LITERACIES IN CONTEXT: WORKING-CLASS DEAF ADULTS

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This dissertation explores the literacy practices of working-class Deaf adults in a variety of contexts. While literacy practices have been the subject of study by many scholars, they have most often been studied in educational contexts and in terms of textual literacy practices (reading and writing). However, there are a great deal of alternative literacy practices that go unacknowledged primarily when determining what it means for a person to be literate; therefore, it these alternative literacy practices need to be studied in context in order to provide a better and more accurate definition of literacy or what it means to be literate. This dissertation seeks to begin to remedy this problem.

In analyzing the literacy practices of working-class Deaf adults, this dissertation argues that several literacy practices are a part of their daily lives but that those literacy practices are dependent upon the context. The data for the analysis was collected via interviews conducted in American Sign Language with three individual participants: Linda, Wade, and Karen. I then interpreted the signed words, facial expressions, and body language in order to produce a text that could then be analyzed using the Constant Comparative Method. Analysis of the data based on the five main contexts of home, workplace, marketplace, school and social locations presented four main types of literacy practices: textual, visual, digital, and oral.
This is dedicated to my parents: for my dad, who inspires me constantly with his positive outlook on life despite many challenges, and for my mom, who is an inspiration for and advocate of continuous learning.
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understand what it means to be Deaf. While this project cannot possibly hope to accomplish such a great task, it is a step in the right direction.
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CHAPTER ONE. RATIONALE AND LITERATURE REVIEW

My Interest in this Project

“I am d/Deaf,” is something my father has stated many times and will state many more. He means “d/Deaf” in both of its iterations at different times: the lower-case “deaf,” meaning he physically cannot hear as a medical condition, and the upper-case “Deaf,” meaning he belongs to a culture that defines itself as a linguistic minority (Brueggemann 1-2) and shares a common language, American Sign Language (ASL). The typical situations for these statements are first, when I am singing along to the radio while we are in a car, he says, “I am deaf,” and we laugh. Second, when a hearing person has done something to upset him, he says, “I am Deaf,” and we discuss how insensitive/stupid/arrogant some hearing\(^1\) people can be. Examples of these situations are too plentiful to describe and serve to demonstrate how little the dominant hearing world understands about deaf people, especially those who claim status as Deaf.

The understanding, or lack of understanding, of Deaf culture is what leads me to this project. The members of the Deaf community who are part of this study want others who are “hearing” to understand them as “Deaf,” not merely as people who cannot hear. Making others understand this distinction is not something that I can do because I do not have the same experiences or understanding that would enable me to educate others extensively due to my being a hearing person who only knows from the borders some of the struggles faced by Deaf people. I can, however, share their stories and their words in order to complicate the understanding on the part of other hearing people.

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\(^1\) When referring to “hearing people,” the “h” is not capitalized because the hearing do not identify as “hearing” but rather as the norm. Deaf people, with a capital “D,” identify as such, and while this capacity is normal for them, society regards it as a disability or lack.
While the existence of a Deaf culture is acknowledged, the need for understanding Deaf culture as important to society still remains to be fully examined. Deaf culture expands and challenges dominant ideologies. Included in these ideologies is the English Only Movement, which has become quite political (Horner and Trimbur). This movement builds on the historic understanding that education’s intention is to make people literate. The natural move seems to be for everyone in the country to speak English and also read and write it to a certain, undefined, extent (Horner and Trimbur). However, if a person has limited speech and cannot hear the language, do these standards still apply? Very quickly people will answer in the negative, but typically only when the situation is brought to their attention. There is no automatic acknowledgement of the “other” without the reminder that people exist who cannot hear and/or speak.

In an effort to focus on one element of Deaf culture, I explore the literacy practices as skills in context of a working-class Deaf community to demonstrate how these practices defy and broaden traditional definitions of literacy and to acknowledge the rhetorical knowledge that is demonstrated by those who comprise the community as they negotiate the hearing world around them. The various literacy practices require knowledge of when to use which practice, such as digital versus oral, and to what extent, creating a form of *kairos*, the right thing at the right moment to the right degree. Whether note writing, gesturing, silence, or other form of communication is in use, the situation will dictate the method, requiring instant understanding of the context in which one finds her or himself. These practices, based in context, further complicate and challenge traditional definitions of literacy.

In order to introduce how the literacy practices of this Deaf community actually serve to resist and expand traditional definitions of literacy, it is necessary to first understand these
traditional definitions most often discussed in education and alternative literacies (Brandt, Janks, and Purcell-Gates) that have already done this. Following that discussion, this chapter will introduce the literacy practices of Deaf people based on foundational research. In addition, an explanation of literacy as part of one’s identity and how identity plays a part in culture and community formation provides better understanding of additional complications and challenges to traditional definitions as well as the rhetorical situations that Deaf people find themselves negotiating on a daily basis.

**Traditional Definitions of Literacy**

A traditional dictionary definition of “literacy” is simply the ability to read and write; however, what is being read and written is never part of the definition, except possibly the addition of *English*, making the default definition “to read and write English,” and even then a large number of the population typically think in terms of Standard English. In the discipline of education, which is charged with maintaining measurable standards, literacy defined as reading and writing is a primary goal. The editors of *Toward Defining Literacy*, all education scholars, state, “Since the mid-nineteenth century, most Western industrialized nations have funded education for their citizens, with literacy as a primary goal. Modern citizenship requires literacy for full participation in the process of society – work, home management, child rearing, and voting” (x). In order to participate as a full member of society, literacy is important, yet there are a number of people considered “illiterate,” by educational standards, who seem to function well regardless. Many people who are bilingual may struggle with Standard English, leading to them being considered illiterate, but in their communities they navigate work, marketplace, and social contexts quite well.
In addition, many questions remain that complicate such a simple definition of literacy as the ability to read and write: To what extent do these skills need to be demonstrated in order for a person to be deemed literate? Should one be able to read a grocery list? An academic article? What does one need to know about writing in order to be deemed literate? Should someone have the same knowledge of writing as reading, or is it different? The lack of questioning and the assumption of simplicity makes defining literacy difficult and a concept associated with privileged ambiguity, where the privileged make determinations not according to a set standard but according to what will maintain their privileged status. To further explain, Richard Venezky, in his essay “Definitions of Literacy,” demonstrates the privileged ambiguity that literacy maintains which he describes as:

one of that class of autopositive terms, like liberty, justice, and happiness, that we assume contain simple, primal qualities—necessary and desirable attributes of our culture—but that under scrutiny become vastly more complex and often elusive, yielding to no simple characterization of definition. … most have accepted without debate its desirability and have focused on methods by which it could be endowed on entire populations. (2)

Without questioning his own assertion and the privilege assumed or why the “simple characterization” is supported and prescribed to by hegemonic forces, he supports literacy as important and, evidently, a gift or privilege. However, without a concrete definition of literacy or an examination of what it means to be literate, privileged ambiguity is merely maintained and people who have limited literacy in terms of reading and writing Standard English are depicted as “other.” The literate are only defined in comparison to those who are considered to be illiterate.
Considering this binary, literate versus illiterate, Linda Brodkey writes in “Tropics of Literacy” that “all definitions of literacy project both a literate self and an illiterate other,” and that these are used to “stipulate the political as well as cultural terms on which the ‘literate’ wish to live with the ‘illiterate’” (82). The dominant literate population cannot exist without the illiterate “other,” who lack literacy to some undetermined degree. By being the ones who determine the definitions or standards, the dominant literate population maintains its dominance. Brian Street in *Literacy and Development: Ethnographic Perspectives* explains this model of literacy as one that “works from the assumption that literacy in itself – autonomously – will have effects on other social and cognitive practices. The model, however, disguises the cultural and ideological assumptions that underpin it and that can then be presented as though they are neutral and universal” (7). In most autonomous definitions of literacy, there seems to be a minimal assumption of writing and reading skill modeled on the dominant culture’s ideological assumptions, a privileged ambiguity. Yet, the definitions have become much more complex including other skill sets and practices: technological, cultural, visual, and so forth. These more complex definitions not founded in print-based literacy need to be explored because it is in these definitions where an understanding of more complex ideas of literacy lies.

More complex definitions of literacy rather than only those of print-based Standard English offer diverse ways to discuss and explore alternative literacy practices in context and by culture. Street explains, “The alternative, ideological model of literacy…offers a more culturally sensitive view of literacy practices as they vary from one context to another” (7). It is in a variety of contexts that we can begin to understand literacy as a social construct that is unique to each social group or culture. A significant number of people in this country would not think in terms of other languages and alphabets rather than English when discussing literacy. More complex
understandings of literacy are needed. Street also states:

The concept of literacy practices attempts both to handle the events and the patterns around literacy and to link them to something broader of a cultural and social kind. …Literacy practices, then, refer to this broader cultural conception of particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing in cultural contexts. (11)

The focus of literacy when studied in this manner shifts to how people in a particular context regard and practice reading and writing rather than how researchers, scholars, educators, and others desire to define literacy according to preconceived and privileged ways.

Furthermore, Julie Lindquist and David Seitz, in their book The Elements of Literacy, attempt to define literacy in a variety of ways according to context. Much like Brodkey and Street, Lindquist and Seitz note that people stress the importance of literacy but use the word in such disparate ways that the meaning is lost while believed to be static and transparent. They state, “literacy is an abstract noun with no corresponding verb to tell us what range of actions might possibly be associated with it” (7). Without knowing the “range of actions,” the label “literate” serves to function as an autopositive term, as identified previously by Venezky. Literacy is something desirable, but not something that has any concrete measurement or meaning because we do not “literate” something. Being such an abstract word, literacy easily fits the binary Brodkey explains where literacy can only be defined in terms of illiteracy or what it is not or the lack of something. By defining “literacy” according to context, the definition becomes more concrete in that context and, in some cases, more measurable.

In order to start explaining the contextual meanings of literacy, Lindquist and Seitz continue to explicate the social benefits of literacy and identify three different metaphors,
initially discussed by psychologist Sylvia Scribner, that explain the difficulty and consequences of defining literacy. They explain that as a form of adaptation, literacy provides people the basic requirements for “social and economic wellbeing” (9); however, to what extent people need literacy for their wellbeing remains a matter of opinion. For some the only literacy required is that which allows a person to participate fully in society. For others it is a requirement for success. Again, “participation” and “success” are abstract nouns that are used without any sort of concrete idea of what they are or how they are measured. Defining one word by utilizing words that require additional definition is problematic. The context of the definition makes a difference but needs to be transparent rather than obscured.

Another form of social benefit provided by literacy is power as “an essential precondition for social change” (Lindquist and Seitz 10). Without effective literacy practices, affecting change is difficult if not impossible, but even that necessity still raises the question of the extent and type of literacy practices necessary. For example, there have been activists whose speeches have moved people to actively seek social change but who had limited, if any, reading and writing skills, Sojourner Truth and Fannie Lou Hamer for example. How speech practice fits into traditional ideas of literacy creates another context that needs to be examined.

Finally, the third metaphor Lindquist and Seitz use to explain literacy is “as a state of grace” behind which the thought is “you’re smarter, more civilized more ethical, more humane” due to “intellectual engagement with the written word” (10). Essentially, in many cases, privilege is granted to people who are presumed to be more literate than others. Academic literacy falls into this category when one knows how to negotiate the realm of academia with little or no trouble and can write in a certain, undefined, way. Academic writing is, again, abstract because we know it when we see it, but it is difficult to define. Part of the charge compositionists often
face is teaching students to do academic writing that provides some level of difficulty due to how others define “academic” (Bartholomae, Bruffee, Kinneavy). The idea that privilege is granted depending on one’s level of literacy is problematic due to the power structures in place because it is always the privileged who tend to define which literacy practices are most desirable.

The idea of literacy practices being tied to privilege is of major concern because more and more literacy has come to the forefront of political conversations, the political aspect that Brodkey mentions. It is the driving force of the No Child Left Behind education curriculum in place at schools around the country. Yet as Jeanne S. Chall, in “Policy Implications of Literacy Definitions,” explains:

To a great extent, the most essential policy for literacy already is in effect - free public education through the twelfth grade. But while this policy has achieved its purpose for many, it has done badly by others - the poor, ethnic minorities, bilinguals (particularly Hispanics), and those with learning disabilities. (55)

And while public education for all is in place, the quality of education varies from school to school and no real agreement as to what level of literacy needs to be obtained has been reached. In addition, how privilege so obviously enters into the discussion when looking at the groups who are often left behind is easily ignored or brushed aside because the requirement of literacy training is assumed met and these groups are not part of the dominant culture.

Nevertheless, if literacy were better understood as a contextual matter, then various literacy practices would be more acknowledged. Emphasizing the context, Lindquist and Seitz see literacy as rhetorical. They write:

[C]onversations about and uses of literacy always operate from particular definitions of literacy, but also…these definitions are situated—that is, they’re
given shape and meaning by their economic, historical, intellectual, political, and cultural contexts. In this way, understanding what literacy ‘is’ is a matter of understanding it as it is situated in a time and place. (13)

Because definitions of literacy are situated and dependent on context, alternatives to the traditional view of literacy as the ability to read and write in Standard English exist and need to be not only acknowledged, but also studied and reported for greater social understanding. Some of this research is already taking place and arguments for more complex definitions of literacy are being made.

One such argument is made in *Growing Up Literate: Learning from Inner-City Families* where Denny Taylor and Catherine Dorsey-Gaines provide their findings having studied inner-city families. They argue that:

1. To be literate is a uniquely human experience, one that enables us to deal with ourselves and to better understand one another. It is never a mechanical process that is solely dependent upon skills that are taught.

2. Sex, race, economic status, and setting cannot be used as significant correlates of literacy. The myths and stereotypes that create images of specific groups (families who are poor, inner-city families, teenage mothers and their children) have no relevance when we stop counting and start observing and working with people. (201-202)

Describing literacy in this way, Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines begin to move literacy as a set of learned skills into a more contextual realm where literacy practices are dependent on the rhetorical situation. Context determines to what extent and what type of literacy is necessary rather than tests and arbitrary standards. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines also relate how literacy
practices can be better understood, stating, “Ours is a literate society, and at some level, by studying the manner in which print is used by ordinary people in both ordinary and critical situations it is possible [to] gain a view of the workings of a social system and of the ways in which it can impede, constrain, or enhance our everyday lives” (199). Yet, here again the emphasis on print limits literacy to reading and writing. Literacy practices reflect society, which is how they should be regarded rather than as ways to maintain societal hierarchies. Therefore, in order to fully understand literacy practices, all practices need to be acknowledged, including alternative literacies.

**Alternative Understandings of Literacy**

Alternative literacy practices have been and are currently being studied, but these practices as forms of literacy are not often acknowledged by mainstream populations, as one can see by the emphasis on standardization and quantification in our school systems. Through these emphases, the status quo is maintained; people in power remain in power as “literate” elite professionals while the majority are kept in their place as “illiterate” people who lack an ambiguous skill set that has yet to be clearly defined, the form of literacy as “a state of grace” according to Lindquist and Seitz (10).

If literacy is traditionally regarded as an ability to read and write in Standard English, in a very textual sense, then alternative literacy practices would be practices that are different, such as computer skills, other languages, other forms of English, and other non-print, non-English, non-standard practices. When defined in this way, literacy covers a wide range of media and skill sets and literacy practices become dependent on context. One way of seeing alternative literacies is demonstrated by James Paul Gee in his book *What Video Games Have to Teach Us about*
Learning and Literacy. He explains, “If we think first in terms of semiotic domains and not in terms of reading and writing as traditionally conceived, we can say that people are (or are not) literate (partially or fully) in a domain if they can recognize (the equivalent of ‘reading’) and/or produce (the equivalent of ‘writing’) meanings in the domain” (18). Gee uses “semiotic” as a means to say anything, “not just words” (17), that can take on meaning, using an example of handheld controllers for video games. The controllers become part of the semiotic domain of video games, and players know how to “read” the controllers and utilize them to “write” in various games (33). Thinking of literacy in this manner offered by Gee, literacy can take place in any domain where tools are utilized to make meaning in or of that particular domain or situation.

Along the same line as Gee, Ian Bogost, in *Persuasive Games* explains:

> any activity that encourages active assembly of basic building blocks according to particular logics contributes to procedural literacy. Written and spoken language does require conceptual effort, but it is fallacious to think that media such as toys and videogames do *not* demand conceptual effort. …The procedurally literate subject is one who recognizes both the specific nature of a material concept and the abstract rules that underwrite that concept. (257)

As individuals discover how to play with or utilize various toys or tools, they also learn alternative means of play or usage along with the limitations of said toys or tools. In this way, we all learn how to do the things we need to do using the tools we need to use and gain greater procedural literacy.

Yet another view of alternative literacies is offered by Deborah Brandt in *Literacy in American Lives*, where she explains, “in an information economy, literacy shows up in all aspects of production: as raw material, as labor power, as an instrument of production, and as
product” (171). Looked at in this economic manner, many different skill sets comprise different literacy practices. Brandt also states, “Literacy is the energy supply of the Information Age. This unusual status also illuminates why highly developed literacy skills – or, I should say, skills of a certain sort – can be a source of economic and social advantage…just as it also confirms why illiteracy has become such a thorough liability from the standpoint of economic productivity…” (170-171). Yet, as mentioned earlier, Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines argue that literacy “is never a mechanical process that is solely dependent upon skills that are taught” (201). The issue of elitism still remains because some literacy practices are deemed more important than others based on educational and societal standards. For example, the ability to build a computer takes a certain skill set that in the context of manufacturing is important, but being able to program that computer tends to have a higher value as a literacy practice while not being able to use a computer is often deemed a form of illiteracy regardless of context.

Even with the acknowledgment of alternative forms of literacy practice, a hierarchical system is once again engaged to maintain power structures as they are. Brandt explains that knowing how to use computers is one more literacy practice that upholds oppression based on the fact that access is an issue for some while not for others (181-182). In this way literacy becomes varied but controlled. Even while new literacy practices are becoming accepted to a limited degree by those outside of literacy studies in certain circles or disciplines, there remain ever present the means to regulate the context and the situatedness of those literacies. As Hilary Janks, in *Literacy and Power*, posits, “How literacy is constructed is contested; it spans a wide range of meanings from basic or functional literacy to the advanced ability to manipulate symbols and abstractions” (21). Without a clear definition that accounts for all forms of literacy in their various contexts, literacy remains, in the minds of many, a means to flatten power
structures. Yet, when literacy is limited by definition or by access, it does not have the power to change the status quo. Lindquist and Seitz caution, “literacy might in fact change things, but it doesn’t change things for everyone in the same way, and it’s not always obvious what these changes are and how they work” (44). Looking at literacies in context to better understand how the hierarchical structure is created would provide better insight as to how literacy and power interact and perhaps what can be done to flatten power structures.

