4.5 Developing a Deaf Identity

Seth emphasized his move to his deaf school as a significant transition in his life. After starting at the deaf school, Seth went from viewing himself as a hard of hearing person to understanding himself as a Deaf person; an important personal and cultural turning point for deaf individuals (Ladd 2003). In his hearing school, he continually felt left out and isolated from his peers, recognizing his difference from them. At his Deaf school, Seth was no longer ‘the deaf boy,’ but rather, one of many Deaf people. He explained that:

I used to think I was hard of hearing then changed to Deaf because I feel [like I] belong to the Deaf community... [I] now have a label, a culture, and friends that understand me as a whole.

For many Deaf students, specialized schools are:

A social haven where Deaf students can communicate freely...[are] environments where students can experience full participation in social and athletic events, share in each other’s successes and failures, and have contact with Deaf adult role models. Through these interactions individuals who are deaf begin to acknowledge their identity as a Deaf person, feelings of belonging are awakened or strengthened, and a sense of community is formed (Scheetz 2012: 212).

A renewed sense of belonging provided Seth the opportunity to better understand himself as a Deaf person and to find comfort in his identity. As a result, Seth’s experience at the school for hard of hearing and deaf students radically challenged that of his time spent in the mainstream environment. Embracing his new identity as a Deaf individual, Seth became part of the Deaf community, sharing not only a language but also a culture. His new commitment and involvement in his community helped to minimize the impact of Seth’s ‘deafness’ on his educational trajectory by diminishing the negative connotation commonly associated with his socially ascribed label and by allowing him to learn and interact in an environment where he was no longer the ‘outsider’

4.6 Looking To The Future: Post-Secondary and Career Plans

With the financial support of his parents, Seth intends to pursue his degree in psychology at Gallaudet University in Washington, DC. A six-year program with tuition costs averaging “\$40,000 a year” for Canadian students, the encouragement and aid of his parents does not go unnoticed by Seth who has also considered going to a university closer to home to offset some of the financial burden. Without a university for deaf students in Canada, Seth would need to attend a hearing school, which he revealed, would not be ideal and likely would ultimately lead to a transfer to Gallaudet.

Even though attending a deaf university will require Seth to move again - this time out of country, he believes the sacrifice to be worth the reward “because of the communication I’m able to socialize, I’m able to...we’re able to understand each other”... “They won’t reject me.” At Gallaudet, it is his hope to become a marriage counsellor for deaf couples or a psychologist that works with deaf and hard of hearing students, specializing in the affirmation of identities in Deaf and hearing communities. By finding his niche in the Deaf community, Seth will be able to work with other deaf individuals and to communicate using sign language at work - something that many deaf and hard of hearing people do not get the opportunity to do, as they are forced into jobs within predominantly hearing circles (Canadian Association of the Deaf 2012c).

When I asked Seth what inspired his career goal, he referred to the time he spent with his psychologist in grade seven. According to Seth,

Um, I always knew from when I was little that I wanted to be a psychologist. It all started when I was in grade seven and I met a psychologist... and this person in my opinion was a little crazy... [She said]... You’re not going to post-secondary. You don’t really have a future there. You can’t do that. You’re not capable.

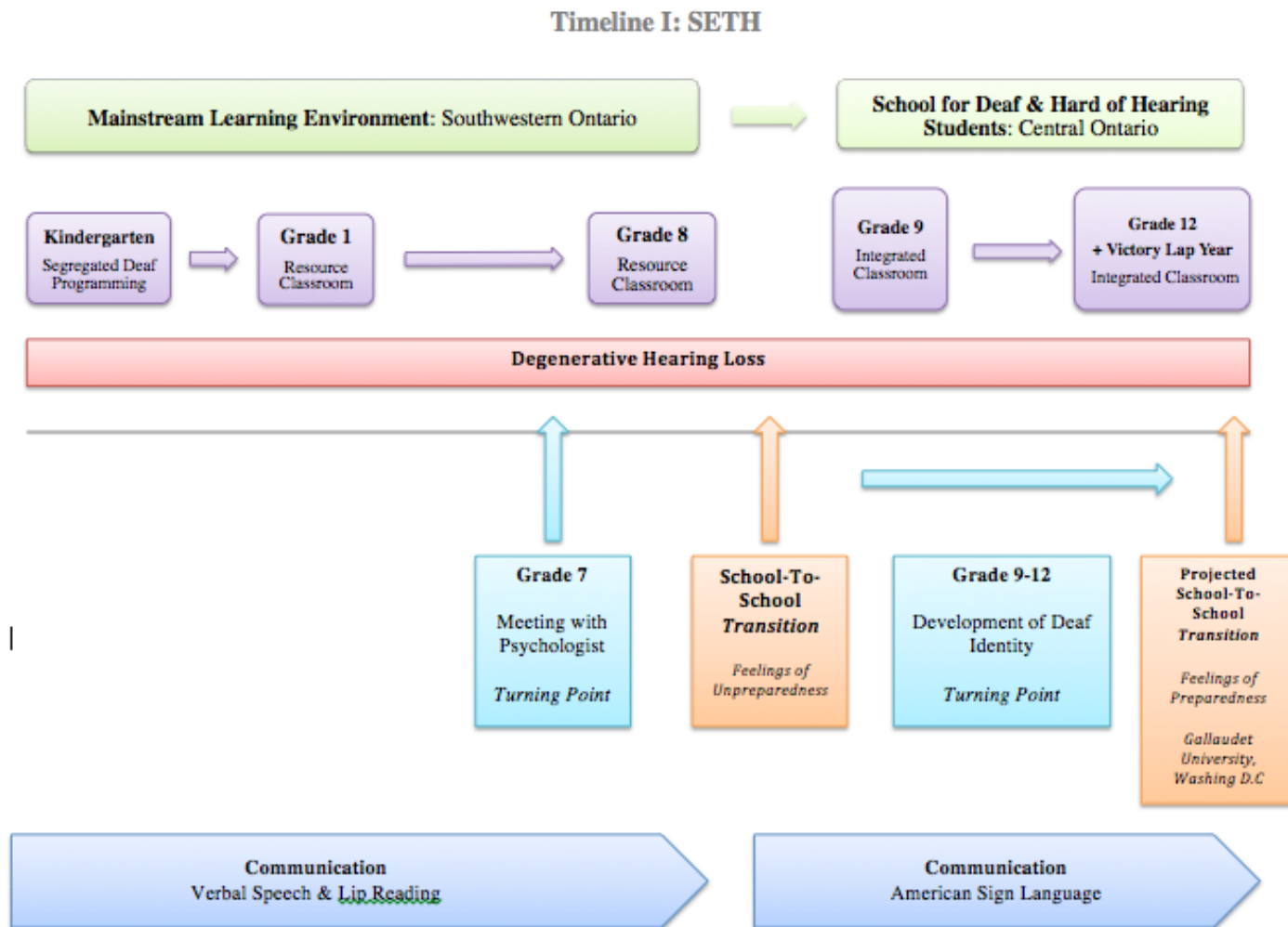
To prepare himself for his studies, Seth added that he has been reading *Psychology Today*, a popular online forum with articles addressing psychological topics. Seth summarized that he had been reading it “since grade seven... it’s my favourite. That really helps me every day read you know, five, six, seven, eight, articles every day and by the time I’m in the course... I’m already going to have all that information. I’ll be prepared.” Reading articles in his field will not only give Seth a strong foundation to expand upon when he begins university but it also gives him an opportunity to read in English and to continue improving his writing skills; both of which are abilities that he believes will be essential as he completes his degree and eventually starts work as a psychologist.

4.7 Considering Social Forces: The Development of Self-Efficacy

Seth’s story suggests the influence of different intersecting social forces, especially different dimensions of social class that shape the development of his self-efficacy and post-secondary education plans. For example, sociological research has shown that parents with lower levels of formal education (like Seth’s parents) tend to be less effective in how they intervene in their children’s schooling success (Lareau 2003). In Seth’s case, this is complicated by his deafness. Seth’s parents (who are both hearing) have advocated strongly on his behalf during his primary education. That these early interventions did not help Seth can potentially be explained by the fact that, both his parents and his teachers lack the cultural capital and knowledge of deafness necessary to fully understand and support him as a deaf person. Still, it could be argued that upon reaching a turning point in his schooling (i.e. the meeting with the psychologist), their stable financial position and their support of Seth’s educational ambitions, enabled him to

attend a school for deaf and hard of hearings students and to consider studying at Gallaudet University. Social class is a factor in Seth's development that has been both limiting (his parent's lack of relevant cultural capital) and enabling (their relatively high levels of economic capital). Embracing his Deaf identity gave Seth the opportunity to immerse himself in Deaf culture, providing him with more opportunities to develop forms of social and cultural capital that facilitate the development of self-efficacy and ambitious post-secondary plans, albeit within the Deaf community.

4.8 Figure 1. Seth's Timeline



CHAPTER V: JILL'S STORY

Jill is nineteen years old and has been deaf since birth. She has one hearing sister and both of her parents are deaf, which facilitated communication using American Sign Language (ASL) early in her life. She has attended two schools for deaf students in Ontario communities that are each home to significant deaf populations, and has for most of her life, been an integrated member of the Deaf community. Jill is an accomplished athlete who chose to attend a mainstream public high school to take classes (half-days) to improve her hockey skills and to take more specialized courses, in addition to those offered at the deaf school. She then moved to another school for deaf individuals to complete her high school graduation requirements. Jill is a strong academic who intends to pursue a career as an electrician. She recently graduated from high school and was awarded a scholarship to aid her post-secondary pursuits. She is currently taking a year away from school but plans to meet her girlfriend in Newfoundland to attend a hearing-based college program to acquire the training necessary to become licensed in her field next year.

The positive influence that Jill has on those she meets is impossible to overlook. Optimistic and forward-thinking, Jill's motivation to achieve her own academic, professional and personal goals is obvious, but so too is her longstanding commitment to her community and those who are most important to her. Speaking with Jill challenged many commonly held conceptions of deafness and made clear the true diversity of those with hearing loss. She shared with me her personal experiences and plans for the future and also reflected on her peers and community. She highlighted the barriers that many have faced but more frequently emphasized the continued resilience and motivation characteristic of her deaf peers. Much like Seth, it became evident that there was no *one* thing that predicted Jill's successes, challenges, or her plans for the future. Rather, by

incorporating the relationships, the events, and the significant influences that have shaped the transitions, turning points, and trajectories across her life course, the underlying traits that have made Jill who she is are the result of an intersection of continued sources of support and a multitude of other social factors.

5.1 Family

A self-proclaimed “Mamma’s girl,” Jill is very close with her family. Her parents are both deaf and she has an older sister who “is fluent in ASL.” Jill’s parents divorced when she was four but have been an unwavering source of support to their daughters. Both her mother and father continue to live in the same Ontario town as Jill and her sister and have been actively involved in their lives.

According to Jill, her family has always had “really high expectations for me.” She summarized that her parents “talk to me about my future and talk to me about my marks ... getting into college and make me think.” Jill shared that her father “went straight to the workplace” after completing high school and now works at a local factory that manufactures car parts. Her mother had aspirations of attending Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. Jill recalled that her Mom elected instead to stay in Canada to attend a college in Ontario that had a prominent reputation for working with deaf students interested in a variety of programs. Shortly after beginning her studies, she became pregnant and left school, later choosing to work “as an EA [educational assistant]” at the same school Jill would attend for most of her academic career. As a result, if Jill completes college as planned, she will be the first in her immediate family to successfully graduate from a post-secondary program.

Jill was quick to point out that her family often reminds her of the value of education. Reiterating that her “mom was supposed to go to Gallaudet but she didn’t have the money to do so,” she explained that she [her mother], “doesn’t want the same for me, she wants the best for me.” Together, Jill’s parents have been able to comfortably support both of their children financially. In addition to financing her high-level athletic pursuits, Jill shared that her parents have paid “\$25 every month since I was small for my college.” These savings will be used to fund Jill’s post-secondary education and to support her as she transitions into adulthood. Thinking ahead to when she will move away from home, Jill also mentioned, “if I needed money, my family will, you know... they’ll pay for me to come visit.” Although her parents’ fiscal support is not limitless, it does provide a degree of flexibility that makes it possible for Jill to consider different educational options that may not have otherwise been viable.

Jill also reported that her parents have been active members of the Deaf community in their area for many years. Her mother and father have advocated her participation in this tight-knit group since she was young. Jill emphasized that being involved was something that “I’ve kind of learned from them,” and is quick to point to the many ways that her community has been supportive of her as she has grown up. She described that the “Deaf community is so important to me because they have been in my life since I was a baby. I... [wouldn’t] be who I am right now if there is no Deaf community. I probably... [wouldn’t] be signing.”

As members of the Deaf community, Jill’s significant hearing loss was not something that made her birth any more challenging to her parents who communicated using ASL and were part of a cohesive and supportive social network. Like Seth, more

often than not, children with hearing impairments are actually born to parents who are *not* deaf (Bat-Chava 1994; 2000; Scheetz 2012). In many cases, these early differences create challenges and obvious communication barriers between parents and their children. Many work to learn to communicate using sign language and then to pass these skills on to their child but it is widely held that such efforts are not always entirely successful. For a small number of children - as in Jill's case - patterns of familial hearing loss see babies born to families where one or both parents (and other immediate and distant relatives) also have some degree of hearing loss. In these instances, many of the challenges facing hearing parents are simply non-existent and having a deaf baby is no different than a hearing couple welcoming a hearing child (Jambor & Elliott 2005; Bat-Chava 1994; 2000; Scheetz 2012; Winzer 2005). Jill's parents' fluency in sign language fostered her language acquisition in ASL, just as a hearing child would acquire verbal language through communication with their hearing parents, early in her life (Jambor & Elliott 2005; Bat-Chava 1994; 2000; Winzer 2005).

It is suggested that deaf parents are more successful in transmitting sign language to their deaf offspring than hearing parents as they typically "sign more slowly and modify the location of the sign so that the child can see it more easily, and use more repetitions" (Winzer 2005: 329). These early stages of development are critical in the later lives of deaf children, many of whom acquire sign language more slowly (if at all) before starting school. Jill made note of the differences that she noticed between her peers who have deaf parents to those who have hearing parents:

Learn sign language later... they haven't acquired language yet so their education is a little bit delayed... if kids have deaf parents and they're deaf themselves then their intelligence level tends to be higher.

Without the communication barriers and uncertainties that often accompany deafness in a hearing family, Jill's parents were able to facilitate an environment where she could acquire language efficiently and effectively. Being fluent in the language of instruction at her specialized school prior to her entry created the foundation for a more favourable academic trajectory than many of her peers who were not exposed to this means of communication as early in their lives.

5.2 Schooling: Deaf School

Jill attended a small school for deaf students in her hometown for most of her schooling. She gushed, "I loved it. They're like family to me." Jill added further that she was fortunate to have "teachers [who I] had a bond with... because most of them have been there since I was really small." Her favourite classes were gym and math. She enthusiastically emphasized her success in each and trumpeted the fact she is a "math freak!"

Moreover, teachers at Jill's school had to be fluent in ASL which she noted, removed the need for "that kind of middle person to communicate [an interpreter]." With instruction in her first language, Jill was not forced to contend with the communication barriers that often plague deaf students who attend schools with hearing teachers and peers who do not know sign language (van Gurp 2001; Jambor & Elliott 2005; Scheetz 2012). Instead, she was able to capitalize on engaging with her lessons and developing her understanding of what was being taught. Fortunate to start her education in an environment where she was surrounded by others who were hearing impaired *and* communicated using sign language, Jill was not automatically labelled as 'different' or 'unable' because of her hearing loss.

Jill also recognized the advantage of her accessible environment, specifically pointing to the benefits of being in the smaller classes that were typical of her school. Not only did such an environment help her to develop strong and supportive relationships with teachers, it was also opportune for students to “modify their curriculum to accommodate each student’s level” especially for the many students who, Jill pointed out, were “not at the place they’re supposed to be.”

Apart from her success in the classroom, Jill participated in high-level sports (particularly hockey) in her community and continued her involvement in her school as well. “I was involved in student parliament, the yearbook, um, prom committee... um, you know, general committees, I like to be involved” she added, again citing her parents’ commitment to community involvement as her motivation.

In her final years of high school, Jill explained that the encouragement of her teachers and guidance from her school community was instrumental in fostering her confidence and preparedness for the future. When I asked her about the supports that were in place to guide her through her senior grades, Jill was quick to point out that there was always a guidance counsellor or someone with whom she felt comfortable discussing her future at her school. She remembered several individuals reassuring her by telling her to “come and talk to them... feel free. Don’t be afraid.” She also found the stability characteristic of her long-time teachers helpful. Even after she decided to move to another school to finish her final high school semester (to be discussed later), Jill felt comfortable reaching back to seek the trusted advice of those she was confident had her best interests in mind.

Jill's teachers collaborated with her to plan and prepare for her future throughout her academic career. Jill revealed that her teachers motivated her to take relevant classes at the high school level that would be helpful in developing some of the specialized skills she may require post-graduation, "like grade twelve math... math wasn't a requirement in school for credits but for my program it was so she [her guidance counsellor] pushed me to take it." Jill also noted that her instructors were sensitive to her interests and made sure to share the many educational routes that she could take to achieve her goals. Rather than focusing on attendance at North America's only university for deaf students (Gallaudet University in Washington D.C.), Jill's teachers made sure to explain the potential of college programs and apprenticeships (including those in hearing environments) which better suited Jill's plans of becoming licenced as an electrician.

