

**SIGN LANGUAGE IN SOUTH AFRICA: LANGUAGE  
PLANNING AND POLICY CHALLENGES**

**THESIS**

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**BY**

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# **DECLARATION**

I the undersigned, hereby declare that this thesis is my own original work and has not, in its entirety or part, been submitted at any university for a degree

**SIGNED:** .....

**DATE:** 12 December 2011

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis sets out to undertake research into the very important topic of sign language and its usage, particularly in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. Three schools are used in this study. Interviews and questionnaires were used to conduct research with teachers, students and deaf teacher assistants within this context. The analysis of this data is presented in Chapter five of this thesis.

Chapter one of the thesis introduces the topic as well as the research methodology that is used in this work. In chapter two the history of South African sign language is presented with some commentary on the status of sign language planning in South Africa more generally.

Chapter three of the thesis presents a case study of what has happened in relation to the growth and usage of sign language in Britain, reference is also made to the status and use of sign language in other countries such as America as well as European nations such as Denmark. The purpose of this is to see whether there are any lessons to be learned for South African Sign Language from this comparative analysis.

The history of sign language in South Africa is carefully researched and presented in Chapter four of this thesis. The first four chapters then present a more theoretical background to what follows in Chapter five. In this chapter a more ethnographic approach is used in order to present the opinions and findings that relate to the research that was conducted in three Western Cape Schools. Finally, a conclusion is presented which summarises this research and presents some recommendations which relate directly to language rights as outlined in the Constitution of South Africa.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction and Research Methodology

### 1.1 Introduction

This dissertation undertakes research into sign language planning and policy challenges in South Africa. It explores ways in which deaf learners' rights can possibly be protected through appropriate language policy and planning, in the same way that the rights of speakers of the 11 official languages are entrenched in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. According to Penn (1993:12), sign language is a real language, which should be equal in status to all other languages. Deaf people can sign any topic, concrete or abstract. The deaf do not live apart from hearing people, and they need to communicate with hearing people in order to function socially and economically (Ricento 2006:331). This communication should be learned by children at an early age, so that the child's cognitive abilities can begin to develop. From my experience of teaching deaf learners, these learners cannot read questions on their own when they write tests and assignments and do class work. This is due to the fact that the level of English that is being used is too advanced. Therefore, these learners remain a marginalised minority group when it comes to formal education. Curriculum advisors do not provide suitable material for deaf learners. In South African statistics from 2003 of the numbers of home language speakers, sign language is not listed (Beukes 2004:4).

The research was undertaken in the Western Cape at the following schools for the deaf: Mary Kihn School for Partially Hearing Children (where I currently teach), the Dominican School for deaf Children (Wittebome), Noluthando School for the deaf, and De La Bat School for the deaf. Part of my methodology was contextualised in each of the above schools, as they all teach sign language at different levels. Educators, learners, and deaf adult teacher assistants

participated in my study. The methodology that was followed in this study was qualitative research. The researcher researched the nature of the language teaching and learning in these schools by observing educators when teaching in selected Grade 7 classes. After the observation, Grade 7 learners, teachers, and teaching assistants were interviewed concerning their language usage in the classroom. The questions posed were open-ended questions and were based on observations in the classroom. The researcher concentrated on investigating how the teachers developed equivalent terminology for English concepts when they teach.

Further to this, there is no specific curriculum for deaf learners, unlike the case in other countries, such as the United States. Nevertheless, some teachers may have developed their own curricula. My research established how teachers use the official Western Cape curriculum, and how this curriculum relates to what is actually being taught and learned in the classroom. In other words, the researcher wanted to research how teachers come up with innovative ways to support deaf learners, while at the same time assessing to what extent these teachers adhered to the official curriculum. There has been some corpus planning in recent years. The researcher intended to ascertain how educators and learners react to this new terminology in the classroom. There is often a lack of awareness in schools regarding this corpus planning, and the ongoing development of dictionaries. The researcher shared these dictionaries with teachers, teaching assistants, and learners, in order to assess their reaction. The researcher used a video camera to record the interviews and the reactions of research subjects when responding to new terminology. Government departments were also visited to collect any policy documentation regarding sign language. The researcher worked with the Western Cape Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture (DSRAC), as well as the provincial Education Department. The findings of this research will be presented to both of

the above-mentioned departments, and will also be made available to the National Department of Basic Education and the Deaf Federation of South Africa (DEAFSA).

## **1.2 Qualitative research approach**

Qualitative research can be described as a research strategy that usually emphasises words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data (Bryman 2001:20). Qualitative research stresses the importance of allowing theoretical ideas to emerge from one's data.

Qualitative research can and should have an important role in relation to the testing of theories as well. It may serve the researcher's needs better, since it is typically associated with the generation of a theory, rather than with the testing of a theory (Bryman 2001:22). The goal of research is defined as describing and understanding, rather than the explanation and prediction of human behaviour (Gibson et al. 2009:53).

The emphasis of qualitative research is on methods of observation and analysis that link the researcher to the research subject. It includes observational methods such as unstructured interviews, participant observation, and the use of personal documents. Terms that are used as synonyms with the term "qualitative research" are the following:

Ethnography;

Field research; and

Naturalistic research.

The researcher conducted interviews of 45 minutes with each teacher at the four schools. Deaf adults and learners were interviewed for 60 minutes, as these individuals required more time to think and comprehend. Collection of



documents from the different government departments took 45 minutes per department. The interviews took 5 weeks. Some of the interviews were structured, and some unstructured, hence the researcher gained a balanced perspective from the research subjects (Gibson 2009:90). The interviews with each deaf participant guided the researcher in collecting the required knowledge about how sign language is used in the classrooms of deaf learners. The interviews again guided the researcher in collecting the required knowledge on how the teachers develop equivalent terminology for English concepts when they are teaching.

The teachers were interviewed as to how they came up with innovative ways to support deaf learners, while at the same time assessing to what extent they adhered to the official curriculum. The deaf learners were asked questions on how sign language is used in the classroom, and how they felt about it, as well as what ways they thought would help to make sign language teaching comparative in terms of teaching and cognition in their classrooms. The deaf teacher assistants were asked the same questions, because when they were younger they experienced what the learners are currently experiencing. The Department of Education was asked for copies of any suggested curriculum for deaf schools. They were asked if they thought the curriculum was suitable for deaf learners, and why. Changes would have to be made to the curriculum in order to properly develop it. The Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture was asked whether South Africa's language policy and planning documents made provision for deaf learners. They were asked their feelings concerning language policies and planning for deaf learners in South Africa.

The interviews were recorded on video camera and the recordings transcribed, so that all the necessary information could be collected. Educators and deaf teacher assistants were informed that the participant would record on video

camera while they were busy teaching their Grade 7 classes. Field notes were taken while the researcher watched and listened, as is recommended by Bernard (2000:318). The observations were based on teachers' and learners' responses. The teachers were observed while they were teaching, to ascertain whether they were using the Western Cape Education of Department official curriculum material or not, and it was noted to what extent what was actually being taught and learned in the classroom corresponded to what was in the curriculum. Innovative ways that educators use to support deaf learners were observed, and it was investigated how educators developed equivalent terminology for English concepts when teaching.

### **1.3 Fieldwork**

There are five rules to follow when doing participant observation fieldwork, namely the following (Gibson et al. 2009:326):

The researcher must not choose a site that is difficult to enter. He or she must choose a site that is easy to enter.

When the researcher goes into the field, he or she must have written documentation about himself or herself and the project that he or she is researching. The researcher presented a request letter on a Rhodes University letterhead to the relevant schools and government departments, requesting permission to conduct the research. The letter was written in English in an attempt to accommodate all the participants.

The letter gave a brief explanation of the study, but not the details of the research. This letter was shown to the security guard of the school concerned, to confirm that the researcher had received permission from the principal to conduct research at that school. The letter was submitted to the security guards at the different government departments to confirm that permission had been obtained from the curriculum advisers and the language heads.

Fieldwork was conducted from April to May 2010. Fieldwork began with a visit to De La Bat School for the Deaf in Worcester. The researcher introduced herself to the educators, learners, and deaf teacher assistants. Preliminary arrangements were done while the researcher familiarised herself with the environment.

The researcher contacted the principal and requested permission to conduct interviews with the staff and the learners.

#### **1.4 Structured interviews**

Structured interviews make use of questions that have been prepared in advance (Babbie 1998:87). In structured interviews the researcher decided about the exact areas in which she was going to enquire.

Analysis is built around and depends on structured interviews. Data is generated from the topical issues which have been developed as questions. When designing structured interviews, it is useful to bear the following advice in mind (Babbie 1988:87):

All the questions should be clear and certain.

Pilot your interviews, and ask someone to read through them before undertaking your research.

All the relevant matters should be analysed and be included in the interview schedule. Researchers often make the mistake of failing to include questions about key issues in their research.

The interesting matters should be part of the enquiry.

Time should not be wasted in the interviews.

The order of questions should be appropriate. Piloting can be useful to make sure that one gets it right.

After the interviews have been conducted, analysis will be undertaken around the themes represented in the question topics. The ways in which respondents answer the questions will involve a form of thematised analysis. The structure of the questions that are being asked should be rigid, in order to help ensure data gathering.

### **1.5 Unstructured interviews**

Unstructured interviews involve the asking of questions that have very little predefinition of the topical concerns of the interview. This approach should be used in long-term ethnographic research. Researchers need to familiarise themselves with a given research setting in order to figure out how to conduct the research. Unstructured interviews may also be used as a form of pilot to find out what might be of interest in a given setting. Becker et al. (1997:18) describe the value of unstructured interviews as helping to uncover data that will enable researchers to work out what types of questions they should be asking in their research.

The interviews followed the questions that were asked by the researcher. The researcher did not limit the responses of the participants. Open-ended questions were asked, and participants were probed about what they said. The researcher expected the participants to express themselves, that is, to share their feelings with the researcher and say whatever they wanted to say. These interviews involved all the participants, that is, educators, learners, teacher assistants, Western Cape Education Department staff, and Department of Arts and Culture staff.

### **1.6 The problem**

Deaf learners' rights are not protected by the appropriate language policy and planning in the same way that the rights of speakers of the 11 official languages

are entrenched in the Constitution. Deaf learners are a marginalised minority group when it comes to formal education.

### **1.7 The objectives**

The primary aim of this study was to research what is happening in selected schools in the Western Cape in terms of how sign language is being used and taught. The secondary objective of my research was to come up with concrete suggestions for language planners and policymakers, which can be implemented countrywide.

### **1.8 Research design**

The research method chosen was an ethnographic method. It is the study of people's self-understanding of their life worlds, their everyday life practices, and their belief system. Ethnographic research methods are not a detailed collection of descriptions as they occur (Harries 1999:17).

The researcher wanted to find out how teachers use the official Western Cape curriculum, and how this curriculum related to what is actually being taught and learned in the classroom, that is, how educators come up with innovative ways to support deaf learners. It was to assess to what extent teachers adhere to the official curriculum.

The researcher also wanted to find out how teachers developed equivalent terminology for English concepts when they were teaching. This is informed by Penn (1993:12) who maintains that sign language is a real language which should be equal in status to all other languages. The researcher decided to focus on teachers who would be able to share their classroom experiences, learners who were currently experiencing problems in their classes, and deaf adult

assistants who also experienced the complex linguistic and cognition issues in the classrooms.

This selection was based on Schneider and Priestly's (2006) argument that if deaf children are not exposed to sign language, it amounts to an infringement of their human right to language usage. Although the researcher planned to concentrate on Grade 12 classes, the chosen schools offered sign language teaching only up to Grade 7. Schools in the Western Cape were chosen, as the researcher resides and works there.

A visit to the relevant government departments was also included in the list of selected institutions, in order to collect policy documents concerning sign language. The researcher decided to inform the teachers, the deaf learners, and the deaf assistants in good time about the interviews. Government Departments such as the Western Cape Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture and the provincial Education Department were also informed of the collection of policy documents concerning sign language. Communication was done by means of fax and email.

The researcher gave a brief summary about what the study entails. The teachers encouraged the learners and deaf assistants to participate in the study. Quintus van der Merwe, who is the Head of the Language Unit in the Western Cape Government, agreed to assist the researcher. A suitable time was arranged for interviews.

### **1.9 Length of the study**

It was decided by both parties, that is, the researcher and the participants, that the study would be conducted over a period of five weeks, that is, one week per institution.

### **1.10 Sampling**

The sample group comprised 12 deaf learners, that is, three learners from each school, four teachers, four deaf teacher assistants, one representative of the Western Cape Department of Education, and one representative of the Western Cape Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture.

Gibson (2009:56) asserts that sampling refers to data collection or cases to be included within a research project. He argues that samples are formulated in relation to the interests and concerns of the researcher and the logic of the research design adopted.

The selection of the teachers was motivated by the researcher's interest in teachers' experience in deaf schools. Gibson (2009) asserts that the researcher may be interested, for example, in the experiences of nurses of a particular specialisation. The learners' ages were between 12 and 13.

### **1.11 Educator interviews**

The teachers were interviewed as to how they came up with innovative ways to support deaf learners, while at the same time it was assessed to what extent they adhered to the official curriculum. The teachers were interviewed on how they develop equivalent terminology for English concepts when they are teaching.

There were four teachers from four different schools. The teachers were observed while they taught. After the observations, questionnaires were distributed to the teachers. Some of the questions were based on what the researcher had observed when the teacher was teaching. The interviews were 20 minutes.

Each teacher was to complete his or her questionnaire. Questionnaires were both structured and unstructured. The teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire for 45 minutes. The questions were open-ended and allowed probing. The teachers lacked knowledge of corpus planning, because corpus planning is a new phenomenon, therefore the teachers were asked questions in the questionnaire about corpus planning and their awareness of the development of dictionaries. The teachers were selected from Grade 7, as all the selected schools offer Grade 7.

### **1.12 Interviews with the deaf learners**

The deaf learners were asked questions on how sign language was used in the classroom and how they felt about that. They were observed during school hours when they were being taught. The way they answered questions was observed.

After the observations, each learner was given a questionnaire. In the case of the deaf learners, they could not answer the questions independently, and thus needed the researcher to assist them by explaining each question to them. From the researcher's teaching experience, deaf learners cannot read questions on their own when they write their tests and assignments and do class work.

The level of English that is being used is too advanced for them. Interviews with the deaf learners took 60 minutes, as each question was explained. After the interview questions, the learners were asked about corpus planning. Corpus planning is a new phenomenon in the classroom, and there seems to be a lack of awareness in schools regarding corpus planning and the ongoing development of dictionaries.



### **1.13 Interviews with the deaf teacher assistants**

The deaf teacher assistants were asked the same questions on how sign language is used in the classroom and how they felt about that, because the deaf teacher assistants have had the same experiences as the deaf learners from an early age. The interviews were the same length as those with the deaf learners, as the deaf teacher assistants also required explanation of the questions. The interviews were both structured and unstructured.

The deaf teacher assistants likewise lacked awareness of corpus planning and the development of dictionaries. They, too, were asked questions about these issues. The deaf teacher assistants were also selected from Grade 7.

### **1.14 Interviews with the Western Cape Department of Education curriculum advisor**

The Department of Education was asked for copies of the deaf curriculum that caters for deaf learners at the different deaf schools. The department was asked if they thought the curriculum was suitable for deaf learners, and why. They were also given a short questionnaire, which took 45 minutes to complete.

### **1.15 The Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture representative**

The Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture was asked to provide the researcher with South Africa's language policy and planning documents for the deaf. The department was asked its feelings about policies and language planning for deaf people in South Africa (Bryman 2001:114).

The interviews took 45 minutes. The department was asked a few questions which were selected from observations of and interviews with the teachers, the learners, and the deaf teacher assistants.

### **1.16 Participant selection criteria**

Each learner was a deaf learner who had studied in each of the selected schools and had a knowledge and understanding of sign language and had relied on the use of sign language as his or her primary means of communication (Commerford 2003:20).

A learner who had been at a deaf school from Grade R or Grade 1.

The deaf teacher assistant was an assistant who had taught learners from their Foundation Phase classes. He or she knew and understood sign language and was able to teach it.

The deaf learners were from similar cultural and socio-economic backgrounds (Roth & Spekman 1984).

The gender was both males and females.

The race was blacks, coloureds, and whites. The same selection criteria that were applied to the learners were applied to the teachers.

The selection of the teachers was based on their deaf school teaching experience. The teacher needed to have been teaching in deaf schools for many years to experience these language problems.

The Department of Education was chosen because of its planning and provision of a curriculum for different schools.

The selection of the Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture was motivated by their development of a language policy and language planning. They were able to share information, because all the material that the researcher needed was available in their offices. They also have the material of the different provinces.

### **1.17 Participant description**

All the learners were deaf learners who obtained their primary education from Grade R and Grade 1 in deaf schools. They were all signing learners, that is, they were profoundly deaf.

The learners' ages were between 12 and 13.

The learners were both males and females.

The deaf teacher assistants were profoundly deaf.

Some of the deaf teacher assistants obtained their primary education from deaf schools up to Grade 6 or 7. Some passed their Grade 12 and studied at university for a year. They had experienced language problems from their previous schools in different provinces.

Their teaching assistance experience in the classroom differed, some having been assisting for more than 10 years, and some for less than that.

The teachers were both males and females.

They had taught deaf learners for more than three years.

They knew sign language and had used the curriculum in all the time that they had been teaching.

The representatives of the different government departments were both male and female.

### **1.18 Preliminary meeting**

The researcher made an appointment to meet with the teachers, assistant deaf teachers, deaf learners, and department representatives who agreed to participate in the study. The researcher met with participants and explained what was expected of them during the study.

The teachers and the deaf assistant teachers were told to be aware of the researcher's observation in the classroom, and they were told the content of the

study, or what the study was about. After the observations, they were asked to answer the questions.

They were informed about their rights. The researcher respected their rights. The learners were informed about the study and the interview process. They were also informed of their rights. The Department of Education representatives were given time to collect the policy documents about sign language. Quintus van der Merwe was requested to set up an appointment with a relevant person who would be able to assist the researcher in her studies.

The participants were informed about the use of a tape recorder and video camera in order to keep records. Participants were allowed to withdraw at any stage of the research process if they wanted to.

### **1.19 Interviews**

The researcher conducted interviews of 45 minutes with each teacher at the four schools. The deaf adults and learners were interviewed for 60 minutes, because they took more time to think and understand. Collection of documents from the different government departments took 45 minutes per department. The interviews were conducted over a period of five weeks. The interviews were structured and unstructured (Gibson 2009:90).

The interviews with each deaf participant guided the researcher in collecting the required knowledge about how sign language is used in the classrooms of deaf learners. The interviews again guided the researcher in collecting the required knowledge of how the teachers develop equivalent terminology for English concepts when they are teaching.

The teachers were interviewed as to how they came up with innovative ways to support deaf learners, while at the same time it was assessed to what extent the teachers adhered to the official curriculum. The deaf learners were asked questions on how sign language was used in the classroom and how they felt about that, as well as ways they thought would help to make sign language competitive in their classrooms.

The deaf teacher assistants were asked the same questions, because as young people they experienced what the learners were currently experiencing. The Western Cape Department of Education was approached for copies of the deaf curriculum that caters for deaf learners in the different deaf schools. The department was asked if it thinks the curriculum is suitable for deaf learners, and why.

Any changes or additions that had been made to the deaf curriculum were also requested. The Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture was asked to provide the researcher with South Africa's language policy and planning documents for the deaf. They were asked their feelings about the policies and language planning for the deaf in South Africa, and changes to the policies and language planning (Bryman 2001:114). The wording of questions was kept in the same order, meaning that the signs were in the same order.

The time was scheduled according to the agreement of both parties, that is, the researcher and the participants (Bryman 2001:114). The interviews made use of open-ended questions. The research included probing, so as to assist those participants who might not be able to understand the questions. The probing showed any evidence of lack of understanding on the part of the participants and was another way of obtaining further information. The interview process focused on the following steps (Kvale & Brinkmann):

Design: Outlining of the process of the study;

Interviewing: Conducting of interviews;

Transcribing: Constructing written texts from the interviews conducted;

Analysing: Finding meaning in the written text, and finding out whether it answered the research problem.

## **1.20 Participant observations**

The interviews were recorded on video camera, after which the recordings were transcribed, so that all the necessary information could be collected. Educators and deaf teacher assistants were informed that the participant would make video recordings while they were busy teaching their Grade 7 classes. Field notes were taken while the researcher watched and listened, as is recommended by Bernard (2000:318). The observations were based on teachers' and learners' responses.

The educators were observed while they were teaching, to ascertain whether they were using the Western Cape Education Department official curriculum material or not, and it was noted to what extent what was actually being taught and learned in the classroom corresponded to what was in the curriculum. Innovative ways that educators used to support deaf learners were observed, and it was investigated how educators developed equivalent terminology for English concepts when teaching.

These observations were done because from the researcher's experience of teaching deaf learners, these learners cannot read questions on their own when they write tests and assignments and do classwork. The learners were observed when answering questions, to see if they adapted from the Western Cape Education Department curriculum, if usable or not.

They were also observed to see if they understood the terminology, that is, whether the material that is being used by the educators was too complicated for the deaf learners or not. The learners were observed to see whether they coped with the new terminology in the classroom. The deaf teacher assistants were observed while they assisted the educators with teaching in the classroom and while they developed English terminology and concepts, so as to establish whether they were aware of corpus planning or not.

A video recording was made when interviewing the deaf learners and deaf teacher assistants, as these individuals were using hand signs to communicate. New and different ways of applying language teaching by educators at the four deaf schools under investigation was observed.

The researcher learnt new dialectical signs from different learners and deaf teacher assistants of the different deaf schools. The researcher did not switch the tape recorder on if any of the participants were reluctant to answer questions. She left the tape recorder on the table, and when everyone was more relaxed she would say something like, “This is really interesting. I don’t want to trust my memory on something as important as this. Do you mind if I record it?” (Bernard 2000:204).

If a participant became sensitive about the topic, the researcher would ask whether the tape recorder could be turned off. After the researcher has completed the interviews, the tape recorder was left on, because the participants might have had more to say.

The video recording made it easier to identify speakers and the non-verbal characteristics of the conversation (Bernard 2000:161), meaning that any deaf

participants that used hand signs were identified, and any signed answers and questions were not be missed out.

A video recording is the best mode of recording observations. The facial expressions of the deaf learners and the deaf teacher assistants was captured on the recording, that is, the way they were feeling was exposed. A video recording was made in observations of deaf participants, and a tape recording was made in observations of educators and representatives of the different government departments, that is, the different participants were identifiable by their voices.

### **1.21 Analysing observational data**

Observational work is data analysis, which involves thinking through what is being observed, why it is interesting, and so on (Babbie 1998:107). Data collection should not be separated from data analysis. The researcher combined data collection and data analysis. When the observations were done, the researcher combined the observation notes and the video recordings.

The purpose of research is to understand an empirical domain for some motivated reasons. The researcher would think about the following reasons for the variation of materials (Babbie 1998:107):

What is it about the particular settings or people or practices that were observed?

Were there any defined questions or issues that were being explored when the researcher started the observations, and does the data help the researcher to deal with those questions?

Was there anything that the data showed that was not part of the formalised research interest prior to the observation and which is interesting and relevant?

What were the strengths and limitations of the data gathered, and what other form of data might complement them?



### **1.22 A plan for gathering data**

A plan for data gathering involves detailed specification (Babbie 1998:55). The plan involves the method that was used and the ways in which the researcher would use it. The researcher was to visit four schools, including the school where she teaches. The Western Cape Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture and the Provincial Department of Education were also to be visited. The interview and questionnaire process has been explained above.

### **1.23 Survey research**

Survey research in the form of questionnaires was the method of collecting data for this study (Babbie 2008:356). Questionnaires were distributed to the educators and learners after the observations. Each educator was given 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire allowed the participants to give their own answers and ask their own questions.

Open-ended questionnaires provided a frame of reference where participants were allowed to give answers in their own words. The second questionnaire that was administered to the deaf learners and the deaf teacher assistants asked about their feelings and their possible solutions and suggestions for improving sign language teaching in the classroom.

Each learner and each deaf assistant was given 45 minutes to complete the questionnaires. The time they were given to complete questionnaires was longer, as they took time to understand. The deaf learners and the deaf teacher assistants were assisted. The researcher explained each question, as these individuals could not read sentences and understand them independently, that is, they needed the educator's assistance at all times. After the questionnaires had been completed, the researcher assisted participants with the checking of their

spelling and sentence construction. The researcher did not answer or decide for the learners and the deaf teacher assistants.

#### **1.24 Transcribing the interview responses**

The researcher was expected to make sense of the interview. Transcription was part of the listening process (Gibson 2009:173). The dialogue needs to be transcribed. A transcription is seen as the empirical data of an interview.

The researcher may use different transcripts to concentrate on unclear features of the interaction and produce the number of variations of transcripts during the analysis if necessary (Gibson 2009:173). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009:178) explain that transcription is translation of an oral discourse into a written discourse. Transcription is never value-free; it is always theory-laden (Kress et al. 2005:10). Through transcription, the researcher represents the data that he or she has gathered. The researcher made transcriptions of the tape recorder recordings and the video camera recordings.

#### **1.25 Meaning condensation as a method of analysing transcribed interview data and content analysis**

Meaning condensation is a process of summarising long statements (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009:205). After completion of the transcription process, each transcribed interview was read. The researcher then obtained a sense of what each participant was saying. The researcher used the most used themes, that is, the main themes in the transcribed text, and rephrased them into easy-to-understand text. The themes were applied to the purpose of the study.

#### **1.26 Conclusion**

The research was based on teachers' teaching in deaf schools. The teachers observed in their classes when they taught the deaf learners. The researcher

noted that there were many sign language challenges in language policy and planning in South Africa. According to Penn (1993:12), sign language is a real language, which should be equal in status to all other languages, meaning that deaf learners' rights can be protected through appropriate language policy and planning.

The researcher looked into how the teachers developed equivalent terminology for English concepts when they were teaching. There is no specific curriculum for the deaf, unlike the case in other countries, such as the United States. The research also established whether, and how teachers used the official Western Cape Education Department curriculum, and whether this curriculum informed what was actually being taught and learned in the classroom.

The researcher wanted to research how teachers came up with innovative ways to support deaf learners, while at the same time assessing to what extent teachers adhered to the official curriculum. There is often a lack of awareness in schools regarding corpus planning and the ongoing development of dictionaries. For this reason, the researcher shared this information about the dictionaries with the teachers, the deaf teacher assistants, and the learners.

The deaf learners were observed and interviewed about their feelings concerning the use of sign language in their classes and their input formed a valuable part of this research. The learners were also asked what ways they thought would help to make sign language teaching more competitive and successful in their classrooms.

The chapter mentioned the problems identified by the researcher, such as deaf learners' rights not being protected through the appropriate language policy and planning in the same way that the rights of speakers of the 11 official languages

are entrenched in the Constitution. Deaf learners are a marginalised minority group when it comes to formal education.

The general goal of this research was to find out what is happening on the ground in selected Western Cape schools and to come up with ways in which the use of sign language can become entrenched as a human right. This point has been made by scholars such as Schneider and Priestly (2006), who argue that if deaf children are not exposed to sign language, it amounts to an infringement of their human right to language usage.

In Chapter 2, the researcher will discuss the history of sign language in South Africa. The meaning of South African Sign Language (SASL) will be discussed, as well as the nature of sign language, its status and its users. Further to this, illiteracy among deaf people, ways of viewing deafness, deaf culture, SASL and language-in-education policy will be researched. The educational implications, why sign language is not used as a twelfth official language in South Africa, SASL as a medium of instruction, the establishment of more deaf schools in South Africa, and the failure of deaf education, among other topics will be explored later in this research.

## **Chapter 2**

### **The History of Sign Language in South Africa**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

##### **The meaning of South African Sign Language (SASL)**

According to Penn (1993:12), sign language is a real language, which should be equal in status to all other languages. Deaf people can sign any topics, concrete or abstract. The deaf do not live apart from hearing people, and they need to communicate with hearing people in order to function socially and economically (Ricento 2006:331). There are two different ways to view deafness. Penn, et al. (1993b) argue that “deafness is essentially a medical condition, characterised by an auditory deficit”, that is, deaf people are people who cannot hear.

Deaf people are not only different from hearing people; they are inferior to hearing people, at least in a physiological sense. Looking at the South African context, some scholars have entrenched the view of deaf learners being a minority group. Bugelmann (1992), Graves (1994), Archard and Niemeier (2004), and Dirven (2001), as well as Robinson and Ellis (2006) argue that sign language and deaf issues are only minor subjects in academia because deaf people are a small minority. Penn (1993b) claims that during the time of apartheid language planning and policymaking “SASL had its documented origins in residential schools for the deaf.” Before that time, some form of sign language existed within groups of deaf people. The Deaf Federation of South Africa (DEAFSA) (2006) asserts that SASL is a visual language, that it was developed naturally, and that deaf people have used SASL for centuries to communicate, in spite of the history of oppression of SASL by the wider society. DEAFSA (2006) contends that SASL will continue to exist for many

centuries to come, saying, “As long as there are deaf people, there will be sign language”.

Sign language is a fully-fledged natural language, which is developed through use by a community of users, that is, deaf people. SASL has its own grammatical rules, that is, syntax. It is a true language. It can express the entire range of human experience (DEAFSA 2006). Sign language is not universal. According to Akach and Morgan (1997), SASL can be defined as “a visual-gestural language that has been created and is used by deaf South Africans to communicate with one another”. Aarons and Akach (1998) argue that “SASL is a language that allows the deaf child access to everything that any other child has access to”.

