

Exploring Teacher Perceptions of a Textbook-Free ASL Curriculum at a Canadian  
University: A Qualitative Combined Methods Study

by

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## **Abstract**

Despite its growing popularity, American Sign Language (ASL) as a second language (ASL/ASL) is an under-researched and under-developed field of study. The present thesis begins to address this dearth through an exploration of four ASL teachers' perceptions of the textbook-free ASL program in which they teach. This study draws on previous literature that highlights the centrality of teachers within curriculum processes and considers the complexities inherent to the ASL context. The results of this qualitative combined methods study suggest that the teacher-participants perceive themselves as sharing in a common curricular vision promoting ASL proficiency and awareness of Deaf culture despite it being tacit and unwritten.

## **Acknowledgements**

Thank you to Professor Janna Fox, my supervisor, who encouraged me to bend convention to my heart's content with this thesis, but knew when to tell me when enough was enough. I'm very much looking forward to continuing to work with you.

Thank you, thank you to my friends and study-buddies for the countless library sessions, brain food, and invaluable insider information; to my participants who are the most fascinating and innovative bunch of ASL teachers in the country; and to the ALDS faculty, administration, and my fellow students who always had a kind and helpful word.

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## **List of Abbreviations and Notations**

2:51 - Sample time stamp used in classroom observation scheme.

(...) - Separates field notes from classroom activity notes.

j or ! - Used in classroom observation scheme to indicate, “do you understand?” (j), and, “I understand” (!).

[...] - Used in in-text quotes from data to indicate omission, addition, or other alteration to original text.

ASL - American Sign Language.

ASL/ASL - American Sign Language as a second language.

BLOCK LETTERS - Used in transcription and classroom observation scheme to indicate communication was signed, not spoken. For example, “GO-TO”.

CL - Used in classroom observation scheme to indicate something was acted out or mimed, not signed in ASL. For example, “CL PEE”.

FS - Used in classroom observation scheme to indicate a word was fingerspelled. For example, “N-I-N-A”.

[J] - Sample name stamp with teacher-participant’s first initial. For example, [J] for Jack.

Q - “Question”. Used during classroom observation to indicate a question was asked.

Rep. or Rep - “Repeat”. Used in classroom observation scheme to indicate a sign or string of signs was repeated.

SLA - Second Language Acquisition.

Ss - “Student” or “students”. Used in classroom observation scheme.

“Writes...” or “voices...” - Used in classroom observation scheme to indicate the following communication was written (on the board) or spoken (verbally).

## Glossary

d/Deaf – Lowercase *deaf* indicates the inability to hear, while *Deaf* indicates membership to the Deaf community.

h/Hearing – Parallel distinction as in d/Deaf, above. This is not yet commonly used in the literature, but it is a distinction made in this thesis.

Qualitative combined methods – Indicates two distinct methods were used within a qualitative paradigm.

Textbook curriculum – Indicates a *prêt-à-porter* program of study in the form of a textbook that contains instructional materials with a defined scope and sequence.

Textbook-free program – Indicates a program does not rely on a textbook for curricular materials, scope, and sequence.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Let's start at the very beginning, a very good place to start.

– Sister Maria, *The Sound of Music*, 1965

“What do you mean you study *American Sign Language* – isn't there one universal sign language<sup>1</sup>?” The frequency of this question startles me after five years of being involved with American Sign Language (ASL). My response to this question, “Is there only one universal spoken language?” usually quashes the misconceptions that “deaf” is a language and that ASL is English with your hands. Indeed, in my graduate studies I discovered that my area of interest, the teaching of ASL as a second language (hereafter referred to as ASL/ASL)<sup>2</sup> to hearing adult learners, was fraught with misconceptions and gaps.

In North American universities and colleges, American Sign Language (ASL) is the fourth most popular language of study after Spanish, French, and German (Modern Languages Association, 2010). But while programs for ASL as a second language continue to appear and expand to satisfy rampant demand, it may be at the cost of suitable implementation, planning, evaluation, and support for the particular language

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<sup>1</sup> To precise, there is indeed International Sign (IS) that is commonly used at major Deaf events such as the Deaf Olympics or Pan American Games for the Deaf. It is more simplified and tends to be more iconic (i.e. signs look more like the objects they represent than natural sign languages). IS (or Gestuno) was developed and adopted by the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) to facilitate communication at WFD meetings (see British Deaf Association, 1975).

<sup>2</sup> For efficiency of reference, I have used this acronym throughout. However, I might also have chosen second language learning of ASL, or SLL/ASL. In the context where this study took place, ASL/ASL is the commonly used reference.

and cultural circumstances of ASL. There is a growing need to develop a pedagogically sound theoretical foundation that informs empirical research and professional development based on the actual needs of teachers in postsecondary ASL contexts.

In a nutshell, this thesis explores teacher perceptions of a textbook-free ASL curriculum at a Canadian university, University A, with the aim of getting a better understanding of what might constitute the “overall curricular idea” (Smith, 1988, p. 171) of an unwritten curriculum. While I do not claim any degree of generalizability for this work, it is nonetheless intended to begin to address one tiny hole in this Swiss-cheese field by granting targeted attention to an area of study left largely unexplored.

### **My Position**

I present this thesis as a culturally Hearing ally of ASL and the Deaf community, but also as an ASL teacher and budding researcher. It should be noted that lowercase *deaf* indicates the inability to hear, while uppercase *Deaf* indicates membership to the Deaf community, a group of people sharing “values, beliefs, attitudes, and, most importantly, a language different from that of outsiders to the culture” (Wilcox & Wilcox, 1991, p. 54). I make the parallel distinction for hearing/Hearing, though this is not yet common in the literature.

Long before I knew the meaning of *empirical research* I was aware of oversights in the ASL teaching scene through my own experiences as a learner, as well as from insiders, such as my own ASL teacher and Deaf friends. Initially as a student in graduate seminars, and later as a graduate researcher, I began to explore the contributions of prominent ASL researchers (e.g., Lamb & Wilcox, 1988; Padden, 2006; Smith, 1988; Wilcox, 1989) and to attach theory to issues and possible responses to unanswered

questions. As an ASL teacher myself, I proceeded to outline the questions that I would like to address with the sole purpose of being useful. Useful. A heavy word. I mean it in no other way than my goal was, and continues to be, to do work that a teacher of ASL might find interesting, insightful, or (ideally) applicable. In the end, this is my story of teachers' stories.

### **Guiding Research Questions**

Smith (1988) outlines the rationale that motivated the design of the landmark<sup>3</sup> ASL textbook curriculum series *Vista Signing Naturally*, arguably the most popular ASL instructional material on the market (Rosen, 2010):

There is no overall curricular idea which can help [ASL] teachers (1) establish a cultural context for language instruction, (2) make decisions about how to sequence course materials, and (3) develop activities which allow students to progress from one-word responses to spontaneous expression of thoughts and feelings on a discourse level. (Smith, 1988, p. 171)

The above rationale also inspired the direction of the present study, which focuses on the textbook-free ASL curriculum at University A and the group of teachers working within this context. Research questions abound: what and how do the teachers teach without the use of materials for an established curricular structure? Where do they turn for materials and resources? Do they have a professional support network in which they could exchange ideas, get feedback, and become part of a larger community of practice? How are teacher beliefs and backgrounds shaping the curriculum? Is the curriculum different for every teacher or is there some kind of shared purpose and direction? Given that many of the teacher-participants in this study were hearing second language learners of ASL

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<sup>3</sup> This series was a landmark in that members of the Deaf community developed it and its importance and usefulness is evident in its pervasive popularity across North American ASL programs.

(who were also trained teachers of additional languages), are there any implications when a learner within a program becomes a teacher in the same program?

In sum, my curiosity is rooted in teacher constructions of curriculum, beliefs, knowledge, and practice. Although the above questions remain primary topics throughout my exploration of one university ASL program, the two overarching questions are as follows:

1. How do teachers perceive their role in contributing to and shaping the “overall curricular idea” for the program, if any?
2. What are the teacher perceptions of the textbook-free curriculum at University A in its capacity to promote ASL proficiency and awareness of the Deaf community?

The intention behind asking these questions is to give insight into the ASL/ASL curriculum by approaching it through teachers’ eyes and lived experiences. The study design combines qualitative methods, constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) and narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), and was developed based on the theory that teachers embody a knowledge landscape (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) and are the primary curriculum makers (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988).

### **Organization of Thesis**

The present thesis is not entirely traditional, and so there are some stylistic decisions that must be acknowledged. First, to maintain my voice and presence at all stages of this work I write in the first person “I” voice and make abundant use of footnotes. These footnotes do not fulfill their usual function that is to provide additional nonessential information; rather, here they constitute a parallel story and are essential to

maintaining the narrative quality of the thesis. This decision was inspired by Sacks' (1989) book, *Seeing Voices*, which made ASL and Deaf culture accessible to a wider audience. His footnotes, he claims, effectively constitute a second conversation running alongside the main body of the text, making his book and illuminating and enjoyable read.

Second, this is a long piece of writing, and so as much as possible I have attempted to sequence and title sections of the work to make its flow more apparent. Still, long stretches of black on white are unavoidable and so I have included figures and tables to break up the text and offer ocular respite wherever possible. Finally, if visual aids do not tempt the reader to undertake a thorough perusal, I might recommend skipping to the sections titled *In a Nutshell*, found at the end of each chapter from two to seven, for more to the point reading.

To orient the reader, Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the bigger picture of this research study and my position as a culturally Hearing researcher concerned with the lack of attention on ASL/ASL pedagogy. It also includes a brief synopsis of each of the chapters.

Chapter 2 answers the question: If I drop this thesis where does it fall? As in, what and who will it impact, who might pick it up, and what might be done with it in various contexts (social, academic, institutional, pedagogical)? It accounts for observed research gaps as well as real-world problems that ultimately make this study a potentially worthwhile contribution to the literature and to the wider ASL/ASL teaching community. It also seeks to dispel assumptions or fill in common knowledge gaps that may interfere with a complete understanding of this thesis.

Chapter 3 accounts for the theoretical underpinnings of the study, outlining concepts such as *curriculum as experience* and *personal practical knowledge* (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988), and elaborating connections between narrative research and identity. This chapter provides the theoretical backdrop for the decision to include narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) as one of two methods applied in addressing the research questions.

Chapter 4 summarizes the history, trends, and terminology of teacher cognition research, which focuses on the impact of teacher background, beliefs, knowledge, and experience on decision-making and classroom and professional practice. The chapter also briefly analyses five studies related to ASL teachers and concludes that they do not adequately address the concerns raised in the present work.

Chapter 5 first outlines applicable methodological terminology such as *methodology*, *method*, and *epistemology* to clarify the operational definitions for this thesis. Next is a detailed analysis of the practical and philosophical compatibility of the two qualitative methods applied in this study, constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) and narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Chapter 6 traces an account of the instruments and procedures applied in the present study, including context, participant demographics, procedures and instruments, and phases of data collection and analysis.

Chapter 7 themes and stories the curriculum, the *vision*, in three parts: one, an inductive narrative, two, recurrent themes in the data, and three, themed short stories. The latter two parts appear alongside a discussion addressing the findings in relation to the

research questions as well as a reflection that brings in outside literature to shed additional light on the findings.

Chapter 8 closes the inquiry by revisiting the thesis' trajectory and noting some of its limitations. It closes by listing suggested future questions and directions that remain unanswered and unexplored after the present study.

Having provided an overview of the thesis as a whole in Chapter 1, I move ahead to Chapter 2, which situates this research in the social, academic, institutional, and pedagogical contexts of ASL.

## Chapter 2: Background

This chapter aims to provide a better understanding of the complexities socio-cultural and academic context inherent to the teaching of American Sign Language as a second language. It is intended to provide a broad rationale for this particular study and address misconceptions related to ASL and further situate this work. I will describe relevant aspects of the ASL context in terms of the following four nested contextual layers: 1) social (e.g. understanding ASL as the language of the Deaf community); 2) academic (e.g. research trends); 3) institutional (e.g. ASL/ASL in university settings); and, 4) pedagogical (e.g. ASL/ASL in the classroom). These contexts have been separated for the purposes of providing a step-by-step introduction to the context; however, in reality, all of these layers heavily intertwine in the complex ASL context.

### **Social: ASL as a Language and a Culture**

This thesis recognizes three important points: one, ASL is a fully developed, natural language as per Stokoe's (1960) influential publications; two, ASL is first and foremost the language of the Deaf community; and three, there is a distinction to be made between culturally Deaf and pathologically deaf. This position is far from straightforward, in part because *Deaf as culture* is contested (for more on this argument refer to Belka, 2001), but primarily for the reason that a variety of signed communication beyond "pure" ASL exists within signing communities<sup>4</sup> (Wilcox & Wilcox, 1991). Deaf signers may use manual communication systems (e.g. Signed Exact English (SEE), Signed English (SE), Manually Coded English (MCE), to name a few), but these do not

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<sup>4</sup> Wilcox and Wilcox (1991) include an insightful and succinct note about the diversity within the Deaf community in the early chapters of their book.

constitute a “real” language (Wilcox & Wilcox, 1991). There is a general lack of awareness that ASL is a “fully developed, natural language” (Wilcox & Wilcox, 1991, p. 5) and that it must be distinguished from these “coded forms of ordinary English” (Chapin, 1988, p. 113).

Nonetheless, the old adage “those who can’t do, teach” works in the opposite direction in ASL/ASL instruction: those who sign, teach – often regardless of signing accuracy (i.e. whether a teacher signs manual English or ASL), qualifications, and experience (Smith, 1988). Smith (ibid) objects to “ASL programs often [selecting] teachers for their language fluency rather than their background in language teaching” (p. 171), while Kelly (2001) also states, “it takes linguistics and training to be effective in the ASL classroom (p. 175). Unfortunately, there is little to no regulation to this effect.

In addition to the quality of ASL instruction being at risk, there is the additional concern that this may be endangering the language – and, by association, the Deaf community. Community members and allies have voiced this concern (see Olsen, 1988), though it extends far into a sociopolitical sphere into which I have neither the time nor knowledge to enter herein. At the end of the day this study encourages reflection and careful consideration of the development and effects of teaching ASL to Hearing learners<sup>5</sup> on the sociocultural and linguistic spheres it impacts.

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<sup>5</sup> Though not an explicit argument made in this thesis, I do believe that increased exposure of the Hearing community to the Deaf community through ASL could potentially help understand and fight issues of equity faced by the latter. What’s more, in my experience, exposure to a signed language is a mind-expanding activity as it leads learners to think spatially, absorb visually, and value personal contact.

## **Academic: ASL in the Literature**

Although gone is the time where ASL as a foreign language is a novel idea amongst academics, “ASL has been slow to garner any degree of status in the academic community” (Wilcox, 1988, p. 101). More recent researchers (e.g. Sandler & Lillo-Martin, 2006) describe sign language research as dynamic and prolific; however, most of this research is *linguistic* (i.e., informing linguistic theory).

Cooper et al. (2008) note that most relevant data on ASL pedagogy is neither published nor derived from empirical study; and Rosen (2010) agrees that there are few, if any, empirical studies of “the impact that pedagogies in ASL as a second language have on learning; the empirical studies under review pertain to spoken second languages” (p. 352). Quinto-Pozos (2011) similarly calls for a “systematic examination of the teaching resources and methodologies” (p. 151), but Cooper et al. (2008) point out that “no comprehensive professional journal exists to serve the discipline of sign language instruction” (p. 78) and so there is little dedicated space for such publications.

Published empirical studies in ASL/ASL are sparse for several reasons, among them: ASL is tied to deafness, and therefore ASL/ASL is enormously overshadowed by fields like Deaf Studies, deaf education, special education, childhood ASL acquisition, and communication disorders. As well, ASL/ASL is often tied to ASL-English interpretation and CODA (referring to hearing Children of Deaf Adults) or bimodal/bilingualism (bi/bi) studies (referring to hearing people whose interactions have led them to be “fluent” in both modes (sign and spoken) and both cultures (hearing and

Deaf)), which have very different pedagogical considerations than university ASL/ASL programs where ASL is taught as a modern language<sup>6</sup>.

Quinto-Pozos (2011) makes the point that from while Deaf Studies overlooks ASL/ASL, Linguistics and Applied Linguistics do the same:

Notwithstanding its popularity as a language, it seems to be the case that, over the years, there has not been substantial dialogue between ASL teaching professionals and educators and researchers from other foreign language units. There are few journal articles that can be found concerning ASL pedagogy, models and theories of second language acquisition (SLA) and language teaching have primarily focused on the teaching of spoken and written languages, and SLA- focused conferences have mostly not included representation of the teaching of ASL or other sign languages. (p. 138)

This is not surprising given that the majority of university ASL programs are poorly positioned outside and far from language and education research facilities that could include them in valid linguistic and pedagogical research. As a final consideration, published studies are written and thus may be less accessible to researchers and practitioners who prefer visual or signed communication as the mode of information collection and dispersion<sup>7</sup>.

The justification for the current work in the academic context is clear: there has been little progress in ASL/ASL in general, let alone in pedagogy, and research

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<sup>6</sup> These are not intended to be in any way resentful statements; rather, I am pointing out that ASL is studied and developed in countless ways. Although I am not aware of claims in the literature to this regard, I nonetheless consider ASL/ASL to be a separate branch of ASL instruction whereby the learners, teachers, materials, outcomes, and other pedagogical components are particular in this learning context (i.e. hearing, adult second language learners of ASL in a university modern language program) and different from, for example deaf education contexts (i.e. where students are deaf) or interpretation contexts (i.e. where students apply and learn ASL intending to emerge professional interpreters).

<sup>7</sup> My suspicion is that inclusion of signed publications would be a highly unlikely occurrence, as ASL does not have a widely used writing system despite several having been invented over the years (e.g. Stokoe Notation, Sign Writing) and video stills are not an ideal substitute.

institutions are poorly connected to classrooms and practitioners that offer ripe research potential.

### **Institutional: ASL in the University**

Compared to the roughly 150 American universities offering or accepting ASL as a foreign language (Wilcox, 2010), ASL instruction in Canadian post-secondary institutions is limited<sup>8</sup>: according to a scan of the websites of ninety-six Canadian universities<sup>9</sup>, ten offer one or more ASL course and of those ten the majority offers ASL only at the beginner level as an additional language credit<sup>10</sup>.

Belka (2001) takes the largely unsupported and radical view that studying another spoken and written language necessarily increases students' awareness of English, whereas, "the study of ASL does not give the learner information... that increases understanding of English" (p. 50). However, there is much disagreement with this view (see Cummins, 2006). Wilcox (1988) concedes that there is less economic motivation in developing ASL a Second Language than for other languages due to "the claim is that

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<sup>8</sup> The United States of America has much more ample offerings but I am primarily concerned with the state of Canadian ASL/ASL for the purposes of this paper. As a "bonus" side note: the publication of *The Canadian Dictionary of ASL* (Bailey et al., 2002) was a step forward for recognizing Canadian ASL, and the Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf, which has long overseen training and evaluation for ASL instructors across Canada, offers continual professional development. These, however, are not dedicated Canadian associations for ASL teachers.

<sup>9</sup> Although the Language Portal of Canada compiled a list of language programs, it did not appear comprehensive and I resorted to going into each and every university website to verify the availability of ASL. The figures in Table 1 are therefore based on my perusal of university websites with publicly available information regarding Canadian ASL programs, plus personal correspondence with ASL program administrators for those sites not offering program information.

<sup>10</sup> Note that without first-hand communication with all program coordinators, I cannot guarantee that the following findings are complete or up to date in all cases, nor can I state with absolute certainty the exact number of programs that constitute regular program offerings.

traditional foreign languages such as French or German must be taught because professionals need to read scholarly literature in them: there is a vocational motivation for learning one of these languages that does not exist for ASL” (p. 102). This thesis recognizes the many challenges unique to ASL instruction and encourages the continued consideration of ASL/ASL. outlines Canadian university ASL programs, lists the department in which they are housed, and the teaching material they claim to use<sup>11</sup>. If Canadian students wish to pursue advanced studies in ASL, they must attend an interpretation program or a university in the United States.

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<sup>11</sup> “Claim” because, as Woodward (1993) and Richardson (1998) note, there has been little investigation of how teachers actually implement textbooks in the classroom (as cited in Fox, 2012).

Table 1

*2013-2014 Canadian University ASL Programs, Departments, and Teaching Materials*

University	Program	Department	Teaching Material
A*	4-year minor	Modern Languages	None.
B	ASL Prep, Basic, Intermediate	Continuing Studies: Adult Basic Education (G.E.D)	Vista Signing Naturally (Smith, Lentz, & Mikos, various dates).
C	Levels I & II	Modern Languages and Cultural Studies	Information not available.
D	Levels I & II	Continuing Studies: Languages, Cultures and Travel Programs	Information not available.
E	Levels I & II (up to level V, depending on demand)	Continuing Education	Vista Signing Naturally (Smith, Lentz, & Mikos, various dates).
F	Levels Prep I & II	Continuing Education: Languages	Vista Signing Naturally (Smith, Lentz, & Mikos, various dates).
G	Joint BA- Diploma with Red River College	Linguistics (BA) and Diploma (ASL- English Interpretation)	Vista Signing Naturally (Smith, Lentz, & Mikos, various dates); Deaf Tend Your: Non-Manual Signals in ASL (Bridges & Metzger, 1996); Fingerspelling 1 & 2: Signs for Intelligence (Keast, 2005).
H	Level I	Linguistics	Vista Signing Naturally (Smith, Lentz, & Mikos, various dates).
I	Prep I-IV (part-time, non-credit certificate)	Faculty of Health and Human Services	Information not available.
J	a) Levels I- III; b) Half-course	a) Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics b) Deaf Education (Teacher of the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing program requirement	Vista Signing Naturally (Smith, Lentz, & Mikos, various dates); The Complete Idiot's Guide to Learning Sign Language (Shelley & Schneck, 1998); The Canadian Dictionary of ASL (Bailey et al., 2002).

\*Site of the present study.

If an ASL program is instituted, it usually has limited level offerings and is housed either in Continuing Education or in departments such as Communicative Disorders (Lamb & Wilcox, 1988, p. 219), Speech Pathology, or Special Education (Wilcox, 1989, p. 2). These are “not the appropriate home for future development” (Lamb & Wilcox, 1988, p. 219) and ASL/ASL programs are better housed in departments of theoretical or applied linguistics. Researchers in such departments have access to resources that can support the growth and development of ASL (ibid, p. 219). In turn, ASL instructors would be well placed to offer valuable insights for how to move the field of second language learning forward (Quinto-Pozos, 2011, p. 152). Belka (2001) claims the ideal placement of ASL/ASL is in foreign language departments, which would be beneficial due to “the pedagogical connections between the study of ASL and other foreign languages” (Lamb & Wilcox, 1988, p. 219).

After their instatement, university ASL/ASL programs can remain problematic. Among the reasons are the previously mentioned issues regarding the difficulty of finding qualified teachers (Belka, 2001) and ensuring the teaching of ASL over signed English equivalents (Wilcox, 1989). Additionally, offering an immersion setting beyond the classroom is near impossible (Belka, 2001) and the exceptionally flexible nature of ASL demands a complete reconfiguration of assessment and grading procedures (Wilcox & Wilcox, 1991). The latter may require that university language policies regarding language proficiency be amended to encompass signed communication skills beyond the usual reading, writing, speaking, and listening (ibid).

Belka (2001) takes the largely unsupported and radical view that studying another spoken and written language necessarily increases students’ awareness of English, whereas, “the

study of ASL does not give the learner information... that increases understanding of English” (p. 50). However, there is much disagreement with this view (see Cummins, 2006). Wilcox (1988) concedes that there is less economic motivation in developing ASL a Second Language than for other languages due to “the claim is that traditional foreign languages such as French or German must be taught because professionals need to read scholarly literature in them: there is a vocational motivation for learning one of these languages that does not exist for ASL” (p. 102)<sup>12</sup>. This thesis recognizes the many challenges unique to ASL instruction and encourages the continued consideration of ASL/ASL.

### **Pedagogical: ASL Teachers and Textbooks**

In a recent survey, 83% of American ASL teachers claimed to use the *Vista Signing Naturally* series by Smith, Lentz, and Mikos (various dates) (Rosen, 2010). As Belka (2001) takes the largely unsupported and radical view that studying another spoken and written language necessarily increases students’ awareness of English, whereas, “the study of ASL does not give the learner information... that increases understanding of English” (p. 50). However, there is much disagreement with this view (see Cummins, 2006). Wilcox (1988) concedes that there is less economic motivation in developing ASL a Second Language than for other languages due to “the claim is that traditional foreign

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<sup>12</sup> Snoddon (personal communication, April 25, 2014) points out that: “There is often a higher economic motivation to learn ASL due to accessibility legislation (e.g., the Americans With Disabilities Act and Supreme Court of Canada’s *Eldridge* decision) that mandates provision of sign language interpreters (witness the proliferation of sign language interpreter training programs in the U.S). ASL remains a viable job opportunity for hearing people (e.g., witness the proliferation of baby sign programs). I refer to the website <http://www.streetleverage.com> which offers several critical reflection articles on this subject”.

languages such as French or German must be taught because professionals need to read scholarly literature in them: there is a vocational motivation for learning one of these languages that does not exist for ASL” (p. 102). This thesis recognizes the many challenges unique to ASL instruction and encourages the continued consideration of ASL/ASL. shows, at least six of ten Canadian universities follow *Vista*: four programs list *Vista* as their sole reference manual, one combines *Vista* with other resources, such as *Deaf Tend Your: Non-Manual Signals in ASL* (Bridges & Metzger, 1996) or *Fingerspelling 1 & 2: Signs for Intelligence* (Keast, 2005), and one uses *Vista* with additional ASL resources for upper level courses only. Appendix A lists these and additional ASL teaching materials. The program at University A does not use a textbook. Three other program coordinators did not respond to personal communication inquiring about their materials usage and so their textbook usage remains unknown.