5.3 Schooling: Transitions

In addition to attending deaf programs through high school, Jill also capitalized on the opportunity to enrol in courses at a local hearing public secondary school. She shared that she worked with an interpreter whom she knew well and who was able to support her in her new environment. Jill reflected on her relationship with her interpreter, emphasizing that she "signed very clearly... she's been an interpreter for many years so I was lucky that she was the one who was my interpreter."

Jill attended her hearing school for half days during her grade eleven year. This school provided unique opportunities for Jill to participate in specialized courses, including an athletic development course, which she cited as "what made me want to go to the hearing school." Interestingly, Jill shared that participating in her sports class "was no problem because I can follow what the others are doing."

Jill also enrolled in courses that were predominantly classroom based. In this environment, the communication barriers that made learning difficult for Seth [discussed in the previous chapter] challenged Jill's success in a similar manner. According to Jill, communication in the traditional classroom proved particularly difficult on occasion, especially when her interpreter could not attend. She said that:

Sometimes the interpreter wasn't able to attend so I had to kind of figure out how to communicate with the teacher on my own but the teacher can't really give me all his focus because of the other students in the class so that was challenging sometimes... I had to wait but I didn't get my work done.

Further, when asked what it was like working and socializing with her peers, she revealed that:

They would kind of leave me out and be unsure of who I was, but as they g[ot] to know me then, then... it would be different but they judged me by, you know... judge a book by its cover kind of thing.

Although these types of continued challenges might deter some students from stepping out of their comfort zones, Jill made sure to emphasize the importance of the time that she spent in a hearing-learning environment. Jill expressed that beyond the lessons learned in the classroom, attending a hearing school - even just for a few courses - "was a good idea." She maintained that, "it gave me the opportunity to learn what the hearing world was like. I liked the experience of staying in the hearing world all morning to prepare myself for my future if I am surrounded by hearing people every day."

As highlighted above, the continued support of teachers and other school staff at her school for deaf students, proved important to Jill but so too were the bonds that she shared with her peers. Their influence was felt most in Jill's final high school year, as many of them had graduated from their program and she was left behind to complete her own graduation requirements [now, entirely at her deaf school]. Jill recalled that, "from

elementary school to grade eleven, I always had good marks” but “when my friends graduated ... I started to lose motivation because there was no challenge for me at all.” “I hang out with older people... not really my age group. I find that they’re not really mature or that same intelligence level.” As a result, “my grades dropped because everything was too easy and I was going through a depression state that time. I just needed to get out of [my town]... it was the town that put me down because of old friends around me who knew too much about me.” Jill’s close relationship and interconnectedness to her peer group is clear. The absence of these influential individuals in Jill’s life led to feelings of isolation and disconnection from her school community and social network, eventually affecting her academic performance and perseverance.

Required to take some extra time to complete her high school diploma, Jill elected to transfer to another school for deaf students outside of her hometown. She said that the move was made easier because of her “girlfriend... [who was] attending [the school] and a lot of my friends who supported me a lot also attend [the school].” Jill commented that the move brought “my motivation back up again in order to have a good end to my grade twelve year.”

When asked more about her move to her new school, she was quick to point out that “education is more challenging there because there is a lot of students who love to be challenged academically. I moved there so I can have a good ending to my last year.” Jill’s move to this more tailored educational environment proved fruitful as she enthusiastically declared that, “ it was a good end with amazing grades. I got 84% in chemistry, 88% in co-operative placement and 92% in wood shop class.”

Although her graduation was delayed, Jill successfully completed her high school diploma graduation requirements in 2014 - after just one semester at her new school. With a renewed sense of confidence, optimism, and the continued support of family and friends, Jill's plans for the future have begun to take shape and her opportunities appear plentiful.

5.4 Looking To The Future: Post-Secondary and Career Plans

Jill has not shied away from exploring different career options throughout her life. She explained to me that she wanted to become a teacher when she was younger. Ideally, this position would allow her to instruct in one of the three Ontario schools that specialize in teaching deaf students - much like her mother has done for most of her working life. Here, she would be able to work within the Deaf community and would be able to continue to communicate with her students using sign language. In 2012, the release of the *Drummond Report*, which called for the closure of two of the three schools for deaf students in Ontario, put into perspective Jill's future as a teacher (Drummond for the Ontario Ministry of Finance 2012). She commented that:

I used to want to be a teacher but the reason that... [my] school actually almost closed last year and that scared me in terms of my future and I wasn't sure if the job as a teacher would be reliable because I don't want to become a teacher and then the school closes and then at an older age, go back to post-secondary ... I want a permanent reliable job, so I didn't really know what I wanted to do but I knew I wanted something in the trades because I like doing things that are hands on.

Although teaching was a long-time goal of Jill's, her awareness of the broader social influences that may make opportunities fewer by the time she is prepared to enter her field, inspired her to work with her guidance counsellors and teachers to ignite a new passion. Jill shared that she knew that she enjoyed working with her hands but that she

was unsure of which trade would best suit her [if any at all!]. To learn more about different fields, Jill decided to participate in her school's "co-op" program - a popular work-based opportunity for high school students to gain academic credit and trade-specific experience in a field that interests them (Ontario Ministry of Education 2015). In total, Jill participated in four different placements. Her two placements in the electrical field were particularly meaningful and are where she "found that that was my passion... that was what I was going to do." She enthusiastically recalled that she "loved it" and benefited immensely from working with both deaf and hearing electricians during her placements.

As summarized above, Jill had completed high school requirements and had plans of pursuing her electrical training in Eastern Canada at a hearing college. Although continuing her education in a deaf environment might have seemed appealing, Jill talked at length about a recent trip that she had taken to Gallaudet University. She explained that:

I went to visit last November... and I asked if they had electrician courses and they said no but I could do dual credits with a hearing university so it's almost the same thing so why would I go to uh, a university where I had to pay the cost of an international student when I can stay here for a much better rate?

According to Jill, her concerns with programming and the high costs of tuition are common amongst deaf Canadians. Although instruction in sign language was appealing to Jill and her peers, high tuition dues (\$40,000 annually) limited program availability, and the thought of leaving her close-knit community, proved undesirable. Jill further detailed that:

Before I wanted to go to Gallaudet because most of my friends would go there... but then many of them backed out and that kind of made me doubt if I wanted to do it or not because um, they're the ones I want to keep close to in my future.

After much consideration, Jill described that she decided to pursue her diploma at a hearing college, moving to Newfoundland with her partner who would also pursue her post-secondary education there. She revealed that her planned move from home did worry her but that she was excited to be with her partner and to reunite with old friends that she “met ... a long time ago.”

On considering the post-secondary plans of her peers, Jill explained that looking beyond attendance at Gallaudet can be difficult for many deaf students. It is one of the only post-secondary schools in North America that, like the elementary and high school programs for deaf students in Ontario, offers instruction in sign language. For many deaf students then, attendance at Canadian institutions is considered more favourable. Jill summarized that many of her peers have opted to:

Either go to George Brown College or... Sheridan College... or Loyalist [Ontario Colleges]... those are the three that have um, deaf individuals and there are a few at the other colleges as well but those are where the biggest populations are.

These three schools, all located in Central Ontario are “in the meca of the Deaf community,” and are appealing to students who choose to attend schools with predominantly hearing populations but wish to stay close to home and the Deaf community.

Though Jill advocates that separate learning environments are ideal for deaf students because “deaf school is great because they can modify the curriculum to accommodate each student’s level of “conversation is direct,” she welcomes the opportunity to attend a college with hearing peers and faculty. Jill noted that she anticipates experiencing challenges in her new hearing-dominated setting, including:

Relationships with um, professors... um, I don't know if they will have ever had a deaf student in their class before so they may be unsure what to do at first, um, and you know, forget that I'm there or I don't know... that's a possibility.

She also described the notable struggles she expected to face finding an interpreter that is qualified and with whom she feels comfortable in another province, adding that:

Interpreters from Newfoundland and the Deaf community... they are not the same as in Ontario so I'm not sure that they have the same amount of practice or a lot of experience so maybe um, the signs might be different than here. So at first, I think there will be, kind of, an uncomfortable period.

Asked how she plans to overcome the obstacles that she discussed, Jill shared that "I just have to be patient and get through those barriers until I finally achieve me dream." Jill emphasized the importance of her social network in maintaining her positive attitude and proactively dealing with difficulties experienced at school. She described that:

When they, um, try to bring negativity to me, I'm just going to turn to the people that support me and give me those positive feelings to feel better and just know that I can do it and forget about those that give me negative attitude.

5.5 Looking To The Future: Revisiting Best-Laid Plans

After thinking more about schools to attend and where to live, the costs associated with living out of province and starting her adult life were top of mind. Jill went on to illustrate how her plans for the future have changed over time. She again highlighted the contributions of her social network, and referred to the accumulated savings her parents would contribute to her education that were discussed earlier in this chapter. As she continued to consider her education, she said that, "I want to graduate and you know, pay whatever I need to for a short period of time and then be done with it and start my life without debt...without owing something." Additionally, she reported that her studies will

be further compensated by a scholarship that she was recently awarded to help offset the financial strains of post-secondary education.

Beyond the continued support of those closest to her, college is a welcomed opportunity for Jill to be independent and to take control of her learning and her life. She explained that, “high school, um, they’re there to help you... but in college, I expect that there isn’t going to be help there.”

With these thoughts in mind, Jill shared that she had changed her plans to move out East to attend school and would instead enrol in an Ontario college beginning next year. She explained that she had planned to live with her girlfriend in Newfoundland but that her girlfriend had had difficulty finding a program that suited her academic goals there. Jill still plans to pursue her diploma and hopes to one day become a successful electrician.

5.6 Sharing In Deaf Identity

Throughout our interview, Jill commonly referenced her connection to the Deaf community and her identification as a Deaf person. According to Higgins who explored deafness sociologically more than three decades ago (1980), membership in the Deaf community is based on “ (1) *identification* with the deaf world, (2) *shared experiences* of being hearing impaired, and (3) *participation* in the community’s activities” (Higgins 1979: 6). Deafness alone does not guarantee association with the Deaf community. Instead, is it based on an unwavering self-identification as a Deaf individual and the reciprocal bond between members. Higgins describes such social solidarity as, “not merely a symbolic community of hearing-impaired people who share similar experiences.

It is also created through marriages, friendships, acquaintances, parties, clubs, religious organizations, and published materials” (Higgins 1980: 47).

As discussed earlier, Jill’s participation in the Deaf community echoes her parents’ continuing involvement. Like any social group, the Deaf community is diverse and people experience their involvement in the community in different ways. Some may be very involved and others, not as much. Entire families, like Jill’s, may become members or individuals may associate independently. How one defines their affiliation in the Deaf community can be fluid over their lives but the solidarity between members and the collectivity of experiences remain constant (Higgins 1980). Jill pointed out to me that the Deaf community is instrumental in sustaining the first language of many deaf Canadians - American Sign Language (ASL). She said that the “Deaf community keeps our language strong and alive” and that without them, “I probably... [would] not be signing.” Moreover, the Deaf community provides support to those, who in the dominant ‘hearing’ world, are often reminded of their difference. By holding events, opportunities for companionship, and cultural education, the Deaf community brings members together, creating a sense of solidarity. Most recently, the local Deaf community afforded Jill a unique opportunity when they decided to put her name forward to meet a well-known deaf individual who was visiting their town. She recalls, “My name was nominated in order to give him a medal ... So it was a really cool experience that the town picked me. They only pick six out of you know ... 48,000 people ... six of us were chosen and I was the only deaf individual.”

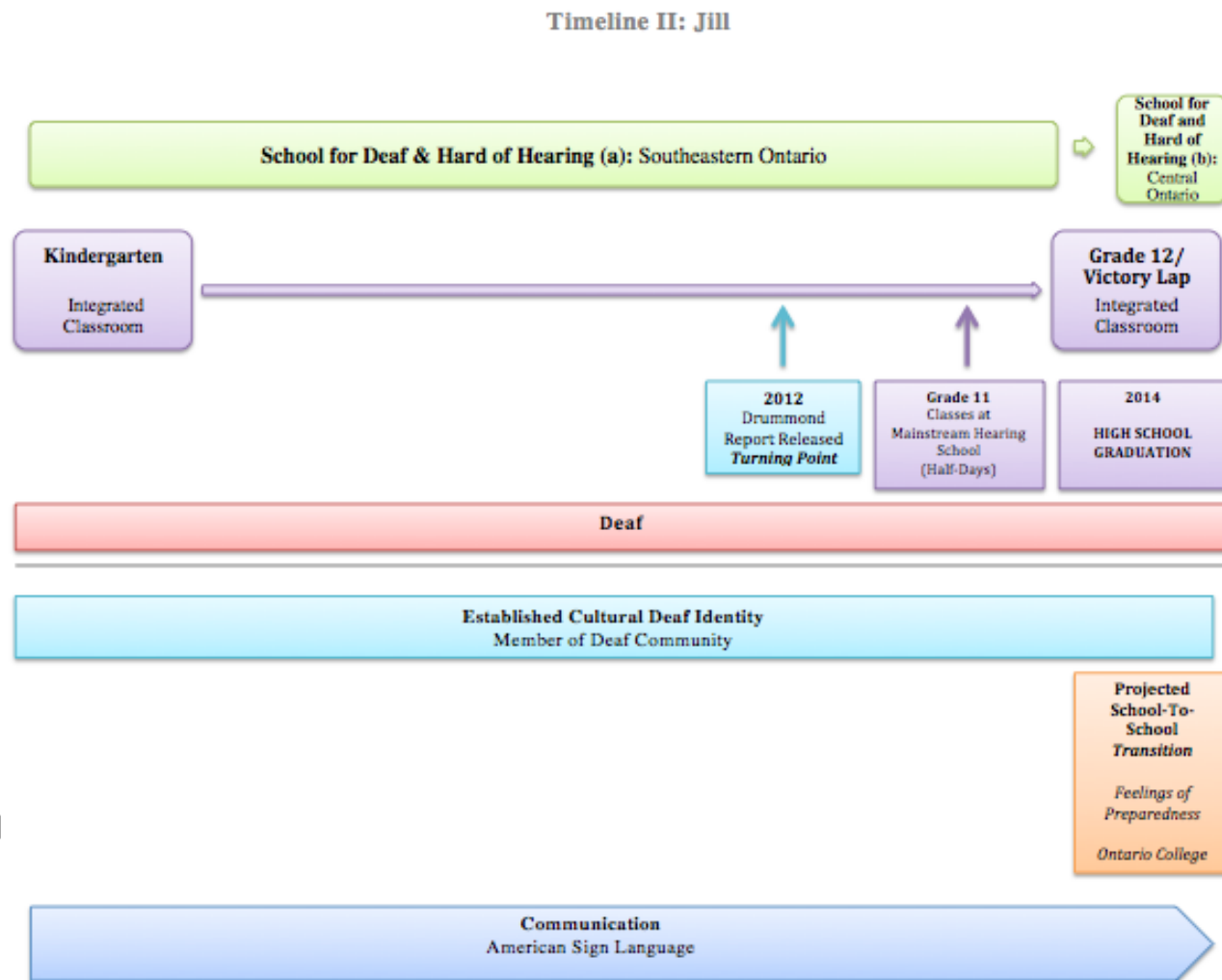
Jill has cultivated her identity as a Deaf person throughout her life as she shared; her community has been part of “my life since I was baby.” Beyond her familial ties, by

attending a school for deaf students, Jill was fortunate to be further immersed in Deaf culture outside of her family's home. These institutions are understood within the Deaf community as "the locus of sign language and Deaf culture" (Scheetz 2012: 210; van Gurp 2001; Jambor & Elliott 2005; Bat-Chava 2000). Here, Jill could further develop her social network and generate support from those who share similar experiences based on their hearing impairment.

5.7 Considering Social Forces: The Development of Self-Efficacy

Cultural and social capital are essential to understanding Jill's development of self-efficacy. Her parents have relatively high levels of cultural capital, both in terms of their own attitudes toward educational achievement, but also within the Deaf community. Consequently, they have been actively involved in Jill's education and in the Deaf community. Jill's strong connection to the Deaf community could be interpreted as the type of concerted cultivation Lareau (2003) has described as instrumental to the development of what I call self-efficacy in this thesis; frequent opportunities to affirm mastery are central to the maturation and confirmation of perceptions of self-efficacy (Bandura 1977). Furthermore, being surrounded by supportive teachers and peers creates the type of social capital that is instrumental in the development of self-efficacy, while her parents' stable economic capital makes post-secondary education financially possible.