## **2.2 The nature of sign language**

Sign language is established in linguistics and it is a fully and completely human language that meets every criterion that one can apply to describe language (Fromkin, Rodman & Hyama 2003:3-29). Signing does not always take the form of a sign language, and its diversity is significant. There are natural sign languages, which are used by deaf people, and there are also contact sign languages, which are commonly used by both deaf and hearing people when interacting. Deaf educators and learners use manual sign codes for spoken languages which are used in educational settings (Bornstein 1990).

SASL is a unique language, which is unrelated linguistically to any of the spoken languages in South Africa. SASL is a distinct language in its own right. It is a rule-governed, grammatical, systematic, and non-arbitrary communication system which is similar in nature to other natural sign languages (Penn 1992:277-284, 1993). SASL provides evidence which suggests that sign language may have universal characteristics.

### **2.3 The status of SASL**

Before 1994, the rights of deaf people to use SASL were not considered, and the majority of deaf and hearing people did not recognise SASL as a language. Deaf people were not recognised as a cultural minority with their own language (Penn 1993). SASL is not one of South Africa's 11 official languages, but it has a status in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, and it needs to be promoted by the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB).

### **2.4 The users of SASL**

DEAFSA (1996a) argues that there are approximately 600,000 South Africans who use SASL. Today there are possibly more than three million hearing impaired South Africans (see below). These statistics refer specifically to deaf people who share the deaf culture. Deaf culture can be defined as people belonging to a linguistic minority across the world. They have their own language and for the South African deaf it is South African sign language. "Deaf culture has its own history, shared values, social norms, customs and technology which are transferred from generation to generation."

[www.edeaf.co.za/culture.asp](http://www.edeaf.co.za/culture.asp)

Some deaf people in South Africa are illiterate, that is, they are deaf people that cannot communicate and express themselves in any way other than sign language (Crawhall 1995:2). In every country in the world, sign language interpreters should always be present in deaf communities. Traditionally, children of deaf adults (CODAs) have assumed the responsibility of making communication between the deaf communities and the hearing communities possible (Akach & Morgan 1997). Religious workers, social workers, and teachers with some knowledge of sign language vocabulary and structure but without any training have acted as interpreters.

This situation has resulted in the interpreters developing the attitude of their being helpers helping “the helpless”. Up to 1997 there had been no formal training of sign language interpreters in South Africa. There were few interpreters, less than 5% of whom had been trained in other countries (South African National Council for the deaf 1995). Deaf people were obliged to make use of the sign language skills of CODAs to act as interpreters. These individuals would have to act as volunteers, without any training or skills in interpreting from spoken language to sign language, and they would have to do voice-overs.

A further problem in the African communities in South Africa is that there are almost no CODAs who know sign language as a first language, because the hearing family members often raise the children of deaf parents (DEAFSA 1996b). Teachers at schools for the deaf often have to act as interpreters without having any training and sign language knowledge, and tend to use manually-coded sign language (Ceronio 1997). As people become more aware of sign language, and the rights of the deaf as a minority language group, so interest in sign language interpreting increases, and a greater need for interpreter training is created.

## **2.5 Problems and challenges facing South Africa’s deaf and hard-of-hearing citizens**

*The Sunday Times* (August 16, 2009) cited Karen van Rooyen, an educationist, as saying that “deaf education in South Africa is “failing miserably”, and that “[a]lthough there are about four million deaf or hard-of-hearing people in the country, the overwhelming majority never make it to matric – and only a handful reach university”. DEAFSA revealed the following statistics: only 12 of the country’s 47 schools catering for the hearing-impaired offer matric; only 14% of teachers are fluent in sign language; although about 6,600 deaf children



attend school, thousands more have no access to education; and the illiteracy rate among South Africa's deaf and hard-of-hearing is 75%, and the unemployment rate is 70%. Karen van Rooyen (2009), in a document titled "Deaf Education in South Africa: A State of Emergency", claims that DEAFSA highlights its battle to have South African Sign Language officially recognised in our schools. More than a million South Africans use South African Sign Language as a first language, yet it is not one of South Africa's official languages.

Matric is the least of the worries of many of South African's deaf. Tim Stones, a researcher at the National Institute for the Deaf's DeafNET NID Centre of Knowledge, maintains that deaf learners at schools struggle, because few of their teachers can communicate in sign language. South Africa has one tertiary institution catering for the deaf or hearing-impaired, namely the institute's college in Worcester. The number of deaf or hearing-impaired students at mainstream universities is negligible. There are no deaf students at the University of Cape Town (UCT), and only six hard-of-hearing students are registered. The students that study at UCT are well chosen and prepared, but those generally coming from the deaf education system do not have the skills to cope. In my opinion, deaf learners coming out of the deaf education system just do not have the skills and they don't get the points to get them into most universities.

According to *The Sunday Times*, "deaf students need a lot of extra assistance with English if sign language is their first language and their language of learning" (August 16, 2009). The University of South Africa has 113 deaf students registered in the faculties of Human and Social Sciences, Economic and Management Sciences, and Law. There are very few deaf students registered in the Faculty of Science.

## **2.6 A sign language case in court**

There is a case study in KwaZulu-Natal, where a matric student, Kyle Springate, was due to go back to court in his quest to have sign language recognised as an exam subject. Springate discovered in 2009 that, despite having taken sign language as a subject throughout high school, sign language would not form part of his matric exam. He appealed for sign language to be recognised as an additional language, believing that it formed part of the school curriculum. Springate discovered that sign language was not a recognised subject, which meant that he faced losing points in his university application. He ended up taking dramatic art as an extra subject and had to study three years of work for his final school year at Westville Boys' High School in Durban.

Kyle's mother, Paige McLennan-Smith, said that this turn of events had placed her son at a disadvantage. Kyle's mother argued that her son was exhausted after a normal day at school "as a result of lip-reading", and that he had to concentrate all the time during the school day. With the burden of taking dramatic arts as a subject, he was even more exhausted after a day at school. She stated this complaint in court papers. Paige argued that "If Kyle fails dramatic arts and his application to university is assessed on the basis of only six subjects, he stands little chance of being accepted". Springate hoped to study fine art at Rhodes University.

In the court papers filed at the KwaZulu-Natal High Court in Pietermaritzburg, the Department of Basic Education's deputy director general for further education and training, Penny Vinjevold, said that there had not yet been any consensus among organisations representing the deaf about the exact definition or components of sign language, and that this had resulted in a delay in the process of formally recognising sign language as a subject. Tim Stones, a

researcher at the National Institute for the deaf's deafNET NID Centre of Knowledge, said, "A positive result in this court case will go a long way to ensuring that the deaf and hard-of-hearing community in South Africa moves closer to enjoying equal access and equal opportunities in all spheres of life."

## **2.7 Ways of viewing deafness**

Deafness is seen as an audiological matter, and it is viewed as a medical condition. It is also viewed as a sociocultural and linguistic condition. The two approaches to understanding deafness are the pathological, or medical, perspective, and the sociocultural perspective. The pathological perspective, or medical perspective, emphasises deafness as a disability. The sociocultural perspective has important implications for issues of language policy (Kuhn 1996:43-51). In relation to China, the following statement about deafness, posted on the Internet, February 16, 2004, argues that the deaf themselves are "aware of their disadvantages stemming from inadequate conditions", and that this awareness is now "spread more and more globally". Deaf people are often confronted with situations where they cannot access all the information which is provided, because there is not always a sign language interpreter available.

Deaf people cannot use the visual channel and the auditory channel at the same time, as hearing people do. Deaf people have to rely on the visual channel. Because of this, education becomes more time-consuming than is the case with hearing people. For example, if information is presented visually, a deaf person needs enough time afterwards to use an external memory system such as writing or typing or signing, to save the information in his or her memory (Anderson 1999; De Jong 1985:107). In my opinion, if deaf people are presented with visual information from more than one source at the same time, the information can be lost or become cognitively blurred and misunderstood.

## **2.8 Deaf culture**

In the 1970s deaf people recognised themselves as members of a common deaf cultural community (Bragg 2001). The cultural concept presented a significant challenge to the more popular view among hearing people of deafness as a disability. Hoffmeister and Bahan (1996:371) argue that when hearing people think about deaf people, they “project their concerns and subtractive perspective” onto them.

## **2.9 Educational implications of cultural conceptions of deafness**

“The acceptance of deaf culture forces us to reconsider the norm against which the deaf are to be measured, which, in turn, will mean that the kind of educational practice that is seen as appropriate would look very different than does contemporary practice” (Penn 1992). The great change in educational practice would be the status and the role of sign language itself (Branson & Miller 1993:21-41). A growing number of educators of the deaf suggest that the most appropriate approach to the education of deaf children is essentially bilingual and bicultural in nature, that is, utilising sign language and one spoken language and teaching children to function in both the deaf world and the hearing world.

## **2.10 SASL and language-in-education policy**

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa identifies 11 official languages, namely Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga. Sign language is not among the 11 official languages. The Constitution contends that everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions.

### **2.11 Why recognise SASL as a twelfth official language?**

Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (1995:32) assert that “Often individuals and groups are treated unjustly and suppressed by means of language”. They further contend that “People who are deprived of linguistic human rights may thereby be prevented from enjoying other human rights, including fair political representation, a fair trial, access to education, access to information and freedom of speech, and maintenance of their cultural heritage” (ibid.). The Bill of Rights has a responsibility to ensure that deaf people are not deprived of their human rights on the basis of their disability. SASL holds the key to a deaf person’s enjoyment of virtually all his or her human rights. While deaf people are considered a minority group, at the count of one million, they are a much larger group than some of the users of the current official languages. In my opinion, South Africa, as a caring society, can no longer continue to ignore such a large group (DEAFSA 2006).

### **2.11 South African Sign Language as medium of instruction**

Penn (1992:190) contends that “There is a huge gap between what is stated in the Constitution and in educational policy documents and curricula, and what is happening in schools”. SASL is still not being used as a language of instruction. Akach & Morgan (1997) claims that there is nothing that is happening to the teachers in terms of being properly trained, in other words those who do not use sign language as a medium of instruction. Akach (ibid) argues that the Constitution says that sign language needs to be developed for use in schools and the Schools Act says that sign language is an official means of instruction for educating deaf persons, but few are using it.

### **2.12 The failure of deaf education**

The researcher has had direct experience concerning the life stories of hearing impaired learners over a period of 10 years working at schools for the deaf. It is

clear that most of the deaf learners were forced to leave school without having acquired the literacy skills that they needed. Deaf people have also been denied access to further education at the tertiary level. The language issue, according to Lucas Magongwa, a deaf learner, is the inability of teachers to teach effectively, for example, comparing the experience of deaf learners to that of their hearing learners. In 1993, Magongwa gave up his education as he doubted its value when he failed to secure employment as a manual labourer at a factory. In 1997, many of the deaf learners failed their matric, some dropped out, and some became factory workers. According to Norman, an 18-year-old deaf black man from the North West, the principals at the schools offered the deaf pupils the choice of either staying at school, or going home and finding work in the factories. The deaf learners could not get into university, because their previous education was inadequate. At school they were not allowed to study the subjects of their choice.

### **2.13 The foundation of deaf schools in South Africa**

In 1948, after the foundation of schools such as Grimley Institute for the deaf, the School for the deaf in King William's Town, and De La Bat School, sign language was formally encouraged in schools and was used outside the classroom, but it was not used as a medium of instruction.

### **2.14 The use of manual codes during apartheid**

At the beginning of 1948, as part of the apartheid education system, manual codes were used in schools for the black deaf who were schooled in schools where the oral and written manuals were used. White schools remained strictly oral in their orientation. Oral education required expensive hearing aids and intensive ongoing speech and language therapy to be effective (Aarons & Reynolds 2003; Deumert 2000:429-433; Penn 1993b). These resources were available for white children, but were not generally available for children of

other races. In black schools, where signing was used, those working with deaf adults and children became aware that the signing that was being used in the classroom seldom matched the sign language that was being used for social purposes in deaf communities (Aarons & Reynolds 2003; Deumert 2000:429-433; Penn 1993b). The signing that was used in black schools consisted of signs used to represent spoken language, taken from a book titled *Talking to the deaf/Praat met die dowes* (Nieder-Heitmann 1980). A lexicon of signs was produced for use in the South African education system, and it was based on a combination of signs drawn from the British Paget-Gorman Sign System, Gestuno, and Nieder-Heitmann's own knowledge of signs used in the South African context.

The signing used in schools for the deaf was not sign language at all, but a manually coded form of English. The nature of the signing differed from the way the deaf use signed language, especially the signed language used as a medium of instruction to educate deaf children. Nieder-Heitmann argues that the philosophy of "oralism", that is, insisting that a deaf child try to lip-read and speak, has been enforced at deaf schools since the Milan Conference in 1881. Sign language has suffered from a lack of resources, which have usually been provided to other languages. Aarons (1996) argues that "Manually coded English or Afrikaans are not languages, and they are certainly not signed language."

Teachers who use signed English or Afrikaans must be aware that these are codes that cannot be acquired, and that they are doing their students a "grave linguistic and cultural disservice" by using these ad hoc, haphazard manual codes. Sign language is a language of its own, with its own structure and sign order. Aarons (1996:190) argues that, "Signs represent concepts not words", this makes understanding of the concept possible without a specific sign for

each word to describe the concept. SASL is not related to any spoken language used in South Africa.

### **2.15 Natural sign language versus manually coded systems**

There is one universal language, namely English. Each country has its natural sign language. Natural sign language is the language that is used by deaf people among themselves when they come together (Penn 1992). Although English is spoken in Britain, South Africa, and the United States of America, the natural sign language used in each of these regions is different. British Sign Language (BSL) is used in Britain, American Sign Language (ASL) is used in North America, and SASL is used in South Africa. Each variety of sign language has its own set of hand shapes, vocabulary and grammar (Penn 1992). SASL has always been the first language that has been used in deaf schools, irrespective of the method of communication used in the classroom. Deaf children that are born to hearing parents do not share the language and culture of their parents. Most hearing parents have never learned SASL. As a result, they cannot communicate that effectively with their children. Few deaf children who are born to deaf parents acquire SASL from their parents, and they teach it to their peers when they get to school. In oral schools, deaf children use SASL to communicate on the playground and in the hostels.

SASL is acquired naturally when deaf people are exposed to other signers (Penn 1992). The SASL dialect that is used by children has its own vocabulary and is different from the one that is used in the adult communities. Interpreters for deaf children should be familiar with the dialect that is used in the schools. According to Penn (1993:33), “SASL has its own linguistic structure (grammar), which is completely independent of that used in spoken or written languages”. In SASL, the item that is emphasised may appear at the beginning of the sentence, for example, the English sentence *John loves Mary* would be



translated as *MARY JOHN LOVE* in sign language. In English the same sentence could be translated as *It is Mary that John loves*. Hearing educators use the grammar of spoken language. There are no signs for *is* and *-ing* in SASL. A sign has been invented to represent these “English terms in artificially created signed English”. In schools for deaf children, the artificially created systems are the systems that are used by the teachers. Teachers rely on the spoken words that they speak as they sign. They speak and sign simultaneously and use the signs that correspond to the words that they speak.

### **2.16 The use of Total Communication after the apartheid era**

The situation changed towards the end of the apartheid era, as the Total Communication approach began to be used. Total Communication involves the simultaneous use of spoken language and signs. Most schools for the deaf in the country adopted the Total Communication approach. A single education system for all students was established towards the end of apartheid. There was the emergence of a more bilingual approach to deaf education for all students, which emphasised the use of both SASL and spoken language, which was compatible with government educational language policy in general (Reagan et al. 2000).

### **2.17 The emergence of a research base for South African Sign Language**

A conference was held at the Human Sciences Research Council headquarters in Pretoria in 1983 to discuss signed languages and their use in education in South Africa (Human Sciences Research Council 1983). The conference was the first of its kind to take place in South Africa. The conference led to the establishment, in 1987, of the South African Sign Language Research Programme (SASLRP) by the Human Sciences Research Council under the auspices of the South African National Council for the deaf (Penn & Reagan 1990). The primary function of the SASLRP was the production of a dictionary

that would document the actual sign language usage of deaf adults in South Africa for use in educational settings (Penn 1992a, 1993a, 1994a, b, c).

The SASLRP has undertaken a dictionary project and has served important roles in empowering the deaf community in South Africa. Reagan (2001a, b, 2002a) explains that “It was assumed that hearing linguists and educators should be able to create, from the available linguistic resources, a functional, common sign language that could be utilised in all schools for the deaf”. The researcher has been informed that, because of South Africa’s history of apartheid and deliberate segregation, considerable diversity existed in terms of the signing of various deaf communities. This linguistic diversity, geographically, ethnically, and educationally, made the original task of the SASLRP fundamentally unethical and pedagogically unwise. Penn (1994d) explains that “Rather than impose a created sign language on the various deaf communities, it was decided to attempt to document the diversity that existed and to empower the deaf themselves ultimately to make whatever policy decisions about their language that were to be made”. The operation of the SASLRP led to deaf groups and individuals playing key policymaking roles. The deaf participants were keen about the project, and they were presented with choices concerning what constituted different signs. Lexical diversity existed. The dictionary project of the SASLRP became a microcosm of the socio-political changes that were occurring in the broader perspective of South African society in the 1980s and early 1990s (Penn & Reagan 1994).

The dictionary project, which was run by a group of deaf researchers and hearing researchers, had as its goal the development of a resource which would facilitate communication between parents and educators of the deaf and deaf individuals (Penn & Reagan 1994). The political subtext was in line with other developments to provide status and an identity to a group of people that were

previously neglected and oppressed (Aarons & Akach 1998; Aarons & Reynolds 2003). The differences in terms of lexicon were real and were seen as significant by the deaf themselves. The SASLRP provided an important forum for deaf people to meet and start the process of developing a language policy for their own language. The goal of the project was to involve the deaf in all aspects in both consultative and decision-making capacities.

### **2.18 The objectives of the SASLRP project**

The objectives of the project were to employ deaf people for several years, employing individuals as computer technicians, research assistants, editorial staff, and in a variety of other roles. Several members of the Pan South African Language Board became involved in policy issues and in the development and implementation of sign language curricula and programmes for hearing people. In the biennial conference of the South African National Council (2000), a deaf education national policy proposal was formulated. This was the first time in South African history that such a policy was formulated, and a large number of deaf people actively participated (Penn & Reagan 1991, 2001). The dictionary project played an important facilitating role in uniting deaf people in South Africa at a critical time. Many organisations and institutions, such as DEAFSA, the University of Stellenbosch, the University of the Free State, and the University of the Witwatersrand, played a crucial role in this process. Since the publication of the *Dictionary of Southern African Signs*, several investigations have been conducted. There was a development of assessment tools for SASL and the acquisition of SASL by hearing parents and educators of deaf children (Penn & Ogilvy 1988).

At present, there is a natural sign language, SASL, which is a real human language in every meaningful sense, and it is used by deaf people for communication and interaction. SASL functions as a primary vernacular

language. It is characterised by lexical variation related to regional and educational background. The characteristics of SASL syntax are similar to those documented in natural sign languages, such as American Sign Language, British Sign Language, and French Sign Language. When the lexicon is used in deaf-hearing signed interchanges, SASL undergoes a pidginisation process, which is similar to the process that has been documented as taking place in other natural sign languages. Sign language has remained a stigmatised language in the South African context, and there are many serious misconceptions about it among many educators, policymakers, and linguists. However, SASL often offers educational opportunities for the deaf, which allow them to move towards an academic curriculum (Aarons 1996; Aarons & Akach 1998, 2002a, b). This evidence supports the view that SASL is a different language in its own right. In addition, it is rule-governed, grammatical, systematic, and similar to other languages.

### **2.19 Language policy, language planning, and SASL**

The study of language policy and language planning for the deaf and their languages has become a critical topic internationally in recent years (Ramsey 1989; Reagan 1995, 2001a, 2005b). Alexander (2004) and Murray (2002) contend that “In the South African context, issues of education, language and culture, especially with respect to individual human rights in these areas, have also been of considerable concern to the government, which is, of course, understandable given the history of educational language policy in South Africa”. During the apartheid era, the activities of language planning and language policy were employed to promote an official bilingualism, which was intended to protect the use of Afrikaans. Language policy and language planning was also used to support the ideology of apartheid.

Language policy in South Africa was used to reinforce ethnic and tribal identity among black schoolchildren (Hartshorne 1987, 1992; Heugh 1985). Because of apartheid, language remained a controversial matter in black education (Alexander 1990; Hartshorne 1987). The National Party government supported mother-tongue schooling for blacks, while blacks opposed the schooling. After the emergence of a democratically elected government in the country in 1994, language planning and policy continued to play a critical role in South African society. In the case of SASL, the challenge of multilingualism has been taken seriously, and significant work has been done at policy level to protect and promote the use of SASL. In 1996, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa recognised a total of 11 official languages, although SASL was not one of them. In Chapter 1(6)(5), the Constitution stipulates that a Pan South African Language Board must promote, and create conditions for, the development and use of the Khoi, Nama and San languages, and sign language ([www.info.gov.za/documents/constitution/1996](http://www.info.gov.za/documents/constitution/1996))

In 2001, a National Language Unit was created for SASL (Reagan 2001b; Wright 2002). The National Language Policy Framework (2002), issued by the Department of Arts and Culture, mentioned whether SASL was a single unified language, or a number of different related sign languages. From the perspective of education, the South African Schools Act (No. 84, 1996) also mentioned that SASL was part of the language policy for public schools. In the Constitution, the Bill of Rights guarantees that “Everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions, where that education is reasonably practicable”. The South African Schools Act noted that “A recognised sign language has the status of an official language for purposes of learning at a public school” (Reagan 2001b; Wright 2002). This point has been explained and reinforced in the Department of Basic Education’s Language in Education Policy. The Language in Education Policy

began with an introduction which intended to set the stage for the national approach to educational language policy. This introduction reads as follows:

This Language in Education Policy document should be seen as part of a continuous process by which policy for language in education is being developed as part of a national language plan encompassing all sectors of society, including the deaf community ... In terms of the new Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, the government ... recognises that our cultural diversity is a valuable national asset, and hence is tasked ... to promote multilingualism, the development of the official languages, and respect for all languages used in the country, including South African Sign Language...” (1997: Preamble)

The rights of the deaf community, especially with respect to SASL, are both constitutionally and legally protected in the South African context (Language in Education Policy 1997). Through the Language in Education Policy, one of the National Department of Basic Education’s main aims has been to support the teaching and learning of all other languages required by learners or used by communities in South Africa, including languages used for religious purposes, and languages which are important for international trade and communication. The South African Qualifications Authority (2001:3) maintains that it established the Standards Generating Body (SGB) for SASL and SASL interpreting, with the support of the National Standards Body for Communication Studies and Language. The vision of the language policy for education and training is to promote education for all and foster the development of inclusive education that enables all learners to participate actively in the process of education, in order to develop and extend their potential and participate as equal members of society (Department of Basic Education 1997b:xi).

The Department of Education (1997b:xi) explains that “Before looking at inclusive education as it pertains to deaf learners, we will need to clarify in what ways deaf children may be said to have special needs”. A National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET)/National Committee for Education Support Services (NCESS) report states that children with special needs can be provided for in an inclusion model, by designing the inclusion in such a way that the child’s education barriers are removed. A significant way in which deaf children differ from children with other special needs is that they use a different language, namely sign language. South Africa has multilingual classes in its schools, and learners desire to acquire the languages of their classmates. The barrier for deaf children in the context of multilingual classes is the spoken language (Department of Education 1997b:159). Aarons and Akach (1998) maintain that the oral approach has been unsuccessful as a method of educating deaf learners. The reason for this is that the deaf cannot hear, and also cannot learn to hear. Secondly, before one can be able to lip-read and understand a language, one must already know the language.

A deaf child cannot learn English through lip-reading. Aarons and Akach (1998) assert that “The equivalent of expecting a deaf child to learn English through lip-reading is to imagine oneself being asked to learn Japanese by sitting in a glass booth and lip-reading speakers of Japanese all day”. Lip-reading is very difficult, even for those who already know the language. The most skilled deaf lip-readers in the United States may not be able to lip-read if they have been trained to lip read only American English. Deaf people’s speech is not clear. As a result, a great deal of their time in school is spent in speech training, when they could be learning and developing the same way that other children are. The result is that deaf children come out of schools for the deaf uneducated, functionally illiterate, and with neither a first language nor any

other language. According to Aarons and Akach (1998), South African schools for the deaf have failed deaf children, because they haven't educated them and prepared them to be productive members of society.

If South African deaf learners were educated through the medium of natural signed language, there would be no barrier to learning. The spoken language is a barrier to the deaf child. Hearing learners can acquire a new spoken language through exposure, but deaf learners cannot. According to Aarons and Akach (1998), "deaf learners do not have access to the primary form of a spoken language, because they are physically incapable of this access". Once deaf learners are given fair and equal access to learning contexts, through the use of signed language as a medium of instruction and the language of communication in the broader learning context, they will no longer experience a barrier to learning and development. In South Africa, the average reading age of deaf adults is about fourth grade level (Aarons & Akach 1998). Previously, education of the deaf was conducted either orally or by using a combination of speech and hand signs.

Most deaf learners have not learned to speak a spoken language; they have acquired only partial literacy. Their general education has been unsuccessful, because they lack access to the content of instruction. Deaf adults are often not prepared to engage in any productive way with the economy of the country, and they find themselves depending on disability grants and other funded schemes (Aarons 1999; Akach 2000). The most important education consideration is the acquisition of literacy by deaf learners. Sign language is a face-to-face language. Sign language does not have a written form. Svartholm (1994) argues that sign language should function as the first language and primary medium of instruction for deaf learners. However, most deaf learners acquire their literacy in their second language, which involves their learning to read and write in a



second language. They should not be expected to listen to and speak that language, but to acquire a written and spoken form as a second language. The approach applied in this situation is called the Bilingual-Bicultural approach. In this approach, the learners first acquire signed language and learn through the medium of signed language, and are introduced to literacy in a written language through sign language. The Bilingual-Bicultural approach has been found to be the most effective approach to the acquisition of literacy among deaf learners (Svartholm 1994).

## **2.20 The requirements of schools for the deaf**

The Integrated Strategy for Disability White Paper of 1997 states that “Schools for the deaf will have to be revisioned”. Schools for the deaf will no longer be the same as in the past. They will no longer be places where teachers who do not wish to learn to sign can work. Teachers will no longer have the option of using Total Communication, speech and manually coded spoken language, or any combination of these approaches. Decisions will be implemented (Integrated Strategy for Disability White Paper of 1997). The policy will no longer protect the system, that is, the school. The teacher who believes that a deaf child is inferior and must be dependent is perpetuating the disability of the deaf child. The racial division at schools for the deaf, which seems to be much in evidence, will be abolished. These divisions can be traced back to 1934 when there was a separation between European and what was called non-European schools. It was in 1941 that the first school for black deaf people was created. Another significant factor creating further divisions was the 1984 change of medium of instruction from vernacular to English in the then department of Education and Training Schools. Largely, education, including that of deaf learners has been separate.

([http://wikipedia.org/wiki.South\\_African\\_Sign\\_Language](http://wikipedia.org/wiki.South_African_Sign_Language))

The Integrated Strategy for Disability White Paper of 1997 contends that “Special education, in the sense of inferior education, is a thing of the past”. The teacher in the system will work to include the child, meaning to give the child equal access, that is, the same access that other children from society have. Schools for the majority of deaf learners will use a signed language medium of instruction. This practice will provide the child with total access to the medium of instruction. This is how the barrier between learners will be removed (Integrated Strategy for Disability White Paper of 1997). Learners who are not deaf but who are interested in being educated through the medium of signed language will not be excluded. Many of these schools will remain residential, hence it is impossible to have one signed language-medium school in every town. Teachers of the deaf in signed language-medium schools should play a decisive role in deaf children’s lives.

It is the teacher’s responsibility to ensure that deaf children are able to become independent and to be contributing members in the social, political, and economic life of the country. Teachers of the deaf should be proficient in SASL and should have fully acquired deaf culture. Teachers should be committed to the Bilingual-Bicultural approach to deaf education to be successful. This approach will easily engage the teacher to use SASL in the classroom as a medium of instruction. The teacher should use SASL as a medium of instruction and teach pupils literacy in English or any other spoken language. The teacher should ensure that the learners learn to read and write a written language in their second language. When the hearing teacher introduces the deaf child to literacy, he or she must use SASL and what he or she knows about deaf culture (Integrated Strategy for Disability White Paper of 1997). The deaf child will learn face to face through the medium of SASL and will read and write in the written language that has been chosen.

The Integrated Strategy for Disability White Paper of 1997 argues that teachers of the deaf should be deaf or near-native users of SASL. In reality, so few deaf learners have made it through the system that there are currently only three qualified deaf teachers of the deaf in South Africa. As equity develops in the educational opportunities for deaf learners, more deaf people will be able to reach twelfth grade and study further to become teachers (Integrated Strategy for Disability White Paper of 1997). There are not many teachers of the deaf in South Africa who are fluent in SASL, and that needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. Legislation on SASL as the medium of instruction in schools should ensure that teachers of the deaf learn SASL. However, all the teachers in signed language schools will be expected to use signed language (Integrated Strategy for Disability White Paper of 1997).