Nevertheless, in order to begin thinking about flattening power structures, first the contexts in which literacy is practiced need to be acknowledged and studied. According to Victoria Purcell-Gates’ in her edited collection, *Cultural Practices of Literacy: Case Studies of Language, Literacy, Social Practice, and Power*, various literacy practices “cover a range of contexts and explore a number of relevant dimensions in the evolving picture of literacy as situated, multiple, and social” (197). Again, how the context plays a role in defining literacy or, more accurately, literacies, can be seen. Yet, understanding what those contexts are does prove problematic. Lindquist and Seitz put forth a set of locations:

To understand [literacy’s] full range of possibility as a subject for research and as a social practice, you have to follow it around in the places where it lives—in people’s heads, in communities, in workplaces, in virtual and digital spaces. To put literacy somewhere is to stabilize it long enough to take in its complexity foregrounding particular aspects of literacy as a human accomplishment, an activity, and a social predicament. (13)

Locating literacy practices in these places allows greater understanding of how those practices are valued in each site and by whom. For example, Shirley Brice Heath, in *Ways with Words*, discusses two working-class, rural communities: “Roadville,” a white community and
“Trackton,” a black community. She discusses the two communities’ literacy practices in relation to work, church, and social events. She also explains the expectations placed on education to bring children to another level of literacy, or a “mainstream” literacy used by the townspeople or middle class people. Locating literacy differences in the two separate communities as well as among the townspeople utilizes the contexts in which those practices are found to better understand the nature of the diverse communal groups. For another example, in her book, *Whistlin’ and Crowin’ Women of Appalachia: Literacy Practices since College*, Katherine Kelleher Sohn locates her participants’ literacy practices in their community, workplaces, and homes. By placing the literacy practices in context, Sohn demonstrates the complex literacies the women already perform and the new literacy practices that enhance those existing ones, enabling significant changes in the lives of the women. When literacy practices such as creating a spreadsheet, collecting money for charity, solving a household problem, and so forth are actually recognized as such, then definitions that account for all forms of literacy practice can be developed, rather than labels such as “basic” or “functional.”

Furthering Heath’s and Sohn’s view of literacy and literacy practices, Susan L. Lytle in “Living Literacy: Rethinking Development in Adulthood” claims that when looking at literacy practices rather than merely skills or tasks, “being and becoming literate means using knowledge and experience to make sense of and act on the world” (382). Relying on what people already know is something that can be done at the earliest levels of education because while children are still learning and have limited experiences, they still have some experience and knowledge that grants them a variety of understanding. Lytle is building on critical literacy studies by scholars such as Paulo Freire who advocates reading the word and the world and Henry Giroux who believes people’s experiences shape their assumptions and perceptions. Critical literacy again
moves beyond the labels of “basic” or “functional” used in many settings by valuing people’s experience and knowledge.

Traditional literacy definitions are further complicated by the practice of looking at non-alphabetic items—movies, spaces, people, images, videogames, etc.—as texts that can be read (Bogost, Crowley, Gee, Mountford, Selfe). These non-traditional texts provide examples of what needs to be examined in the various places where literacy takes place. The literacies required to “read” and “write” these texts are important and often overlooked when discussing how to define and/or measure literacy, especially outside of cultural studies, literature, and, most notably for this project, rhetoric and composition circles. Nevertheless, when looking at these various contexts and texts, the need to remember people who are not part of the majority is important or once again definitions become exclusionary and not representative of the whole of society.

Adding another voice to the discussion of context, Marlon Kuntze, Deaf studies and education scholar, in his chapter, “Turning Literacy Inside Out,” discusses how literacy studies need to incorporate more than merely printed text. Discussing American Sign Language (ASL) in conjunction with visual literacy, Kuntze explains, “We should try to understand how [literacy] may manifest in various modes of human communication. …Keeping the scope of discussion limited will keep deeper issues of literacy obfuscated” (156). Relying only on alphabetic text when discussing literacy limits understanding of actual day-to-day literacy practices, how they are utilized, and the multimodal aspects of those practices. Studies of various contexts where literacy takes place will serve to curb obfuscation of deeper issues.
Deaf Literacy Practices

One group in particular complicates not only traditional definitions of literacy but also the understanding of literacy in various contexts. As a minority group, the Deaf community sees itself in much the same way as other oppressed groups of people, being oppressed due to difference from the dominant culture, the hearing culture. The field of Deaf studies approaches research from this standpoint. Much the same as those who work in gender, ethnic, and race studies, researchers in Deaf studies focus on ending oppression and misunderstanding and misrepresentation as well as retention of an established culture. With this culture in mind, discussions of oralism, audism (discriminatory practices that privilege hearing), and language are at the forefront of Deaf studies. The attention to the literacy practices of Deaf people is an area of focus that provides further insight into these discussions by focusing on the literacy knowledge that is often unacknowledged by outsiders.

While the language and literacy practices of Deaf students is an emerging focus in rhetoric and composition at this point, much research can be found in studies done by Education scholars. One issue the Deaf community does indeed face, studied extensively in education, is reading ability. According to Charlotte Enns and Lori Dustan Lafond, in their article “Reading Against All Odds: A Pilot Study of Two Deaf Students with Dyslexia,” “Deaf students’ low level of reading success is a long-standing and well-documented fact in the field of deaf education…Further, the question of how best to promote literacy in deaf children has long frustrated teachers” (63). Add a learning disability to the already difficult time Deaf students have reading and the outcome needs serious consideration. The desire to promote greater degrees of literacy, however, only take into account reading and writing in Standard English without
acknowledging other literacy practices that may be very well developed, like computer literacies or strong ASL proficiency.

Part of the issue with reading ability stems from the fact that reading and writing are done in English rather than ASL because “[n]o community of signers has adopted any conventional transcription system for general use” (Senghas and Monaghan 86). The assumption by many is that ASL is like English, but ASL is a more conceptual language that does not easily translate in a word-for-word manner to English. Nuances, such as facial expression and body language, change the meaning of any given sign, as does context, typifying multimodality. In addition, not all signs are the same based on state and region, much like accents for hearing people. For example, in Minnesota the sign for “car” is the same as “drive” where the signer makes a motion much like grasping a steering wheel and moving is slightly, but in California the sign for “car” is made by forming the letter “C” with each hand and stacking them one on top of the other and then moving them away from each other and back again in an up and down motion.

While the early work in literacy studies by Walter Ong in *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* paved the way, it has been much criticized yet remains a foundational text. In this book, Ong states:

> Written texts all have to be related somehow, directly or indirectly, to the world of sound, the natural habitat of language, to yield their meanings. ‘Reading’ a text means converting it to sound, aloud or in the imagination, syllable-by-syllable in slow reading or sketchily in the rapid reading common to high-technology cultures. Writing can never dispense with orality. (8)

The message sent by such a statement assumes that people who are deaf still have a sense of sound and orality, which is not true for many Deaf people. Also, while ASL is a “spoken”
language, it lacks the sound that Ong suggests. Ong also states, “Despite the richness of gesture, elaborated sign languages are substitutes for speech and dependent on oral speech systems, even when used by the congenitally deaf” (7). Again, the syntax of ASL belies this statement because if it were truly dependent on oral English, the languages would be more closely related. In these two instances, Ong makes assumptions about people who are deaf based very much on his own experiences as a hearing person. While he acknowledges that oral cultures are difficult to study due to his and other scholars’ ability to read and write, he fails to recognize the same difficulty when discussing people who are deaf and misses an opportunity to look more closely at additional literacy practices. This error has long lasting effects on studies of literacy learning.

Regarding literacy learning, in “Natives and Newcomers: Gaining Access to Literacy in a Classroom for Deaf Children,” Claire Ramsey and Carol Padden explain:

Primarily, we suggest for deaf children, reading and writing are not based solely upon detailed knowledge of English. Rather, these abilities are based upon knowledge of the juxtaposition of ASL and English and the ability to use one’s primary face-to-face language to approach one’s print language (and vice versa).

(21)

Learning how to negotiate two different forms of literacy, one print and one visual, becomes yet another form of literacy and challenges Ong’s assumptions that these systems are based on orality. Still important, though, is the recognition that ASL is not always exactly the same among users because it can vary between regions, states, and communities. Also important is the understanding of how bilingualism and/or code switching further complicate language acquisition. As it affects d/Deaf students, M. Virginia Swisher, in “The Language-Learning Situation of Deaf Students” cautions, “one cannot assume that deaf students have been exposed
to ASL or predict with any certainty what their language attitudes will be. One can predict, however, that English is likely to have been an issue for them for most of their lives” (251). Obviously, negotiating literacy practices is a key factor in this education scholarship and in complicating traditional views of English-based literacy.

Notably, the edited collection *Literacy and Deaf People: Cultural and Contextual Perspectives* by Brenda Jo Brueggemann, rhetorician and disability studies scholar, pulls together several essays that locate “the study of deaf people’s literacy within their various cultural constructs and specific contexts” (3). This collection is an example of the research advocated by Lindquist and Seitz based in a variety of contextual situations: economic, historical, intellectual, political, and cultural. Consisting of nine essays, eight deal with some form of literacy education at a variety of school levels that negotiate culture, signed language, and written language. The ninth essay discusses Deaf women’s autobiographical practices. All of these pieces reinforce traditional understandings of being literate as having the ability to read and write in the culture’s dominant language. Bilingualism is emphasized and, to an extent, necessary, yet the focus on education is notable and somewhat troubling when not all people have the same access to education (Chall 55). The essays touch on some of the literacy practices of Deaf populations, such as lip reading, orality, and language acquisition, and while the collection seeks to move away from Deaf people being “judged by hearing English literacy standards” (Brueggemann 3), the emphasis still appears to be on acquiring those hearing English skills or, at least, mimicking them in educational settings.

The focus on education and acquisition of Standard English ignores a number of people. What about those who have limited education or did not do well in school? What about those who just wanted to work in order to earn money whether or not they cared about formal
schooling? What about those who had limited access to education in general or a quality education? Studies that focus mainly or only on formal education and the extent to which people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing develop Standard English literacy practices do not get at the core of what it means to be literate (Janks, Kuntze, and Lindquist and Seitz), especially for working-class peoples who have not generally had the same educational opportunities as the dominant middle class. By only approaching literacy from an educational standpoint that emphasizes textual English literacy, many practices of the working class as well as Deaf culture and communities are ignored, limiting perception of what it means to be literate. The complex literacy practices that enable working-class Deaf people, as well as the middle-class Deaf, to navigate the hearing world around them have been overlooked.

In order to demonstrate the complex literacy practices employed by Deaf adults who are working class, research and study are required in order to fully understand the extent to which Deaf people practice alternative literacies in a variety of contexts. Yes, “fitting in” with hearing people is important and, as the dominant group, hearing people are always present in the lives of Deaf people. This fact means that the literacy practices involved can be quite complex. Because working-class people are often considered undereducated by many, and illiterate by some, their literacy practices demonstrate a talent for rhetoric to a high degree in order to communicate in a manner to be understood, and even more so to understand, despite language differences. Their literacy practices require an extensive awareness of how best to navigate the rhetorical situation in all of its complexities. For example, walking into a room and knowing who to approach in order to get an answer to a question when no one is at a reception desk or there is no reception desk means understanding by posture and position who would be the person in charge. Such negotiations and/or navigations need to be explored as an example of rhetorical practice by a
group that is often defined in terms of lack, especially when discussing literacy and education.

One literacy study done by Madeline Maxell is discussed in her article “Some Functions and Uses of Literacy in the Deaf Community.” Her study focuses on communication practices in the homes of children who are deaf and their hearing and deaf parents across all classes. After discussing various literacy practices—writing, commercial, home—Maxell urges scholars to conduct further research, stating that “It may be surprising at first that a minority that is undereducated and linguistically restricted by the absence of hearing should utilize literacy in ways that the dominant culture with free access to a tradition of literacy does not” (219). In other words, the dominant hearing culture discriminates against the Deaf community by devaluing the literate and rhetorical practices that members of Deaf culture must obtain in order to endure the hearing world around them. Discrimination occurs by defining literacy practices in terms of reading and writing Standard English, which lessens bilingual abilities. Working-class Deaf people broaden and challenge traditional literacy definitions by demonstrating complex literacy practices that shape their identities, communities, and culture.

And while there are those who espouse literacy as a means of moving up in social class, one of the implications of completing one’s education, there is no guarantee that the move from one class or from one way of identifying to another can even be made. According to Lindquist and Seitz, “it’s not necessarily the case that everyone who is working class can, by acquiring the right ‘literacy moves,’ become happily middle class—even if they have the money and/or connections to get them access” (123). For working-class Deaf people the move would be even more difficult. There are social graces involved that are sometimes too difficult to master. According to Barbara Jensen in “Across the Great Divide: Crossing Classes and Clashing Cultures”: 
Professional middle class social style, language, and knowledge constitute a kind of social currency. People who have learned these things can use it for entrance into, and access to some amount of power … Cultural barriers may be as effective in shutting out working class people as are the (significant) economic ones….

Social cues or markers denote one’s status and call attention to one’s background, and those markers are difficult to overcome regardless of the education or connections one makes. For people with hearing loss, identifying as a hearing person may help in class movement but doing so is difficult and requires auditory aids and/or enhancements and speech training along with lip reading. Even with these advantages, there are often markers that denote hearing loss, such as vocal markers or lack of eye contact due to watching a speaker’s lips. These markers often lead to hearing people thinking the speaker has a mental disability rather than hearing loss. Whatever the social markers, social style or eye contact, “lack” is a marker of the working class.

On the other hand, identifying as Deaf and part of the Deaf community, in part and regardless of class, is through language. Some deaf people are provided with cochlear implants at a very young age and are taught to lipread and speak, growing up as “hearing” people, a practice which is very controversial in Deaf communities and culture because most often it is the hearing parents of deaf children, rather than the people who are deaf themselves, who choose this option. Other people who are deaf become bilingual in all aspects including speech, and yet others reject any aspect of being a “hearing” person and never learn to read lips or to vocalize. The key to community is the shared language, and becoming part of most Deaf communities requires knowledge of ASL.
Deaf Identity Creating Community

H-D Dirksen L. Bauman, in *Open Your Eyes: Deaf Studies Talking*, explains that of main concern in Deaf communities are the notions of identity, power, and language (9). He explains that “identity is not a fixed, stable notion, rooted in a single defining element, such as ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, or language skill” (328) and power is constantly a concern regarding Deaf people and their “right to use sign language, the right to intermarry, and the right not to be subjected to medical and religious cures, the right simply to be left alone” (15). And third, “the revelation of the linguistic nature of sign languages that opened the way for Deaf Studies to enter the public discourse,” (15) is probably the main concept of concern. The shared identity as Deaf utilizing a shared language, ASL, aids in the creation of Deaf communities. These communities are often close knit even though separated physically by many miles. Just as anyone can belong to almost any type of community and a number of discourse communities that require certain shared qualities and literacies, the Deaf community demands shared language in order to fully communicate. Outsiders are sometimes welcome but will feel somewhat uncomfortable and hesitant. Hearing people who are willing to sign may be welcomed into a community, but they should have an understanding of Deaf culture and the community because it is difficult for “outsiders, such as those raised orally, to assimilate to the ways of Deaf people—from eye gaze to cultural patterns of introductions and value systems” (Bauman 9). To some, the need for a certain language may seem exclusionary but when English-Only movements seem to rise annually, the need for a shared language to confront this hegemonic powerhouse is necessary to maintain the shared identity.

In short, being a part of the Deaf community does not require one to be deaf her or himself, but it does require the understanding of the value systems and language of the
community. However, Deaf culture is another thing entirely and to be a member does require deafness in the medical sense and that one is a “native” Deaf person, rather than a pseudo-hearing person (Bauman 10). The distinctions are important and somewhat dependent on the literacy practices that Deaf people utilize, some of which are culturally dependent.

A Deaf Community in Central Minnesota

As stated previously, literacy practices of Deaf people is clearly an area of focus for scholars in rhetoric and writing, albeit not a major focus as of yet. Brueggemann’s pulling together of several essays that locate “the study of deaf people’s literacy within their various cultural constructs and specific contexts” (3), discussing literacy in the way advocated by Lindquist and Seitz, provides some insight as to what some of these practices are. And while her collection on literacy and Deaf people is beneficial in understanding literacies in practice in certain contexts, Brueggemann states, “We need many more studies of literacy learning by deaf people in different cultures, communities, and contexts” (22). To help address that need, this research project seeks to study the literacy practices of Deaf members in a specific Deaf community.

The community explored for this project was the one that I was a part of for many years and that I still try to visit with when I return to my parents’ home in central Minnesota. While this community is not one defined by physical space, like a town, it is a community that has developed as part of a culture that shares a common language outside the societal norm, namely ASL. The people themselves live miles apart yet manage to maintain a sense of community similar to any American town. In recent years, this maintenance has become easier with the advent of electronic mail, text messaging, and video phones. Prior to these technological
developments, though, the community was still strong and in touch with one another by means of other avenues, such as Deaf clubs and networking. The members of this particular Deaf community offer great insight into the ways in which Deaf people negotiate the hearing world around them.

More specifically, the members of this particular Deaf community are widespread in terms of miles and number over one hundred. Some are married Deaf couples while others, like my parents, are a couple where one person is Deaf and the other is hearing. Many have children, most of whom are hearing but some are Deaf. All of the members have dealt with the hearing home, workplace, marketplace, school, and social environments. With one exception, the members who are the focus of this study all have or had hearing parents. Members of this community achieved different levels of education from barely finishing elementary school to earning a Master’s degree. The variables make this community an interesting one to study because the negotiations vary from person to person in remarkable ways yet perform together in a cohesive and communal manner.

The community as a whole is not a formal group, like any community of people living near each other. The commonality and driving force behind it is the shared language of ASL. People who cannot sign are not part of the community. They may be known to the community, but they are not a part of it. As with any community, communication is a key component, and without the language, communication becomes difficult.

Utilizing interviews, I have extrapolated the variety of literacy practices that three members of this community employ in order to navigate the hearing world. My membership in this community presents some limitations due to my perceptions not only of the individuals, but also of Deaf culture because I am not deaf and cannot understand that perspective. Clarifying
questions were asked to ensure understanding, especially given the nuanced nature of ASL. Nevertheless, my insider status gains me entry into their lives in a way other hearing people would not have.

This project is one that this particular Deaf community has wanted for quite some time. They desire for hearing people to have an understanding of what it is that they go through in order to assimilate, to an extent, with the dominant hearing culture. My hope is that the limited nature of this project, focusing on literacy practices, will provide some level of understanding and will also provide insight as to what research remains to be done to develop further understanding. To this end, the research questions I sought to answer are:

1. What are the literacy practices of individual participants?
2. What literacy challenges does each individual participant face?
3. How are various hearing contexts (workplace, marketplace, school, home, social) negotiated?
4. What are some of the common practices for the community?
5. What common challenges does the community face?

The data collection and analysis utilizes a variety of methods and methodologies. In particular, a feminist approach ensures fair treatment of the participants and the data. According to Patricia A. Sullivan in “Feminism and Methodology, “researchers who engage in feminist approaches “are consciously seeking to create the conditions and circumstances whereby voices, stories, and discourses too long silent in the academy can be heard” (58). Allowing the “voices, stories, and discourses” of working-class Deaf people to contribute to conversations regarding literacy and what it is to be literate serves this goal. In addition, while Sullivan’s focus is primarily on gender differences, ablest notions need to be called into question and a feminist
Another reason for utilizing a feminist approach is that it does not claim any form of objectivity. My positionality is acknowledged in the analysis of the data. Being a hearing person writing about the Deaf creates an odd dynamic due to my privileged position. Also, contributing to my privileged state is my level of education. I had to present the complexities of the literacy practices being explored accurately without romanticizing them or downplaying their effectiveness for the members of this particular community. A feminist approach aids in the most challenging task of all, interpreting of the interviews once they are complete. Because ASL does not have the same syntactical structure as English and because it is a conceptual language, the words are nuanced by facial expression, body language, and context. Remaining true to the meaning and intent was constantly a focus and concern during the data analysis. Relying on reflexivity, a feminist approach forced me to question my biases and approach when interpreting the interviews.