To briefly introduce *Vista Signing Naturally*<sup>13</sup>: this landmark instructional series was created in response to a lack of quality materials and coherence in ASL/ASL teaching and the concern that not enough attention was paid to cross-cultural components (Smith, 1988). These deficiencies were particularly unfortunate for the aforementioned reason that teachers are often chosen for their signing and not teaching abilities<sup>14</sup> (ibid). Therefore, the authors of *Vista* “wrote detailed lesson plans that included what to teach and how to teach it. They developed activities and materials (handouts, worksheets, transparencies, and videotapes) to help teachers successfully implement the curriculum”

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<sup>13</sup> The Deaf community developed this series and it remains a useful guide. To this point, the Canadian Hearing Society (CHS) first developed sign language instructor training in Ontario in the 1980s. CHS in fact requires ASL instructors to complete training workshops and receive certification in the *Vista Signing Naturally* curriculum and ASL linguistics before they can teach.

<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, this is still the case today according to Rosen (2010).

(ibid, p. 179). It was, in short, a ready-made curriculum, or, in this thesis, a *textbook curriculum*. Since ASL was booming at the time of its publication and this was basically a prêt-à-porter program that teachers could follow, it became the primary go-to resource and a household name (Rosen, 2010).

Rosen (2010) argues that what is problematic about *Vista* is that the series has not developed to reflect current trends in language pedagogy, such as content-based instruction and task-based learning, nor have any empirical studies evaluated the effectiveness of this and other existing ASL textbook curricula. There are, however, a few overview texts that scan and break down current and earlier ASL materials, including *Vista*. For example, Kelly (2001) published in her dissertation an overview of the current and commonly used ASL curricular resources on the market; almost a decade later, Rosen (2010) released a more contemporary overview, including newer resources (e.g. *Master ASL!* (Zinza, 2006)) and excluding non-curricular materials such as dictionaries and glosses. The following year, Quinto-Pozos (2011) reiterated Rosen's (2010) claims in terms of the wider field of ASL research.

The above three texts are the most recent, comprehensive, and critical analyses of ASL curricular texts that I have found to date, and yet none mention the existence literature that empirically evaluates the effectiveness (perceived or "actual") of materials in promoting ASL acquisition and cross-cultural competence. In fact, Quinto-Pozos (2011) comments on the lack of investigation in the effectiveness of ASL materials and claims it continues to be a void in ASL research (p. 151). Importantly, none of the literature has discussed the use of written English in textbooks or spoken English in the classroom as it may help or hinder ASL acquisition. Though the L1 debate (i.e. how

much L1 to use in the classroom) is strong in ESL classrooms, for example, it seems to have been overlooked in ASL, despite the potential effects on students' language learning. This thesis is an exploratory account of the perceived nature of one ASL Canadian program – a move that has not yet been taken in the field.

### **In a Nutshell**

To summarize, I am situating this research on rocky terrain. The major contextual characteristics and concerns as elaborated above were:

- There is a lack of understanding about the nature and presence of ASL and the Deaf community, and yet the number of ASL/ASL programs is dramatically increasing in response to high demand. Concerns were raised about quality of programming in this context of rapid growth<sup>15</sup>. Despite an increase in ASL/ASL teaching, there is a lack of ASL/ASL research as a result of it being overshadowed by related fields (e.g. ASL linguistics and Deaf Studies) or overlooked as a “real” language.
- Institutions often do not consider and ensure appropriate placement and quality control of ASL/ASL programs, which might limit their growth.
- *Vista Signing Naturally* continues to be the primary textbook curriculum used in Canadian post-secondary ASL/ASL programs without any inquiry into its (or any other curriculum material's) effectiveness in promoting ASL acquisition. The simultaneous advantage and disadvantage is that “anyone” can use it to teach, regardless of qualification and knowledge of the Deaf community.

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<sup>15</sup> It should be pointed out that the American Sign Language Teacher's Association (ASLTA) discusses these issues: <http://www.aslta.org/node/31>. The ASLTA website also provides related information and resources.

Having situated the present research in the multilayered ASL context, in Chapter 3 I begin laying the theoretical bricks that will pave the way for a review of empirical literature in Chapter 4.

### **Chapter 3: Theoretical Background**

In the previous chapter I situated the present study in the ASL context. I clarified the contexts it may affect, outlined several research gaps, and (hopefully) addressed potential misconceptions, such as the d-/Deaf distinction. In the current chapter I present the theoretical background of this study, which recognizes the central role of teachers as curriculum makers and the vital importance of acknowledging their individual cognitions in curricular processes. First I elaborate on congruent and conflicting historical perspectives of the term *curriculum* in order to clarify the operational definition for this thesis. Going further with this, I take a closer look at the central place of teachers in curriculum.

#### **Defining Curriculum**

Curricular stakeholders (students, parents, teachers, researchers, developers, and administrators) each have their own ideas of what could and should be in a given curriculum and in a sense all of their opinions are valid and worthwhile. However, the very way in which they think about curriculum depends on a host of factors. Thus, before the term *curriculum* is used again, it will be helpful to understand what it does and does not mean in the context of the present work.

In this thesis, curriculum is considered a multipurpose and multifaceted term with countless implications. As several authors (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Peterson, 2009) point out, the Latin root of the word is *currere*, meaning *race* or *course*<sup>16</sup>, which on one

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<sup>16</sup> In my eyes, although etymology can be delightful and insightful in terms of understanding a word in current usage, in this case too many people have adopted “curriculum” in too many ways, making this root useless to anyone. At this point, it is far

hand offers a brilliantly philosophical understanding of curriculum as a course of action that participants (i.e. stakeholders) experience. On the other hand, a more common (and concrete) interpretation of curriculum is that it comprises the materials and documents that exchange hands in learning processes, that it is a concrete noun, a *thing* in the form of course outlines, learning plans, teacher guides, and textbooks (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988).

In ASL pedagogical literature, I noted that the majority of ASL/ASL researchers consider *curriculum* to be synonymous to *textbook*. For example, Peterson (2009) initially holds a theoretical view that “curriculum, even at its best, is theory; it is what someone, somewhere *supposes* will work” (p. 158). Later he refers to curriculum in relation to the educational philosophies and approaches held by several popular ASL books (e.g. the *Vista Signing Naturally* curriculum is functional-notional) (ibid). By the end of the same publication Peterson (ibid) refers to curriculum as something to be applied and manipulated by the teachers and students and uses *curriculum* and *textbook* interchangeably<sup>17</sup>. This is in line with the current ASL/ASL curriculum literature (e.g. Kelly, 2001; Quinto-Pozos, 2011; Rosen, 2010) that overwhelmingly tends towards the same idea: curriculum equals textbook<sup>18</sup>.

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more important to know what it means to the relevant stakeholder and work with it, rather than to agree on one “real” meaning. Fox (2007) is helpful in this regard.

<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, Peterson’s (2009) book is dedicated “to the Deaf Community, our best ASL teacher and our real curriculum” (dedication). Unfortunately, this is not elaborated any further.

<sup>18</sup> This equivalence is not in itself an issue and may never be a problem in other language situations; however, it is in this case given the aforementioned fact that nearly all ASL programs follow a textbook curriculum despite little to no empirical evidence of their effectiveness, coupled with the abovementioned concerns that signing quality and teacher qualifications are not regulated, nor is there much academic or institutional support for ASL/ASL. Now, there is cause for targeted pedagogical attention.

**Curriculum as experience.** This thesis aligns with Connelly and Clandinin's (1988) curricular view that curriculum is "something experienced in situations" (p. 6). If we are to apply this definition, "something", "experience", and "situation" must be clarified.

They explain:

- "A situation is composed of persons [e.g. teachers and students], in an immediate environment of things [e.g. classroom, books], interacting according to certain processes [e.g. lecturing, reading, disputes, friendships];
- "At any point in time there is a dynamic interaction among persons, things, and processes;
- "Every classroom situation grows out of some preceding classroom situation [i.e. situations are part of the greater historical whole];
- "Situations have a future;
- "Situations are directional." (ibid, p. 7-9)

To rephrase the above: "curriculum as something experienced in situations" refers to curriculum as a lived course of action in which people, places, and things relate in ever-unfolding situations. Interaction, process, and temporality are central and allude to a dynamism that is unseen in static notions of *curriculum*, such as a "curriculum as textbook" view in ASL (see Peterson, 2009). Note, however, that it is common practice that "ASL teachers habitually adapt existing curriculum/textbook materials to meet the needs of learners... Thus, there is in fact a postsecondary ASL curriculum (or several ASL curricula) in use in Canada" (Snoddon, personal communication, April 25, 2014).

**Commonplaces of curriculum.** Understanding the curriculum as lived experience can be overwhelming, and so Connelly and Clandinin (1988) propose approaching it through the *commonplaces of curriculum*, which are subject matter, milieu, learner, teacher. The commonplaces, in brief, are topics that are empty of meaning and meant to be "filled in as texts are read" (ibid, p. 85) in order to understand the curricular experience. This activity is compared to an approach proposed by Aristotle: when a matter appears significant, one way to make sense of related chatter is by establishing a set of topics to

help define the matter at hand without eliminating anyone's experience with it (ibid). Such are the commonplaces of curriculum, "factors or determinants that occur in statements about the aims, content, and methods of the curriculum" (ibid, p. 84) that do not prioritize or discount any stakeholders.

Schwab (1962) introduced the notion of the commonplaces in reaction to the view that teachers were mediators between curriculum and student outcomes; this was, in his view, metaphorically putting the cart before the horse (Clandinin, 1992). Schwab (1974) saw curriculum as requiring bodies of experience and he was "the first educational theorist to call close attention to the lived experience of children and teachers in classrooms" (as cited in Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007, p. 359). It is interesting to note that a number of researchers have devoted their academic careers to building on the four commonplaces, among them: Ben-Peretz (1996) advocates for *time* as a fifth commonplace; Clarke and Erikson (2004) do the same for *self-study*; while Fox (personal communication, September 18, 2012) claims *assessment* should also be added.

The commonplaces are characterized first and foremost as being commonplace - as in, "they appear and reappear in curricular statements" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 84). They are useful as an analytic or organizational structure through which curricular (or other related) conversations or situations can be "read" like texts (ibid). Being empty of meaning allows any reader to apply the commonplaces to organize and better grasp any number of curricular situations without imposing her or her own views. Insofar as theory goes, because the commonplaces are, by nature, empty of meaning, they offer theoretical structure more than a guiding theory. The commonplaces are a way to give a sense of order to lived experience; as such, they reappear as a helpful analytical tool to

assist in *reading* and *storying* the teachers' perceptions of the ASL curriculum at University A in the present thesis.

### **Narrative Theory**

Claiming that curriculum can be *read* and *storied* is drawn from the notion that narrative is the key to understanding human experience. In the broad sense, narrative research is founded on the premise that humans are natural storytellers for whom sharing stories of experience is a way to communicate with others in their surroundings, to lend continuity and coherence to their life understanding, and to construct personal identity (Clandinin et al., 2006; Lieblich et al., 1998). Thus, understanding human identity, reality, and experience is said to be achievable through narrative:

stories imitate life and present an inner reality to the outside world; at the same time, however, they shape and construct the narrator's personality and reality. The story *is* one's identity, a story created, told, revised, and retold throughout life. We know or discover ourselves, and reveal ourselves to others, through the stories we tell. (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 7)

The main purpose of narrative inquiry is to understand this "inner reality" of human experience – not to gain insight into a universal reality. It considers *narrative truth*, which holds that "stories are usually constructed around a core of facts or life events, yet allow a wide periphery for the freedom of individuality and creativity in selection, addition to, emphasis on, and interpretation of the 'remembered facts'" (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 8). Narrative truth recognizes that the telling of said facts is another entirely unique instance of storytelling, in which the teller offers a "snapshot, a picture frozen in time of one instance of life" (ibid, p. 8) to a particular listener at a particular time under particular circumstances.

## **Narratives of Personal Practical Knowledge**

Combining *personal knowledge* (Lampert, 1985) and *practical knowledge* (Elbaz, 1983) and drawing from the notion of teaching knowledge as context-bound (Ben-Peretz, 2001), Connelly and Clandinin (1988) coined the term *personal practical knowledge* to describe a “teacher’s knowing of the classroom” (p. 25). It is highly individual, “shaped by the personalities of the teachers themselves, their past experiences, and how they view teaching” (Calderhead, 1996, p. 718); it is also heavily contextualized, created through experiences, and applied according to the “exigencies of a present situation” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 25). Otherwise put, personal practical knowledge is born from the past, present, and future mind, body, and practice of a given teacher (ibid, p. 25). It is Schwab’s (1974) “bodies of experience” living and taking action in the current and future reality of individuals (as cited in Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007).

In educational narrative inquiry, Clandinin et al. (2006) observe that teachers speak not only of “their knowledge, their personal practical knowledge, and their contexts, the professional knowledge landscape, but also how their contexts and knowledge were intimately woven into their stories of who they were and who they were becoming.” (p. 8). In other words, when teacher articulated elements of contextual personal practical knowledge they were tangled up in reflections on their identities as teachers:

Attending to personal practical knowledge helped them to develop a language for understanding how teacher knowledge was held and expressed. For example, the language of images, practical principles, personal philosophies, metaphors, narrative unities, rhythms, and cycles became a way to speak of the knowledge teachers held. (ibid, p. 5)

Thus, storying personal practical knowledge is a way to understand the relationships between knowledge and identity, and to ultimately build a bigger picture of how teachers' realities come together to form a *multistoried* curriculum (Olson, 2000).

### **In a Nutshell**

To summarize, Chapter 3 established:

- This thesis supports the view that *curriculum* is the dynamic, interactive, lived experience of key stakeholders – and thus does not align with the curricular notion in ASL/ASL literature that *curriculum* often refers to *textbook*.
- The *commonplaces of curriculum* are useful organizational tools to make sense of curricular situations. Teachers are understood to be the primary curriculum makers and thus the primary commonplace.
- Narrative theory dictates that narrative is a way for humans to make sense of their experiences and identity; as such, narrative is an ideal way of making sense of curriculum.
- Teachers embody *personal practical knowledge*, which is a form of knowing that comes from past experiences, an understanding of the present, and how both may inform future decisions. Narrative is an ideal way of exploring the nature of this knowledge, which is inherently temporal.

Having introduced the theoretical background in Chapter 3, I present in Chapter 4 the empirical background for this thesis.

## **Chapter 4: Empirical Background**

Chapter 3 provided the theoretical backdrop for this study and gave insight into the meaning of curriculum and the role of teachers in shaping and living it in their personal and professional lives. Certainly, teacher cognitions are increasingly being recognized as a central part of the identity and actions of teachers. Since the literature (and this thesis) recognizes teachers as central to educational processes (Calderhead, 1996, p. 710), it is important to appreciate these cognitions and move beyond “one size fits all” pedagogy. This chapter will shed some light on the ways in which teacher cognition research had been undertaken in ASL and its related areas, and in language and general education more broadly. This will provide the empirical backdrop to the current study, which adds to the pool of teacher cognition research and constitutes the majority of the puddle that is ASL/ASL teacher cognition research.

### **Teacher Cognition Research**

Teacher cognition research is not, as its name suggests, purely the study of cognitive processes. A broad and divergent field of study, it is generally agreed to encompass the study of teachers’ thoughts, beliefs, values, and decision-making, to name a few. Just as terminology varies, so, too, do methodological approaches: from quantitative to qualitative to mixed methods; subjects may be pre- or in-service teachers; learning settings may be university ESL courses (Woods, 1996) or primary classrooms (Clandinin, 1986). The purpose of teacher cognition studies may be to inform teacher education initiatives that seek to integrate teachers’ cognitions (e.g. about effective language practice and error correction) (e.g. Schultz, 2001) or perhaps to inform teaching standards (e.g. Jacobowitz, 2007).

**History.** In the 1960s there was growing dissatisfaction with the narrow focus of behaviorist studies” (Calderhead, 1996, p. 709), which were not supporting positive developments in education. The 1970s brought the notion that learning was a product of teaching and therefore looking at teacher behaviours could explain learning (Borg, 2006). Early studies looked at teaching not only as observable practices, but also attended to their “mental lives” (Borg, 2006, p. 6) with the assumption that “what teachers do is affected by that they think” (Clark & Yinger, 1977, as cited in Borg, 2006, p. 8). Calderhead (1996) notes that this focus on decision-making as a thought-to-action process eventually “diversified to include teachers’ perceptions, attributions, thinking, judgments, reflections, evaluations, and routines (p. 710).

In the 1980s the notions of knowledge and belief appeared (Calderhead, 1996). Through the 1980s and 1990s seminal publications introduced such terms as *practical knowledge* (Elbaz, 1983), *personal practical knowledge* (Connelly & Clandinin, 1985; Clandinin & Connelly, 1986) and *subject matter knowledge* (Shulman, 1986a, 1986b, 1987) appeared. These ideas showed a major move away from teachers’ cognitions as rationalization for their actions and toward a more complete framework (Borg, 2006). Shavelson and Stern (1981) offer two major justifications for the shift: first, a recognition that exclusion of teacher cognitions from a behavioral model of teaching is “conceptually incomplete” (as cited in Borg, 2006, p. 9); and second, teacher cognition research could have implications for teacher education and educational innovation (p. 9). Calderhead (1996) adds that the growing attention can be attributed to the increasing recognition of teaching as a professional activity.

**Common research methodologies.** Since the study of teacher cognition involves the examination of internal processes as well as observable practices, the field has borrowed elicitation methods from cognitive psychology, human problem solving, social anthropology, and the humanities (Calderhead, 1996). In a comprehensive review of the field, Calderhead (ibid) assembles the common research procedures found in teacher cognition studies. Table 2 summarizes the purposes, pros, and cons of each.

Table 2

*Common Methods in Teacher Cognition Research Based on Calderhead (1996)*

Method	Details	Pros	Cons
Simulations and commentaries	Policy capturing, critical incidents, controlled planning tasks, “think aloud” commentaries	Controlled by the researcher Can trace student actions affecting teacher decisions	Contrived Unknown influences on reporting Questionable accuracy of words to represent thought
Concept mapping and repertoire grid	Elicit and represent conceptual structures of decision-making, classroom management, and planning	Can compare and sort structures across teachers and over time	Imposed structure Presumes thought can be reduced to concept map
Ethnography and case studies	Observation and interview procedures	Extensive data and long-term relationship allows in-depth insight	Large amount of data Risks making generalizations that support researcher bias
Narratives	Diaries, stories, “negotiated biographies”	Theories and perspectives can be in teachers’ own words Contextualized accounts Can construct model Broad accounts	Ethical issue Facilitates self-disclosure and increases consciousness of practice “Narrative truth”

Munby et al. (2001) commend Calderhead (1996) for providing this methodological overview, which accounts for the development and application of new

methods beyond observational techniques that “embrace[] positivist, interpretivist, and critical traditions of research” (p. 885).

**Knowledge and beliefs.** As several authors (Borg, 2003, 2006; Çakir, 2010; Calderhead, 1996; Munby et al., 2001) observe, countless terms have emerged over the years to describe the inherently complex nature of teachers’ cognitions. These terms “collectively [highlighted] the personal nature of teacher cognition, the role of experience in the development of these cognitions and the way in which instructional practice and cognition are mutually informing” (Borg, 2006, p. 49). Borg (2003, 2006) argues that researchers have characterized, investigated, and assigned (and reassigned) terms in the field to the point of excess. There are in fact both slight and significant differences in terminology and in intentions from all corners of the field, as will become evident in the discussion that follows.

Questions surrounding the nature of teachers’ knowledge are many: what is a teachers’ professional knowledge? How can it be represented? How does a teacher’s personal knowledge impact professional knowledge and actions? How are knowledge and practice interrelated? How can we investigate this relationship? Calderhead’s (1996) review of the work of authors such as Schulman (1986a, 1986b), Schon (1983), and Munby (1986) resulted in six categories of general education teacher knowledge. Borg (2003) adds his own *personal pedagogical systems* (Borg, 1998), *pedagogical principles* (Breen et al., 2001), *personal theories* (Sendan & Roberts, 1998), and *beliefs, assumptions, knowledge* (BAK) (Woods, 1996). These are listed and described in Table 3.

Table 3

*Types of Teacher Knowledge, Based on Calderhead (1996) and Borg (2003)*

Type of Knowledge	Details
<i>Subject knowledge</i> (e.g. Schulman, 1986a)	Three categories: subject matter (disciplinary expertise), pedagogical (techniques, e.g. illustrations, examples, explanations, etc.), and curricular (e.g. materials, scope/sequence)
<i>Craft knowledge</i> (e.g. Berliner, 1988)	Five stages to expertise: novice (seek rules), advanced beginner (contextual and strategic understanding of rules), competence (conscious choices), proficiency (intuition, holistic understanding), expert (teacher and task are inseparable)
<i>Personal practical knowledge</i> (e.g. Clandinin, 1986)	Past life experiences influence adaptation to present teaching tasks
<i>Case knowledge</i> (e.g. Schon, 1983)	Reflection on past cases of classroom activity to compare/guide new cases
<i>Theoretical knowledge</i> (e.g. Furlong et al., 1988)	Hierarchy of teacher education activities (direct experience, indirect practice, practical principles, disciplinary theory) where understanding of theory helps develop practice
<i>Metaphor and images</i> (e.g. Munby, 1986)	Metaphors in teachers' talk suggest underlying beliefs (e.g. classroom as a home)
<i>Personal pedagogical systems</i> (Borg, 1998)	"Stores of beliefs, knowledge, theories, assumptions and attitudes which play a significant role in shaping teachers' instructional decisions"
<i>Pedagogical principles</i> (Breen et al., 2001)	"Shaped and generated by underlying and more abstract beliefs, these service to mediate between beliefs and on-going decision-making in particular instructional contexts"
<i>Personal theories</i> (Sendan & Roberts, 1998)	"An underlying system of constructs that student teachers draw upon in thinking about, evaluating, classifying, and guiding pedagogical practice"
<i>Beliefs, assumptions, knowledge (BAK)</i> (Woods, 1996)	"A construct analogous to the notion of scheme, but emphasizing the notion that beliefs, assumptions, and knowledge are included" (Borg, 2003, p. 87)

This is but a glimpse of the extensive terminology that has accumulated to describe or conceptualize "knowledge" in teacher cognition research. Literature about teacher beliefs is similarly diverse. Calderhead (1996) comments:

Such terms as beliefs, values, attitudes, judgments, opinions, ideologies, perceptions, conceptions, conceptual systems, preconceptions, dispositions, implicit theories, personal theories, and perspectives have frequently been used almost interchangeably, and it is sometimes difficult to identify the distinguishing features of beliefs and how they are separated from knowledge. (p. 719)

Evidently, teacher beliefs are a recurrent but diversely understood theme in the research literature. Pajares (1992) and Nespor (1987) offer suggestions about how to distinguish belief from knowledge, but those will not be visited here for concerns of time and space. Calderhead (1996) identifies five core categories of beliefs that most terms tend to fall into:

1. “Beliefs about learners and learning
2. “Beliefs about the nature and purpose of teaching
3. “Beliefs about the subject matter
4. “Beliefs about learning to teach
5. “Beliefs about the self and the teaching role.” (p. 719-721)

Of course, as these elements are heavily interconnected, beliefs of one category spill out and mingle with those of the next. Studies of beliefs have shown conflicting results: some studies show that beliefs are highly connected to practice (e.g. Cornett et al., 1990; Wilson & Wineburg, 1991, as cited in Calderhead, 1996), while others claim the contrary - that there are “large discrepancies between teachers’ espoused beliefs and their observed classroom practices” (Calderhead, 1996, p. 721). Interestingly, Guskey (1986) found that changes in belief were shown to follow changes in practice (as cited in Calderhead, 1996); this finding, though contested by Richardson (1995), could have significant implications for teacher education practices and attempts at curricular innovation (as cited in Calderhead, 1996).

In closing, Borg (2006) observes that identical terms have been defined in different ways and different terms have been used to describe similar concepts, which he claims is responsible for a lack of coherence of the field. Woods (2009), however, points

out, “Just because two researchers use the same term does not mean that they have identical concepts in mind, and the fact that two researchers use different terms does not necessarily mean that they are talking about different things” (as cited in Çakir, 2010, p. 10-11). As a novice researcher, it is simpler to agree with Borg (2006) that the field should be “cleaned up”, so to speak; nevertheless, Woods’ observation is also of merit.

### **Five Studies of ASL Teachers**

There are a great many concerns in the potholed field of ASL/ASL and while this study tosses a few pebbles into some of the research holes mentioned in previous chapters, it explicitly targets a gap mentioned by Kelly (2001):

There are no studies or academic literature about ASL teachers themselves... discussing how they came to this teaching field, how they perceive themselves as guides to the DEAF^WORLD<sup>19</sup>, its language, and how their construction of language and culture has emerged. (p. 94-95)

Since Kelly wrote the above, there have indeed been a small handful of published papers that peripherally address teacher cognitions within ASL education. I have selected five articles for review; these are introduced in Table 4 in a loose imitation of Borg (2003, 2006).