5.8 Figure 2: Jill's Timeline



CHAPTER VI – TAYLOR’S STORY

Taylor is a profoundly deaf eighteen-year old. Born into a deaf family, both of Taylor’s parents communicate with her using American Sign Language (ASL). Taylor and her brother (who is also deaf) have attended a school for deaf students throughout their elementary and secondary studies, lodging at the student residence when they are on campus. Inspired by a close family friend who works as a nurse (and interestingly, was instrumental in saving her life as a baby), Taylor hopes to pursue a university degree and to one day work as a nurse. Throughout her life, Taylor has been mindful of her ultimate career goal and worked diligently to ensure her success. Concerned that her high school classes have failed to effectively challenge her, Taylor plans to pursue an English upgrade program at a local college before applying to complete her degree at a nearby university. Notably, while Taylor appreciates the benefits of attending a deaf school, she also sees value in learning in hearing environments. Accordingly, it is her plan to enrol at a mainstream [hearing] Canadian post-secondary institution to pursue her degree, instead of travelling to the United States to attend Gallaudet University (Washington, D.C.).

The things that inspire us come in all different shapes and sizes. For Taylor, her greatest inspiration has come in the form of a close friend’s mother (she refers to as an aunt) who changed her life long before she could even sign ‘thank you.’ Taylor summarizes, “when I was born, she [her aunt] saved my life so um, I would like to do what she does and save other babies.” Having once enjoyed “play[ing] with like Band-Aids and put[ting] them on people... pretend[ing] they were hurt...” as a little girl, Taylor now works toward her ultimate goal of saving new lives herself – challenging each of the pessimistic social attitudes, communication barriers, and academic obstacles impeding her way.

The stories that she shared reveal the strong influence of her family, her schools, and her unique relationships with both deaf and hearing peers, on her ability to look forward and her understanding of herself. Now eighteen and preparing to graduate from high school, Taylor's goals are being realized and the hard work is just beginning.

6.1 Family

Born to deaf parents - like Jill who was discussed in the previous chapter - Taylor was exposed to American Sign Language (ASL) and the Deaf community early in her life. Her parents (who are now separated) welcomed Taylor, without the worry of communication barriers that can be a problem for hearing parents of deaf children (Bat-Chava 2000; Obrzut et al. 1999; Jambor & Elliott 2005). Beyond the eased acquisition of language, both of Taylor's parents attended an Ontario school for deaf students, experiencing first-hand the benefits of this specialized learning environment and Deaf culture. Although she first attended a mainstream school through kindergarten, her family decided that both Taylor and her brother (who is also deaf) would attend the same school for deaf and hard of hearing Ontarians at which their parents studied and from which they ultimately graduated.

Taylor revealed that she is now closest with her Mom but shares that both of her parents have been supportive of her academic ambitions. She emphasized that they have always encouraged her to pursue post-secondary education "since I was little... all the way up." Both college graduates themselves, Taylor's mother works as a personal support worker (PSW) and her father holds an AZ drivers license [truck driving license]. Together, they have "helped [her] with [her] homework" throughout elementary and high

school, and as Taylor explained, “support[ed] what I want and what I wish for my future.”

Since the beginning of high school, Taylor has lived in the student residence on campus (with her brother). She shared that she was fortunate to have other family members live close by throughout her time at school (her aunt, uncle and cousins) but that she did miss being with her family. Taylor went on to explain that she would be transferring to a hearing high school to complete her high school studies. Though her parents saw obvious benefit to her involvement in programming for deaf students early in her life, Taylor reported that they have been supportive of her decision to move to a new school and have expressed understanding of her choice to pursue attendance at a hearing post-secondary program when she finishes high school [to be discussed below].

As she considered her plans for the future, Taylor noted that her parents had offered to support her financially as she looks ahead to pursuing her post-secondary education. She shared that, “my parents offered to help but I told them no. I said I wanted to do it on my own.” To help save for university, Taylor has found “ways to get the money that I need in order to attend school” including working at a local pizza restaurant.

Moreover, Taylor stressed that her family’s influence has been felt especially in their continued optimism and unwavering confidence in her abilities. She reasoned that:

I have a good family who exposes me... and... had... role models to look up to and I know that if I have a positive attitude then I will have more opportunities in the future.

According to Taylor, this continued support has been instrumental in fostering her optimism for what is possible for her life. She suggested that many of her deaf peers may feel unmotivated or even unable to pursue higher education without a similar support

system, explaining that “maybe they don’t have parents who have exposed them to the world or communicated with them so they think that they are not able to [go to college or university].”

It is evident that the initial optimism and encouragement offered by Taylor’s family has motivated her independence and inspired her ability to be able to make decisions that are reflective of her abilities and her confidence. Continued reassurance provided Taylor with opportunities to be successful (i.e. academically) and, further affirmed her perceived abilities by celebrating her achievements and supporting her challenges. As a result, Taylor has become a self-assured young person who is able to look past the socially limiting attitudes associated with ‘disability’ and to plan for a dynamic and rewarding future that may not otherwise have been possible.

6.2 Schooling: Deaf and Mainstream Environments

Touched upon briefly earlier, Taylor began school in a hearing environment at a local public school. After kindergarten, her parents decided to move her to the school for deaf and hard of hearing individuals that they had both attended as children. Taylor and her brother have both been students at the same school in Eastern Ontario for most of their formative years, living in residence on campus to continue their attendance since 2011.

Though living away from home as a teenager has been difficult for Taylor, she has found continued comfort in the fact that her brother, aunt, uncle, and cousins live close by. She elaborated:

My brother lives in residence as well and my aunt, uncle, and cousins... um, my aunt and uncle are staff [at the school]... um, and my cousins go to school there as well but they don’t live in residence.

In addition to spending time with her family that lives close to her school, Taylor added that being involved in her school community has been helpful. She explained that she also participated in “student parliament... a lot of sports, the graduation committee... I’m in a lot of committees at school both in and outside... within the community.” Moreover, living in residence has provided a unique opportunity to spend time with her deaf peers. Taylor shared that though she loves spending time at home, “I love the residence for the social aspect.”

Fluid communication in ASL has been an instrumental component of the community-like atmosphere that Taylor described. Taylor clarified that she “liked the ASL conversational environment” - being able to talk freely with her peers and to learn from teachers who also spoke sign language provided accessibility and instruction free from language barriers characteristic of hearing dominated environments. Moreover, the long history that her school had of sharing Deaf culture with students (like her parents) was meaningful to her and helped her to find her own place in her community.

Though Taylor shared with me many of the benefits of attending a school for deaf students, she did not shy away from being critical of her experience. She aptly described her experience as being “50/50.” When asked about her preparedness for beginning her post-secondary studies next year, she seemed to be most sensitive to the types of classes that were available to her as a senior and the level of instruction that they offered. She recalled that:

Sometimes, um, I find classes too easy for me and uh, the teacher kind of depends on me to help other students or um, I am kind of just waiting for others to catch up so I don’t find it challenging.

During her most recent semester, Taylor described that, “I am not doing well at school. It’s getting bored. This year I got not good marks because I am not interest[ed] in any courses. They didn't provide courses ... I want.” She added, “I am struggling with work and I find that, you know, that maybe other students aren’t focusing as much as I am and so they are distracting me.” Reflecting on her senior year and her plans for the future, Taylor suggested, “If they [her classes] were more challenging then I think they would be more beneficial” and would more effectively engage students in programming.

Taylor also told me about the supports that her school had in place to help her plan for her future. She explained that guidance counsellors were available to provide “general information about what the options are ... they see what you want and then, um, take the discussion from there.” These supports have helped her to focus her studies and to consider which post-secondary options will best help her to achieve her goals.

In making plans for her future, Taylor recently decided to transfer to a mainstream school to pursue more advanced courses that will prepare her to transition into post-secondary education. She clarified, “my school didn't have a lot of courses that [are]... required... I need to take it for my future. That [is the] reason why I am starting at a hearing school.” Taylor further rationalized that though “deaf people might prefer to have an ASL environment,” she prefers “mainstream [environments] with an interpreter” and that she anticipates that attendance at a hearing school will improve the English skills necessary to succeed in college or university. Taylor expects that she will be taking an extra year of study to complete her high school diploma.

6.3 Looking To The Future: Post-Secondary and Career Plans

Taylor recalled the many hours that she spent as a little girl playing with Band-Aids and helping to ‘fix’ injured people around her. With a chuckle, she went on to illuminate her hope that her once imaginary play would one day become her reality.

Taylor was quick to provide me with a detailed summary of her professional goals and just how she was going to achieve them. She explained:

So I plan to go to George Brown College for the upgrade program, upgrade my English skills and then take ECE [Early Childhood Education] and then go to university and major in labour and delivery nursing.

Taylor clarified that the English Upgrade program is offered to deaf students and that it “focuses on um, my English and improving my English skills.” She explained that strong English reading and writing skills will be “very important” as she works towards her degree and eventually, enters the workplace. Upon completion of her English program, Taylor plans to enrol in a college diploma that focuses on early childhood education (ECE) so that she has an opportunity to work with young children. She will then apply to begin studying at a university “that’s in Toronto” that has a program “specifically... for nursing and um doctors programs as well.”

Taylor has put a lot of thought into how she would achieve her ultimate goal of becoming a nurse. She pointed out that she had ambitions of becoming a nurse since “like kindergarten ... grade two?” and had been actively thinking about how to prepare herself for her eventual career since about the same time. She shared that she, “always talked about going to college and university” and that she was motivated to succeed because she has “always said that I don’t want to work at McDonalds.” For Taylor, the choice to pursue further training and to thrive professionally, are “decisions that I already made.”

Taylor's forward-thinking attitude is one that, she reported, has been strongly influenced by her parents. While growing up, both of her parents have advocated her attendance in a post-secondary program. Though they originally "wanted me to become a teacher," Taylor recalled, they both support her decision to pursue her nursing degree. On making the decision to become a nurse and attend a college and university, Taylor justified:

I... you know, let them know they they've had the opportunity to make decisions and I think that they should treat me as an equal in letting me make those opportunities for myself.

Although, by the time Taylor begins her college upgrade program at a hearing college, she will have spent some time at a mainstream high school, the majority of her education has taken place in an accessible ASL environment. Looking to her future, Taylor described some of the challenges that she expected to face as a deaf student starting college in an English-speaking environment. She clarified that communication would not be an issue with the help of her "interpreter." She explained to me that lessons would be "the same. It's just taught in a different language ... that's all." With the right supports in place, Taylor will be able to attend classes, write exams, and complete assignments like any other college student. Her main concern however, did focus on the "availability of interpreters" at a hearing school. She went on to say that, "if there's a lack of availability of interpreters, I can't attend class. If I don't attend classes then I'm not going to be able to get my degree." Moreover, though Taylor suggested most interpreting services are covered for deaf students who choose to attend mainstream schools, she recognized that "if they tell me that I have to pay, then I would be willing to pay the money." Evidently, like Jill who was discussed in the previous chapter, attendance at a

hearing school brings additional considerations that deaf students must attend to before even starting their programs. With strong supports, including a reliable and proficient interpreter who is able to attend school regularly, both Jill and Taylor believe that they will experience post-secondary education in much the same way as their hearing peers. Without these necessary accommodations however, classes may be missed and learning opportunities, simply inaccessible.

These challenges aside, Taylor stated that even if there were a post-secondary institution that offered instruction in ASL (like Gallaudet University in the United States) in Canada, she “would still do the mainstream environment.” She reasoned:

The program is better in the mainstream environment and also, um, in Canada, is better because Gallaudet I have to uh, get the degree but then I have to get an equivalency in Canada and would have to do some things over again so I would rather not do that.

Attending hearing schools, Taylor believes, will prepare her to work as a nurse in a hearing environment. She also sees benefits in staying close to her hearing friends who will also attend public universities and colleges. She shared that her peers “do influence your decisions, ya... they encourage me.” Most importantly, “they let me know that I can do things;” they “remind me that I am the same as them. We have the same experiences and I know they’re right when they say those things.” Having strong ties to hearing students her age Taylor suggested, has impacted her sense of assurance in choosing to attend college and university in an English-dominant environment because “we support each other... it’s a very positive effect she [her hearing friend] has.”

Finally, as touched on previously, Taylor has long-considered the financial commitment that her schooling will require. She has worked throughout high school and focused on saving her money to help with paying the high costs of tuition. She

commented that, “if I were to change what I wanted to do just because of the cost, I don’t think that it would be beneficial to what I want to do... so I know it’s expensive but that’s what I want to do so...” Committed to being independent, Taylor will not rely on her parents to help her pay for school and will also try to avoid supplementing her income with government support programs including student loans like OSAP. She explained that:

I want to show that I can do it myself. I can save without the government’s help. You know if I’m almost there and I need a little bit left then, maybe sure, that’s fine... but I don’t want to get my whole tuition from the government.

At the time of our interview, Taylor was working towards her high school diploma at a hearing high school and saving for college. Upon further consideration, Taylor elaborated on her plans further, explaining that she had taken some time to reassess her professional goals and will focus on attaining her early childhood education certification so that she can “work with children” instead of pursuing her full nursing qualifications.

Taylor seemed confident that she would be ready to make the transition from high school to college. She was assured in her plans and prepared financially to take on the many years of post-secondary study ahead of her. Though she is sure to be met with small challenges along the way (like any student!), Taylor’s confidence in herself and her drive to succeed will undoubtedly help her to achieve each of her goals.

6.4 Finding A ‘Place’: The Deaf Community and The Hearing World

Born to deaf parents and a student at a school for deaf students, Taylor has been exposed to the Deaf community for most of her life. Though she was an identifying

member of the community she explained to me that, “I didn't really participate [in the] Deaf community [a] lot. I am longer no interested in Deaf community.”

Both of the cases previously discussed (Seth and Jill) illustrate the numerous benefits that are commonly associated with involvement in the Deaf community. These participants each praised the unique bonds that they had with other deaf people and the importance of the shared culture of the Deaf community. Moreover, they highlighted the importance of this community to their self-identities. Having such different opinions of the Deaf community, Taylor elaborated on why she had chosen to no longer identify with this group. She did not offer an in-depth explanation but did say that it “is getting bored and too much dramatic. I know everywhere is drama but they are too much.”

Talking with Seth and Jill, it was obvious that there were many benefits to involvement in their Deaf community but Taylor’s story provides another unique opportunity for discussion. Both Seth and Jill reference the advantageous nature of being a part of such an insular and connected community. They felt supported and enjoyed sharing a unique culture and language. Taylor on the other hand illustrates some of the challenges with growing up in a small and bonded group. When exposed to many of the same people for a long period of time and so close with many of them, tensions are bound to rise. Moreover, as made clear earlier, Taylor has very strong ties to hearing circles. Some of her closest friends are hearing and attend hearing schools. This unique element of Taylor’s life may add to her comfort in exploring her connections outside of the Deaf community and working towards attendance at a public hearing college.

Taylor challenged Jill’s claims that most deaf students do in fact intend to pursue post-secondary education. According to Taylor, many of her deaf peers “have a negative

perspective on it [plans for post-secondary education].” She emphasized that she did not “mean to be offensive in saying this” but explained that many of her classmates do not have plans to pursue education beyond high school because:

They think they don’t have to go to school... that um, collecting ODSP [Ontario Disability Support Program] is good enough... That you don’t have to work hard, that you can just, you know... sit back and collect money.

As such, rather than sharing her ambitious plans with other deaf students, Taylor says that she instead turns to “my friends who are positive.” She relies on the support of her hearing friends when thinking about her future (as already discussed).

Taylor continues to have ties to the Deaf community (and of course others with hearing loss including her parents) but has also fostered strong ties in hearing circles. These bonds have been encouraging to her as she continues to plan to attend hearing schools for college and university and have also provided her with a unique perspective on education, perhaps not typical of many of her deaf peers. Taylor clarified that many young deaf people she knows may be discouraged from pursuing further education because they rely on government funding and do not come from families that “exposed them to the world or communicated with them.” She made sure to add however that, “I honestly think that they are [capable] if they work hard like I have.” She emphasized:

Let them know that they can do it and um, never to take another person’s opinion. Take their own opinion seriously and figure out what they want. If you want that job, get that job. You know, if you accept criticism from others, it’s going to ruin and spoil what you want to do... that’s my opinion.