In addition, transcripts of the conversations were created in order to better determine meaning and intent. The use of interviews, according to Steiner Kvale and Svend Brinkmann in Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing, allows “the interviewer and interviewee through their relationship [to] produce knowledge” (17). The joint production of knowledge is in keeping with feminist methodology. Kvale and Brinkmann acknowledge the unique relationship between interviewer and interviewee, stating:

…An interview is a conversation that has a structure and a purpose. It goes beyond the spontaneous exchange of views in everyday conversations, and becomes a careful questioning and listening approach with the purpose of obtaining thoroughly tested knowledge. The research interview is not
conversation between equal partners, because the researcher defines and controls the situation. The interview researcher introduces the topic of the interview and also critically follows up on the subject’s answers to his or her questions. (3)

With this relationship in mind, reflexivity was once again very important.

For this project, I discuss each of the participants’ literacy practices individually and then synthesize the findings to present a common group of literacy practices in various contexts. The whole community has many shared practices that vary mainly in extent used from person to person and context to context, and this idea is evident from discussing the individuals’ literacy practices they employ in a variety of contexts.

Understanding the literacy practices of a specific Deaf community that is comprised of mostly working-class people provides insight as to how traditional definitions of literacy are not enough to represent society as a whole. These various literacy practices demonstrate a complexity and high-level understanding of rhetorical situations that challenge views of Deaf people or, more specifically, working-class Deaf people, as lacking and in some cases as illiterate. The literacies that must be negotiated on a daily basis are surprising. I hope that this project demonstrates the high level of literacy practiced by these people whom I call family and friends.

Looking Ahead

The following chapter discusses the community that has been researched along with the methods and methodologies that served to answer the research questions, above. Beginning with a detailed description of the community and participant selection, the first section outlines how potential participants were recruited via email and the videophone. The videophone was the
preferred method of contacting potential participants because email tends to be in Standard
English and not all potential participants read Standard English well. Utilizing the videophone
enabled people to readily recognize me and allowed us to use ASL to communicate rather than a
faceless email system.

Following the discussion of how participants were selected, I discuss how feminist
methods and methodologies advocated by Nancy Naples and Patricia A. Sullivan, among others,
aid in not only the collection of data, but also in the analysis of that data. In addition to feminist
methods of analysis in order to collect data, I conducted face-to-face interviews approved by the
Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board. The interviews were videotaped
with one camera focused on the participant and one focused on me, the interviewer.

After the chapter focusing on the community along with the methods and methodologies,
in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, I discuss each of the three participants – Linda, Wade, and Karen – and
their various literacy practices. Because the focus of this project is on how the literacy practices
of working-class Deaf adults complicate and challenge traditional definitions of literacy and
demonstrate complex rhetorical skills, each person’s literacy practices are discussed in-depth to
get a sense of situation and context along with sub-contexts.

The organization for each participant focuses first on literacy practices in the home
during childhood and then the present. The second context that is discussed is the workplace, and
it is divided into two to three sub-contexts depending on the particular participant being
discussed in that chapter whether Linda in Chapter 3, Wade in Chapter 4, or Karen in Chapter 5.
The marketplace follows and is divided into the sub-contexts of “Shopping” and “Professional
Services” for all three participants. Then school is discussed and for Linda and Karen that
discussion is divided to address their post-secondary education. The final context is social, which
comes full circle and is similar to the home context. Within each context and sub-context each participant’s literacy practices are discussed in four separate categories: textual, visual, digital, and oral.

The digital literacies overlap somewhat with those of reading and writing in general because closed captioning is read, as are emails, text messages, and websites. However the literacy practices engaged are somewhat different with a digital text than a print text. In addition to the literacy practices demanded by these digital technologies, the benefits for the Deaf community these technologies bring are also acknowledged and described as they remediate more traditional practices.

While visual literacies have some similarities to digital literacies due to shared spaces, there are other visuals that are not of a digital nature. ASL is a visual language that does not rely solely on what the hands do, but also on facial expression and body language, much like meaning in spoken language relies on pitch, tone, and volume. As a literacy practice, ASL, along with gesture, is discussed and described. Also, Deaf people sometimes rely on drawn pictures along with written text to explain a variety of topics in various contexts and sub-contexts. Sometimes the drawings make understanding easier. In addition, the rhetorical situation is often determined by what is seen upon entering a room, area, or site and determines which literacy practice is utilized in that context or sub-context. The literacies in the visual literacy sections of each chapter further illustrate alternative practices that need to be acknowledged as such.

In the sixth, and final, chapter, I compare and contrast the literacy practices of the three participants and explain how the literacy practices of working-class Deaf adults complicate and challenge traditional definitions of literacy based on the analysis of practices based on the answers each participant provided to the interview questions. Also, a description of the complex
rhetorical skills demonstrated provides implications for the field of rhetoric and composition that need to be taken into consideration. These implications and the consideration that needs to take place are discussed in-depth. Based on the data and questions that arise, suggestions for future research are made in order to continue the work of understanding this complex community as well as other communities of Deaf people. A daunting task to be sure, yet an important one as Deaf people further complicate how we understand social hierarchies and power structures.
CHAPTER 2. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The previous chapter outlined the need to study literacy practices in context and, more importantly, the need to examine the literacy practices of non-traditional groups, such as working-class Deaf people. This chapter discusses the use of qualitative research methodology and methods in order to investigate literacy practices in a variety of contexts. The decision to begin this study stemmed from personal experience with people who are part of Deaf culture and the need to develop a more encompassing definition of what it is to be a literate person. At this time literacy practices other than just reading and writing Standard English have been well documented yet not acknowledged in dictionary definitions of “literacy” or in many other contexts, such as classrooms and workplaces. Utilizing qualitative and feminist approaches to interviews in order to collect data from Deaf participants, this study has presented the opportunity to investigate the literacy practices of an underrepresented group that has developed a significant number of said practices. Finally, the study has provided an opportunity to gain some insight into the lives of working-class Deaf people who may return to academia or have children who attend college and the literacy practices already encountered by these potential students.

Prior to discussing the methodologies and methods used in conducting the study, I present a brief review of the rationale for the study from Chapter 1. The remainder of this chapter is composed of seven major sections: (a) Research Design, (b) Feminist Methodology, (c) Participant Selection, (d) Data Collection, (e) Data Analysis, (f) Trustworthiness, and (g) Looking Forward.
Brief Review of the Rationale

The current study examined literacy practices in context to demonstrate the need for a more complex definition of literacy, rather than primarily as reading and writing in Standard English. The reason context plays such a large part in understanding literacy is because, as Julie Lindquist and David Seitz explain, it allows for literacy to be studied or reflected upon in a specific moment and contributes to understanding literacy as a social construct (13). Literate practices in a narrow sense, both socially and politically, support the status quo, which is part of the reason why the dominant culture holds such narrow definitions. When a large portion of the population thinks of literacy as the ability to read and write in Standard English, then power structures are maintained. As Nancy A. Naples states in Feminism and Method, “Dynamics of power influence how problems are defined, which knowers are identified and are given credibility, how interactions are interpreted, and how ethnographic narratives are constructed” (48). In this sense, understanding literacy in context changes the dynamics due to how those practices are interpreted and situated. And while literacy does not have the means to flatten power structures, it has yet to be recognized in all of its complexities by the majority of the population in a manner that possibly could.

Studying the literacy practices of various populations is important, according to scholars (Brueggermann, Heath, Purcell-Gates, Sohn), in order to begin to define literacy in a way that takes all practices into account. The population’s literacy practices studied for this dissertation are those of a working-class Deaf community of which I am a fringe member. Deaf literacy practices have been studied a great deal in educational settings, but studying literacy practices in other contexts is important in order to understand literacy in a broader sense. To move outside of the classroom is also important because it allows for deeper understanding of what literacy
practices are actually in use that have been gained or honed alongside those learned in school settings. These reasons underpin the following discussion of the research conducted.

**Research Design**

The following six questions were developed in order to gain a broader understanding of what it means to be literate:

1. What are the literacy practices of individual participants?
2. What literacy challenges does each individual participant face?
3. How are various hearing contexts (home, workplace, marketplace, school, social) negotiated?
4. What are some of the common literacy practices for the community?
5. What common literacy challenges does the community face?

As noted above, I wanted to examine contexts that included school but also looked at other areas in which various literacy practices take place, and that was the focus of the research.

The first three research questions were designed to gain an understanding of each participant’s individual literacy practices in a variety of contexts. To answer these three questions, I interviewed three participants and asked open-ended questions about a variety of contexts: workplace, marketplace, school, and home (see Appendix A). In addition, I asked follow-up questions to clarify points. Answers varied somewhat from person to person yet provided unique participant profiles.

To discover overlap, I answered questions four and five by comparing the answers provided by each individual. Also, research done in the field of education, described in the previous chapter, indicated some of the common challenges faced by people who are deaf. In
addition, I know the people I interviewed and have had many conversations with them. Going into the research I had some knowledge as well as biases that informed the decisions I made.

For the current study, I utilized qualitative research methods rather than quantitative or a mixture of both. The main reason for this selection was that studying literacy practices in context was the most viable option. According to Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, qualitative research has historically attempted to aid researchers in understanding the “other” (1-2). Due to the ever-changing duration and use of those practices, quantifying them would have been difficult if not impossible. Also, given the “other” status of working-class Deaf adults, qualitative methods made each individual’s use of literacy practices more understandable; as Sharan B. Merriam explains, “qualitative researchers are interested in how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (14). Participants shared their experiences and what those experiences meant for them with me, leading to a richer understanding of their literacy practices.

In addition, utilizing qualitative research methods took into account the difference in language and representation, advocated by David Silverman. Silverman maintains that when doing qualitative research, the researcher must “broaden our conception of qualitative research beyond issues of subjective ‘meaning’…” (1) and beware conclusions based on anecdotal evidence by incorporating a comprehensive view of the data (362). Utilizing the preferred language of the participants aided in creating a comfortable situation. Focusing on the individual’s point of view rather than a quantifiable number of literacy instances allowed her or his perspective to be captured (Denizen and Lincoln 16). I found that each participant held a unique perspective based on her or his education, upbringing, and experience.
Finally, using qualitative methods provided an inductive approach to the data rather than determining a hypothesis prior to the research and doing analysis to prove or disprove the hypothesis or, another possible method, counting the number of times a particular literacy practice is used daily. Therefore, employing qualitative methods aided in understanding phenomena rather than looking for cause and effect, according to Maykut and Morehouse (x) which Merriam echoes, “The overall purpose is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences” (23, emphasis author’s). As discussed in the previous chapter, literacy as a phenomenon needs to be studied in context because the context determines the literacy practices to be used. Already having some knowledge of the cause and effect relationship made quantifying such activities not as urgent as the need to understand actual practice.

**Feminist Methodology**

I took a feminist approach to the study, which consisted of reflecting on positionality and communicating in ASL. Part of the reason for this choice of methodology was the desire to respect the participants and their lived experiences as much as possible. Leslie Rebecca Bloom supports the use of this approach in *Under the Sign of Hope*, stating, “feminist methodology promises a more interpersonal and reciprocal relationship between researchers and those whose lives are the focus of the research” (1). This promise protected the participants by communicating in a shared language that allowed them to express themselves in an authentic manner, granted those expressions were then interpreted, which poses another potential issue to be discussed below. Also, each participant was given a pseudonym to protect her or his identity.

Feminist methodology values the knowledge of people with lived experience. In particular, a feminist approach ensured fair treatment of the participants and the data. According
to Patricia A. Sullivan in “Feminism and Methodology,” researchers who engage in feminist approaches “are consciously seeking to create the conditions and circumstances whereby voices, stories, and discourses too long silent in the academy can be heard” (58). Having the “voices, stories, and discourses” of working-class Deaf people contribute to conversations regarding literacy and what it is to be literate served this goal. While Sullivan’s focus was primarily on gender differences and called those differences into question, for my study abest notions need to be called into question and a feminist approach served this end by providing a forum to “hear” disabled voices.

In addition, the recognition of my positionality was necessary when utilizing a feminist approach to the research because “the identification of power relations in the research process is generally seen as necessary” (Ramazanoglu and Holland 118). To that end, I utilized reflexivity practices advocated by Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Deborah Piatelli in “Holistic Reflexivity.” They state, “Reflexivity exposes the exercise of power throughout the entire research process. It questions the authority of knowledge and opens up the possibility for negotiating knowledge claims as well as holds researchers accountable to those with whom they research” (495). Reflecting on the power structures inherent in interactions with participants created a complex situation, yet was a step that assisted in my understanding and, according to Merriam, aided me in discussing the data collection and analysis in a manner that “allows the reader to better understand how the individual researcher might have arrived at the particular interpretation of the data” (219). Reflexivity, as a feminist method, aided in understanding positionality and the power structures inherent in interactions with participants. One difficulty encountered was my positionality being fluid and changing during those interactions. The power structures changed from time to time and made reflection a challenge in order to continually
maintain awareness of those changes. For example, as the research, I was the one asking the questions and leading part of the discussion; however, my participants would often refer to my prior knowledge saying “you know” and making the questions and my asking seem unnecessary, shifting me from trying to be objective and focus on what was said in the interview to someone who knows so much more than what was actually said.

While reflecting on this study as part of my feminist approach, one complexity that I faced and needed to continuously acknowledge was my insider/outsider status, which remained fluid throughout the entire project. Hesse-Biber and Piatelli advocate reflecting on this part of one’s positionality. They state:

In considering positionality, one must not take for granted that we are insiders as we may make false assumptions, blind ourselves to important insights and viewpoints, or simply ask the wrong questions. However, if we stand back and distance ourselves as outsiders, we are in danger of producing the very barriers we wish to deconstruct. (499)

Because the deconstruction of barriers is the main reason for having done this project as a part of feminist ideologies, I had to continually reflect on my insider/outsider status and how that affected my approach to interacting with participants and analyzing data as well as how I wrote about the participants and my findings and how to remain somewhat objective while still acknowledging my lived experiences.

Beginning the reflective process, I understand that my position within the community is as a member but a fringe member because while being part of the community I am not part of the culture. Being hearing marks me as an outsider even though there is understanding and knowledge of Deaf culture to some degree. Nevertheless, this limited knowledge required the
input of culturally Deaf participants. My position was a privileged one with regard to insider status, but was also one where I needed to rely on participants to clarify understanding and build on or even challenge my knowledge of Deaf culture, acknowledging the feminist need to understand power structures within the relationship.

Additionally, my insider status was affected because I moved away from Central Minnesota in 1992, visiting only on occasion, then later moved to Ohio. Contact with the members of this Deaf community was limited by distance and technology. Also, most of the people in the community had families, limiting the amount of contact that may have been maintained even had I remained in the area. While relatives and close friends generally maintained contact with more frequency, other members of the community were in touch only sporadically. The introduction of videophones made contact easier and more frequent when in the area. Not having a videophone of my own, however, limited and continues to limit contact. Again, reflecting on how distance and time has affected my insider status addresses Hesse-Biber and Piatelli’s concerns.

The second element of my positionality in relation to that of participants that required reflection is the age difference; they have known me since my childhood. Yet according to Christopher Dunbar, Jr., Dalia Rodriguez, and Laurence Parker, in “Race, Subjectivity, and the Interview Process,” it’s important for the participants to know the researcher. They explain, “Self-disclosure on the part of the interviewer is especially important when he or she is interviewing people of color, because, like other marginalized individuals, people of color tend to regard outsiders with suspicion. Years of misrepresentation and misinterpretation have legitimated skepticism and distrust” (291). While these authors are discussing the relationship between different ethnicities, the same issues arise with any oppressed group that has been the
subject of “misrepresentation and misinterpretation.” Knowing the researcher to some extent aids in leveling the power structures that are of great concern in feminist methodology and alleviates fears of misrepresentation due to the researcher’s, or in this case, my insider status and my awareness of misrepresentations and misinterpretation that have happened in the past. The difference of one or two decades is significant and could have led to me being dismissed despite my insider status, but because participants know me and knew what I wanted to accomplish, the difference (both age and auditory) in this instance did not interfere with the data collection.

On the other hand, my level of education mitigated some of the power structures in the generational relationship due to the amount of respect that education is given by the members of the community while others may find it intimidating. Again, it is important to reflect on the difference in education that would traditionally affect power dynamics, not often acknowledged by researchers; however, I am someone the members of this community claim as their own, and my success is their success, a concept that is part of working-class values. Barbara Jensen, in “Across the Great Divide,” explains this element of working-class mentality, “individuality (but not necessarily self) is downplayed in favor of a powerful sense of community and loyalty, and an internal sense of ‘belonging’” (174). Taking on this project provided me not only the necessary respect to garner volunteers for participation, but also strengthened the identity of the community and my place in it. In addition, working-class peoples have traditionally been underrepresented in research, and a feminist approach works to give voice to those underrepresented groups by sharing their stories and striving to acknowledge the importance of everyone’s stories when it comes to research.

Finally, the language spoken by the community was another important element related to insider status and access. I am in a position of privilege because of my ability to communicate
effectively without mediation establishing the “interpersonal and reciprocal relationship” (1) that Bloom advocates. Other researchers would have difficulty working within this community if they did not speak ASL. My fluency in ASL provided me access that others would be denied if forced to utilize the aid of interpreters. Not only were members willing to participate due to my insider status, but they were also able to communicate freely. Being free from another’s interpretation allowed me to fully explore the conversation held during the interviews even though I did interpret the conversations into English.

Participant Selection

This project focused on three individuals from a Central Minnesota Deaf community. The first step in selecting participants was to determine what group of working-class Deaf adults I could access. While Deaf people inhabit all areas of the country to different degrees, access has always been an issue. While sharing ASL as a language has been beneficial when interacting with people who are deaf, having insider knowledge of a community benefited me when choosing a group from which to request participation. More importantly, the chosen community has traditionally been comprised largely of culturally Deaf people rather than people who are deaf by medical standards and were raised to be “oral,” with hearing aids or cochlear implants as well as speaking and lip reading and generally without ASL.

Considering this group, I began my recruitment strategy by creating a list of twenty people to contact. All of these individuals are known to me, and I had a reason to ask each one to participate because of my knowledge of their lives. I interpreted a script, approved by BGSU’s Human Subjects Review Board (See Appendix B), into ASL in order to request participation. While many people were interested in being part of the study, schedules made it difficult for
most to participate due to my limited time in Minnesota. There were also some people who I contacted that were a bit dubious about what I was doing. An element of distrust was evident in those rejections. It was not distrust of me, which was made clear, but a general distrust of how Deaf people are often represented and, more so, how the research would be viewed in the long run by hearing people. None of them wanted to come across not being able to function normally, normal for them, within hearing society.

The recruiting of the participants took place utilizing a videophone. Videophones are similar to webcams and programs like Skype except the image is usually seen on a television screen and, in order for the discussion to be clear, a high-speed bandwidth is required. Although a fairly recent invention, videophones have changed the communication practices of people who are deaf and use primarily ASL to communicate. Employing a videophone for recruitment enabled me to communicate in the most effective way with potential participants because we could sign with one another rather than relying on other technologies, such as email or text messaging, that rely heavily on print literacies. Three participants whose schedules worked with mine agreed to be interviewed for this study.

Data Collection

In order to collect data, I conducted face-to-face interviews, approved by the Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) (See Appendix D). The interviews were videotaped with one camera focused on the participant and one focused on me, the interviewer. Videotaping the interviews allowed me to view the conversations and examine meaning that may not be entirely evident in transcripts. Transcription has limitations, as discussed below, that viewing the conversations did not have. However, video was difficult to
code and present in a text-based document requiring the development of transcripts even though they were somewhat limiting.