I say “peripherally” to describe the relevance of the chosen articles to ASL/ASL teacher cognition because none explicitly purport to address the cognitions of ASL teachers of hearing learners (child or adult). Nonetheless, their inclusion here is justified given the notion of curriculum that informs this thesis, namely, the centrality of teacher experience in curriculum making. Marlatt (2004) and Bedoin’s (2011) studies about teachers of hard-of-hearing (HH) or deaf students are included because of the potential insight into deaf-hearing interactional contexts. Schornstein (2005) is an autobiographical

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<sup>19</sup> DEAF^WORLD refers to the Deaf community and culture where the primary language is ASL (Lane, 2005).

commentary on her own experiences, thoughts, and beliefs as a teacher of ASL in the university setting and, though not an empirical study, is nonetheless a suitable paper for inclusion. Scheetz and Martin (2006) and Jacobowitz (2007) are both concerned with examining teacher-training standards in ASL and deaf education and include a small focus on teacher perspectives.

Within the selected articles is a range of terms used to describe teachers' cognitions and decision-making processes, among them: attitudes, beliefs, perceptions and considerations, opinions, content knowledge, practical knowledge, representations, strategies, and objectives. These are comparable to the terminology in studies of teachers in language and general education in the following section and thus will not be further elaborated herein. The majority of the studies are qualitative, with some quantitative elements for descriptive purposes. While not fully representative of non-ASL studies, there is an assortment of methods that includes questionnaires, interviews, and autobiographical narrative as primary methods in the examination of teacher cognitions. With the exception of Schornstein (2005), the studies do not incorporate classroom participation, intervention, or observation. Also, the explicit voices of the researcher and the participants are by and large kept to a bare minimum.

Table 4

*Five Studies of Teachers of American Sign Language or in Sign Language Contexts*

Author, Year	Focus	Context
Marlatt, 2004	Comparison of practical knowledge of hearing and deaf pre-/in-service teachers	163 pre-/in-service teachers in HH <sup>20</sup> /deaf education who are graduates or alumni of Gallaudet University's teacher trainer program (USA)
SchorNSTein, 2005	Autobiographical reflection of a university ASL teacher	Teacher-trainer in university ASL interpreter program (USA)
Scheetz and Martin, 2006	Relation between teaching performance/excellence to National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) certification (and to student achievement)	11 teachers of the deaf (7 certified by the NBPTS, 4 uncertified) in deaf education system (USA)
Jacobowitz, 2007	Examination of ASL Teacher training program (ASLTTP) standards	6 national organizations for teacher standards; 8 teacher educators and staff from 3 ASLTTPs (USA)
Bedoin, 2011	Analysis of teaching beliefs and practices of English teachers of HH/deaf students	1038 D/HH students and 137 English teachers from 104 secondary schools (questionnaires); 12 teachers (interviews); 7 teachers (observations); within special and mainstream schools teaching English to HH/deaf students (France)

**The Textbook Debate**

A final area of research, textbook roles and usage, must be brought into this literature review given that the ASL program that is the focus of this study (i.e., University A) is distinguished from other university programs in that it does not use a given textbook. The section that follows outlines both sides of the textbook debate in

<sup>20</sup> HH is a commonly used abbreviation for Hard-of-Hearing.

general education as well as language instruction in order to clarify the ways in which a textbook-free program is fundamentally different. I will also close with a brief overview of possible challenges of textbook usage in ASL classrooms, drawn from my own hypotheses and the small amount of literature on the subject.

**Textbook debate in general education.** In general education, textbooks may be considered anything from “sacrosanct” and “essential” (Ariew, 1989, p. 12-13) to pure commercialism and useful only because they are too much work to redo (ibid). According to Fontenelle (2013), the textbook arrived as an instructional – and acculturative – written genre intended to encourage literacy for more widespread access to the Bible. The structure of these early textbooks was primarily a question-answer type format that betrays a “knowledge transmission” function from book to learner.

Ariew (1989) suggests that in more recent years “knowledge transmission” has also come to embody another meaning. He suggests that textbook developers might view teachers as simplistic and incapable of well-informed action, and therefore textbooks can function to transmit knowledge of appropriate pedagogical decisions to teachers (ibid). This can be seen as helpful, but it undoubtedly raises questions of teacher freedom and constraint.

On a slightly different note, Ariew (1989) also implies that the textbook can play a supportive role and act as a guiding resource for teachers and students in terms of content, sequence, goals, pacing and methodology (p. 16). Woodward (1993) suggests that novice teachers rely more heavily on the textbook as a source of guidance than experienced teachers. In times of curricular innovation this reliance can be beneficial (Harmer, 1991; Hutchinson & Torres, 1994, as cited in Fox, 2012) and it facilitates the

introduction of new curricular developments. On the other hand, reliance on a textbook at early stages of teaching can be detrimental to professional development (Richards, 1998).

**Textbook debate in ASL/ASL education.** As mentioned in Chapter 1, Peterson (2009), Kelly (2001), and Rosen (2010) use *textbook* and *curriculum* virtually interchangeably. Similarly, Richards (1998) points out, “in many schools and language programs, the textbooks used in classrooms are the curriculum” (p. 125), particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environments. As previously mentioned, this fact is not inherently worrisome; however, Smith (1988) and Phillipson (1991) express that booming language contexts such as ASL and EFL may employ teachers who possess little qualifications, and so adoption of a textbook curriculum is risky without careful scrutiny of its acculturative, controlling, and guiding functions. Smith (1988) advocates for teachers to always have a basic understanding of theories in language pedagogy and second language acquisition.

Basic linguistics indicates that ASL is a manual visual language, which is a key argument against the use of textbooks for ASL/ASL instruction. Wang and Han (2002, as cited in Fox, 2012) suggest that a textbook dependence may result in an overemphasis on text-based activities. In an ASL classroom, this is naturally problematic as text-based activities draw the eyes away from the speaker and interrupt person-to-person visual flow. Furthermore, there is the possibility that a printed English textbook detracts from acquisition and interferes with cross-cultural learning by failing to replicate an authentic Deaf environment with only signed communication. These concerns have not yet appeared in the ASL/ASL literature as a result of empirical study, but I mention them nonetheless as possible deterrents for textbook usage in ASL teaching.

## **In a Nutshell**

To summarize Chapter 4:

- In the 1960s, teacher cognition research began looking beyond behaviorism and attending to questions centred on teachers' knowledge, beliefs, assumptions, and so on, in and beyond observable classroom behaviours.
- Knowledge and beliefs have been characterized and categorized in countless ways – some say to the point of excess, which now contributes to a lack of coherence in the field.
- Studies of ASL teacher cognition are few and ultimately do not attend to the questions raised in this thesis. More development in this area is called for.
- The textbook debate in education claims on the one hand that textbooks offer guidance and support, but on the other hand that they restrict development and flexibility. In ASL, the debate extends to practical concerns such as lack of teacher training and modality conflicts (i.e. eyes on a print textbook are eyes not on the interlocutor – ASL is not a language that can be processed any way but visually).

Having summarized relevant empirical literature in Chapter 4, I now move to Chapter 5, which elaborates the methodological considerations of the present study.

## Chapter 5: Combining Research Methods

Let me begin by offering an aide memoire to the reader about the matters attended to thus far: Chapter 1 laid out the overarching research questions guiding the present thesis: what are the teacher perceptions of the textbook-free curriculum at University A in its capacity to promote ASL proficiency and awareness of the Deaf community? And, how do teachers perceive their role in contributing to and shaping the “overall curricular idea” for the program, if any? Next, Chapter 2 clarified the background and research gaps for this area of study; Chapter 3 provided the theoretical backdrop by specifying the theoretical assumptions herein; and most recently, Chapter 4 reviewed a sample of studies from general and ASL education that focus on teachers and their thought processes. These all lead to the chapter at hand, which elaborates in close detail the methodology and methods that were selected to inform the research design and address the above research questions.

To begin, discussions of *method* and *methodology* result in a wide range of definitions. In a study by Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner (2007), 21 researchers defined the two terms in 19 different ways (as cited in Creswell, 2010, p. 51). Some researchers refer to methodology in relation to paradigm, i.e., qualitative, quantitative, and mixed – although “mixed” has contested status as a methodology. Denzin (2010) offers an interesting discussion of this. A conflicting line of thought claims that methodology refers solely to the study of research methods and will never hold the paradigmatic weight inherent to the definitions of many researchers (Adamson, 2006). Unsurprisingly then, the question of methodology is difficult territory for any researcher to maneuver.

While I cannot claim to hold a universal understanding of the terminology in question, I will elaborate on the interpretation upheld by the present thesis and then move into progressively more targeted discussions of the paradigm, epistemologies, and methods at play in the present study. The final sections of this chapter are in direct response to criticisms that “researchers adopting combined approaches place too little attention on the historical, epistemological, and theoretical aspects of the research design” (Lal et al., 2012, p. 1). I will outline how these two approaches can be (and, I later argue, were) successfully combined in the present study. This chapter will set the stage for Chapter 6, which unfolds a narrative about the emergent methods.

### **Methodology and Method**

It took a great deal of visualization (my natural way of grasping theory) to translate the literature about these oft-confused terms into a comprehensible and manageable idea. I will explain them with the help of an analogy, a guiding image if you will, of methodology as a bookcase and methods as boxed games upon its shelves.

**Bookcase analogy.** It begins with three bookcases. Upon each expansive bookcase’s shelves are countless board games in boxes. Each game has a name and each box contains a set of rules, guidelines, and modifications for the game. Assorted game pieces are included with instructions on how to apply them to various ends as outlined in the rulebook. There are countless, endless games to be played; some share similar rules or game pieces, others are played individually, in pairs, or in groups. Also inside the game boxes is a littering of notes with tips, tricks, and alternative rules of play written by past players. It is naturally intimidating to be faced with so many options and variations.

A player seeking a game selects the bookshelf that has the kinds of games she knows she wants to learn or play again. She asks herself many questions before choosing a game. Does she want a word game or a strategy game or a teambuilding game? Can she play all day long or is it best to find a short game? Does she have others with whom to play or is she alone? She is not inclined to make a rash decision. She opens many boxes until she finds a game that “feels right” and that has game pieces she is comfortable using. Once she chooses a game, she then decides on a version (pure or modified). Should she discover partway along a missing game piece to accomplish her play, she may peek in other similar game boxes and borrow a game piece, making a note in her game box which piece was taken from where, why, and how she used it.

This analogy understands the three bookcases as the three main *methodologies*: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed. Guba and Lincoln (1989) consider methodology to involve “everything from the worldview at the start of the research process to the last processes of inquiry” (as cited in Creswell, 2010, p. 51). The bookcases are the highest level of organization that guide subsequent decisions. Note that while the bookcase is the highest level of methodological organization, nothing has yet been mentioned about the understanding of the nature of knowledge that guides selection in the first place. This is a question of *epistemology* and disciplinary directive, which will be discussed in the next section.

The *methods*, i.e., the games in our analogy, vary tremendously and may be entirely incompatible. Nonetheless, they exist in the same bookcase based on a shared and fundamental standard. The rules, modifications, and added notes of the analogy are the guiding principles of the research method, which then dictate particular data

collection and analytical procedures, or tools, i.e., game pieces, which serve to accomplish the goals set out by the method.

The above is a bigger picture view that is distinguished by the number of steps taken back from the matter at hand. As in, some methodological literature equates methodology with the research method and uses method as an umbrella terms for data collection, analysis, and representation of findings (Lal et al., 2012). In the present understanding this is a misappropriation of terms, as it does not consider the overarching categories into which the so-called methodologies fall. Of course, I make this claim understanding that this is one understanding among many. Within a given research study the overarching methodology may not be the focus and so the scope of the terms is shifted down a level and re-appropriated in a similarly concentric relationship. For the sake of clarity, I shall continue to use the terms as described through the bookcase analogy.

### **Researcher as Other**

No matter how detailed, theoretical, or analogically articulate, any discussion of methodology would be empty if it failed to consider researcher as a situated, decision-making being leading the research process. And so, one can attempt to answer, what led the metaphorical player/researcher to choose one bookshelf over another, let alone one box over another? To conjecture: methodological direction may be influenced by experience and familiarity with a method, personal preference for a method, the nature of the research question(s), funding, availability of research subjects, time constraints, intended publication outcome of the research (i.e. conference paper, journal article, or

book), languages spoken, access to software, the weather, fear of travel and the unknown, to name only a few possibilities.

A real likelihood is that choice of methodology is in large part influenced by a disciplinary directive that aligns with one paradigm or epistemology over another and that values a certain outcome over another. For example, a psychologist of the positivist paradigm may not value or even accept the rightful existence of intimate, small-scale qualitative studies of human experience and seek instead statistical evidence of a given phenomenon. In the other direction, a social constructivist researcher in applied linguistics may not see the usefulness of dehumanizing numbers and figures and so these do not appear on their bookcases. Indeed, each of these researchers may not even see the others' boxes on the shelf due to their respective disciplinary lenses, and so these contextual values play no small role in methodological direction.

### **Taking a Qualitative Perspective**

The bookcase from which I have chosen to draw is the qualitative bookcase. But what is qualitative research? Why would I select this over the other two? One way of introducing a foreign concept is by comparing it to what it is not; I found Schwandt (2000) to be very helpful in clarifying the nature of qualitative research by elaborating what it is decidedly not:

Qualitative inquiry is more comprehensible as a site or arena for social scientific criticism... a "home" for a wide variety of scholars who often find themselves at odds with one another but who share a general rejection of the blend of scientism, foundational epistemology, instrumental reasoning, and the philosophical anthropology of disengagement that has marked "mainstream" social science. (p. 190)

Dörnyei (2007) hints at a similar idea in more tangible terms as he summarizes the most frequently mentioned features of qualitative research: emergent research design,

the nature of the data (often recorded interviews, texts, and images), natural research setting, valuing insider meaning, small sample size, and an interpretive analysis (p. 37-38). Each item can be contrasted to its quantitative counterpart for further clarity; for example, quantitative research tends to be interested in variables over individuals and in fact seeks to eliminate “individual-based subjectivity” (ibid, p. 34).

The clash of subjectivity versus objectivity in the quantitative-qualitative “paradigm war” (Denzin, 2010) is fairly straightforward and constitutes a simple, fundamental difference between the two paradigms; unclear, however, are the clashing epistemologies under the qualitative banner. Before proceeding in the next section with a clarification of three differing epistemologies, let us remind ourselves of Schwandt’s (2000) explanation of qualitative inquiry as a “site” defined in part by its disagreement with social scientific traditions and its “fidelity to phenomena, respect for the life world, and attention to the fine-grained details of daily life” (p. 190). This image will hopefully be helpful in directing the following discussion of differing epistemologies in qualitative inquiry.

### **Three Epistemologies of Qualitative Research**

Let me open with an initial note about epistemologies drawn from Schwandt’s (2000) final notes in his chapter on three epistemological stances in qualitative inquiry. He claims the labeling of theoretical perspectives is

dangerous, for it blinds us to enduring issues, shared concerns, and points of tension that cut across the landscape of the movement, issues that each inquirer must come to terms with in developing an identity as a social enquirer. (p. 205)

Schwandt’s warning is reassuring to me, a novice researcher, who at times feels flooded by terminology, hierarchies, and complex allegiances of this to that. On the other hand, drawing lines and colouring within them with defined names is beneficial as I introduce

myself into the ongoing conversations of the metaphorical drawing room that is academic inquiry. Thus, I will forge ahead with this section on epistemologies, but I proceed with the disclaimer that these categorizations are not applied with permanent ink and that they have been applied to this thesis retroactively in attempts to situate my research within the larger realm of inquiry.

The first question is, why mention epistemology? In short, epistemology as the theory of knowledge dictates “the appropriate foundation for the study of society and its manifestation” (Bryman, 1984, p. 80). Just as certain data collection methods lend themselves to certain research methods (e.g. interviews, collection of artifacts and field notes lend themselves to narrative inquiry), so, too, do certain methodologies align with certain epistemologies. Interpretivism, hermeneutics and social constructionism will be the focuses of this section as the more frequently mentioned perspectives in discussions of qualitative research (Schwandt, 2000). Brief explanations of each will segue into the following section about the combined methods of the present study.

**Interpretivism.** Interpretivism grew out of the claim that the human sciences, which aim to understand human action, are fundamentally different from the (positivist) natural sciences that aim to offer “causal explanations of social, behavioral, and physical phenomena” (Schwandt, 2000, p. 191). The justification: human action is inherently meaningful. According to the interpretivists, meaning exists in all human action and to find it requires an interpreter to understand the actions of the actors. The term *verstehen* is used to describe this form of understanding wherein there is a gaining of knowledge about a subject (see Schwandt, 2000, for further discussion of this term). This form of knowing holds that interpretation is a subjective process that can lead to an objective

reconstruction of the original meaning of the action (ibid, p. 193). That an interpreter is distanced from the subject being interpreted (because it exists independently) is the primary point of disagreement between this and the following two views.

**Hermeneutics.** Though related to interpretivism, hermeneutics argues that the process of understanding human action is not an objective procedure-governed process, but rather, “understanding *is* interpretation” (Schwandt, 2000, p. 194). It claims that there is no one correct reconstruction of meaning; meaning is *negotiated* and coloured by the interpreter’s “historically inherited and unreflectively held prejudices” (ibid, p. 195). The process of interpreting is the process of understanding; they do not exist as sequential stages. Further, there is no meaning to be “found” external to the interpreter – it is all found in the process of interpretation. In this way hermeneutics distinguishes itself from interpretivism.

**Social constructionism.** Social constructionism shares the view of hermeneutics that meaning does not exist statically in action, independent of the interpreter, but it goes one step further by saying that the interpreter cannot claim to interpret outside the “backdrop of shared understating, practices, language, and so forth” (Schwandt, 2000, p. 197).

Ultimately, meaning is created, not discovered, by the minds of individuals or groups *in a social context* (Andrews, 2012). Some understandings of social constructionism go so far as to say that the meaning only exists in the mind of the meaning maker, which contradicts hermeneutics that has some faith that some kind of “truth” can be uncovered (Schwandt, 2000). A simpler understanding is that social constructionism does not deny reality, for example that a classroom exists, but it says that the naming of “classroom” and what it constitutes (a place or space for learning, teaching, interaction, play, and so

on) is socially constructed. Interpretation of meaning, therefore, cannot be separated from the social context, hence *social* constructionism.

**Shared epistemology in a combined methods study.** Enjoyable as it is to delve into philosophical contemplation of the nature of knowledge, let us not lose sight of the reason that brings us here: an argument for the combination of two distinct methods of qualitative research, constructivist grounded theory and narrative inquiry<sup>21</sup>, which, as we will come to see, have strikingly similar epistemologies. Epistemologically interpretivist (i.e. there is a core theme within the data that will emerge and the researcher is a silent reporter) (Goulding, 1998) and widely adopted as a scientific methodology (Åge, 2011), traditional Glaserian grounded theory can be shelved on the quantitative bookcase - although its game pieces and rules will certainly find overlap with the games on neighbouring qualitative shelves. Constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), however, aligns with the social constructionist view and falls on the subjectivist (and qualitative) end of the spectrum<sup>22</sup>. This later form of grounded theory, developed by Charmaz, upholds that researcher-participant interaction *produces* data and therefore the researcher is an interpretive agent of co-articulated narratives (Mills et al., 2006).

On the narrative side, this is consistent with Clandinin and Connolly's (2000) narrative inquiry, which maintains that the researcher and participants alike socially construct narratives. Moreover, like constructivist grounded theory, narrative inquiry

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<sup>21</sup> Although sometimes considered not more than general approaches or analytical methods, grounded theory and narrative inquiry are considered methods in this thesis based on their developers' methodological statements that consistently extend beyond analytical prescriptions to encompass guiding principles and values, as well.

<sup>22</sup> To address the *constructionist*-*constructivist* confusion: according to Speed (1991), "the distinction between constructivism and social constructionism is reflected more in the latter's emphasis on 'social' rather than in what ending the word 'construct' has" (p. 400). Lal et al. (2012), however, claim there is "a lack of agreement about their distinctive parameters" (p. 8). I will continue to use them as roughly interchangeable for the time being.

“might look for themes that emerge from the intertwining conversation (e.g., the relationship between the narrator and listeners)” (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2008, p. 153). These comments suggest that while narrative researchers can hold different positions (Lal et al., 2012), Clandinin and Connelly’s pedagogically concerned variation also holds to a social constructionist epistemology. This suggests that at the level of theory of knowledge, the two methods are compatible.

Thus far we have come to better understand the nature of qualitative methodology and three epistemologies frequently claimed within qualitative research approaches. We have briefly examined the epistemological compatibility of the two methods applied in this study, constructivist grounded theory and narrative inquiry. I have attempted to provide an explanation that recognizes its own precariousness but also sets a foundation for claims yet to come. At this point I turn to a more targeted review of the implications of combining methods in the present study, beginning with an introduction of the methods.

### **Historical Background of Grounded Theory and Narrative Inquiry**

This research study combines two distinct methods within qualitative inquiry that are frequently seen in educational research: constructivist grounded theory as per Charmaz (2006) and narrative inquiry as per Clandinin and Connelly (2000). To begin with a brief introduction to each: Glaser and Strauss (1967) developed “traditional” grounded theory (so named in Mills et al., 2006) in the 1960’s from sociological fieldwork to satisfy the need for a “sufficiently elaborate and procedurally rigorous” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 259) qualitative complement to their quantitative investigation of health professional and terminally ill hospital patients (Lal et al., 2012). Critiques that

their approach was poorly defined gradually surfaced (ibid), as did rifts over procedure (e.g. entering *tabula rasa*) that eventually caused the “founding fathers” to diverge. Following the split, Strauss and Corbin (1994) developed an “evolved grounded theory” (as per Mills et al., 2006). Later, Charmaz, a student of Glaser and Strauss and a strong proponent of grounded theory, eventually formed a constructivist thread that is frequently used in educational as well as psychological and nursing research (ibid). Charmaz’s (2006) constructivist grounded theory “reject[s] notions of emergence and objectivity” (ibid, p. 6).

Narrative inquiry is very much a different story (pun intended). Strictly speaking, the interpretation of narratives can be traced back to the earliest days of storytelling (Lal et al., 2012), but more recently it has been linked to Dewey’s experientialism, Johnson and MacIntyre’s narrative unity, Geertz’s anthropological reconstruction, and Bateson’s notion of learning as change, temporality, and situatedness, to name a few (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Historically, research of narratives has applied to a variety of purposes, among them: in psychology, education, and medicine to diagnose psychological and medical problems or learning disabilities (Capps & Ochs, 1995; Herman, 1992; Wigren, 1994; as cited in Lieblich, 1998); in sociology and anthropology “to represent the character or lifestyle of specific subgroups in society, defined by their gender, race, religion, and so on” (ibid, p. 4-5); and in cognitive science to study memory and information processing (ibid, p. 5). Connelly and Clandinin coined the term “narrative inquiry” (Clandinin et al., 2007) to refer to their framework for inquiry into “the narrative phenomenon” (Lal et al., 2012, p. 5) within the field of education.

As an important point to mention, recent literature suggests that, without a link to a particular adaptations, narrative inquiry and grounded theory can effectively function as umbrella terms for “a constellation of methods” (Charmaz, 2008, as cited in Floersch et al, 2010, p. 409) that hold to common overarching principles (Lal et al., 2012). For example, narrative researchers should begin with no specific hypotheses (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 73) and aim to describe the *life movement* of an individual (Clandinin et al., 2006). How to proceed and to what end is left to the researcher to decide.

Grounded theory is similarly diverse: while its ultimate objective is to generate theory from data, how that is accomplished varies. For example, researchers following Glaser will generate emergent theory based on the data alone; those following Strauss and Corbin will take into consideration the data *and* researcher interpretation; while followers of Charmaz will generate theory by describing a process of “unfolding temporal sequences that may have identifiable markers with clear beginnings and endings and benchmarks in between” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 10). According to Floersch et al. (2010), Charmaz’s emphasis on temporality is one of several overlaps that allows for constructivist grounded theory and narrative inquiry to co-exist within a coherent methodological framework. Further compatibilities will be discussed in the sections that follow.

### **Compatibility of Five Key Methodological Features of Grounded Theory and Narrative Inquiry**

Having tentatively established that grounded theory and narrative inquiry are of a similar epistemology and have historically come to function as natural allies (Lal et al. 2012, p. 12), this section consists of a more in-depth practical compatibility analysis of

the two methods via abbreviated accounts of how their successful coexistence within the present study was considered and ensured (or, at the very least, attempted). It draws from Lal et al. (ibid) and other supporters of combined approaches to make a case for the combination of constructivist grounded theory and narrative inquiry approaches based on their key methodological features. These features have been ordered to reflect the order in which they appear in this thesis: purpose, data collection and analysis, representation of findings, researcher relationship, and criteria for quality. Each sub-section presents an overview of one of the features as it appears in constructivist grounded theory and narrative inquiry, and closes with the question, *How was the combination successfully accomplished in this thesis?*

**Feature 1: Methodological purpose.** The fundamental purpose of grounded theory research is to eventually generate theory based on deconstructed and reconstructed data with the final aim of better understanding social and psychological processes (Lal et al., 2012, p. 7). Constructivist grounded theory, more specifically, has slightly different intentions, as evidenced in its treatment of data (Mills et al., 2006): the constructivist grounded theory researcher is wary of depersonalized deconstruction and should treat the data so as to keep “life in the foreground” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 536) by going “beyond the surface in seeking meaning in the data, searching for and questioning tacit meanings about values, beliefs, and ideologies” (Mills et al., 2006, p. 7). This priority is also found in a more extreme form in narrative research, which seeks to understand human experience through a “phenomenological, macro-contextual, performative, and structural understanding of singular narratives” (Lal et al., 2012, p. 7). Clandinin and Connelly’s

(2000) narrative inquiry emphasizes the individual life story in the context in which they are embedded and the faithful reconstruction of unbroken narratives.