There will be a transition period, where the teacher's responsibility will be heavier than it will be. Deaf learners will have access to teachers who use SASL. The pupils will understand the teachers that teach by means of SASL. The deaf pupils will be exposed to deaf adults that use signed language. Many deaf teachers in schools for the deaf are working together and signing the content of the lesson to the pupils, helping to answer pupils' questions, and serving as sign models and language advisers to the pupils. Deaf adults should be employed as teaching assistants in schools for the deaf only if the teachers in schools for the deaf are proficient in SASL. Professional interpreters will be needed in order to facilitate the interface between deaf people and hearing people within and outside the school (Integrated Strategy for Disability White Paper of 1997).

Professional interpreters play a crucial role in facilitating communication between deaf people and hearing people. The Integrated Strategy for Disability White Paper of 1997 contends that "A good signed language interpreter needs to

have an excellent command of SASL". The interpreter must have an understanding of deaf culture, the structure of the deaf community, and deaf perspectives. Interpreters should meet the requirements, by working with at least two languages, and often two cultures, and they should be bilingual and bicultural. An interpreter for the deaf is expected to have excellent spoken and written language skills in at least one spoken language and must be proficient in SASL and deaf culture. Signed language should be taught in all the skills that are required of professional interpreters of any language.

The signed language-medium schools will be more effective and will also provide more learning environments for deaf learners than do the current schools for the deaf. In the short term, money will have to be invested in order to set up signed language training courses for teachers, teacher trainers, potential teachers, second language teachers, and interpreters (Integrated Strategy for Disability White Paper of 1997). According to the Integrated Strategy for Disability White Paper of 1997, such proposals have been made, and draft curricula have been drawn up, but none of these have to date had any funding from government, the private sector, or international donor organisations. The administration of these training programmes should be handled by professional trainers and educators. The professional trainers should be chosen wisely for existing schools for the deaf. In my opinion, education authorities and non-governmental organisations have their own needs and agenda that do not consider that the development of signed language is top priority.

The development of signed language teaching, training and research should be seen as an investment in human rights and equity of access. Johnson, Liddell and Erting (1989) argue that the Bilingual-Bicultural approach should be the approach that is encouraged in schools for the deaf. Learners are taught face to

face through the medium of SASL, and they read and write in English. English teachers have a responsibility to arrange written activities where learners will focus on words and concepts. In order for English teachers to communicate in SASL, they should use face-to-face oral communication with pupils, even if the language used is English. Learners are expected to become fluent SASL users. Johnson, Liddell and Erting (1989) maintain that learners will not only know about language, but they will use it for argument, discussion, poetry, plays, jokes, and learning, and they will analyse it, play with it, and research it. SASL users perceive SASL with their eyes. In order to have a record of SASL discourse, it is necessary for schools for the deaf to acquire video equipment. This equipment will be of more value to deaf learners than textbooks, because SASL is the primary language of deaf learners.

The assessment of SASL performance could be done by the teachers to pupils through video recording. A visual record is needed, especially when the pupils need to analyse any SASL discourse, such as a play, a story, or a poem. In all the schools for the deaf, in every classroom there should be a video camera and video cassette recorder, as permanent features. Because teachers of the deaf have never been taught to teach through the medium of SASL, it is necessary for the teachers to attend a workshop at which other SASL teachers will be present, so that they can work together with the aid of facilitators, to develop syllabi and assessment procedures. The teachers should assist each other to implement the new curriculum and agreed-upon guidelines. There should be in-service teacher developments where teachers can share information and skills to add to an active and current in-service development programme. The Education Department, an outside consultancy, or DEAFSA should arrange regular workshops. Each workshop should have a restricted topic, and teacher attendance should be obligatory. Teachers should take control of their curricula, syllabi, assessment procedures, and materials, and they should design their own.

They can share their experiences, such as their successes and their failures, with other teachers.

SASL teachers are encouraged to attend SASL upgrading courses that are offered by DEAFSA or local deaf communities. The curriculum should make provision for SASL teacher training as a second language, as well as the use of signed language as a medium of instruction in the classroom. From this collaboration, deaf matriculants and deaf graduates, some of whom can become teachers, will be produced. While using signed language as a medium of instruction, teachers can develop the reading and writing skills of learners in the written form of a language as well.

### **2.21 The implications of mainstreaming deaf children in terms of school progression, scholastic achievement, and teacher preparation**

Svartholm (1994) argues that the Bilingual-Bicultural approach is not likely to be practical within a mainstream classroom. Learners would need to be provided with primary input through the medium of signed language. In the mainstream classroom a single teacher has other learners with other needs and other languages to deal with. A teacher cannot accommodate deaf learners within her classroom and provide them with these basic requirements. In response to the proposal for deaf learners to be included in mainstream classes, the World Federation for the deaf (1995) has pointed out that the education of deaf children should not be carried out by placing them alone in hearing schools if a proper interpreting service is not available during all the lessons. The World Federation for the deaf (1995) believes that deaf children have the right to education in sign language, and that they have the right to be educated in their own schools.

## **2.22 Inclusion and the deaf child in South Africa**

The former Department of Education (1996) contended that “It is important to see the constitutional and legal status of South African Sign Language in terms of the rights of the deaf”. This is taken into account in national and international policy documents. The former Department of Education (1997b) strongly recommended inclusion in all schools. It argued that deaf people’s creativity should be accommodated (*ibid.*). Another means of accommodating sign language should be established to include it as a medium of instruction in schools. The opportunity to learn in sign language should be open to any child who wants instruction through the medium of signed language. Schools for the deaf would then no longer offer different communication options for the deaf, but only sign language as the medium of instruction. Training would be made available for staff at schools that offer instruction in sign language.

In the past, existing schools for the deaf tried to make deaf children “normal”, that is, they tried to teach them lip-reading and speech. The World Federation for the deaf (1995) argued that “deaf children are regarded as having special needs precisely because their special need is to have a different communication system in education”. The federation said that as soon as deaf children are included, the special need can be met by specific and costly measures, such as employing full-time interpreters in each classroom in which there is a deaf child. Each teacher in a classroom of deaf learners should learn to sign fluently, that is, he or she should master an entirely new language.

In order for teachers to qualify for the teaching of deaf children in their classrooms, they should be fluent in SASL. If the teacher is unable to communicate with the learner, then an interpreter will be required. Signs for All maintains that “Education policies should take full account of individual differences and situations”. It also insists that the importance of signed language

as a medium of communication among the deaf should be recognised, and it should be ensured that all deaf people have access to education (ibid.). The former Department of Education (1997a) claimed that the schools that provided teaching and learning through the medium of SASL were not considered to be specialised learning contexts.

### **2.23 SASL is a fully-fledged language and can be used as a medium of instruction**

Aarons (1996) argues that SASL is a natural signed language that has arisen through use by a community of users and has stabilised over the years. SASL has the same structure as all other human languages. However, there are differences between signed languages and spoken languages. Spoken languages are oral, whereas signed languages are visual. Sign language uses space, whereas spoken language uses sounds. Aarons (1996) argues that sign language is not universal. SASL has morphology, syntax, and pragmatics, which all other human languages have. Signed languages are not based on spoken languages, as they have their own independent grammar. Signed languages demonstrate that the human capacity for language is not bound by physical impairment; language is in the brain, and it may be used as a medium of instruction from kindergarten to tertiary level. South African Sign Language is the primary language used by the deaf in South Africa. On average, a mere 10% of all deaf children in South Africa are born to deaf parents. Those deaf children acquire natural signed language as their mother tongue, and the course of their language acquisition is identical to that of normal hearing children with hearing parents.

Most deaf children get their first exposure to sign language from their peers when they enter deaf schools. After these learners' exposure to sign language, they acquire sign language very quickly. Historically deaf schools have been opposed to the use of sign language as a medium of instruction for educating



deaf children. Like all natural signed languages in the world, SASL makes use of the hands, body, head, and face to communicate the linguistic meaning of which human beings are capable. According to Penn (1992), “SASL is a fully-fledged human language that has all the properties of natural human language, including those of duality, discreteness, productivity, creativity, displacement, arbitrariness, conventionality, and being culturally transmitted”. Communication in sign language involves face-to-face interaction.

#### **2.24 Teaching SASL to the hearing**

There is the sentiment among some people that sign language should be a medium of instruction only in the education of deaf children. However, sign language has also been learned and taught as a foreign or additional language by hearing individuals (Belka 2000:45-52; Wilcox 1988). Programmes, textbooks, and other curricular materials have been designed to teach sign language to hearing people.

#### **2.25 Variation in SASL**

According to Penn (1992, 1993), “Each sign language has different varieties and dialects, in the same way that spoken languages vary according to factors such as age, geographical region, or ethnicity”. Dialectical variation affects the production of signs and the use of vocabulary. An older deaf person may use a sign language dialect that has different items of vocabulary from the dialect of a deaf child. A black deaf person uses different vocabulary from a white deaf person. A deaf person from Johannesburg will have a different dialect from a deaf person from Cape Town. However, the grammar of all dialects of sign language is the same, irrespective of users’ age, ethnicity, or geographical region. Dialectical variation in SASL arose during the apartheid regime. Deaf schools were divided according to racial, linguistic, and ethnic factors.

Before 1978 in Soweto, if deaf children were born to isiZulu-speaking parents, they were sent to the deaf school in KwaZulu-Natal, and if the parents were isiXhosa-speaking, the child had to go to the appropriate school in the former Transkei. Different SASL varieties developed in different geographical regions. According to Penn (1992), “Linguistically there is one SASL with dialectical variation on the vocabulary level, as different groups often have different signs”. For instance, there are four different signs used for “mother”. In urban areas, deaf people become multidialectal quickly once they have been exposed to other varieties of SASL. They quickly learn the vocabulary varieties that are used by other groups.

## **2.26 Significant changes of SASL in official documents**

In 2002, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) issued Draft Editorial Policies. The SABC’s Language Broadcasting Policy addressed the issues of language and language equity in terms of public broadcasting in South Africa. The proposed language policy included references to SASL. This policy was criticised by a number of individuals and groups, including the Multilingualism Action Group, which emerged in the Western Cape, but focused its attention nationwide. The Multilingualism Action Group raised the following objection with regard to South African Sign Language: The integration of South African Sign Language should be placed within a sociocultural perspective rather than a remedial perspective.

Educational programmes should be provided in all the official languages, as well as South African Sign Language, to assist the Department of Basic Education in promoting mother-tongue education. The Draft Editorial Policies excluded the issue of sign language within the framework of a remedial perspective, due to the fact that many sign language users, including those whose mother tongue is sign language, do not have hearing disabilities, and

South African Sign Language is, after all, a language spoken by a particular community (South African Qualifications Authority 2001:3). The discourse of the deaf cultural community became mainstreamed.

### **2.27 The socioeconomic and political context of sign language**

What has happened in South Africa is that a developing economy has attempted to foot the high cost of fitting technologically advanced hearing aids for poor people who could not afford them. That means that all deaf people should have a meaningful choice. The language choice and its fundamentals should be included. The implementation of language policy has been frustrated by a lack of resources, and a lack of significant, systematic, and appropriate applied linguistic research.

### **2.28 Recommendations for the South African context**

There were recommendations for the South African context that emerged from the arguments, as well as a number of significant suggestions related to educational practice and language policy issues. One of the recommendations was that learners should receive a solid foundation in SASL. Some of the other recommendations were as follows:

All teachers of the deaf should be competent in SASL.

Deaf individuals should be recruited for teaching positions in deaf education, as well as in other educational settings.

There should be provision for the teaching of SASL to hearing groups and individuals.

Hearing parents of deaf children, as well as future teachers of the deaf and other professionals, should be taught SASL.

SASL should be one of the official languages of South Africa and should have the same status as any of the current official languages.

Language planning and policy efforts with regard to SASL by the Pan South African Language Board and other government agencies should be increased, and support for the teaching and learning of SASL and to be used in public settings such as political gatherings.

### **2.29 Status planning and policy: Sign language in deaf education**

In 1967 a new policy of Total Communication was proposed by Roy Holcomb in the United States, so as to recognise and promote the right of a deaf child to use all forms of communication available to develop language competence. In the late 1960s and 1970s, the Total Communication approach was followed, when there was a sudden and uncontrollable increase in the development of artificial codes for representing English. In the 1990s, a new movement called the Bilingual-Bicultural approach, or “BiBi”, emerged. There was corpus planning which dealt with language development, that is, the development of a writing system, a dictionary, standardisation, new vocabulary, conventions on punctuation, and the incorporation of loan words or signs.

### **2.30 The challenges of sign language**

There is an urgent need for sign language interpreters in South Africa. Serious problems are experienced in courts, charge offices, and hospitals because of the absence of sign language interpreters, and when interpreters *are* available, the standard of interpreting is not acceptable (DEAFSA 1996b). The policy paper of the World Federation for the Deaf (WFD), issued in 1993, states the following:

That the WFD call for the right of all individuals to have access to high quality interpreting between the spoken language of the hearing community and the sign language of the deaf community. This in turn requires the establishment of qualified interpreter training programs and the establishment of mechanisms in every country for making

professional interpreters widely available to deaf individuals. (WFD 1993)

From the statement above, it is clear that there is a need for interpreters and the training of existing interpreters in sign language. These needs include court and conference interpreter training.

### **2.31 The problems in schools for deaf learners**

During apartheid most deaf people were oppressed. According to Gavin (for reasons of anonymity only the first names are used), an educator and informant consulted in the course of the study, “This affected most of the people whose stories were collected who were sent to racially segregated schools far away from their homes”. Most of the formerly disadvantaged schools in the rural areas and in the townships remained discriminated against. These collected life stories which formed part of my informal interviewing process contained interviews with hearing principals and teachers who controlled deaf schools. Hearing principals and teachers could not communicate effectively with the children in SASL. Communication became a huge problem when deaf children went to boarding school at a young age and they could not communicate with their parents about problems they experienced at school. Teachers and parents could not understand them. Parents often left their children’s burdens to the experts in the education system and did not get involved in supporting their children at school (Gavin).

Parents dumped their children at school and did not become involved in their children’s education (Gavin). Gavin also argues that “The communication problems at home are made worse because deaf children are often taught a spoken and written language at school that is different from the one used by the family at home” (Gavin). At deaf school the children learn SASL from older

deaf adults. Both parents and teachers are unable to use SASL. Stephen, another informant in the study, agreed with Gavin, in making the point that there was a lack of a coherent language programme. Stephen's opinion was that SASL should be the first language acquired by deaf children in school, followed by written English, so as to enable deaf learners to access employment and further educational opportunities. A written home language such as Afrikaans could be added after the first two languages are in place.

### **2.32 Oralism**

William, a 36-year-old deaf man from the Western Cape, claims that at school they were taught by means of the oral medium of instruction. There was no sign language, and the teachers taught them how to lip-read, so that he could lip-read and speak and could also hear some sounds. It was also difficult for other deaf learners, because they had to use their voices. The children couldn't answer questions in class, because they didn't understand what the teacher was saying. Only the hard-of-hearing could respond in class. No sign language was allowed. There was only one teacher at school who could sign. William explains that "The teachers used to say, 'Come! Come!' but we didn't understand what they were saying". Simon, a 33-year-old deaf man, claims that their school oppressed them and hurt them inside. The teacher taught him how to say words such as "mummy" and "daddy", and that is how he started learning how to speak. When the teachers wanted to say something to them, they solicited their attention by banging something or stamping their foot on the floor. According to Najibha, a 29-year-old deaf coloured woman from Gauteng, a respectful way of attracting the attention of a deaf person is to wave a hand.

According to Rosina, a 32-year-old deaf black woman from the North West, deaf learners who did not understand the teacher would ask a classmate who had more hearing or better lip-reading skills to interpret what the teacher was

saying into SASL. Some deaf learners could not use oralism but could use sign language. Olga claims that the teachers did not make any effort to learn to use sign language in the classroom. She pointed out that the one or two teachers who can use SASL in deaf schools often end up leaving the school because of being victimised by the teachers who cannot sign.

### **2.33 The DEAFSA protest-march for quality education**

In 2003 DEAFSA organised a national march on the provincial departments of education. They marched on provincial departments of education in every province. A memorandum was presented to the National Department of Education. Almost 3,000 deaf people in all nine provinces simultaneously presented a memorandum to their respective provincial department of education. In Johannesburg, deaf people presented a memorandum to the provincial and the National Department of Education. The following are the demands that were included in the memorandum (Gavin):

That schools for deaf learners receive an official circular in which South African Sign Language is addressed and supported;

That South African Sign Language be officially approved as a medium of instruction for deaf learners;

That South African Sign Language be approved as an examination subject in schools for deaf learners, and that it should be equal in status to the spoken languages offered in hearing schools;

That in-service training of educators in SASL be compulsory in schools for the deaf;

That the National Department of Education undertake, as point of departure, that the sign language skills of each educator be evaluated. The SASL Training and Evaluation Committee of DEAFSA would be actively involved in this process; and

That the department undertake to accept responsibility for the development of teaching and learning materials in SASL, and to work with DEAFSA in doing so.

The march was effective, and there was direct action from the National Department of Education. A partnership was formed with DEAFSA, the Education Development Programme, and the Sector Education Training Authority to manage, on a national level, training in SASL of teachers in schools for deaf learners. There are short-, medium- and long-term plans (Gavin). The long-term plan is to introduce SASL as a school subject for deaf learners. The short-term plan is to ensure that all deaf learners can access the curriculum through SASL (Gavin).

### **2.34 SASL use in a deaf family**

There are few deaf children that are born to deaf parents. When a deaf parent gives birth to a deaf child, there is great joy and excitement in that family, because a parent and a child will have a common deaf cultural identity, and will also use the same language, namely sign language. The school sign language systems are influenced by the vocabulary that hearing teachers use. Deaf children often change the sign-supported English systems used by teachers and transform the vocabulary to fit the structure of signs and the grammar of SASL (Gavin). This sign language becomes the sign language that is being used outside the classrooms, which has SASL structure. The sign language that is used by deaf families has its own vocabulary, and if it were used by deaf parents, it would be a more highly developed system, which would equip young children better in their language use. In some families, where hearing people did not use sign language and there was more than one deaf child in the family, deaf siblings would develop their own home sign system before they started school (Gavin). Hypothetically then, once they started school, they would then be sign



language role models who had a firm foundation in early sign language development.

### **2.35 The SASL curriculum on Home Language level for Grades R-9 developed by the University of the Free State**

The Free State Department of Education (September 2009) declares that “South African Sign Language (SASL) has been recognised as the language of deaf South Africans by several South African Acts of Parliament and Government policies.” The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa states that sign language is one of the languages that must be promoted. The importance of the application of the national sign language of any given country as the language of learning and teaching is also emphasised by international documents (Free State Department of Education - September 2009). In the Free State, according to the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996, SASL is the medium of instruction. SASL has been acknowledged by the National Curriculum Statement as being part of the Languages learning area. The National Policy on Assessment and Qualifications for Schools in the General Education and Training Band is very clear about the position of South African Sign Language as a recognised school subject, for example, learners must have at least one official language, including SASL. Although SASL is recognised in several policy documents as an official school subject, there is no SASL curriculum that has been developed to teach SASL as a formal learning area to deaf learners. DEAFSA developed a SASL curriculum in 1997 which was based on Curriculum 2005, but it was not approved by the National Department of Education (Department of Free State Province, September 2009). As a result, the University of the Free State developed a SASL curriculum on Home Language level for Grades R-9, to be used in the Free State. The curriculum is based on the Languages curriculum statements. “In 2005 a task team was identified to steer the development of the SASL curriculum; the University of

the Free State (Philemon Akach) and the University of the Witwatersrand (Debra Aarons) were also involved in the initial discussions to develop a SASL curriculum for the Free State” ( Free State Department of Education - September 2009).

The Free State Province shows that there is much that can be done in creating appropriate curricula for deaf learners. There needs to be wide consultation in order to come up with an appropriate system in South Africa that will satisfy the needs of all deaf learners as well as the teachers who operate within the Schools for the Deaf. There seems to be no consolidated effort in South Africa to achieve this goal.

### **2.36 Conclusion**

It will now be appropriate to turn to another country where sign language has gained both political and educational support and where sign language is widely used and entrenched. In the chapter that follows an analysis of British sign language (together with other countries) will be undertaken in order to see what lessons can be learned for the South African context.

## Chapter 3

### Case Studies of Sign Language: Lessons for South Africa

#### 3.1 Introduction

There is much that can be learned from a study of British sign language in relation to the path that South African educational authorities may still need to follow. In this chapter it is hoped that an analysis of British sign language will create a comparative platform from which language planners and practitioners in South Africa can learn. Reference will also be made to American Sign Language in order to further enhance the comparative nature of this chapter.

Deuchar (1984:1) asserts that British Sign Language (BSL) refers to “a visual-gestural language used by many deaf people in Britain as their native language”. Deuchar (1984) explains that the word “visual-gestural” refers to “both the perception and production of BSL”. BSL is produced in a medium perceived visually, using gestures of the hands and the rest of the body, including the face. The term “manual” has been used to describe BSL, but Deuchar avoids this term, as it suggests movements of the hands only, and not head movements, facial expressions, and body movements. BSL is used by many deaf people. The estimate based on a survey conducted in the early 1970s is that 40,000 deaf people in Britain were using BSL. Deaf people who were using BSL were mostly born deaf, to either deaf or hearing parents. BSL was also being used by hearing people born to deaf parents (ibid.). BSL is a native language for many deaf people in Britain, because it is the language that they feel comfortable with and that they know best. However, BSL might not be the first language they are exposed to.

### **3.2 Is British Sign Language universal?**

Most people are interested to know whether the sign language used by the deaf is universal, that is, whether deaf people everywhere in the world use the same signs. Sign language is not universal, and therefore it is debatable whether sign language *should* be universal (Deuchar 1984:2). Deuchar (1984) argues that sign language is different from spoken language. Sign language need not be learned, because it is a natural, instinctive, and pictorial language. For deaf people to be able to communicate with deaf people from other countries, they need to use the same language. Despite similarities in grammar or vocabulary between certain spoken languages, they remain different in many respects and are mutually unintelligible (Deuchar 1984:2). Many spoken languages differ, meaning that the speaker of one language will not be able to understand the speaker of another language. Deuchar (1984:2) contends that “Languages develop in communities, through contact between speakers, so communities that are geographically separated from one another are likely to have different languages.” This development of languages applies to spoken languages, as well as to sign language.

Deuchar (1984:3) claims that when a deaf community becomes established in a country as a result of links between different institutions, for example educational institutions, the assumption may be the gradual development of a national sign language. However, there are differences in the sign language that develops, and the differences would be related to how these languages develop in different schools and institutions. Deaf people would have had very little contact with one another across national boundaries. Therefore there would have been no reason for an international sign language to develop. It has been claimed that there has been some contact between educators of the deaf in different countries in the past, for example, there is a documented link between France and the USA in the early nineteenth century (Deuchar 1984:3). Deuchar

(1984:3) argues that “The second assumption, that sign language is ‘natural and instinctive’, may come from hearing people’s association of the term ‘sign language’ with ‘body language’ or ‘non-verbal communication’”. Cf. Hinde (1972). Morris et al. (1979) argue that non-verbal communication is not always recognised as part of spoken language, but that at least part of it seems to be learned and culture-specific.

### **3.3 The origin and use of British Sign Language**

Deuchar (1984:27) states that when he defined BSL as a visual-gestural language used by deaf people in Britain as their native language, he did not say what he meant by “deaf people”. He explains that by “deaf people” he referred to people with some degree of hearing loss. Deuchar (1984:27) argues that it would be more accurate to describe BSL as the language of the “deaf community” in Britain, since there are many deaf people who do not use BSL, and there are many people who use BSL who are not deaf. According to Deuchar (1984:27), “Deaf people who do not use BSL include many of those who became deaf after learning to speak, especially those who became deaf as adults, and some of those who were born deaf but have never had an opportunity to learn BSL, through lack of contact with the deaf community”. Those people using BSL who are not deaf include those individuals whose parents are deaf, or those who have learned BSL as a second language to English through contact with the deaf community.

According to Deuchar (1984:28), the term “deaf community” means the deaf sign language community, which in Britain refers to users of BSL. Feldman et al. (1978) claim that some deaf children who have never been “signed to” by adults develop their own sign system when a communication system is needed between two or more people. When deaf people have come together in groups, they have developed BSL collectively, especially if the language was needed

primarily for communication purposes. This view is expressed by Conrad (1981). Deaf families use some kind of “home sign” system, however not more than 10% of deaf people have deaf parents (cf. Conrad 1981). Prior to the formalisation of sign language, deaf children with deaf parents had to develop their own family sign system, which, unless they were in contact with other deaf families, may have been different from the sign systems of other families. Deaf children with hearing parents may have a more limited visual system of communication for the family. Deuchar (1984:28) explains that in early times there were individual isolated deaf families, and that the beginnings of the deaf community were in the first institutions for deaf people, which were schools for and missions to the deaf which were established in the nineteenth century.

Hodgson (1953) explains that education for deaf children in Britain did not become free and compulsory until 1893, and that it became free and compulsory in Scotland in 1891, with the passing of the Education (Blind and Deaf Children) Act. The first school for the deaf was established in the eighteenth century. In the seventeenth century interest in deaf education in Britain began. John Bulwer was the first Englishman to write about deafness. He published a book titled *Chirologia: Or the Natural Language of the Hand* in 1644. The book dealt with the use and the value of manual gestures for speech, oratory, and acting (cf. Wright 1969:146). The gestures that he proposed were not based on sign language for the deaf themselves, but on a manual alphabet used by the Deaf. According to Hodgson, Bulwer was the first person to advocate a school for the deaf. From that time on, most people in Britain became interested in the education of the deaf. Bulwer was more interested in teaching ways of speaking for the deaf than describing or using any sign language that deaf people might have devised.

A teacher by the name of George Dalgarno invented a finger alphabet for teaching the deaf in the late seventeenth century (Hodgson 1953:91-92). Dalgarno also took more theoretical interest in language. The teachers of that time concentrated on speech teaching, rather than on language teaching in general. Bulwer and Dalgarno were theorists of deaf education, not practitioners. Alphabets were used by one of the first known English teachers of the deaf, John Wallis. Wallis began teaching deaf pupils in 1661. He started his teaching with natural signs, that is, gestures, which he learned from his pupils. He did not invent signs for his pupils; instead, he used theirs (Seigel 1969:99; Wallis 1670). Wallis' intentions were not to teach speech, in that case he would have used signs primarily as a means of communication. William Holder had a similar aim to Wallis. He was reported to have "used a leather strap to illustrate the position of the tongue in the articulation of various sounds" (Wright 1969:148). Wallis and Holder used Dalgarno's alphabet as a teaching aid.

The British deaf community and hearing people used an early version of the two-handed alphabet which was invented by Henry Baker, a teacher of the deaf in the eighteenth century (cf. Hodgson 1953:120). Later in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, deaf education in Britain was dominated by the secret methods of the Braidwood family, who established various schools for the deaf. The first school was founded by Thomas Braidwood in 1760 in Edinburgh and was known as Braidwood Academy. Hodgson states that "with his first pupil he made no use of manual signs of any sort, because he had never heard of them" (Hodgson 1953:140). Braidwood had no experience of manual signs when he started working with individual pupils. It therefore seems likely that once the deaf pupils became a small community, they would have used signs among themselves. The teachers might have learned to sign from the pupils themselves. McLoughlin (1980:18) explains that the Braidwood schools used a combined method of speech, lip-reading, and natural signs.

In 1783 the Braidwood Academy moved from Edinburgh to London, when Thomas Braidwood was joined by his two nephews, Joseph Watson and John Braidwood. Watson and John Braidwood were trained in the secret methods. The Edinburgh Academy was opened to those who could afford it. In 1792 an “asylum system” of deaf education was formed, where schools for poor deaf children were supported by charity (Hodgson 1953:148). The first asylum was in London and was run by Braidwood’s nephew Watson, who carried on with the Braidwood method. After 1806, when Thomas Braidwood died, Watson published his book *Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb*. Watson revealed an interest in sign language and suggested that all teachers of the deaf should be able to understand it (Hodgson 1953:148). Watson suggested that “instead of the teacher manipulating the sign language, signs should be used to introduce pupils to speech” (Deuchar 1984:32).

Watson was not certain about the linguistic status of sign language. A Swiss man, Louis du Puget, introduced Abbé Charles-Michel de l’Épée’s (an eighteenth century French educational philanthropist known as “The father of the deaf”) “silent method”, which involved the use of signs. This process was the beginning of the inclusion of signs in the formal education of the deaf and lasted until the late nineteenth century. During this century, the use of signs became common in British deaf schools, inside and outside the classroom (Deuchar 1984:32). There was little direct contact between the users of De l’Épée’s original system and the users of signs in British schools, because Braidwood ignored De l’Épée’s system in the eighteenth century. De l’Épée’s method became influential in the nineteenth century in Britain. Subsequently, it became widespread in the rest of Europe. While De l’Épée’s manual system was used, there was another method, called Heinicke’s oral method, which was promoted later in the nineteenth century. Heinicke’s oral method was promoted



by some of Heinicke's more ardent followers (Deuchar 1984:32). Two of these followers were Gerrit van Asch and William van Praagh. In the 1860s they went to England to help re-establish oralism.