When determining the approach for gathering data, many different methods and methodologies could have been used. According to Carol A. B. Warren, “Researchers often choose qualitative interviews over ethnographic methods when their topics of interest do not center on particular settings but their concern is with establishing common patterns or themes between particular types of respondents” (85). While this dissertation focuses on literacy practices in context, the physical setting of those contexts was not as important to me at the time as what was specifically done within those settings and establishing commonalities among participants. My desire was to describe the various literacy practices of participants in the home, workplace, marketplace, school, and social contexts. Therefore, the interview analyses done as part of this study are considered “particularistic” by Merriam:

*Particularistic* means that case studies focus on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon. The case itself is important for what it reveals about the phenomenon and for what it might represent. This specificity of focus makes it an especially good design for practical problems—for questions, situations or puzzling occurrences arising from everyday practice.(43)

Observation and artifact collection remain options for the future, but the focus of this particular project was on finding the commonalities among the participants and contexts and how those commonalities challenge traditional definitions of literacy as text-based in Standard English.
Interviews

In order to determine individual literacy practices that would lead to the determination of common practices data collection was done via interviews. The questions used during the interviews sought to discover literacy practices in five contexts: home, workplace, marketplace, school, and social. I knew the contexts which I wanted to examine and developed my questions accordingly. I also thought I knew the kinds of literacies that would be discussed and grouped the questions accordingly. The coding of the transcripts quickly changed how the literacies needed to be grouped, which is discussed below. Additionally, the method of interviewing was selected due to its cultural, political, and feminist nature.

Interviews as a research method, at the time of this study, were still fairly new historically speaking. Nevertheless, Jaber F. Gubrium and James A Holstein, in their introduction to *Handbook of Interview Research*, state, “the individual has the wherewithal to offer a meaningful description of, or set of opinions about, his or her life. Individuals, in their own right, are accepted as significant commentators on their own experience…” (5). Individuals possess knowledge of their lived experiences to share both culturally and socially. Once collected and studied, this knowledge provided information about various literacy practices in context from which all can learn.

Additionally, I chose interviewing as a method of research due to the importance of engaging face-to-face with working-class individuals as explained by Jensen:

Professional middle class social style, language, and knowledge constitute a kind of social currency. … most working class people’s native tongue is more metaphoric than literal, more personal and particular than abstract and universal. It is more implicit than explicit, more for members of a defined social group, also
more pithy, colorful, and narrative. It reflects cultural differences from the middle class. (177)

Working-class people tend to be more metaphorical than middle-class people and to share more personal information than the middle class because “sharing confidences with someone you hardly know might be considered rude or at least déclassé” in the middle class (Jensen 175). For many of the working-class, being able to express their selves was important in order to obtain the agency so often denied them. The metaphorical nature of working-class narration fit that of the Deaf culture participants not only due to class but also due to the conceptual nature of ASL. In addition, Deaf people tend to share personal information with one another and community members, like me, that is not normally shared by middle-class, hearing people. Asking someone how much money they make or what they paid for their house is not considered rude or too personal in this particular Deaf community.

Another benefit, in addition to the cultural aspect, of interview research is the democratizing aspect in utilizing interviews to collect data. Again, Gubrium and Holstein explain, “Everyone—each individual—is taken to have significant views and feelings about life that are accessible to others who undertake to ask about them” (5). With this idea in mind, the interviews shared the views, beliefs, and experiences of not merely those in power or who were typically the spokesperson for a given group but those who possess knowledge and voices of their own. Allowing others to have a voice broke down the power dynamics and provided a different picture than was typically seen when only those in control discussed the group as a whole rather than as individuals with different experiences and views.

Important to note, in feminist approaches to interviews, some researchers believe that the interviewee should guide the questions and discussion (Bloom 18). While I agreed that providing
the interviewee the power to lead the interview and guide the questions would be very beneficial for both participants and myself, needing to have interview questions approved by Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) prior to conducting the interviews limited the opportunity to do this. While I asked some follow-up questions and participants asked me questions, the script needed to be followed as closely as possible with each participant. That being said, participants felt free to discuss points that were not part of the script but added to the discussion and potential for understanding. I also tried not to be too repetitive while also trying to get as much information as possible.

In addition, the transcripts developed from the interviews illustrate the nature of knowledge making inherent in interpretation. The use of interviews, according to Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann in *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*, allowed “the interviewer and interviewee through their relationship [to] produce knowledge” (17). The joint production of knowledge was in keeping with feminist methodology. Kvale and Brinkmann acknowledge the unique relationship between interviewer and interviewee, stating:

> An interview is a conversation that has a structure and a purpose. It goes beyond the spontaneous exchange of views in everyday conversations, and becomes a careful questioning and listening approach with the purpose of obtaining thoroughly tested knowledge. The research interview is not a conversation between equal partners, because the researcher defines and controls the situation. The interview researcher introduces the topic of the interview and also critically follows up on the subject’s answers to his or her questions. (3)

With this relationship in mind, reflexivity once again was very important to address power structures during the interviews.
Data Analysis

In order to begin analyzing the data, I transcribed it utilizing broad translations and glossing. Once that task was completed, I used the qualitative method of interpretive-description or constant comparative method to analyze the data and determine the individuals’ literacy practices involved in each of the five contexts. Neither of these tasks were without issue.

Transcription

When transcribing the videotaped interviews, I used voice recognition software. I viewed the videos multiple times and each sign and its possible meanings along with the facial expressions and body language that accompanied it were narrated. As a conceptual language, the ASL used in the interviews demonstrated nuances that I found difficult to describe in Standardized English. Listing possibilities of meaning allowed me to determine the best interpretation of each, especially when taking facial expression and body language into account. Each viewing was narrated separately and then reviewed and interpreted into the final transcription (Appendix E) to ensure a high level of accuracy. In the end, the final interpretations of the transcriptions state what was said.

Transcribing the videos had several drawbacks. Stating the signed words along with facial expression and body position is a practical way to transcribe if one wants to examine how language is used or the multimodal nature of ASL or how meaning is made. My purpose was to examine what was said to determine what literacy practices were being used by each participant and then determine the commonalities. The interpretations of the videos that were used for analysis are just that, interpretations. They lack the richness of conversation and the deeper meanings of what was actually said; however, they provide the statements that were made that
could be analyzed and fractured into slivers that would answer the research questions.

In addition, while spoken English to written English has its drawbacks, such as how tone may construe sarcasm, ASL when compared to English had further drawbacks due to translation or interpretation issues between the two languages. As Melanie Metzger explains in *Sign Language Interpreting*, the common belief is that “translators should not influence the texts with which they work” (8). Yet, this task is nearly impossible due to context, words, and ideas all being open to interpretation by the researcher and the “social and cultural” aspects inherent in all texts and conversations (12). Because no orthographic form of ASL exists officially, transcription of the videotaped interviews attempted to maintain the words and ideas while interpreting them to English. The languages lack commensurability, making transcription difficult at best and overly simplified or complicated at worst.

Notably, various scholars have developed or utilized transcription protocols that use a variety of symbols and type sets to indicate sign versus facial movement versus body movement along with many other variables, such as Jack Hoza in *It’s Not What You Sign, It’s How You Sign It* and Melanie Metzger in *Sign Language Interpreting*. For analysis of the interview data, though, these protocols created the added difficulty of determining which symbols should stand for what and then how they could be coded. Also, these protocols are meant more for linguistic studies, and this project looks at literacy practices rather than the language itself. I made the decision that I needed something else and the voice recognition software aided in translating the interviews into readable English.

When transcribing ASL into English, Abigail Rosenthal describes three methods in her article “Text & Talk.” Each of these methods, broad translations, glosses, and visual representations, has its strengths and weaknesses when approaching the transcription of the
videotaped interviews. Broad translations generally ignore the ASL lexicon by adding direct and indirect pronouns and articles (Rosenthal 8). Translation thus relies heavily on the interpretation of the researcher, which can be affected by social and cultural aspects, such as education.

Granted, the interviews conducted in ASL did need to be translated into English. My broad translations adhered to the meaning of what was said, but sometimes misses how the statement was made. However, the goal of the project was to examine literacy practices not the manner in which they were discussed.

The second form of translation utilized is glosses, typically used “to present fundamental differences between languages both to colleagues and to nonexpert readers unversed in technical jargon” (Rosenthal 9) and was a selective process that often required me to determine what was included or left out. Taking a feminist approach to analyzing the data also meant taking the same approach to transcription. With that in mind, glossing the interviews relied heavily on reflexivity due to glossing’s heavy reliance on much more personal interpretation. This method was used in order to make the transcripts readable but caused some discomfort due to the desire to preserve participant’s word choice while not simplifying meaning. When including statements from the participants, those are generally my interpretations of what was meant versus what was signed and how it was signed. The meaning is theirs, but the words are mine, and that distinction caused discomfort during the writing process.

Again, my insider status makes interpretation easy for me being a hearing person who speaks ASL. However, my feminist and ethical nature taints that ease and my comfort with interpretation (part of why I am not an interpreter). I am uncomfortable putting my words in the mouths of others who can speak for themselves. Granted, hearing people do not generally understand that speaking because it is done in a different language. While I know what a given
individual has signed, there is a depth of meaning that cannot be articulated in English. I find this concept difficult to explain. The issue lies in the fact that I have my own way of speaking that is unique to me, every individual does. If another person tells me something and I tell a third person, the way that the first person said it is changed to the way I say it. Are the words the first person’s or mine? The dilemma I struggle with is that the words may be correct, but the spirit behind the words is never the same. This struggle has affected how I dealt with this project.

Finally, the third option that Rosenthal discusses is incorporating visual representations of the signs into the final project, but that seemed unlikely to affect the final outcomes of the analysis. While pictures of signs could have served an important purpose at times, such as demonstrating the multimodal effect of how facial expression or body language can change meaning, for the purpose of this project the use of visual representations of signs appeared extraneous and unnecessary to discuss the literacy practices of the participants. ASL is considered to be a separate literacy practice from English due to it being a different language even though a print version does not exist. Including pictures of signs to demonstrate ASL’s different syntax seemed extraneous and unnecessary when descriptions of signs work to do the same thing. Pictures of signs do not portray full meaning because facial expression and body language contribute to the full meaning provided any given sign, similar to how tone can shape what is spoken whereas the single written word cannot.

Because these methodologies left some room for error, the transcripts were shared with participants, enabling them to determine accuracy as to what their intentions were versus my interpretation. Participants in this study are active meaning makers, and their meaning needed to be clearly and accurately stated. Each participant was sent their transcript via email to make changes or add comments as needed. While all three were satisfied with the transcriptions, their
feedback was welcome and changes would have been made accordingly. The inclusion of participants in the research process is part of the feminist methodology employed for this study. As previously stated, Sullivan advocates including “voices, stories, and discourses” of underrepresented people. To that end, and to ensure the accuracy of my representation, including the participants was important.

Method of Analysis

Beginning to analyze the data required that it first be organized. I labeled the transcripts created using the transcription method described above according to participant and made copies. Then I determined the units of data to be analyzed. Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba refer to this process as unitizing in Naturalistic Inquiry, and I found it necessary to create pieces of data that could be coded in a manageable manner. Following the recommendations of Maykut and Morehouse along with those of Lincoln and Guba, I cut each question and answer segment out of the copied transcript and coded each separately. Utilizing the data in this manner gave access to smaller pieces of meaning that I later organized into larger categories, such as the contexts in which various literacy practices were utilized.

Once the smaller pieces were separated, the following coding system was used to show the major contexts:

- H Home
- W Workplace
- M Marketplace
- S School
- C Social
When the contexts overlapped, such as home and social, I made an additional copy and cut that piece out in order to keep the contexts separate. I wrote the appropriate code on each slip and made copies as appropriate to be able to discuss the literacy practices separately in each context.

The next element of the coding process were the literacy practices themselves. Looking at how I organized the interview questions, I had ideas of what types of literacy practices I wanted to examine. However that quickly changed as I kept examining each of the slips of paper. The original coding followed the question groups:

- T  Traditional
- C  Communication
- S  Skill-based

However, a change became apparent very quickly due to the overlap between traditional or “textual” literacies and communication literacies; the distinction was not apparent as to how traditional was not communication. Also, the number of skill-based literacies would each need to be discussed separately – gardening versus building versus cooking. I changed the coding to the following:

- T  Textual
- V  Visual
- D  Digital
- O  Oral (Vocal)

Some overlap occurred between literacy practices, such as a practice that was digital was also visual and textual because all three forms of literacy were at work simultaneously. An example of a digital and visual literacy was reading a blog by a Deaf person that includes signing and minimal text. I decided that the distinction between textual, or print, literacies could be separated from visual, which generally involved the signed languages themselves, and both could be made
distinct from the more obviously multimodal digital literacies, not to say that all three are not multimodal because they are; however, as Jody Shipka laments there are still a number of people who think that “multimodal” refers exclusively to digital technologies (10). For the coding, the larger category of the contexts made the overlap easier to handle when writing about the interviews because the use and reuse of some practices pointed to context as being a key to understanding the participants’ use of a particular literacy practice.

Furthermore, a couple of the statements made regarding literacy practices were overarching. For example, Linda claims to “write in ASL.” I clarified that statement once, but other than school, she was very adamant that ASL is her language of preference. Unless she stated otherwise, I described her writing as having ASL syntax because that is her preference. Wade was much the same way when he reminded me that I know how Deaf people write. I do know how they write. I’ve read many notes and emails written by Deaf people, and much like hearing people, they write how they talk; however, the language they use to talk is ASL. These statements made by the participants were coded in each context as overarching.

The first look at the units of data resulted in my coding the literacy practices within each context. Then, sub-contexts became apparent, and I found a secondary way to organize the data set. For example, I broke down the context of the workplace for one participant, Linda, into patients, co-workers, and supervisors because a variety of literacy practices may be used in a given context but only in particular situations, which these sub-contexts address. Because the sub-contexts sometimes varied, I kept the coding simple and just numbered them (1, 2, 3) within each of the major contexts. The chapters that follow, focusing on each individual, explain the secondary categories in more detail, adding further nuance to the broad contexts being examined.
The qualitative method of interpretive-description, otherwise known as the constant comparative method developed by Glaser and Strauss, was used. According to Merriam, “Because the basic strategy of the constant comparative method is compatible with the inductive, concept-building orientation of all qualitative research, the constant comparative method of data analysis has been adopted by many researchers who are not seeking to build substantive theory” (199). This approach to analysis presented an accurate description of the information provided in the interviews and recreated a “recognizable reality,” described by Maykut and Morehouse, for the participants that others outside of the community may then read and understand. Due to the narrative nature of this research, it was not conducive to quantitative methods unless the desire was to determine the amount time spent using each literacy practice, which was not the focus of this particular study. The use of interviews rather than observation also lent itself well to the constant comparative method.

While the need to have HSRB approval to do this research required a list of the interview questions, the questions were open-ended enough to allow participants to share as much or as little as they wanted. At times clarification was requested of the participants, so they provided further definition or elaboration as requested. HSRB approved the interviews for up to two hours. None of the interviews took that long and ranged from thirty to sixty minutes. The data collected from the interviews has been analyzed so it tells its own story and that of the participants.

Allowing the data to take the forefront of analysis is what the constant comparative method emphasizes. This method was beneficial because, according to Maykut and Morehouse, “we want to stay close to the research participants’ feelings, thoughts, and actions as they broadly relate to our focus of inquiry” (126). Because this project focused on the literacy practices of the participants in context, remaining “close” to how the participants regarded those
practices was important. Their regard, in part, demonstrates the need for a broader definition of literacy.

**Trustworthiness**

Any intellectual endeavor needs to guarantee some measure of trustworthiness for its findings. With that in mind, this study relied on a variety of techniques to establish credibility: possible recreation, and reflexivity.

One element of reliability to be concerned with was the ability to recreate the data set in another place and time. While interviewing different participants would elicit different responses, the overlap found in this study would be similar among other members of the community and members of other communities of culturally Deaf people. The main limitations other researchers would discover are the language barrier and the issue of insider/outsider status. Both of these limitations are surmountable with fluency in ASL and some understanding of Deaf culture.

My credibility as the researcher was the final concern of trustworthiness. Merriam explains, “Related to the integrity of the qualitative researcher is a…strategy sometimes labeled researcher’s position, or more recently, reflexivity” (219). Again, this strategy was utilized throughout the research process. The concern related to accurately portraying the views of the participants was that I could romanticize, simplify, or overstate the lived experiences of the participants. Reflexivity kept the focus on the study itself by acknowledging where various biases and assumptions lay. Reflexivity also made me acknowledge what I already knew versus what the participants stated. Most of that information was the same; however, a few differences did emerge. Conducting the interviews reinforced what I already knew and, in a couple moments, provided new insights.
Looking Forward

Each of the participants’ literacy practices is discussed individually in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, using pseudonyms to protect their identities. After discussing each of the participants and their individual literacy practices, I synthesize the findings in Chapter 6 to present a common group of literacy practices in various contexts along with the implications for the field of rhetoric and writing. While I discussed similar practices, the contexts vary greatly and the need for a variety of practices becomes clear. Although I already had experience with many of these practices due to my insider status, community member participation was necessary to provide as full an understanding as possible.
CHAPTER 3. ANALYSIS OF AN INTERVIEW WITH LINDA

The aim of this study was to investigate the literacy practices of working-class Deaf adults within typical contexts: home, workplace, marketplace, school, and social. The previous chapter discussed the research methods and methodologies used to conduct this study. This chapter focuses on the data collected via an interview with Linda. She is the first of the three participants being introduced in the interview analyses that take place in this chapter along with Chapters 4 and 5.

I conducted the interview with Linda in American Sign Language (ASL) and then interpreted and transcribed the signed words, facial expressions, and body language in order to analyze the conversation textually, using the constant comparative method within the five specific contexts. I analyzed each answer to determine the literacy practices in use as described in Chapter 2. Analysis of only the answers to the interview questions (see Appendix A), which did not specifically mention “literacy,” provides some limited answers for the first three research questions outlined in the previous chapters as they reflect Linda’s experiences:

1) What are the literacy practices of individual participants?
2) What literacy challenges does each individual participant face?
3) How are various hearing contexts negotiated?

Utilizing the constant comparison method, I determined four main types of literacy practices – textual, visual, digital, and oral – within each context. The contexts provide a means for discussing the analysis. In addition, I found sub-contexts within each of the main contexts that vary slightly in Chapters 4 and 5 based on the answers provided by each individual participant. Each of the literacy practices I found are discussed within each of the major contexts and their sub-contexts. The contexts and literacy practices within each are discussed in the same order for
each interview analysis. However, the sub-contexts within each context do change somewhat, having discovered differences among the participants within the main contexts.

The first type of literacy practices I found based on my analysis were textual literacies. They are important to discuss due to the emphasis placed on perceived correctness in Standard English and the difference in syntax used for writing Standard English in comparison to writing what Linda refers to as ASL. While there is not a formal written language for ASL, utilizing the syntax – no verb tense, limited prepositions, no articles, and switched modifier placement – offers an economy of words that Standard English does not. For example, Lottie L. Riekehof in *The Joy of Signing* explains, “While in English we would say: ‘I didn’t get to work until noon yesterday because I had an accident,’ ASL users would say: ‘Yesterday happened me accident; work arrive noon’” (12). This example shows English using thirteen words versus ASL only requiring seven. While textual literacies are one of the most used literacy practices found in this analysis when in hearing contexts, the economy of language practiced by the Deaf needs to be remembered.