*How was the combination of purposes successfully accomplished?* This thesis seeks to address the question stated in Chapter 1: how do ASL teachers construct the curriculum without a textbook to anchor, bind, and guide? The purpose is to understand both the social process that is University A's unique teacher-led curriculum, through the individual teachers' experiences within it. Thus, the outcome of this thesis is both theory generation about crosswise as well as individual experiential narratives of the ASL teacher-participants. To clarify, I use *crosswise* to refer to the analytical procedure of looking across several individuals' data in order to get a better view of the "whole" (Fox, 2001). This in contrast to narrative procedures that focus on one individual's narrative (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

**Feature 2: Data collection and analytical methods.** Narrative studies may have anywhere from two to 600 participants from whom a researcher would elicit written texts (e.g. daily logs), photography, artifacts (e.g. course outlines), or interviews where the researcher is actively engaged (Lal et al., 2012). Analysis involves a "close and detailed look... of particular stretches of talk and of narratives" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 635). The unit of analysis is the story with a beginning, middle, and end (Cortazzi and Riessman, 1993, as cited in Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2008) so that the content and cases are left intact – although the delineation of "story" is vague (Lal et al., 2012) and informative texts about narrative research design are lacking (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Riessman, 2008; Floersch et al., 2010).

Despite numerous differences between the various grounded theory approaches (e.g. Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1994; Charmaz, 2006), they tend to have more clearly defined data collection and analytical procedures than narrative. In many grounded theory studies participants number 10 to 60 in number, they are often intensively interviewed, and quality and richness of data is prioritized over quantity (Lal, et al., 2012). Coding is the key analytical procedure. Traditionally, coding involves the deconstruction of (usually interview) data, its division into themes, and then its reconstruction into an overarching core category. In a constructivist grounded theory analysis, however, themes might also include literary analysis of narrative plot, characterization, and/or metaphor (ibid). Moreover, Charmaz (2002) says it might even be fruitful to “draw back from a line by line approach to data analysis and view the participant's story as a whole in order to identify the overarching narrative characteristics or plot of that story (as cited in Drew, 2005, p. 83). This brings constructivist grounded theory procedures even closer those of narrative inquiry.

*How was the combination successfully accomplished in data collection and analytical procedures?* The two methods are compatible in this arena: interviews and transcripts, observation data, field notes, and artifacts (e.g. course outlines) are all permissible in both methods, and my analysis of both themes and whole narratives is prioritized in both, as well. Combination in analysis can “enrich the understanding of the dynamic nature of core categories that emerge in a grounded theory analysis” (Lal et al., 2012, p. 14) – I make the same claim that a dual approach strengthens results through data as well as methodological triangulation. This is apparent in my analytical procedure of looking crosswise at three teacher-participants’ data, and individually at the fourth’s.

**Feature 3: Presentations of findings.** Successful representation of findings in a combined methodology was a difficult task initially, as I recognized that poorly presented findings would suggest conflicting underlying research principles and thus impact coherence of the study. Traditional grounded theory studies tend to follow a more linear, conventional format, but Charmaz (2000) “advocates a writing style that is more literary than scientific in intent” (as cited in Mills et al., 2006, p. 7). Narrative inquiry studies are diverse in style (Lal et al., 2012).

*How was the combination of presentation of findings successfully accomplished in this thesis?* Free from immediate restrictions from both approaches, I proceeded with an intuitive presentation of findings without fear of violating methodological values. As previously described, findings naturally grew into separate, but complementary, parts: Parts II and III presents the results of primarily grounded theory analysis as supported and led by narrative; and Part I focuses on a particular narrative of experience. In all cases, findings consist primarily (Parts II and III) or entirely (Part I) of participant stories – i.e. extracts of data that have a beginning, middle, and end, as per Cortazzi and Reissman, (1993).

**Feature 4: Researcher relationships.** Charmaz (1995) identifies the constructivist grounded theory researcher as a “coproducer” of data (as cited in Mills, et al., 2006, p. 7) whose presence should be voiced<sup>23</sup> (ibid). The researcher aims to “[keep close] to the participants through keeping their words intact in the process of analysis” (ibid, p. 7) and recognizes the participants as co-contributors in theory generation (ibid). Similarly, in

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<sup>23</sup> In contrast, traditional grounded theory primarily discusses researcher-participant relationships in relation to the outcome of data collection (i.e. what was done to obtain data) and researcher-phenomenon relationships in order to clarify the theory (Lal et al., 2012, p. 10).

narrative inquiry, relationships are at the heart of everything and claiming silence or non-involvement with the phenomenon and participants is self-deception (Lal et al., 2012, p. 10). Ideally, a researcher will share an understanding of the phenomenon with their participants and have a common “taken-for-grantedness” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 78). For example, I have experience teaching and learning in ASL classrooms and so I am well positioned to relate to my participants’ daily lives in the ASL classroom. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggest a narrative inquirer establish connections with participants and allow relationships to spill out into “real time” (e.g. telephone conversations at home, meetings in homes and coffee shops).

*How was the combination of researcher relationships successfully accomplished in this thesis?* As discussed in Chapter 1, I have employed first person voice on top of free-flowing footnotes in order to keep my voice present throughout. I have also included myself as a participant-observer-researcher in Chapter 6. These elements are key as they satisfy the needs of both methods by visibly positioning me as a researcher and co-creator of meaning in the study, while openly discussing the social context in which I am embedded.

**Feature 5: Criteria for quality.** Both methods apply similar criteria of credibility, plausibility, and transparency (Lal et al p. 12). These are commonly used to evaluate most qualitative research, though it is noted that qualitative criteria continue almost indefinitely to include such requirements as *sincerity* (Tracy, 2010), *positionality*

(Lincoln, 1995) and *vividness* (Whittemore, 2001). These are value-laden criteria and continually contested, and so will not be applied to the present study<sup>24</sup>.

*How was the combination of criteria for quality successfully accomplished in this thesis?* Since there is virtually total agreement between constructivist grounded theory and narrative inquiry as to what constitutes a valuable study (beyond the obvious required elements such as human participants, interviews, for example) I have compiled Table 5 to lay out in simple terms the action undertaken in this study to ensure quality. Attempts were made at every stage of the study's development to leave a clear trail accounting for all steps in the decision-making and analytical process.

Table 5

*Criteria for Quality Applied in Thesis*

Criterion	Action	Sample reference in thesis
Credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rich descriptions with concrete examples</li> <li>• Members' checks</li> <li>• Triangulation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chapter 6</li> <li>• Chapter 7</li> </ul>
Plausibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extensive extracts from interview transcripts</li> <li>• Original analytic memos and coding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chapter 7</li> <li>• Appendix E, F</li> <li>• Appendix G</li> </ul>
Transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Detailed description of data collection and analysis procedures</li> <li>• Sample coding notes show progression from initial to later stages</li> <li>• Sample of early drafts of narrative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chapter 6</li> <li>• Appendix G</li> <li>• Appendix H</li> </ul>

<sup>24</sup> Due to constraints of time and space, the philosophical debates (e.g. Seale, 1999) about the applicability of criteria to various methods will not be further elaborated, either.

As a final point, according to Lal et al. (2012) the combination of methods can occur at all or selected stages of the research process. The present study attempts the former with grounded theory and narrative inquiry by considering not only data collection and analytical approaches, but also the underlying principles and epistemology of the methods. Drew (2005) mixes and matches certain features of these same methods to suit her purposes while also considering both to be methods<sup>25</sup>.

### **In a Nutshell**

Chapter 5 touched on several topics:

- I elaborated a bookcase analogy to describe how methodology is a bookcase in which *games*, i.e. methods, are shelved. The researcher is driven to choose a bookcase or a *game* in part by research questions, and in part by disciplinary directive.
- Qualitative inquiry is characterized by its attention to the details, the *nitty-gritty*, of daily life.
- Within qualitative research are many epistemologies, among them interpretivism, hermeneutics, and social constructionism. The thesis holds to the latter, which maintains that meaning lies in socially situated interaction.
- I outline the histories of grounded theory, leading to constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), and narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), the two methods applied in the present study. Five methodological features of each are outlined and compared to ultimately support to the conclusion that the

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<sup>25</sup> I highly recommend browsing Drew (2005) and Hole (2004) for two very different and fascinating approaches to this same method blending.

two can be successfully applied within a study. Examples of their combination in this thesis are included.

Chapter 5 discussed the methodological basis for combining research methods and leads into the next chapter that details the specific data collection and analytical procedures applied in this thesis study.

## Chapter 6: Storying Emergent Methods

In keeping with the methodology, this chapter is dedicated to unfolding a *narrative of emergent methods*<sup>26</sup> - that is, the tale of the present study, which came alive through exploration and an invitation to follow a curving course of action. The story begins with an immediate dissatisfaction with the project's proposed approach<sup>27</sup> and continues through an exploration of alternatives and modifications lead first and foremost by gut instinct. This chapter will develop chronologically (as much as logic allows) the living entity that is this study. Where deemed helpful, I have also incorporated elements of conventional formatting. This will hopefully allow the reader to enter into this story while also getting the “cold, hard facts” of the research study.

As a first step, ethics approval for the study was obtained (see Appendix B for the ethics certificate). Figure 1 shows a simplified flow chart of the following steps in the study's unfolding. These will be elaborated throughout the chapter.

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<sup>26</sup> To clarify: although it was previously established that constructivist grounded theory as per Charmaz (2006) rejects ideas of *emergence*, the term is used here to indicate that methods developed, or unfolded, as the study proceeded.

<sup>27</sup> The study was originally intended to include a quantitative element, a Likert-type scale questionnaire, and more structured qualitative (i.e. interview and classroom observation) elements. However, from the first two phases detailed in Figure 1 to the third, it was decided that a different course of action must be undertaken to address the research questions more satisfactorily. Thus, the questionnaire was dropped entirely, while interview and classroom observation instruments required modification.

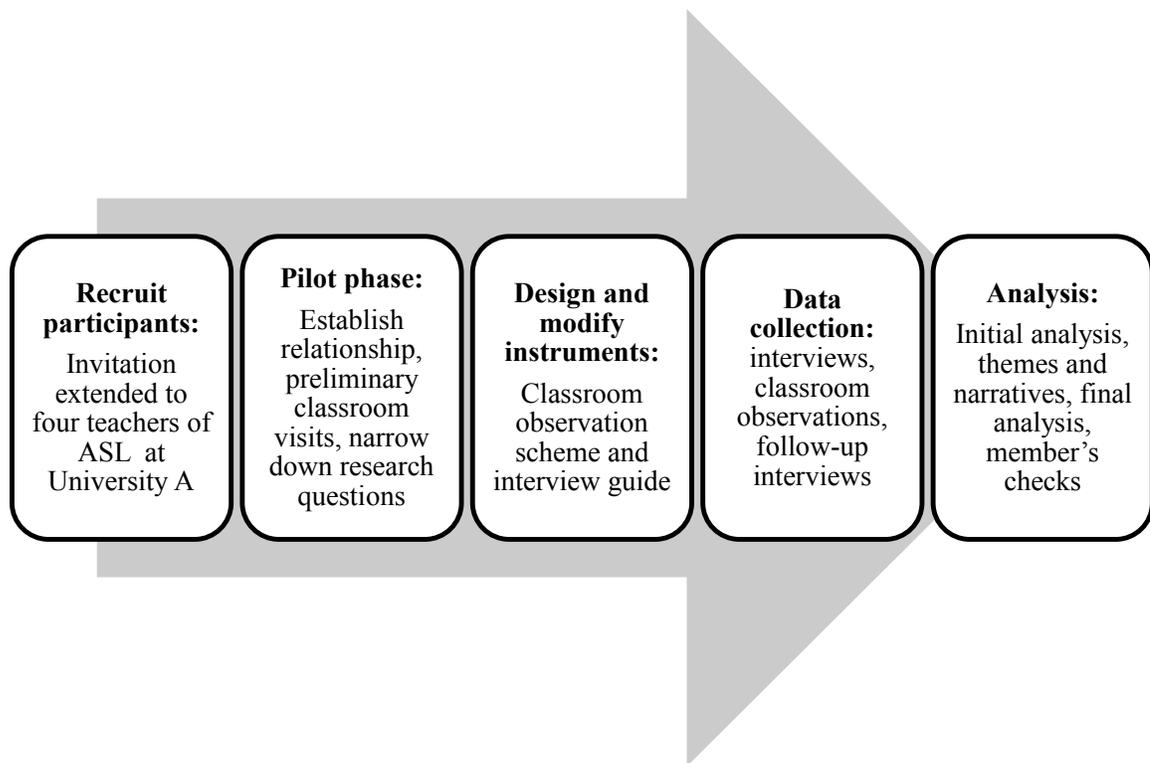


Figure 1. Flow chart of study procedures.

### Setting the Scene

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) recommend *setting the scene* prior to entering into a narrative account. This section will do exactly that by introducing the context as well as the participants who feature in the study.

**Context.** This study focused on four teachers of various levels of ASL at a Canadian university, University A. As mentioned, University A's ASL program is a fairly unique program in that it offers a minor in ASL of four levels housed within a modern languages department that also offers six other language minor programs, plus a rotation of less commonly taught languages. The department is positioned alongside departments of ESL, linguistics, and applied linguistics. As mentioned in Chapter 2, this positioning is highly advantageous as it is granted independence from, for example, departments of communicative disorders, and maintains proximity to related fields of academic study.

University A's ASL program began in the early 2000's. Year by year more levels were added as demand grew. At the time of this study, there were approximately 400 students enrolled each term. Of the teachers in this study, three were teaching at least one class of the maximum allowable number of 42 students. The number of students in each class was a recurrent topic in many informal conversations and most felt 42 was far too many, particularly given the assessment procedures for ASL (usually 2-7 minute video tests).

Class schedules range from two hours per class twice a week (regular schedule) to two hours four times a week (intensive). In Fall 2013, there were 11 sections of regular schedule classes at the first year beginner level and one intensive; second, third, and fourth year had three, two, and one regular schedule sections, respectively. In Winter 2014, there were four regular sections of first year beginner and five sections of regular advanced beginner classes; there were two regular advanced second year classes and one intensive; there were again two regular third year and one regular fourth year courses. There were seven teachers in the fall term; by winter, there were again seven teachers, but two new teachers had replaced two that were no longer teaching.

Like several of its counterpart language programs<sup>28</sup>, ASL teachers do not use a textbook and, in fact, they are discouraged from doing so. Students are not instructed to buy a textbook, though several teachers recommend optional supplementary texts or online material in their course outlines (see Appendix C).

**Participants.** Since I was previously acquainted with four ASL teachers at University A through various academic activities and chance encounters on campus I invited them

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<sup>28</sup> This information is based on informal personal communication with teachers and coordinators of other language programs.

first, with full success. Although attempted, on-going communication with teachers outside University A was unsuccessful. Apart from recorded interviews, there were countless “off the record” conversations that allowed our relationship to deepen and mutual trust to grow (as I, too, was sharing my thoughts, beliefs, and experiences) and for me to get a better sense of who they are as individuals.

The teachers reflect a range of characteristics and experiences (albeit unevenly): age, Hearing/Deaf status, signing experience, prior language learning experience, education, and teaching history. Readers should note that gender was not investigated in this study; therefore, readers should understand that gender attributions are not necessarily accurate in all cases. While this would make an interesting avenue for future studies, this study did not extend its scope to include such investigation. Table 6 summarizes the key dimensions of participants that featured in the study. In addition, I include myself, Nina, as a participant-observer-researcher.

Table 6

*Key Dimensions of Participants*

Name	Age range	Deaf/ Hearing	Learned ASL with Jack at University A	Years teaching ASL	Full-time/ part-time position at University A
Oliver	30-35	Hearing	Yes	5-10	Full-time instructor
Jack	65+	Deaf	-	30+	Full-time instructor
Rose	25-30	Hearing	Yes	1-5	Part-time contract instructor
Nancy	30-35	Hearing	Yes	1-5	Part-time contract instructor
Nina	25-30	Hearing	No	2	-

*Note:* “Years teaching ASL” includes teaching roles such as class/teaching assistantship.

**Character sketches.** To further aid in understanding the participants as individuals I drafted brief “character sketches”, below, to introduce them, suggest the nature of our relationship, and begin to develop their teaching character (i.e., *the self-who teaches*, Palmer, 1998, 2004) from the point of view of one teacher relating to another. Although my ‘voice’ is evident in writing this thesis, my own character sketch (as participant-observer-researcher) is also included. The sketches are comprised of interview and researcher memo excerpts.

***Oliver.***

I mean, I know all my students, I know all their names, but I’ve also been told on numerous occasions that at the end of not always my course but the program that, uh, students have a better understanding of who they are as people. Um... they grow in confidence and in awareness and a lot of them grow in, um, in sort of their body image also. So that’s really huge for me. That’s huge.  
(Oliver, interview)

In the classroom, Oliver brings *himself* to his teaching, more so than methods or ideas or lessons, per se. It seems he draws on experience, methods, colleagues, and material resources for his information, to keep him going – but once he’s in class, it’s all Oliver. His body language, gaze, and whole lesson is structured with a very personally involved touch. Nothing is outside of him; it is all very embedded in his person, which he openly shares. What’s more, he would no doubt go far beyond “teaching duties” and extend his touch into any student’s personal realm should the occasion arise.

(Research memo from field notes, November 3, 2013, written after a classroom observation)

***Jack.***

My students are like babies; first they babble, they learn from their mistakes. It’s a natural learning process here.

(Jack, interview)

Clearly kind, patient, and very sharp he recounted stories and shared big ideas about the future of ASL/ASL. He was a self-proclaimed radical of the shrewd kind, and very aware of the impact he had on everyone. There was also a certain reservation in his demeanor, almost verging on humility. Our conversations went from frequent to not and back again several times.

(Research memo from field notes, January 29, 2014)

***Rose.***

If there were such thing as having a natural knack for teaching, I’d say I have it.

(Rose, interview)

Rose is a more tentative teacher than the others I’ve observed so far, though she’s clearly very comfortable teaching. She has a very easy way with people, I noticed. She’s not overpowering, but assertive. Her role, her being even, is decidedly that of a teacher. She arrives to the classroom and presents herself very personably, but not so personable that her lesson plan is ever too far out of reach. I have little doubt that her mental lesson plan is well organized, with careful attention to scope and sequence. I suspect she would bend over backwards to help her students, stopping only when her teacher boundary dictates.

(Research memo from field notes, October 23, 2013, written after a classroom observation)

When I interviewed Rose, she came wearing her teacher hat. When I observed Rose in class, she was wearing her teaching hat. When we met for a follow-up after the class, she still had her teaching hat perched firmly on her being. Her teaching hat, it turns out, is her permanent accessory. Teaching and learning are

part of her everyday and she is a bottomless pool of energy for anything to do with them. Had our conversations drifted to the intricacies of Turkish textiles or to some other concept about which I am ignorant, I have no doubt that Rose would have found a computer, huddled over a YouTube video, and taught me the basics within minutes.

(Research memo from field notes, October 24, 2013, written after a follow-up interview)

### *Nancy.*

I can do this. I can do this very well.

(Nancy, interview)

She might not use these exact words to describe herself, but Nancy has a huge heart and is constantly striving for a better learning experience for her students. Her idea of successful learning and teaching seems to come from the outside: have a good curriculum, good methods, and good assessments and good things will happen - and she does everything she can to work on those things. She views her role as that of a supporter or promoter or catalyst in the learning process. She brings a lot of herself to her classroom mostly through thoughtful planning and careful selection of materials, though she does like to share a good joke.

(Research memo from field notes, December 4, 2013, written after a follow-up interview)

### *Nina.*

These beginning steps have been challenging as I try to wrap my head around what I'm trying to accomplish. I realize that [this thesis] has great potential to get a lot done in terms of giving the lay of the land and setting myself up for bigger projects.

(Nina, extract from personal research journal, written June 6, 2013)

Between my unending curiosity and penchant for laying and taking the roundabout route, it has been my hope that there is a straight line in this thesis somewhere - perhaps a straight line between question and interpretation, or is it between interpretation and answer? Either way, this project has been a learning process that hopefully sees no end, for it does indeed embody a great deal of inspirational material.

(Researcher's personal reflection)

### **Pilot Phase**

The nature of this study was highly responsive to the situation, the data, and the participants' needs. I had ideas of what might be interesting to explore in the ASL

program, but as an outsider to the program and teaching at University A, I largely allowed the participants to “guide” the research process. That is, from the first interviews it was clear that there was far more to say than the earlier program evaluation research design could capture. It was also increasingly important to nurture our teacher-teacher relationships, though while “on record” I switched back and forth to my researcher hat to provide guidance and structure.

Though not a true pilot in the common sense of the word, I consider piloting to include the months leading up to the beginning of interviews during which I assessed the site of study, the ASL program, began making contact with teachers, and designed tentative instruments and procedures. A first step was visiting the teachers in person to have a frank discussion about my intentions and to gauge their interest in contributing to the project. Since this was intended to be a first step in potentially informing curricular innovation in ASL, I recognized the need to work in solidarity with practitioners. I met all four teachers several times, sometimes individually and sometimes in pairs, which was not uncommon given they often work in close proximity.

Several weeks were dedicated to class visits where I was invited to be an observer and even a participant in a number of lessons of various levels. In this stage of the project, I observed teaching styles and asked questions of the students regarding their learning experiences. After class, the teachers and I exchanged ideas about useful research questions and directions. Conversations and specific observations during the piloting phase were left unrecorded since the priority was to get a feel for the ins and outs of the program.

The result of piloting was a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it was clear that my initial vision for the research design (see Footnote 27) would not adequately address the emergent directions. On the other hand, it was by now inescapable that the revised direction would be driven by the teachers themselves. Based on the richness of the piloted interviews and observations, it was decided to retain those elements of the research design and allow the exact form of each to remain adaptable. The next section takes a closer look at those adaptations.

### **Instruments**

Like the research questions, instruments were modified or developed after piloting. For example, the initial proposal for this project included an online questionnaire. It was designed but never distributed, as it was deemed no longer applicable in addressing the research questions. Details of the instruments applied in the study are found below.

**Classroom observation scheme.** The Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching Observation Scheme (COLT) (Spada & Frölich, 1995) was the initially chosen classroom observation scheme but it was quickly deemed inappropriate. Without having obtained ethics clearance to videotape class lessons, I immediately found COLT to be excessively complex. Without back-up video support, especially given the fact that in the signed classroom context my eyes needed to be on the teacher at all times, I risked missing large portions of the lesson. The Classroom Discourse Observation (CDO), which was designed specifically for ASL classroom observation, was judged too broad and was not appropriate for teacher-centred observation.

A new scheme was thus elaborated in accordance to the demands of this particular situation. As a first consideration, the classes were mostly but not entirely No Voicing, and so I required a system of capturing signed, gestural, and spoken classroom activity. I devised the codes and abbreviations for my observation, shown in Table 7.

With the help of the above, I put pen to paper and proceeded to use a narrative and descriptive system (Wilkerson, 1988) of time-marked event capturing. I recorded classroom behaviours and teacher-student exchanges by noting the time at each “event” interval. To determine the definition of “event”, I relied on the “set, body, close” (Pychyl, personal communication, September 20, 2012) model of lesson planning, and the notion of stories having a beginning, middle, and end (Clandinin, 2007). These same principles applied to the definition of “event”. In observable terms, this was marked by a shift in classroom focus, guided by the teacher. Rose, for example, marked the beginning and end of events with a clap:

6:07 clap  
HOW YOU? Basic Q, SUP?  
Eye contact, respond  
respond, elaborate  
Clap

Similarly, Nancy marked the end of an event with several rounds of repetition prior to a new topic:

2:34  
2 WEEKS QUIZ FINISH  
1 WEEK, NOW WEEK, FEEDBACK FINISH, NEXT WEEK BREAK, PARTY,  
PLAY  
SCHEDULE, j, Rep, 1 student FS (!), [N] writes “schedule”, Rep

Table 7

*Codes and Abbreviations for ASL Classroom Observation Scheme*

Code/abbreviation	Function	Example from observation notes
2:51	time stamp	2:51 still steady whispering
Ss	“student(s)”	Ss copy
Single or double letter	represents first initial of teacher’s name	[J] OK, WHAT?
Rep or Rep.	“repeat” (i.e sign was repeated)	1 MORE... ss answers, Rep.
Q	“question(s)”	[O] look out for errors & Q
(...)	separates field notes from classroom activity notes	EXAM TOPIC? (lots face/body)
writes ...	indicates following word(s) were written on the board	writes “add dates”
voices ...	indicates following word(s) were voiced	[J] voices “do all that, do it”
BLOCK LETTERS*	marks signed words and sentences	NEXT WEEK DO-DO?
¡, !	¡ “do you understand?” <sup>29</sup> – usually teacher to student ! for “I understand.” – usually student to teacher	SIGN DON’T-KNOW ACT. ¡, !, GO
CL	indicates “acting out” a sign*	Ss TOILET [J] CL PEE? NO models TUESDAY
FS	indicates a word was finger spelled	FRIEND N-I-N-A

\**Note:* These are my own observation codes and I did not follow true glossing conventions for ASL notation due to constraints on time and attention during observation. My ethics clearance did not allow video records of classroom interactions between students and teachers.