Once more, the diversity of those with hearing loss in Canada is made evident. As Higgins pointed out, deafness alone does not qualify or assume one’s involvement in the Deaf community (Higgins 1980; Ladd 2003). Rather, participation is a personal decision and reflective of the adoption of a unique identity as a Deaf person. For some like Seth

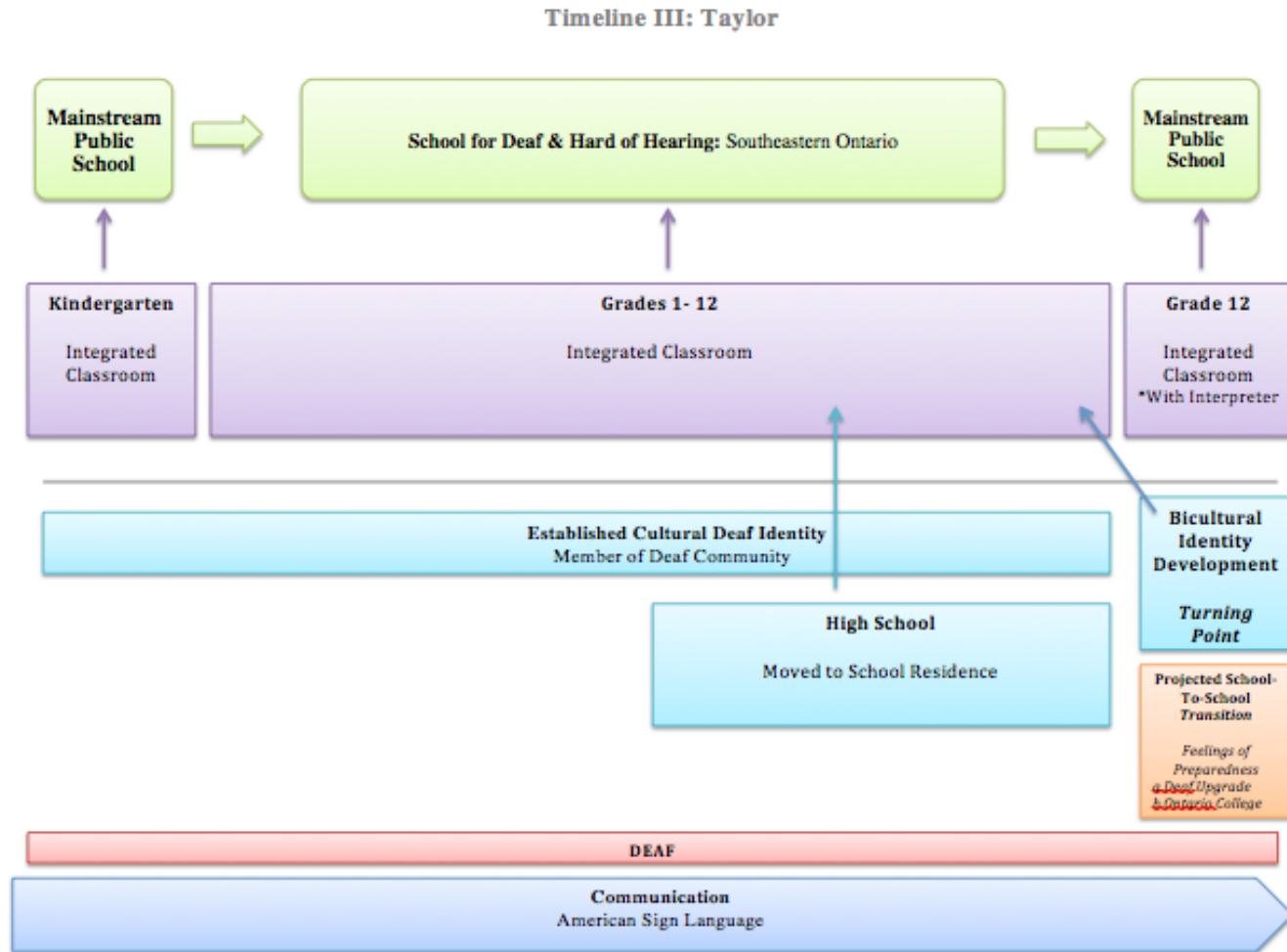
and Jill, involvement in the Deaf community is a positive and fulfilling experience but for others like Taylor, participation may not be desired nor make a meaningful contribution in their lives.

6.5 Considering Social Forces: The Development of Self-Efficacy

Like others her age, Taylor will continue to explore a variety of academic, vocational and social possibilities. Her story highlights the true fluidity of the life course, characterized by the ongoing personal and relational debates that motivate transitions and turning points. Particularly, Taylor's efficacious attitude towards her education reflects the interconnectivity of many different social forces.

Taylor's development of self-efficacy is very similar to that of Jill. Her parents value higher education and have been successful in their adult lives. They both have high levels of cultural and social capital in the Deaf community and have been active in shaping Taylor's education, as well as her involvement with the Deaf community. It may be possible to further argue that Taylor's strong perceptions of her self-efficacy have been nurtured by these forms of cultural and social capital and have allowed her to move successfully into the 'hearing world' (and thus develop new forms of social and cultural capital) as she embarks upon a career outside of the Deaf Community.

6.6 Figure 3. Taylor’s Timeline



CHAPTER VII – BETH’S STORY

Beth is seventeen and is hard of hearing. She was born with significant hearing loss but underwent a series of surgeries as a child to fit a cochlear implant and therefore, has some ability to hear. A few years ago, Beth was moved out of her family home and placed in a foster home where she continues to live with two parents and two foster brothers. Though her biological parents never learned American Sign Language (ASL), her foster parents have been keen to adopt the language in their home. Beth has attended a series of schools, including mainstream public facilities and specialized schools for deaf and hard of hearing students. Today, she identifies herself as a culturally Deaf individual and communicates using both sign language and English (depending upon whom she is with). She is currently completing her high school diploma requirements at a school for deaf and hard of hearing students in Ontario. She plans to pursue a culinary degree that allows her to teach others to cook at a university or college that offers their classes in American Sign Language (ASL) if possible.

Beth is hard of hearing and wears a cochlear implant. Cochlear implants are commonly offered medical interventions that seek to ‘correct’ hearing loss by amplifying a patient’s residual hearing (Ladd 2003; Reagan 1995). Such treatment is a hotly debated topic amongst members of the Deaf community, many of whom suggest that this option seeks to ‘fix’ hearing impairment; a mandate that contests the integration of deafness as part of an individual’s personal identity (Reagan 1995). As a result, Beth has spent much of her life seeking security as *both* a deaf and hearing person. She described that she was offered little support early in her life by her biological parents whom, she expressed “don’t think about what I feel or what I try to say.” She revealed that she felt that they

were “just really oppressive” and “more discriminatory.” It was not until she moved away from her family to live with her foster parents as a teenager that she truly felt that her wellbeing and happiness were made a priority. Beth’s interview reflected the extreme highs and the challenging lows of her life, but most significantly emphasized a continued possibility for change and an honest hopefulness in the face of challenge. Like the previously discussed cases, Beth could not describe one ‘thing’ that helped her to escape the limitations of her early life. Rather, she emphasized her personal interdependence on numerous sources of support and guidance as she moves forward with her plans for the future.

7.1 Family

Beth’s large biological family has resided in a metropolitan area in Ontario for most of her life. She has “3 half-sister(s), 2 half-brother(s), [and] 1 sister.” Born to hearing parents, Beth was the only one of her siblings to experience significant hearing impairment. She shared that in her family, “my biological parents never [used] sign language but they do talk a lot. I am the only one ... [who is] deaf in my family... They just write on paper to me or... just like say nothing to me.” She added, “In my real family, I did try to teach them sign language and they refused and they told I needed to speak and they sent me to a deaf school for two years.” As such, Beth did not use American Sign Language to communicate with those related to her for most of her life. She clarified that she was only exposed to American Sign Language (ASL) (she previously had some training in English Sign Language (ESL)) when she began attendance at her school for deaf and hard of hearing students in grade seven (2010).

I asked Beth about her hearing loss and the process of being fitted for a cochlear implant. She shared:

I was born early so it caused damage to my lungs and stomach, the cleft lip, amnesia... problems with memory and uh, when my Mom was pregnant with me, she was doing drugs so that's what caused the premature birth.

Beth remembered that her parents elected to have her fitted for a cochlear implant when she was around two years old. She summarized that, "it's really confusing... I've had the surgery two times [to fit the cochlear implant]." Though she cannot recall many of the specifics of her medical reports or official diagnosis, she continues to wear her cochlear implant and considers herself deaf. With her cochlear implant, Beth can "hear right but not 100%." Even with medical intervention, as noted above, Beth's communication with her family was strained by her hearing loss, which considerably impacted the relationship that she ultimately developed with her biological parents.

Beth described her parents as "discriminatory" towards her hearing loss and explained that they "didn't take care of me well." When asked more about her parents, she explained that her "mom was not like... really a housewife kind of person. She didn't really take care of things. She went out with friends to the bar and just um, and also, she prostituted herself but I don't really like to talk about that." Beth added that her father "had no control" and that he had "anger management issues." She reiterated to me that her parents fought often and are now divorced.

Moreover, though she remembered her biological family as "hav[ing] money... yes, they could afford things," she made note that "sometimes my mom used my money... like you know, you get disability support from the government [ODSP]." She explained further that, "I thought my mom had saved that money for me but she didn't..."

she, she spent all the money on drugs, so whatever.” While open about many of the uncertainties that have faced her family, Beth also made sure to emphasize to me that she valued her father’s ability in particular to shield her from most of her parents fighting and that she “just [doesn’t] judge” her mother. Her positivity towards such challenging circumstances demonstrated an unwavering strength in Beth, that it is evident, she has carried with her as she has grown older.

There are many challenging decisions that face hearing parents with deaf children. Choices about medical intervention (like cochlear implants), education, housing, community involvement, and even language acquisition must be made in a timely manner. Considering such diversity in the avenues that can be taken by parents and their children in these respects, the lived experiences of deaf and hard of hearing children vary considerably. As has been highlighted by each case study, familial support can vary significantly and the resources that parents can provide their children can also differ. Often, parents who are also deaf can share language with their children and expose them to Deaf culture early in their lives (Koelle & Convey 1982; Reagan 1995; Obrzut et al. 1999) - as is the case with Jill and Taylor. Like Seth, Beth was born to hearing parents and was not exposed to sign language or other deaf individuals until later in her life. Certainly, this is not to suggest that children with deaf parents fare better than those with hearing parents (and vice versa). Rather, it is important to note the different experiences of these children based on their primary socializing environments (the family) and how these early experiences influence their later lives.

Further, one important decision that must be made by parents early in their child’s life is where to send them to school. Both mainstream learning environments and schools

for deaf and hard of hearing students offer educational opportunities for students with hearing loss (van Gurp 2001). Beth's biological parents elected to send her mainly to hearing public schools in Ontario. She was then encouraged by her mother to begin attendance at another school for the deaf students outside of her hometown just before starting grade seven. While it appears that Beth's biological mother motivated her to learn sign language and to embrace Deaf culture by enrolling her in this specialized school, Beth suggests that she may have sent her to the deaf school away from home for other reasons. She explained that:

I decided to go to [the school] because my mom forced me to and uh, I didn't want to because uh, I knew that that abuse was going to happen to my sister as well and I felt I was free from it ... but at the same time, I felt guilty about my sister.

She added that:

My biological Mom want[ed] me to go to ... [the deaf school] because I need more social, education and more learn ... school stuff. But my opinion is she want[ed] me [to] go far away from my home because ... [so] I have no idea what going on in their (home) ... because I am in part [the] issue of family like [contacting the] Police or CAS (Children's Aid ... [Society]).

Though Beth's new environment exposed her to the Deaf community and taught her to communicate using a language not shared by her parents, Beth's mother reassured her that moving to her new school was best. Seemingly uninterested in Beth's attachment to the Deaf community previously, and a strong advocate that she use her cochlear implant, it does appear as though her mother may have seen benefit in sending Beth to a school where she would need to live in residence away from home, as Beth suggested. Beth went on to explain that though her move to her new school greatly benefited her eventually, she worried for her younger sister who she was forced to leave behind. She clarified that she knew her sister would continue to face many of the challenges that she,

herself had dealt with for most of her young life but now without Beth's supportive presence.

She further explained her beliefs about her mother's attitude (specifically) towards her hearing loss by sharing a story with me that she remembered from her childhood.

My real family ... I find that they are discriminatory. They won't let me do things. They won't let me go out. You know ... it's summertime. I won't be allowed outside. They don't want me to show my implant to people. They don't want me to be pitied. But I'm like - that doesn't matter to me. I want to be outside ... I want to be in the world. There was one time ... my old one didn't work ... my first implant. There was a car ... I was riding my bike and I didn't hear the car. I wasn't hit but I moved myself at the last minute And you know the bump on the sidewalk? Like I hit it and fell. And my mom came and ran last minute. And the man who was in the car ... he was a stranger ... came over and asked me if I was okay. Uh, and I took my implant off because it was hurting me because I ... and he said, oh sorry ... I didn't know that you were deaf! My Mom got mad and swore at the guy and said you know ... she's deaf and dumb! What are thinking? And I'm like - I'm not dumb? I know sign language. I have friends who are deaf too.

Rather than encouraging Beth to embrace her hearing loss (which she would come to do later in her life) as part of her identity, her biological parents stressed the use of her cochlear implant so that she could be part of the 'hearing world.' While her cochlear implant did help her to communicate with others to a degree, as she noted earlier, it was not completely effective. Additionally, the visibility of her cochlear implant appeared to have concerned Beth's parents who feared that their daughter would be "pitied." Such circumstances reflect the many ways that hearing loss can be understood by parents and the implications of these views on individual lives. For Beth, her parents' caution toward her hearing loss created a sense of insecurity and at times made communication difficult.

Reflecting on her plans for the future, Beth again emphasized her mother's hesitation toward her hearing loss. It became obvious to me that such differing attitudes

toward her abilities as a consequence of her deafness have motivated divergent attitudes in Beth. It is apparent that when she was living with her biological parents where her academic and social capacities were frequently questioned, Beth appeared frustrated, uncertain, and conflicted about her abilities. Beth was later placed in a foster home (at the beginning of high school) with parents whom she credits with inspiring her optimism toward her future. Her foster parents [who will be discussed in greater detail later] seem to have shared with Beth a more positive outlook of her hearing loss and have acted as enablers to her future plans. Their frequent conversations about post-secondary attendance and willingness to support Beth in her goal setting seem to have challenged the limits that faced her as a child, encouraging her instead, to believe in herself and her ambition.

7.2 Schooling: Hearing School

From 2003-2010, Beth enrolled in three different schools where she was taught in integrated, English speaking classroom environments. She described her experiences at these schools as “a big struggle.” She often found it difficult to understand her lessons as her teachers taught using “only speaking [and] no hand movement.” Without being able to completely engage with her instructors and peers, Beth suggested that she missed out on important lessons and “los[t] interest in school.” She added that her disengagement impacted her academic performance negatively, sometimes receiving marks as low as fifty percent.

In addition to the challenges that Beth faced academically, she also discussed the social implications of her hearing loss inside and outside of her classrooms. Often, she felt as though her peers pitied her hearing loss and consequently, were quick to make

judgements about her abilities. She proposed, “People just feel bad that like deaf people struggle with education but that doesn’t mean we’re like below them, intelligence-wise.” Beth suggested that it is “dangerous to make such assumptions” and that it is important to recognize that deaf people are not necessarily limited by their hearing loss. She went on to explain that though “hearing people don’t realize what they’re saying is wrong,” the premature judgement that she has experienced is “hurtful” and “frustrating.”

As highlighted earlier, Beth moved permanently to a school for deaf and hard of hearing students in grade seven. Her early experiences in hearing environments, it is evident, equipped her to deal effectively with her peers and diverse classroom settings. For example, although enrolled full-time at a school for deaf and hard of hearing students now, Beth elected to return to a hearing high school to take a course in grade ten. Like Jill who also took courses at a hearing high school in the mornings, Beth encouraged her guidance counsellor at her deaf school to enrol her because the course “would be more advanced.” Though communication barriers challenged her formative years and her early marks reflected these limitations, Beth did not shy away from an opportunity to improve her skills and was able to ultimately integrate her past experiences to motivate attendance in an advanced mainstream program where she thrived.

Beth recalled an experience in a hearing class that she was taking outside of her deaf programming in high school to clarify how she approaches the challenging situations in the “hearing world” she previously touched upon. She shared:

I was in grade ten [and] I was taking a cooking class at the hearing school...I was enrolled in that class and my partner asked me if I was deaf and she looked, at you know, my implant... like obviously, it’s here! And she’s like, oh sorry, and I’m like why are you sorry? And she was like, well I feel bad because you can’t hear if there’s a fire alarm or anything like that! And I was like, don’t worry about that! I can see the timer. I can look at the lights on the fire alarm. Um, you hear

something and you need me to move, just tap me on the shoulder. It's really that simple, right?

She added that, "I always just do my best to think of ways to break down the barriers." Specifically, she encouraged her classmate to ask her more about the Deaf community and hearing loss. Motivating others to learn more about deafness Beth believes will help deaf students to access many different types of learning environments - and ultimately to embrace careers that may have seemed unattainable.

7.3 Schooling: Deaf School

Beth's biological mother encouraged her to enrol at a school for deaf and hard of hearing students in central Ontario when she began grade seven. At this time, Beth moved away from her home and her family to begin attendance at one of the province's largest programs for hearing impaired students. Here, Beth would learn a new language, embrace her Deaf culture, build her identity as a Deaf person, and work with others to plan for her future. Though her experience at her school has been one of adjustment and on occasion, uncertainty, it has been one that she credits with helping her to better understand herself.

Unlike Seth, Jill and Taylor who also attended a school for deaf and hard of hearing students at some point during their formative education, Beth started school *visibly* different from her peers. In each of the previous case studies, my participants valued their schools because they were able to interact with other deaf students and share in a common identity. Though Beth could be considered hearing impaired, her cochlear implant made her *not deaf* by traditional Deaf culture standards - and noticeably so.

Initially, such a visible difference made integration into her new school difficult. Beth remembered, "I have a cochlear implant so I've suffered through the discrimination

for that.” Moreover, though she had some background in Signed English (English grammatical structure), she had had very limited exposure to American Sign Language (ASL) – the dominant language of those enrolled at her new school. When asked about these early experiences, Beth shared that “they told me many times that my signing was incorrect and that ... I struggled to kind of learn.” She even elaborated on an instance when one of her new teachers told her, “I should learn better ASL,” ultimately failing her in that class. Outside of the classroom, Beth continued to be challenged by communication as “most student’s [didn’t] talk to me... or didn’t talk to me because I was lousy at sign language. I just made two friends who kind of understood where I was coming from.”