In 1872 the Association for the Oral Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb was established. The aims of the association were recognised internationally at the International Conference of Teachers of the Deaf in Milan in 1880, where it was resolved that "Considering the incontestable superiority of speech over signs in restoring the deaf mute to society, and in giving him a more perfect knowledge of language ... the oral method ought to be preferred to that of signs for the education and instruction of the deaf and dumb" (quoted in Wright 1969:177). There was clearly much social prejudice against deaf people in the eighteenth century. Later on the oral method became the preferred method of instruction everywhere, except in the United States, where oral and manual methods were used. In 1893 deaf education became free and compulsory in Britain. In existing schools, the asylum system of deaf education came to an end, and deaf education became funded by grants and rates. Where necessary, new schools were to be built by the local school boards.

Education of the deaf remained separate from education for hearing children until 1944. Most educators were interested in speech development. In the nineteenth century many missions to the Deaf, in addition to schools, were developed and became another important focus for the deaf community (Deuchar 1984:33). The first missions were founded in Scotland, namely in Edinburgh and Glasgow, and others were established in Northern England and the Midlands in the middle of the century. The early missions were often attached to schools for the deaf and were intended to provide for the educational and spiritual needs of former pupils of the schools. Their local support depended on charity. The local charity was inspired by three motives, namely

evangelism, mutual aid, and philanthropy. Evangelism and mutual aid were the most important motives. The primary emphasis of the missions was religious instruction and the facilities that were used became regular meeting places for local deaf people and were used for recreational purpose (Deuchar 1984:34). Religious instruction was carried out by sympathetic local churchmen (cf. Lysons 1978).

As far back as the nineteenth century there were missions that were set up in rural areas where no local mission had been established. Since 1960 local authorities have been responsible for the financial support of the welfare of deaf people and they have also provided services through their agencies. The two main focuses of the missions to the deaf and the schools were the newly formed deaf community and its sign language. In schools, the official attitude to sign language was negative. Sign language was only accepted and promoted as a means of religious instruction in the missions. Sign language would have been used mostly in informal situations outside the classroom. In the missions, sign language had a formal usage in church services, as well as an informal, social usage. The current use and status of BSL, according to Deuchar (1984:35), will be described in deaf education and in adult deaf life. He contends that there is no longer a close link between the schools and the deaf centres, as there used to be between the schools and at least some missions. Deuchar (1984:35) argues that “The school is the focus of the community of deaf adults”.

Many schools for the deaf are residential. Only those children that go home for the weekend are able to go to their local deaf centre. Deuchar argues that most children do not become full members of their local deaf centre until they leave school. The separation between the school and the centre is a reflection of the difference between the types of sign language that are used in the two communities (Deuchar 1984:35). Children who have deaf parents will know

how to sign when they start school, but learners who have hearing parents will learn from their peers, and their variety of sign language will be similar to the adult variety. Adult signers can tell where a deaf person comes from and the school where he or she went to. Deuchar (1981) argues as follows: “I would guess that all residential schools have some signing system which is used by the children, even if it is only used secretly”.

He contends that the negative attitude to sign language that prevailed in educational policy from the time British schools for the deaf began has survived into the twentieth century and has been reinforced by the resolution of the Conference of Milan, so that oralism has become the predominant trend. Denmark (1976:76) argues that oralism is not restricted to speech teaching, but it involves the use of speech lip-reading, as well as the use of auditory aids and the written word. The main aim of oralism is to teach English and other subjects and describe them without manual aids. This means that sign language was banned from the classrooms of some schools which practised oralism. Many teachers of the deaf are still not competent in sign language and end up seeing English as the only acceptable means of communication. They develop a negative attitude towards sign language, which is the first language of many deaf children and is used by almost all deaf children outside the classroom (Deuchar 1984:36).

On the one hand, Deuchar (1984:36) asserts that many oralists think that signing, or “manual communication”, does not interfere with the acquisition of English, and also that signing is unsystematic and non-linguistic. On the other hand, Watson (1976:6) argues that the signs in general use do not follow a system of rules, and therefore cannot be regarded as a language. Deuchar (1984:36) contends that “Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that this kind of statement is becoming less frequent, as more research is being done on BSL”.

He argues that until recently, the term “BSL” was not used at all in discussions on the need for sign language in deaf education. In 1981, the term “BSL” was used in a proposed policy statement of the British Association of Teachers of the Deaf (BATOD). Deuchar (1984:36) describes British Sign Language as “a mode of manual-visual communication incorporating the national or regional signs used in Britain within a specific structure”. The Teacher of the Deaf Association magazine (September 1981, p. 8) asserts that sign language is recognised as a language in its own right and is different from English. However, schools for the deaf are different, because oralism is used inside the classroom, and signing is used outside the classroom.

Later on the practice changed, from the total banning of signing both inside and outside the classroom, to an acceptance of signing outside of formal lessons, to the use of signs to support speech both inside and outside the classroom (Deuchar 1984:36). This process is called “Total Communication”. According to Denton (1976), the term “Total Communication” is “sometimes being used in a broad sense of philosophy, according to which any method of communication which works is to be used, and sometimes in a narrow sense, referring to a ‘combined’ or ‘simultaneous’ method of communication”. He argues that when signs are used simultaneously with speech, the result will be a variety of signs, and it is sometimes called “Signed English”, because the order of signs reflects the structure of English. In some educational schools, the methods that are used are the same throughout the school, whereas in other schools, especially the “pure oralist” ones, the use of signing may be allowed in classes with learners of lesser ability. The idea that sign language is for the less capable children in these schools reinforces the low status that is generally accorded to sign language (Deuchar 1984:37).

Craig (1973) and Griffiths (1980) claim that there were methods used in some “pure oralist” schools which did not involve the use of BSL. One of these methods is the Paget Gorman Sign System. The other is Cued Speech. The Paget Gorman Sign System was developed by two individuals, namely Sir Richard Paget and Pierre Gorman, between the years 1934 and 1971. The aim of this method was to introduce a manual representation of English, where signs chosen for their “iconicity” corresponded to English words, and where there were signs for affixes, such as *-ly*, *-er*, and *-ed* (Craig 1973). The idea was for the full grammatical structure of English to be represented on the hands. Deuchar (1984:37) claims that some teachers consider this method rather than BSL, as they do not consider BSL to be a language or regard the structure of BSL as being the same as the structure of English. Cued Speech, according to Cornett (1967), has been viewed as “a compromise between the oral and manual approaches, though it does not use signs to represent ideas, but rather a system of hand positions and configurations which are designed to disambiguate sounds which appear similar on the lips, like ‘p’ and ‘m’, for example”.

Deuchar (1984:37) maintains that the oral-manual controversy, which started in the eighteenth century, continues even today in the discussion of the methods that need to be used in the education of the deaf. The discussion sometimes becomes an argument between “oralists” and “manualists”, or those who advocate the use of speech, versus those who advocate the use of sign language in deaf education (Freeman et al. 1981:3). Deuchar (1984:38) maintains that both advocates and opponents of oralism do not support the use of sign language, and that those who use sign language in the classroom tend to use Signed English, with speech rather than BSL. Deuchar (1984:38) argues that although oralism was approved in 1880 by the Conference of Milan, it is not effective for a large number of deaf children. This has led to a continual discussion of alternative teaching methods for the deaf. In 1964 there was

consideration of a government inquiry for finger-spelling and signing in deaf education. The results of this inquiry became known as the “Lewis Report”, which represented opposing opinions rather than research findings (Deuchar 1984:38).

The committee drafting the “Lewis Report” proposed that the research be done. The UK Department of Education and Science (1968:90) argued that the lack of research on BSL at that time was reflected in the claim in the report that “signing, as commonly used at present among deaf adults and, even more, signing as it develops spontaneously among deaf children, are non-linguistic media of communication”. Deuchar (1984:38) claims that the above statement was based on the opinion of the committee members and those who submitted the evidence to them, and that none of them were linguists. He contends that the statement therefore conveys the prevailing negative attitudes, even among deaf people, to the status of signing. He argues that, as a result of the mainly oral education through which deaf people are taught, and the attitudes of hearing people, deaf people come to believe that “their most natural and easy means of communication is not a language”. Deuchar (1984:38) contends that “The committee have unfortunately made the mistake of equating ‘language’ with English”, and that “their statement would be quite reasonable if ‘non-linguistic’ were replaced with ‘non-English’”.

Deuchar (1984:39) contends further that the attitude that sign language is ungrammatical or non-linguistic is similar to the attitude that non-standard dialects of English are not suitable for the classroom, and that standard English is the only variety of English that is suitable to be used in the classroom. He argues that such attitudes “reflect the idea that a language must be taught to be a proper language”. The above statement by the UK Department of Education and Science suggests the attitude that BSL cannot be used in education because it is

not a proper language. Deuchar (1984:39) argues that between 1968 and 1980, there was progress on sign language. The UK Department of Education and Science (1968:88) contended that “The Lewis report states that the aims in educating deaf children should be ‘to enable them to realise their full potential and so far as possible take their place in society in due course’”. Some deaf teachers think that the use of BSL will isolate them from the hearing majority. Deuchar (1984:39) argues that the role of sign language in schools for the deaf in the nineteenth century was different from its role in the missions, and that this difference has also been observed in the twentieth century, where oralism became the dominant trend in schools.

However, teachers of the deaf do not require sign language training to be competent in sign language. Social workers working with deaf people should also receive sign language training, in order to be able to communicate with deaf people. Deuchar (1984:39) argues that “A social worker with the deaf finds sign language essential to communicate with his or her client, many of whom may be ‘failures’ from the oral system of education, and also to interpret for them in their dealings with the hearing world, as in visits to the doctors, job interviews etc”. Social workers will be connected with deaf people through deaf centres, where deaf people will be identified and use BSL in order to encourage its acceptance as the means of communication (Deuchar 1984:39). Because of the common belief that those deaf people who can succeed orally will not need sign language, and the negative attitude towards sign language in many deaf schools, the deaf people who compete orally and communicate well with the hearing world will not frequently attend the deaf centres, because they see them as places for failures.

As the oral deaf do not attend the deaf centres, the negative status of BSL is reinforced, and therefore deaf people, especially those who use BSL as their

main language, were able to enjoy this relaxed atmosphere and communicate, since the BSL used to be avoided in public (Deuchar 1984:40). The use of sign language in services for the deaf has also reinforced the negative status of BSL, as it used to be Signed English that was indirectly used in formal settings, and not BSL. Social workers and deaf teachers of the deaf tend to have an “instrumental attitude” towards sign language and have agreed with many other deaf educators that sign language does not have the same status as English (Deuchar 1984:40). This attitude has resulted in a desire by educational authorities to improve sign language, as well as to promote it. This desire has also been apparent through the establishment of the Committee for the Study of Sign Language in the 1960s. The promotion and improvement of sign language were formalised in 1964, with the establishment of the College of Deaf Welfare. The aims of the college were the standardisation, improvement, codification, and extension of the sign language vocabulary, and the promotion of the teaching of sign language.

According to Deuchar, the Committee for the Study of Sign Language aimed to develop a system, namely “Basic Sign Language”, which could be introduced in schools. Unfortunately, their work came to an end, because of the closure of the College of Deaf Welfare. Deuchar (1984:40) argues that the minutes of the committee’s meetings are an interesting reflection of “prevailing attitudes to sign language, even among those who promoted it”, in that the committee said that sign language should be similar to English for it to be grammatical. For example, Deuchar says that “Despite the fact that not all languages in the world mark tense on verbs, it states in the report of a meeting held on 18 May 1966 that ‘in an endeavour to make an attempt at grammatical structure for Basic Sign Language, the Committee should consider in particular the tenses of verbs’”. Deuchar (1984:41) argues that the committee aimed to develop a way



of marking tense on verbs which are similar to English. This was an attempt to describe how they mark time in sign language.

Deuchar (1984:41) maintains that he used the term “sign language”, or “BSL”, with reference to “the language used informally among deaf pupils in schools and by adult deaf people”. Due to the lack of research on signing among schoolchildren, it is impossible to be certain about the degree of similarity between signing systems used in schools which are scattered geographically. Deuchar (1984:41) argues that one might expect school signing systems to be similar to adult BSL because of the presence of deaf parents with deaf children in schools that use BSL. Deuchar (1984:41) contends that adult BSL is not standardised, hence English BSL does not have a written and accepted standard form. He argues that the degree of standardisation may depend on the degree of contact that exists between the different deaf centres for sporting and social events and the national congresses of the British Deaf Association. Gorman (1960:215) suggests that “welfare workers play an important role in the standardisation of sign language through their mobility”. He contends that “this may be because of those welfare workers who are native signers”, but he concedes that the subject requires further study.

According to Deuchar (1984:41), the British Deaf Association (BDA) was founded in 1890 as the “British Deaf and Dumb Association”. The name of this association was changed in 1970, when there was a protest against the fact that the Royal Commission had never heard of or listened to the deaf witnesses called to state their opinions, when it recommended the use of the oral method in British deaf education after the Conference of Milan. The British Deaf Association used the manual method as well as the oral method in the area of deaf education (Deuchar 1984:41). Goodridge (1960) asserts that in 1960 the British Deaf Association produced a manual of sign language vocabulary. With

regard to the work of teachers and social workers with the deaf, until recently the BDA had not recognised BSL as a language in its own right. Deuchar (1984:42) claims that the 1970 BDA report which commented on the Lewis Report says that “It was agreed that there was no complete grammatical sign language in the full meaning of the words in common use today”. He also argues that “Where communication was carried on by signs alone, this consisted of stringing signs together to convey ideas, but in no way did it constitute a genuine form of language with an acceptable grammatical basis”.

The BDA published articles on BSL in the late 1970s in its bi-monthly publication, the *British Deaf News*. These articles, according to Deuchar, recognised BSL as a language in its own right, and they also reported on the results of recent linguistic research. The activities of the BDA included the establishment of a Communication Skills Programme, which was supported by a grant from the Department of Health and Social Security. The aims of the skills programme, according to Deuchar (1984:42), were to promote the publicity, study, and teaching of sign language, and also to set up a register of sign language interpreters who would provide training. This register of interpreters was intended to improve the professional status of sign language interpreters. In 1980 the Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People was established. It adopted similar aims to the Communication Skills Programme, as this programme was due to come to an end in 1981 (Deuchar 1984:42). The Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People included representatives of the major organisations which dealt with the welfare of the deaf and deaf education. It also coordinated the way in which this was to be conducted and promoted cooperation between oralist educators and manualist welfare workers (Simpson 1981).

After the appointment of a new general secretary in 1981, the BDA considered introducing changes in deaf education. The BDA continued to advocate for the use of oral and manual methods in schools. Volume 13, Number 6 of the *British Deaf News* (1981:205) claimed that the Total Communication campaign was launched to improve the status of British Sign Language. The BDA recognised the status of BSL and the rights of BSL users, and therefore the organisation was ethically free to promote the use of BSL in the deaf community as a whole. Volume 13, Number 11 of the *British Deaf News* (1982:419) asserts that “One indication of initial success in improving the status of BSL interpreters were first involved in political conference in 1981, including the Labour Party Conference, where part of the party leader’s speech was shown in sign language on television at peak viewing time, thus introducing many hearing people to BSL for the first time”. This provided a public platform for sign language to be used in a political domain.

In 1982 the BDA organised a “British Deaf Awareness Week”, where they launched a manifesto (*British Deaf News*, Volume 13, Number 11, 1982:419). The BDA asked the UK government to recognise British Sign Language as a real language of the British people when it makes laws. For inputs on the use and status of BSL, two members of the newly formed Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People contributed. One of the members was the Royal National Institute for the Deaf, which has existed since 1924, and which has acted as a useful resource centre for information related to deafness, including sign language. The institute has an excellent library, which is open to everyone, and it arranges conferences for discussion of the methods of communication in deaf education (Royal National Institute for the Deaf 1976a, 1976b). The other member was the National Union of the Deaf (NUD), which had its regular newsletter and other activities advocating for the

acceptance and recognition of BSL. It also provided a useful forum for information-sharing and discussion of BSL by deaf people themselves.

The NUD newsletter provided information and published the views of deaf people. Many deaf people never thought of their primary means of communication as a language with grammatical rules (Deuchar 1984:43). According to the programme *Signs of Life* on television channel BBC2 (1979), another pressure group which had an impact on the status of BSL was the Deaf Broadcasting Campaign (DBC), which began in the late 1970s, following the first television programme designed especially for deaf people and using signs. The aim of the DBC was to promote the use of signs on television, and it achieved success in the areas that follow below. There was a local interpreting television station, and there was also a BBC magazine programme which was broadcast in the autumn of 1981 and 1982 (Deuchar 1984:44). The DBC also hoped to develop a television course for teaching sign language to beginners. Deuchar (1984:44) argued that “The use of BSL on television may also contribute to its standardization”. There was expenditure of public money for BSL research, in the form of grants to higher education institutions (Deuchar 1984:44).

Deuchar (1984:44) asserts that in 1978, after he had completed his postgraduate research, he began a three-year research project at Bristol University on “Sign Language Learning and Use”. He explains that the research involved data collection in deaf clubs and interpreter testing. The project had three full-time members of staff, namely a psychologist, an interpreter, and a linguist, and also employed deaf people as research assistants (Deuchar 1984:44). In 1979 a British Sign Language project began at Moray House College of Education, Edinburgh, with the aim of analysing the grammatical structure of BSL. The projects based in Bristol and Edinburgh were conducted and coordinated by

research teams which involved the deaf community (Deuchar 1984:44). This resulted in the simultaneous learning of deaf people's own language and the gaining of confidence in their learning of sign language. These deaf people also achieved more confidence as a group. Deuchar (1984:45) claims that the first International Symposium on Sign Language Research was held at Stockholm in 1979 and included five papers on BSL, which were published in (Ahlgren and Bergman 1980).

The first British national conference on sign language research was held at Lancaster. Over 100 people attended the conference, including teachers of the deaf, social workers, and representatives of the deaf community (Deuchar 1984:45). The second International Symposium on Sign Language Research was held in 1981 in Bristol, where BSL research was well presented (Kyle & Woll 1983). The research papers on BSL had been presented at conferences with a general theme of language or linguistics. Through this, the status of BSL was promoted among those professionals concerned with language, but not necessarily with deafness. Papers on BSL have been presented at meetings of the Linguistics Association of Great Britain, and Woll and Lawson (1981) presented a paper at a conference on minority languages, where the status of BSL was established as one of the minority languages of Britain (Deuchar 1984:45).

However, in the July 20, 2010 edition of Newsflash, it was reported that "Yesterday in Vancouver, Canada, the International Congress on the Education of the Deaf (ICED) apologised to the global deaf community and stated that the resolutions (the outlawing of signed languages, deaf culture, etc.) passed at the ICED Milan Congress in 1880 were 'WRONG' and 'OPPRESSIVE' to the deaf Community! And, more importantly, it admitted that this was the root of the decline in deaf education over the last 120 years!"

### **3.4 Sign language and education in later years**

Kyle and Woll (1985:31) contend that educators in the UK never accepted sign language as a teaching method in the classroom. Sign language was not considered a teaching method; it was considered a means of communication. Sign language was not being used to educate children (Kyle & Woll 1985:32). They argue that sign language opened a channel of communication and “provided a vehicle for the curriculum”. Kyle and Woll (1985:31) maintain that “The idea of sign language as a panacea overcoming all the difficulties that deaf children have in learning is certainly mistaken”. Kyle and Woll (1985) claim that the view that the deaf child does not “need” sign language or that “we do not have to resort to signs” is mistaken in its understanding of the function of a language. Teachers and pupils should share equal means of communication, which is a fundamental principle in all education. Education begins when communication between a teacher and a child exists. Kyle and Woll (1985) argue that sign language is a shared language which required the skill of a teacher in order to provide the knowledge a child needs as part of growing up.

The form of BSL used by children is recognised in most schools for the deaf and those schools whose educators do not use sign language. Kyle and Woll (1985) claim that deaf adults often talk about “school signing”, that is, a style which may be governed by “the necessity of avoiding the teacher’s detection of the use of the hands or school signs”, thereby developing individual signs and not those used by the deaf community. Kyle and Allsop (1982a) argue that this sign language cannot be recognised without a detailed examination of deaf children’s BSL. These authors argue that deaf children in the USA use a different language variety from American Sign Language. They were also concerned that teachers should understand this form and offer an alternative adult form. Kyle and Allsop (1982a) maintain that “in the UK it seems that deaf

children do graduate quickly to adult signing and claim to have learned this before leaving school”. According to Kyle and Allsop (1982a), signs can be used as a teaching method in order to teach a specific skill, that is, to train speech, or to teach reading. Sign systems should be developed for the specific purpose of allowing speech and signs to be presented together.

Most countries encourage the use of signs and speech together. Total Communication requires the use of signs in spoken language word order. It is claimed to be a powerful tool in achieving a learning environment in schools. Evans (1981) discusses the consideration of using signs and speech together and outlines the main concepts for education. He argues that the use of signs and speech together “opens up a whole series of possibilities for educators and allows full participation in group activities by deaf and hearing people together”. Hansen (1980) and Ahlgren (1982) maintain that the interconnectedness of BSL, signed English, and speech “arises from the needs of educators to teach the language of the hearing community”.

### **3.5 Attitudes towards sign language**

Kyle and Woll (1985) argue that the language attitude where a general community is not interested in learning, using, or understanding a particular language blocks the promotion of BSL among young deaf people. Kyle, Woll and Llewellyn-Jones (1981) claim that there were 1,000 people attending sign classes in the UK at the beginning of 1980. The classes were not formal classes, the course usually lasted about 10 weeks, and there was great desire from the public to learn to communicate with deaf. Stokoe (1980) claimed that there was an experiment by the local television company to have sign language interpretation of the news. Most of the responses came from the hearing community. Hearing people were learning signs from watching television. Stokoe (ibid) also contended that “The view that the use of signs in the

classroom will interfere with the correct order of English has been another frequently voiced argument for the ineffectiveness of sign language in the classroom”. According to Kyle and Woll (1985), once we understand the difference between BSL and English, “we can begin to use signing constructively in a way which does not negatively affect English use”.

The Warnock Report (1978) argues that the acceptance and understanding of sign language in education supports the case for bilingualism in BSL and English. The UK does not accept bilingualism in one child. Countries where there are large or respected minority groups have been most accepting of the language of deaf people.

### **3.6 Developing education**

Hansen (1980) claims that in Denmark, parents of deaf children did sign language training in communication. Sage, Evans and Savage (1981) maintain that “Most modern accounts see the systematic education of deaf people as having started in the 16th century and as becoming a subject for discussion at least in England during the seventeenth century”. Two writers of the seventeenth century showed the greatest understanding of the basis of sign language. Dalgano in 1661 developed a means of communication through finger spelling, which was used as the way of teaching deaf people. Wallis and Holder were the first teachers of speech to the deaf. In 1760 Thomas Braidwood began to teach deaf people in Scotland. Braidwood was famous, and in his success, he developed speech in his pupils; not all of his pupils were deaf. He started a tradition which was known as the English method (Kyle & Woll 1985). The English method was an intermediate method between the German and the French methods. The Royal Commission (1889) made a similar claim, setting out the history of deafness. Kyle and Woll (1985) claim that the first school for the deaf and dumb, started on the combined system, was established by



Braidwood in 1760 in Edinburgh. The combined system was a combination of English and speech and signs.

### **3.7 Characteristics of the British deaf community**

Kyle and Woll (1985:17) argue that many deaf characteristics are shared across different countries. Schein and Delk (1974) reported a definite profile of adult deaf people in the USA. The Avon Study in the UK evaluated the characteristics of the deaf population as viewed by hearing people and expressed by deaf people to a deaf interviewer (Kyle & Allsop 1982b). The interviews which were conducted shared basic features of the community. All the deaf people had serious hearing loss and nearly all had access to signs, however many of them did not use them at home or at work. Delk (1974), for the USA, and Montgomery et al. (1977), for the UK, argue that it is not easy for deaf people to get jobs in factories, that they are supervised by hearing people, and that they have less chance of promotion than hearing people. Deaf people work with large numbers of hearing people in lower-paid jobs (Delk 1974; Montgomery et al. 1977). Although deaf people admit to experiencing communication problems, they do not avoid contact with hearing people. Some deaf people claim to talk to hearing workmates at coffee breaks, with the primary means of communication being speech and lip-reading. At work deaf people accept the use of speech and lip-reading (Delk 1974; Montgomery et al. 1977).

Deaf people claim to be happy at work and few dislike in their work. Baker and Cokely (1980) argue that “If members of the deaf community are not separated from hearing people at work, it is possible that home and social life reflect the choice of deaf identity”. According to Schein (1979), 90% of deaf people have hearing parents and siblings, and 90% of deaf parents have hearing children. The home life of deaf people requires contact with the hearing community. In the Avon Study, 61% of deaf people lived with a husband or a wife, while 26%

lived with a father and mother. Of those deaf people who lived with parents, 76% used speech and lip-reading as their means of communication, while of those who lived with a spouse, 92% communicated by means of either signing alone, or signing and speech (Schein 1979). Schein (1979) contends that if most of the communication was between parents and their children, then the interaction was going to be less. Lawson (1981) argues that “If the language is a core feature of the community, then deaf people almost have to ‘marry into’ the community identity”. Kyle and Allsop (1982a) claim that the major problem of home life for deaf people is contact with the media.

Deaf people considered contact of the mass media, television, newspapers, and books as a way of interaction where possible. 77% of deaf people read newspapers every day, 50% watch television every night, and 58% sometimes read books. According to a study by Schein (1979), 35% percent of deaf people could not understand the television programmes they watched. 74% said that newspapers were too difficult for them to understand. Some of them could not remember the type or title of the last book they had read (Schein 1979). Deaf people are happy to work with hearing people at work, but the communication is not satisfactory at home. Because deaf people work and live with hearing people, they have limited time to attend deaf clubs where they can interact amongst themselves. Kyle and Woll (1983:21) claim that “It is very unusual for deaf people to discuss ‘being deaf’, unless it is for the benefit of a hearing member of the group, nor is it typical for deaf people to sit around complaining about the hearing world”.

### **3.8 The status of sign language in education in Europe: prospects for the future**

Kyle and Woll (1983) argue that from the beginning of regular education for deaf children 200 years ago, two opposing philosophies, that is, signing versus

speech, were present. The influence of the De l'Épée's school in Paris and Heinicke's school in Leipzig spread over Europe as the French versus the German method (Kyle & Woll 1983). After the Congress of Milan, two other schools of thought were articulated, namely the ideas of Edward Gallaudet and Thomas Arnold, who carried the famous resolution in favour of the oral method, which created the conditions for the successful development of oralism all over the European continent. Most European representatives, according to Kyle and Woll (1983), voted in favour of the resolution, which shows that oralism was already spreading faster than the French method. In 1980 Otto Krohnert rejected the Milan resolution, "not for its incorrectness, but for its incompleteness". He stated that the deaf live in "two worlds with two languages". Krohnert suggests that "It is about time that educators acknowledged that fact". There are not enough educators in Europe who have reached this point (Kyle & Woll 1983:135).

Kyle and Woll (1983:139) state further that the distinction between a true sign language and a signed spoken language with reference to American Sign Language (ASL) and Signed English (SE) is clear, and that only careful study of the structure of the communication of the deaf can establish whether the presence of true features of visual communication warrant the distinction between an ASL-like system and a SE-like system. There is a gradual transition between true sign language and the spoken language of the country that is involved (Kyle & Woll 1983:139). Dreillard (1980) asserts that "I am struck by the number of people preparing studies, theses or reports on the deaf, their communication or way of life, who have never put a foot into a deaf club, never attended a talk on sign language". In the education of deaf children, with the exception of the multiply handicapped deaf, sign language does not play any role (Kyle & Woll 1983:141). Kyle and Woll (1983:141) claim that the children in schools for the deaf have developed systems for "mutual understanding",

which are based on signs. In Belgium, most schools have tried to be strictly oral, hence the Department of Education does not have any particular standpoint. A similar situation has been reported in German-speaking countries and the Low Countries (Kyle & Woll 1983:141).

In Hungary, body language was accepted, and the traditional Hungarian signs were used by the pupils only outside the classrooms among themselves. In Ireland the schools are strictly oral, however the two major schools in Dublin each have a small number of pupils who are taught by combined methods. Kyle and Woll (1983:142) argue that “The system of education of deaf children in the USSR envisages the use of the spoken language (oral, written form and finger spelling) as the main means of teaching”. They also argue that sign language is an auxiliary means in the process of education. Sign language and signs are used by teachers in different ways. In Romania, signs and finger spelling are always used in relation to speech, and all schools use combined methods.

### **3.9 American Sign Language: a further perspective**

Although this chapter deals essentially with British Sign Language, some comparative comments regarding American Sign Language can only be illuminating. Groce (1985) claims that deaf learners on Martha’s Vineyard, an island of mainland Massachusetts, attended school in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Public schools were located on Martha’s Vineyard in the few years of the settlement. Groce (1985) asserts that “no names of children known to have been deaf appear on school records, but that can hardly be taken as proof that they did not attend”. The signatures of deaf people on early wills, deeds and other documents provide evidence that many of them could sign their names, “and we can assume that they were at least partially literate”. According to Groce (1985), “For many Islanders, hearing and deaf, literacy meant little more than the ability to write one’s name and puzzle out phrases from the

Bible”. Groce (1985) claims that the first school for the deaf was the American Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb, which was opened in 1817 in Hartford, Connecticut. The result of leading in relation to the use of sign language in deaf education at that time was that the school had a great deal of attention nationwide among the general hearing public, as well as among the deaf community. A rare educational opportunity presented itself after 1817, and one of the Vineyard deaf attended the Hartford school for some time, leaving home at the age of nine or 10 to spend several winters in Connecticut (Groce 1985).