Notes were then typed using the same handwritten conventions. With this scheme I could re-envisage classroom activity, signed, spoken, and gestural communication, with

<sup>29</sup> The ¡ symbol reminded me of the raised eyebrows that accompany yes-no questions in ASL, and so ! was used to indicate that the students had understood.

time markers as a reference point. It was additionally helpful in arriving at a more holistic understanding of a teacher's patterns of planning logic.

**Interview guide.** The initial interview guide was retained from the pilot phase.

Recollection of specific incidents was a central component in maintaining a narrative element and so questions centred on past and current experiences in the ASL program. It encouraged participants to reflect on their teaching, for example:

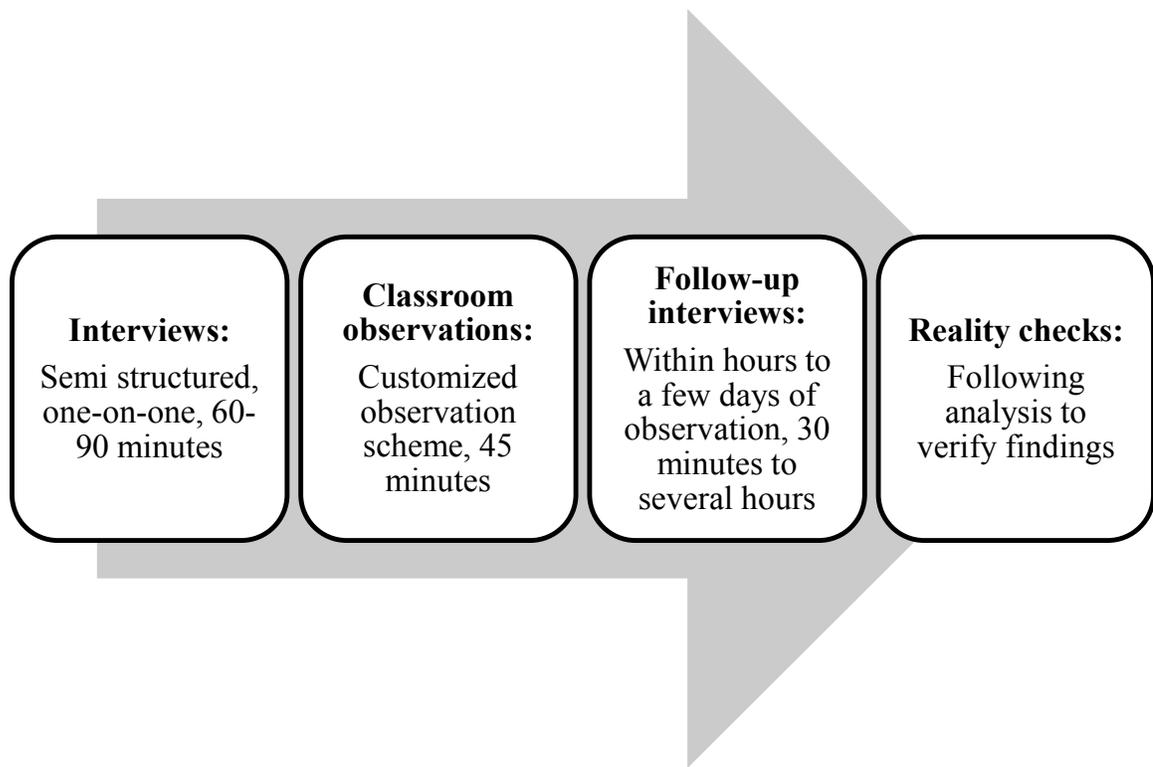
Thinking back to something you've tried to learn, recently or long ago, what was successful? What was an unsuccessful experience? What were your objectives? Why do you feel you succeeded or not?

It also included more targeted questions about course sequencing, materials, and methods. Finally, the topic of working in a textbook-free environment was included.

Appendix D includes the full question guide. The questions were inspired primarily from Woods' (2012) recommended interview guide for eliciting teachers' BAK (beliefs, assumption, knowledge).

### **Phases of Data Collection**

The emergent design dictated significant back-and-forth between data collection and analysis in an ongoing process of clarifying, exploring, and relating to the data with the ultimate aim of giving a strong voice to participants. The following procedures, outlined in Figure 2 applied to all participants: one or more one-on-one interviews, one 45-minute classroom observation, an informal follow-up interview almost immediately after the observation, and finally a members' check once results were compiled in draft form. Beyond that, informal conversations extended beyond these procedures into real time coffee chats, hallway conversations, and text and email messages.



*Figure 2.* Phases of data collection.

**Interviews.** Interviews took place at various locations on University A’s campus and lasted from 60-90 minutes. Three interviews were videotaped. One interview was not recorded, as the participant preferred to converse less formally off camera. For this participant, notes were taken during an informal interview and transcribed as supplementary data to the final videotaped interview. The interview guide remained unchanged from the pilot to realization, but the format of delivery morphed to suit the increasingly relational aspect of the study. As Drew (2005) also experienced, “while the overall approach to interviews was semi-structured, the interview process followed a predominantly open-ended questioning technique” (p. 82). Participants responded to more or fewer of the topics and were invited to contribute new lines of conversation to include topics they felt were important in a conversational style.

A free-flowing interview format was helpful in allowing for stories to emerge and blend together in a natural conversational space; however, in the case of several teachers this meant that several questions or even entire topics were skipped. Wherever possible, I attempted to fill in these blanks during less formal conversations and follow-up interviews to maintain the semi-structured nature. To offset the potential limitation this may pose to the completeness and trustworthiness of results I also made conscious efforts at increasing transparency and maximizing reflexivity.

Following the constructivist grounded theorist and narrative inquirer's obligations to co-construction (Charmaz, 2000), during the interviews I allowed myself to make ongoing comments, connections, and reformulations out loud that let participants verify my interpretation of our conversation. For example:

N: Earlier you mentioned there were two teachers that early on in the program that who didn't match the program.

O: Yeah, yeah.

N: I'm trying to find the uh the not contradiction in there. You can teach however you want but if it doesn't match...

O: Mm hmm

N: So how does that... can you clarify that?

Videotaping was an essential component for consenting participants for spoken interviews because I noticed through piloting that ASL signs either replaced or reinforced the articulation of abstract concepts during spoken interviews. One such instance was with the sign INTUITION, which can be translated to *gut feeling*, *instinct*, "it just feels right", or *hunch*. Another instance was when participants reenacted sections of signed lessons from memory; without video support, the sharing of experiences would have been limited.

**Class observations.** Within weeks of the interviews, I requested to observe a class of each teacher's choice. Over the whole study, pilot phase included, I observed every level of classroom, from first to fourth year. Pilot phase observations were diverse: some classes I was invited to participate as a student and I attended the same class several weeks in a row, while others I stayed only part of the class and observed quietly and did not partake in any activities. Post-pilot observations lasted approximately 45 minutes and I did not participate in any activities. Twice I was introduced to the class as a visitor and twice I was not introduced at all. Although I tried to slip into the room and find an inconspicuous seat so as not to upset the natural flow of the class, in all observations I felt immediately identified as an intruder of sorts.

The classes I observed ranged in topics, from Remembrance Day to likes and dislikes and exam review. The observations notes entailed timed event capturing, which provided structure and also left room for my attention to focus on items of interest that arose in previous communication with the teachers. In the initial interviews, for example, many teachers had commented on their and others' approach to feedback and I was thus curious about (and sought out) teacher-student contact. I noted several instances of feedback in order to compare my perspective and theirs on the interaction. Several times teachers condemned certain feedback behaviours (e.g. respond in English, delay response, etc.), but subsequently displayed them.

**Follow-up interviews.** The above contradictions, as well as less potentially inflammatory observations, were shared with teachers during follow-up interviews, scheduled within hours or a couple of days after the class. These took place in comfortable and convenient locations for the teacher: in one case in an office, another in a café, another in the

classroom after class, and another in a student lounge. These conversations lasted between 30 minutes to several hours, depending on the teacher's interest in receiving comments about their teaching. Two teachers were very eager to hear about what I saw from my third party perspective. Two others were keener on sharing ideas for future lessons.

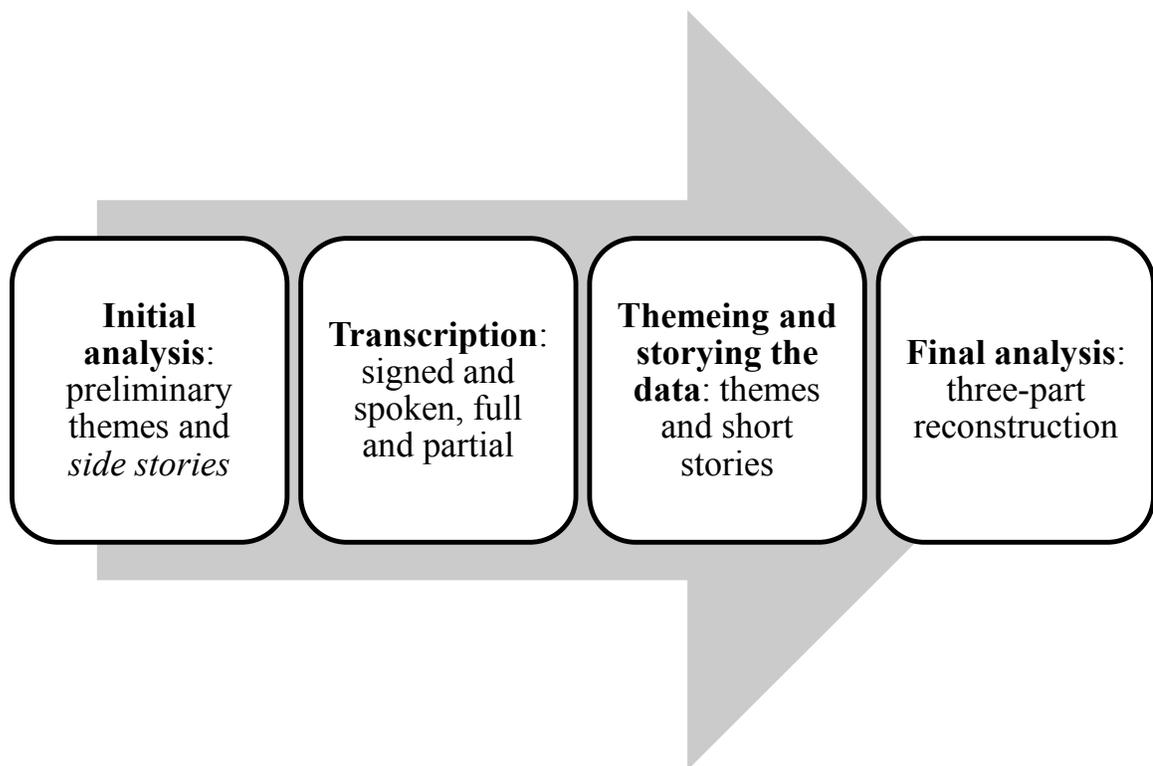
In these conversations, I presented excerpts from my observation notes and opened the floor for the teacher to retroactively reflect on their decision-making process. They were invited to contemplate it as a learning moment, and to consider how or if this will be mentally stored for future teaching situations. From my perspective, these follow ups were highly valuable, in particular because they allowed the space for open teacher-teacher conversations to happen according to the needs of the moment, and also for the insight I got into their views of teaching once they were presented with an outsider's perspective.

**Members' checks.** Finally, after more than eight months of data collection and simultaneous analysis, I contacted each teacher and sent them their character sketch and reconstructed individual narratives or the crosswise themes, depending on the participant. They were invited to modify, edit, or delete elements as they saw fit. This was the final step in reconstructing their stories.

### **Phases of Analysis**

Applying narrative and grounded theory analytic approaches within the same study was notionally complex; in practice, however, it was an intuitive solution. I collected data continuously with these analytic questions in mind: what common themes appear within and between participants? How can I look into these themes and how can

they be restored? How do these individual teachers' stories build a bigger story about the curriculum? How can each of their stories be told? Drew (2005) began with grounded theory coding techniques to break down the data, but mid-analysis he found that "the relationships between certain themes remained unclear and problematic" (p. 83). With this in mind and clarification of focus and questions in early phases meant that I could avoid this predicament to some extent and apply two methods from the beginning. Figure 3 shows the phases of analysis.



*Figure 3.* Phases of analysis.

**Initial analysis.** From the earliest piloting sessions I brainstormed preliminary connections and potential presentations of results (i.e. how to tell the story); these were revisited during an initial analytical review of all interview and observation data. In this

stage I kept an open eye for crosswise similarities and sought to “naively to gain a pre-understanding of the embedded narratives (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007, p. 162).

An initial reading across the data yielded four preliminary themes:

1. Particular culture of Hearing teachers of ASL
2. Gut (INTUITION)
3. “Pillar”, “Vision”
4. “Wouldn’t want it any other way”

Ultimately, they implicitly formed the basis for the story told in Chapter 7, but were not explicitly developed, as the initial reading also revealed individual *side stories* that fell outside the above themes, but nonetheless constituted critical curricular experiences. This initial step opened the way for transcription, described below, which began a close reading of the data.

**Transcription.** Having grasped its breadth, I approached my data in more depth using both mixed coding and narrative approaches on fully and partially transcribed data. The interview I felt encompassed the majority of the crosswise components noted in initial analysis was chosen for full transcription (see Appendix E for sample pages from full transcription). I piloted several analytical approaches on the full transcription to determine which procedures would be most appropriate. The selected procedures are described in the next section.

Drew (2005) and (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) support partial transcription, and so I transcribed the segments of the other two videotaped interviews that held immediate narrative value, such as stories with a discernable “beginning, middle, end” structure. In particular, segments were selected on the basis that they a) provided further support for crosswise themes, and b) gave sufficient textual data to support conceptual narratives that

formed each teacher's identity. Several examples of transcribed segments are included in Appendix F.

***Transcription of spoken data.*** Since these were interviews about and sometimes in ASL, transcription was a no small task. Several authors have spoken of the challenges of transcribing spoken (Ochs, 1979; Poland, 2002; Reissman 1993) and signed (Hole, 2007) language into a written form. Arvay (2002) claims, "transcription is an interpretive process and, therefore, the exact reproduction of the speech act is impossible" (as cited in Hole, 2007, p. 702). Hole (2004) treated signed video interview data as performative and applied a fitting analytical procedure. For spoken interview data, I transcribed fillers, stutters, pauses, and any other conversational features so as to maintain the performative aspect. Scrawled shorthand memos on written data were typed, but kept alongside the originals so as to reflect the raw, instinctive circumstances in which they were written.

***Transcription of signed data.*** In all spoken interviews there were elements of ASL, and since there is no widely recognized ASL writing system and no established ASL-English transcription conventions (Hole, 2007), I opted to transcribe ASL data as per Hole (2007):

I interpreted the signed interview into spoken English focusing on meaning-based translations" (Esposito, 2001, Larson, 1998) and then transcribed the spoken English into printed text; when I was unsure of how to interpret a sign or series of signs, I included English glosses of the sign (or series of signs) in the transcription... Glossing is the nearest conventional equivalent of a sign in printed text and the sign(s) are represented by block letters to present a transliteration of a sign and/or string of signs. (p. 702)

This was an effective means of preparing the data for further coding. Although I took pains in recreating accurate meaning, written transcripts nonetheless "appeared featureless and lacking the important nuances of the performed texts" (Hole, 2007, p.

703). Thus, I analyzed “live” (i.e. video) data whenever possible, with written transcriptions serving as a reference and, of course, a convenient writing surface.

**Theming the data.** Following initial analysis and the abovementioned transcription, I loosely followed a grounded theory coding scheme, working from initial codes to descriptive and process codes, which were then grouped into broader categories and themes (Saldaña, 2012). An example of raw coding on a transcript is presented in Appendix G. The resulting table of themes from the grounded theory analysis is presented in Table 8. Like the preliminary themes, those in the table formed the basis for Chapter 7, but took on a different form in later stages of analysis where narrative played a more significant role. Thus, they constitute an intermediary phase of analysis, and not the final findings.

**Storying the data.** Again, had this been a purely grounded theory study, analysis would have ended with intermediary themes and side stories would have served as descriptive supports for these eventually concretized themes; however, I still relied on narrative to round out and guide the process, and so I continued the search for *narrative unity* (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). To achieve this, I continued to rearrange themes, recode interview and observation data, reread analytic memos, and redevelop concept maps, to name a few. My goal was to arrive at an understanding of the entire story at hand.

**Final analysis.** Rereading the data led to several rewritings of a storied curriculum, most in a heavily narrative-based format (see Appendix H for examples). I determined that they did not quite serve to answer the research questions and account for crosswise themes, and so I ultimately arrived at a three-part arrangement: a full inductive narrative, themes with unstoried data extracts, and themed short stories. This was decided to be the

ideal representation of findings for responding to the research questions at hand, and so the final stages of analysis proceeded according to this structure.

Table 8

*Initial Table of Grounded Theory Themes*

Short description	Key words	Examples from the data
“Gut”	Gut, “slippery terms”	Intuition, gut feeling, can’t define it, from experience, feeling
Freedom and constraint in teaching	Vision	Jack’s vision, the pillar
	Creativity	Not stock sentences
	Freedom	Do your own thing
	Constraint	Need to follow vision, need to fit into university
Community of teaching and learning	Collaboration Community of learning	Some discussion amongst teachers Students helping each other
	Team	In University A, in department, within ASL program
	In/exclusion	Included or not on team
Power relations and teaching	Ownership (language, learning, teaching)	Hearing feel like they need to follow
	Power relations	“The Deaf person is the boss”

As a final and critical point, in order to enhance quality and coherence, I opted to reinforce this procedure with data and methodological triangulation. Three participants’ data, including one whose interview was fully transcribed, was analyzed according to the first two parts of the process, which relied more heavily on grounded theory with supportive narratives. The fourth participant’s data was analyzed with an emphasis on

narrative. Time triangulation and final member's checks further lent support to the process.

### **In a Nutshell**

This chapter outlined the research processes for the present study by addressing the following points:

- It *set the scene* for the study by introducing the context, the ASL program at University A, and participants, four ASL teachers and myself as researcher-observer. Character sketches of participants are included to give the reader a sense of their individuality.
- The phases of data collection and analysis began with a pilot phase in which I established early contact with teachers and refined research direction. Next, instruments (interview question guide and observation scheme) were modified and then applied one-on-one interviews, classroom observations, and follow-up interviews.
- Analysis was multi-phase, as well. Transcription of signed and spoken data was done in full for one participant and partially for the remaining three. Initial codes developed into themes, while narrative excerpts were built into full narratives of experience. Closing phases looked at the results side by side as the final representation of findings was considered.

In this chapter I detailed the instruments and procedures undertaken in the present study. In Chapter 7, I present the findings of the inquiry alongside a reflection and discussion.

## Chapter 7: Results and Discussion

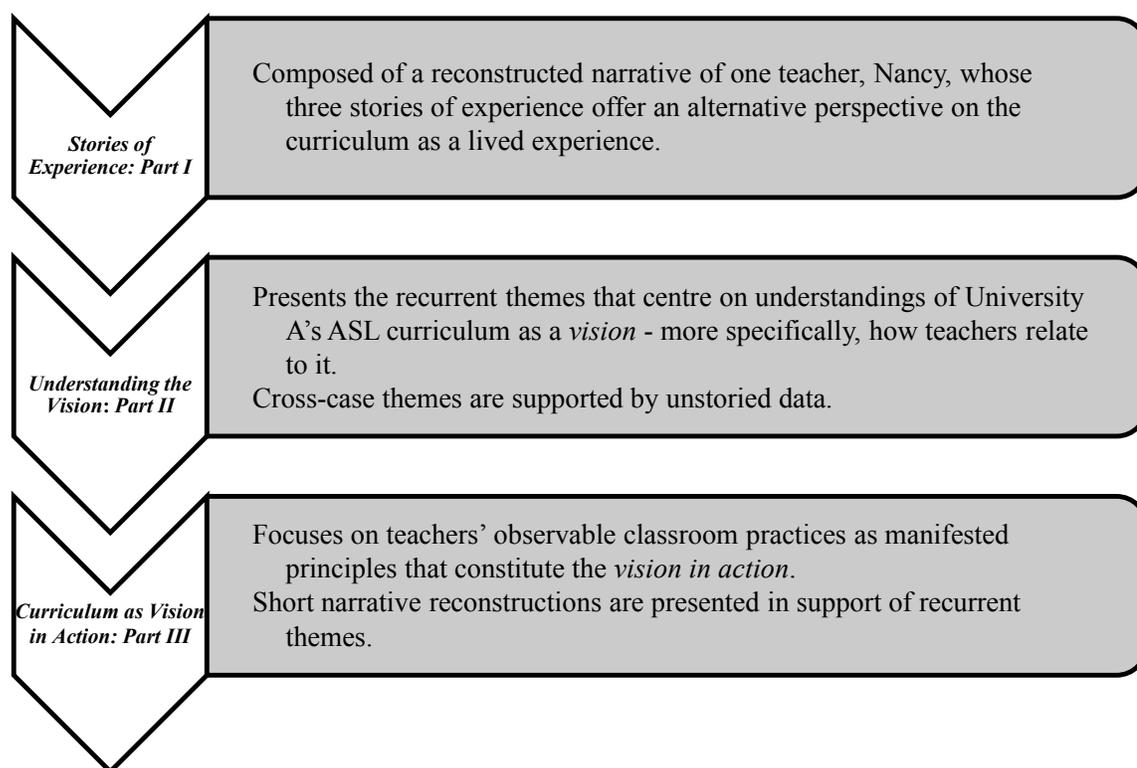
This chapter is my story of teachers' stories, the stories of a curriculum, drawn from a nearly yearlong inquiry. As explained in the previous chapter, the decision-making process for the reconstruction of themes and narratives, and especially their logical representation, was challenging. I sought to present the teachers as the complex stakeholders and curricular-makers they are, while simultaneously reconstructing a coherent image of the program's curriculum through their eyes.

To inform the process, I turned to several model studies (e.g. Hole, 2004; Drew, 2005; Floersch et al., 2010) and an array of readings offering methodological support (e.g. Borg, 2006; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Lieblich et al., 1998). Charmaz (2000) advocates a literary writing style, free of the constraints of traditional scientific representation of findings (as cited in Mills et al., 2006). Similarly, Richardson (2000) supports the writing of results as a learning process in itself and joins Denzin (1997) in calling for alternative "creative" and "evocative" ways of representing research (as cited in Hole, 2004). Eisner (1992) similarly "stressed the need to experiment with 'forms of representation'" (as cited in Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 11).

I applied a combination of approaches to suit this thesis' guiding research questions, which are, to remind the reader, as follows:

1. How do teachers perceive their role in contributing to and shaping the "overall curricular idea" for the program, if any?
2. What are the teacher perceptions of the textbook-free curriculum in its capacity to promote ASL proficiency and awareness of the Deaf community?

To address these two questions and in keeping with my methodological framework, I opted for a mixed presentation of findings and discussion for this chapter. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggest presenting an initial “narrative sketch, something like a character sketch except that it applies to the whole inquiry” (p. 11) to serve as a descriptive overview. The *narrative sketch* is presented in *Figure 4*.



*Figure 4.* Narrative sketch for Chapter 7.

Further, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) recommend *setting the scene* to open any inquiry. I did so previously to introduce the methods of this study and I will do so again to introduce the three parts that follow. The following excerpt from my interview with Oliver provides the most appropriate opening, as it captures several key results of this inquiry:

Nina: Say, then, say then that the magical stork came flying down with a package for you and it was going to bring a textbook resource for you... You open it up, what does it look like? What did the stork bring you?

Oliver: What would it look like? The stork brought me a book that, yeah, that has everything about the way we teach the language...

Nina: By 'we' you mean...?

Oliver: By 'we', the [ ] program. Because, yes, our program is different from other programs. The whole, well, the fact that we don't have a textbook, um, well, the emphasis on gesture, on non-manual communication, on classifiers, all that is really different. The other thing is the, uh, the whole foundation idea, which is a really, God, it's such a slippery word. Um, um, so yeah we'd have to talk about that which would be so difficult. Because what the hell does it mean? Sometimes I know and sometimes I don't... Um, it's a, it's here (INTUITION), that's the problem, it's all right here (INTUITION).

(Oliver, interview)

Oliver voices what I have been attempting to articulate since the beginning: in not following a textbook as per the norm for such programs, University A's ASL program is truly unique and fascinating grounds for exploring how a team of teachers experiences and builds a textbook-free curriculum. In a sense, this excerpt could introduce and conclude this chapter that presents the results of this nearly yearlong exploration of the ASL program through its teachers; however, that would not make for a very complete or exciting chapter and so the rest of this chapter unpacks and discusses the above and more.

### **Stories of Experience: Part I**

The three stories of experience that follow are drawn from the one teacher-participant, Nancy, whose data was analyzed and compiled through an entirely narrative lens. They are spoken in Nancy's own voice, which is, of course, the outcome of my own reconstruction. This is an inductive narrative unaccompanied by a discussion, as it is intended to allow the reader to "enter" into the lived curriculum of a teacher in University A's ASL program and "captur[e] elements otherwise lost to a structural analysis"

(Bleakley, 2005, p. 535). It aims to bring the reader "as close to our living lives as the earth we can pick up and rub between our fingers" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 8).