As it seemed that she had little support in her new environment and was away from home, Beth recalled “I wasn’t comfortable because I was the only hard of hearing individual really. Um, I wasn’t comfortable around those kinds of people. I was used to being around hearing people or people who are hard of hearing but now I was in a place with uh, all deaf people ... I didn’t understand the cultural differences.” Additionally, Beth reiterated that she continued to worry about the abuse and fighting that her sister faced at home with her biological parents, and that she looked forward to the weekends and holidays so that she could return home to make sure that she was doing okay.

Although these initial months were taxing on Beth, she explained that she simply asked “people to be patient with me.” She practiced frequently and adjusted her use of ESL to fit more with the grammatical structure of ASL. Eventually, she enthusiastically shared, she “picked it all up... I sign fluently.” With language now on her side and her peers more accepting of her implant, Beth went on to say, “I really love [my school]. The

staff, the communication is great, there's great socialization." Beth contemplated moving back to a mainstream program to start high school but decided that her new environment offered "more accessibility" and provided her the greatest opportunity to prepare for her future. For example, Beth discussed the influence of her school's guidance counsellor who helped her to look at her school credits and prepared her for "writing the test you have to write to get into schools in the States [SATs]."

Today, Beth's grades have improved and she continues to work towards her high school diploma. She has found success in the classroom and also amongst her once-hesitant peers whom she says have helped her as much as she has helped them. She described that, "My friends ... at school would help me in terms of learning new signs ... um, all kinds of different things." She explained further that she enjoys advocating for her peers too - especially when it comes to education. She described a time when she was discussing her own post-secondary plans and was met with hesitation by one of her close friends who questioned, "Do you really think you can do that?" Beth quickly pointed out that she "encouraged her and you know, we talked about the different things that you can learn" and can do regardless of hearing loss.

Finally, in addition to learning more about ASL and thriving in her new learning environment, her school also exposed Beth to the important culture shared by those in the Deaf community. This helped her to find support in others who share in their membership and to gain access to important resources that would be instrumental in shaping her plans for the future. Today, almost at the completion point of her secondary school requirements, Beth identifies as a Deaf person. She is a strong advocate of the Deaf community and went so far as to suggest that when she begins attendance at an ASL-

instructed post-secondary school, she “might just remove it [her cochlear implant] completely” - an action that represents her acceptance and appreciation for her deafness as a part of her rather than something that needs to be ‘changed’ or ‘fixed.’

7.4 Positive Spaces: Transitioning To Foster Care

Beth was moved from her home and to a foster family in her early teens. She remembered that her “mom was charged. She had to go to rehabilitation and refused. The judge decided that uh, that me and my sister would stay in a foster family.” Beth moved with her sister to the same home. Her sister has since moved in and out a series of different homes and “is still hav[ing] a rough life.” Beth explained however, that, “I’m really happy! I love my foster family!”

Beth continues to live with her foster mother and father, their biological son, and another foster child. Talking with her, it was clear that her move away from her biological family was truly life changing. Perhaps most significantly, Beth enthusiastically added that, “My foster parents learned sign language!” Though she was the first child that they have had in their home who is deaf (her foster brother is also deaf), both her foster mother and father were motivated to learn ASL to help Beth transition into their home. Beth recalled, “I think I was in grade nine or uh, in the summer... maybe fall of grade ten... I don’t remember, but they signed to me... I’m taking sign language classes for you!”

Being able to communicate with her new parents and seeing their appreciation (and acceptance) of her deafness, Beth was “surprised and thankful to them for learning.” The steps that her foster parents took early on to help Beth communicate freely were steps that her biological parents never did. Within the first few months of her stay, it was

evident to Beth that her foster family offered her a “safe environment” where she could “feel at peace.”

Beth has also found solace in her foster family’s commitment to religion. Her foster father is a “really busy man. He’s a principal of a school... of a private school for Christians... and he’s a pastor.” Her foster mother also shares her religion in her work as an event coordinator with a local company that supports Christians in their area. Exploring religion with those who are closest to her, Christianity has become an important aspect of Beth’s life and a source of strength that she is happy to have found in her new family.

Additionally, in her senior year now, Beth’s foster parents have worked with her to plan for her future. They have “really encouraged my education” Beth explained. Elaborating, she added, “You know, before I didn’t know where I ... or what I was doing ... my grades weren’t very good but once I switched to the foster home ... my grades are great.” Beth went on to tell me about the ways in which her new family has helped to support her plans for the future. Immediately, a smile crossed her face as she went on to list the ways that she felt the ongoing commitment of her foster parents in her plans. She excitedly illustrated that, “We might go on a vacation together just to look around and have a tour [of the school Beth wishes to attend]. She also was assured by her foster family’s willingness to discuss the related financial commitments associated with post-secondary education. Her foster family has helped to explore funding options through the Children’s Aid Society (who support foster children with their educational expenses) and the organization that she has worked closely with through her time in foster care. Both of her foster parents have also been strong supporters of Beth’s decision to attend a post-

secondary program for deaf and hard of hearing students - outside of Canada. As discussed in previous case studies, high international fees most often accompany this choice. When I asked her about these limitations, Beth reiterated to me her foster parents' pledge to help her secure funding to support her dream of becoming a chef.

Beth's move to her foster family was evidently a turning point for her. Accompanied by her successful transition into a new educational environment where she embraced her identity as a Deaf person, Beth's foster family appears instrumental in nurturing her newfound forward-thinking attitude and motivation for the future. Their advocacy of her education (regardless of the cost or location) and their commitment to embracing and supporting Beth's Deaf identity have influenced her in numerous ways - most noticeably in providing her with the support she needed to find confidence in herself. This new confidence in her academic abilities and in her understanding of Deaf culture has propelled Beth from the limitations she faced as a young person trying to understand her place in a 'hearing world' of which she did not feel a part. She is now able to set goals for herself and to rely on the support of her foster family as she navigates each step of her journey.

7.5 Positive Spaces: Role Models

Earlier, Beth emphasized the important role that her peers played in helping her to learn ASL and to appreciate Deaf culture. Though she did reflect on these experiences favourably, she paid close attention in our interview to the influential adults in her life who have helped her in many different ways as well.

Like Taylor who found inspiration in a close family friend to become a nurse, Beth benefited from working closely with a volunteer at the summer camp that she

attends for deaf and hard of hearing Ontarians. Asked when she thought she really started to think about her future and to set goals for herself in this regard, Beth framed her answer by describing the time she has spent working in the camp kitchen with the head cook. She recalled:

The first time I came here was in grade seven. I used to not eat a lot. My parents didn't take care of me well ... my biological parents. Um, [the cook] and the other person who used to be here ... I don't remember his name ... I saw the food and was really picky but [the cook], you know, encouraged me to try new things ... and I was like no, I don't eat salad! But she told me to trust her so I would try little bits of things and I thought it was delicious so I was curious how to make it, so she let me go into the kitchen, um you know, other campers weren't allowed Just me and I saw all these things and thought it was really cool and imagined my future doing this.

What immediately stood out in Beth's story was *trust*. The camp cook was able to encourage her to try new things and to develop a relationship with Beth founded on support. This experience not only provided Beth with some of the skills she will need as she begins taking classes in her field, but also motivated her to trust in the unfamiliar and most importantly, those around her.

Beth went on to tell me about another influential camp staff member whom she credits as being one of her closest friends for nearly six years. She told me that, "he always tells me that I can do things. And I'll say that I don't know and he'll say - trust me, you can! So, and then I realize I can do anything and that's been a great influence on me." Again, the strong influence of the trust that Beth has found in her role models has been instrumental in shaping the confidence that she has in herself and the way that she looks towards her future. Though she has experienced doubts at times, she is able to turn to these individuals for their guidance and continues to trust in them as she grows into herself.

7.6 Looking To The Future: Post-Secondary And Career Plans

The time that Beth has spent in the kitchen at camp has motivated her to pursue a career as a chef. Ultimately, she wishes to teach cooking classes to others, sharing her knowledge and passion for culinary design. When discussing her plans, Beth was quick to add that, “I am graduating [from high school] in two more years... I’m in a hurry to be done with that!”

Ideally, Beth would like to pursue her training in an environment that offers programming in ASL. Though she believes that hearing classrooms can offer comparable training because “they’re really... they’re teaching you to cook right? So really, I don’t think one is beneath and one is above,” she is excited by the opportunity to learn more about Deaf culture and communicate using ASL.

Beth has considered enrolment at both Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. and at the Rochester Institute of Technology in Rochester, New York. As previously noted, Gallaudet is the only university in North America to offer bilingual instruction to students in ASL and English. The Rochester Institute of Technology similarly offers deaf and hard of hearing students a comparable experience at the college level through the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (The Rochester Institute of Technology, 2015). Beth plans to take courses at the Institute and then hopes to transfer to Gallaudet to pursue her teaching credentials so that she can eventually instruct cooking classes. Beth’s attendance at both of these schools will force her to move out-of-country and away from those to whom she is closest. She says that she is “ready to be done” and really wants “to go to college.” She went on to explain that she “wants to be out of Canada for a little while. Just be at peace and be on my own.” Like any student preparing to start their post-

secondary studies away from home, Beth admitted that she is sometimes “nervous for moving um, because moving from my country to another country for four years” will be met with uncertainty. She finds comfort in knowing though that her peers will “speak the same sign language” and that her foster family has been “wonderful and supportive” in her decision to move.

Beth has considered attendance at a local college so that she can stay close to home and keep the costs of her education down (most of her expenses will be covered by the Children’s Aid Society and her foster care agency as discussed above). Like each of the previous case studies, she has looked into attending a school in the Toronto area where a large number of deaf people also take classes. This would provide her access to the Deaf community and the accessible language that she has come to value. She remains hesitant to commit to these plans however, citing the availability of qualified interpreters and course options as deterrents. She rationalized:

I’m unsure but I also know finding interpreters and negotiating academic curriculum ... some curriculums say that they won’t accept deaf students so that’s a little bit difficult.

She went onto to clarify:

You don’t have to have an interpreter at RIT. If I wanted an interpreter, you have to pay for it there ... it’s my responsibility ... at [a Toronto school], they provide them for you. But finding an interpreter, even though they are provided, is difficult.

Confident that her decision to attend schools that are focused on instruction in ASL, Beth feels prepared to transition to college and is certain that her choices will prepare her well for the future.

Looking beyond her own plans, Beth was quick to rebut government reports that suggest that deaf people continue to achieve lower levels of education than hearing students and go underrepresented in high status positions after graduation. She added:

I disagree. I know a lot of hearing people who aren't interested in going to college. They don't think that they need to go And a lot of deaf people think that they do need to go ... and of course there are not ... all people think the same way ... some people think that they don't have to go school and maybe deaf people are struggling and they fail ... same ... but that happens with hearing people as well so I would say that they are equal in terms of attendance at post-secondary.

She went onto to explain that the attitudes of hearing people toward deaf people can often limit the choices that some deaf people feel they have for their future.

Because a lot of people think that deaf can't do things, right? They think that they have to be able to hear, um if there's an emergency or police have to be able to hear to talk on the walkie-talkie ... firefighters for the sirens and when there's a fire to get ready in a hurry and go ... but that ... I think that there are deaf people who are able to do those things.

Again, reflecting on her own plans for the future, Beth told me about how she thought her peers could be encouraged to challenge these restrictive social attitudes. She carried on:

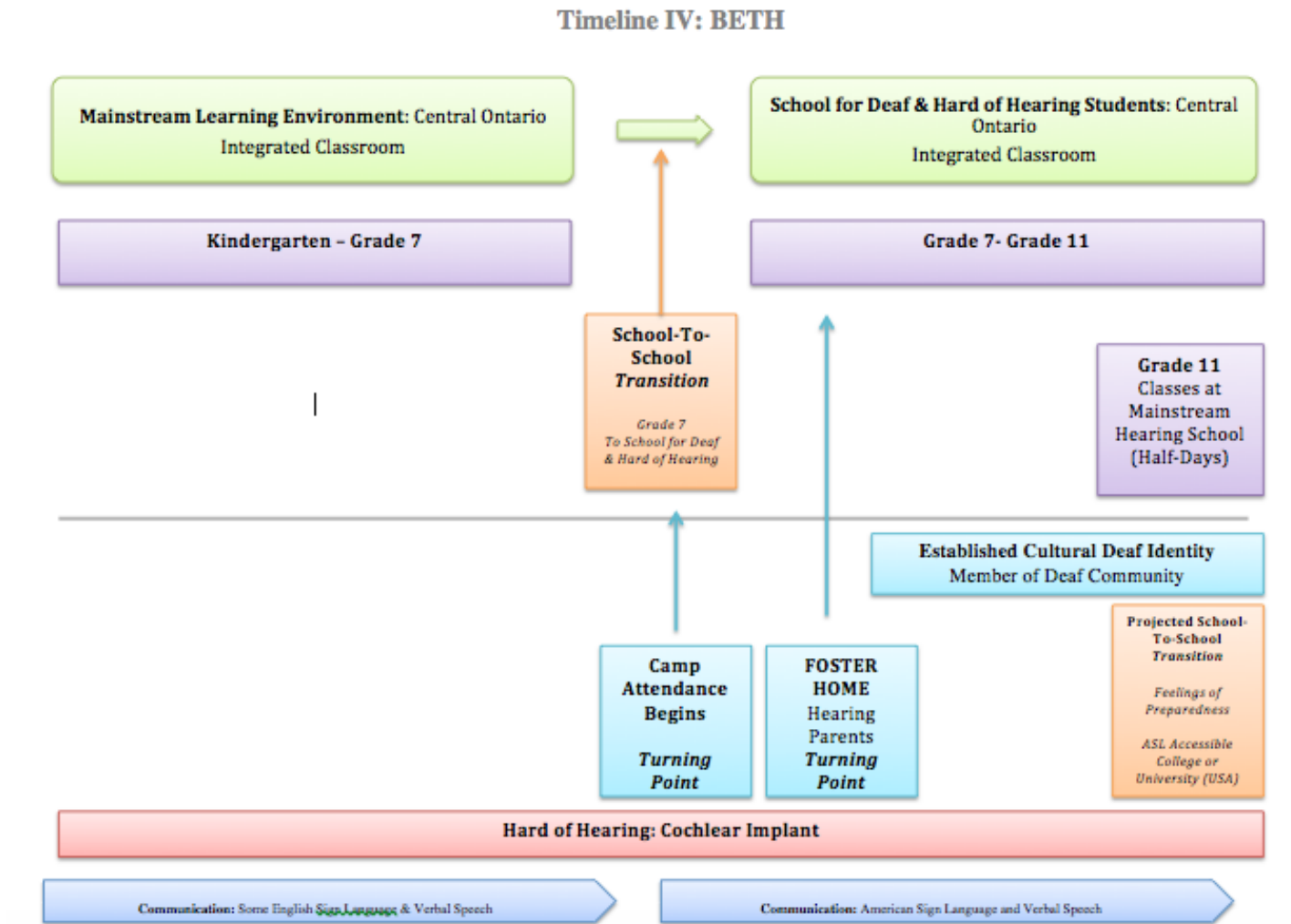
I know people who do want to become doctors and uh, I think it's important to educate and teach them that deaf people use their eyes in different ways than hearing people do, right? If an alarm is going off, deaf people will see the lights. Um, with ... instead of using walkie-talkies, have some sort of like caption device where people can type on the screen where they need to go. For a doctor ... they have pagers, right? So they can be at an emergency, ready, so ... as, a long time ago, ya... they didn't have technology but now we have of these great things that are assets to have deaf people included in the workforce.

7.7 Considering Social Forces: The Development of Self-Efficacy

Beth's story offers perhaps the most interesting sociological perspective, as she experiences a radical transformation in her family situation and thus the types of social and cultural capital to which she has access. Her birth family had relatively low levels of economic and cultural capital and no connection to the Deaf community. Living in

financial instability (and having been exposed to various forms of abuse), Beth was unable to develop academically. Furthermore, being viewed as disabled and therefore less capable by her birth family, Beth had very low levels of self-efficacy. Once she was placed in a foster home, her access to economic, cultural and social capital radically changed and created opportunities for Beth to become successful. This shift in her circumstances effectively highlights the role of social factors and the influence of various social actors in life course trajectories and the development of self-efficacy.

7.8 Figure 4. Beth's Timeline



CHAPTER VIII: DISCUSSION

Each of the preceding case studies reflects a unique, dynamic and fluid life story. Though we can discern some similarities across these narratives, no two accounts are the same. Rather, the stories of each participant illustrate the influence of social forces including family, education, peer group, and Deaf community involvement that shape the transitional experiences of deaf youth.

This thesis compliments existing government studies that show that deaf Canadians attend post-secondary institutions far less frequently than do their hearing peers (PALS 2006; Canadian Hearing Society n.d.). This is of particular concern as the Ontario government continues to push for inclusive educational and vocational settings where ability does not impede the integration of all citizens (AODA 2005; The Ontario Human Rights Commission 2015). My findings show that respondents differed in their interpretations of these national-level findings. Both Jill and Beth said that their peers were motivated to attend post-secondary education and recognize that further training is necessary to be competitive in a knowledge economy fuelled by credentialism (Lehmann & Adams 2016). Seth and Taylor, on the other hand, agreed that most of their peers seem unmotivated to pursue a diploma, degree, or apprenticeship after high school.