The use of a signed language presents the second type of literacy practice used in multiple contexts, visual literacy. Visual literacy obviously is the reading of signs, but also facial expressions, body language, and various contexts. These practices are necessary for communication and situational understanding. The multimodal aspect of visual literacies is evident because ASL is a visual language that relies heavily on facial expression and body language. For example, raised eyebrows signify a question is being asked; therefore, it changes the meaning of the ASL signs “go store” from the statement “I’m going to the store” to a question “Are you going to the store?” In addition, the situational understanding is significant due to entering spaces and needing to be able to read the room. For example, when walking into
a meeting, a visual scan of the room lets Linda know who is in charge and/or who to approach along with which person is the interpreter (generally wearing a black shirt to provide a background for the hands) if one is present. Visual literacies are used more than textual literacies and convey a wealth of meaning that textual literacies often lack.

Digital literacies overlap with visual and textual literacies. For Deaf people digital technologies are basically visual and/or textual at all times. These technologies, especially in the last two decades, have significantly changed how Deaf people communicate and stay in touch with one another.

The final category, oral literacies, is one with which many people who are deaf have some experience even if that experience is limited. The majority of deaf people are encouraged to learn to lipread and speak mainly due to the fact that most are born to hearing parents who want to communicate with their children. However, Lennard J. Davis claims as “one of the foundational ableist myths of our culture: that the norm for humans is to speak and hear, to engage in communication through speaking and hearing” (15), which is the reason so many hearing parents get cochlear implants for their children. Yet, Davis continues, “we can see that the aural/oral method of communicating, itself seen as totally natural, like all signifying practices, is not natural but based on sets of assumptions about the body, about reality, and of course about power” (16). The “normal” expectation is that people can hear and speak; however, that expectation is merely another form of dominance that allows for those who do not hear and/or speak to be labeled as “abnormal.” Oral literacy practices for people who are deaf are very much about power as will be demonstrated in the analysis of the interview with Linda.

Each category of literacy practice listed above is contingent on context. The context always determines the literacy used and how it is used. Each of the five contexts is explored
briefly below to examine Linda’s literacy usages in each that were determined based on her answers to the interview questions. Within each context are sub-contexts that further delineate the four types of practices for a more accurate view of how Linda utilizes those literacy practices.

The emphasis on context is due in part to research done by many scholars as discussed in Chapter 1, yet Juliet Merrifield and colleagues explain further, “After many years of unsuccessful attempts to define literacy and assign it exact measures, we have come to recognize literacy as constantly changing because it is inherently connected to a particular context” (1). The context determines which literacy practices are used and in what manner similar to how audience determines tone and word choice when writing.

**Interviewee #1: Linda**

I have known Linda since I was a child. She is in her early or mid 50’s and lives in Sauk Centre, Minnesota. She is Puerto Rican, married, and a mother of two grown children. Her husband grew up in a nearby town and is hard of hearing but culturally Deaf and relies on hearing aids. He also has some speech capabilities and is proficient at reading lips. Their children are both hearing and both learned ASL as their first language. Linda works as a Certified Nurses Assistant at one of the local retirement homes. She enjoys various crafts, gardening, and cooking.

When recruiting people to participate, I asked Linda due to her knowing more than one form of sign language because she was born in Puerto Rico and moved to the states. Also, she is one of only a few Deaf people I know who does not “mouth” words while signing. “Mouthing” is just the movement of the lips in the form of a word rather than speaking out loud. She never does it, which is unusual because most people who have been through the education system had speech classes or lessons. I used the recruitment script (see Appendix B) interpreted into ASL.
Our initial conversation was via videophone and was brief. She was a little hesitant, but I assured her that her name would be changed and that no one would see the video of our conversation. We set up a time and agreed to meet in her home.

**Context #1: Home**

I met with Linda at her home and we spoke for approximately forty-five minutes. Based on her responses to the interview questions, I extrapolated the literacy practices found within this first of five contexts into the four essential types: textual, visual, digital, and oral. In the case of Linda, a large number of her literacy practices take place or culminate in the home. For easier discussion, I divided this context into childhood and adulthood.

**Sub-context #1: Childhood**

Childhood is when literacy practices are initially introduced. Analyzing the responses to the interview questions provided interesting information regarding Linda’s childhood. Linda was born in Puerto Rico and lost her hearing as an infant due to illness. Similarly, one of her maternal uncles had lost his hearing in the same manner; therefore, her mother had some previous experience with the situation. Because her uncle had not received any schooling and had spent his entire life as a dependent without formal communication skills, her parents knew that Linda needed to go to school in order to gain greater independence. Linda was sent to learn Mexican Sign Language at a school for the Deaf at the age of two or three. She was never mainstreamed and had no interest in being mainstreamed into a hearing school system. For the most part, she was never forced to assimilate to the hearing world around her. Being able to embrace her deafness allowed Linda freedoms that others who are forced to assimilate to the hearing world
are denied, such as learning a signed language. Brenda Jo Brueggemann discusses “passing” for hearing and “‘coming out’ as a deaf person” (82) later in life in her book *Lend Me Your Ear*. It was not until adulthood that she started learning to sign and does not feel part of “Deaf or Hearing culture” (83). In comparison, Linda grew up as a part of Deaf culture and feels very much a part of that.

Textual literacies at home took the form of written notes when face-to-face communication was not possible. That writing was done in Spanish. However, Linda typically left out the articles that are not part of Mexican Sign Language. She generally utilized the same syntax for her writing as she did for her signed speaking. Therefore, even though writing is a traditional literacy practice and was a part of her everyday life, Linda’s writing went against standard language practices by utilizing the syntax of her signed language yet was still understandable and left unchecked outside of the schoolroom. Correction at an earlier age may have aided Linda later in life when standardization did become important; however, assessing her responses to the interview questions does not indicate whether or not correction would have helped.

The utilization of a signed language ensured a strong use of visual literacy. Contributing to the development of visual literacy and literacy in a signed language, Linda’s parents learned Mexican Sign Language in order to communicate and hold conversations with her while living in Puerto Rico, which is significant because many hearing parents never learn more than a few signs. Moving to the continental United States later, Linda learned ASL in order to continue her education. Her visual literacies grew as a part of the new language. She maintained her original signed language, in order to speak with her family, while learning and utilizing ASL for school, which will be discussed as a separate context. The visual acuity required to understand signed
languages is vast. Not only must one understand the signs, but one must also be able to read facial expressions as well as body language. A raised eyebrow or the shifting of weight from one leg to another may be misinterpreted and change the meaning of what is being signed. For example, when signing a question, the eyebrows should be raised. If a person asks a question with a furrowed brow, the change in facial expression alters the meaning from a simple inquiry to an angry demand. Understanding these nuances in two languages that may require different facial expressions to indicate meaning requires a high level of literacy in each language.

Digital and oral literacy practices were not part of her childhood for the most part. While her parents spoke orally to each other and to other people, they used sign language when speaking with Linda. However, outside of the home oral literacies were part of her education and will be discussed later in this chapter as part of the context of school.

Sub-context #2: Adulthood

While the interview questions focus on communication practices and other skills, additional information was evident from the conversation that developed as a result of the answers Linda provided. Linda discussed her husband, a Deaf man who uses hearing aids, and who is also one of four Deaf brothers born to a hard-of-hearing mother, who never learned to sign, and a hearing father. Linda often relies on him to help in situations where she has difficulty communicating because he does have oral and some aural capabilities. The couple also has two grown children, who are both hearing.

The first type of literacy practice encountered and most often used by Linda is textual, the traditional forms of reading and writing, but with a change on her part from Standard English. These textual literacy practices are used on a daily basis. However, Linda is very adamant that
the writing she does is not in English; it is in ASL, meaning that the syntax used does not follow English standards but follows closely what would be signed. For example, when Linda shared this information, she sat forward in her chair and raised her eyebrows (the means of indicating a question in ASL), signing “me” and “English” twice. Then she sat back and smiled. Shaking her head, she signed “no” and then fingerspelled “ASL.” While these six signs may seem simple, the body language and facial expressions add a depth of meaning. Fundamentally, she asked, “Do I write in English? *Me* use English?” Then she answered her own question, “No, I write in ASL.” As this example demonstrates, the written words Linda would write would more closely mirror the signed words than the Standard English translation of her signed questions and the answer provided that were interpreted.

Just like in her childhood, leaving notes for one another remains the main form of textual literacy. Again, Linda does not write in Standard English but rather uses English words with ASL syntax when writing notes to her family. When work schedules do not allow for face-to-face conversation, writing with ASL syntax allows for a quick note even if it may be confusing to others who are used to reading Standard English. According to Madeline Maxwell, “deaf parents and their children regularly leave notes for each other about their whereabouts and plans. These notes tend to be rather brief – even cryptic – written to members of the household, usually referring to events and places already known to both parties” (216). The reference to familiar events and places makes writing the note even less taxing due to no extraneous explanations being necessary.

Recipes are the one form of written Standard English that Linda does use in the home. While recipes aren’t always written in complete sentences, the syntax more closely resembles that of Standard English than ASL. This type of reading is another form of textual literacy apart
from either language because one needs to learn how to properly read a recipe in order for the
dish to turn out correctly. Most recipes do not explain cooking terms, such as “braising” or
“poaching,” nor do they explain the difference between mincing, dicing, and chopping. The
assumption is that people know the difference and how to do them. Linda’s familiarity with these
skills and ability to cook well demonstrate this form of textual literacy.

As an adult, Linda has continued her visual literacies in ASL and MSL, and started
teaching her children ASL, and some MSL, when they were nine months old. Simple signs for
“milk,” “cookie,” “mama,” and “dada” were the ones she mentioned. Sharing this, or these,
common languages was important to her and her husband and broadened her visual literacies by
focusing on the more simplistic forms that are taught to small children and then, in turn, how
small children actually sign those signs. For example, the sign for “more” is made with the hands
slightly cupped with fingers spread; the palms should be facing each other. The hands are then
moved together so all of the fingertips of both hands meet and match up, tapping lightly two to
three times. However, as an example of what a young child, and possibly Linda’s, would do, my
niece would just touch her index fingers together with the rest of her hands splayed open. In
order to avoid frustration on her part, my sister and brother-in-law needed to learn to read the
altered sign and know what she meant. All parents go through this same learning-to-read process
when their children are learning to sign. This process would be similar to parents understanding
their children’s speech when the children mispronounce words as they learn to speak. Linda
learned to read her children’s awkwardly formed signs and respond accordingly. In addition, the
fact that Linda and her husband stressed communication at such an early age, before children can
speak orally, they exemplify the “positive aspects” of parents with a disability (78) that Megan
Kirshbaum and Rhoda Olkin seek to bring to the forefront in “Parents with Physical, Systemic, or Visual Disabilities.”

Another visual literacy Linda participates in at home is the building of birdhouses with her husband. She draws the designs then the couple builds them together. Drawing the designs is comparable to “writing” them or the creation of a text. Then the building is another form of reading and writing – reading the designs and building, or “writing,” the finished birdhouse. This hobby is a “non-traditional text” as discussed in Chapter 1. While Linda does not participate in reading in the traditional sense as a hobby, this form of visual literacy has a similar requirement of understanding complex texts and ability to interpret those texts in order to complete a project, providing an example of Susan L. Lytle’s definition of what it means to be literate, “being and becoming literate means using knowledge and experience to make sense of and act on the world” (382).

Overlapping with textual and visual literacies, digital literacies play a major role in Linda’s home life. One of the earliest digital technologies that Linda participated in was the use of closed captioning. This digital literacy overlaps the most with textual literacies due to the use of printed English text. However, Linda does point out that there are often too many words used. She would much prefer an ASL syntax; however, because closed captioning is for all hearing impaired people who may or may not know ASL, she acknowledges that it will not change. She also gets frustrated when watching something that is captioned live because the captioning is always delayed, so final statements are often never seen by the viewer due to commercials or the running of credits. Patricia S. Koskinen et al. explain further:

First, the match between what one hears (the audio) and the print one sees (captions) is not precise. While major concepts and ideas in the dialogue are
presented in print, some words and phrases may be omitted due to the limited space available for displaying the text or to reduce the speed of captions. Second, the rate of the caption presentation is also a concern. The captions on many cartoons, situation comedies, and educational programs are presented at a rate of approximately 120 words per minute… (41)

However, despite the faults, Linda uses captioning for all television shows and movies that she watches, which has allowed her to develop a digital literacy but also improve her textual literacy of reading to a degree.

Another early technology that Linda has used and still has access to is the teletypewriter (TTY). This technology also overlaps with textual literacy due to the writing and reading involved. TTYs allowed deaf people to contact one another via telephone lines. They could type messages to one another and read what the other person had to say. Linda does not use this technology any more. She and her husband still have their TTY device in case of emergency because fire stations and hospitals still have these for emergency calls. It is an older technology, but it was one of the first to engage Linda in digital literacies and utilizing a digital technology to communicate with others, requiring not only the knowledge of how to use the technology, but also textual literacies even if not in Standard English.

Taking the place of the TTY, video telephones have created another means to communicate and further develop digital and visual literacies. For Linda, this technology allows her to speak with others who use signed languages. Using a webcam, the video phone transmits signed conversations over the phone lines to be viewed either on a computer monitor or a television. According to Elizabeth Keating and Gene Mirus in “American Sign Language in Virtual Space,” “Some important skills for a virtual or technologically mediated environment
include: manipulation of desktop ‘real estate,’ manipulation of language features, manipulation of image transmission and body relations, creation of a radically different sign space, alteration of signing speed, increased repetition, code-switching, and adjustment of deictic references” (700). The digital nature of the technology aids in improving and developing digital literacies for Linda in addition to further practicing visual literacies, utilizing her ASL or MSL depending on the conversant. When utilizing either language, understanding of how speeds needs to be modulated and how space is affected by the limits of the screen are very important to learn. The best aspect of this technology in her opinion is that she can see all missed calls on the screen and easily call people back when she has time. Understanding how to look back on missed calls requires a higher degree of digital literacy skills than the older technology, or TTY.

Cell phones have also increased Linda’s digital literacies. The ability to communicate readily with family and friends, even when away from home, helps to maintain relationships. Before all of these various digital technologies, deaf people would either need to ask a neighbor to call a Deaf friend’s neighbor or just drive over and hope that someone was home. Linda likes the ease of sitting at home and finding out what is happening and when without the lengths to which she used to go to, writing letters or asking a friend to contact others. Also, texting does not rely on Standard English as its main form of writing. Most people use abbreviations and skip words to keep the communications short. For example, many people use “u” instead of “you” or “k” instead of “okay.” She appreciates the fact that there is a device for writing that “does not feel like school.”

Linda’s digital literacies have also been greatly developed due to the computer and Internet. Email, while also textual, is one of her main forms of communication after the videophone and texting. She uses email when longer messages need to be sent. Again, she does
not use Standard English. Email to friends is a less formal form of communication which lends itself well to looser grammatical rules than other forms of writing. The informality fits with Linda’s textual literacies while developing further digital literacies. Learning to create groups and use other time saving elements of email have also been part of her digital literacy development.

Linda’s children have taught her to use Facebook in order to keep in touch with friends and family from inside and outside of the country. She admits that it is a little confusing at times, but she is getting better at utilizing the various elements that Facebook offers. She especially likes the games that can be found on Facebook. Because these games often have limited, if any, help screens, the level of literacy necessary can be fairly complex in order to just begin using them and maintain that use as the games become progressively more difficult.

At home, Linda has no need for oral or aural literacies because everyone signs. Linda never learned to lip read or speak and refuses to participate in either practice. Not being forced to do either is unusual due to the “oral only” movement – where, according to Carol J. Erting, schools treated signed languages as prohibited and made lipreading and speaking the predominant means of communication – that was predominant during the time when she would have been in school, but her refusal was evidently absolute. As mentioned earlier, her never mouthing words is unusual, but it may be a developed habit due to her insistence on not being oral. She did not explain, and asking about the mouthing of words was not in my list of questions. Linda relies solely on her textual, visual, and digital literacies, which are strong enough to address all of her communication, learning, and entertainment needs at this point in time.
Context #2: The Workplace

Linda works as a Certified Nurse’s Assistant in a nursing home located at the local hospital. Based on her answers to the interview questions about her work, I was able to determine that she relies on a variety of literacy practices to communicate with the various people she encounters in this context. Based on the analysis of her answers to the interview questions I determined three types of people she encounters on a daily basis in her work: patients, co-workers, and supervisors. The literacy practices utilized change somewhat with each group as explained below.

Sub-context #1: Patients

Textual literacy practices do play a role in Linda’s work because one of the main means of communicating with patients is via written notes. Again, the notes are written using ASL syntax but provide the necessary information for the patients to know what to expect. Much of her work with patients revolves around getting them up and out of bed as well as dressed. She has a sign that she made that lets the patients know she is there to help them get dressed and off to whatever activity they have planned for the day. She always carries a notepad and pen in order to answer any questions or address any concerns the patients may have.

Linda’s visual literacies are utilized with some patients. Most people as they age lose their hearing, and some of the residents have lost their hearing to the point where they are now deaf, so she has taught them some simple signs that allow them to speak with her along with any of the other staff members who have learned some sign language. Sharing her preferred language also increases the literacy skills of the people around her to an extent, depending on how much the person desires to learn. The individuals who have lost their hearing to large degrees enjoy
being able to communicate in another mode now that they have become reliant on some lipreading and hearing aids that, over time, erode what hearing is left. Linda appreciates being able to speak with her patients while helping them throughout the day. Signing with people who are learning ASL at an advanced age and often with limited mobility requires more attention because the signs are often not precise and at times jumbled much like those of small children discussed in the previous context; therefore, Linda’s visual literacy is challenged and expanded by speaking with patients.

Linda’s digital literacies are not put to any use with patients. She is not accessible to patients via any digital technology – no pagers or cell phones are allowed while working. Therefore, her focus remains on her other literacy practices when dealing with patients.

Linda jokes that any of the residents who are more vocal or hard to deal with due to the anger often associated with dementia or Alzheimer’s do not bother her because she cannot hear them, “a welcome silence.” Her lack of oral, and especially aural, abilities make working with difficult vocal patients easier for her than for her hearing counterparts due in part to her lack of oral literacies, like lipreading. Not being able to understand what’s being screamed at her allows her to complete her job efficiently while still providing patients with the care they need.

Sub-context #2: Co-Workers

When communicating with co-workers, Linda again relies on her textual literacy practices to an extent. Notes can be left for her or by her for other workers regarding changes to the schedule or tasks that need to be done. Most often the written notes are regarding work but not always. When changes in policy or concerns arise, that are being discussed by her co-workers, someone will usually let her know in writing if they cannot sign the message for her.
Linda’s written notes utilize ASL’s economy of words and syntax when she leaves messages for others. For example, rather than writing the English, “Can you work for me on Friday, and I’ll work for you on Saturday?” Linda would write, “You work Friday, me Saturday?” It is understandable but limited, expressing exactly what she would want to know.

Linda’s visual literacies are utilized with co-workers because gesturing and signing play an important role in her everyday interactions also. To a large extent gesturing can communicate a large amount of information when someone does not know ASL or when notes may be cumbersome, like when passing in a hall with a quick question. A large number of gestures are fairly universal among hearing people and Deaf people alike. Pointing, waving, nodding all communicate simple messages that make note writing or speaking orally unnecessary. Linda’s co-workers rely somewhat on simple gestures but also on simple signs that they have learned from Linda. Because they have worked together for several years, Linda and her co-workers have found that knowing a little ASL makes talking easier and does not limit them to merely work related interactions. In addition, her daughter, who is hearing, works at the same nursing home and helps because her daughter advocates for co-workers to learn ASL also. She can also practice with workers when Linda is not there. Her co-workers like to surprise Linda with new signs they have learned in order to speak with her further. Again, as is true for patients, learning ASL as an adult is sometimes difficult and requires more patience and a stronger level of visual literacy when reading imprecise signs in order to understand the intended meaning.