They unfold, as stories often do, in a roughly chronological manner.

**Then and now.** When I started learning ASL things were different than they are now. It used to be that the teacher would stand up at the front and teach vocabulary. Sign after sign after sign. I knew a lot of signs by the end of that year. For quizzes the teacher would sign something and we'd all scramble to write it down. It would go like this:

The teacher would sign SCHOOL

Everybody would write down "school" - if they knew what it was. And then GO-TO. And we'd write that down. The problem was that by the end of the year even though we had all of this vocabulary nobody could do anything with it. We'd know SCHOOL, or HOME, or we'd know AGE, but we could only put it together in very rudimentary ways. So we could say, AGE ME SIX. And that was about the extent of our sentence building.

Now if I'm trying to teach vocabulary to my students, I try to teach it in a way that they can use it immediately, so I always teach it within a sentence or within a phrase that they can use. The very first day they learn very basic signs, like:

ME WHAT? What am I?

They'll learn teacher. TEACHER

YOU TEACHER?

So I try to model the grammar from the start, even if they don't quite understand what it is yet.

ME TEACHER, ME TEACH WHAT? I TEACH ASL

And then I see their eyes light up and they start chattering to each other, “Oh it means *teach!*” So I keep going.

YOU STUDENTS YOU LEARN? LEARN ASL

By the end of day one they can already start to say, “I’m a student learning ASL.” I try to give it to them in a way that they can start to create things with it right away. There are some things where they’re sort of confused but I’m OK with them being a little confused. They don’t need to catch every single sign. They don’t need to understand everything perfectly. As long as they understand the important ones, which tend to be grammar points. I need to see that they can do that. But as for the rest, I’m OK letting some of it just flow right on by them.

**“Oh yeah? Watch me.”** Going into my second year I was basically told that everything I had learned in first year was wrong and now I was going to struggle. It wasn’t told to me, specifically, it was to everyone who had had the same teacher as me first year, but it was still intimidating. The teacher seemed to think that we wouldn’t be able to learn because of how we learned with first year. I smelled a challenge and I thought, oh yeah? Watch me. I can do this. I can do this very well.

The same thing happened when I started teaching here. I started and I wasn’t given anything, materials, resources, sample plans, nothing. There was always the offer of help if you needed it, but there was no introduction or a general sense of where students are expected to be at the end of the semester. It was just, go, go and do. Go and teach. I sort of had an understanding of what they need to be doing for 2<sup>nd</sup> year and so I reverse engineered that down to a first half credit course. At least I knew what 2<sup>nd</sup> year

looked like – for any new teaching coming in, I can imagine it would be extremely difficult because there's nothing really to go on.

I suppose that's not entirely true: we did have some sample course outlines to look at, but they looked a lot like the schedules we give students at the beginning of the year. They're very vague. They say, introduce new vocabulary, practical activities, movie, midterm, review, introduce new vocabulary, practical activities... That doesn't tell me anything! It tells me there was some vocabulary and some kind of activity. My first year teaching was pretty tough, but I got through it.

**Fitting in.** I have noticed that even just being in my second year, I see that the things I teach and the way I teach have already started to change. I set up my days very similar to the way Jack sets up his. I don't walk in and start teaching right away. I walk in, I greet the students, say hello, and they're at the point where they can understand simple things like, How're you? Or, What did you do on the weekend? Or, if it's on a Friday class, I might ask, what are you planning for the weekend? It's all general chat. And then I say OK WARM-UP, GET-UP MEET, PRACTICE. Sometimes they ask, PRACTICE WHAT? And I tell them, DOESN'T-MATTER, PRACTICE ALL, GO! They do a warm-up for 10 or 15 minutes and then we either do a short review of what they had done last class and then build on it, or if it's something new we go into new vocabulary or new practical activities. I teach, introduce the new material, and then they practice. That'll flip back and forth maybe twice. New material, practice, practice, practice. If I see they're doing well, introduce something else, practice, practice, practice.

That's pretty similar to other teachers' way to doing things. But one thing I do that some of the other teachers don't or that we're told is a bad idea, is I do use voicing in

the classroom. I sign to them with no voice unless I feel it's something explicit information that they *need* to know, like the grading process. I wanted them to know what I expected from them how to test was set up and how the grade was divided between the two sections of the test. I wanted to be clear so they entered the test knowing exactly what was expected. Not knowing exactly how to sign everything, but knowing what my expectations were, knowing what they needed to do. I wanted that to be clear. I know there are some teachers who don't voice at all and I do wonder then do students have questions that, that they're just not getting answers to? And as a learner, that would drive me up the wall if there were things that I wanted to know but that weren't being clearly explained. I choose to voice but I have made a conscious decision to do it.

The funny thing is sometime students come up to ask me questions, but I make sure they know that I won't let them voice to me, they have to sign their questions. If they need to fall back on fingerspelling, that's fine, but it does have to be a silent question. The way I see it, if they continue to the next levels, they might have a Deaf teacher and so they need to be able to sign to them. I need to see, because I know how to sign it, I need to see that they would know how to sign their question. For the student it maybe feels a bit imbalanced, but nobody seems to mind too much. They seem OK with it.

### **Curriculum as *Vision*: Part II**

Having read Nancy's stories of experience, I invite the reader to pause for a moment and reflect on who this teacher is and what she is saying about her teaching and learning experience. I encourage the reader to reread them as needed to envision the curricular landscape prior to proceeding with Parts II and III, which constitute the results

of my own analysis of University A's ASL curriculum, also known as the *vision* and the *vision in action*. Presuming the time is ripe to continue, allow me to open with a quote:

It's good that we're all free to, to do whatever, but that's why it's important for us that we hire people who are team players, who are, who share our vision, and that's what's nice about hiring previous students, because they share our vision. (Oliver, interview)

Oliver's comment acknowledges three important points about University A's ASL program: a) teachers have free rein in what and how they teach, yet b) there is a common vision in the program, and so c) previous students are the preferred hires for teachers, because they are more likely to understand and uphold the vision. Given that three of four teachers in this study match the description of "preferred hire" (i.e. previously students, now teachers), it is no surprise that this concept of *vision* constituted the thickest thread between the participants.

The *vision* is also referred to as a *plan*, *program philosophy*, "*our*" *curriculum*, and "*the way we teach*". It is also referred to as *Jack's vision*. Jack started the ASL program at University A in the early 2000s with one class of beginner students (among the students was Oliver). He is largely responsible for building the program into a four-year minor. He is indisputably identified as the primary guiding beacon for the program – though Oliver, the program coordinator and Jack's "sidekick" (to use Oliver's terms), has since joined Jack as a leading proponent of the vision. Since Jack is identified as the founder of the vision, his voice is not heavily featured in the descriptions herein, although his presence seeps in everywhere the vision is present.

Combined, the following three sections comprise an account of the shared notion of curriculum, i.e. the *vision*, in relation to the teacher-participants of this study.

**The vision as conceptual.** In educational programs, physical (or digital) pedagogical documents such as textbooks can serve several functions: lend coherence to education settings, guide lessons, offer structure, lay out activities and homework, or reinforce a teacher's planning scheme (Ariew, 1989). While its usage is also disputed (ibid), overall, a textbook can serve as a tangible roadmap for learning. In a way, it can testify to past learning to anticipate learning yet to come.

In contrast, the roadmap for University A's ASL program is entirely intangible, completely unwritten, and hazily defined. To clarify, teachers are not communicated a teaching structure for their courses or the program, much less course outlines, objectives, or outcomes in written or any other form. As Rose describes it, new teachers are offered some suggestions for the first classes, but they are not given overarching guidelines, benchmarks, or even sample topics for the course. In Nancy's words, they are simply told, "Go, go and teach!"

On the one hand, this apparent lack of structure can be daunting. It offers little frame of reference, which is especially challenging for incoming teachers. To assist novice teachers in the planning and decision-making process, there is the option to seek advice from the coordinators or colleagues. It is a teacher's responsibility to seek out such contact. It is also left to a teacher's own initiative to meet and share materials and resources with more experienced teachers, as Rose was sure to do when she began her teaching. She spoke of sharing ideas for activities and modifications, advice for classroom management, as well as exchanging sample lesson plans with another teacher. Ultimately, advice and materials are the "teaching trails" of other teachers and constitute

a normal procedure in a community of practice – they do not constitute a program’s intended curriculum.

An unwritten vision can also cause disruptions to the coherence of a multi-level program. Oliver the following thoughts on having more explicit guidance as a teacher of second year students who arrive with a hodge-podge of signing skill levels:

At least it [a textbook] would give me an idea of what, uh, of what’s expected of me in the program... of the kind of student I’m supposed to produce, um, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I mean, [Jack] already produces, uh, goals for the first 6 classes or so that he gives to new teachers so they have an idea of what they’re supposed to do. I think it’s helps them. I used it this summer because I don’t teach first year often, so it does help. It keeps you sort of, uh, it keeps you it keeps you in line. The other thing is I’m motivated, I’m motivated to have, to have everybody turn out the same because I teach them the next year, right? So I get all those students from different... yeah, I get those students from all different classes and then some of them know... what came up yesterday, today, that they didn’t know? Oh! The sign... no, was it that? Geez. What sign came up today that they didn’t even know? Anyway. There was a sign I signed this morning and nobody knew it and it was a basic sign. It was like, it was like one of the first signs they learn. And nobody knew it. It was like what the, what’s going on? Who’s your teacher? So yeah so I think following a sort of plan like that makes sense.

(Oliver, interview)

Oliver notes that the inconsistency of student abilities when they reach the second level is frustrating and leaves him with the predicament of whether to teach down to those students or to continue at the level he deems appropriate for the course. Rose, being a teacher of early beginner students only, did not mention this inconsistency. Several teachers spoke of drawing on outside references such as *ASL for Dummies* for more explicit guidance and a stable source of ideas than their conceptual curriculum provides. I have provided a list of common ASL materials in Appendix A.

On the other hand, the freedom an open-ended curriculum allows can be liberating and offer a wealth of opportunities for growth. As Oliver notes above, teachers

are free to teach as they see fit. Having autonomy has allowed him to experiment with teaching strategies, to “come into his own” as a teacher, and to enjoy teaching:

In a classroom you’ll get more of that [openness]. I’m quite playful. But no, I’ve had to be more, uh, I’ve had to own that I’m playful and I make jokes and ASL is, it’s really fun. It took me a long time to realize that it’s not ASL necessarily ASL that’s fun, it’s how you offer it. So I have to make it fun, it’s not just fun on its own. I can make it terrible if I want to. Yeah. So my classes now are much more, they’re pretty informal. They’re pretty informal and I like it that way. I hate it when they have to be super like *nuh*<sup>30</sup>, and so they’re not.

(Oliver, interview)

At this point, the question must be raised: if the curriculum, the so-called *vision*, is completely unwritten, it is not made explicit to new or experienced teachers, it cannot be clearly articulated, and so teachers effectively teach as they please, does the vision exist? Without exception, University A’s teachers maintain that there is indeed a plan of action that they recognize as a curriculum and that they strive to uphold. Rose captures the essence of this apparent contradiction:

We’re making it up as we go, kind of. Not to be, not in a haphazard way – there’s definitely foundation there and there’s a reason why we teach what we teach.

(Rose, interview)

Although teachers forge their own path, design their own lessons, and build their own structure all without overt restrictions or regulation, there is nonetheless a method to the madness, so to speak. Note that Part III is an attempt at clarifying said method by examining said madness.

**The vision as unifying.** Returning to Rose’s comment, “there’s a reason why we teach what we teach”, there is clear indication that there exists a shared notion about what and how teachers teach. At the time of this study, Rose was the newest addition to the

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<sup>30</sup> I interpreted *nuh* as meaning “structured” or “formal”, based on gesture and facial expression.

teaching team and yet within months of beginning her contract she was using the same inclusive language to describe the way “what we teach” that Oliver uses, a teacher for several years:

I mean our sort of ASL is, um, well it’s supposed to be “pure ASL” and then what you actually get in the community is Pidgin Signed English [...]. So we’re not teaching that front line stuff, right? We’re teaching that, the pure form.

(Oliver, interview)

There is the sense of a unifying plan for the program, even with the lack of physical documentation of its components. Jack also speaks of wanting to hire “home grown” teachers (i.e. previous students of the program) because they understand what an outsider would not: the way “we” (i.e. University A’s ASL teacher-participants) do things here. And so, although teachers speak about neither the tenets of the *vision*, there is nonetheless a definite understanding among the participating teachers that they are part of a larger curricular idea.

**The vision as expectation.** A caveat—is the *vision* freedom at the cost of freedom?

Oliver’s comment, below, is telling:

I mean, because there is this pressure, right? I do have to follow the curriculum, the, the sort of [Jack’s] vision of the program, and even though I’m the coordinator and now, I uh, and I’m full time and I have the university gives me complete freedom to teach what I want to teach, I still feel an allegiance to [Jack’s] vision of the program and I want to teach the way that he, that he wants his students to learn.

(Oliver, interview)

Oliver summarizes the points mentioned thus far: the vision is a shared notion of curriculum that Jack has built and that teachers who were previously students understand and uphold. Oliver also introduces the present point: teachers are expected to “fit in” the vision. This was undoubtedly a conflicting storyline, as teachers spoke of the freedom to

teach what and how they want, and yet simultaneously they felt obliged to follow a certain unspoken plan, for better or for worse. In the early stages of teaching, Rose expressed:

And for me, because I'm new, I try to fit with [Jack and Oliver]'s vision of the program. So I look to them.

(Rose, interview)

Her trying to integrate tells of both her recognition that there is a certain expectation for the program and that she needs to match it. She does not indicate *why* she must integrate nor does she mention what might be at risk by not making such attempts.

Oliver hints at what “fitting in” might mean when he speaks of two previous instructors who didn't “fit the plan” as a result of being “too structured” which contradicted the vision established by Jack, who “flies by the seat of his pants”. Since the next section explains how spontaneity and creativity may be principles that form part of the vision's expectations, these particular characteristics will not be elaborated here.

Oliver also suggests that as a previous student he has a more informed perspective on the vision than a newcomer and therefore has a perspective on the newcomers' integration that they also might not have access to:

But they [two previous instructors] didn't fit the program that well, at the time... I knew what was expected of them. Things that I had seen first year, year after year... I had seen a lot of first years at the time, and I knew those students were not coming out the same way as [Jack's] were.

(Oliver, interview)

At this point in Oliver's interview, I requested clarification on this apparent contradiction: how could it be that teachers could do what they wanted, but only if it fit a plan that was not explicitly defined, prescribed, or enforced? The response was again that

“home grown” teachers are preferred because it ensures more uniform understanding of implicit vision values. Otherwise put:

Yeah, so it basically we, we have freedom in how we deliver the material as long as the material fits the plan. I think. That’s my interpretation of it.

(Oliver, interview)

In planning for her first courses, Rose did exactly that. She began by searching her memory and previous class notes to recall what she learned during her own ASL studies and then applied it to her new teaching tasks. Additionally, Rose reached out to her more experienced colleagues for assistance in lesson planning to get ideas that might help her achieve the teaching that she feels is expected of her. During our follow-up interview she showed me an activity handout and described how she had procured and modified it from another teacher. This is also evident in Nancy’s story (Part I), though it happened less frequently in Jack and Oliver’s accounts, perhaps for the reason that their teaching store is better stocked from more years of experience.

As a final and critical point, Oliver observes that not only are there institutional strings guiding their program’s pedagogy, but sociocultural strings, as well.

They [teacher who are previous students] probably also don’t feel like they have any ownership over the language and feel like they have to follow a certain, uh, vision. Which they do. [...] But so do I because I’m also hearing. [...] So we’re kind of at [Jack’s] mercy in a way (laugh). [...] Basically, you know, [Jack’s] like, oh no [Oliver’s] the boss, but yeah, you’re the Deaf person so nope. So yeah. We have, uh, we have “freedom” but we don’t have much freedom I think.

(Oliver, interview)

Since Jack is Deaf and Jack founded the program, Jack is seen as the “real” boss. This sense filtered through all participants’ words to different degrees, highlighted primarily in the naming of the vision as Jack’s, and the underlying current that there is a certain unspoken obligation to teach “real” ASL, not an English-based variation – a principle

seen in Part III. It can be supposed that this is a result of recognition of Deaf-Hearing relations and questions of language ownership, both of which Hearing teachers cannot escape if they are working alongside Deaf teachers.

And so this *vision*, the curriculum of the ASL program, exists according to its teachers despite the fact that teachers were largely unable to articulate the precise principles and practical components of the vision in its entirety. However, they alluded to pieces of the puzzle (e.g. Oliver's comment that structured teachers did not fit in) that I have attempted to match with elements drawn from classroom observation to form a more complete picture in Part III.

**Discussing "Curriculum as Vision".** In this textbook-free curriculum, teachers are building on a so-called *vision*, a "shared curricular idea" (Smith, 1988). It is a series of practices and principles that was passed along in large part during undergraduate studies in the same program, but also through "murmurings" amongst the teachers that encourage (with more or less force) adherence to certain principles that are theorized to promote ASL acquisition and awareness of Deaf cultural norms. Interestingly, much of teachers' talk centers on their *relationship* with "Jack's vision", on elements they felt were constraining or liberating, and focuses less on what it actually involves. This constituted a certain narrative of an *implied* curriculum.

In terms of materials, the teachers find books and other resources on their own, or look to other teachers and adapt them to suit the demands of their own situations, or they bypass most materials in favour of teaching based on INTUITION. I observed that the two novice teachers, Rose and Nancy, rely primarily on the first and second, while more Oliver and Jack, the more experienced teachers, seem to use all three. This is

unsurprising given that more experienced teachers presumably have a larger wealth of past experiences to draw from, on top of the fact that the more experienced teachers are identified as the *vision*'s founders and so may feel additionally free to adapt their teaching as desired.

What's more, the sharing of resources between teachers seemed to further reinforce the idea that the teachers are building a *shared* curriculum in which incoming teachers maintain an awareness of what current teachers are doing. Rose made sure to visit other teachers to see how she might align her teaching with theirs; Nancy underwent a "working backwards process" in order to match (her impression and recollection of) where the next teacher would pick up; Jack and Oliver maintain that they are open to meeting with new teachers to offer advice and recommend activities and resources. Thus the materials not only serve as actual teaching aids in the classroom, but also as an opportunity to reinforce coherence within the program.

In a sense, in University A's curriculum the teachers *are* the textbooks in that they are students' and their own resource for determining the scope and sequence of the course. However, they differ from a textbook in one major way (besides to obvious that teachers are not made a paper product): teachers have personal practical knowledge landscapes in addition to full freedom to adapt and shift according to the demands of present classroom situations. A textbook is by nature a static resource book. Of course its application is generally quite dynamic, but in itself it does not respond to the constant shifts in classroom activity. At University A, even the vision is dynamic and ever changing in response to lived successes and failures. Important to note is that the teachers

in this study are those who went through the program themselves, making it impossible to presume the same reality exists for the other teachers of the program.

### **Curriculum as *Vision in Action*: Part III**

The above is an assembled account of the *vision* drawn based on teachers' expressed and implied thoughts and beliefs. Together their statements can be said to answer the first research question about a "shared curricular idea" (Smith, 1988). It does not, however, address the second question, "What are the teacher perceptions of the textbook-free curriculum in its capacity to promote ASL proficiency and awareness of the Deaf community?" Teachers are decision-making beings (Calderhead, 1996), and so this section explores action as the lived curriculum, or the *vision in action*. This is an extension of the above and situates the teachers, and by extension the vision, more overtly in the contexts in which they experience curriculum. The stories will be discussed insofar as how classroom experiences demonstrate principles of the *vision in action*.

**Stories from the classroom.** While Part I provided a full narrative of Nancy's lived curricular experiences, what follows is a series of short, reconstructed stories spoken in my observer "I" voice about ASL classroom experiences as they relate to professed and suggested principle of the vision. In short this is capturing what Rose called, the way "we teach what we teach".

#### ***Rose:***

She starts class the same way as the other teachers I have seen: after a quick welcome, students are instructed to stand and go through their routine open practice session. Quietly, Rose writes the agenda for the day: "new stuff" and "game 😊".

Clap. She motions for the student to copy as she signs the “new stuff”, FOR-FOR.  
STUDY FOR-FOR? EXAM.

(What are you studying for? An exam.)

She gives two more examples and asks if the students understand FOR-FOR. Not so much, it seems, and so she continues.

LIBRARY FOR-FOR?

(What is the library for?)

Several students answer: Study. Exams. Books. Sleep.

BOOKS WHAT? LEND, BORROW

(What do you do with books [at the library]? [The library] lends books, you borrow books [from the library].)

She breaks down the handshapes and movements for “lend” and “borrow” and then writes them on the board. She does the same for “keep” and continues with her introduction of FOR-FOR.

GYM FOR-FOR? RUN

(What is the gym for? It’s for running.)

CAFÉ FOR-FOR? COFFEE TEA

(What is a café for? It’s for coffee and tea.)

Rose continues this process for I-S-S-O (International Student Services Office), POST OFFICE, and SCHOOL. She ends with DOOR, FOR-FOR (for entering in room) and WINDOW-FOR-FOR (for staring out and enjoying the sun in the morning when you’re tired).

Clap. She slowly repeats all of the signs she has written and then erases the board. Clap. The lesson on FOR-FOR is over. Rose draws a “+” to “-” scale on the board and moves on to setting up the next topic about likes and dislikes to review food and sports vocabulary. Clap.

***Oliver:***

PRACTICE, I WRITE TOPICS, YOU-ALL PRACTICE, UNDERSTAND?

(It’s time to practice. I’ll write topics on the board and you practice them. Do you understand?)

Oliver had set up the lesson about comparisons beginning with winter and summer and incorporating previous weather and sports vocabulary. He opens the floor for students to practice “summer vs. winter” in groups. They turn to their neighbours and jump right on task. Oliver wanders from group to group, answering questions and correcting errors in movement. After five minutes or so, he walks to the board and writes “email vs. letters” under “summer vs. winter”. No clap, no wave, no pointing at the board – yet the students move seamlessly to practicing this new topic as if on cue.

One group asks Oliver if there is a sign for “but”. He replies that there is no sign for it and to rely on facial expression and pausing instead. Satisfied, the students carry on. After a time, Oliver silently changes the topic to “cats vs. dogs”. I slide out of the room after noting that once again all of the students had shifted their focus to cats and dogs and some were already in heated debate.

***Jack:***

The lesson that day began with a discussion of the recent holiday REMEMBER DAY, or RED FLOWER DAY. The students’ movement was off the mark: they were

signing “one person died three times” instead of “graves in a line”. It seemed they could not quite grasp the spatial positioning. Jack stopped them all and told them to watch carefully as he showed them what they signed and then what should have been signed.

“What was different?” He asked.

“You can figure out what this means now, can’t you?”

He sent them on their way to continue practicing in groups. He may have noticed some students hesitating or “freezing up” because of what followed next:

3 WEEKS AGO HOLIDAY KNOW? SCHOOL CLOSED

(Three weeks ago, what holiday was it? The school was closed)

No response.

TURKEY UNDERSTAND?

(Turkey. Now do you understand [which holiday it was]?)

Still, no response. Jack writes “Thanksgiving” on the board.

“If you don’t know the sign for something, why should you freeze? You should continue the conversation... what do we do? Watch.”

He turns to the class assistant.

KNOW DEC-25?

(You know [the holiday on] December 25?)

He draws a Christmas tree in the air in front of him. She immediately signs, “I get it - Christmas!” Jack turns to the students. “Now we both know “Christmas” without needing the sign for it and it still ends with both of us understanding the conversation.”

He does the same thing for elevator. “Do you know the sign for elevator? No? Why would you avoid a conversation about it just because you don’t know the sign for it?”

He instructs them to get back to practicing, watching closely from the front.

**Discussing the Vision in Action in “Stories from the Classroom”.** Since I was familiar with ASL classrooms prior to this study, I had a sense of which observable pedagogical elements may appear in the classrooms I visited. I had anticipated such things as the No Voicing rule, written words on the board, and abundant pair or group practice. I witnessed these and many more. Of course, I was not interested in identifying every possible observed action; rather, this discussion matches observed action with teachers’ stated or implied notions about ASL teaching, which can be considered shared and part of the vision.

Although teachers do not clearly state that the *vision* includes this or that practice or principle, the above stories collectively represent the *vision in action*. I have conceptualized the *vision in action* as the relationship between elements of observable practice and accompanying principles, the latter which illustrate some facet vision’s philosophical underpinning. For example, “No voicing in the classroom”, a practical element apparently encouraged at University A, may demonstrate the principles of “encouraging maximum contact hours with ASL” (i.e. by not disrupting an ASL-only environment with English) but also “establish and respect Deaf environment” (i.e. by signing, not speaking). In the other direction, although the principles appeared to be largely collective, some are enacted in a multitude of ways. For example, “Create

enjoyable and relaxed learning environment” may be lived out through games in the classroom, teacher joking during a lesson, or a calm teacher demeanor, to name a few. To simplify these findings, I present a selection of principles and practices in Table 9. Teachers vary in how much and to what extent they demonstrate the listed practices and associated principles, but all were observed or talked about to an extent that suggests that these may well form part of a shared notion of a practical curriculum, the *vision in action*. I must note that this list is far from exhaustive and offers but a snapshot in one time of one place.