Each of my participants individually challenged the applicability of government projections in their own lives by outlining detailed plans for their futures – each of which included attendance at a post-secondary institution in a diploma or degree program. Given my respondents' ambitious plans and the rather bleak image of deaf students' educational goals portrayed in the fore-mentioned government studies, I became

interested in understanding what made them *different*. What made the four participants in this study decide to pursue higher education?

In looking at the differences and similarities across the life narratives of participants, it became clear that all four respondents not only valued the role of further education and anticipated their transition to post-secondary studies, but that they also truly believe that they are *capable* of being successful in this next phase of their lives. All four shared their excitement for college and university and reflected on their preparedness for pursuing higher education. They all agreed on the importance of further education in helping them to reach their career goals and drew on the support of families, friends, and communities to overcome limiting social attitudes and barriers that they face. Finally, all of them embraced their deafness as part of themselves rather than a disability or deficit, and subsequently, expressed high levels of motivation for their future.

For the remainder for this chapter, I will explore how my respondents have resiliently embraced their deafness. More than that, I will highlight the importance of the “*deaf can*” attitude that is shared by Seth, Jill, Taylor and Beth. I will describe how the high levels of self-efficacy characteristic of each participant are socially constructed and shape projected transitions to post-secondary education.

8.1 Resiliency

There is no doubt that each of the participants in this study have successfully adopted their Deaf identities and effectively navigate a predominantly ‘hearing world’ with grace and continued determination. According to Young et al. (2008; 2011), those who are resilient are not necessarily those who are ‘extraordinary.’ Rather, they consider those who simply live their lives in ways that are personally meaningful, to be resilient.

We see this in many different ways throughout this study. These four young people are not only successful in their day-to-day activities, but also look optimistically to their futures. With the support of their teachers, friends and families, each has found an educational environment that suits his or her learning style and in return, has found academic success and social integration. Each student has discovered something to be passionate about – Seth pours himself into learning more about psychology; Jill is an accomplished athlete and involved in her local Deaf community; Taylor has embraced her bicultural identity and is active in both the Deaf community and the ‘hearing world’; and Beth returns to camp each summer as a volunteer and has found comfort in the religious teachings of her new family. In their eyes, deafness is not to be viewed as a ‘disability,’ but rather, part of who they are as whole people.

Research that explores the resiliency of deaf young people is comparatively well developed (see Young et al. 2011; 2008; Zand & Pierce 2011). Definitions of *deaf resiliency* challenge more traditional conceptual models that consider resilience characteristic of those who are ‘exceptional’ or ‘accomplished.’ Scholars who study deaf populations reflect on the diversity of those with hearing loss and motivate readers to reconsider their understanding of deafness as a disability, echoing a general shift towards the sociocultural model of deafness. Certainly, these thoughts are well founded and are impactful to the educational paths that deaf students choose, but my participants suggest that they cannot independently inspire decisions to pursue higher education.

When asked why many of their peers chose not to pursue higher education, my participants were quick to point out that they likely had never been told *that they could*. Taylor explained that many deaf people are not as fortunate as she is to have strong Deaf

role models or adults who encourage their education. Jill also shared how instrumental her parents' continued support is as she looks towards her future. Finally, Beth ended our interview by stating simply what she wants her deaf peers to know – “*deaf can do it!*” Those final words seem to be at the heart of what makes the pursuit of higher education possible.

8.2 Self-Efficacy

Bandura argues that social actors only willingly engage in activities in which they believe they will be successful (Bandura 1977). This idea seems especially pertinent when considering the post-secondary plans of young people. If individuals do not believe that they will successfully transition to post-secondary training, they are less likely to decide to pursue higher education. Bandura refers to this belief in personal ability to achieve a desired outcome as *self-efficacy* (Bandura 1977; Gecas 2003).

The “*deaf can*” attitude articulated by Beth, and shared by the other participants, is reflective of *high* self-efficacy. Each respondent cited that they are academically prepared and excited to realize the goals that they have set for themselves, often looking beyond the education itself and towards success in the occupations of their choosing.

Self-efficacy is not innate and is not fixed. Rather, self-efficacy is crafted over time, taking shape long before students start to think about their higher educational goals (Bandura 1977). Although this study explores the impact of self-efficacy on a specific transition (school-to-school), it is important to understand how these unique attitudes are developed over time to better inform intervention and policy decisions. In this chapter, I will outline that the study participants' high self-efficacy about higher education is reflective of prior trajectories, turning points, and lived experiences. I argue that events,

accomplishments and challenges within the educational trajectory will be of great importance in understanding self-efficacy in school-to-school transitions, but that self-efficacy is also highly related to experiences in other life domains and contact with diverse social actors over time. Specifically, self-efficacy is not innate to an individual but socially constructed across the life course. Social forces including family, education, peer group, and community involvement, appear instrumental in motivating (or limiting) the development of self-efficacious attitudes, as actors negotiate the opportunities and constraints of their social position.

8.3 The Development of Self-Efficacy

This chapter will discuss the social forces that influenced the development of participants' highly efficacious attitudes, making their projected transition to post-secondary education more likely. To review, Bandura outlines four different ways in which self-efficacy is shaped. These four sources of development, affirmation, and challenge to efficaciousness, work as a collective but are not necessarily experienced equally. Though many other scholars have developed concepts that depict these four influences, Bandura's terminology will be used to explore the efficaciousness of my respondents (Bandura 1977; 1993; 2000; Gecas 2003).

First, *experiences of mastery* are pertinent to the development of self-efficacy. These experiences help to inform social actors about their abilities. Most commonly, repeated successes in a domain will positively affect efficacy development, as individuals perceive their strengths in this area. On the other hand, repeated failures that appear to be the fault of the individual will likely decrease levels of mastery. This source of efficacy

development is most influential because it is personally informed; individuals reflect on their own actions and develop understandings of their perceived abilities.

Second, *vicarious experiences* provide individuals opportunities for social comparisons. Although personal perceptions about performance are important, how one compares to others also informs self-efficacy. For example, students who outperform many of their peers will likely have higher self-efficacy. For students who are struggling with their courses and who are at the bottom of their class, lower levels of self-efficacy are probable.

Third, *verbal persuasion* from parents, teachers, peers, and significant others can be influential in how individuals interpret their successes and failures. If someone is constantly applauded by someone they respect, they are likely to develop high self-efficacy in that domain. For those whose actions go unnoticed or who are negatively evaluated by others, self-efficacy development may be lower.

Finally, *emotional arousal*, or more simply, different emotional states, are important in predicting self-efficacy. Individuals who find themselves in emotionally stable situations are more likely to develop self-efficacy, whereas individuals in states that are stressful, anxiety-inducing or unstable are less likely to develop it.

Drawing on these four sources of influence and the words of my participants, the next section of this discussion will focus on the development of high self-efficacy and the important role it plays in making post-secondary transitions possible for deaf individuals. I will then highlight intervention and policy strategies that will aid students in planning for their futures.

8.3.1 Experiences of Mastery: Evening the Playing Field

Experiences of mastery are especially impactful in developing self-efficacy in many different life domains. Although successes outside of school are influential in the perceptions that students hold of themselves, academic mastery is especially predictive of the post-secondary plans that young people set. These accomplishments not only qualify students for programs that they may be interested in, but also facilitate attitudes towards education that are reflective of their academic performance (Bandura 1993; Canadian Hearing Society n.d.).

For many deaf students, it appears that experiences of academic mastery can be few and far between, as classroom environments, school support systems, and curriculum often fail to adequately address these individuals, causing them to fall behind their peers (Canadian Hearing Society n.d.; Winzer 2005; Scheetz 2012; Rushowy 2014b). Without opportunities to excel in the classroom, deaf students are likely to develop lower levels of academic mastery, and as a result, will be less likely to develop self-efficacious attitudes that make higher education a viable option.

All participants in this study experienced significant barriers to education during some time in their schooling. Although these challenges took different forms, each was difficult for the respondents to overcome and placed doubt about their abilities to be successful.

First, Seth spoke candidly about the very difficult time that he spent at a mainstream school. He felt unchallenged, labelled, and isolated. Not only were the technical supports (i.e. FM system) he was provided ineffective in amplifying the voices of his teachers, the lessons that he was given were un motivating and did not force him to

engage with his work. In this limiting environment, Seth felt as though he “couldn’t learn anything.” Moving on to high school quickly became his “biggest fear because ... [he] knew ... [he] couldn’t do that work.”

The move to a new school was instrumental in Seth’s later accomplishments. Though he had fared poorly in his elementary school, his decision to move to a school for deaf and hard of hearing students led to improved grades and additional opportunities for academic mastery. Seth shared that “for the first time I could understand what the teacher was saying” – for the first time, he had the opportunity to learn. Over the next four years, Seth’s marks would continue to improve, frequently affirming his academic strengths, and consequently, his academic mastery. These experiences would later be influential in informing his high self-efficacy as he made plans to pursue his undergraduate degree in psychology at Gallaudet University.

Similarly, Beth spent most of her elementary school years in a series of hearing mainstream environments where she struggled academically and was often challenged by the communication barriers between her and her teachers. She remembered that “hearing school [was] hard for me and a lot of challenge.” In grade seven, Beth’s biological mother moved her to a school for deaf and hard of hearing students. Interestingly, she was initially met with similar difficulties - unable to communicate and being judged harshly because of her cochlear implant. In time however, Beth became fluent in ASL and her teachers and peers became more accepting of her cochlear implant. At this time, Beth also found confidence in her academic abilities. She now looks optimistically to her future, planning to pursue a culinary degree in a post-secondary program for deaf and

hard of hearing students. Without such academic improvement, Beth likely would not have qualified for her program or, realistically, seen it as a possibility.

For Seth and Beth, moving to an environment where they were provided with opportunity was critical to their academic improvement and subsequent self-efficacy development. At their mainstream schools, communication proved difficult and learning more of a burden than an exciting activity. At their schools for deaf and hard of hearing students however, communication was no longer an issue, curriculum was reflective of Deaf culture and deaf experiences, and the expectations of others were not based on 'disability' but rather on academic prowess. In a sense, the playing field was 'equalized' for these participants. Seth and Beth were finally provided with the tools they needed to find opportunities for self-efficacy development and now, look toward their academic futures with the skills and confidence needed to be successful.

Similarly, Jill and Taylor looked to other learning environments to find experiences of mastery. Both of these students attended segregated learning environments for most of their lives but also took classes at mainstream schools. These participants make clear the benefits of receiving the support and resources required to motivate ongoing mastery experiences in early life. At schools for deaf and hard of hearing students, they were not met with the same communication, cultural, and resource difficulties that Beth and Seth encountered. Both students came from homes where ASL was their first language, which is obviously as fundamental to success in segregated schools as is speaking English in mainstreams schools (Obrzut 1999; van Gurp 2001; Garberoglio et al. 2014; Winzer 2005). As a result, they had more opportunities to develop academic mastery early in life, and in turn, their self-efficacy. This is made clear

by how comfortable they are in transferring to mainstream hearing schools to be “challenged” and to experience new things. The confidence in their academic abilities that was fostered over time in their accessible learning environments enhanced the prospect that these young women would pursue further education.

These experiences of mastery not only develop academic confidence, but also inform the self-efficacious attitudes these individuals hold toward their post-secondary transition. Interestingly, each respondent in this study wishes to attend a post-secondary environment that is similar to his or her preferred learning space. Seth has decided to pursue attendance at Gallaudet University where he will be able to continue to be taught in sign language. Similarly, Beth wishes to attend the Rochester Institute of Technology which is home to The National Technical Institute for the Deaf. Both of these students have found success in their deaf environments and would prefer to continue their learning in schools that offer similar linguistic and cultural accessibility.

Jill and Taylor on the other hand wish to attend hearing colleges and universities to pursue their training. Again, both of these students found success in hearing schools. This could be particularly important for deaf students, to affirm their academic abilities in the ‘hearing world’ where communication and integration may be more challenging. While communication could be problematic on occasion for them, both have found ways around these barriers and created opportunities for continued mastery experiences.

All four case studies accentuate the need for resources, supports, and open communication in classrooms (and schools) between administrators, teachers, parents, and deaf students in order to facilitate greater opportunities for academic success and efficacy development. Further, it is evident that efficacy is not ‘fixed.’ Although Beth and

Seth had low levels of efficacy before coming to their deaf schools, in their new environment they were able to challenge their previous experiences and to grow their efficacy over time. As such, although early support and intervention is ideal, it is possible to develop a stronger sense of self-efficacy later in life, making future post-secondary transitions more likely.

8.3.2 Vicarious Experiences: Like Me; Not Like Me

In an academic setting, students will look to the actions and performances of their peers to gauge whether they are working at grade-level. Outside of the classroom, students will look at significant others (ex. parents, teachers, friends, and role models) to evaluate how they should act and perhaps - what is possible for them as deaf individuals (Bandura 1977; 1993).

For deaf children, their earliest vicarious experiences are with their families. These considerations are particularly important in formulating how one understands their deafness. For example, children who are born to deaf parents will know nothing but *being deaf*. Hearing loss will not appear to be a challenge or deficit as these parents, most often, will communicate using ASL and may also have a positive relationship with their Deaf community.

The majority of deaf children are born to hearing families. These families will face difficult decisions throughout their children's lives and will need to make many choices very early on that will impact the long-term development of their child. Unfortunately, most hearing parents know little about the Deaf community, Deaf culture, or being a deaf person. Most of their opinions are informed instead, by hearing medical professionals who typically advocate medical intervention to 'correct' hearing loss so that

the child can be part of the ‘hearing world.’ These early decisions can affect how individuals understand their deafness, influencing how they eventually live out their lives (Garberoglio et al 2014; van Gurp 2001; Bat-Chava 1994; Obrzut 1999; Koelle & Convey 1982).

Deaf children with deaf parents likely will not view their deafness as something that needs to be ‘overcome’ or ‘fixed.’ On the other hand, many deaf children who are born to hearing parents may feel different from their parents and isolated, especially if communication is hindered and the important bonds between child and parent are strained (Obrzut 1999; van Gurp 2001; Garberoglio et al. 2014).

As children age, these comparisons become even more important. For deaf children who have deaf parents, seeing their parents’ success is found to inspire the “deaf can” attitude that was characteristic of participants of this study. For example, Jill spoke about her deaf mother’s pursuit of a college diploma but more importantly, about her long-term role as an educational assistant (EA) at a school for deaf and hard of hearing students. Jill explained that her mom, who is also deaf, had always told her that she “wanted more” for her daughter. Seeing her mother as a successfully integrated member of the labour force in a job that she enjoyed, made the same things (if not more) seem possible to Jill. For much of her life, she aspired to be a teacher that worked with deaf students, like her mother had for so long. Jill’s mother was influential in showing Jill that deafness did not have to be limiting. From a young age, Jill could see through her mother’s actions that she too could be successful in what she chose to do, regardless of her hearing loss. This lent favourably to fostering high self-efficacy toward Jill’s planned education.

Beth, on the other hand, was born to hearing parents who advocated for her to be fitted with a cochlear implant. Unfortunately, Beth noted that this intervention “was not 100% for me,” and that she had difficulties communicating with her family who elected not to learn sign language. Beth’s earliest role models emphasized her difference from them. She explained that, “I feel left out in my world [hearing world]” and as though her parents were “discriminatory” towards her hearing loss. Without any reference point to challenge deafness as ‘disability’ or a ‘limitation,’ Beth’s understanding of her Deaf identity was founded in the negative attitudes of those around her.

Fortunately, when Beth transferred to her segregated school environment, she was exposed to peers, teachers, and adults who were deaf too and who were successful. Most importantly in her life, she was given the opportunity to go to a summer camp for deaf individuals where she was again, exposed to other deaf people that helped her to develop her identity as a Deaf person. She quickly realized that deafness did not have to be a disability, as others around her were successful academically, socially, and at work. She found further support in the Deaf community, particularly with a Deaf role model who took the time to talk with her at a recent Deaf empowerment movement. Together, these individuals were instrumental in fostering the “*deaf can*” attitude in which Beth now believes. Seeing the success of other Deaf role models has helped her to challenge the negative attitudes of her biological family who viewed her hearing loss as limiting – especially relating to her future.

Additionally, Bandura points out that we develop self-efficacy by comparing ourselves to those to whom we believe we should be performing similarly. For instance, Taylor is a successful academic who has often outperformed many of her peers. She

thought of herself as so academically superior to her deaf peers that she decided to transfer to a hearing high school to complete her diploma requirements. This reflects the important role that vicarious experiences have played in shaping her academic mastery and efficacy to the extent that she felt comfortable leaving the security of her Deaf community to be academically challenged.

In comparison, Seth spoke often about feeling behind his peers in his mainstream school. He remembered feeling “embarrassment of having to ask questions in front of other students and them thinking ... well you should know this by now.” Seth’s evaluations to his peers led him to question his abilities, actions, and perceived failures. Consequently, Seth exhibited very low levels of self-efficacy, particularly toward his transition to high school. In his new school, where he has seen significant academic growth, Seth now feels accepted and part of his school community. He is now the student that encourages others. He shared – “I’m trying to make them [his peers] realize that that’s not true ... that it doesn’t matter if it’s you or me ... we’re all deaf and we can do it.”