Much like when working with patients, digital devices are not used among the staff either. Linda’s digital literacies are limited to the other contexts at least for interactions during the workday. Co-workers who are also friends will text, email, or contact Linda on Facebook, which will be discussed in the social context of this chapter.
Linda’s co-workers know her well enough to know that she does not speak or read lips, so they do not try to speak to her orally. Again, Linda utilizes her other literacy practices instead. She “likes that no one pushes” for her to try to read lips or speak at work.

Sub-context #3: Supervisors

Linda’s supervisors or the home’s administrators rely largely on notes and lists. If there is a task assigned to her that varies from her normal routine, Linda will find a note waiting for her when she arrives at work. For example, a variation may be a resident who needs to go to doctor’s appointment or will be going out with family members. These are simple adjustments to make and do not generally require physical interaction to be communicated. However, sometimes there are emergency meetings or the need to talk with Linda, and interpreters are unavailable because either there is not enough notice for them to be there in time (none are local) or because there is no one available on short notice. These times are more difficult because note writing becomes the main form of communicating. Linda admits to the fact that Standard English is not always easily understood. It is not a form of writing that she uses and not her preferred written language. Because it is not her preferred means of communicating, misunderstandings do occur on occasion. Nevertheless, the use of Standard English for memos and other missives from supervisory personnel pushes Linda’s textual literacy practices to a higher level.

Linda utilizes her visual literacies often during meetings and formal training sessions. When there are meetings or training sessions, interpreters are hired to ensure that Linda knows what is being discussed. While having someone who can communicate information to her in her preferred language is great and helps in understanding what is being said, Linda says that sometimes interpreters sign words a little different from one another and she needs to ask for
clarification. When they have to stop and explain a sign, part of the conversation is missed. Usually, it is not a problem unless the person talking is quickly listing information that she needs to know. The interpreter then needs to stop the speaker and have them start back at the point where the question occurred. Some speakers get annoyed with this sort of interruption, but those who have been there long enough know that interruptions are sometimes going to happen. Fortunately, Linda’s daughter can act as an interpreter at times, lessening the chance for unanswered questions or misunderstanding. However, as she is not a certified interpreter, the situation is still not ideal.

Linda’s digital literacies are used only when she needs to “call” her supervisor due to illness or some other instance when she will be late or need to make a change to her schedule. She utilizes email for this purpose. She said that even though the message is being sent to her supervisor she still utilizes ASL writing. She smiles and shrugs as she says this, indicating a lack of concern. For her, email is a tool for communication and whether the syntax is English or ASL is of little concern. The main goal of communicating with her supervisor is achieved either way. Her comfort utilizing a newer form of contacting her supervisor rather than a relay service through TTY or videophone marks a growth in her digital literacies. Using the TTY had required her to call a service that would then call her supervisor and as Linda would type, the service provider would speak then “relay” back to Linda via type what was said by her supervisor. It was a very cumbersome method that has been made simpler with email used for the same purpose.

Similar to the other people she encounters at work, Linda’s supervisor and the administration at the nursing home do not expect her to understand their oral language. They accommodate her by utilizing other means of communication where her literacies are stronger.

As is evident, Linda utilizes textual and visual literacies to a large extent at work.
However, her digital literacies are limited to her engagement with supervisors and only in very distinct circumstances – inability to work. This change in the use of digital literacies from home to work demonstrates the way in which context determines one’s literacy practices.

**Context #3: The Marketplace**

Again, based on Linda’s answers to the interview questions, I was able to gain additional information as it pertains to context. Because Linda lives in a small town, many of the people who own, run, or work at places of business recognize her and tend to greet her and aid in any way just as they would other customers. However, going outside of the town in order to get items not available at the local level or going to offices not often frequented, such as insurance agents, car sales, specialists, and so forth can present some challenges. Her descriptions of these encounters when answering the interview questions offered me insight into the literacy practices utilized in this context and its sub-contexts, shopping and professional services.

**Sub-context #1: Shopping**

Linda’s textual literacies for shopping are limited to making a list. Having a written list assists her when shopping because if she needs help locating an item she can just point to her list and the person helping her knows exactly what she needs. At times a little more question and answer is necessary; however, Linda always carries a pad of paper and writing utensil with her for these instances. Again, note writing is a significant part of her life although it takes the form of ASL rather than Standard English.

At some of the local businesses, there are employees who know a few signs and can help when needed. Mostly, they use fingerspelling and gesturing, but that helps. Utilizing her visual
literacies is always preferable to Linda even when speaking with people who have limited abilities. She says, “They try; that’s what matters.” Also, one of the local businesses employs a couple of Deaf workers to stock shelves. Linda knows them and will often seek them out when she needs help at that particular store. Again, these interactions utilize the visual literacy of reading ASL and provide Linda further strengthening of that literacy.

Linda’s digital literacies are not used for shopping. Even though more consumer goods are available online than in local establishments, she prefers to go to stores to get what she needs despite the fact that sometimes that means driving to other towns or cities to make those purchases. She is not comfortable shopping online at this time, so her digital literacies remain limited to other contexts.

Linda’s reluctance to learn or utilize oral literacies is not the case with her husband. Therefore, when handling larger purchases, such as a car, Linda relies on her husband, who does have oral and lipreading capabilities, to be the one who handles most of the transaction. While she makes sure that her concerns and requests are handled, they are generally communicated via her husband. If he is not available, then her daughter, who is hearing, is a viable stand-in.

Sub-context #2: Professional Services

While shopping does not require a wide variety of literacy practices, dealing with more important marketplace matters does. Professional services carry a higher price, in most cases, than shopping, with the exception of a car purchase. Deciding how to best negotiate professional services can be challenging, especially because interpreters do cost money.

Linda limits her use of textual literacies when dealing with people in the professional services realm due to possible legal implications. Reading over standard policies or contracts is
about all she is willing to do in these situations, and even then, she often relies on her daughter to clarify aspects she finds confusing. Most interactions for insurance, medical assistance, and other professional services are handled face-to-face.

Linda utilizes her visual literacies to a great extent in this particular context because when dealing with professional services, interpreters are generally called in. Any medical appointments require an interpreter to be present when possible. Setting up appointments requires timing because the doctor’s office is responsible for obtaining the services of the interpreter, which requires at least a two-week notice. The licensing for medical interpreting requires more training, making these interpreters more difficult to hire in the rural area where Linda lives. Even with the additional training, because the medical field is so jargon based, interpreting is difficult and relying on a “go between” can be taxing for Linda. Understanding the signing of strangers is often difficult, and interpreters sometimes do not understand her sign uses, which can be frustrating for Linda. In emergency situations, interpreters are not available due to the two-week-notice requirement. In these cases, Linda generally relies on her daughter or husband and is thankful that these situations are “rare.”

Sometimes businesses, such as banks and insurance companies, hesitate to call in an interpreter. The cost is a factor and something they would rather share with their Deaf clients than pay themselves. Linda stresses the need for an interpreter and reschedules appointments if she arrives and is told that an interpreter was unavailable. In these situations, she wants a certified interpreter present rather than relying on family members. Some things are not worth the chance that something is misunderstood or not clearly articulated. Plus, it is within her rights to insist on this accommodation rather than rely on printed text. Her visual literacies are stronger than her textual literacies, and she fully understands her limitations.
Unfortunately, even though Linda does not utilize oral literacies, some business people do try to speak to her. These situations are awkward. Linda asks, “Why do they do that even when I tell them I am Deaf?” I could not and cannot answer the question, but one could assume it has something to do with the dominant culture as well as privilege and entitlement. This assumption would relate to Davis’ statement mentioned earlier that bears repeating, “one foundational ableist myths of our culture [is] that the norm for humans is to speak and hear, to engage in communication through speaking and hearing” (15) rather than all language being socially constructed.

Examining the literacy practices at use in the marketplace, primarily with professional services, the possibility of misunderstandings appears great. Even when interpreters are engaged, the margin for error remains due to differences in not only one’s vocabulary but also usage of the signs. Because facial expression and body language can change the meaning of any particular sign, they can also lead to confusion or misunderstanding in important marketplace dealings.

Context #4: School

The majority of educational programs for deaf children fall into two categories “oral-only” and “Total Communication.” Oral-only programs bar any kind of sign or gestural communications. The Total Communication system utilizes signing and speaking at the same time. Generally the form of sign language encouraged is Signed Exact English (SEE) to avoid syntactical issues. People who are part of the Deaf community often disparage SEE sign because it is not their language; hearing people developed it to represent English. Part of the issue according to Carol J. Erting is that “a deaf person requires as much information as a hearing person, [sic.] a basic goal for deaf people is to acquire information and to communicate with
others in the most efficient way possible, both to avoid visual fatigue and to free their attention for the next activity or demand” (226-227). The constant use of one’s eyes rather than being able to utilize other senses can be tiring, and all individuals need to keep up in their daily lives. No one has the ability to just stop engaging due to tiredness, especially in contexts such as school.

Understanding the educational systems is important when reading about and analyzing the development, or not, of oral literacies. How ASL is ever taught in schools becomes a question, but the answer lies in those schools that do not follow either of these prescriptive forms. ASL is the language of Deaf culture perpetuated and continually developed by members of the culture and the community. Some schools for the deaf, fortunately, respect language choices and while they may encourage oral literacies to aid assimilation and competencies within the hearing world, do not insist on them. The context of school is where textual literacies, especially, become formalized. Linda’s responses centered predominantly on the textual requirements of school and provided some insight as to the acquisition, usage, and challenges of these literacies in particular.

Sub-context #1: Childhood

Linda attended schools for the Deaf both in Puerto Rico and the U.S. At first, Standard Spanish was her main form of textual literacy then, after moving to the states, Standard English became the focus for writing in classes. Switching between these two languages textually was very difficult. According to Walter Ong, languages are more easily learned when the language learners are also able to hear and practice speaking them (72). Nevertheless, Linda made the transition to English and was able to graduate from high school even though “It was very, very
hard,” according to her. Her textual literacies grew despite the difficulty and despite her reluctance to use written Standard English.

Linda’s visual literacies improved greatly due to some similarities in the syntax of written Spanish that aided in Linda learning ASL. Utilizing what she knew in Spanish made ASL an easier language to speak and understand. Switching to MSL at home was not very different from ASL. She said, “They are only a little different,” which made learning ASL that much easier to accomplish. Also, knowledge of two signed languages, one for home and the other for school, enhanced her visual literacies due to reading the signs and responding in the correct language.

This code switching between ASL and MSL supports the purpose of literacy development espoused by Marlon Kuntze, in “Turning Literacy Inside Out,” where he states, “An important objective of literacy development is the development of skills to think about information and to respond to it thoughtfully” (154).

While in school, Linda’s digital literacies were limited to calculators in math and some science classes. Her digital literacies would wait until later in life to develop in any significant way.

For oral literacies, Linda went to school during the oral-only movement and before Total Communication. Brenda Jo Brueggemann explains the rationale for the movement, “If deaf people are to function and communicate at all, the argument goes, they must do so as if they can hear; if they can’t get along in the hearing world, they can’t get along at all…” (410). Classes in speech and lip reading were required. With the support of her parents, Linda refused to participate fully. To this day, she has had no interest in learning either skill. She states, “The hands are beautiful. Why would people not want to use them?”
Sub-context #2: Adulthood

Linda went back to school as an adult to earn her CNA certification. She says that getting her degree was difficult, but she kept working and finally made it through. The reading and writing were the most difficult part because she had not used Standard English for many years when she decided to go back and get her degree at a nearby vocational-technical school. She relied heavily on her daughter to help her when the reading was confusing and when she had to write papers. Her daughter clarified points from the textbooks and helped edit written papers. The help was beneficial because Linda did learn the material she needed and began to recall her early textual knowledge and education from her earlier years in school.

In addition, Linda explains that tests made getting her degree difficult. How questions are written can affect meaning in seemingly subtle ways, but when English is not a person’s first language those subtleties can become large. A simple word like “always” means that there can be no exceptions. Close attention to language is required, and Linda admits that she struggled with tests the most because she had to take them on her own rather than having help from her daughter. While accommodations were made to provide more time for her to take tests, no accommodations were made for the language that would emphasize words like “always” in a way that ASL would emphasize them. While she has a respect for Standardized English, she still would rather utilize ASL syntax and limitation of words. She keeps her writing pointed.

Linda had interpreters for face-to-face classes. The challenge for her was determining signs for jargon used in the nursing field along with her interpreters. She would need to repeat the process every time there was a new interpreter. Also, remembering the signs for those words was not always easy for her or the interpreters due to lack of use and them being made-up signs rather than standard signs. There is ontology for signs, and Linda and her interpreters attempted
to use that for development of their signs. The development of new signs for the jargon utilized in nursing was a challenge for Linda’s visual literacies, remembering the agreed upon signs was very similar to learning the new terminology.

Linda’s digital literacies were also challenged during her education. Some of her courses were online and relied on her computer skills and ability to use all of the online tools. Unfortunately, video material was never captioned, so she would ask her daughter to help with those elements. However, in the most recent years, the move toward having all video accessible by both Deaf and blind people has been taking place. Nevertheless, she got through her online courses and learned to use the learning management system being utilized by the vocational-technical college she attended, an accomplishment for a non-digital native.

Linda also utilized email for her classes, emailing instructors with questions and concerns. She would attempt to use Standard English although she did not ask her daughter to help with the editing of the messages thus leading to errors. While she was not afraid to make errors in the emails, she did want to acknowledge the school setting and attempt Standard English even though it has always been a struggle for her to do so.

Once her instructors were aware of her deafness, the issue of oral literacies was overcome by the use of interpreters who would help with all of their face-to-face communication needs. The interpreters would step in and speak on behalf of Linda either in class or to the instructors personally while signing to her what was said verbally by the instructors and her classmates. In educational settings, participation is an issue. Based on Linda’s answers to the interview questions and the resulting narrative, the potential for participation in courses where she may be the only Deaf person was difficult. Online courses are different because most
discussion is asynchronous; however, in face-to-face courses, engaging with the teacher and other students in discussions would be difficult at best.

**Context #5: Social**

Interview answers to this final context, social, overlap somewhat with the context of home because some social events are in the home while others are outside the home. Regardless, based on Linda’s responses to the interview questions, I was able to extrapolate specifics that pertain more to a social context than that of the home. Also based on her responses, I was able to determine the literacy practices at use in those social situations. The social situations are divided into dealing with neighbors, who may not be well known, and friends.

**Sub-context #1: Neighbors**

Linda explained that she uses note writing to a large extent with neighbors because this is the way that they typically began speaking with one another. Writing quick notes back and forth can cover a large amount of material from how the family is doing to comments about local events to major happenings. Once again, as Maxwell points out, “Most such notes lack complete sentences, much less developed text” (216). Notes written in this context are meant to be read immediately, followed by an immediate response. The lack of complete sentences in this context does not seem to be an issue as neighbors respond and carry on conversations at length.

One set of neighbors has learned some basic signs. Much like in other contexts, Linda prefers this form of speaking. Relying heavily on her visual literacy is the norm and part of her preferences. Being able to readily communicate with neighbors helps her feel a part of the neighborhood as a whole. She says that there is a degree of comfort knowing someone can
understand her if she needs something. Still, Linda is sometimes challenged due to the lack of fluency of these neighbors. Visually interpreting imprecise signs takes patience and a higher level of literacy.

The only digital literacy Linda utilizes with neighbors is texting, and this particular literacy is only utilized in cases of emergency for the most part. Again, as far as digital literacies are concerned, the difficulty of those literacies lies in understanding the technology, not necessarily in understanding the information being shared or how it is shared. Linda likes that texting allows easy communication among neighbors because there is no need to wait for people to arrive home or to leave notes hoping that they will be found. Due to how texting is often naturally abbreviated, Linda’s textual literacies appear “normal” in these instances.

Once again in this context, Linda does not utilize oral literacies. She relies on her other literacy skills to communicate and keep in touch with neighbors.

Sub-context #2: Friends

Linda only utilizes textual literacies with friends when those particular friends either do not sign or only sign minimally. In these cases writing notes is necessary in order to communicate fully. Once again, Linda’s notes are not in complete sentences, and they utilize ASL syntax. This note-writing is often accompanied by gesturing, drawing, and other visual cues.

With friends who are not proficient in signing, gesturing can often take its place in addition to writing notes back and forth. As mentioned previously, several gestures are easily understood by both hearing and deaf people, such as making shapes in the air and pointing, are included in this group. Kuntze offers some insight here as well:
One of the goals of literacy development is the development of higher-order thinking and reasoning skills such as making an inference that involves making use of existing knowledge or identifying relevant pieces of information to help arrive at meaning that is not in the content on a literal level...the process of making an inference involves going beyond what is explicitly expressed in order to arrive at what is implied. (149)

Not fully sharing a common language develops the use of inferences both textually and visually. In addition, Linda enjoys this because her friends are trying to utilize literacies other than oral ones that seem to be the default for many hearing people.

In addition to gesturing, ASL is a major visual literacy employed by Linda when with friends because the majority of her friends are Deaf or part of the deaf community. While most of her friends who sign do not live in the same town or nearby, they visit each other as often as possible, as most people do. For Linda, spending time with other people who sign is always preferable. Being from Puerto Rico and then eastern states, she did need to adapt to certain regionalisms of the Midwest, but has become proficient over the years and rarely, if ever, needs to ask for clarification of a given sign.

Linda’s digital literacies are mainly utilized with friends. She uses email and Facebook on the computer along with the videophone and texting. As previously discussed, these technologies were somewhat difficult to learn and, in the case of Facebook, not necessarily utilized to the fullest extent. Yet, Linda maintains relationships utilizing these technologies while increasing and developing her digital literacies. Understanding how each individual technology works and how best to use each one has taken time, but for Linda it is time well spent in order to have greater contact with those people she considers friends.
Because her friends either sign or use other forms of communication, Linda does not need to utilize any oral literacies. Even in cases where the mouthing of words would normally work, she does not understand even those terms. Basically, the only words or phrases she can understand that someone would say are “thank you,” “hello,” and “goodbye.”

Summary

In this chapter I used the answers provided by Linda to the interview questions (see Appendix A) to determine the literacy practices she utilizes in the five main contexts: home, workplace, marketplace, school, and social. The literacy practices fell into four categories: textual, visual, digital, and oral. Literacy practices change depending on the context, such as Standard English being used in school. Also, the degree to which literacy practices are utilized, such as visual literacies being challenged by either interpreters or novice signers due to lack of familiarity with their particular signing regionalisms or precision, also change in each context. Sub-contexts were also determined to gain a better understanding of which literacies are used and to what extent as well as the challenges inherent because different forms of literacy are utilized with patients versus co-workers versus supervisors who are all part of the contextualization.

In short, Linda’s textual literacies are not usually in Standard English. The only times she has felt the need to utilize Standard English have been when she going to school where it is not only expected but required. While her writing with ASL syntax may appear overly simplistic, the meaning remains the same and requires more “inference” according to Kuntze, which demonstrates a significant level of literacy because the person on the other end of the note will generally respond in the same manner. She also writes, to some degree, in two languages, which also demonstrates a significant level of literacy.
Linda’s visual literacy practices are quite complex. She speaks more than one signed language. Being able to share ideas and information in two natural sign languages requires the ability to filter the information and respond in the appropriate language. In all of the contexts, her preference is to use ASL unless speaking with her parents who only know MSL. Learning to understand the signs of new people can be a challenge, but doing so also further develops her visual literacy practices.