Instruction at Hartford was primarily in sign language, and later changed to the combined methods (Groce 1985). After that, the first oral schools, which stressed lip-reading for the deaf, were introduced in the 1860s. Hartford remained the alma mater for all Vineyarders. The *Boston Sunday Herald* (1895:22) indicated that the Hartford school became an island tradition:

There has never been any attempt made to send any of the congenitally deaf children to oral schools. The feeling, in fact, is so strongly in favour of the prevalence of a non-speaking race, that anyone who should go there and offer, by the use of some magician’s wand, to wipe out the affliction from the place and to prevent its recurrence would almost be regarded as a public enemy, and not as a benefactor.

According to Groce, the recommended period of instruction at Hartford was five years (American Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb 1837). Education was available to deaf students in Massachusetts for up to 10 years, regardless of the parents’ ability to pay (Bell 1837). All the Massachusetts residents at the school were funded by the state. Many of the deaf Vineyarders were better educated than their hearing neighbours.

Groce (1985) argues that Martha's Vineyard was a poor island. Many children had to leave the school at the age of 10 or 12 to help at home or at sea, even though education was highly valued (Groce 1985). In the nineteenth century, the illiteracy rate was high. According to Groce, deaf children who received state tuition assistance, were able to spend several more years at school than their hearing siblings and friends. All the deaf could read and write. They had more than the average amount of education and were also considered well educated (Groce 1985). Gordon (1892) claims that it is estimated that only 25 to 35 percent of deaf Americans were literate in the nineteenth century, and that many of them were only partially literate. Groce (1985) maintains that 75% of all deaf children in America never went to school at all. Schein and Delk (1974) assert that today the majority of deaf individuals receive an education. However, many children leave school with only a fourth- or fifth-grade education, because of "delays in learning to communicate" and "disruptions in special education programs".

According to Edwards and Sienkewicz (1990), "American Sign Language (ASL) is a distinct language with its own content, grammar and principles that are not dependent upon English, and is a completely visually oriented language". According to Christie and Dorothy et al. (1995), "ASL has a literature of its own that has been passed down from one generation to the next by culturally deaf people". It includes phonology, morphology, the lexicon and inflections, semantics, syntax, and pragmatics. Edwards and Sienkewicz (1990) argue that in the provincial schools, Deaf children are taught English, mathematics, science, history, social studies, art, health, and physical education at an appropriate academic level. They argue that at the time they were writing there was no ASL curriculum, and that they were in the process of developing an ASL curriculum. Edwards and Sienkewicz (1990) argue that "This kind of curriculum is a new concept for all of us in the field of deaf education". From

an examination of the history of deaf education, there is no evidence that an ASL curriculum ever existed in any form in any school programmes in North America.

Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) contend that “Language policies have long been recognized to have the potential of being either emancipatory or oppressive, empowering or disempowering in nature”. They argue that an area that has received little attention in this regard is the users of sign languages. Covington (1976) and Deuchar (1980) assert that there is a very small body of research which deals with language policy and language planning for sign languages. This means that this area of research has not been concerned with the issues of multilingualism and the deaf in terms of “individual bilingualism and multilingualism in spoken and sign languages with respect to the challenges of political, social, educational and economic inclusion of the deaf in the broader community”.

### **3.10 American Sign Language literacy**

American Sign Language (ASL) literacy is the ability to understand and express American Sign Language. It is the acquisition of knowledge of content areas, including deaf history, ASL literacy, different deaf cultures, deaf traditions, deaf politics, and controversial current issues, such as deaf education, ASL literacy, the deaf community, and underemployment. According to Merriam-Webster’s (1995) *Encyclopedia of Literature*, ASL literacy is the possession of extensive knowledge, and also experiences, associated with American deaf culture. It is the ability to analyse the structures to interpret the values, morals, etc. that are found in ASL literature and ASL texts. ASL literacy leads to a feeling of empowerment in connecting with the world, which enables one to take control of one’s own life and contribute to the deaf community, as well as to a changing society. According to Christie and Wilkins (1995), there are three components

to ASL literacy, namely a functional component, a cultural component, and a critical literacy component. ASL functional literacy involves ASL skills that enable an individual to use and communicate information at a basic level. ASL cultural literacy involves a knowledge of the values, history, heritage, and experiences of deaf people.

ASL critical literacy refers to the use and analysis of ASL works in a way that allows “enjoyment of the work itself, as well as empowerment and an increased understanding of our DEAF-WORLD in relation to other parts of the world and people of other communities” (Christie and Wilkins 1995:2). The deaf cultural community is called the “DEAF-WORLD” in American Sign Language.

### **3.11 The inclusion of the three components of ASL literacy in the ASL curriculum**

Christie et al. (1995) gives an example of one of deaf American teachers who taught an English poem through the medium of ASL. They explain that the name of the poem that they taught to their nursery and junior kindergarten learners was “S-N-O-W”. According to Christie et al. (1995), every learner that was exposed to the poem enjoyed every minute of analyzing the poem. They claim that the learners “laughed and laughed”, and would sign the poem repeatedly. The way the teacher taught the poem enabled the deaf learners to understand English poems. Christie et al. (1995) explain that “The poem opens with students lying on the floor, with their hand using the open A5 hand shape (indicating that it’s snowing) in the air”. The learners finger-spelled the letters slowly one by one (S-N-O-W), starting from the top and going towards the floor, using different directions and shapes of the hand to show the movements and actions of the snow in ASL. When they finger-spelled the @ W @ hand shape, they threw their hands right into their faces (Christie et al. 1995). According to Christie et al. (1995), this indicated that the snow was flopping



right into the learners' faces. The learners that did the activity used their language creativity beyond functional literacy skills in ASL. The learners not only finger-spelled the word SNOW; they also did it in artistic ways, by using different movements, directions, hand shapes, and actions of the snow (Christie et al. 1995). The art form that was used in the poem was from the context of deaf culture. The learners applied cultural literacy in their signing of the poem. The poem reflected the symbolism of the deaf spirit.

### **3.12 The challenges associated with inclusion and exclusion of sign language users in multilingual settings**

The cases which have been examined pertain to the US, UK and South Africa (Reagan 2001a). Baker (1999) and Bragg (2001) argue that the US case provides an example of a well-educated and unified deaf culture and linguistic community which is not a monolingual society, in which the deaf can be regarded as a minority population group. Aarons and Akach (2002a) argue that the South African case examines a more protective and “historically less empowered deaf community in which lexical diversity within the natural sign language is both a result and an ongoing characteristic of the oppression of the deaf as a cultural and linguistic group which exists in a society that is both officially and practically multilingual”. Both cases constitute the key issue in current debates on the language rights of sign language users (Jokinen 2000; Muzsnai 1999). Reagan (2001a) argues that “The underlying question to be addressed here is therefore: how can the unique linguistic needs of the deaf in society be met in a manner which contributes to the empowerment and inclusion of deaf people rather than to their disempowerment and exclusion?”

### **3.13 The US case: The DEAF-WORLD**

The deaf cultural community, which is called the “DEAF-WORLD” in American Sign Language (ASL), is an oppressed and disempowered community

in the US and has never been among the successful deaf communities in the world. ASL plays an important role in the construction of the DEAF-WORLD worldview, that is, the way deaf people “make sense of the world around them”. This means that ASL users make sense of the world in two ways, i.e. through its role as linguistic mediator and as an identifying facet of cultural identity. ASL mediates experience in a unique way from other languages (Reagan 2001a). Jerome Schein explained that “Being deaf does not in itself make one a member of the deaf community”. He also argues that one has to remember that “the distinguishing feature of membership in the deaf community is how one communicates” (Schein 1984:130). There are many hearing people who can sign, but only few of them who are competent in ASL. ASL has historically functioned as a language of “group solidarity” for deaf people. Lane et al (1996) predicts that as more hearing people start to learn ASL, there will be new complications which will arise with respect to the issue of “ownership” of ASL, as well as concerns among some deaf people about the use of ASL by hearing people.

ASL plays a critical role in the construction of deaf identity. It is a necessary condition for deaf cultural identity, but in the case of hearing people that use ASL fluently, it is not a sufficient condition (Lane et al. 1996:71). Edwards (1994:83-86) argues that the deaf community is characterised by social bilingualism, rather than individual bilingualism, because not all members of the community are functionally bilingual. Baker (1999) and Branson and Miller (2002) view deafness in two ways. The first way that they view deafness is essentially as a medical condition characterised by an auditory deficit, which means that deaf people are people that cannot hear. This view of deafness can be labelled a pathological view of deafness, which means that deaf people are not only different from hearing people, but in a physiological sense they are inferior to hearing people (Baker 1999; Branson & Miller 2002). The only

reasonable approach to dealing with deafness, according to this view, is to remedy the problem, by focusing on the teaching of speech and lip-reading in education, using technology such as hearing aids and cochlear implantation to maximise whatever residual hearing a deaf individual may possess, and otherwise seeking to develop a medical solution to hearing impairment (Baker 1999; Branson & Miller 2002). Baker (1999) and Branson & Miller (2002) argue that the pathological view of deafness assists the deaf individual to be like a hearing person.

The second view of deafness is the “sociocultural” perspective on deafness. According to Ladd (2003) and Lane et al. (1996), that sociocultural view of deafness operates from an anthropological rather than a medical perspective. For some deaf people, it makes sense to understand deafness not as a handicapping condition, but as an essentially cultural condition. This view of deafness sees deaf people not as individuals with disabilities, but as “individuals who are members of other dominated and oppressed cultural and linguistic groups” (Shapiro 1993:74-104). This means that the sociocultural view could lead to issues of civil rights and also assist the deaf to function fully in the dominant hearing culture. The pathological and sociocultural perspectives of deafness lead to different approaches to the issue of language rights for the deaf community, as well as different understandings of deafness and different social and educational policies for the deaf (Baynton 1996; Johnson et al. 1989).

In the sociocultural view of deafness, the deaf are seen as disadvantaged members of a particular spoken language community. There will be interpreting services and similar support that will be provided for the deaf. Baynton (1996) and Johnson et al. (1989) argue that the sociocultural view of deafness “implies an empowerment approach to language rights for the deaf, in which signed language and other supports are called for, not as a means to correct a disability,

but because the deaf, as a cultural and linguistic minority, should be entitled to them as basic human rights” (Bouvet 1990:119-133). Harlan Lane and his colleagues argued that “internationally recognized language rights are universally violated when it comes to signed language minorities” (Lane et al. 1996:422). The compensatory and empowerment approaches to language rights for the deaf represent two basic views of deafness and language rights. However, resources in society tend to be more available and ready for groups that are considered to be disabled than for groups that are considered to be cultural minorities.

### **3.14 The deaf in post-apartheid South Africa**

Aarons (1996) and Aarons and Reynolds (2003) argue that the situation of the deaf in South Africa is both similar and dissimilar to the situation in the US context. The nature of South African Sign Language (SASL) reflects the complications. As a consequence of the social and educational policies of apartheid, SASL is characterised by lexical variation (Penn & Reagan 2001:55). It is argued that sign language linguists, including SASL linguists, are engaged in debates as to whether SASL is a single sign language, or whether it is a collection of different related sign languages (Aarons & Akach 1998, 2002b). SASL is a minority language, and also the language of the deaf as a cultural minority group in relation to other languages and cultural groups in South Africa. According to Ramsey (1989) and Reagan (2001a), “This debate has not only reflected the social and political forces affecting language and language policy”, but “there is an ongoing discussion in the country about human rights, economic and social justice, education, and a host of other issues”.

Ramsey (1989) and Reagan (2001a, 2005b) contend that the study of language planning and language policy with respect to the deaf and their languages has become an important issue or topic internationally in recent years. With respect

to linguistic human rights, this has been especially true (Kontra et al. 1999; Phillipson 2000). Because of the South African context of education, and language and cultural issues with respect to individual human rights, it is of considerable concern to the government, which is understandable given the history of educational language policy in South Africa (Alexander 2004; Murray 2002). In 1994, after the establishment of a democratic government, language planning and language policy continued to play an important role in South African society. In the case of SASL, the challenge of multilingualism has been taken seriously, and a great deal of important work has been done at policy level to protect and promote the use of SASL (Reagan 2001a:167). The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Republic of South Africa 1996a) recognises a total of 11 official languages.

SASL is not among these 11 official languages, although it is mentioned in the Constitution. PanSALB (2005:15) argues that the Constitution created the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB), which is empowered to “promote, and create conditions for, the development and use of (i) all official languages, (ii) the Khoe, Nama and San languages, and (iii) sign language”. There were National Language Units created for each of the official languages, as well as for the Khoe and San languages (PanSALB 2005:15). A National Language Unit was also created for SASL, with two objectives, namely the implementation of strategic projects aimed at creating awareness of, initiating and identifying the needs of, and promoting, SASL, and identifying and funding projects aimed at developing SASL. The National Language Policy Framework (2002), issued by the Department of Arts and Culture, mentioned SASL, although it referred to “South African Sign Language(s)” (1.3.6; 4.9), which indicated that the debate had begun to take place as to whether SASL was a single unified language, or a number of related sign languages.

In the educational domain, the South African Schools Act (No. 84) (Republic of South Africa 1996b) included specific mention of SASL in the section related to language policy in public schools. The Constitution, under the “Bill of Rights”, guarantees that “everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions, where the education is reasonably practicable” (29(2)). The South African Schools Act took the right further, noting that “a recognised Sign Language has the status of an official language for purposes of learning at a public school”. This point has been reinforced in the Department of Education’s Language in Education Policy (1997), which is sympathetic to the needs of the deaf community in South Africa, and to SASL (Reagan 2001a:168). This Language in Education Policy document “should be seen as part of a continuous process by which policy for language in education is being developed as part of a national language plan encompassing all sectors of society, including the deaf community” (Reagan 2001a:168).

In the new Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, the government recognises that it is tasked to promote multilingualism and the development of the official languages, and that multilingualism is also a “valuable national asset”. Reagan (2001a:168) claims that the Language in Education Policy noted that one of the Department of Education’s main aims is “to support the teaching and the learning of all other languages required by learners or used by communities in South Africa”. Important languages, such as languages used for religious purposes, languages which are important for international trade and communication, and South African Sign Language, are also included (1997:Aims). According to the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) (2001:3), SAQA established a Standards Generating Body (SGB) for SASL and SASL interpreting, under the National Standards Body for Communication Studies and Language.

SAQA (2001:3) describes the task of this new SGB as follows:

The primary brief of the SGB is to develop unit standards for South African Sign Language, from NQF [National Qualifications Framework] Level 1 (Grade 7) to Level 6 (4-year degree). Qualifications and unit standards will be developed in areas such as: the nature of sign language, finger spelling, lexical diversity and syntactic unity, the study of SASL on a phonological, morphological and syntactic level, and history of sign language internationally. SASL interpreting will include areas such as translation theories and cross-cultural communication.

### **3.15 Conclusion**

In this chapter a comparative approach has been presented regarding the development and acceptance of sign language in countries such as Britain and various European nations, the United States of America as well as South Africa. Each of these case studies reflects the challenges that the development of sign language has faced across continents. These case studies also reflect the commonalities that exist between hearing impaired and deaf people who make use of sign language. It will ultimately be up to the South African population to lobby for further sign language rights and the implementation thereof, in relation to policies such as those outlined in the South African Constitution as referred to in this chapter as well as in Chapter 2.

## Chapter 4

### Language Policy and Planning for Sign Language in South Africa

#### 4.1 Introduction

Language planning is a deliberate effort to change a language or its functions in society (Nitobe Centre for Language Democracy). The Nitobe Centre for Language Democracy claims that there are three kinds of language planning, namely corpus planning, status planning, and acquisition planning. Covington (1976) and Deuchar (1980) assert that sign languages have been the focus of status planning and corpus planning in several nations, as can be seen from the case studies presented in chapter 3. These scholars claim that there are a number of common themes that appear in language planning. According to Covington (1976) and Deuchar (1980), efforts concerned with language planning for sign languages are being undertaken worldwide.

#### 4.2 Status planning

According to Kaplan and Baldauf (1997), status planning refers to “those aspects of language planning which reflect primarily social issues and concerns, and hence are external to the languages being planned”. Two status planning issues are language selection and language implementation (Kaplan & Baldauf 1997:30). Language selection refers to “the official recognition of a natural sign language” (Kaplan & Baldauf 1997:30). Kaplan and Baldauf (1997:30) explain that “Language implementation primarily refers to the use of sign language in educational settings, and to some extent in legal and medical settings”, for example, by 1997, 35 of the 50 states in the United States had passed legislation granting legal status to American Sign Language (ASL), and efforts were “underway” in several other states to pass similar legislation.



### **4.3 Developing and promoting South African Sign Language (SASL)**

This section concerns a comprehensive business plan which had details of the process and purpose of having SASL recognised as a twelfth official language. A National Deaf March was held in 2006, where a memorandum demanding that SASL be used as a medium of instruction in all schools for the deaf, in line with the South African Schools Act, was handed over to the then Minister of Education (Deaf Federation of South Africa (DeafSA) 2006). According to DeafSA (2006), an educational task team (ETT) was established. The designing of a unit standard for SASL as an additional language, in order to be successfully registered with SAQA, was demanded in the memorandum (DeafSA 2006). Some of DeafSA's other demands were the following: to have a position paper for SASL and SASL interpreter services, training of SASL interpreters, a registered course with SAQA (NQF level 5), accreditation of SASL interpreters according to international practices (DeafSA 2006). DeafSA (2006) asserted that a task team composed of representatives from DeafSA and the Department of Arts and Culture should be established with immediate effect, with the purpose of monitoring the process of maintaining and promoting SASL.

According to DeafSA (2006), the task team should include implementation of various projects. Parliament "should effect constitutional amendments, so that SASL becomes a 12th official language with immediate effect, or within a period of six (6) months calculated from October 2006". "The Department of Arts and Culture should provide the necessary funds for the development of a curriculum for the training of SASL instructors so that SASL instruction becomes a recognised profession. This process is to start by March 2007." "The Department of Education should liaise with the tertiary education institutions for the purpose of revising the curricula for public service professionals such as doctors, social workers, paramedics, police, etc. to include inter alia SASL and

Deaf culture. These curricula should become effective from 2008” (DeafSA 2006). According to DeafSA (2005:15), “A comprehensive interdepartmental training programme for all the public service personnel on SASL and Deaf culture should be carried out with funding from each government department, with effect from January 2007”. SASL interpreters should be made available to many public service institutions with immediate effect for the Deaf consumers to receive SASL services (DeafSA 2005:5).

Each public service institution should provide funds to employ a SASL interpreter. DeafSA (2005) and the Department of Arts and Culture asserted that DeafSA and private sectors should run an awareness campaign for the public at large on SASL and Deaf culture, and that this should start in January 2007. DeafSA (2005) recommended that the implementation of Recommendation 7a of the White Paper on the Integrated National Disability Strategy be liaised between the Department of Arts and Culture and DeafSA, in order to continue the development of SASL interpretation as a profession. DeafSA (2005) also recommended that the Department of Education liaise with DeafSA, to discuss ways of implementing “Recommendation 9b of the White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy for the betterment of deaf education”.

#### **4.4 The status of SASL**

According to Morgan (2008:6), “Before 1994 Deaf people were not recognised as a cultural minority with their own language”. The rights of deaf people to use SASL were not considered a priority, and the majority of deaf and hearing people did not recognise SASL as a language with many varieties (Morgan 2008:6). SASL is not one of the official languages. In the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, sign language is mentioned as one of the languages that must be promoted by the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) (Morgan 2008). DeafSA (2005) contended that the World Federation for the

Deaf (WFD) should encourage the national federations for the Deaf, including DeafSA, “to work towards the official recognition of sign languages for the purposes of communication accessibility for Deaf people”. According to DeafSA (2005), sign languages have been accepted, recognised, and protected in the following countries: Austria, Belgium, Canada, Colombia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Finland, Flanders, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, the Netherlands, Uganda, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Venezuela.

The following legislation and codes of good practice have been contributed by DeafSA:

- Recognition of SASL as Deaf people’s primary mode of communication in terms of the South African Constitution, Act No. 108 of 1996;
- Recognition of SASL as a medium of instruction for the purpose of educating deaf children (South African Schools Act (Education White Paper 6) (DoE 2001));
- Codes of good practice for people with disabilities (The Independent Communications Authority of South Africa – ICASA, March 2006);
- A White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy, where the disability in general is premised on the social model, away from the previous medical model (Office of the Deputy President 1997); and
- Codes of good practice on the employment of people with disabilities (DoE 2002).

The purpose of the presentation, according to DeafSA (2005), is to give effect to one of DeafSA’s objectives, namely to “proactively facilitate and successfully lobby for the acceptance, recognition, development, and utilisation

of South African Sign Language as a medium of communication with deaf persons as the 12th official language”. DeafSA (2005) asserts that it “regards this objective as key towards effectively promoting all other interests of Deaf people”. The national director of DeafSA, Kobus Kellerman, said that “the recognition of sign language is long overdue” (*The Sunday Independent*, 11 April 1999:5).

According to *The Sunday Independent* (11 April 1999:5), sign language has its own grammar, structure, and syntax. It is independent of any spoken or written language. Kellerman, who himself is deaf, said that sign language in South Africa has been “oppressed”, and that it “has yet to be recognised as an official language” (*The Sunday Independent*, 11 April 1999:5). Sign language is not a universal or international language, as some people may believe. In countries where deaf communities exist, different forms of sign language have developed, for example, British Sign Language, Ethiopian Sign Language, and South African Sign Language (*The Sunday Independent*, 11 April 1999:5). According to *The Sunday Independent* (11 April 1999:5) sign language is capable of developing new vocabulary when needed and constantly changes and develops. Kellerman said that the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) is in the process of promoting the development and use of SASL. According to Kellerman, PanSALB wants SASL to be recognised as the twelfth official language and as a medium of instruction in schools (*The Sunday Independent*, 11 April 1999:5).

Kellerman said that “DeafSA has been lobbying the Department of Education to support the initiative at the local, provincial and national levels” (*The Sunday Independent*, 11 April 1999:5). The Department of Education is developing a Green Paper on the implementation and support of the use of sign language nationwide. According to *The Sunday Independent* (11 April 1999:5), DeafSA

aims to create one South African sign language which is based on English. DeafSA has managed to develop curricula for sign language, as well as for the training of sign language interpreters, teachers and trainers. DeafSA has continued to promote the rights of and the recognition of sign language (*The Sunday Independent*, 11 April 1999:5). DeafSA also promotes the use of sign language as a means of interaction within deaf culture. Kellerman said that there has been very slow government support regarding the recognition of SASL (*The Sunday Independent*, 11 April 1995:5). Kellerman said that “The next phase will be implementation, which can only happen after the appropriate legislation is passed”. Kellerman acknowledged that implementation will be another process that will take time (*The Sunday Independent*, 11 April 1999:5).

The Gauteng provincial administrator of Disabled People South Africa (DPSA), France Motsepe, believes that for successful implementation, there should be representation from all disabled communities. According to Motsepe, DPSA is in the process of establishing a deeper relationship with the deaf community, as well as integrating the aims of organisations such as DeafSA into the aims of DPSA (*The Sunday Independent*, 11 April 1999:5). Motsepe argues that not everything has been addressed, and that there are certain things that are not being addressed. According to *The Sunday Independent* (11 April 1999:5), sign language does not only need to be recognised as an official language, but curricula for the deaf should also be given official status.

#### **4.5 The inclusion of sign language in all schools**

The *Diamond Fields Advertiser* (10 February 2003:3) claims that hundreds of people with disabilities took part in a peaceful march. They marched to the Northern Cape Provincial Legislature to hand in a memorandum demanding that sign language be taught from primary to tertiary level (*Diamond Fields Advertiser*, 10 February 2003:3). According to the *Diamond Fields Advertiser*

(2003:3), the departmental Director of Education in the province, Andre Joemat, “stepped in and came to receive the memorandum from the marchers”. After the memorandum was handed over to Joemat, the Northern Cape chairperson of DeafSA, Desmond Kgarebe, said that the reason for the march was that nothing had yet been done by government to implement the use of sign language for educational purposes, despite the fact that sign language was recognised by the country’s Constitution. According to the *Diamond Fields Advertiser* (10 February 2003:3), the Department of Education was not focusing on the creation of inclusive education, which would include sign language. From Grade R to Grade 12 inclusive, learners were not being taught sign language (*Diamond Fields Advertiser*, 10 February 2003:3).

Kgarebe argued that sign language had few fluent teachers in the country, and that the Department of Education was not doing enough to improve sign language skills. He asserted that all provinces would soon discuss syllabi for sign language and methods of incorporating sign language into the current education system (*Diamond Fields Advertiser*, 10 February 2003:3). Kgarebe said that research had proved that subjects such as Biology, Mathematics, and English could be taught to deaf learners by means of sign language. Joemat agreed that sign language had a constitutional right to exist (*Diamond Fields Advertiser*, 10 February 2003:3). Joemat said that the Department of Education recognised that it had to deliver quality education to all learners, no matter who they were, including deaf learners. White Paper 6 had been in place since the previous year, and it made it possible for inclusive education to be implemented (*Diamond Fields Advertiser*, 10 February 2003). Joemat promised the deaf marchers that they would have a response from the provincial Department of Education in two weeks’ time from the date of the march.

A social worker at DeafSA's Gauteng branch, Gerty Dlamini, maintained that "sign language should be recognised as the twelfth official language of South Africa" (*The Star*, 21 August 1996:18). She argued that if sign language were not recognised officially, sign language interpreters would not be subsidised by the State (*The Star*, 21 August 1996:18). Dlamini said that "When deaf people attend court, they need an interpreter to communicate with hearing people". Dlamini said that the cost of employing an interpreter was not carried by the State, but by DeafSA. DeafSA hoped that with the official recognition of sign language, deaf people would have a greater number of programmes to watch on television (*The Star*, 21 August 1996:18).

#### **4.6 Sign language to be given official status**

The *Sunday Tribune* (14 September 2008:3) claims that Deaf people want sign language to be recognised as South Africa's twelfth official language. Deaf people handed over a memorandum to the Gauteng premier's office. According to the *Sunday Tribune* (14 September 2008:3), the march where the memorandum was handed over aimed to highlight the needs of the deaf community. Lucky Sifiso received the memorandum on behalf of the premier. Sifiso acknowledged the challenges faced by deaf people (*Sunday Tribune*, 14 September 2008:3). According to the KwaZulu-Natal Blind and Deaf Society chief executive officer Jace Nair, Sifiso promised that the memorandum would reach the premier, and that he would arrange a meeting with representatives of the deaf community by the end of that month. The *Sunday Tribune* (14 September 2008:3) claims that the memorandum also demanded the improvement of sign language interpreters, that is, that there be interpreting services at schools, and that deaf children be taught by means of sign language at schools. The memorandum, according to the *Sunday Tribune* (14 September 2008:3), demanded that deaf people have access to health, welfare, education,

housing, and other services that have been provided by municipal and provincial government departments.

A conference was held in Durban in 2005 to discuss the needs of the deaf. According to the *Sunday Tribune* (14 September 2008:3), “A number of resolutions were passed at this conference, one of which was getting sign language recognised as an official language”. Nair claimed that “sign language is recognised only as a cultural language, which means that no resources are made available, and, as deaf children are not taught in sign language in schools, they get a lower quality of education” (*Sunday Tribune*, 14 September 2008:3). According to the *Sunday Tribune* (14 September 2008:3), the KwaZulu-Natal Blind and Deaf Society had tried to “lobby” the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) and other bodies to support the plan to support the official recognition of sign language. Nair said that the KwaZulu-Natal Blind and Deaf Society had corresponded with PanSALB and had met many people from the departments of Education and Health. Nair said that the departments had acknowledged that the issue was important, but that nothing was being done (*Sunday Tribune*, 14 September 2008:3). In July 2008, Nair said that they had decided to take forceful action on the matter. Nair said that 200,000 deaf people in KwaZulu-Natal, and many more across the country, were positive about the proposed march to lobby support for sign language. Nair claimed that there was a request from the Constitutional Review Committee of PanSALB to compile a report for the implementation of a government conference to draw up a roadmap to fulfil the “initiative” (*Sunday Tribune*, 14 September 2008:3). Nair was reported to have said that the KwaZulu-Natal Blind and Deaf Society was confident that there would be good news on the matter in the near future.



#### **4.7 Deaf people criticise the Constitution**

Wendell Roelf, cited in *The Star* (8 December 2004:8), claims that more than 4 million deaf people in South Africa are not enjoying the fruits of democracy, as sign language is not an official language, and that about 95% of deaf people are illiterate. A spokesperson for the Cape Town branch of DeafSA, David Petro, said that there was no communication between deaf people and hearing people, because, he claimed, people don't know how to sign (*The Star*, 8 December 2004:8). Petro said that deaf people encountered difficulties. He related an incident that had happened to him, as a typical example of the frustration that the deaf had to deal with on a daily basis (Roelf, cited in *The Star*, 8 December 2004:8). Petro said that in 2002 he was walking to the shops, and that when he passed the library, he noticed a broken window. He tried to tell the security guard about the window, "but the man put a gun to his head after Petro tried to sign with his hands, and was hit, pepper-sprayed in the face, and had his hands tied behind his back" (Roelf, cited in *The Star*, 08 December 2004:8). Petro said that he had reported the "assault" to the police, the Independent Complaints Directorate, and the Human Rights Commission, but that nothing had happened.