In summary, vicarious experiences shape each participant’s understanding of their deafness and their academic abilities. Comparison to other deaf individuals appears to be important in inspiring these students and helping them embrace a Deaf identity in which deafness is not viewed as a disability. Additionally, comparisons in the classroom influence views of academic mastery; with those outperforming their peers exuding confidence compared to those, who experience frequent academic challenges who seem to feel at a loss against those who are more advanced. These comparisons help students to

realize what is possible, regardless of their hearing loss, and to affirm their mastery experiences in education.

8.3.3 *Verbal Persuasion: “Deaf Can”*

Words of encouragement and affirmation can help to solidify perceived self-efficacy while continuous critical judgements can be detrimental to self-development. The feedback that is received from significant others (ex. parents, teachers, peers, community members) can affect how individuals interpret the situation that they are in, and consequently, their subsequent actions (Bandura 1977; 1993). My participants’ stories highlight the many ways that their lives have been shaped by the opinions of others – both by those closest to them and those they barely know.

Family is regarded as the single most influential force in shaping perceptions of self-efficacy (Bandura 1977; Gecas 2003). This should come as no surprise since their influence is seen across multiple trajectories in the lives of respondents. Particularly, familial acceptance, encouragement, and academic involvement, appear to be highly significant in shaping efficacious attitudes (Cawthon et al. 2015; Gecas 2003; Zimmerman et al. 1992; Michael et al. 2013).

First, hearing parents who develop sign language skills have been found to foster feelings of acceptance in their deaf children. Similarly, deaf children who have deaf parents appear to form close bonds almost immediately with their parents and commonly, feel that they are an integrated member of their family, despite their hearing loss. Hearing parents who do not communicate using sign language often create communication difficulties in their homes which can hinder the development of close relationships with

their children and consequently, familial solidarity (Obrzut 1999; van Gurp 2001; Garberoglio et al. 2014). Seth commented on the importance of breaking down problematic communication barriers. He said that:

I really suggest that deaf people who have ... deaf students who have hearing parents, their parents need to learn to sign. I'm noticing more and more that deaf kids ... their parents can't sign and it's embarrassing ... their hearing parents call in the deaf principal to communicate with their own kid because they can't talk directly to their own children ... that's embarrassing! Right? It's not deaf peoples' fault. It's the hearing people who aren't willing to help their own family member.

As students move through their schooling, it is important that they find encouragement and support from their parents (Cawthon et al. 2015). Students who come from families that are unaccepting of their hearing loss may not experience parental reassurance at all, and instead, may feel as though their families actually expect very little of them because they are deaf. Respondents point out that this could be for reasons of viewing deafness as a disability or because parents want to protect their children from the harsh realities of the 'hearing world.' Again, Seth added that many deaf young people may:

Grow ... up ... feel[ing] rejected by their family ... and when you're a kid you tend to work and help and do whatever for your parents and friends ... that's how you start off, right? And that's good for yourself but deaf children often aren't given that chance.

Children who miss out on opportunities for affirmation and support from parents throughout their childhood because of communication barriers may later experience lower levels of self-efficacy, particularly in pursuit of higher education. Simply put, if no one tells you that you *can*, how will you ever know what is possible?

Taylor elaborates on this foundational source of social support. She emphasizes the role that her family has played in shaping her attitudes towards education and her plans for the future. She reported that her parents talked about education with her

frequently, encouraging her to do her homework and supporting her in her pursuit of more advanced classes when she decided to move to a mainstream school. She went on to explain that many of her peers do not have plans to pursue higher education like her because they are not confident. She suggested that this is because “maybe they don’t have parents who have exposed them to the world or communicated with them and so they think that they are not able to.”

Being deaf themselves, Taylor’s parents were accepting and knowledgeable of hearing loss. Moreover, both of her parents are college graduates and have encouraged Taylor to pursue a diploma or degree of her own, thus inspiring and affirming her self-efficacious attitudes as she prepared for her transition to post-secondary education.

The feedback that is received from teachers can also be impactful in shaping efficacy, especially towards an educational transition (Bandura 1993; Obrzut et al. 1999; Garberoglio et al. 2014). Seth illustrates the impact of these judgements on the development of his self-efficacy early in his academic career. He shared that he was quickly assigned to a resource room for students requiring ‘extra support’. His teachers were fast to judge his abilities based on his hearing loss and made few adjustments when his academic performance began to slip. The early perceptions of Seth’s ‘difference’ and his ‘disability’ created little opportunity for him to challenge the views that others held of him and he was forced to pass through an educational environment that only reaffirmed his perceived deficits until he got to high school. Once he had transferred to a school for deaf and hard of hearing students, he recalled that his teachers were impressed by his academic performance and his involvement in the school community. The attitudes of his

high school teachers, in addition to his improved academic performance, challenged his original beliefs, and motivated efficacy growth through his secondary years.

Finally, peers can provide important feedback to individuals at many different points throughout their lives. Each participant in this study revealed that they often turned to their peers for affirmation, especially in instances when challenging social attitudes placed their abilities in question because of their deafness.

Jill shared that she was very close with her peer group – many of whom were older than she. These individuals helped her to challenge negative social attitudes and inspired her to do better by committing to her studies. She was so connected to this peer group that when they graduated and left her behind, she found it difficult to find the motivation that she once had. She said that it became important to her to “turn to the people that support me and give me those positive feelings to feel better and just know that I can do it.” Similarly, Beth explained that she is often quick to look to her friends when others question her hearing impairment. Like Jill, she draws on the more positive views of her peers to challenge the limiting and assumptive nature of social attitudes that she finds “frustrating.”

Interestingly, unlike the other respondents, Taylor more often turned to the ‘hearing world’ for affirmation. She shared that she found feedback from her hearing friends more helpful than from her deaf peers because her friends were instrumental in assuring her that she could be successful in the ‘hearing world’ regardless of her deafness. These attitudes seemed particularly important in her decision to move to a hearing high school and to pursue her degree at an English-speaking university.

The support of peer-groups seems especially important in *affirming* self-perceptions. While other sources of social support appear to facilitate *both* encouragement and judgement, participants seemed keen to share the important role that their peers played in helping them to overcome challenging situations by bolstering their faith in their abilities.

Together, the feedback from these different social influences can either affirm or challenge perceptions of self-efficacy. Though Bandura (1977) suggests that this shaping force is one of the weaker influences and can be more easily reformed, the views of others are instrumental in helping respondents to understand their deafness and their abilities. The culmination of these sources of support and challenge contribute to the effaciousness that young people have as they plan for their futures, either supporting their perceptions of ability or affirming their views of inadequacy.

8.3.4 Emotional States: *Us vs. Them*

According to Bandura, how social actors *feel* also impacts their perceived levels of self-efficacy. For the participants in this study, the development of a Deaf identity appeared especially important for students who experienced heightened emotions about their education. Both Seth and Beth discussed the development of their Deaf identities, illustrating how their perceptions of deafness changed over time and how these changes, influenced their abilities to deal with difficult situations. For example, Seth's decision to move to a school for deaf and hard of hearing students exposed him to the Deaf community. His new learning environment provided him with a culture and language that were accessible and seemed to 'fit' him. In finding acceptance, Seth was able to overcome the anxiety that he faced at elementary school. His new school was accepting

of his hearing loss and his new community embraced him, sharing their language and culture in a meaningful way. His new identity fostered feelings of confidence and assurance, which are now reflected in his academic mastery and school involvement.

Similarly, Beth has found assurance in her identity as a deaf person. Her biological family did little to learn about her hearing loss and expected her to communicate with them as a *hearing* person would. Although her first few months at her deaf school were met with similar confusion, finding comfort in her new language and others who were also deaf helped Beth to learn more about herself and to become confident in who she is. She said, “I’m deaf, I’m happy with who I am,” further emphasizing her commitment to the Deaf community by explaining that she often removes her implant at school because she is now most comfortable communicating in ASL. Beth shared that she thought that the Deaf community played an important role in her ability to overcome challenging situations, and most importantly, in fostering her optimistic attitude for the future. Deaf empowerment movements where “they talked about how deaf are able to do things and that we shouldn’t listen to the word can’t” have been especially impactful in challenging the repressing social attitudes that previously brought with them confusion and uncertainty in her life. As a Deaf person who is confident in her identity and well supported by her community, Beth is now able to “think of ways to break down the barriers when people say that I can’t do it” and to encourage those around her to learn more about deafness. Although the actions and attitudes of her biological parents and mainstream school teachers were hard to overcome, Beth has found success in her new learning environment, and most importantly, a community that is supportive and foundational to her identity.

Deaf students like Beth and Seth will continue to face difficulties in their day-to-day lives. These experiences will bring with them feelings of tension, anxiety, anger, and frustration. What is important however, is their ability to successfully navigate these challenges. The Deaf community and their identity as Deaf persons appear to be pivotal to addressing this challenge. The solidarity and support offered by the community, in addition to the assurance of an established identity, help these participants to mediate emotional states that could put their high levels of self-efficacy at risk.

8.4 Self-Efficacy Development: Considering Multiple Levels of Analysis

The life course perspective makes clear the fluid and dynamic nature of a post-secondary transition. Although the “deaf can” attitude is consistent across all of this study’s cases, no two post-secondary transitions will be the same for each respondent’s life course is different and reflects a different series of trajectories, turning points, transitions, and social influences. As such, it is important to explore the transitional choices of individuals over the life course and to understand the intersecting influences that shape their choices to pursue (or not pursue) higher education. While the participants in this study highlighted family, education, and Deaf community involvement as being key factors in their decision making processes, a broader and more theoretical approach can be adopted by investigating the different levels of social analysis. This framework can be useful in highlighting additional factors that should be considered in conjunction to those identified by my participants.

8.4.1 *Macro*

The life course is impacted by the broader social structure. For example, considering how history, time, and space shapes social institutions (i.e. government, the

economy, culture, etc.) is critical to understanding the resources, opportunities, and constraints that individuals will experience as a result of their social positions.

For deaf people, this consideration is particularly important. As touched on previously, social attitudes towards deafness have changed dramatically over the past few decades. Previously, Oralist views that perpetuated deafness as a disability were most common. During these times, deaf students were forced into programs where sign language was not accepted and verbal speech was mandated (Ladd 2003). More recent shifts towards the sociocultural model of disability now informs Ontario legislation and policy to encourage accessibility and equality, shaping new opportunities and resources available to deaf students at the meso level, including schooling environments, familial supports, and Deaf community involvement.

8.4.2 Meso

Macro institutions shape personal negotiations within meso level contexts. This level of analysis plays an important role in facilitating opportunities for efficacy development in a variety of different social settings. Participants in this study emphasized the role that their families, their schools, and their communities played in helping them to believe that ‘deaf can.’

First, familial resources significantly influence the plans that deaf persons in this study set for themselves. Parents who had saved for their education and who had high levels of economic capital to offset tuition costs, were encouraging of their children’s attendance at college or university. For example, Jill’s parents saved money for her so (unlike her mother), she could afford to pursue higher education. In comparison, until moving to her foster home, Beth’s family did not have enough money to facilitate her

transition to higher education. It was not until she moved to her new environment and was offered financial support by her foster placement organization and Children's Aid Society, that she recognized this as a viable option.

Similarly, participants highlighted how hearing and deaf families can provide access to different types of cultural and social capital. Respondents who had deaf parents, like Jill and Taylor, acquired sign language more quickly and related to other deaf individuals at a younger age. These unique opportunities helped both women to start at their school for deaf students with a stronger linguistic background than many of their deaf peers from hearing homes, making their academic success more likely. They also fostered feelings of acceptance of their deafness, consistent with a matured Deaf identity. Seth and Beth on the other hand, did not learn sign language until they were teenagers, and had hearing parents that focused on integrating them into the 'hearing world.' Enrolled at mainstream schools, their difference from other students was made obvious by communication barriers and their academic performance reflected these limitations. Accordingly, familial knowledge of deafness and interpretation of hearing loss (ex. as a disability or as an identity) can impact the early experiences that deaf youth have and the resources and supports that are made available to them. These differences will influence the choices that parents make on behalf of their children, like where to send them to school and the peer groups they are a part, shaping the trajectories that they will follow and the ways in which self-efficacy is nurtured or challenged.

Beyond the family, schools play an important role in facilitating opportunities for efficacy development and affirmation. Beyond the encouragement and support of parents, participant's perceptions of their abilities were shaped by how they academically

compared to their peers (deaf and hearing) and the ways in which their teachers treated them. Particularly important to these experiences of mastery were resource availability and educational setting. Taylor and Jill, who both attended schools for deaf and hard of hearing students, were well supported in their environments and found education accessible. Seth and Beth had a more challenging time in their original mainstream spaces where they were not adequately supported and where their hearing loss appeared to be relied on by their teachers as a determining factor of their ability. Without suitable interventions in their learning spaces to support them, Beth and Seth's opportunities for efficacy development were limited. In contrast, Jill and Taylor were provided with instruction in ASL, culturally sensitive curriculum, and supported by the experiences of other deaf people, facilitating frequent opportunities for their efficacy development.

Finally, involvement in the Deaf community aided respondents in acquiring social and cultural capital. Participants described how these resources were foundational to the 'deaf can' attitudes that they possess. First, cultural capital provided respondents with cultural solidarity and linguistic insight. Each case study highlights the importance of these considerations in shaping the identities of participants as Deaf people who understand their hearing loss as a small piece of their broader self-concept in relation to others. Second, social capital between members of the Deaf community helped to expose deaf youth to other deaf people who had been successful despite their hearing loss. These ties appear to give participants access to their network's resources and subsequently, to provide considerable opportunities for self-efficacy development and affirmation of efficaciousness by other deaf persons.

Though there are many other meso social contexts that can be examined in relation to the development of self-efficacy, the three identified by this study's participants highlight the interconnection of social spheres and the multiple resources that are impactful in shaping the experiences of social actors within these contexts.

8.4.3 *Micro*

Social contexts are influential in shaping the micro interactions between social actors and subsequently, the perceptions that individuals have of these exchanges. Self-efficacy can be affirmed or challenged within niche encounters - especially between individuals and their significant others.

For example, Beth's self-perceptions were frequently challenged by her biological parents, whose attitudes she interpreted as discriminatory and limiting. Without others to affirm her abilities or to encourage her success, Beth believed herself unable and unlike her family because of her hearing loss. On the other hand, after moving to her foster family who were accepting of her, and transferring to a school for deaf and hard of hearing students, Beth's interpretations of her deafness as 'limiting' was challenged by finding support and more frequent positive interactions with other deaf people who had been successful.

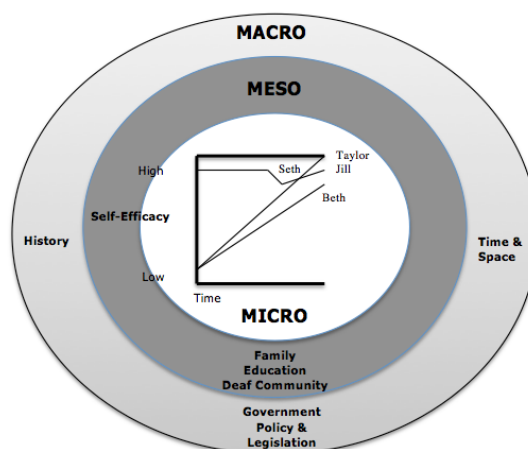
These personal interactions exemplify the ways that self-efficaciousness can be challenged but also positively impacted over time. In exchanges where deaf youth are encouraged and accepted, efficacy development is more likely. In instances where hearing loss is perpetuated as a disability and youth are academically and socially dissuaded, perceptions of efficacy may be lowered.

8.4.4 *Self-Efficacy as Socially Informed*

The above discussion emphasizes many of the different social forces that influence the development of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is not innate or created independently of the social world. Drawing on the notion of agency within structure (see Settersten 1999), this study shows that the ‘deaf can’ attitude, although shared by all four participants in this study, developed in different ways, depending on their access to economic, social and cultural capital.

While this study explores the role of self-efficacy in relation to deafness on transitions, there are many other socially ascribed characteristics that further mediate social interaction and perceptions of personal ability. For example, future studies should also consider the intersectionality of attributes including gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality - in addition to deafness - to reflect on ways that the development of self-efficacy is enabled or limited within different social contexts AND to better understand alternative influences that could shape post-secondary transitions. Figure 5. illustrates how different social forces impact the development of self-efficacy across multiple levels of analysis over time.

8.5 **Figure 5. Development of Self-Efficacy**



CHAPTER IX: CONCLUSION

As Canada continues to transition to a knowledge economy, the attainment of higher education becomes increasingly important (Conference Board of Canada 2013; Lehmann & Adams 2016). Although many Canadians are making positive strides in achieving credentials that make them competitive in the labour market, some groups are at least in part, left behind. One such group are Deaf Ontarians. As has been emphasized throughout this thesis, deaf people in Ontario, on average, experience lower levels of educational attainment (PALS 2006; Canadian Hearing Society n.d.). Problematically, lower levels of education typically result in higher risk of unemployment and underemployment. Furthermore, lower levels of educational attainment mean that few deaf individuals hold “high status” positions in Canadian society (Canadian Association of the Deaf 2012c; Lehmann & Adams 2016; Statistics Canada 2013). Little scholarship focuses on *why* deaf Canadians so rarely choose to pursue higher education. Even less attention has been paid to the successes of deaf students in our country. Studying this unique group in greater detail is necessary to better understand the persistent educational patterns of deaf people and to inform policy and intervention strategies.