The digital literacies that Linda engages also demonstrate a willingness to grow and learn new practices. Technology keeps changing, and Linda has adopted those changes into her life in many ways. While certain situations, like when working with patients or in face-to-face classes where cell phones are not allowed, may limit the amount of use of digital literacies, she uses them extensively at home and socially.

Linda has also consciously made literacy practice choices in the realm of oral literacy, refusing to learn to speak or lipread in any context. While these choices may present challenges, she is adamant that she should not need to change just because that is the expectation of the hearing culture. She is “Deaf and proud.” As far as she is concerned, others can attempt to sign if “speaking” is so important to them. Again, “the hands are beautiful” and should be treated thusly. Linda’s regard for assimilation to the dominant hearing culture is quite clear in that she does not believe in it to any extent.

Next Chapters

The next two chapters are interview analyses of two other participants, Wade and Karen. The same five main contexts are explored looking at the same four categories of literacy practices. The answers supplied by these participants were analyzed to determine those literacy
practices and how they are used. A few additional sub-contexts will be explored due to
differences in workplaces; otherwise, the main contexts are broken into the same sub-contexts.
These additional interview analyses will also compare and contrast the literacy practices of the
previous participant(s). Following the two additional interview analyses, the limitations of the
study will be explained and further research will be recommended.
CHAPTER 4. ANALYSIS OF AN INTERVIEW WITH WADE

As stated in the previous chapter, the aim of this study was to explore the literacy practices of working-class Deaf adults within the typical contexts of home, workplace, marketplace, school, and social. The previous chapter discussed Linda and her literacy practices, including choices and challenges within those practices. This chapter focuses on the data collected via an interview conducted in American Sign Language (ASL) with the second of the three participants: Wade. Again, this analysis was completed based on the answers to the interview questions (see Appendix A) that did not specifically mention “literacy.” This analysis chapter provides answers for the first three research questions outlined in Chapters 1 and 2 as they reflect Wade’s experiences:

1) What are the literacy practices of individual participants?

2) What literacy challenges does each individual participant face?

3) How are various hearing contexts negotiated?

The literacy practices are discussed as part of each individual context. Context is important in understanding literacy practices because according to Julie Lindquist and David Seitz in *The Elements of Literacy*, “To understand [literacy’s] full range of possibility as a subject for research and as a social practice, you have to follow it around in the places where it lives—in people’s heads, in communities, in workplaces, in virtual and digital spaces” (13).

Looking at the literacy practices in these contexts has a stabilizing effect. The context determines the literacy practice each individual utilizes. Using the constant comparative method, I discovered sub-contexts within each context that further delineate the literacy practices. Also, utilizing this method, I determined four main types of literacy practices: textual, visual, digital, and oral. Each of these practices is discussed within each of the major contexts based on the sub-
contexts. The contexts and literacy practices are discussed in the same order for this chapter as they were for Chapter 3: home, workplace, marketplace, school, and social. However, the sub-contexts change slightly. Each context is broken down into sub-contexts specific to Wade in this chapter. The delineation of the contexts is necessary because each participant has a different workplace and has had different educational experiences that need to be acknowledged and that affect their use of the literacy practices.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, textual literacies are important to discuss due to the emphasis placed on prescriptive grammar rules in Standard English and the difference in syntax used for writing Standard English in comparison to writing what Linda refers to as “ASL” as was also explained in the previous chapter. While a formal written language for ASL does not exist, utilizing the syntax – no verb tense, limited prepositions, no articles, and switched modifier placement – does offer an economy of words that is lacking in Standard English. For example, if I want to tell someone “I am going to the store” in ASL, I would only use two signs, “go store.”

The second type of literacy practice used in multiple contexts is visual literacy, mainly as the use of ASL. As explained in the previous chapter, visual literacy is the reading of signs, but also facial expressions, body language, and various contexts, making ASL inherently multimodal. These practices are necessary for communication and comprehension of situations. The communicative aspect of visual literacies is evident because ASL is a visual language that relies heavily on facial expression and body language. Using the example above, my facial expression would have been neutral. However, if I wanted to ask the person, “Are you going to the store?” the signs remain the same, “go store,” but my facial expression would change, raising my eyebrows, which indicates a question. In addition, the situational understanding is significant due to entering spaces and needing to be able to “read” the room (Mountford). For example, when
walking into a meeting, a visual scan of the room allows Wade to know who is in charge (usually at the front of the room) along with which person is the interpreter (generally wearing a dark, solid-color shirt to provide a good background for their hands) if one is present.

Overlapping with visual and textual literacies are digital literacies. Patricia Boechler, Karon Dragon, and Ewa Wasniewski define digital literacies in the article “Digital Literacy Concepts and Definitions” stating that they “are skills to operate technology, not to program or develop computer systems associated with IT.” For Deaf people digital technologies have been happily embraced for the most part, barring any access or usage issues. These technologies, especially in recent decades, have significantly changed how Deaf people communicate and keep in touch with one another.

Oral literacies, the final category, is one with which many people who are deaf have some experience even if that experience is limited. The majority of deaf people are encouraged to learn to lipread and speak mainly due to the fact that most are born to hearing parents who want to communicate with their children without the stigma of a signed language. As explained in the previous chapter, the majority of educational programs for deaf children fall into two categories “oral-only” and “Total Communication” (Erting). Oral-only programs eschew the use of any kind of signed or gestural communications. The Total Communication system utilizes signing and speaking at the same time and tends to use ASL. Most recently, the form of sign language encouraged is Signed Exact English (SEE) to avoid syntactical issues. People who are part of the Deaf community often disparage SEE sign because it is not their language; it is a language developed by hearing people even though the Deaf already have their own signed language. As explained in the previous chapter, Carol J. Erting maintains that the importance of information is just as great for a deaf person as a hearing person, but the deaf person needs “to avoid visual
fatigue” due to it being the way they gain that information (226-227). Signing exactly what is spoken is exhausting and distracts from the main concern, which is the exchange of ideas and information. Understanding the educational systems is important when analyzing and reading about the development, or not, of oral literacies. In Wade’s case this understanding is even more important due to his having had aural capabilities.

Each category of literacy practice listed above is contingent on context. The context always determines the literacy used and how it is used. Each of the five contexts – home, workplace, marketplace, school, and social – is explored briefly below to examine Wade’s literacy usages in each, which I determined based on his answers to the interview questions. Within each context are sub-contexts that I was able to extrapolate based on his responses to the interview questions in order to further delineate the four types of practices for a more accurate view of how Wade utilizes those literacy practices in segments of each context.

Identical to the interview with Linda, the questions I asked and answers Wade provided were conducted in ASL. I then interpreted and transcribed the interviews utilizing the signed words, facial expressions, and body language in order to have a printed coding system for analysis (see Chapter 2 for the complete process). As the example about going to the store provided earlier demonstrates, facial expression and body language alter the meanings of signs and are an important part of interpreting what is meant versus what only the signed words would indicate.

**Interviewee #2: Wade**

I have also known Wade since my childhood. He is in his mid-sixties and lives outside of Sauk Centre, Minnesota. He is married to a hearing woman and has two hearing grown children.
His wife learned to sign while they were dating, and his children spoke ASL as their first language. Wade currently works at a factory; however, he has had a variety of jobs. He enjoys fishing and hunting along with various woodworking projects.

Wade was born hard of hearing in the state of New York. His situation was unique due to the fact that his father was also hard of hearing while his mother and three older brothers were all deaf. He attended a residential deaf school in Rome, NY rather than being mainstreamed even though he had partial hearing and was able to hear fairly well with the use of hearing aids. He was raised as if he were deaf until he actually did go completely deaf in his early teens while standing too close to a rifle when it was fired by his uncle. As a teenager, he moved with his family to California and attended the local deaf school. As an adult he, his wife, and children moved to Minnesota.

When recruiting people for my study, I asked Wade because he did have partial hearing as a child, which was lost suddenly. Also, he has lived in different states and gone to different schools for the Deaf. Unlike Linda, he will vocalize at times and does mouth words often. He also offers different points of view on what it is to be Deaf.

Context #1: Home

I met with Wade at his home and we spoke for approximately an hour. Utilizing the constant comparison method to analyze his responses to the interview questions, I divided the literacy practices found within this first of five contexts into the four essential types: textual, visual, digital, and oral. In the case of Wade, much like is true for Linda, a large number of his literacy practices take place or culminate in the home. As in the previous chapter, for ease of discussion, this context is subdivided into childhood and adulthood home lives.
Sub-context #1: Childhood

Textual literacies, when Wade was a child, took the form of written notes only when face-to-face communication was not possible, which wasn’t often with three older brothers and a stay-at-home mother. When notes were left for members of the family, they took the form described by Madeline Maxwell, who states, “notes tend to be rather brief – even cryptic – written to members of the household, usually referring to events and places already known to both parties” (216). These notes do not require fluency in English in order to be produced. For example, when I was young and still living at home, my dad left a note that stated, “Go cut tree wood. Back lunch.” From that note, I knew that he had gone over to friends of the family to cut down dead trees for firewood and that he would be back by noon for lunch. A time and place is often enough to convey what is expected if others are to attend an event.

A strong use of visual literacy was established due to the family’s use of ASL. As Wade grew up, he learned more and more signs. Learning the signs and how they work together to talk with one another is a form of literacy due to the “reading” of the signs along with facial expressions and body language and then “writing” in response by using the signs, expressions, and movement oneself. As vocabulary grows so does the complexity of expression and sharing of one’s ideas and thoughts, or one’s “literate thought” that Peter V. Paul and Ye Wang define in “Literate Thought and Multiple Literacies,” “as the ability to access captured, decontextualized forms of information and to use that information in a creative, reflective, or rational manner” (305). As Wade was the youngest of the family, he had constant avenues for engaging in literate thought and learning from his parents, his older brothers and their friends, along with classmates and teachers.
Digital literacy practices were not part of his childhood for the most part. Much like Linda, he used calculators for school, but other than that, there was not a lot of access to digital technologies when he was a child.

Wade’s oral literacies were not utilized at home as a child. Because the family signed at home and all had high, if varying, degrees of hearing loss, oral speech was not used. Even his father, who had some limited ability to speak, did not use his voice at home. Before going completely deaf, Wade’s family would at times vocalize to get his attention, but it wasn’t necessarily a use of words, but rather oral utterances or yells merely to gain attention. These vocalizations would be similar to stomping on the floor in hopes that the vibration would be felt, or waving to be seen in one’s peripheral vision when trying to gain a Deaf person’s attention. In turn, Wade did not vocalize with his family. They were Deaf and could not have heard him, with the exception of his father, but even then, the sound would have had to be extremely loud because his father did not use hearing aids.

The circumstances of Wade’s childhood are unusual. According to M. Virginia Swisher: Most deaf children are born into hearing families who do not know or use a natural sign language. Some will be exposed to a natural sign language, such as American Sign Language (ASL), when they enter a residential school for the deaf; others who are “mainstreamed” in schools with hearing children may not have contact with the language until (and unless) they become involved in the deaf community after graduation.

The fact that Wade’s family was Deaf affected his literacy practices to the extent that the oral literacies of speaking and reading lips were deemed unimportant by him because his family all utilized ASL. However, because they all spoke in ASL, at a young age his visual literacies and ASL literacy were greater than most Deaf people’s at a similar age. The tradeoff of one
literacy practice for another may appear trivial, but when oral literacies would afford him more options for communicating with the dominant hearing culture later in life, the tradeoff is significant.

Sub-context #2: Adulthood

Based on the answers Wade provided to the interview questions I was able to determine that currently, Wade is married to a hearing woman, and the couple has two grown children, who are both hearing. As a young adult, he moved from California to Minnesota with his family. He lives in the country outside of a small town.

As in the previous sub-context, the first type of literacy practice used by Wade is textual, the traditional forms of reading and writing. These textual literacy practices are used on almost a daily basis. However, like is true for Linda, Standard English is not really used. Wade’s writing more closely mirrors what he would sign. He says that he struggles to write in English because that is not the way he talks. For example, the word order is different because in ASL adjectives follow the nouns they modify versus in English where they precede the noun. He can read Standard English but often finds doing so boring because there are “too many words,” which was stated with a dropping of the hands and drooping of the body at the end signifying a level of exhaustion and frustration due to the number of words. Nevertheless, he subscribes to various hunting and fishing magazines. As with many people, Wade will read articles written about subjects that he enjoys even if there are “too many words” that seem unnecessary. In this way, Wade fits in with most people who only want to read what they find relevant to their lives.

Just as in his childhood, leaving notes for family members is the main form of written textual literacy. Again, Wade does not write in Standard English, but rather uses English words
with ASL syntax. When schedules do not allow for face-to-face conversation, writing with ASL syntax allows for a quick note even if it may be confusing to others who are only used to reading Standard English. According to Maxwell, “Most specify time, person, and/or place…” (216). The reference to familiar events and places makes writing the note even less taxing due to no extraneous explanations being necessary.

As an adult, Wade continues his visual literacies in MSL. A large influx of Mexican workers in the town where he lives has enabled him to meet people from Mexico who are deaf and continue to expand his MSL, learning more signs and carrying on conversations. Additionally, he teaches them ASL, when asked, for their various needs. The learning and teaching of different sign languages demonstrates complexity in visual literacy because the signs need to be interpreted and translated between the two languages.

In addition, he and his wife taught their children ASL as infants/toddlers. Much like Linda taught her children, these were simple signs for “milk,” “more,” “mama,” and “dada.” Sharing this common language with the children was important to him and his wife and broadened his visual literacies by focusing on the more simplistic forms that are taught to small children and then, in turn, how small children actually sign those signs, which is rarely, if ever, precise, discussed in the previous chapter, using the example of my niece signing “more.”

Another visual literacy Wade participates in at home lies more along the lines of mechanical literacy, but for the purposes of this project will remain in the visual literacy category to maintain continuity. He often does repairs around the house and on vehicles and other machines found around the home and property. This also includes carpentry and the building of wood furniture. While he has never had formal training in carpentry, auto repair, plumbing or any of the other forms of repair and building he does, he has learned from others, like his father
and brothers, how to perform these tasks and enjoys being able to do these things for himself and his family. This form of visual literacy requires the understanding of complex texts (the requirements of the project at hand) and the ability to interpret those texts in order to complete the project and get the repairs or creations correct. This form of visual literacy fits with James Paul Gee’s discussion of visual literacy, “Knowing how to read interior designs in homes, modernist art in museums, and videos on MTV are other forms of visual literacy” (13). The home, vehicles, and machines become different semiotic domains in Gee’s terms and have to be read in a different manner than text. This type of visual literacy is also representative of procedural literacy espoused by Ian Bogost, understanding the tools and how to use them to accomplish what needs to be done.

Overlapping with textual and visual literacies, digital literacies are a major component in Wade’s home life. One of the earliest digital technologies that Wade participated in was the use of closed captioning. This digital literacy overlaps the most with textual literacies due to the use of printed English text. Wade’s comments were similar to Linda’s regarding the point that there are often too many words used. He would much prefer just enough to get the gist of what is happening; however, because closed captioning is for all hearing impaired people who want to know everything said, the format will not change. He also gets frustrated when watching something live that is captioned because the captioning is always delayed, so final statements are cut off and often never seen by the viewer due to commercials or the running of credits. Patricia Koskinen and her colleagues have written about the speed of the captions for some televisions shows, “approximately 120 words per minute” (41) and that “some words and phrases may be omitted due to the limited space available for displaying the text” (41) which may affect meaning. Despite the potential drawbacks, Wade uses captioning for all television shows and
movies that he watches, which has allowed him to develop a digital literacy but also improve his
textual literacy of reading to a degree. However, he does note that he does not read it all
sometimes, “It’s just too much.”

Another early technology that Wade has used, just like Linda, is the teletypewriter (TTY). This technology also overlaps with textual literacy due to the writing and reading involved. TTYs allowed deaf people to contact one another via telephone lines. They could type messages to one another and read what the other person had to say. Wade does not use this technology any more. Newer technologies have replaced it, but it was one of the first to engage Wade in digital literacies and utilizing a digital technology to communicate with others, requiring not only the knowledge of how to use the technology, but also textual literacies even if not in Standard English.

Taking the place of the TTY, video telephones have created another means to communicate and further develop digital and visual literacies. This technology allows Wade to speak with others who use signed languages. Wade is able to use a webcam in order for the video phone to transmit his signed conversations over the phone lines or internet to be viewed either on a computer monitor or a television. The digital nature of the technology aids in improving and developing digital literacies for Wade in addition to further practicing visual literacies, utilizing his ASL. The best aspect of this technology in his opinion is that he can see all missed calls on the screen and easily call people back when he has time. Understanding how to look back on missed calls requires a higher degree of digital literacy skills than using the older technology of TTY required.

Cell phones have also increased Wade’s digital literacies. Being able to communicate readily with family and friends, even when away from home, helps to maintain relationships.
Before the advent of all of these various digital technologies, deaf people would drive over and hope that someone was home or write letters in advance. Wade likes the ease of sitting at home and finding out what is happening without the lengths to which he used to go to. Also, texting does not rely on Standard English as its main form of writing. Most people use abbreviations and skip words to keep the communications short. He appreciates the fact that people do not judge his writing in this format. The writing is supposed to be simple.

Wade’s digital literacies have also been greatly developed due to the computer and Internet. Email, while also textual, is one of his main forms of communication after the videophone and texting. He uses email when longer messages need to be sent. Again, he does not use Standard English. Email being a less formal form of communication lends itself well to looser grammatical rules than other forms of writing. The informality fits with Wade’s textual literacies while developing further digital literacies. Learning to create groups and use other time saving elements of email have also been part of his digital literacy development. In addition to using email with friends and family, he also receives several emails due to subscriptions to various news feeds. Some of the sites he subscribes to are in ASL.

Wade uses the internet to watch online Deaf news channels that are all in ASL. He also subscribes to different video logs that are done in ASL. The internet has benefited Deaf culture and communities in many ways. The sharing of information in ASL online is one main benefit. Granted, it did take Wade time to learn how to find all of the feeds and how to store them as bookmarks or favorites depending on the platform being used, but now that he has learned, he keeps finding more and more and not only utilizes his digital literacies, but also utilizes his visual literacies, watching people from around the country sign and use unfamiliar signs at times depending on the subject being discussed. The complex nature of social and political issues
challenge him to consider different points of view as he watches various people discuss those issues in different ways. He hopes to eventually be able to video and post responses.

At home, Wade has little need for oral or aural literacies because everyone signs. Wade was not interested in learning to lip read or speak when he was younger. Now that it would aid him more, he feels it is too late. However, he does lipread a very small amount – words that are more obvious than most – and generally just one or two words at a time in the context of a conversation that is already taking place. When he needs to get someone’s attention he will generally call the person’s name. His speech is not clear, but his family usually knows what he is saying.

While Wade utilizes a large number of literacy practices, the limited level of his oral literacies is the area on which he focuses his frustration. The pressure to fit into and assimilate to the larger hearing culture is great, especially considering that his immediate family with whom he lives is hearing. Wade’s frustration also points to the larger social construct of literacy that caters to the dominant hearing culture.