Petro said that when he had reported the matter to the Diep River Police Station in Cape Town, the police had laughed at him. Petro was later taken to the Magistrate's Court by the members of that particular police station. The police responded to the complaint of a neighbour who was sitting there while his matter was being processed (Roelf, cited in *The Star*, 8 December 2004:8). Petro said that the police and the prosecutors had laughed at him, because they couldn't understand him. Petro said that "Hearing people knock sign language". He said that he was taken to the psychiatric hospital because of the communication breakdown. He said that by recognising sign language as a twelfth official language, the government would go a long way in empowering the deaf community (Roelf, cited in *The Star*, 8 December 2004:8). He said that

“without proper access to information, the country’s laws were not understood, the president was not heard, and everyday chores became a nightmare”. Petro claimed that in the deaf community there was strong “racism”, which he claimed was caused by a lack of information (Roelf, cited in *The Star*, 8 December 2004:8).

Deaf families, according to Petro, were often abused, with pensions and social grants being kept from them or awarded to them “unlawfully”. He reported that a mere 2% of teachers at schools for the deaf use sign language in the classroom. Petro alleged that the illiteracy rate among deaf people was high (Roelf, cited in *The Star*, 8 December 2004:8). According to Roelf, cited in *The Star* (8 December 2004:8), the deputy chairperson of PanSALB, Prof. Hennie Strydom, said that an amendment to the Constitution would be required for sign language to be recognised as a twelfth official language. Prof. Strydom said that “It is a political decision that must be made”. Prof. Strydom reported that PanSALB had not received a formal application from DeafSA, which would have to be passed on to Arts and Culture Minister Pallo Jordan, in order to be presentable to Cabinet for consideration of the amendment of the Constitution (Roelf, cited in *The Star*, 8 December 2004:8). Prof. Strydom said that he did not think that government had the political will to promote multilingualism.

#### **4.8 Promoting the rights of deaf people: From legislation to action**

During the International Month for the Deaf in September 2010, DeafSA asserted that the mission of the WFD was “to promote the human rights of Deaf people, including the right to sign language, and equal opportunity in all spheres of life, including access to education and information”. DeafSA (2010) explains that on 30 March 2007, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Optional Protocol was “formally opened for signature” at the United Nations headquarters in New York City. The CRPD

helps to increase public awareness of barriers which are faced by people with disabilities (DeafSA 2010). It also promotes laws and policy changes at national level, “provides remedy in individual cases of rights violations or abuses”, and “channels resources into programs that support the rights of people with disabilities” (DeafSA 2010). The CRPD “requires nations to recognise that the human rights of people with disabilities deserve the same level of commitment that governments demonstrate towards the rights of people without disabilities, and society as a whole” (DeafSA 2010).

According to DeafSA (2010), the CRPD states that the South African government should recognise sign language as an official language in the Constitution, ensure professional interpreting services, and guarantee education in sign language to deaf people. The Convention aims to ensure the rights of deaf people to receive education in sign language, to use sign language in official interaction with authorities, to promote access to interpreters, and to receive services and information in sign language.

The government recognises South African Sign Language, with no guarantees that deaf citizens have access to education or public information in South African sign Language (DeafSA 2010). According to DeafSA (2010), only 5% of programmes broadcast by the SABC make use of South African Sign Language interpretation, subtitles are only available on pre-recorded programmes, and other important programmes are not “accessible” to deaf people. DeafSA (2010) claims that unemployment and illiteracy are high in South Africa’s deaf community.

DeafSA has nine provincial councils in South Africa (DeafSA 2010). Its business is conducted according to the DeafSA official mission statement, namely “to effectively promote the interests of the deaf and hard of hearing on a

national level in Southern Africa” (DeafSA 2010). DeafSA coordinates and facilitates the process of providing all kinds of services “for the purpose of integrating the one million Deaf South Africans into mainstream society (DeafSA 2010). The objective of DeafSA is “to proactively facilitate and successfully lobby for the acceptance, recognition, development, and utilisation of resources/interpreter services of South African Sign Language as a medium of communication with deaf persons, as the 12th official language” (DeafSA 2010). DeafSA regards this objective as key in order to promote the interests of all deaf people in Southern Africa (DeafSA 2010). DeafSA has contributed towards the recognition of SASL as a primary mode of communication for deaf people, in terms of the South African Constitution, Act No. 108 of 1996 (DeafSA 2010).

Recognition of SASL as a medium of instruction for the purpose of educating Deaf children- SA Schools Act Education White Paper 6 (DoE 2001) “White Paper on an integrated National Disability Strategy, whereby the disability in general is premised on the social model (Office of the Deputy President 1997)”, “Codes of Good practices on the employment of people with disabilities (DoL 2002).” “Codes of Good Practice for people with Disabilities- Telecommunications and Broadcasting Industries (ICASA March 2006),” DeafSA 2010). According to DeafSA (2010), the federation spent 15 years engaged in different activities aimed at developing and promoting South African Sign Language. DeafSA has been honoured to have SASL mentioned in legislation and codes of good practice (DeafSA 2010).

DeafSA (2010) claims that although SASL is listed in the South African Schools Act as a medium of instruction, it is not used as a medium of instruction in deaf schools. DeafSA (2010) argues that this is what led them to conduct a deaf march in 2003. According to DeafSA (2010), “The only logical

conclusion that DeafSA could arrive at as a factor influencing the exclusion of deaf people is that SASL is not one of the 11 official languages, and therefore does not deserve to be placed on an equal footing with the other official languages”. DeafSA 2010 argues that South African deaf has the right to have access to government agencies and services without “prejudice”. In public amenities, such as stores, businesses, hotels, theatres, restaurants, retail stores, museums, banks, parks, libraries, and private schools, aids and services should be provided in order to communicate with deaf people (DeafSA 2010). Sometimes an interpreter is needed.

DeafSA (2010) is of the view that television programmes should be fully accessible. State-funded hospitals and private hospitals should provide equal services to deaf people. DeafSA argues that hospitals should make sure that deaf people can communicate with doctors and nurses. According to DeafSA (2010), deaf people have the right to choose the kind of communication they prefer, be it communication through an interpreter, written notes, lip-reading, or assistive listening devices. Where there is important communication needed, the hospital should convey important communication about illnesses affecting, and kinds of treatment used by, deaf people.

#### **4.9 Sign language included in the curriculum**

*The Star* (12 November 2002:6) contended that the government should look at the possibility of introducing sign language as a medium of instruction and as a school subject. According to *The Star* (12 November 2002), the national director of DeafSA, Kobus Kellerman, claimed that there was no master plan for sign language in South Africa (15 December 1995). He argued that in South Africa there were different interest groups that had the opportunity to forge alliances. According to the then University of the Orange Free State (15 December 1995), DeafSA was drafting a plan of action. DeafSA was

contracting groups such as the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), the National Language Units, and the National Coordinating Commission on Disability. Kellerman said that they were doing this so that the idea of human rights could be addressed. Kellerman said that many people were becoming aware of the rights of deaf people (University of the Orange Free State, 15 December 1995). A deaf rights activist and the first deaf Member of Parliament in South Africa, as well as the current chairperson and president of DeafSA, Wilma Newhoudt-Druchen, argued that deaf people in South Africa knew that they needed sign language, but that they did not have contact with the outside world in order to gain support.

Newhoudt-Druchen said that there was a lot of variation in the sign languages used by various communities in South Africa. According to Newhoudt-Druchen, this variation affected the recognition of sign language as an official language. Newhoudt-Druchen asserted that “many people confuse additional variation with thinking there are eleven separate sign languages”. She argued that when a deaf person from South Africa meets another deaf person from South Africa, they always understand each other, regardless of the culture to which they belong (University of the Orange Free State, 15 December 1995). Newhoudt-Druchen said that the rules of sign language are followed in the same way in the different varieties of South African Sign Language. She cited an example of a boy from a Sotho-speaking family who came to her office and communicated with her. She said that at the beginning of their communication they understood each other. Kellerman claimed that there were about 11 or 12 different sign language dialects in the country, and that there was a problem with the official acceptance of a version of sign language in terms of education and interpreting services.

Kellerman maintains that “for the Deaf to use different sign language dialects among themselves is no problem, but for hearing people it can be very hard” (University of the Orange Free State 15 December 1995). He explains that he was going to Durban once and got involved in a car accident, which landed him in court with a Natal Sign Language dialect interpreter, whom he did not understand, and who did not understand him. Kellerman said that in schools the main dialect of South African signs should be used as medium of instruction. According to the *Diamond Fields Advertiser* (10 February 2003:3), the Department of Education was not focusing on the creation of inclusive education, which would include sign language. From Grade R to Grade 12, learners were not being taught sign language (*Diamond Fields Advertiser*, 10 February 2003:3). The Northern Cape chairperson of DeafSA, Desmond Kgarebe, argued that the language had few fluent teachers in the country, and that the Department of Education was not doing enough to improve the other skills. He asserted that all the provinces would soon discuss sign language syllabi and methods of intertwining sign language into the current education system (*Diamond Fields Advertiser*, 10 February 2003:3).

Kgarebe said that research had proved that subjects such as Biology, Mathematics, and English could be taught in sign language to deaf learners. Departmental Director of Education in the Northern Cape, Andre Joemat, agreed that sign language had a “constitutional right” to exist (*Diamond Fields Advertiser*, 10 February 2003:3). Joemat said that the Department of Education recognised that it had to deliver quality education to all learners, no matter who they were, including deaf learners. White Paper 6 had been in place since the previous year, and it made it possible for inclusive education to be implemented (*Diamond Fields Advertiser*, 10 February 2003:3). Joemat promised the deaf marchers that they would get a response from the department. *The Star* (21 August 1996:18) claims that a social worker at DeafSA’s Gauteng branch,

Gerty Dlamini, said that “Sign language should be recognised as the twelfth official language of South Africa”. He argued that if sign language were not recognised officially, interpreters would not be subsidised by the State (*The Star*, 21 August 1996:18). Dlamini said that “when deaf people attend court, they need an interpreter to communicate with hearing people”. Dlamini said that the cost of an interpreter was not carried by the State, but by DeafSA. *The Star* (21 August 1996:18) claimed that DeafSA hoped that with the official recognition of sign language, deaf people would have a greater number of programmes to watch on television.

#### **4.10 Sign language to be given official status**

Lobbyists from the University of the Orange Free State in 1995 argued that if a deaf child has to go to school in Natal and his parents move to the Cape 10 years later, he has to cope with a different system of signs. Teachers of deaf children should be trained in various sign language dialects (Institute for the University of the Orange Free State, 15 December 1995). Kellerman argued that DeafSA should make the creation of a South Africa Sign Language uniform system a top priority (Institute for the University of the Orange Free State, 15 December 1995). Kellerman said that “The way to achieve this is to study the sign variants per single word and to find the most common sign, which can then be incorporated into the uniform South African Sign Language system, without detracting from the common Sign Language grammar and structure” (Institute for the University of the Orange Free State, 15 December 1995). Kellerman claimed that there was a South African Sign Dictionary which listed variants for various words. Once this uniform language had been created, then it should be awarded official status.



#### **4.11 ASL planning**

Nover (13 April 2006) claims that he did research-based information gathering regarding the language planning process and specific research findings of ASL English Bilingual Education, so that teachers, specialists, education administrators, new researchers, parents, deaf and hearing communities, and others would be able to judge how much confidence to place in his study and to determine whether the methods employed in his study fitted the research questions that had been asked. Nover (2006) argues that “language planning is an empowering tool that helps us as a community to identify or name the real problems experienced by real deaf or hard-of-hearing children, students and people (insiders) about language acquisition, learning, and use issues”. According to Nover (2006), language planning helps to “reflect upon and describe the REAL problems explicitly”, and it takes action on resolving the “REAL” problem. According to Nover (2006), there are four major types of language planning, namely three major language orientations, more specialised language planning frameworks, language consideration, and considerations for teachers working as language planners and educational leaders in deaf education.

According to Nover (2006), language planning refers to deliberate efforts to influence the behaviour of others with respect to the acquisition and structure (status) of their language code. Status planning refers to the drafting of policies which decide which languages or variants to declare official, or to develop deliberate efforts to allocate the functions of languages and literacies within a language community (Nover 2006). Status planning refers to official provincial recognition of sign language and wider communication, visible in the international arena, as well as using sign languages an educational school subject, thereby encouraging literacy and affording the language some status even for example in religious contexts (Nover 2006).

#### **4.12 Status planning and policy: Sign language in deaf education**

Nover (2006) explains that in 1967 a new policy of “Total Communication” (TC) was introduced, which was proposed by Roy Holcomb in the United States, in order to promote and recognise the rights of a deaf child by using all forms of communication available to develop language competence. In the late 1960s and 1970s, Total Communication spread and took place during the time of a sudden and uncontrollable increase in the development of artificial codes for representing English. Nover (2006) claims that in the 1990s a new movement called the Bilingual-Bicultural approach, or “BiBi”, emerged. In the 1960s, several deaf resources were developed, namely an *ASL Dictionary on Linguistic Principles* (1965), and the books *Say It With Hands* (Fant 1964), *Talk with the Deaf* (Springer 1961), and *Talk with Your Hands* (Welton 1964). Stokoe argues that the sign language books played a powerful role in stimulating and shaping sign language awareness and appreciation and direction for language studies, and dictating best practices in the classroom.

#### **4.13 Acquisition planning**

Cooper (1989) explains that acquisition planning “sets up methods and incentives for acquisition of the desired language”. It involves efforts to influence the number of users, and it improves opportunities to learn the desired language (Cooper 1989). According to Cooper (1989), acquisition planning promotes and spreads the desired language. An example of acquisition planning can be seen in the American Sign Language Teacher Association (ASLTA). ASLTA is the only national organisation in the United States dedicated to the improvement and expansion of the teaching of ASL and “Deaf studies” at all levels of instruction (Nover 2006). Nover (2006) explains that ASLTA is “an individual membership organisation of more than 1,000 ASL and Deaf Studies educators from elementary through graduate education, as well as agencies”.

According to Nover (2006), a “Summer Intensive Bilingual Mentor Training” programme was held, at which mentors and university instructors provided ASL-English bilingual professional development of educators at their schools. Nover (2006) explains that the ASL-English Bilingual Professional Development In-service Training lasted two years.

Facilitators met for 12 seminars each semester. The seminars lasted for two hours and were conducted in ASL and written English. According to Nover (2006), the primary aim was the maintenance of the ASL-English bilingual education programme, which was to ensure that all deaf and hard-of-hearing students acquired, developed and enhanced ASL-English bilingual proficiency and English literacy skills, in order to achieve academically in content areas in both English and ASL, and so that students could reach their full potential as far as access is concerned and participate in both the deaf world and the hearing world (Nover 2006). It was important to encourage language proficiency in each language. Nover (2006) argued that each language should be given equal importance in both the curriculum and in instruction. Students should be encouraged to produce equal amounts of signed work and written work in each language, and the languages should not be mixed within schoolwork (Nover 2006). According to Nover (2006), students should be encouraged to become “equally proficient” in both varieties. The curriculum content should be rich in both languages, “with language acquisition and language learning and language use opportunities interwoven with content instruction in multiple disciplines” (Nover 2006). Nover, Christensen and Cheng (1998) adapted the source on Bilingual Ability of the Eleven Language Abilities for Deaf Children. The table is as follows (Nover, Christensen & Cheng 1998):

<b>Made</b>	<b>Signacy</b>	<b>Special abilities</b>	<b>Literacy</b>	<b>Oracy</b>
<b>Receptive skills</b>	<b>Watching or attending (ephemeral); Viewing (durable)</b>	<b>Finger-reading; Lip-reading</b>	<b>Reading (durables)</b>	<b>Listening (ephemeral when appropriate)</b>
<b>Productive skills</b>	<b>Signing (ephemeral &amp; durable)</b>	<b>Finger-spelling; Typing</b>	<b>Writing (durable)</b>	<b>Speaking (ephemeral)</b>

According to the ASL-English Bilingual Education Program, Nover (2006) maintains that the languages should be separated, that is, that ASL should be the only language. There should be concurrent use of ASL and English. Literacy should focus on reading, writing and sign writing (future plan). Signacy should focus on signing, and oracy on listening and speaking (Nover 2006). According to Nover and Ruiz (2005), the primary goal of an ASL-English Bilingual Programme is “to develop language and academic proficiency in both ASL and English for deaf and hard-of-hearing students, in order for cognitive and academic advantages to accrue”. According to Nover and Ruiz (2005), this means that a bilingual programme needs one of the two full-maintenance and dual-language models that supports and facilitates the complete development of both languages over an extended period of time, in order to reap the cognitive and academic advantages (Nover & Ruiz 2005). Nover and Ruiz (2005) argue that educational leaders and practitioners should demonstrate their knowledge of language planning by separating and monitoring the two languages used,

rather than using them throughout daily classroom instruction. Educational leaders and practitioners also need to encourage deaf students to use the language, that is, ASL or English, during certain instructional activities (Nover & Ruiz 2005). According to Nover and Ruiz (2005), educational leaders and practitioners should ensure that they create a learning environment where ASL and English skills can “flourish”. According to Reagan (2005), “the primary focus of attitude planning activities is on the development of positive or negative attitudes toward the target language, or toward bilingualism or multilingualism involving some particular set of languages.”

#### **4.14 SASL in education**

According to Morgan (2008), most teachers at Deaf schools are hearing, and are not “proficient” in SASL. They use Total Communication, which involves signing and talking at the same time. This communication is known as “sign-supported English or Zulu or Sotho”, for example, if the sentence is spoken in English, signs are simultaneously made for each English word (Morgan 2008). The signs used are invented by the hearing educators and are usually different from the signs that have developed naturally in the Deaf community. There are no natural signs for English words, and they therefore use artificial signs. Facial expressions are used as grammatical markers (Morgan 2008). Signs end up being dropped due to the rapid speed of speech. This results in the message being misunderstood by deaf people, because the message is incomplete, and therefore “incomprehensible”. Learners end up leaving high school with a low literacy level (Morgan 2008). In the US, the average reading age of a Deaf adult is Grade 4, and in South Africa it could be lower (Morgan 2008). Deaf people are arguably the most disadvantaged group in South Africa, and very few deaf people in the country have university or college degrees.

If deaf learners are admitted to universities or colleges, they experience problems in understanding and communicating in the language medium of the university or college. Most universities and technikons do not have funds to employ SASL interpreters. The new policies and changes legislated in the Constitution have not benefited the majority of deaf South Africans, because they have not been implemented. According to (Morgan 2008), SASL is not taught as a subject in most deaf schools. Most teachers are not competent in sign language. As a result, there is a lack of communication between teachers and learners. DeafSA organised a protest march in 2003, where they demanded “quality deaf education”. The march took place in three cities simultaneously, targeting various provincial departments of education. Legislation was being processed to require teachers at deaf schools to be proficient in SASL (Morgan 2008). Morgan (2008) explained that “once this legislation is passed, teachers who do not have the proficiency will no longer be able to work at these schools” (Morgan 2008).

#### **4.15 ASL curriculum**

According to teachers that were interviewed, hearing public schools have a better curriculum than deaf schools, and teachers at these schools have high expectations of their hearing students. Teachers suggested that they would like the residential schools to make their curriculum equal to what is found in the public schools. Another teacher who worked at one of the schools for deaf children, and he spoke about the time he took his family on a tour of the school. The parents of some deaf children asked him if he could enrol their children at the school. He contacted the school and was told that the school could not enrol the children because the school had a different curriculum from the one which was used in the hearing public schools (Interview 29 May 1990). He considered this to be a contradiction, because if the deaf are encouraged to be mainstreamed into public schools, hearing students should likewise be

encouraged to be mainstreamed into deaf schools. He (Interview 29 May 1990) argued that “If a hearing child can’t be mainstreamed into a deaf school, we need to find out why”.

#### **4.16 Swedish Sign Language in deaf education**

In Swedish schools for the deaf, sign language is officially the language of instruction in all subjects, including Swedish (Ahlgren 1989). Because of the official curriculum, Swedish Sign Language is regarded as the first language of deaf learners in Sweden (Ahlgren 1989). Written Swedish is their second language. Ahlgren (1989) argues that “The real picture of teaching in the deaf schools is, however, not as bright as in the curriculum”. Ahlgren (1989) maintains that Sweden has reached the stage where the majority of teachers has come to accept Swedish Sign Language as a true language which is beneficial to the students. However, according to Ahlgren (1989), this majority still has a long way to go before they know sign language well enough to be good teachers. Ahlgren (1989) argues that for a person to know sign language, that person should be able to understand when deaf people talk to each other, and not only be able to make himself understood by deaf people. According to Ahlgren (1989), in Sweden a five-year programme for instructing teachers in Swedish Sign Language was initiated by the government, to bridge the gap between the reality in schools and the demands of the curriculum.

The government also stipulated a minimum prerequisite of sign language skills to be admitted to a college for training teachers for the deaf. Ahlgren (1989) contends that the major requirement for education to be successful is communication. Ahlgren (1989) argues that when it comes to education of the deaf, the communication initiated by the schoolchildren is equivalent to a form of sign language. He maintains that sign language is no longer regarded as a threat to the normal development of deaf children, but that rather it is the best

possible guarantee for their normal development (Ahlgren 1989). In 1981 in Sweden, parliament recognised the above. For the hearing parents of deaf children, Ahlgren (1989) explains that in Sweden, as soon as a child is discovered to be deaf, the child's parents are offered courses in Swedish Sign Language, so that they can learn to communicate with the child. The courses are organised by the local deaf clubs and are taught by deaf adult teachers. The parents meet the teachers so that they can develop sign language skills and learn to be relaxed around their deaf children, and also have a positive attitude towards them (Ahlgren 1989). According to Ahlgren (1989), the deaf clubs organise special activities for the hearing parents and their deaf children, so that they can get to know each other and support the child while he or she is still young.

Thanks to the deaf clubs, deaf children are able to meet with deaf adults and peers for their socialisation (Ahlgren 1989). The child joins pre-school at the age of 4. Each pre-school, according to Ahlgren (1989), will have one or more deaf adults on the staff who are trained in pre-school teaching. The hearing teachers receive training in sign language, so that their general level of sign language skills are high (Ahlgren 1989). Pre-schools were the first sector of Sweden's education system to recognise the importance of signing for small deaf children. Ahlgren (1989) argues that using sign language in homes and pre-schools for the deaf ensures that children have a linguistically normal childhood. At the time that Ahlgren (1989) was writing, all the children that started at deaf school came with a command of sign language that was adequate for their age level. Deaf children starting at deaf school therefore had a level of command of sign language that was comparable to the level of command that same-age hearing children had of spoken Swedish (Ahlgren 1989).



In 1968 there was a development of interpreters' training for the deaf. A two-week training course for skilled signers was developed into a two-year course, on top of a one-year course for sign language beginners (Ahlgren 1989). Ahlgren (1989) argued that "Sign language interpreting is a proper profession in our country, and today there are around 100 permanent positions for interpreters, and the demand for more interpreters is increasing". According to Ahlgren (1989), deaf people had legislated rights to have free interpreting services, which were paid by society. For sign language interpreters to become qualified educational interpreters, they had to attend three semester course at Stockholm University, after which they were awarded a certificate for education and conference interpreting (Ahlgren 1989). Ahlgren (1989) maintained that a deaf student at university level had the right to have two interpreters at every lecture that he or she attended, no matter what subjects he or she was registered for. According to Ahlgren (1989), in the 20 years up to 1989, the number of deaf students in Sweden that received higher education increased, and the average educational level of deaf people also improved. At the time that Ahlgren (1989) was writing, academically trained deaf people were working with deaf people as psychologists, pre-school teachers, school teachers, dentists, etc.

#### **4.17 Schools for the deaf in Sweden**

Ahlgren (1989) argued that the primary goal of deaf education was no longer the teaching of speech. At the time that Ahlgren (1989) was writing, the aim of deaf education had changed to that of equipping the deaf learner to leave school with the same knowledge, degree of personal maturity, self-confidence, and level of social adjustment that was expected of a hearing student. Ahlgren (1989) asserted that it was important for deaf learners to be given a realistic opportunity to develop bilingual skills in sign language and written Swedish, and to receive training in speech, which is based on knowledge of the written

language. The aim of deaf education is that deaf learners should be taught the different subjects of the curriculum in a language that they understand to the same degree that hearing learners understand spoken instructions (Ahlgren 1989). Ahlgren (1989) argues that the personal and social development of deaf youngsters requires that they be surrounded by adults with whom they can communicate freely, and associate with and share ideas with in a relaxed way. In Ahlgren's (1989) view, the use of Swedish Sign Language is the only means of free and relaxed communication for deaf learners.

To be able to teach a subject as abstract and "intellectual" as a written language to somebody who has no access to the spoken form, a teacher requires good communication skills. According to Ahlgren (1989), a teacher needs to know a lot about the grammar of the language he or she is teaching. Ahlgren (1989) argued that when it comes to signing, and deep knowledge of the structure of Swedish Sign Language, and training in teaching written Swedish as a second language, Sweden should have a very high standard. According to Ahlgren (1989), when it comes to understanding a conversation between two or more pupils, teachers have limited ability to make themselves fully understood when they are excluded from the dialect that is being used. This limited ability of teachers to make themselves understood restricts teachers' ability to give clear instructions to learners (Ahlgren 1989). There was increasing awareness and dissatisfaction among teachers about this situation. In deaf schools, teachers were faced with having to teach learners that had linguistic skills and general knowledge that was comparable to those of hearing children of the same age, and who demanded instruction of a level comparable to the level of instruction that hearing children would receive.

When the parents realised that there was a basic communication problem, and that their children were not getting the level of instruction that they were

entitled to, they blamed the teachers (Ahlgren 1989). When the parents and the learners demanded that the teachers be proficient in sign language and that the teachers never offered them sign language instruction through the curriculum, then this puts the teachers in a predicament and in a bad light (Ahlgren 1989). According to Ahlgren (1989), the government was forced to do something about the situation, and, as a first step, it implemented a five-year programme of further education in Swedish Sign Language for teachers at Stockholm University. The programme, according to Ahlgren (1989), was an opportunity for teachers to study Swedish Sign Language for a semester and to continue to receive a full salary and their tuition expenses paid for. Ahlgren (1989) argued that if a teacher wanted to significantly develop his or her teaching skills, a semester course would not be enough. A semester course would be a foundation from which a teacher could develop further, through daily contact with deaf learners in the classroom, and through registering in local courses (Ahlgren 1989).

The majority of teachers, according to Ahlgren (1989), would never reach the level of language skills required to teach Swedish to deaf beginners. A new category of teachers of the deaf came into being, namely teachers of the deaf that had formal recognition (Ahlgren 1989). There arose another category of teachers of the deaf, namely teachers that had studied Swedish Sign Language as a subject and Swedish second-language teaching at university for three years. In Sweden a special qualification is required to teach Swedish Sign Language as a mother tongue and Swedish as a foreign language at a hearing school (Ahlgren 1989). According to Ahlgren (1989), “These teachers have studied Swedish Sign Language as a mother tongue and Swedish as a foreign language”. The new curriculum for training colleges for teaching of the deaf stated that knowledge of sign language was a “prerequisite” for entrance to study deaf education (Ahlgren 1989). Ahlgren (1989) argued that in five to 10

years' time, it could be expected that Swedish schools for the deaf would be curricularly fully bilingual in Swedish Sign Language and written Swedish as a second language. Ahlgren (1989) contended that the majority of deaf pupils were not being taught, but were being kept in the classroom for 10 years. Ahlgren (1989) maintained that, rather than the above scenario, the majority of deaf people should be taught by qualified teachers who are able to communicate freely.

#### **4.18 Sign language dictionaries for specific subjects**

Von Meyenn et al. (1989) claimed that a dictionary was being developed as a joint project in cooperation with institutions for professional vocational training of the deaf, on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Labour. Signs were being collected by a group of deaf experts with experience in computer technology. The cooperation was helpful in terms of selection of terms for the dictionary (Von Meyenn et al. 1989:163). Concerning future implementation of the dictionary in institutions for vocational training of the deaf, Von Meyenn et al. (1989) were of the view that the cooperation would be very useful (Von Meyenn et al. 1989:163). According to Von Meyenn et al. (1989:163), the design of the “didactical” aspect of the dictionary, and the linguistics for arranging the database information, leads to rich and deep structures that are used in the dictionary (Von Meyenn et al. 1989:163). Von Meyenn et al. (1989:163) claim that at a congress on sign language research held in 1989 in Hamburg, they demonstrated a “prototype” version of a specific computerised dictionary for the vocational field of the deaf.

The aim of the project, according to Von Meyenn et al. (1989:163), was to develop learning material for the vocational field of education for the deaf. According to Von Meyenn et al. (1989:164), the dictionary was a great aid for deaf people who wanted to learn how to use the computer at work. The project

was sponsored by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (Von Meyenn et al. 1989:164). According to Von Meyenn et al. (1989:164), the various different German institutions had shown dedication to the project by contributing information about the needs of each institution. The intention was to develop an electronic dictionary which would be easy to be use and which would allow users to browse through the terms, explanations, and examples, much like “leafing through a book”, and at the same time look up the corresponding signs (Von Meyenn et al. 1989:164). The main purpose of the research, according to Von Meyenn et al. (1989:164), was to enable teachers of the deaf to learn signs, in order to communicate more easily with the deaf. Another purpose of the research was to facilitate communication among the deaf about the professional knowledge involved in learning how to use computers (Von Meyenn et al. 1989:164). Yet another purpose of the research, according to Von Meyenn et al. (1989:164), was to provide translators with the equivalent sign language of the terms that they had to translate.