To discuss the principles I will frame them in relation to the two capacities mentioned in the second research question: “What are the teacher perceptions of the textbook-free curriculum in its capacity to promote ASL proficiency and awareness of the Deaf community?” The principles from Table 9 fall into one or both perceived capacities of University A’s ASL curriculum, as shown in *Figure 5*. Insofar as ASL proficiency goes, without wading into the foreign (and deep) waters of second language acquisition (SLA) literature, let it be said that University A’s program, despite not having a fixed, written program of study, has a method to the madness as it seeks to promote ASL acquisition. Culturally speaking, it also seeks to promote awareness implicitly (i.e. through classroom procedures such as No Voicing) and explicitly (e.g. Deaf Culture lecture).

Based on my interpretation, the program’s vision hinges on three basic tenets that can be summarized as follows:

1. Promote a relaxed and enjoyable learning environment

2. Stimulate, challenge, and enlighten students about ASL, Deaf culture, and how to communicate non-verbally
3. Think outside the box – use INTUITION in the classroom

My observations indicate that teachers seem to support these ideas, although again it is unclear as to how they sensed the need or how they were inspired to do so. Nonetheless, the teachers seem content to adapt these tenets by putting them into practice in ways that suit their individual teaching approach. For example, selective error correction is a repeat concept, but each teacher is selective in his or her own way. Rose, Nancy, and Oliver made several mentions of needing to “do what they have to do to make it work”.

Table 9

*Classroom Practices and Associated Principles of the Vision.*

Observable Practice	Example	Implied Principle
No textbook in the classroom	e.g. Rose, Oliver, Jack	Maximize contact hours with ASL (i.e. by not relying on English) Reproduce authentic signing space (i.e. continuous eye contact, not eyes on book) Be creative, adaptive, and natural in presentation (i.e. do not get caught up following books to the letter – invent! Create!)
No voicing in the classroom (teacher and students)	e.g. Rose, Oliver	Maximize contact hours with ASL (Rose: “I want them to think in ASL”) Establish and respect Deaf environment Prepare students for future Deaf interactions
Voicing in the classroom (teacher)	e.g. Rose and Oliver writing on board, Jack voicing	Make necessary information accessible Keep voicing to minimum, use “acting” or drawing
Emphasis on student practice time	e.g. Rose, Oliver, Jack	Increase exposure to different ways of signing Maximize contact hours with ASL Learn by experience Allow students to experiment and get creative

Incorporation of humour and games	e.g. Rose “☺”, Oliver “I make it fun”	Create enjoyable and relaxed learning environment “Don’t take it too seriously”
Plenty of pair or group work	e.g. Rose, Oliver, Jack	Provide authentic signing situations (i.e. people rarely sign to themselves only) Encourage problem-solving tactics (e.g. gesture, “acting”) to achieve communicative purpose Present opportunity to help each other and share knowledge Let the students learn from each other
Students ask teacher questions	e.g. Oliver	Support curiosity about ASL and Deaf culture Encourage comfortable learning environment
Teacher asks students questions	e.g. Rose, Jack	Provide authentic signing situations Prioritize student comprehension Maximize student involvement
Relevant topic selection	e.g. Rose “library, gym...”, Oliver “winter-summer”, Jack “holidays”	Encourage personal connection to topic (i.e. students remember more if topics are relevant) Maintain less formality, more adaptability to demands of current situation
Selective error correction	e.g. Oliver, Jack	Correct as needed for intelligibility Encourage “babbling” in early stages, precision only at later stages Correction according to learning phase (e.g. 1 <sup>st</sup> years master <i>movement</i> , <i>handshape</i> is later)
“Figure it out”	e.g. Jack - Thanksgiving, Christmas, elevator	Develop creativity, problem-solving, resourcefulness, intuition Reduce barriers to communication with Deaf or more advanced signers Improve visual strength/skill

In terms of promoting awareness of Deaf culture in the classroom, the teachers generally try to make it a Deaf-friendly environment with No Voicing policies and behaviours such as waving to get students’ attention. This is not only to create a learning context more conducive to language acquisition (i.e. by being immersive), but also to respect that there are Deaf teachers in the program and it is likely that students continuing will at some point come into contact with one of them. Also, encouraging students to

“figure it out” when faced with signs they do not understand further is a way to reduce barriers to interacting with the Deaf community. While this is debatably beneficial<sup>31</sup>, it certainly reduces the “foreignness” of this linguistic community. As Rose said: establishing and maintaining these behaviours sets a precedent for following Deaf interactions. All in all, these actions and others suggest that the program’s view on Deafness is aligned with my own, stated in Chapters 1 and 2 – Deaf culture exists as different from Hearing culture, and ASL is the Deaf community’s primary mode of communication.

Numerous principles are considered effective in both promoting ASL fluency as well as increasing knowledge of the Deaf community and its culture. For example, “Support curiosity about ASL and Deaf culture” serves to encourage independent and invested learning, arguably a tactic to improve language skills, as well as interaction with members of the Deaf community, which may reduce stigma, misconceptions, and miscommunication.

To this end, it is difficult to develop a clear sense of the extent to which the Hearing teachers (three of four in this study) are familiar with Deaf cultural norms. Is it possible they are familiar only with the vision’s idea of Deafness? Are they aware of their local Deaf community’s ways? These are questions that arose from the findings, but alas form part of a much larger investigation to be conducted at another time.

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<sup>31</sup> It should not be assumed, either, that all Deaf people necessarily want more interaction with Hearing people, especially when the latter are students seeking Deaf signers to act as free ASL “tutors”.

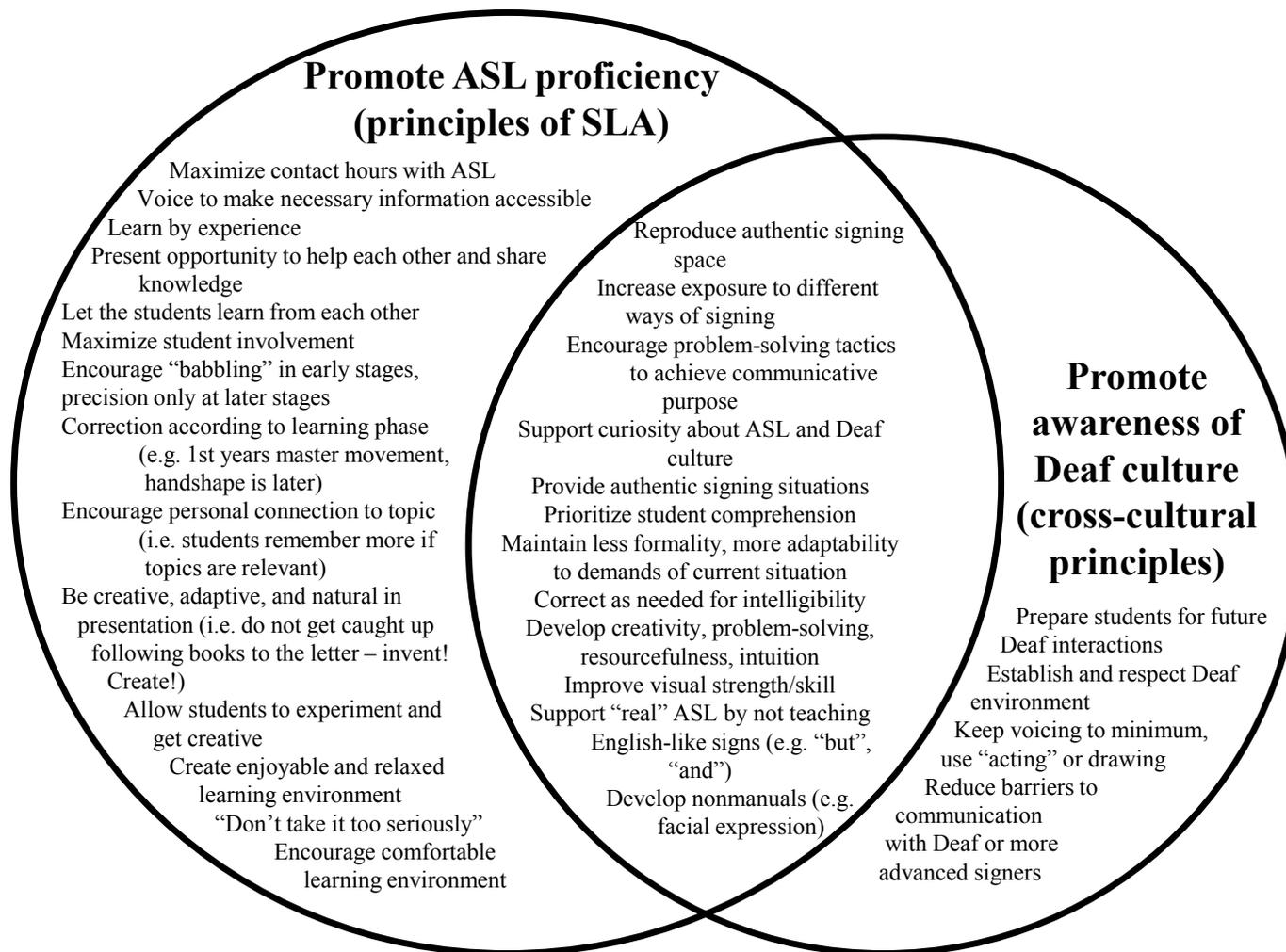


Figure 5. Relating the vision's principles to the research questions

As an important final point, I came to see that the application of the principles was occasionally difficult for a reason beyond pedagogical philosophy. Teachers report such issues as small classrooms, which were problematic because they restrict the movement of students who are asked to mingle during practice. Also, ASL is immensely popular with over 1250 students enrolled in 2013-2014. This means that class sizes had up to 42 students in first year classes, and so the teachers taught with more than one first-year class had up to 84 video tests to watch, grade, and give feedback. I was told repeatedly how much work it is to teach so many students, especially in No Voicing classrooms where merely maintaining line of sight with the majority of students is challenging, let alone teaching effectively.

### **Overview of Results**

In providing one teacher-participant's narrative of experience, Part I invited the reader to enter into University A's ASL curriculum and get a sense of who and what are involved. In summarizing and discussing thematic findings, Parts II and III pulled out recurrent themes and observable actions associated with (articulated or implicit) principles of the *vision*. Together they form a story of the lived curriculum – intact, with flow, real-life examples and reflections. There were repeated themes throughout: there is a vision that unites the teachers, binds them, gives them freedom and constraint in their teaching. According to the teachers, there are “things we do” that serve to promote ASL proficiency and awareness of Deaf culture, “things we do” in class, and “things we do” behind the scenes.

## Reflection on Results

The findings provoke many questions that were beyond the immediate scope of this study, but nonetheless constitute a valuable reflective extension of the above discussion. To begin, it was noted that the Hearing teachers in this study were aware that they were operating, to quote Oliver, “at Jack’s mercy” – as in, at the mercy of the Deaf-dominant environment. Quinto-Pozos (2011) points out that in ASL/ASL classrooms Deaf-Hearing relations is opposite of what is experienced in daily life. As in, in daily life, the both communities operate within a Hearing, speaking world; in the ASL/ASL classroom the dynamics shift to a Deaf, signing environment. This represents a major shift in social dynamics, which is an important step in being able to explain the uniqueness of ASL instruction (ibid, p. 152).

In the context of University A, this brings us back to the question of the role and position of the Hearing teachers in relation to their Deaf colleagues. Questions surrounding Deaf-Hearing relations in ASL/ASL teaching environments include:

What can be learned about instructors of ASL, about their position with respect to the larger Deaf community, and about how Deaf and non-Deaf ideologies have affected the way ASL is commonly taught? What are the specific effects on the teaching of ASL that come from cultural (i.e., Deaf culture) influences? (Quinto-Pozos, 2011, p. 152)

This is a rich area for further research, particularly in how it could inform second language acquisition (SLA) research, which is largely unaware of the “intricacies of Deaf Culture” (ibid, p. 152).

While Quinto-Pozos (2011) discusses the socio-cultural context of the ASL classroom, I remain intrigued by the similar cultural discussions of Yoshimoto (2008) and Kramsch (1993, 1995) about “third spaces” in language learning. Yoshimoto (2008) writes autobiographically about the cultural “in-between” experienced in her own

language-learning journey, while Kramsch (1993, 1995) speaks of “making a home” in a third culture that lies between one’s own and that of the culture associated with the language we study. I must question how this applies in relation to University A’s Hearing teachers of ASL and their notion of cultural belonging and morphing identity as they shift back and forth between the Hearing and Deaf cultures. In this study, most teachers were Hearing and underwent ASL studies in a predominantly Deaf-taught program – surely the impact of entering a Deaf-dominant teaching sphere is a phenomenon of interest. How do Hearing teachers adapt to a Deaf-dominant environment? And how do Deaf teachers integrate into the greater Hearing institution? Do Hearing teachers adopt Deaf cultural norms as part of a bicultural teaching team, and vice versa? Do they adopt their teaching norms?

An additional series of queries surround cross-cultural tensions: is each culture accepting of the other’s place in University A’s program? For example, are there tensions (whether within this program, others, or the wider Deaf community) when a Hearing person is hired to teach ASL over a Deaf person? Questions of language ownership and language contact are particularly interesting and could be developed more fully.

In terms of pedagogy, although the focus of the present thesis is only peripherally on teaching and textbooks (or rather, lack thereof) there is general agreement that “there have been relatively few empirical studies conducted on how teachers use textbooks and the extent to which their teaching is influenced by textbooks” (Fox, 2012). This brings us back to Fox’s (2007) note about knowing which of the several curricula (e.g. written, enacted, etc.) is being addressed in curricular conversations. The textbook constitutes one curriculum (*written*), but “there remains a clear need for empirical study of the use of

textbooks in teaching” (Fox, 2012) in order to see the relationship this and the experienced, or *enacted*, curriculum.

In a similar vein, the results discuss how the vision promotes ASL acquisition through such practices as voicing and writing in English. These particular practices lead to questions about the linguistic and modality differences between signed and spoken languages can be bridged for more effective pedagogies (Quinto-Pozos, 2011). The potential of video and other digital technologies to facilitate his bridging is also a valuable area yet to be explored.

### **In a Nutshell**

Chapter 7 told the story of the results of this inquiry and offered a reflective on the findings and directions for future study. In summary:

- First, Nancy’s stories of experience *set the scene* by inviting the reader to enter into the curricular context of ASL at University A. Next are themes and themed short stories drawn from the other three teacher-participants. Together they paint a picture of the whole story.
- The findings suggest that, yes, the teachers in this study do share a common curricular idea that binds the program and guides their decision-making processes. It also appears that this shared curriculum, though unwritten, is enacted according to various principles that are perceived to promote ASL proficiency and awareness of Deaf culture.
- Throughout the study, a number of additional questions and reflections emerged. These include further cross-cultural, SLA, and pedagogical considerations.

Having presented the results of this inquiry and discussed them in relation to the research questions in Chapter 7, Chapter 8 closes this thesis with limitations and a summary of future directions for this work.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

At last the time has come to bring this story to a close. Without going into excessive depth, the thesis thus far can be summarized as follows: the first chapters pointed to questions and gaps this study attempts to address; the next chapters introduced the theory, previous literature, and combined methods that drive this study; and finally, the previous chapter responded to the research questions by presenting the results of this inquiry with an inductive narrative, recurrent themes, and observable actions that together paint a picture of University A's *vision*.

Methodologically, this thesis was neither entirely straightforward nor conventional and yet, in its own way, came to address the research questions set out at the beginning. The first research question was posed as follows: How do teachers perceive their role in contributing to and shaping the “overall curricular idea” for the program, if any? In response, the previous chapter tells the story of the teacher-participants perceiving themselves to be part of a bigger curricular vision – one that they also feel bound to follow. This vision is claimed to be neither written nor otherwise clearly elucidated; rather, it is implicit and, for three of the teachers, perhaps instilled during the time of their ASL studies in the same program.

For the most part, the principles of said vision were not fully articulated during interviews or conversation; instead, they further revealed themselves through the curricular experiences that I observed. These responded to the second research question: What are the teacher perceptions of the textbook-free curriculum at University A in its capacity to promote ASL proficiency and awareness of the Deaf community? The findings suggest that the teacher-participants enact a common curriculum guided by a

shared perception of the vision's ability to promote both of these. For example, the teachers are united in striving for students to develop curiosity about ASL and Deaf culture – and yet how they accomplish it varies according to the teacher.

In the end, embarking on this journey has been a fascinating and enlightening experience. Fox (2001) echoes this feeling:

I would compare undertaking [qualitative research]... to walking through a tropical rainforest surrounded by layers of lush green plants and cascading flowers: the air vibrant with butterflies, the ground teeming with beetles [sic], spiders and ants. Each attracted my attention. Each contributed to a thickly narrative experience. (p. 279)

In a way this is the most advantageous position of all – neck-deep in the mud and muck that is your site of inquiry, at eye-level with the matters at hand. However, this position brings with it a limitation also mentioned in Fox (ibid): “If we only examine the experience... from a qualitative perspective, we can never gain a sense of the shape as a whole” (p. 279). Indeed, my vantage point is deep within the small pool –more a pond than a pool- that is this study. I cannot claim to know what is beyond this pond, let alone the complex network of ponds.

Another limitation is the emphasis in this thesis on the ‘textbook’. I did not consider the role of video materials in sign language teaching and learning. The increased use of video (and other digital technologies) is an important and growing area in ASL teaching.

Furthermore, I had a small group of participants who are, arguably, a self-selecting set of reflective teachers interested in ASL/ASL research. Three of four teachers were Hearing and completed both a minor in ASL with Jack at University A, as well as a Master's degree in applied language studies. This is reason to assert that this is not a representative sample of ASL teachers at large or within the program. As a result of this,

there may be vital connections that were left unexplored, such as the effect of Deaf-Hearing relations or age and gender on curriculum development, perspectives on curriculum, and professional relationships. Neither can it be claimed that the *vision* is a concept shared by those outside the participants of the study; thus a comparison of the effects of being a previous student versus an “outsider” is another area left untouched.

As a last limitation, while I was neck-deep in this process of discovery I read several “conversations” between experts in narrative inquiry and they all seemed to agree:

Maybe very young people are not highly equipped with the life experience to be able to do the kind of research that good narrative scholars are doing which really requires maturity and experience and sensitivity to people and to one’s self, which takes years to develop. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 642)

A self-declared “very young person”, I kept this in mind throughout the study and will continue to contemplate my position and future in narrative research.

With regards to narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) as a method and its combination with constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) in this study, there is potential for future applications of this combination. The two have not frequently been combined elsewhere, and never to the best of my knowledge in studies of ASL teaching. They are methodologically compatible and where one method is deficient the other excels, making this combination an interesting methodological direction to explore. It would be interesting to pair the methods applied throughout herein at select stages rather than attempt to balance them throughout.

I am also left pondering the countless possibilities for the combination to seep into the presentation of a study, more specifically, since both methods support a presentation that deviates from the standard IMRD (Introduction-Methods-Results-

Discussion) structure. A radically revised structure could potentially ease the interpretation of complex narrative (or narratively inspired) research and perhaps be made more inviting to practitioners who find the standard presentation format inaccessible.

In terms of future directions in the area of ASL/ASL, this study yielded results that give rise to many new directions for research. Throughout the previous chapters I have hinted at several of these directions, and so to avoid excessive repetition, I present these four key future directions:

1. **Conduct a content analysis and assess the practical efficiency of existing ASL curricula.** There are a great many materials available both in print and digital (including video) format and yet they have not been adequately revised and assessed in terms of their capacity to promote ASL proficiency and awareness of Deaf culture.
2. **Prioritize bottom-up ASL/ASL classroom research.** Given the sociocultural and linguistic complexities of ASL, it may be beneficial to keep empirical investigation relatively “grassroots”, i.e. bottom-up, in order to minimize power distances. For example, Tanner (forthcoming) is investigating the idea of benchmarking in ASL/ASL teaching based on teacher perceptions with the intention of determining how this may inform a standardized assessment structure. This line of research could certainly be a useful foundation for pedagogical “next steps”, both at University A as well as elsewhere.
3. **Ensure the accessibility of ASL/ASL related research to ASL teachers.** This might mean providing pedagogical materials and relevant empirical research documents in an ASL-friendly formats such as video or webcast; implementing principles of universal design –or at least guaranteeing the availability of ASL interpreters- at

conferences or workshops related to language pedagogy and SLA to encourage native signers' participation<sup>32</sup>; and making strategic decisions about the administration and integration of ASL programs in institutions (e.g. hiring program administrators who are familiar with principles of language pedagogy as well as the values of the Deaf community). This point could be extended in the other direction, too, where ASL programs in higher education institutions could be positioned so that other disciplines such as Applied Linguistics could have access to the wealth of opportunities for research in sign language acquisition, cross-cultural interactions, ASL classroom practices, among others.

4. **Build a dedicated Canadian ASL/ASL teachers' association.** Such an organization could help with the above point and would (ideally) allow for more efficient flow of pedagogically relevant information and developments, from researchers and administrators to practitioners and students.

In closing, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) note, at the end of an inquiry the narrative researcher may find it difficult to turn away - it is, after all, a consuming form of inquiry that encourages researcher involvement at every stage. I feel that I have emerged from the inquiry full of energy, insight, and, of course, knowing far more about how little I know. And now, with so much behind and still so much ahead, it must be declared that although it is the end, these stories never do, in fact, end.

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<sup>32</sup> Of course, in an ideal world, such accommodation would extend far beyond ASL-related professional development. After all, Deaf individuals cannot be assumed to be involved only in ASL research and pedagogy.

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## Appendix A

### List of ASL/ASL Pedagogical Materials

- Baker-Shenk, C., & Cokely, D. (1991). *American Sign Language Green Books: A teacher's resource text on grammar and culture*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.
- Duke, I. (2004). *The everything Sign Language book*. Avon, MA: Adams Media.
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## Appendix B

### Ethics Certificate



Carleton University Research Office  
Research Ethics Board  
1325 Dunton Tower  
1125 Colonel By Drive  
Ottawa, ON K1S 5S6 Canada  
Tel: 613-520-2517  
[ethics@carleton.ca](mailto:ethics@carleton.ca)

#### Ethics Clearance Form

This is to certify that the Carleton University Research Ethics Board has examined the application for ethical clearance. The REB found the research project to meet appropriate ethical standards as outlined in the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition* and, the *Carleton University Policies and Procedures for the Ethical Conduct of Research*.

New clearance

Renewal of original clearance

Original date of clearance:

Date of clearance	14 June 2013
Researchers	Christina Doré, Master's student
Department	School of Linguistics and Language Studies
Supervisor	Prof. Jenna Fox, School of Linguistics and Language Studies
Project number	14-0161
Title of project	Exploring Carleton University's Textbook-Free ASL Curriculum: A mixed methods study

Clearance expires: 31 May 2014

All researchers are governed by the following conditions:

**Annual Status Report:** You are required to submit an Annual Status Report to either renew clearance or close the file. Failure to submit the Annual Status Report will result in the immediate suspension of the project. Funded projects will have accounts suspended until the report is submitted and approved.

**Changes to the project:** Any changes to the project must be submitted to the Carleton University Research Ethics Board for approval. All changes must be approved prior to the continuance of the research.

**Adverse events:** Should any participant suffer adversely from their participation in the project you are required to report the matter to the Carleton University Research Ethics Board. You must submit a written record of the event and indicate what steps you have taken to resolve the situation.

**Suspension or termination of clearance:** Failure to conduct the research in accordance with the principles of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition* and the *Carleton University Policies and Procedures for the Ethical Conduct of Research* may result in the suspension or termination of the research project.

Andy Adler, Chair  
Carleton University Research Ethics Board

Louise Heslop, Vice-Chair  
Carleton University Research Ethics Board

## Appendix C

### Sample Course Outline

American Sign Language  
School of Linguistics and Language Studies  
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
ASLA --- Section --- Fall 2013

Instructor: -  
Section: -  
Class: -  
Office: -  
Office hours: -

#### Course Description:

For students with little or no knowledge of ASL. Students will obtain basic communicative competence in American Sign Language and a good knowledge of the linguistic features of the language, particularly the grammar and structure. Students will also gain knowledge of the cultural aspect of the Deaf community.

#### Classroom Work:

Classes are generally of two halves, first the introductory half and then the practical half. Students will be expected to take part in these practical activities as well as some activities outside of class time. Peer interaction is expected, especially during the practical components of each class. Teamwork is expected of each student both in class and in preparation for the video assignments.

#### Attendance Policy:

Class time provides invaluable opportunities to develop your language skills in a supportive environment. Attendance in language classes is therefore compulsory. **Lack of attendance will jeopardize your registration and/or final grade in the course.** Specifically, by the end of the second week of classes students must have attended and been assessed by their language instructor. Those who do not attend or who are found to be at a different level will be withdrawn from the course by the Registrar's Office.

To obtain a grade for a course, students must meet attendance requirements as stated in the course outline. Students must attend a minimum of 80% of classes per term in order to qualify for a passing grade for that term (independent of whether this was for medical reasons or otherwise). Absences and cumulative late arrivals will also reduce the participation mark. Make-up of tests or assessments will only be allowed for medical reasons (with a doctor's note).

Required Texts: None

#### Evaluation:

Test 1	15%
Test 2	20%

Test 3	25%
Final Assessment	30%
Participation	10%

Video tests/assessments are graded on a ten-point scale based on the following format:

Required elements: 5

Free elements: 5

Course standing:

Note that student standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

General Information for Students:

*In-class environment and criteria*

In this course the focus and emphasis is on the natural features of languages as they are used in Sign Languages. Students are instructed in the use of a different modality that uses the eyes and manual signals instead of the ears and mouth.