9.1 Summary of Findings

This study suggests that self-efficacy is instrumental in the school-to-school pathways of deaf Ontarian youth. First, drawing on existing work that explores the role of resiliency in deaf students, it is evident that this project’s respondents were indeed resilient. Similar to Young et al.’s (2008; 2011) description of resiliency, Seth, Jill, Taylor and Beth each embraced their Deaf identities, successfully navigating a

predominantly hearing world. Additionally, this resiliency also seems to be evident in their ambitious post-secondary plans, which we know are not common of other deaf Canadians (see PALS 2006). Although a resilient outlook may help to inspire transitions to higher education, I argue that it cannot explain it completely. Instead, I argue that deaf youth need to go beyond being resilient by developing a “*deaf can*” attitude. Seth wishes to focus his career on encouraging young deaf students to pursue their dreams; Jill argues that there are no discernable reasons why deaf individuals cannot do the same things as hearing students; and Taylor and Beth stress the importance of supporting deaf students in challenging limiting social attitudes by letting them know that they are “*able*.” It is this “*can*” attitude that is at the heart of this study’s respondents’ abilities to challenge the low levels of education, unemployment, and underemployment, that are characteristic amongst those with hearing loss in Ontario (see PALS 2006; The Canadian Association of the Deaf 2012c; Canadian Hearing Society n.d.). Their highly self-efficacious attitudes towards further education have been shaped through life-long personal evaluations of their abilities, vicarious experiences and social comparisons, verbal persuasion, and fluctuating emotional states (see Bandura 1977). Specifically, (1) family (parental acceptance of hearing loss, encouragement, and language acquisition); (2) school environment and social attitudes (Deaf schools vs. mainstream), (3): peer-group self-comparisons; and (4) the Deaf community, are cited as instrumental in the formation of the aforementioned sources of development of academic self-efficacy in each life.

The development of self-efficacy is therefore paramount in fostering the possibility of further education among deaf students. Like hearing students, deaf students must believe that they are capable of success in their pursuit of further education and

must feel confident that they are prepared for this transition. Each respondent makes clear the benefits of resiliency (optimism, school involvement, problem-solving, etc.) – particularly in education, but also illustrates the specific necessity for self-efficacious educational attitudes in planning for the training necessary to be prosperous in their desired occupations. This study supports the notion that deaf youth can be resilient across multiple life trajectories but must negotiate self-efficacious attitudes within their educational trajectory to make transitions to further education (university, college, apprenticeships, field-specific training) plausible. Consequently, a deaf person can be resilient but not self-efficacious towards their school-to-school transition. Without self-efficacious attitudes, it is more likely that youth will assume that they are not capable of studying at the level necessary to be successful in the pursuit of their academic goals and will alter their plans to avoid potential failures (actions that are consistent with low self-efficacy - see Bandura 1977; 1993).

9.2 A Call for Refocused Intervention

The findings of this study suggest intervention strategies that are far-reaching and long-lasting. This is to suggest that there are many ways in which self-efficacy is developed – and moreover, that such development takes place across the life course. Accordingly, intervention strategies that encompass multiple social domains and are focused on ongoing growth will be most effective.

As has been addressed throughout this study, families play a particularly important role in the development of self-efficacy. For deaf children who are born to deaf parents, language acquisition and exposure to the Deaf community are eased and more common. For deaf children born to hearing parents, similar access and acceptance is not

as likely. These families often know little about deafness and have to make decisions to support their hearing impaired child(ren) that can be overwhelming and confusing. For deaf children born to hearing parents, language acquisition is often delayed, familial bonds can be hampered, and/or feelings of acceptance can be less common (Bat-Chava 1994; 2000; Jambor & Elliott 2005; Obrzut et al. 1999). Such early deficits can have lasting effects as children start school without the language skillsets and cultural integration characteristic of their hearing peers or their deaf peers with deaf parents (Winzer 2005). Opportunities for the development of self-efficacy in education, in turn, are fewer as these students will be more likely to struggle academically and socially. Accordingly, strategies that support such parents and families in learning about the Deaf community and sign language will help facilitate many of the choices that parents need to make early in their child(ren)'s lives. As previous studies point out, most hearing parents are only exposed to the opinions of medical professionals which typically propose 'curative' measures (e.g., cochlear implants or hearing aids) that make involvement in the 'hearing world' possible (Cawthon et al. 2015; Bat-Chava 1994; Koelle & Convey 1982). Complimenting these medical or curative support systems with sociocultural information will help parents to make informed decisions for their child(ren)'s futures, exposing them to the benefits of cultural involvement and the use of sign language – in addition to more widely accepted medical interventions.

Parents must also choose how to educate their deaf children. As this study highlights, these decisions can be ongoing and fluid as parents try to find learning spaces that can most effectively support their child(ren) academically. Many studies explore the benefits and drawbacks of integrated versus segregated educational settings for deaf

children (see van Gorp 2001; Rushowy 2014a,b,c). Although this study does not seek to be a proponent of one environment over the other, the respondents in this project were, generally, advocates of their segregated schools for deaf and hard of hearing students.

These schools provided accessible learning opportunities (generally in ASL) which were instrumental in fostering academic success - and consequently - opportunities for self-efficacy development in education. Moreover, such inclusive spaces exposed students to the Deaf community and deaf/Deaf role models from whom they could seek support and who inspired them toward similar levels of achievement. In these environments, students saw firsthand that “*deaf can*” in a space that was accepting of their hearing loss. For those who are from hearing homes or who had previously attended mainstream schools, this learning environment was instrumental in facilitating their cultural development and identity as a Deaf person, which in turn led to the development of educationally efficacious attitudes as students became more comfortable in their surroundings, and most importantly, with themselves (Bandura 1997; Bat-Chava 1994; van Gorp 2001; Obrzut et al 1999; Garberoglio et al 2014). Therefore, hearing parents should be provided with information about these educational options. More importantly, the Ontario government should more deeply and effectively explore the prominent role that the three Ontario institutions for deaf and hard of hearing students play in the lives of deaf individuals before considering to follow through with their amalgamation, as outlined in the Drummond Report (2012). Further, if the goal of educational policy is true integration, then mainstream schools need to learn more about the strategies used in deaf schools to better accommodate deaf students. As Taylor, Jill and Beth point out; there are many benefits to attendance in mainstream schools as well. If infrastructure is

appropriately developed and deployed to more effectively support hearing-impaired students in their development of self-efficacy, there are no reasons why deaf students cannot be successful in integrated classroom settings. Policy makers and educators need to work with members of the Deaf community to better understand the medical, cultural, and linguistic uniqueness of deafness, to provide academic and social supports to deaf students that address their individual learning needs. Specifically, promoting the hiring of *qualified* educational supports that are fluent in ASL is essential. Further, ensuring that technological aids fully address the needs of students will help them to communicate effectively and to acquire the information required to reach their academic goals. Finally, interventions that go beyond traditional techniques will be most impactful. For example, integrating examples that discuss deaf lives into curriculum will foster feelings of acceptance and address cultural differences in the classroom.

Accordingly, it is clear that intervention and policy development needs to reach deaf youth before they enter college, university, and apprenticeships. Post-secondary strategies that focus on the recruitment and the success of deaf students are instrumental in facilitating school completion but cannot stand alone. It is essential that self-efficacy is nurtured and that positive attitudes towards higher education are instilled, long before students begin planning their college, university or apprenticeship participation. Strategies that embrace a longitudinal understanding of self-development will be most successful in challenging patterns of deaf under-education, unemployment, and underemployment.

9.3 Study Limitations

Being exploratory, this study seeks to motivate further research on the educational experiences and dispositions of deaf youth and children. As with all research, however, this study has a number of limitations. As a hearing researcher, I am not a member of the Deaf community. Although I have worked with the Deaf community for many years, I cannot claim to know what it is like to grow up as a deaf person in Ontario or to live with a hearing impairment. Rather, I was fortunate to listen to the stories of those who do identify with the Deaf community and were willing to share their experiences. As an outsider to this community, my access to participants was limited. Although each is informed by detailed, in-depth information, this thesis is based on only four case studies. Furthermore, those who were interviewed were all volunteer staff members at a camp for deaf and hard of hearing young people in Ontario, which means they were more likely to be strongly committed to the Deaf community, both in school and in their social lives. Accordingly, their experiences may differ significantly from those who do not identify with the Deaf community or who have not had similar opportunities to interact with other deaf people (as made possible by the participants' summer camp attendance). This study can therefore not seek generalization but rather provides in-depth insights into the lived experience of a small group of people that will hopefully motivate future research that can expand on these limitations.

As a hearing person, the conclusions presented in this project are my interpretations of the data that I have collected. Again, it is my hope that this study will motivate others (both hearing and deaf) to work with this population to learn more about their experiences. It is, however, important to recognize my position as a hearing person

when reviewing this study. Though all precautions have been taken to present the life narratives of my participants in the most authentic way possible, they are their experiences – not mine. As such, future researchers would benefit from incorporating the views of deaf people even more comprehensively. Particularly, Participatory Action Research (PAR) would be an advantageous avenue that encourages the involvement of deaf people in academic research and policy/intervention development that is self-directed and truly reflective of the needs of the Deaf community.

Moreover, longitudinal studies that follow deaf students throughout their educational careers would be extremely helpful in exploring the patterns of post-secondary attendance of deaf Ontarians. This study is limited to its consideration of *projected* school-to-school transitions (i.e. these students have yet to move to higher education). Research that follows up with students at numerous points during their elementary, high school, and post-secondary years, will be instrumental in analyzing the development of self-efficacy and better explaining the lowered aspirations and high attrition rates of deaf post-secondary attendance.

9.4 Final Remarks

As provincial and federal governments develop new policies for the integration of persons with disabilities, we may come to witness opportunities for deaf youth unlike anything we have seen before. Yet, as the experiences of the four young people who participated in this study (and others they discuss show, we still have a long way to go. It is imperative that we work with all Ontarians to reach the goal of an accessible province (AODA 2005). Academic research can play an especially important role in complementing government studies that explore the experiences of deaf people in our

province (or anybody with a disability, for that matter). It is critical that intervention and support strategies focus upon the sociocultural needs identified by the Deaf community and do not simply reflect hegemonic medicalized views of deafness. Most importantly, these strategies must not be individualized and make deaf people alone, responsible for improvements. Rather, it is essential that policy makers, educators, researchers and members of the Deaf community consider the ways in which institutions create and perpetuate barriers that prevent full accessibility.

Together, we have already made much progress. The enactment of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2005) and continued support from influential parties like the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (see Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities 2015), reflect the positive strides that have been made in breaking down social attitudes that perpetuate inequality. Continued efforts toward an accessible Ontario are needed. Together, we can make our province one in which we are knowledgeable, accepting, and supportive of differences – one in which, all Ontarians have equal opportunities regardless of their abilities.

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APPENDIX 1 - Interview Guide

Dr. Wolfgang Lehmann (PhD) & Kaitlyn Blair (BA)

Academic History

1. Tell me a little about your schooling.
 - Have you ever attended a school for the deaf?
 - Have you ever attended a public school?
 - Did you enjoy school?

2. Can you tell me about your time as a student in a public school?
 - Supports (i.e. Interpreters/ Educational Assistants)
 - Technological Supports (i.e. FM Systems)
 - Resource Rooms
 - Mainstream Classrooms
 - Extra Curricular Activities
 - Academic Success/ Preparedness
 - Access to post-secondary and occupational counselling, etc.
 - Were there other deaf students there too?

3. Can you tell me about your time as a student at the school for deaf students?
 - Differences between mainstream/ schools for deaf students
 - Supports (i.e. Educational Assistants)
 - Extra Curricular Activities
 - Academic Success/ Preparedness
 - Access to post-secondary and occupational counselling, etc.

4. How did you do at school?
 - Academically successful?
 - Participate in extra curricular activities (socially engaged)?
 - Do you think that your academic performance is [or was] impacted by your hearing impairment in any way?

Post-Secondary Planning

1. What do you plan to do after high school?
 - Occupational goals
 - Why?
 - Necessary training (college, university, apprenticeship)
 - Will you have access to this training in Canada? (Most programs for deaf students in the USA)

2. Can you tell me about some of the factors that influenced your plans?
 - Family Expectations
 - Peer Groups

- Finances
- Academic Standing
- Government Policies (Mainstream Programs/ Drummond Report/ OSAP Grant/ Inclusion Policies)

Social Expectations

1. Do you perceive any potential barriers to achieving your goals?
 - Few deaf-focused programs in Canada
 - Ability- focused stereotypes
 - Communication Barriers

2. Have any of these barriers been impactful on your planning for the future? How?
 - How might you manage these barriers?

APPENDIX 2 – Ethics Approval

**Western
Research**

Use of Human Participants - Initial Ethics Approval Notice

Research Ethics

Principal Investigator: Dr. Wolfgang Lehmann
 File Number: 105252
 Review Level: Delegated
 Protocol Title: Looking to the Future: Considering the Educational and Occupational Aspirations of Deaf Canadians
 Department & Institution: Social Science/Sociology, Western University
 Sponsor:
 Ethics Approval Date: May 12, 2014 Expiry Date: April 30, 2015

Documents Reviewed & Approved & Documents Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Other	Interview Guide	2014/05/05
Other	Interpreter Agreement	2014/05/05
Letter of Information & Consent		2014/05/05
Western University Protocol		2014/05/07

This is to notify you that The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (NMREB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the approval date noted above.

This approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the NMREB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information.

Members of the NMREB who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the NMREB.

The Chair of the NMREB is [redacted] The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information

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This is an official document. Please retain the original in your files

Curriculum Vitae

KAITLYN A.W. BLAIR
The University of Western Ontario
LONDON, ONTARIO, CANADA

EDUCATION

Master of Arts **Present**

The University of Western Ontario

Sociology: Two- Year Thesis Stream

- **Thesis - Looking to the Future: Considering the Educational Aspirations of Deaf Ontarians**
- Advanced courses in methodology, sociological theory, inequality, education, policy and mental health
- Knowledge of human behaviour, communication and interaction among individuals and groups
- Capacity to conduct, interpret, and explain research and to apply findings in meaningful way
- Ability to think critically and creatively about existing literature, policy and social problems

Honours Bachelor of Arts **2009-2013**

The University of Western Ontario

Honours Specialization- Sociology & Minor- History

RESEARCH INTERESTS

- Deaf Studies
- Education
- Life Course Perspective
- Inequality
- Mental Health
- Qualitative Research

AWARDS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Western Graduate Research Scholarship **2013-2015**

The University of Western Ontario

- Assigned to graduate students with strong academic achievement to assist with program and research expenses

Community Involvement Scholarship: PSAC Local 610 **2015**

The University of Western Ontario

- Selected on the basis of community and school involvement

Social Science Dean's Honour Roll: Undergraduate **2013**

The University of Western Ontario

- Academic average of 80% of higher

The Social Science Students' Council Leadership Award **2012**

The University of Western Ontario

- Awarded to social science undergraduate students in good academic standing who demonstrate leadership and community involvements

The Millennium Excellence Award **2009**
The Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation

- Selected from approximately 10,000 applications on the basis of community service, leadership, social innovation and academic achievement

CONFERENCES AND PRESENTATIONS

Blair, Kaitlyn. June 2, 2015. *Looking to the Future: Considering the Educational and Occupational Aspiration of Deaf Canadians*. Canadian Sociological Association. Congress. University of Ottawa.

Blair, Kaitlyn. March 12, 2014. *The Acquisition of Social and Cultural Capital Through the Life Course: Being Deaf in a Hearing World*. The Sociology Graduate Student Conference. The University of Western Ontario.

ASSISTANTSHIPS & INSTITUTIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Teaching Assistant: Sociology 1020 **2013-2015**
The University of Western Ontario

- Assigned 100 first-year sociology students annually
- Responsible for developing engaging lesson plans reflective of student learning styles
- Attend and contribute to strategic meetings on student development and success
- Independently establish exam bank questions and Annual Teaching Assistant Evaluation

Department of Sociology **2013-2015**
The University of Western Ontario

- The Sociology Graduate Student Conference: Co-Chair and Organizer
- The Journal for Social Thought: Founding Member and Editor
- The Society of Graduate Students (SOGS): Department Representative
- The Sociology Graduate Students' Association: Steering Committee Member
- The Departmental Assembly: Elected Student Representative

EMPLOYMENT AND VOLUNTEERISM

- **The University Skating and Hockey School** **2014-2015**
Figure Skating Coach
- **The World Figure Skating Championships** **2013**
Skate Canada Official Partner: Volunteer
- **Site Supervisor/ Behavioural Specialist** **2012-2013**
The YMCA of Western Ontario: Community Schools Program
- **Volunteers in Progress (VIP): Peer Mentor** **2012-2013**
The University of Western Ontario
- **Alternative Spring Break: Team Dominican** **2011**
The University of Western Ontario
- **Programming Assistant** **2010-2011**
The Bob Rumball Home of the Deaf
- **Programming Facilitator & Senior Counsellor** **2005-2013**
The Bob Rumball Camp of the Deaf