#### **4.19 Sign language research**

According to Von Meyenn et al. (1989:164), there was a team of 14 deaf people that dedicated themselves to the task of collecting the signs. Among the team there were two people from the Centre for Sign Language and Communication of the Deaf (Von Meyenn et al. 1989:164). The members of the group, according to Von Meyenn et al. (1989:164), were either computer experts, that is, computer scientists, or electrical engineers, or teachers at vocational schools who were experienced computer users. All the participants used sign language on a daily basis, and also had knowledge of sign language. The team from the Centre for Sign Language received a list of 1,500 terms, explanations, and definitions in German and English (Von Meyenn et al. 1989:164). The definitions, explanations, and terms were discussed in the group, in order to find a common understanding of the meanings and the proposals of the signs to be

used in the language. Von Meyenn et al. (1989:164) argued that “There are concurrent signs the members of the group. The members of the group decide which sign is best, or whether several signs should be registered, as in the case of local dialects”.

In cases where no sign existed for a certain term, the group tried to create a new sign, according to the rules of sign language formation (Von Meyenn et al. 1989:164). Some new signs, according to Von Meyenn et al. (1989:164), were formed “as a combination of two or more other existing signs, e.g. hard-disk (Fest Plate), hard-ware (Hard-ware), soft-ware (Software)”. Some new signs were formed by the adaptation of existing signs to the new term and then transferring the meaning in a more “metaphorical fashion”, for example, switching directory (*Inhaltsverzeichnis, Katalog*) (Von Meyenn et al. 1989:164). Other signs required a combination of a sign with a letter from the finger spelling alphabet, for example, array (matric) is A+ brackets (*plus Klammer*). Deaf computer specialists, according to Von Meyenn et al. (1989:165), had already generated regular signs for more than 80% of the technical terms. German Sign Language has managed to create a large number of creative signs for new technological terms within a short period of time (Von Meyenn et al. 1989:165). The new technical signs had been formed according to particular morphological principles (Von Meyenn et al. 1989:165).

According to Von Meyenn et al. (1989:165), most signed terms, like oral ones, fall back on everyday language. They obtain an additional new meaning within the specialised technical context, while their external features remain unchanged (Von Meyenn et al. 1989:165). These signs are used, among other things, for opening and closing computer programs, just like opening and closing doors. The sign for Mouse is combined with the sign Move = Mouse-Move. The sign for Monitor, that is, the display screen surface, is “reproduced in two-handed

sign”. The sign for a computer Mouse does not follow the German word *Maus* (Von Meyenn et al. 199:165). According to Von Meyenn et al. (1989:166), “Another form of generation of new technical signs which is also orientated towards the shape of word terms is shown by the use of the manual alphabet”. Von Meyenn et al. (1989:165) argued that general signs were made more specific when the hand shape represented a particular technical word, for example, A-PRAY. The example above will be the first letter of the respective technical word (Von Meyenn et al. 1989:166).

This sign of generation, according to Von Meyenn et al. (1989:166), is widespread in American Sign Language, but rare compared to DGS, because deaf people in Germany only began to accept and use the manual alphabet more widely. Von Meyenn et al. (1989) argued that DGS features were a different form of oral language, which was oriented to the generation of signs, which were far less pronounced in ASL. They argued that special terms could be formed in DGS by differentiating existing signs that had comprehensive meanings (Von Meyenn et al 1989:167). Von Meyenn et al (1989:167) argued that in most cases the DSG was a genetic term by way of a special pattern of the mouth. The term DATA is expressed by the PROGRAM sign, and the mouth pattern of the data is simultaneous. Von Meyenn et al. (1989:167) argued that they had not yet been able to focus their attention on the above-mentioned “lexicological and morphological aspects”, because their work on the sign language dictionary for computer terms had been practically oriented. Thanks to the development of the dictionary, according to Von Meyenn et al. (1989:167), the group of deaf “collaborators” did not only collect the developed technical signs, but they also checked whether the texts which included the explanations of the terms were understandable to deaf people.

After all, the intention behind the development of the dictionary was not only for it to serve as a means of conveying linguistic information on technical signs and technical words, for example, in interpreter training (Von Meyenn et al. 1989:167). Another intention behind the dictionary development was to open up an opportunity for deaf people to comprehend the meaning of these technical terms (Von Meyenn et al 1989:167).

#### **4.20 Content structure of computerised dictionaries**

According to Von Meyenn et al. (1989:168), “A dictionary for the deaf which is made available on a computer should try to use the technological advantages of the new device and include several dimensions of information or sources of knowledge in its environment which otherwise cannot be combined in one single medium”. They argue that, regarding the verbal aspects of the content, a computerised dictionary for the deaf should not only contain terms and their explanations, but should also contain information, which could be structured in a hierarchical way. It should have terms, explanations, categories, grouped terms, and an index (Von Meyenn et al. 1989:168).

#### **4.21 SASL language policy and planning**

According to Ramsey (1989) and Reagan (1995, 2001a, 2005b), the study of language policy and planning for the deaf has become an important topic internationally in recent years. With respect to linguistic human rights, the information provided in the previous section has been true, according to Kontra and Phillipson et al. (2000). In the South African context, issues of education, language, and culture with respect to individual human rights have been considered by planners within government, which is understandable considering the history of language in education in South Africa (Alexander 2004; Murnay 2002). According to Reagan et al. (1995, 1996), language planning and language policy have a long history in South Africa. During apartheid, language



planning and policy activities were employed in order to promote an “official bilingualism”, which was intended to expand and protect the use of Afrikaans (Hartshorne et al. 1987). Hartshorne et al. (1987) argue that language policy and planning were also employed to support the ideology of apartheid. In the sphere of education, according to Hartshorne et al. (1987), language policy in apartheid South Africa was used to “reinforce ethnic and tribal identity amongst black school children, seeking essentially to divide and conquer, by encouraging ethnolinguistic division within the black community”.

Hartshorne et al. (1987) and Alexander (1990) argue that because of this, language remained a “highly controversial matter” in the education of black people in the apartheid era. The Nationalist government supported the policy of mother-tongue schooling for blacks, but blacks did not accept such schooling (Hartshorne et al. 1987; Alexander 1990). In 1994 a democratic government was established, and language planning and policy continued to play an important role in South African society (Hartshorne et al. 1987; Alexander 1990). Blommaert (1996:203) argues that the 1990s were marked by a renewed interest in language planning. Further to this, Blommaert (ibid) states that the historical changes in South Africa triggered a new enthusiasm among language scholars, and almost automatically drove them in the direction of language planning issues, because of the nature of the political-ideological debate surrounding the end of apartheid. Issues of national and subnational identity, of culture and language, featured prominently in almost every debate on the future of South Africa, and the new republic set an important precedent, by allowing 11 languages to be used as official languages, instead of the usual one, two, or four of most other African states.

According to Heugh (2002:449), here was a country which championed multilingualism as symbol of political and cultural pluralism. Heugh (2002:449)

notes that in South African debate and discussion about language policy and language planning, there was a shift to language diversity in society. Heugh (2002:449) argues that the development of language policy in South Africa had undergone many changes over previous years. Statements of policy had shifted away from the “separated mould” of the previous apartheid government, with wider roles and functions now being “ascribed” to the different languages of the country (Heugh 2002:449). The circumstances surrounding the political negotiations which led to the sharing of power with the country’s first democratic elections of 1994. Proposals and language policies were created which encouraged multilingualism to take root in the country. Heugh (2002:449) argues that many of the new language policy proposals in the early years of South Africa’s democracy had been accepted in an optimistic environment, which seemed to promise a vibrant future for language development and multilingualism in the country.

According to Reagan (2001b) and Wright (2002), the implementation of language policy is important and the commitment of government is required in order to encourage effective multilingualism. The challenge of multilingualism, in the case of SASL, according to Reagan (2001b) and Wright (2002), has been taken seriously, and significant work has been done at policy level to protect and promote the use of SASL. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) identifies a total of 11 official languages, namely Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, SiSwati, Tshivenda, and Xitsonga (PanSALB). SASL is not among the 11 official languages, and is not directly mentioned in the Constitution. Reagan (2001b) and Wright (2002) claim that Section 1(6)5 of the Constitution makes provision for the establishment of a Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB), which is empowered to “promote and create conditions for the development and use of (i) all official languages; (ii) the Khoe, Nama, and San languages; and (iii) sign

language”. According to PanSALB (2005), special National Language Units have been established for the Khoe and San languages.

According to PanSALB (2005:15), a National Language Unit was created for SASL in 2001, with three purposes, namely the initiation and implementation of strategic projects aimed at creating awareness, identifying the needs of SASL and promoting it, and identifying funding projects aimed at developing SASL. According to Reagan (2001b) and Wright (2002), the National Language Policy Framework (2002), which was issued by the Department of Arts and Culture, similarly mentioned SASL, and interestingly refers to “South Africa Sign *Language(s)*” (1.3.6.4.9) [my italics]. The debate began as to whether SASL was a “single unified language”, or whether it was comprised of a number of different related sign languages. The South African Schools Act (No. 84, 1996) mentions SASL in the section on language policy in public schools (Reagan 2001b; Wright 2002). Reagan (2001b) and Wright (2002) claim that the Constitution guarantees that “everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions, where that education is reasonably practicable” (29(2)).

#### **4.22 Conclusion**

The status of sign language as an officially recognized language still alludes hearing impaired and deaf people in South Africa. It remains to be seen whether or not the Constitution can or will be amended in order to accommodate South African Sign Language as a language that is legally protected.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Research Findings: An Ethnographic and Comparative Analysis**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the questionnaire and interviews and information regarding curriculum use in the three deaf schools that served as research sites. It also includes a discussion on innovative methods that were used by the teachers in sign language teaching. There were 14 respondents, made up of seven females and seven males.

The respondents came from different racial backgrounds. Of the three educators, two were female and one was male, while two deaf male assistants were also used as part of the research. Nine learners, that is, five females and four males, took part in the study. The focus was on an assessment of how sign language is used in their classrooms.

The research also focused on how teachers develop equivalent terminology for English concepts when they are teaching, and also whether there were any innovative methods that are used in language teaching for the hearing impaired.

Further to this, the research focus was on how deaf teacher assistants feel regarding how sign language is used in the classroom. As indicated in Chapter 1, the interviews were conducted in three deaf schools, where three deaf learners per school were interviewed. The schools are Mary Kihn School for Partially Hearing Children, the Dominican School for Deaf Children (Wittebome), and De La Bat School for the Deaf.

The interviews were conducted with one teacher per school and three learners per school, as well as one government official from the Western Cape Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture and one official from the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) (a curriculum advisor), who agreed to answer questions concerning the curriculum.

## **5.2 The Western Cape Education Department (WCED)**

From my research, it is clear that the WCED is doing very little regarding curriculum development for the hearing impaired. This was accentuated by the fact that the research subject did not allow me to interview her in her office. She came to the security office and told me that she did not know anything about deaf and sign language. As curriculum advisor, she explained that there was no curriculum for deaf learners in the Western Cape. Further to this, she would not answer any more questions. She did not show any interest in the development of a South African Sign Language (SASL) curriculum. She stated further that there was no sign language curriculum advisor. She advised that one should contact the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) to obtain further information. Some questions were forwarded to the PanSALB headquarters (following an agreement with a PanSALB employee), but the questions were never responded to.

## **5.3 Mary Kihn, and De La Bat School**

At Mary Kihn School, two assistants were interviewed, both of them being hearing impaired. The other schools where research was conducted did not make use of such assistants. The researcher observed six lessons at this selected school.

The researcher also selected diverse groups to observe and interview, in order to obtain different views about how sign language is used in the classroom and whether the learners understand the teacher's signing.

The research subjects were selected by means of random selection. The interviews were conducted over a period of about a week. The language used in all of the interviews was English. For deaf learners and deaf teaching assistants, English was used as a way of signing. In all three schools, the classes were kept small, so as to effectively deal with the learners' disability and to deal with individual learners on a more personal basis. None of the classes consisted of more than 10 learners.

At De La Bat School, the participants were three learners and one male teacher. All three learners were male. The teacher would not answer the questions that the researcher posed, and he indicated that he had to attend an urgent meeting. He requested that I give him the questionnaire, and he promised that he would complete it and email it back. I attempted to contact him on numerous occasions and left messages with his secretary, but there was no response. After I left messages on his cellular phone and he still did not respond, I decided not to use him as a research subject. In place of the De La Bat teacher, I decided to select one more teacher from Mary Kihn School.

#### **5.4 Observations from the schools**

School A was situated in Worcester. The observations were conducted in a Grade 8 class. The teacher was teaching Technology. The approach of "Total Communication", an official approach used for teaching deaf students, was used in class, that is, both sign language and the voice were used. The learners came from different cultural backgrounds. The teacher was attempting to explain the

concept of a ‘lever’. He was not well versed in signing, and the learners could not understand what the teacher was trying to communicate. He told the learners that it was difficult to sign in class, and he promised that he would tell them later on what he was trying to say. He could not sign whole sentences. For example, he communicated the sentence “Where do we use a lever?” as “Where (sign language) use (the voice) lever (sign language)?” The learners became confused, because the sentence lacked meaning, as the verb in the sentence, namely “use”, had not been signed. The teacher clearly lacked an appropriate understanding of sign language.

School B was Wittebome Dominican School. Observations were conducted in the Grade 7 class. The lessons observed were in the learning areas of Science, English, and Mathematics. The learners were again taught using the “Total Communication” approach, where the dominant medium of communication used was the voice (oral presentation). The learners were encouraged to speak and repeat what the teacher had said. There were eight learners in the class from different backgrounds. Field notes were taken and accompanied by observations of lessons where both the teacher and the learners made use of sign language. The lessons were recorded by means of a video camera. The fact that lessons were recorded in this manner made it possible for the researcher to assess different aspects of the teacher’s signing. The lesson observations allowed the researcher to spend time in different classes and learn more about the various different signs that were used in the classroom.

The researcher observed how some learners made use of oral communication. This was particularly prevalent in the case of learners that were partially deaf and partially speaking, that is, able to speak. The school had two interpreters, that is, an English interpreter, and an Afrikaans interpreter. There was no sign

language interpreter, hence the school encouraged oralism and the use of “Total Communication”. Deaf learners sat and planned together. Even so, the language structure, sentences and spelling of the partially deaf learners was good compared to those of the deaf learners.

The English lesson involved the reading of short stories. Each learner read his or her own story with confidence. Some learners observed and corrected where necessary. In Science, the learners were taught about plants. The teacher used terminology such as “dicotyledon” and “monocotyledon”, but she did not have signs for the terms. The teacher and the learners developed new signs together. She explained that when she and the learners develop a new sign together, they start with an abbreviation. For instance, she finger-spelled “mono + cot”, which enabled the learners to come up with an explanatory sign. The teacher gave a practical lesson, where she took the learners outside, to observe different kinds of plants.

School C was Mary Kihn Hearing Impaired and Sign Language School. The observations and interviews were conducted in the Grade 7 class. The teacher was male, and he was able to hear and speak. The lesson was in the learning area of Natural Sciences, and the topic of the lesson was the solar system. The teacher used clear signing and the learners understood him. The size of the classroom size was large enough for seven learners, and the teacher had enough space to move around. The learners were very interested in the lesson. The way they answered the questions showed that they understood the concept of the solar system.

The teacher used teaching aids which had clear pictures of what he was teaching about. The teacher argued that deaf learners can see what they are being taught,



because sign language is a visual language, enabling learners to follow what is being communicated, even although they cannot hear the language that is being used.

The learners understood the lesson, because they were able to visualise clearly what the teacher was talking about. While the teacher was introducing the topic, he had to write all the terminology or difficult words on the board before he started the lesson. Arguably, the vocabulary was too advanced for the learners. It really took time for the teacher to finish the lesson. After the teacher had written the terminology on the board, he explained or defined each word. While he explained the terminology, he used sign language. After he had finished the explanations, he began the lesson. The classroom was full of bright pictures, which made the deaf learners' classroom come alive with colour and vibrancy, suggesting a comfortable and exciting learning environment.

The teacher worked with a deaf teacher assistant. Whenever he needed a new sign to be created or developed, he sought assistance from the deaf teacher assistant.

## **5.5 The Western Cape Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture**

The next institution in which I conducted observations and interviews was the Western Cape Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture. I interviewed Joe Maree, who was the coordinator of the Deaf Research Project. He mentioned three schools of which he had personal knowledge, that is, Nuwe Hoop in Worcester, De La Bat School, and Noluthando School for the Deaf. She did not show any interest in my research.

I decided to interview Xolisa Tshongolo, an official in the Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture, who provided me with information and booklets. Xolisa argued that the Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture could do more work in deaf schools, but he argued that the deaf schools are not united.

## 5.6 Research findings

### 5.6.1 Questions posed to the learners

**Question 1:** When a teacher teaches you in sign language, do you understand all the signs that he or she uses?

**Question 2:** If you don't understand a sign, do you tell the teacher that you don't understand the sign, or do you keep quiet?

**Table 5.1: The frequency of different learner responses to the question “Do you tell the teacher if you do not understand a sign that he or she has used?”**

Response	Frequency of response (No. of learners)
No (Does not tell the teacher)	6
Yes (Tells the teacher)	3

As is evident from Table 5.1, six learners responded that they do not tell the teacher when they do not understand a sign that he or she has used, while three learners responded that they tell the teacher when they do not understand a sign.

**Question 3:** If the teacher does not understand a sign that a learner uses, do you help him or her?

**Table 5.2: The frequency of different learner responses to the question “Do you help the teacher if he or she does not understand a sign that a learner has used?”**

Response	Frequency of response (No. of learners)
Yes	6
No	3

As can be seen from Table 5.2, six learners answered that they help the teacher if he or she does not understand a sign that a learner has used, while three learners answered that they do not help the teacher.

**Question 4:** Did you know that deaf learners always experience problems when writing sentences?

**Table 5.3: The frequency of different learner responses to the question “Did you know that deaf learners always experience problems when writing sentences?”**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency of response (No. of learners)</b>
Yes	4
No	1
Not sure	4

As is apparent from Table 5.3, four of the learners knew that deaf people experience problems when writing sentences, one learner did not know this, and four learners were not sure.

**Question 5:** If you are aware that deaf learners always experience problems when writing sentences, how do you solve that problem?

**Table 5.4: The frequency of different learner responses to the question “If you are aware that deaf learners always experience problems when writing sentences, how do you solve that problem?”**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency of response (No. of learners)</b>
I write a sentence and show it to the teacher.	2
I don't know how to solve the problem.	7

As is evident from Table 5.4, two learners responded that they write a sentence and show it to the teacher. Seven learners responded that they did not know how to solve the problem.

**Question 6:** Do you need help with language, for example, with reading and writing?

All the learners responded that they needed help with language.

**Question 7:** If the teacher wants to develop new signs, do you help him or her?

**Table 5.5: The frequency of different learner responses to the question “Do you help the teacher develop new signs?”**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency of response (No. of learners)</b>
Yes	4
No	5

As can be seen from Table 5.5, four of the learners responded that they do help the teacher develop new signs, while five of the learners responded that they do not.

**Question 8:** Do you have a teacher assistant in your class?

**Table 5.6: The frequency of different learner responses to the question “Do you have a teacher assistant in your class?”**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency of response (No. of learners)</b>
Yes	3
No	6

As is evident from Table 5.6, three of the learners responded that they did have a teacher assistant in their class, while six of the learners responded that they did not have one.

**Question 9:** Did you know that there is a sign language dictionary?

**Table 5.7: The frequency of different learner responses to the question “Did you know that there is a sign language dictionary?”**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency of response (No. of learners)</b>
Yes	1
No	8

As is apparent from Table 5.7, one learner knew that there is a sign language dictionary, while eight learners did not know this.

### **5.6.2 Questions posed to the teachers**

#### **Question 1: What curriculum do you use when you teach the learners at school?**

Two teachers follow the WCED curriculum and Outcomes Based Education guidelines and implement adaptations when needed. The teachers were stressed before answering the question, hence they argued that the WCED curriculum gave them a lot of stress, because it was allegedly “complicated”. One teacher admitting to sticking to the WCED curriculum.

#### **Question 2: How does the curriculum relate to what is being taught and learned in class?**

The researcher discovered that the teachers did not know where to start answering this question, because of the disabilities that the learners have. They argued that they stick to the curriculum as far as possible, but that a lot of the

learning material covered and acquired by the deaf children they simply learn from what the teacher tells them in class rather than an official curriculum. They pick up little from their parents and their own general knowledge, which is lacking.

### **Question 3: Do you develop your own curriculum?**

One teacher mentioned that the teachers used what was given by the WCED and adapted it for their learners. Another teacher said, “We do not create our own curriculum. We use adaptation, whereby we use pictures and ask the learners to do research by going to the libraries, use computerised information, and show them exactly what you are talking about.” Another teacher argued that they change some things from the curriculum because of the learners’ disabilities, and that they also ask some questions orally.

### **Question 4: Do you think that this curriculum is suitable for deaf learners?**

The female teachers interviewed are here referred to as Teachers 1, 2 and 3. Teachers 1 and 2 remain anonymous, whilst Teacher 3 represents the viewpoints of the researcher as someone embedded for many years in the process of teaching hearing impaired learners. These views are largely expressed in the third person below for the sake of uniformity.

The researcher discovered that the teachers gave different answers to this question, but that the meaning of the answers was the same. Teacher 1 argued that the curriculum was not suitable for deaf learners because of their disabilities, that is, the learners did not understand the instructions. The terminology that was being used, especially in the content subjects, was difficult for the learners to understand. They did not have much knowledge about the



world, they did not have the background of their home language, and there was no communication between them and their parents. Teacher 2 said that the curriculum was not suitable for deaf learners, because their disability caused them to have a language acquisition problem.

The view was expressed that the level of language proficiency among deaf learners was not what it should be, that it was not the same as that of mainstream hearing children, and that that was where the difficulty lay. It was claimed that the reading level of deaf learners was not what it should be, and that, as a result, the teachers had to explain a lot of the work. Teacher 3 argued that one of the limitations to the curriculum were that the teachers that did not know sign language exacerbated the learners' language acquisition difficulties. This teacher asserted that "sign language is also a barrier, because we do not have all the signs, and that leads us to develop new signs, which the learners won't remember." Teacher 3 also said that the teachers are not work-shopped in order to get sign language training and become well equipped and ready to use the WCED curriculum, and that the level of language was too advanced for deaf learners.

**Question 5: How do you develop equivalent terminology for English when you are teaching?**

Teacher 1 explained that "I ask my assistant to develop a new sign and see if it is suitable for that particular context." Sometimes the assistants cannot create signs, and in that case, they do research among other assistants from different deaf schools, to establish what the dominant sign is that is being used. Teacher 2 said that they start with an abbreviation, for example, "mono + cot", they finger-spell the abbreviation, and then allow the learners to come up with a sign. Teacher 3 revealed that she also asked the assistant to develop signs.

**Question 6: How do you come up with innovative ways in order to support the deaf learners, while at the same time assessing to what extent they adhere to the official curriculum?**

Teacher 1 asserted that one of the innovations that the teachers use is to present the learners with two similar pictures, and learners then have to spot the differences between the pictures. Another innovation that teachers use is to take the learners outside to practically show them the phenomena that they are learning about, and if the teacher can't find the phenomena outside, she will get pictures or do research. Teacher 2 explained that she uses pictures and dramatises the lesson, so that the learners can remember the content of the lesson easily. She helps the learners to visualise the lesson, as deaf learners remember easily when they can see.

**Question 7: How do you react to the new terminology in class, that is, corpus planning?**

Some of the teachers were not aware about corpus planning, so the researcher explained the meaning of corpus planning. Another teacher stated that if there were problems in developing certain signs, she would consult an American signing dictionary and implement the signs given therein. To ascertain what the equivalent SASL signs are, they would check with their coordinator.

**Question 8: What ways do you think will help sign language teaching to become competitive?**

Teacher 1 argued that the deaf community in South Africa is a small and marginalised community and that getting sign language to be accepted is a big issue. The only programmes on television that have sign language interpreters

are certain news bulletins. The teacher argued that “from the communities where our learners are coming from, sign language is not accepted, and that is where the awareness should start, especially amongst the officials, that is, government institutions, etc. throughout the country”. Teacher 2 maintained that SASL should be the twelfth official language of South Africa, in order to be recognised in all government institutions, such as hospitals, courts, police stations, etc, and that sign language should be a medium of instruction. Deaf learners are the most marginalised minority group when it comes to formal education. Teacher 3 contended that teachers that teach deaf learners should be well trained in sign language, that there should be enough resources in deaf schools, that deaf schools should offer matric, as many deaf schools end at Grade 10, and that all universities should have a sign language department.

## **5.7 A case study**

In my personal experience as a deaf teacher, I am working with learners who are mostly coming from hearing parents and family. They grew up with no language, because they are deaf, and they are living with parents who use their own language, which is different from sign language. There is and was no communication between them and their language, that is, sign language, from the deaf adults. The teachers taught them reading, writing, and finger spelling. They also learned numeracy and Life Orientation. It was difficult for the new teachers to communicate with the learners, as the signs were not the same as those used in the deaf schools that the teachers had taught at before. The deaf teacher assistants criticised the new teachers for using different signs from those used at that particular school. There was no workshop or training for the new teachers to be taught the sign language of that particular school. The assistants did not work hand in hand with the new teachers. There was no sign language

policy to guide the teachers that taught the deaf learners. There was no visit from the WCED to assess the teachers' progress, especially as far as their use of sign language was concerned. Writing was very difficult for these learners. They could not construct sentences. When they wrote an essay about the weekend's news, they used to write in sign language structure. This was in spite of the fact that their teachers had taught them signed English so that they could learn the language structure. Their teachers had taught them signed English rather than sign language, because in signed language they wrote according to the way they would say a sentence. For example, if they wanted to write the English sentence "I am going to town", they would write "Go town me". Learning dictionary words is not easy for deaf learners, as terminology is very difficult for them, especially in the Intermediate Phase and the Senior Phase. The English that is used in the WCED curriculum is too advanced for deaf learners. When the teachers teach content subjects, they have to struggle, that is, they have to collect all the difficult terminology and list it on the board and explain each word.

### **5.8 A comparative analysis of the three schools**

School A and School C used sign language, whereas school B used sign language and oralism. The number of learners in each class was almost the same. All three teachers were hearing teachers. In two of the schools, there were no deaf teacher assistants. School B used two interpreters, that is, an Afrikaans interpreter, and an English interpreter, rather than having sign language deaf teacher assistants. School C had more than two deaf teacher assistants, however I selected only two assistants for my research. In all three of the schools, learners did not understand all the signs. Most of them were not free to ask questions, due primarily to teacher-centred approaches, when they did not

understand the teacher's signs. In two of the schools, learners had a language problem, especially in sentence construction.

However, one school did not have a major problem in language or writing, as I noticed when I did my observations. However, the learners did not understand the teacher's signs. In two schools learners had a language problem, especially in sentence construction. Most learners became aware that, as deaf learners, they lacked writing skills. As a result, they needed help from the three schools. There was only one learner that knew about the existence of a sign language dictionary. The two deaf teacher assistants were also not aware of the existence of a sign language dictionary. In schools A and B teachers were helped by the learners in the development of new signs.

In school C, teachers were helped by deaf teacher assistants from all the schools. Only three learners understood the signs used by their teachers (there are no signs for *is* and *-ing* in SASL) (Aarons 1996). School A used the grammar of spoken language, because "signs have been invented to represent these English terms in artificially created signed English" (Aarons 1996). Aarons (1996) explains that in schools for Deaf children, the artificially created systems are used by the teachers. Teachers rely on the spoken words that they speak as they sign. Learners at Wittebome Dominican School reported that they were dissatisfied with the way they were being taught in their school, because the teachers were using oralism. They said that they didn't like oralism, because they couldn't hear, and they also couldn't talk.

The approach of using sign language, as practised at Mary Kihn School and De La Bat School, is supported by Aarons and Akach (1998). Aarons and Akach (1998) explain that deaf people's speech is not clear, and that, as a result, a great

deal of their time in school is spent in speech training, when they could be learning and developing the same way that other children are. They also argue that, because of oralism, Deaf children come out of schools for the deaf uneducated and functionally illiterate, with neither a first language nor any other language. According to Aarons and Akach (1998), South African schools for the deaf have failed deaf children, because they haven't educated them and prepared them to be productive members of society.

One of the deaf teacher assistants at Mary Kihn School claimed that in deaf schools in South Africa there are no resources for deaf education. He said that maybe it is because deaf learners are disabled. He reported that when he was young, he went to a mainstream school, because there was no deaf school in the rural area where he lived. He explained that he struggled at home and in the neighbourhood where we lived, because there was no one to communicate with. When he did Grade 3, he was 23 years old. His family encouraged him to complete his matric, but it was not at all easy for him. When he started experiencing all sorts of setbacks in his life, he became angry. He then adopted a positive mindset and developed a dream of changing the situation. He thought of visiting police stations, hospitals and other government institutions, to advise them to employ sign language interpreters.

He went to V.N. Naicker School for the Deaf in Durban, where he showed great talent in sport. He was selected to represent the South African Deaf team in Johannesburg, where he received a gold medal. In 2001 he studied at Cape Town College in Cape Town. He strived to be a role model and wanted to empower other Deaf people to work hard and realise their dreams and overcome all the barriers they might encounter as Deaf people. He dreamt of seeing

himself achieving his goals by getting a job in a government institution, where he could encourage disabled people.