The signing portion of this course is instructed in an immersion setting and a no-voice rule will be in effect. Students are required to respect the cultural requirements and, in the case of voicing, will be warned and subsequently asked to leave. These cultural behaviors are also expected to be upheld during practical activities either on or off campus.

*Testing*

For the purpose of practice and evaluations, students are expected to select and work with a partner. These partnerships can be expected to rotate throughout the duration of the course.

Testing will take place in a computer lab at ---, Room 349. Tests will be recorded with QuickTime Player, and the instructor will collect and keep all videos recorded during testing. As a safeguard, students are strongly encouraged to bring a USB key with them, and to keep a copy of their video recordings.

Receptive testing is a difficult procedure to duplicate; therefore students should refrain from missing scheduled tests. If you must miss class on a test day (for valid reasons only), you must make alternate arrangements with the instructor, before the test takes place. You may not be accommodated if you miss a test without notifying the instructor beforehand, as make up tests are generally not given.

Students wishing to gain admission to ASLA --- are required to achieve a minimum grade of C in this course.

Academic Accommodation:

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term because of disability, pregnancy or religious obligations. Please review the course outline promptly and write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist.

Students with disabilities requiring academic accommodations in this course must register with the --- for a formal evaluation of disability-related needs. Registered --- students are required to contact the ---, -----, every term to ensure that your Instructor receives your Letter of Accommodation, no later than two weeks before the first assignment is due or the first in-class test/midterm requiring accommodations. You can visit the Equity Services website to view the policies and to obtain more detailed information on academic accommodation at ---.

## Appendix D

### Question Guide for Semi-Structured Interviews

#### Teacher interview topics

*Intro with: We'll be talking about you and your background, your students and their background, and the course itself (how it came to be, your experiences, etc.)*

#### BOTH

#### TEACHER

How many years have you been teaching ASL? How many in 1<sup>st</sup> year courses? Where have you taught before? Levels? How long do you expect to be at [redacted]?

What is your educational background? Studies ASL? Teaching?

Involved with the Deaf community? With the university community (research or otherwise)?

Have you been surrounded by people with teaching experience? Language learning experience?

#### Reflecting

- 1) Thinking back to something you've tried to learn, recently or long ago, what was successful? What was an unsuccessful experience? What were your objectives? Why do you feel you succeeded or not?
- 2) Did you learn the above in a classroom? What was it about the course/teacher/classmates/material that made it un-/successful?
- 3) What was it about some of your favourite teachers that made them your favourite? Least favourite?
- 4) The course you're teaching now, what have been good/bad experiences? Why? How?

- 5) What did you take/learn from those experiences?
- 6) Did you have formal training as a teacher in general? For ASL?
- 7) Have you encountered teaching ideas, concepts/theories about teaching that struck you as good/bad?
- 8) Have those influenced you in your teaching?
- 9) How about actually teaching? Have you been learning differently from those experiences than from how you've learned outside the classroom?

10) **Your current course:**

STUDENTS

Who are your students?

What programs do they come from? Why do you think they enroll in

ASL? What do they expect from your course? What do you tell them they can expect?

COURSE

Objectives<sup>6,1,3,4</sup>

What are your objectives for the course:

For your learning as a teacher (i.e. reflective practices)?

For your materials development (i.e. are you testing things out/ developing something)?

What do you hope the students will leave with at the end? At the beginning?

Midway through? (NOTE: Learning is a process, summative assessment is silly and does not capture learning – only an outcome, which is just another stage in the process)

How do you decide on reasonable objectives? Experience?

Do you aim high/low? Would you consider your course particularly demanding?

### **Content<sup>6,3,4</sup>**

What are the theme and topics you teach?

What skills do you focus on?

What cultural notes do you teach? For what purpose/intention?

Did you consider content together with assessment and learning outcomes?

### **Sequences<sup>6</sup>**

Is the sequence pre-planned? What is the basis for the sequence?

Are the students aware of sequencing decisions, i.e. with the syllabus? <sup>1</sup>

How do you time/deliver assignments/homework? Is there a particular sequence (scaffolding, portfolio?) <sup>3</sup>

Have you sequenced the concepts so as not to overwhelm students with information?<sup>1</sup>

**Methods**<sup>1</sup>

How do you plan/structure class involvement<sup>2</sup> (e.g. facilitate discussions)

Do you incorporate any out-of-class learning<sup>2</sup> (e.g. service-learning, homework, extra resources)

How do you decide on appropriate teaching methods<sup>2</sup> (e.g. role-playing, cooperative learning)

How do you decide on appropriate Technology<sup>2</sup> (e.g. PowerPoint slides, handouts)

How do you evaluate students?<sup>3</sup> Where do you get information about assessment?

How do you target skills building?<sup>4</sup>

Do you use peer instruction?<sup>4</sup>

How do you give feedback?<sup>4</sup>

**Materials**<sup>1</sup>

What resources you will share with the students? With your fellow teachers?

How many additional resources do students need for your course? Do you need?

What kinds of physical materials will your students be given [access to]?

## Appendix E

### Sample Transcription (from full transcription)

P1: So um yeah we'd have to talk about foundation, we'd have to talk about uh yeah about for me structure. Structure would be a big thing.

P1: Uh the problem with the structure issue is that uh we teach a form of sign language that isn't really used. So it's, you know, I want to teach them structure and formalize that structure and then they'd go out and be like, nobody uses this (laugh)

N: What do you mean?

P1: I mean our sort of ASL is um uh well it's supposed to be pure ASL and then what you actually get in the community is Pidgin Signed English, so ah it comes back to these sort of applied questions of you know what's the real language. Is it this standard form that no one uses or is it the everyday you know like front line language. So we're not teaching that front line stuff, right? We're teaching that, the pure form. The yeah. So. Yes. The textbook would be... well I'd even have to answer these questions myself, whether I really want to, yeah.

N: For sure

P1: So.

N: Well there'd be a heck of a lot to it.

N: Because, because you are the coordinator you would have this, I'm assuming and correct me, a certain amount of um guidance, power I'd say, over the incoming teachers that just get hired or, and whatnot.

P1: Yes

N: So say you and --- did put together this textbook, decided ok, cool, covers our vision, for the new teachers coming in...

P1: Can't force them

N: OK so what would the expectations be for them in terms of this work that you just produced? Who would it be for is the question?

P1: Oh the students. it would be for the student yeah yeah yeah. Yeah. It would be for the students in my idea, uh... yeah we can't force anybody to do anything. All the teachers are....

N: We've seen that.

P1: All the teachers can do whatever they want uh so, um, to ...

N: Before this thought slips away, I can't help but latch onto that one, too, teachers do whatever they want. Earlier you mentioned there were two teachers that early on in the program that who didn't match the program.

P1: Yeah, yeah.

N: I'm trying to find the uh the not contradiction in there. You can teach however you want but if it doesn't match...

C: Mm hmm

N: So how does that, can you clarify that?

P1: yeah well I mean, they were free to do whatever they wanted and they did whatever they wanted. But um yeah I mean that's the problem with the university (checks time, laugh), it's not my fault (laugh), it's the problem with the university because... because we're all supposed to have a common goal but um really we can all do what we want, so the common goal is, well if it pleases you, do try to attain that common goal, but if not,

then whatever. So I mean, what the hell is that? On the other hand if they told me what to do, I wouldn't be happy about that either. So... yeah.

N: kind of ...

P1: No it's good that we're all free to, to do whatever, but that's why it's important for us that we hire people who are team players, who are, who share our vision, and that's what's nice about hiring previous students, because they share our vision. Um they also this is awful to say (laugh) I hear like mouth watering...

N: Can't wait

P1: They probably also don't feel like they have any ownership over the language and feel like they have to follow a certain uh vision. Which they do.

N: Yeah

P1: But so do I because I'm also hearing.

N: Great

P1: So we're kind of at ---'s mercy in a way (laugh)

N: That's what it comes down to (laugh)

P1: Basically, you know, ---'s like, oh no ---'s the boss, but yeah you're the Deaf person so nope. So yeah. We have uh we have "freedom" but we don't have much freedom I think.

N: Right

P1: Yeah, so it basically we, we have freedom in how we deliver the material as long as the material fits the plan. I think, that's my interpretation of it.

N: OK

N: And say, say this magical textbook was put together, it's going to be an awkward question to envision, but you come in as a new teacher and you're given the opportunity to use this textbook, do you think you'd be jumping on it?

P1: I wonder. Um... yeah. I think so. Because um at least it would give me an idea of what uh of what's expected of me in that program... of the kind of student I'm supposed to produce, um yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

P1: I mean, --- already produces uh goals for the first 6 classes or so that he gives to new teachers so they have an idea of what they're supposed to do. I think it's helps them.

P1: I used it this summer cuz I don't teach 1st year often, so it does help. It keeps you sort of uh, it keeps you it keeps you in line.

P1: The other thing is I'm motivated, I'm motivated to have, to have everybody turn out the same because I teach them the next year, right? So I get all those students from different... yeah, I get those students from all different classes and then some of them know... what came up yesterday, today, that they didn't know? (pause) Oh! The sign... no, was it that? Geez. What sign came up today that they didn't even know? Anyway. There was a sign I signed this morning and nobody knew it and it was a basic sign. It was like, it was like one of the first signs they learn. And nobody knew it. It was like what the, what's going on? (laugh) Who's your teacher? So yeah so I think following a sort of plan like that makes sense. Yeah.

N: All right. We'll see what happens.

## Appendix F

### Sample Transcription (from partial transcription)

(new concept – old concepts – and then new signs – act out new sign – gather props)  
There are still times were they just still don't get it and at that point then I'll write it on the board. ... As a last resort, write it down. (voicing?) I do voice sometimes. I voice for things either things that, two, usually two occasions that I will voice. If it's something that they really need to know and I need to know that they understand it. (1/19:50) I don't sign at the same time, I try to put my signs away if I'm going to voice. So remember, next week, you have a test on which day? Yes, Tuesday. Good. What time does the test start? No, not at 2:30, that's class time, the test starts an hour later, at 3:30. If you come here at 230 there will be nobody here. Come to the lab. Where is the lab? ---. Does anybody not know where --- is? So if they don't know, I'll pull up a map... I could write that but I would take me an incredibly long time to write it all out. So for information I think they need to understand very clearly and explicitly, at the very beginning of the class, in the first 2-3 weeks, I will voice that. The other one is if somebody has a question that is above the level that I know they can understand if I sign it to them, so if they ask a question that's quite technical or complicated, rather than just saying, oh LATER, you'll it later, NEXT YEAR next year you'll learn it - if I think they can benefit by having that information I will voice that information rather than just saying, oh you'll learn it LATER, doesn't matter DOESN'T MATTER, it's not important.  
(EX) A student today asked about the sign for CAN. She signed it to me and said SIGN CAN the sign can USE - how do I use that? I wanted her to know that it is a sign, there is a sign for that, but it's not necessarily a sign that she's going to use a lot. She was asking about, you know if someone, if you go up and ask somebody, can you visit me on the weekend? - She wanted to know, do I need the sign? She asked at the end of class so I voiced to explain. No, not really if you're asking somebody to come visit you, if your eyebrows are up the CAN is kind of implied. VISIT? Can you visit? Are you visiting? She doesn't need it. So for something like that they don't need to know but she may have already researched it and she wants to know about using it. It's not something I would necessarily teach, but in that case I would rather voice it to her and have her understand how it's used and how it's not used than her just trying to incorporate it wrong and memorize it as a, as a, not an incorrect sign, but using it in an incorrect way. Or incorporating it where it doesn't belong and it becomes more English.

1 sign I teach them early is MEANS

(since you're not given a curriculum, materials, are you given access to materials?) In what way? Like if are we directed if you're interested in materials you can find them... (shakes head)... (again) Nothing... There you go, teach PLOP!... It was always the offer of oh if you run into problems let us know but there was no sort of we're going to have an introduction, this is a general outline that you could follow, this is, there's not even really like a sense of this is where we would like the students to be at the end of the semester, it's just. Go, go and do. Go and teach. ... For me it's, it's not so bad. I rely on where I

thought, where I found I needed to be by 2<sup>nd</sup> year when I was a student, so I think back and I try to remember OK what did I what did I learn in 2<sup>nd</sup> year in 2<sup>nd</sup> year and it still is at least from talking to other teachers, 2<sup>nd</sup> year is very much focused on the structure and getting it right and putting everything in its place whereas 1<sup>st</sup> year is more of an introduction to the language to give you basic vocab in there and getting them used to *seeing* the grammar even if we're not doing it perfectly, it's a, it's more of an introduction to it, giving them the tools that they'll need if they continue on. So I try to focus on that giving them basic signs, not overwhelming them with too many signs but teaching them the things they need to know and that they'll need to know to start polishing it in 2<sup>nd</sup> year. But as for what specifically to cover (nada)...

(how do you go about your planning then?) At the beginning of the year I make out a complete schedule for myself. And I start with learning outcomes. What do I want them to be able to do by the end of the semester and I include those learning outcomes on the course outline so they know what to expect, and everything I plan and I try to point back to those learning outcomes. So if I teach this is it going to benefit them in terms of will they be closer to reaching those learning outcomes that I set at the beginning.

The learning outcomes most of them I just made up. I thought OK if this is an introductory class if they were doing a full year course I would want them to be able to do this and this is a half credit course so they'll have to be halfway there and what will they need at the halfway point. It was a process of working backwards from I sort of have an understanding of that they need to be doing for 2<sup>nd</sup> year so how do I reverse engineer that down to a first half credit course.

I schedule it for myself as a class by class. I work backwards to the beginning class. I know the last classes, it's going to be preparing them for their final assessment which is, that is what we are told, it's always the culture lecture and you devote 2 or 3 classes to this, to this specific culture lecture. So I know I have to do that last. I know the lecture, I know the content of that lecture and I know how advanced the signs are. So from that and continuing to work backwards in terms of structure, grammar, signs that they'll need in order to be able to understand that last lecture. But of course there has to be other things that you building in up to it, so the culture lecture is just, it's just one part of the information. The culture lecture there's no signs for sports in there, or for everyday activities or for colours or food. It's culture stuff – it's ASL history. So leading up to that culture lecture I also have to teach them in the everyday other signs that they'll need to know.

# Appendix G

## Sample Raw Coding

NOT FAIR

TRANSPARENCY

And that's not fair. So I learned that that's not fair. And uh yeah, so I'm much better at articulating what I'm looking for, how I, how I'm marking. I'm very very transparent now. It's my goal, actually, now, it's to be extremely transparent, to be very up front about what I want, how I want it, what it needs to look like, what I'm looking for, how much I'm taking off for each thing, and break down signs into...

(EXCITED) Create

I have this great thing this year, I started this new thing where I give them mini tests, so I'm teaching to a test- I teach a couple classes and we do a very very specific and task-oriented test where like this Thursday they have to create 2 sentences, each one 2 verbs, one plain verb, one directional, and I'd like to see one more verb within that whole thing. And we sit in groups of 5-6 students and we watch the videos of those 5 or 6 students and I give feedback live to all those students. So they can learn from each other's mistake and they sort of get the idea that learning is collaborative, it's supportive, it's a community like oh, ok yeah you made this mistake, cool. I make this mistake. So I love it so far.

structure (around tests)

FEEDBACK

LEARNING FROM E/O.

SUCCESSFUL

N: Where did you get that from, the idea?

from me, from a need. Yeah.

N: That need was...?

The need was I wasn't giving them enough feedback, I wasn't assessing them enough... um, and I wasn't able to assess discrete components enough. It was too, there's too, the tests were too heavy. You know? They'd see classifiers and verbs and sentence structures and time and it was like, OK give me a story and I'll see all that stuff and it was just... I still have those tests, but I only have 2 of them, then I have these mini-tests that are more frequent and lower stakes. And um, easy. Yeah. So, so far so good.

NOT ENOUGH P/B

MORE TESTS MORE SPECIFIC LOWER STAKES

MULTI-NEED

N: Yeah. How about in terms of being transparent, at the beginning of the year, mostly, but also throughout, do you strive to be equally transparent in terms of objectives, non test related objectives? Or are they one and the same?

Well, I mean (pause), it's a hard question. There's a lot of overlap.

OVERLAP  
TESTS + Learning  
Objectives

3rd rule

Uh I try to be very transparent in terms of classroom behaviour objectives.

(mumble) So I let them know I expect no voice from the beginning. Uh. Um.. Yeah, I have to tell them a lot about that, my god.

N: So do you voice that rule?

No.

N: How do you convey that to them?

external  
1st rule

It's pretty gestural when I show, that I'm walking into the classroom (CL same time) and then I hear yappy, and I get mad. But you know like if you get here and I signed the time (?) saying whatever 8:30, you come in and sit down and yap yap yap, k well go outside. Anyway, so yeah. (laugh) Yeah, cuz the, yeah. They need that. Umm...

fearful,  
yapping,  
playful,  
clear.

NEED.

2nd don't  
retain

It turns out they don't even really listen in a permanent way because they get the 3<sup>rd</sup> year and they throw that all out the window, so I learned (mumble).

But uh yeah there's that. And the other expectation I have is that they practice outside of class. So, um, I don't actually know, I'm trying to think of this year, I didn't talk about that at the beginning of class. But in the first 3 or 4 classes I was very explicit about, explicit about homework. Uh, and that homework was to practice this, practice this, I want to see it next class. So yeah. Um.

expect  
to practice  
outside class

few of  
expectations

REF

Other objectives in the class, that's it. Yeah.

obj. are  
1st to  
talk of  
the day

N: And then everything else would be quite specific to the tasks of the day and whatnot?

Need of  
the moment

Yeah.

N: OK. For, to get yourself organized, I mean on the first day, let's start there. The first day, you walk in and you've got that contractual nuisance in my opinion to have

the syllabus fully included, all the requirements and the stuff like that. How does that get presented?

presented  
online only

I present it on the overhead.

I go over it uh because this year in particular I was committed to not voicing on the first day uh.

COMMITTED TO NOT VOICING

N: Your own commitment to yourself?

HIS YEAR

Yeah. It's hard. It's really hard. It's easy to voice on the first day, but it sets a precedent you just can't undo. So um this year I just really wanted to try not to do that. Or to at least save it 'til the very end of the class where it's like... by then I have set the precedent.

PRECEDENT of NV rule

So yeah so I put the syllabus up on the overhead and then I underline things. So (point) it's like, I taught them the sign important. This is so important. Attendance and uh yeah, the attendance policy and my expectations. And we talk after about the mini tests and uh, they did well.

conveying info into details to SS.  
- attendance  
- tests.

(end video 1)

...

N: it's true, there's that consideration.

I know.

I'm always judging myself so, yeah.

JUDGING SELF

N: Do you keep track of those things? Like if you gave one explanation for a mini-test and no one got it... Will you make, I mean, do you take a physical log?

I don't take a physical log, no. But that did happen for the first practice test.

N: This year?

Mm, hmm Yeah.

THIS YEAR, misunderstood test details

TIME

I've, I've grown a lot as an instructor over the past few years. Um, I'm um happy with my growth. I used to take things personally and uh... uh... it's funny

GROWTH

HAPPY w/ growth

BEFORE TOOK IT PERSONALLY

## Appendix H

### Examples of Early Narrative Reconstructions (Rose)

#### Natural-born teacher

If there were such thing as having a natural knack for teaching, I'd say I have it. I'm from a family of teachers, and so I think that's part of it. Also, though, at this point I've been teaching for a long time: I've taught a couple of languages in different sorts of programs, I taught at a high school, I was a teaching assistant for several courses, and I even used to teach swimming lessons as a teenager. Because I'm familiar with it, I'm not afraid in or of the classroom; I can really embrace the performative aspect of teaching. Of course, I get a few nerves on the first day, but after that I certainly feel very comfortable being at the front of the class, speaking to groups, doing testing and grading, and all those things that go with teaching. I thrive in the classroom. I went through a graduate program that focused a lot on teaching, and so that was also helpful on top of my own experience.

When I look back, though, I realize that I have always taught students with whom I have a lot in common, especially language. For example, my swimming lessons were in English and they were usually "native Canadian" students, whatever that means. When I taught other languages they were always to English L1 students learning a foreign language. I hadn't thought about that very much before. I guess it's helpful in that when they make mistakes because I know why they're making those mistakes it's a lot easier to relate to them and explain where they went wrong. I'm not sure how it easy would be if I didn't know where the students were coming from. Actually, I just recently had a student come up to me in ASL class and she tried to ask me a question using the few signs she knew and a lot of gesture. It was something that we had gone over several times already and had practiced so I wasn't sure what she was asking. I pointed to what was on the board and she read it out loud. Only then did I hear that she had an accent, a very thick accent, and I thought, "I see, she's not from here, so she might not understand this and she might not have been following my notes so far." My class is No Voice and so I hadn't realized it before. It made me think about how many times I might have gone ahead giving lessons and instructions ASL and completely lost the students whose English isn't strong – without my knowing, even. There's only so much you can do, like encourage them to come to office hours. It was a bit of a wake-up call.

In this story Rose shares her feelings of ease being a teacher, corroborating the personal memo that I had written not long after observing her class. When she relived in the interview the moment of realizing her student was not a native speaker of English, it was clear that this had already shaped the ways in which she related to her students. For example, she had told me about the web logs she posts on the course web page that include test details, room changes and the like, and some linguistic explanations that are too much to convey in ASL. We hear more about these logs in the third story. Since the encounter she has rethought the information she posts and is sure to make it as clear as

possible and in more accessible language for her students who may not be comfortable in English. In class, she said she is much more aware of student comprehension levels and is careful to check their understanding more frequently during lessons. Her next story looks more closely at her relationship with the ASL program at Carleton, her fellow teachers, and where she sees her future in ASL.

### **Making it work**

I was hooked on ASL from day one. I was a student with Jack and he saw it, too. I went through the four years and I really enjoyed it. In fact, I was fresh out of the program when I started teaching. It was a bit intimidating, of course, being “the new guy” on the team, but I was also really excited. I had spent four years in the ASL program and so I remembered what I had done, what I had learned, what worked for me and what didn’t; it was all still fresh in my mind. When I began to plan my courses I tried to think back to all of those memories. It helped. But I really wanted to meet with other teachers and see what do they do. I do try to meet up with the other teachers every so often. We’ll swap stories, activities and modifications, handouts... and it’s great to have someone to work out these ideas with. Really, because there’s no textbook or written curriculum, per se, we’re really all just making it up as we go, and so the more talk between us the better.

When I first started out, I met with my supervisor to talk about how to deal with the first day because I knew I would have to present the syllabus, introduce myself, meet everyone, and take care of all of those other important elements that really set the tone for the whole term. I was recommended to not voice on the first day, at all. That way I would set the precedent and make it what I was aiming for it to be, a “deaf zone”. My students might well get a deaf teacher next time and so I don’t want them to build the habit of speaking or relying on hearing in their learning. Now that I’ve gone through it I understand why it’s so tempting to voice: this term I realized it’s so awkward to stand there in silence as the students walk in on the first day. They shuffled in and just stared at me. So I stared back. I just took it in and embraced the awkwardness. When it was go time, I wrote my name on the board, signed NAME, pointed to myself, and went back and forth that way until they caught on to what I was saying. I knew they caught on because there would be a little whisper, “Oh, name! Her name is Claire.” And that would trickle around the room and soon everyone was nodding. It takes time, but you can make yourself understood. This class I got halfway through the term before I spoke and even though I was worried that it would set them all off talking during class, it hasn’t caused a problem because the No Voice standard was set that first day. It stuck. The only thing I did notice is that more students come up to me after class and voice questions, but that’s OK. They’re curious. I want them to want to know more. It’s a good class.

Rose tells us about how she integrated herself into the ASL “teaching team” and how she has prioritized meeting and learning from other teachers. Because she had finished the program barely months earlier, she felt she knew the material and was prepared to move into her teaching role; nonetheless, as she discovered and shared here, some details of teaching had to be learned on the spot, like teaching students with

languages other than English. Her teaching choices also extended beyond her personal experiences and those of her colleagues, as we hear in this next story about her decision to maintain an online log for students to learn more about ASL.

### **Instructor log**

Something I realized was that at the level I'm teaching there is a lot that students won't understand if I sign it all, like some of the linguistic details about the language that are too much to explain in simple signs they'll understand. If I have something important to say, instead of botching it by trying to get them to understand in ASL, or wasting time writing a whole essay on the board in class, I post in what I call the "instructor log" on CU Learn. In theory it should be once a week, but it hasn't always been that frequent. I ask them to read it and that's how we go over it. It lets me I can communicate the higher level stuff more clearly. The point is to help them understand ASL and the objectives of the course. The first was talking about posture. I told them, "The reason I get on you in class about posture..." and I explained to them why it's important. I equated posture with enunciation; it's not proper use of the language when you're slouching, with your elbows on the table and your hands flopping around. There were a few other things I posted about, like mouthing and the sign-to-word non-equivalence, which is hard for students to get their heads around. They were things I really wanted them to grasp so they could learn better. We have only four hours a week of precious contact time with the language and so I don't want to waste it. Mostly I want them to practice and think in ASL.

In this story, Rose makes several mentions of "wasted time" in reference to spending time on unnecessary and non-signing activity, like writing notes on the board. She refers to contact time with the language as being "precious" and speaks of how important it is to maximize that time during the few class hours. Here we see her dedication to the students, but also a view of her passion for ASL. She feels it is important for the student to understand things like mouthing and posture for the sake of building their understanding of ASL as a signed language with its own linguistic elements.