Aarons and Reynolds (2003) claim that “sign language has suffered from a lack of resources usually provided to a language”. They assert that resources such as expensive hearing aids and intensive ongoing speech and language therapy have been available for white children only. Nieder-Heitmann (1980) claims that the signing that took place in black schools consisted of signs used to represent spoken language, which were drawn from a book called *Talking to the Deaf/Praat met die Doves*. The Mary Kihn deaf teacher assistant maintained that he struggled during apartheid, because he had not had as good an education as hearing people had had. He explained that he had often misunderstood his teachers, because they had not had sign language training. He claimed that he was often insulted by his teachers when he misunderstood them. He argued that many teachers don’t want to stand for deaf education. In this case, the Integrated Strategy for Disability White Paper of 1997 argues that “Teachers of the deaf in signed language-medium schools should play a crucial role in deaf children’s lives”.

The Integrated Strategy for Disability White Paper of 1997 also argues that the teachers of the deaf should be proficient in SASL and have fully acquired deaf culture. The teachers should be responsible for ensuring that deaf children become independent, contributing members of society, by teaching learners literacy in English, or any other spoken language, and ensuring that learners learn to read and write a written language as their second language. When the hearing teacher introduces the deaf child to literacy, he or she must use SASL and what he or she knows about deaf culture (Integrated Strategy for Disability White Paper of 1997).

The second deaf teacher assistant stated that he experienced what Deaf Teacher Assistant 1 experienced, namely the problem that some of the teachers don't know sign language. He claimed that the teachers used Total Communication and communicated by means of writing. He explained that when the assistants are not at school, the teachers get frustrated, because they are not able to communicate successfully with the learners. He stated that when the learners write tests, it is not easy for them to understand the instructions, and that he has to repeat the instructions six times before they understand.

His experience at his previous school when he was young was directly related to issues of language usage. Further to this, he did not know English and sign language, because there was no one to assist him at school and at home. His teachers did not know sign language, and consequently, he would solicit explanations about the subject matter of his different learning areas from his friends. He began to understand English only when he was in Grade 9. He felt that sign language was useless to the teachers. This view is supported by Deuchar (1984:39), who argues that British Sign Language (BSL) cannot be used in education, because it is not a proper language and it isn't used in education. According to Deuchar (1984:39), many teachers of the deaf have assumptions about the use of BSL. For instance, some deaf teachers think that the use of BSL will isolate them from the hearing majority.

Deuchar (1984:39) argues that teachers of the deaf don't require sign language training in order to be competent in sign language. As a deaf teacher who has experienced difficulties in using the WCED curriculum while teaching deaf learners, I do not recommend the WCED curriculum. Deaf learners cannot read questions on their own when they write their tests, assignments, and classwork.



This is due to the fact that the level of English that is being used is too advanced for them. These learners remain the most marginalised minority group when it comes to formal education.

Curriculum advisors do not provide suitable material for deaf learners. Based on my experience in teaching content subjects, the best way to teach these subjects to deaf learners is to list all the terminology on the board, that is, all the difficult words or vocabulary, and explain each word repeatedly until the learners understand them. This takes a lot of time. Terminology has to be explained before the lesson can start. When I teach comprehension, I have to list all the vocabulary and explain each word to the learners. There is a lot that needs to be fixed. What I would prefer, as a deaf teacher, is if the WCED curriculum could be adapted and curriculum advisors could be consulted on a curriculum specifically for deaf learners. The advisors should visit the deaf schools before they design the curriculum and find out what problems are experienced in those schools.

The language task team should involve the teachers of deaf schools before they decide on a language plan. Kyle and Woll (1985:31) report that educators of the deaf in the UK never accepted sign language as a method of instruction in the classroom. Sign language was not regarded as a method of instruction, but rather as a means of communication. Kyle and Woll (1985:31) argue that sign language opens up a channel of communication and provides a vehicle for imparting the curriculum to deaf learners. A SASL curriculum should be designed in such a way that deaf learners are able to progress and move on to the next level. Aarons and Akach (1998, 2002) argue that SASL is a rule-governed, grammatical, systematic language, and that it is similar to other languages.

Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) state that “language policies have long been recognised to have the potential of being either emancipator, or oppressive, empowering or disempowering in nature”. They contend that an area that has received little attention in this regard is the users of sign languages. An alternative solution to the problem is for SASL schools to have their own curriculum. Edwards and Sienkewicks (1990) claim that in the 1980s in provincial schools in North America, deaf children were taught a mainstream academic curriculum consisting of the following learning areas: English, Maths, Science, History, Social Studies, Arts, Health, and Physical Education. Although there was no ASL curriculum at the time, Americans were in the process of developing one. Edwards and Sienkewicks (1990) argue that this kind of curriculum is a concept for all of us in the field of Deaf Education. There is evidence that an ASL curriculum never existed in any form in any school programmes in North America.

### **5.9 Curriculum use at the three schools**

All three schools use the WCED curriculum. Teacher 1 asserted that “sometimes you find yourself re-explaining many things that you are not aware the learners didn’t understand, and you find yourself going outside the curriculum occasionally, because of the input that is needed to address the hearing disability”. Teacher 2 claimed that the curriculum relates to what the learners see or experience from their homes or background, and also forms part of what they are being taught by their educators. Teacher 3 said that the curriculum relates to what learners experience in their daily lives.

Teacher 1 explained that the teachers do not develop their own curriculum, but that what they do is use what is provided by the WCED and adapt it specifically

for their deaf learners. She asserted that there are times when, because of the hearing disability that has to be contended with, much of the actual teaching consists of explanation. While giving the learners definitions, much adaptation might be used when it comes to questioning and testing for the exam. Other adaptations or changes are in written work, because the learners have difficulties in reading. Teacher 1 gave the following explanation:

The adaptation is giving more visual aids, and we as teachers have much input that we can provide. Although the learners do research and reading in the library, we still need to teach and explain more, because they don't always understand what they read and further explanations through teaching can unpack what they have done. Otherwise, we use the WCED curriculum and adapt it.

Teacher 2 said that they did not create their own curriculum, but that they used adaptations where they used pictures and asked the learners to do research by going to libraries and using computerised information, and getting the learners to show the teacher exactly what she had taught them about. Teacher 2 said that the curriculum was not suitable for the learners because of their hearing disability, and that they were not able to follow instructions. He maintained that the terminology that was being used, especially in the content subjects, was difficult for the learners to understand. He said that the application of OBE was not suitable for deaf learners, because they had to be spoon-fed. He said that group discussions were not easy for these learners, as they cannot discuss independently and they are not familiar with the world, because they do not have the background of a home language and there is no communication between them and their parents. That leads to a lack of explanation about things that are happening in the world. He argued that one of the limitations was

teachers who did not know sign language and who ended up not delivering what the learners were supposed to get from the curriculum.

He argued that sign language is also a barrier, as sign language does not have signs for all the words in English, and that leads the teachers to develop new signs, that is, their own signs, which the learners will remember. Educators are not work-shopped in order to get sign language training and become well equipped to be ready to use the WCED curriculum in their teaching. He said that the level of language in the curriculum is too advanced. Teacher 3 said that the curriculum is not suitable for deaf learners, because the curriculum advisors and language planners use difficult terminology. As a result, the deaf learners cannot understand the terms on their own unless the teachers assist them. The language used in the comprehension or short story books is not suitable for deaf learners. As a result, the learners cannot read independently.

Teacher 1 said that when developing new signs, she starts by finger-spelling an abbreviation, for example, “mono + cot”, allow explanation as the learners come up with a sign. Teacher 2 explained that he asks his assistant to develop a new sign, and he then sees whether the sign is suitable for that particular situation or term. He also said that there are signs that cannot be created by deaf teacher assistants, because they come from different deaf schools. Teacher 3 also admitted to asking the assistant to develop new signs. Teacher 1 stated that the innovative way she used to support the deaf learners was to present them with two similar pictures and get them to spot the differences between the pictures. She also gives her learners a practical lesson outside, where she shows her learners the object that she is teaching them about, and if she can't find the object outside, she looks for pictures or does research and looks for information on the Internet.

Teacher 2 explained that she uses pictures and drama, so that her learners can remember easily. In Science, she gets her learners to do experiments, or she takes them outside in order for them to experience the world and visualise the plants and other things that they are learning about. Teacher 3 also admitted to using pictures, either in the form of handouts, or drawings on the whiteboard, and taking her learners outside for practical lessons. The teacher's reaction to the new terminology for the classroom, that is, corpus planning, is that when she experiences problems in developing signs, she uses the American Sign Language Dictionary. She said that when they need to know the SASL equivalents of signs, they check with their coordinator. Teachers 2 and 3 said that they were not aware of corpus planning, but that instead they used their deaf teacher assistants to develop new signs and asked them to do research among deaf teacher assistants from other schools.

Teacher 1 argued that the best way to make sign language teaching appropriate was to introduce sign language to the communities and to the officials, that is, government institutions etc, for dissemination to the rest of the country. She said that the big issue is getting sign language accepted. The only programmes on television that have sign language interpreters are certain news bulletins. She argued that in the communities where their learners were coming from, sign language was not accepted. She claimed that some schools in the Western Cape had started teaching sign language with the curriculum implemented as an examinable subject, and that they were going nowhere, and that there was a court case taking place in Bloemfontein, where the parents of a deaf learner were demanding that sign language be used.

Teacher 2 argued that SASL should be the twelfth official language of South Africa and that it should be a medium of instruction in schools. He said that deaf learners are the most marginalised minority group when it comes to formal education, and that sign language should be used in all government institutions, such as courts, hospitals, police stations, etc. Teacher 3 argued that teachers should be trained to know sign language. He maintained that the WCED should take them for workshops, and that after they had given the teachers training, they should do follow-up to see whether the training was being implemented in the schools. The WCED should have sign language curriculum advisors, so that the problems that deaf teachers experience in the use of the WCED curriculum can be understood. Language teachers should work hand in hand with sign language teachers, because otherwise language teachers will plan or discuss issues that will not involve sign language.

### **5.10 Conclusion**

There is clearly no single, unified approach to using sign language in South African schools. This is borne out by this research conducted in the Western Cape. This problem is compounded further by a lack of any clear curriculum which teachers can follow. This means that teachers adapt the existing curriculum to their own needs, either correctly or incorrectly. In this process one begins to query the quality of education that deaf learners are receiving. In the chapter that follows certain suggestions and recommendations will be made in order to ensure that a suitable curriculum development process be put in place for deaf learners and teachers, which will create a more uniform, innovative and quality system of education.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Conclusion: Summary and Recommendations**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

South African South Language (SASL) language planning and policy is a major issue in South Africa. In this thesis it has been pointed out that sign language users are a minority group which have been marginalised all over the world. Currently, sign language is not one of the official languages in South Africa. Before 1994 the rights of deaf people to use SASL were not considered a priority. The majority of deaf and hearing people did not recognise SASL as a language having the same status as spoken languages (Morgan 2008:6). The dissertation discussed methods that the researcher used to ascertain what signs are being used in three deaf schools (as well as observations made from the school in which I work) in the Western Cape and an analysis of the sign language issues pertaining to these respective schools was outlined.

#### **6.2 Research within Schools**

The research also investigated innovative ways used by these four schools and how learners use sign language in their classrooms. The research used two different departments, namely the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) and the Western Cape Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture, to collect documents. The dissertation started with the research methodology used, which involved a qualitative research approach. The qualitative research approach is a strategy that usually emphasises words, rather than quantification, in the collection and analysis of data. This approach stresses the importance of allowing theoretical ideas to emerge out of one's data. It can and should also play an important role in relation to the testing of theories.

It was found that deaf learners are the most marginalised minority group when it comes to formal education. The primary aim of the research was to investigate what was happening in selected schools in the Western Cape in terms of how sign language is being used and taught and how this can be extrapolated to the rest of the country. The secondary aim of the study was to come up with concrete suggestions for language planners and policymakers, which could be implemented at national level.

In order to do this, case studies of what happens in other countries were also presented in chapter 3, against the backdrop of the history of South African sign language which was outlined in chapter 2.

In regard to the schools, the length of the study was decided by both parties, that is, the researcher and the participants, that the study would be conducted over a period of one week, that is, one day per institution. The sample comprised nine deaf learners, that is, three learners from each school, three teachers, two deaf teacher assistants, one member from the Western Cape Department of Education, and one member from the Western Cape Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture (Gibson 2009:56).

### **6.3 Signing among the deaf community**

It has been outlined in this thesis that deaf people can sign any topic, concrete or abstract. According to Ricento (2006:331), the deaf do not live apart from hearing people, and they need to communicate with hearing people in order to function socially and economically. This point has been reiterated in this thesis as a point of departure if sign language is to be taken seriously in South Africa. As indicated in earlier chapters, Penn (1993b) argues that during apartheid, language planning and policymaking had its documented origins in residential schools for the deaf. Sign language was developed naturally, and deaf people



have used SASL to communicate for centuries in spite of its history of oppression by wider society.

According to the Human Sciences Research Council (1983), there has been an emergence of a research base for South African Sign Language. There was a conference that was held at the Human Sciences Research Council headquarters in Pretoria, where signed languages and their use in education in South Africa were discussed, as outlined earlier in this thesis. The primary function of SASL (Received Pronunciation) was the production of a dictionary (Penn 1992a, 1993a, b, c). SASL often offers educational opportunities for the deaf, which allow them to move towards an academic curriculum (Aarons 1996).

Throughout this thesis it has been pointed out by scholars such as Deuchar that sign language is different from spoken language. He argues that it need not to be learned, because it is a natural, instinctive and pictorial language. Deuchar (1984) argues that in order for deaf people to be able to communicate with one another from different countries, they need to use the same languages. Deuchar (1984:2) contends that “Languages develop in communities, through contact between speakers, so communities that are geographically separated from one another are likely to have different languages”.

When a deaf community becomes established in a country due to links between different institutions, the assumption may be the gradual development of a national sign language. However, there would be differences in the sign language that develops, and the differences would be related to different schools (Deuchar 1984:3).

#### **6.4 Language planning and sign language**

It has also been pointed out in the literature review of this thesis that status planning is the aspect of language planning which reflects primarily social issues (Kaplan & Baldauf 1997:30). Two status issues are language selection and language implementation. According to DeafSA (2006), there was a National Deaf March, where a memorandum demanding that SASL be used as a medium of instruction was handed over to the Minister of Education. DeafSA also demanded to have a position paper for SASL interpreters services (DeafSA 2006). There was a need for SASL interpreter training, which was to be registered as a course with SAQA (NQF Level 5). A task team composed of representatives from DeafSA and the Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture should be established with immediate effect, for the purpose of monitoring the process of maintaining and promoting SASL (DeafSA 2006).

According to DeafSA, the task team should include implementation of various projects. DeafSA argued that Parliament should effect constitutional amendments, so that SASL becomes a twelfth official language with immediate effect, or within a period of six months from October 2006. The Department of Arts and Culture should provide the necessary funds for the development of a curriculum for the training of SASL instructors, so that SASL instruction becomes a recognised profession. The Department of Education should liaise with tertiary education institutions for the purpose of revising the curricula for public service professionals (DeafSA 2006).

In the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, sign language does have a status as one of the languages that must be promoted by the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) (Morgan 2008). There are countries abroad which accepted, recognised and protected sign language. However, DeafSA (2005) contends that the World Federation for the Deaf (WFD) should encourage the

national federations of the Deaf, including DeafSA, to work towards the official recognition of sign language, for the purpose of communication accessibility for Deaf people. Sign language is independent of any spoken or written language (*The Sunday Independent*, 11 April 1999).

It has also been noted in this thesis that different forms of sign language have developed in countries where deaf communities exist. DPSA and DeafSA argue that for the successful implementation, there should be a representation from all disabled communities. *The Sunday Independent* (11 April 1999:5) contends that sign language does not only need to be recognised as an official language, but that curricula for the deaf should also be given official status. The *Diamond Fields Advertiser* (10 February 2003:3) asserts that sign language should be taught from primary to tertiary level. According to the *Diamond Fields Advertiser* (10 February 2003:3), the Department of Education was not focusing on the creation of inclusive education, which would include sign language.

*The Star* (12 November 2002:6) contended that the government should look at the possibility of introducing sign language as a medium of instruction and as a school subject. A deaf rights activist and the first deaf Member of Parliament in South Africa, as well as the current chairperson and president of DeafSA, Wilma Newhoudt-Druchen, claimed that there was a lot of variation in the sign languages used by various communities in South Africa (University of the Orange Free State, 15 December 1995). This variation affects the official recognition of sign language. The national director of DeafSA, Kobus Kellerman, claimed that there were about 11 or 12 different sign language dialects in the country, and that there was a problem with the official acceptance of sign language in terms of education and interpreting services (University of the Orange Free State, 15 December 1995).

What is stated above alludes to the fact that there has been much publicity in the national media concerning issues related to language planning, policy and implementation as it relates to South African sign language. Even so there is little evidence on the ground to suggest that implementation is taking place within the schooling system, as suggested in this work.

In 1967 a new policy of “Total Communication” (TC) was introduced, which was proposed by Roy Holcomb in the United States, in order to promote and recognise the rights of a deaf child by using all forms of communication available to develop language competence (Nover 2006). The research also entails the research findings on ethnographic and comparative analysis. The discussion is based on findings of the questionnaire, the interviews, and the information regarding the curriculum use in these three deaf schools that serve as research sites. It also includes a discussion on innovative methods used by the teachers in sign language teaching. The respondents came from different racial backgrounds.

## **6. 5 Conclusion and Recommendations**

This research has gone some way to show that sign language in fact does exist in South Africa. Further to this, sign language has a history in this country and it relates also to what has happened in other parts of the world such as the America as well as in parts of Europe, for example in Britain as pointed out in chapter 3 of this work. Nevertheless South African sign language remains challenged in the schooling and education system in general. It remains marginalised and on the periphery, ignoring the more than 1.5 million users of this language and further marginalising them within the broader South African community.

It is recommended that immediate talks be re-initiated between DeafSA and the Department of Basic Education and Training as well as the Department of Higher Education and Training. Communication channels should be re-opened in a constructive way so as to allow for further research related to South African sign language, building on the work of Penn (1992) and others.

It is imperative that appropriate school curricula be developed in order to ensure that hearing impaired and deaf South Africans are granted access to quality education and can therefore play a constructive role in the economy of the country. It is clear from the research presented from the schools in the Western Cape that sign language is being developed and used within the schooling system on an ad hoc basis. It is the view of the researcher that this is not sustainable indeed it is not workable or desirable.

The rights that are enshrined in the Constitution of South Africa also need to be revisited as a point of departure when it comes to the possible official recognition of sign language. Without this official recognition it will be difficult for this language to grow and to receive sanction, which is part of both status and corpus language planning. Further to this, it is important that any policy decision be made from a well-informed research perspective. It is hoped that this thesis goes some way in pointing to some of the issues at hand.

## Appendix 1

### Questionnaire to deaf learners and their selected responses

#### Question 1

When the teacher teaches you sign language, do you understand all the signs?

Participant 1: I understand some signs.

Participant 2: Some.

Participant 3: Some.

Participant 4: Some.

Participant 5: I understand half of the signs.

Participant 6: Some.

Participant 7: Yes.

Participant 8: I understand most of the signs.

Participant 9: Most.

#### Question 2

When you don't understand the signs, do you tell the teacher?

Participant 1: When I don't understand, I tell the teacher.

Participant 2: I tell the teacher.

Participant 3: Yes, I tell the teacher.

Participant 4: No, because our teacher uses oralism and signs, so it is a mixed language. Sometimes I get confused.

Participant 5: No, because it's both oralism and sign language.

Participant 6: She uses sign language and oralism, and I don't like oralism. I am not sure whether I understand or not.

Participant 7: I understand my teacher.

Participant 8: Yes, I ask the teacher.

Participant 9: I ask if I don't understand.

### Question 3

If the teacher does not understand the signs, do you help him or her and teach him or her the correct signs?

Participant 1: Yes.

Participant 2: Yes.

Participant 3: Yes.

Participant 4: No, because she always uses oralism.

Participant 5: No, because there is no time.

Participant 6: No, because her signs are clear and good.

Participant 7: Yes.

Participant 8: Yes.

Participant 9: Yes.

### Question 4

Do you know that deaf learners always have problems in writing sentences?

Participant 1: Yes.

Participant 2: Yes.

Participant 3: Yes.

Participant 4: Yes.

Participant 5: Yes.

Participant 6: Yes.

Participant 7: Yes.

Participant 8: Yes.

Participant 9: Yes.

### Question 5

If you are aware about your problems, how do you resolve them? Do you ask the teacher to help you?

Participant 1: When I've finished writing the sentences, I always show them to my teacher, so that he or she can assist me.

Participant 2: I always practise spelling.

Participant 3: I practise sentences.

Participant 4: I ask the teacher to assist me.

Participant 5: Our teacher always teaches us reading and writing.

Participant 6: I always practise sentences.

Participant 7: I always practise spelling words.

Participant 8: I always practise sentences.

Participant 9: I ask the teacher to teach me how to write sentences.

#### Question 6

Do you need help in language, that is, in reading and writing?

Participant 1: Yes.

Participant 2: Yes.

Participant 3: Yes.

Participant 4: Yes.

Participant 5: Yes.

Participant 6: Yes.

Participant 7: Yes.

Participant 8: Yes.

Participant 9: Yes.

#### Question 7

If the teacher wants to develop new signs, do you help him or her?

Participant 1: No.

Participant 2: No.

Participant 3: Yes.

Participant 4: No.



Participant 5: No.

Participant 6: No.

Participant 7: Yes.

Participant 8: Yes.

Participant 9: Yes.

#### Question 8

Do you have a teacher assistant in your class?

Participant 1: No.

Participant 2: No.

Participant 3: No.

Participant 4: No.

Participant 5: No.

Participant 6: No.

Participant 7: Yes.

Participant 8: Yes.

Participant 9: Yes.

#### Question 9

Do you know that there is a sign language dictionary?

Participant 1: No.

Participant 2: Yes.

Participant 3: No.

Participant 4: No.

Participant 5: No.

Participant 6: No.

Participant 7: No.

Participant 8: No.

Participant 9: No.

## Appendix 2

### Questionnaire to deaf teacher assistants and their selected responses

#### Question 1

How is sign language used in your classroom?

Participant 1: The sign language in our classroom is good, because the learners understand us clearly, and if they do not understand, they tell us.

Participant 2: It is difficult, because my signs from where I was studying, that is, Efata, differ from the signs used at Mary Kihn School. Therefore, there is a lack of communication in a few signs. Another problem is that the teacher does not understand sign language. As a result, it is not easy when I'm absent.

#### Question 2

How do you feel about the use of sign language in your classroom?

Participant 1: I feel good. However, we as deaf teacher assistants and our teachers need training from the WCED, in order to know how to teach deaf learners.

Participant 2: I need to understand our learners' signs. I also feel that teachers need to be trained before they work with deaf children

#### Question 3

How do you assist your teacher in developing new signs, especially for content subjects and English?

Participant 1: We work together and develop some signs. If I don't know the sign, I do research among other deaf assistants.

Participant 2: I do research among other deaf assistants.

#### Question 4

What methods do you use in your classroom when you teach, in order to be competitive?

Participant 1: I do not teach. I assist my teacher. I do what my teacher tells me to do.

Participant 2: Because my teacher does not know sign language, I always do research.

#### Question 5

If the teacher is new at your school or in your classroom, how do you communicate with him or her?

Participant 1: It is very difficult. We communicate in writing.

Participant 2: In writing.

#### Question 6

Are you aware that there is a corpus planning and ongoing development of dictionaries?

Participant 1: I am not aware of corpus planning, and I did not know that there is a sign language dictionary.

Participant 2: I am not aware of corpus planning and sign language dictionaries.

## **Appendix 3**

### **Questionnaire to teachers and their selected responses**

#### Question 1

What curriculum do you use when you teach the learners at school?

Participant 1: We use the WCED curriculum.

Participant 2: We use WCED.

Participant 3: We use WCED and adapt it.

#### Question 2

How does the curriculum relate to what is being taught and learned in class?

Participant 1: Our deaf learners do not acquire information from hearing people, because of their disability. Sometimes you find yourself going back to many things that they are not aware of, and you also find yourself going outside the curriculum occasionally, because of the input that is needed for the disability.

Participant 2: It relates to what they see or experience in their homes or background, and also to what they are being taught by the educators.

Participant 3: It relates to what they visualise in their homes and at school, and also to what they have experienced in life.

#### Question 3

Do you develop your own curriculum?

Participant 1: What we do is use what is given to us by the WCED and adapt it specifically for our learners. There are times when obviously because of the disabilities, they need to be changed. A lot of it is explanation. While giving definitions and lots of adaptations might come in questioning and testing for the exam, lots of them is written, because the learners have difficulties reading. The adaptation is giving more visual aids, and we as teachers have more input, and although the learners do research and reading in the library, we still need to

teach that, because they don't always understand what they read, then explanation and teaching what they have done is required.

Participant 2: We do not create our own curriculum. Instead, we use adaptations, where we use pictures and ask the learners to do research by going to the libraries, using computerised information, and showing them exactly what you are talking about. We change some things from the curriculum because of the learners' disabilities. Sometimes we ask questions in the oral medium. We summarise the passage, because we want them to understand the story. Afterwards, we ask them to read word by word and we use finger spelling, and we usually give them visual aids.

Participant 3: We change some things from the curriculum to the oral medium. For example, not all the learning outcomes are suited to deaf learners. In that case, we change listening to visual, because deaf learners cannot hear etc.

#### Question 4

Do you think this curriculum is suitable for deaf learners?

Participant 1: These learners could learn anything. It is the disability which brings the limitations. Because of the disabilities, learners have a problem of acquiring language. The level of language is not what it should be, that is, it is not the same as that of a mainstream child. The reading level is not as far as the mainstream child that is where the difficulty lies. The reading level is not where it should be. We find out that we have to add on and explain a lot of work. Sign language is another limitation, because we often don't have a sign at hand, and sometimes it's not easy to find a sign. We have to borrow from the American sign language dictionary or UK sign language. Then, if there is no sign, we develop or borrow one from outside. If they don't have it, we develop our own sign. For example, for the words "angiosperm" and "dicotyledon", we developed our own signs, however it took a lot of time.

Participant 2: The curriculum is not suitable for our deaf learners because of their disability. The learners do not follow instructions. The terminology that is being used, especially in content subjects, is difficult for them, because they need to be spoonfed. The group discussions are not easy. They cannot discuss independently. They are not familiar with the world, because they don't have the background of their home language, and there is no communication between them and their parents. They cannot explain things that are happening in their lives. Some of the limitations are teachers who do not know sign language. Those teachers cannot deliver what they are supposed to deliver to the learners.

Participant 3: The curriculum is not suitable for the deaf learners, because the teachers do not know sign language. Teachers need to be workshopped, that is, to attend sign language training, in order to deliver good curriculum results. The level of language use is too advanced for deaf learners.

### Question 5

How do you develop equivalent terminology for English when you are teaching?

Participant 1: We start with abbreviations, for example, mono + cot, we do finger spelling, and allow explanation from the learners in order to come up with a sign.

Participant 2: I ask my teacher assistant to develop new signs when necessary. If the Deaf teacher assistant does not have a sign, then he goes out and does research among other deaf adults.

Participant 3: I work with my Deaf teacher assistant.

### Question 6

How do you come up with innovative ways to support the deaf learners, while at the same time assessing to what extent they adhere to the official curriculum?

Participant 1: The innovative ways is that we use two pictures and learners have to figure out the differences between the pictures. We take them outside to give them a practical lesson, and then if I can't find what I am teaching them about, I will get a picture or do research. I will find a picture and show the structure of the animal that I am teaching the learners about from the picture. There is a lot of visual work, or I use a whiteboard and find adequate information on the Internet.

Participant 2: We use pictures and drama, so that the learners can remember easily. In Science, we do experiments, and we take the learners outside and give them a practical lesson, where we show them the different plants, for example, that they are learning about.

Participant 3: We show them pictures, so that they can visualise what the lesson is about. We give them practical lessons and work with them by doing research in the libraries, on the computer, and in magazines.

### Question 7

How do you react to the new terminology in the class, that is, corpus planning?

Participant 1: If I find out that there are problems in developing signs, I use the American Sign Language Dictionary, then we implement the signs listed in that dictionary. For equivalent SASL terms, we check with our coordinator.

Participant 2: As I have already said, I use my assistant to develop new signs. If he cannot develop a sign, he does research among other deaf adults.

Participant 3: I am not aware of corpus planning. I use my assistant to develop new signs.

### Question 8

What ways do you think will help sign language teaching to be more appropriate?

Participant 1: The deaf community in South Africa is a small and marginalised community. There is a big issue for the language to be accepted, there are interpreters on TV for certain news bulletins. From the communities where our learners are coming from, sign language is not accepted and that is where the awareness should start especially amongst the officials, i.e. government, etc. For the rest of the country some schools in the Western Cape started teaching sign language with the curriculum implemented as an examinable subject and going nowhere, and there was a court case in Bloemfontein where the parent won it.

Participant 2: The best way to assist sign language teaching to be more competitive is that, firstly, SASL should be one of the official languages, that is, it should be the twelfth official language. Sign language should be a medium of instruction. Deaf learners are the most marginalised minority group when it comes to formal education, therefore sign language should be used in all government institutions, such as courts, hospitals, etc.



Participant 3: Teachers who teach deaf learners should be well trained in sign language. There should be enough resources in deaf schools. Deaf schools should have Grade 12, because many deaf schools end at Grade 10. All universities should have a sign language department.

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