Context #2: The Workplace

In Chapter 2 the Workplace was divided into three sub-contexts. For this chapter there are only two sub-contexts. Based on the answers provided by Wade during the interview, he only has contact with two sets of people in the workplace: co-workers and supervisors. The two types of people have an influence on the literacy practices, described below, that Wade utilizes. Wade spent most of his life working in various manufacturing settings. Based on his answers to the questions about his work, I was able to determine a variety of literacy practices used to communicate with his co-workers and supervisors.
Sub-context #1: Co-Workers

When communicating with co-workers, Wade relies on his textual literacy practices to an extent. Notes can be left for him or he can leave notes for other workers regarding tasks and repairs that need to be done. For example when he worked as a machine operator he logged what took place during his shift in order for the next shift’s machine operator to understand where the work left off and, more importantly, if any issues had happened earlier that may affect production or completion of an order. Most often the written notes are regarding work but not always. When changes are going on at work or concerns are raised, someone will usually let him know in writing if they cannot sign the message for him. Wade’s written notes are not in Standard English when he leaves messages for others. He says that everyone basically leaves “the same short notes in the log because we do not have time to read a lot of information.”

Other note writing happens during breaks. When “talking” with his co-workers, Wade will rely on a mix of note writing, signing and gesturing, and also some minor utterances. The note writing is generally about their hobbies, like fishing and hunting, or sometimes how to do or fix something. He says that it is sometimes easier to draw a picture than try to write a bunch of words when sharing information, like how items fit together or what would need to be replaced and the order in which to do the replacement.

Wade’s visual literacies are utilized with co-workers in situations where note writing takes place because the drawings shared are a form of writing. Sometimes the drawings are of how to fix something at work. Arrows and circles will mark what needs to be changed or replaced. Along with the textual elements, the drawings play a major role in communication and understanding the needs of different positions on the job.
Gesturing and signing, other communication forms that require visual literacy, also play an important role in Wade’s everyday interactions with co-workers. To a large extent gesturing can communicate a large amount of information when someone does not know ASL or when notes may be cumbersome, like when moving down the line with a quick question. A large number of gestures are fairly universal among hearing people and Deaf people alike. Pointing, waving, nodding all communicate simple messages that make note writing or speaking orally unnecessary. Wade’s co-workers rely somewhat on simple gestures but also on simple signs that they have learned from Wade. Because they have worked together closely, Wade and his co-workers have found that some ASL makes talking easier and does not limit them to merely work-related interactions. Wade’s co-workers like to surprise him with new signs they have learned, usually online, in order to speak with him further. Again, learning ASL as an adult is sometimes difficult and requires more patience and a stronger level of visual literacy on Wade’s part when reading imprecise signs.

Outside digital devices are not allowed at most work sites where Wade has worked or where he currently works. Nonetheless, Wade does utilize digital literacies at work. The machine he operates is controlled by a computer that also monitors various elements of the process, like temperature and flow. If anything goes wrong, one of the sensors will send a message to the computer, which will then alert the operator, Wade’s position. He then needs to make adjustments using the computer, go fix whatever section of the machine that is not working correctly, or notify a co-worker to do something different. Co-workers who are also friends will text or email Wade, but these will not be discussed here because instances of digital literacy have been discussed in the home context and will be revisited briefly in the social context.
Wade’s co-workers know him well enough to know that he does not really speak or read lips, so while they may mouth some words, they do not try to speak to him in a wholly oral manner. Again, Wade utilizes his other literacy practices for the most part. He appreciates his co-workers trying other methods of communication rather than insisting on dominant means.

The manner in which Wade discusses his interactions with his co-workers is done with smiles and animation, which indicate the level of enjoyment he has when interacting with this group of people. The manner changes when discussing his interactions with his supervisors.

Sub-context #2: Supervisors

Wade’s supervisors or managers rely largely on notes and lists. If there is something that varies from his normal routine, Wade will find a note waiting for him when he arrives at work or something written in the log. Variations may be the number of bags per hour that need to be processed or something that needs to be repaired that the person before him either did not get to or could not fix. These are simple adjustments to make and do not generally require physical interaction to be communicated. However, sometimes there are emergency meetings or the need to talk with Wade and interpreters are unavailable because either there is not enough notice for them to be there in time (none are local) or because there is no one available on short notice.

These times are more difficult because note writing becomes the main form of communicating. Wade admits that Standard English is not always easily understood. Misunderstandings do occur on occasion. The use of Standard English for memos and other missives from supervisory personnel pushes Wade’s textual literacy practices to a higher level.

Wade utilizes his visual literacies often during meetings. When there are meetings, interpreters are hired to ensure that Wade knows what is being discussed. While having someone
who can communicate information to him in his preferred language is always preferred, Wade says that sometimes interpreters are difficult to understand. Sometimes they use signs he does not know, and he needs to stop the interpreter for clarification. Wade prefers when interpreters with whom he is familiar are the ones hired because he is used to the way they sign. Just as people who speak have different voices, people who sign have slightly different ways of making each sign. Becoming familiar with a particular person’s way of signing takes time. Some people adapt more quickly than others, just like hearing people adapt to accented English. Wade has his preferences and the people at work who schedule interpreters try to accommodate those preferences. Yet, having unfamiliar interpreters provides a challenge for his visual literacy skills.

Wade’s digital literacies are used when he needs to “call” his supervisor due to illness or some other instance when he will be late or need to make a change to his schedule. He utilizes email for this purpose. Prior to email, his wife would call the office where he works to let his supervisor know if anything was wrong. The independence that email provides saves time because if his wife is at work when he needs her to call, obviously he would have no way of contacting his place of work without her. He could have used a relay service on the TTY, but that was never a preferred way of calling people for Wade. Having new technologies makes contacting the workplace easier.

Similar to Wade’s co-workers, his supervisor and management team know his limitations when it comes to speaking and reading lips. They know that they can mouth certain words and that he will sometimes respond in kind. His speech is not very clear, and he needs to develop a level of comfort with a person before he will speak in front of her or him. However, understanding a couple of mouthed words along with gestures is generally something he can do. Lipreading is difficult for anyone because so much meaning lies in the context of the
conversation along with facial expression and body language. Only a small part of understanding is how the word itself is mouthed. Everything that goes along with it is what provides the real meaning.

The formality of interactions with supervisors versus the enjoyment of interactions with co-workers is clear when looking at how interactions take place as described above. However, the interactions with supervisors versus co-workers became extremely apparent when Wade talked about them. When discussing his interactions with co-workers, Wade was very animated, probably very similar to how he acts with them. That animation goes away when he discusses his supervisors. The signs are slower, the facial expressions are frowns and a furrowed brow, and the body language is slumped. The words are very similar, but the bodily expression of those words speaks volumes.

Context #3: The Marketplace

Because Wade lives in a small town, many of the people who own, run, or work at places of business recognize him and tend to greet him and aid in any way, just as they would other customers. However, going outside of the town in order to get items not available at the local level or going to places not often frequented, such as insurance agents, car sales, specialists, and so forth can present some challenges. Wade’s signed descriptions of these encounters offered insight into the literacy practices utilized in this context and its sub-contexts.

Sub-context #1: Shopping

Wade utilizes textual literacies for shopping more than Linda because he usually shops for parts and other materials for repairs around home. If he needs help locating something he
needs to ask staff working at the store. Sometimes if a particular part or item is out of stock the
staff member may recommend another part or material that could work, and the exchange
requires notes written back and forth between the store staff and Wade so the different part or
material is used correctly. Because times like this require a little more question and answer,
Wade always carries a pad of paper and writing utensil with him for these instances. Again, note
writing is a significant part of his life although it is not in Standard English.

At some of the local businesses, there are employees who know a few signs and can help
when needed. Mostly, they use fingerspelling and gesturing, but that helps. Utilizing his visual
literacies is always preferable to Wade even when speaking with people who have limited
abilities. Also, one of the local businesses employs a couple of Deaf workers to stock shelves.

Wade knows them and will often seek them out when, or if, he needs help at that
particular store. Again, these interactions utilize his visual literacy reading ASL and provide
further strengthening of that literacy.

Wade’s digital literacies are used to a degree for shopping. Much more is available online
than in person, and while he prefers to go to stores to get what he needs, sometimes it is just
cheaper and easier to get what he needs online. It also is convenient to have purchases delivered
to the home if they are not needed immediately. He is fairly comfortable shopping online at this
time, so his digital literacies have been growing.

Wade’s reluctance to utilize oral literacies extends to public places. He can understand some
mouthed words, and he appreciates that many people will try to communicate with him. Trying
to read their lips is difficult, though. Simple words are easier, like when a clerk tells him a part
will be in “tomorrow” and gestures slightly to the side. Wade understands those simple oral
exchanges even though he is reluctant to speak himself. A thumbs up will generally signal his understanding and that he will be in the next day.

When handling larger purchases, such as a car, Wade relies on his wife, who is hearing, to be the one who handles most of the transaction. While he makes sure that his concerns and requests are handled, they are generally communicated via his wife. If she is not available, then he tends to wait until she is. Major purchases are always made as a couple, so both need to be available for any of those types of decisions.

Sub-context #2: Professional Services

Wade, similar to Linda, limits his use of textual literacies when dealing with people in the professional services realm due to possible legal implications. Reading over policies or contracts is about all he is willing to do in these situations, and even then, he relies on his wife to clarify aspects he finds confusing. Most interactions for insurance, medical assistance, and other professional services are handled face-to-face with his wife. He can read what is presented but relies on her to ask questions and voice concerns.

Wade utilizes his visual literacies to a great extent when dealing with some professional services because interpreters are generally called in when his wife wants to be able to just listen and pay attention rather than signing for him. Setting up appointments requires timing because the service’s office is responsible for obtaining the services of the interpreter, which requires at least a two-week notice. The certification for legal or medical interpreting requires more training, making these interpreters more difficult to hire in the area where Wade lives. Even with the additional training, because these fields are so jargon-based, interpreting is difficult and relying on a go between can be taxing for Wade. Understanding the signing of strangers is often
difficult, and interpreters sometimes do not understand his signs, which can be frustrating for Wade. In emergency situations, interpreters are not available due to the two-week-notice requirement. In these cases, Wade generally relies on his wife and is thankful that these situations do not happen often.

Unfortunately, even though Wade’s oral literacies are not strong, some business people do try to speak to him. These situations are awkward, but Wade relies on his wife to intervene and deal with the situation. Hearing people’s assumptions that all deaf people can speak are never good, but there are many people who are deaf that have much stronger oral literacies who make it easier on hearing people in these settings. However, Wade prefers not to use oral literacies.

In the context of the marketplace, Wade’s frustration with his inability to read lips and speak becomes apparent. He signs that the people in this context “talk, talk, talk,” then he pauses and holds both palms up. He then uses the index finger of one hand to slowly draw a line from the corner of his mouth down toward his chest. What he means is that when he goes into these places people approach him and begin speaking then pause waiting for an answer then realize no answer is forthcoming. The palms up indicates the waiting while the slowly drawn line indicates the realization, but that slowly drawn line also indicates regret on Wade’s part that he cannot respond to whatever it was that the person said.

Context #4: School

As mentioned previously, education for deaf children generally takes one of two forms: oral-only or Total Communication. And while there are some schools that utilize Total Communication and use Signed Exact English, ASL is used in many schools for the deaf,
especially after being declared a formal language. ASL is the language of Deaf culture perpetuated and continually developed by members of the culture and the community. However, they still respect language choices and while many hearing educators and parents may encourage oral literacies to aid assimilation and competencies within the hearing world, some do not insist on them. Primarily, the context of school is where textual literacies, especially, become formalized. Important to note is that while Deaf parents do want their children to learn and be proficient at English reading and writing, “they also recognize that they have a language—sign language—that takes the place of spoken language for purposes of everyday communication…they regard it as more efficient, natural, and esthetically pleasing than manually encoded English signing” (Erting 236).

Wade’s responses centered predominantly on the reading and oral expectations at school and provided some insight as to the acquisition, usage, and challenges of these literacies in particular. Because Wade only attended K-12, no sub-contexts are used for this context.

While in school, all writing and reading was done in Standard English, and while it made sense to Wade while reading, he often had difficulties remembering what was read and why the words were in a particular order. Many students struggle with remember what was read, so that challenge was most likely not related in any way to his language abilities. Writing complete sentences was difficult due to the difference in syntax between English and ASL. He often struggled with verb tense and articles. These are common difficulties for students whose first language is not English. He learned enough and became proficient enough to graduate, but he says that he has forgotten a lot of it because he has not had the need to use formal English.

Wade’s visual literacies were centered in ASL during school. He attended schools for the Deaf both in New York and California. While both schools utilized ASL for teaching, there were
some regionalisms that took time to learn. However, he says that they did not cause many issues. Asking a quick question about a particular sign that was not one with which he was familiar was all it generally took. Sometimes context was all it took for him to understand what was being said. He could then later clarify the exact meaning of an unfamiliar sign.

Wade’s visual literacies also increased after moving to California because some students were of Mexican origin and spoke Mexican Sign Language. Wade learned to speak this language to use with them outside of class and helped them in return with their ASL. Also, knowledge of two signed languages, one for home school and the other with friends, enhanced his visual literacies due to reading the signs and responding in the correct language.

While in school, Wade’s digital literacies were limited to calculators in math and some science classes, and he says he often did not use a calculator if the math was simple enough. His digital literacies waited until later in life to develop in any significant way.

Wade also went to school during the oral-only movement and before Total Communication. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the rationale behind the oral-only method of education is explained by Brenda Jo Brueggemann who claims that if deaf people are to adapt to a hearing world, they must do so in the same way as hearing people (410). In other words, they need to “pass” for hearing. Speech therapy and lip reading were required. While Wade participated, he admitted that he did not necessarily take the lessons seriously. With his classmates, who became his friends, and his family, he did not need to speak or read lips; therefore, the lessons seemed irrelevant. As an adult, he does wish he were a little better at lipreading, but it is not something he has pursued during adulthood.
Context #5: Social

This final context, as explained in the previous chapter, overlaps somewhat with the context of home because some social events are in the home while others are outside the home. Regardless, based on Wade’s responses to the interview questions, I was able to extrapolate specifics that better suit a social context than that of the home. Also based on his responses, I determined the literacy practices at use in those social situations. This context is broken down into the sub-contexts of neighbors and friends even though some overlap occurs between these two groups. However, sometimes neighbors are not well known, and different literacy practices are utilized at times.

Sub-context #1: Neighbors

Wade uses note writing to a large extent with neighbors because this is the way that they typically began speaking with one another. Writing quick notes back and forth can cover a large amount of material from needing to borrow a tool to asking for help to do something. Notes written in this context are to be read immediately followed by an immediate response. The lack of complete sentences in this context does not seem to be an issue as neighbors respond and carry on conversations at length in the same manner.

Some neighbors have learned some basic signs and fingerspelling. Much like in other contexts, Wade prefers this form of speaking. Relying heavily on his visual literacy is the norm and part of his preferences. Being able to readily communicate with neighbors helps him feel a part of the neighborhood as a whole. He likes his neighbors and spending time with them. Many neighbors have become close friends that he will go fishing or hunting with or with whom he and
his wife will have meals. Still, Wade is sometimes challenged due to the lack of fluency of these neighbors. Visually interpreting imprecise signs takes patience and a higher level of literacy.

The only digital literacy Wade utilizes with neighbors is texting, and this particular literacy is utilized often to make plans. Again, as far as digital literacies are concerned the difficulty of those literacies lies in understanding the technology not necessarily in the information being shared or how it is shared. Wade likes that texting allows easy communication among neighbors because there is no need to wait for people to arrive home or to leave notes hoping that they will be found. Due to how texting is often naturally abbreviated, Wade’s textual literacies match much of what others do for texting.

Once again in this context, Wade rarely utilizes oral literacies. He will sometimes call out to get someone’s attention, but he cannot carry on an oral conversation. Any mouthed words on the part of a neighbor or any spoken words from Wade are limited and not always easily understood by the other. His oral literacies always work in tandem with his textual and/or visual literacies.

Sub-context #2: Friends

Wade, like Linda, only utilizes textual literacies with friends when those particular friends either do not sign or only sign minimally. In these cases writing notes is necessary in order to communicate fully. In general, the notes are not in complete sentences and Wade’s friends also use a shorthand style of writing. This note writing is often accompanied by gesturing, drawing, and other visual cues that enhance meaning and require a different means of understanding the communications for all participants.
As with Linda, for Wade when with friends who are not proficient in signing, gesturing can often take its place in addition to writing notes back and forth. Several gestures are easily understood by both hearing and deaf people; making shapes in the air and pointing are included in this group along with waving and thumbs up. The conversation can be very animated due to pulling the notepad between “speakers” to write things down and gesturing when it is quicker. Wade enjoys this because his friends are trying to utilize other literacies rather than expecting him to lipread, at which he is definitely not proficient except very simple words and only when exaggerated.

In addition to gesturing, ASL is another visual literacy employed by Wade when with friends because many of his friends are Deaf or part of the deaf community. While most of his friends who sign do not live in the same town or nearby, they visit each other as often as possible, as Wade and his friends do. For Wade, spending time with other people who sign is always preferable and fortunately most of his hearing friends have learned at least a few signs. Because he is also from the East, he did need to adapt to certain regionalisms of both California and the Midwest, but he says it was an easy adaptation.

Wade’s digital literacies are used to a degree with friends. He uses email on the computer along with the videophone and texting, all discussed previously. These technologies were somewhat difficult to learn and are not necessarily utilized to the fullest extent. Yet, Wade maintains relationships utilizing these technologies while increasing and developing his digital literacies. Understanding how each individual technology works and how best to use each one has taken time, but in order to stay in touch with friends and family, it is time well spent in Wade’s opinion.
While Wade’s friends either sign or use other forms of communication, he does use some limited oral literacies. At times, for people with whom he is familiar, the mouthing of words normally works for simpler terms or for an occasional word that is very familiar. He will vocalize but only with people he knows well because of the lack of clarity when he speaks. Once out of high school, speech therapy was no longer available unless he would have been willing to pay for it, and even then, there is always the question of finding someone qualified and willing to work outside of a school setting, which is difficult outside of larger towns or cities.

Similar to how Wade talks about his co-workers when talking about neighbors and friends, he is very animated. His animation indicates his feelings toward these groups. Even if I did not understand the signed words, I would still understand the level of feeling towards his friends and co-workers that was being conveyed.

Summary

In this chapter I used the answers provided by Wade to the interview questions (see Appendix A) to determine what kinds of literacy practices he utilizes in the five main contexts: home, workplace, marketplace, school, and social. The literacy practices fell into four categories: textual, visual, digital, and oral. Context is important insofar as literacy practices change somewhat depending on the context in which they are needed, such as Standard English being used in school. In addition to what degree the literacies are engaged, such as visual literacies being challenged by either interpreters or novice signers. Because context is important, the main contexts were broken out into sub-contexts to gain a better understanding of which literacies are used and to what extent as well as the challenges inherent in each type of context based on those sub-contexts, such as co-workers versus supervisors.
Wade’s frustration with textual literacies is evident. He made comments about Standard English having “too many words.” Despite the number of words, he does subscribe to several hunting and fishing magazines and enjoys reading them. Other than for pleasure at home, the only other context where Standard English was used in his life was school. Everywhere else, he utilizes ASL syntax.

Overall, Wade’s visual literacy practices are very strong in all contexts. He signs in two languages and helps others to learn ASL whenever possible. Teaching other people a signed language requires a higher degree of literacy due to the fact that the signs are often imprecise; however, he still needs to be able to figure out what was meant in order to correct the error. In addition he has several mechanical abilities that are the result of visual literacies, watching others and studying diagrams, in order to develop. He makes many repairs around his home himself rather than calling someone. Also, he enjoys building whatever is requested of him out of wood. In all contexts, visual literacy practices are used, but the home context seems to have the most variety of those practices.

While the digital technologies may be different, Wade uses digital literacy practices in every context. The lowest amount of use was in school due to computers and many other digital technologies taken for granted today not being invented or in wide use when he was younger. He has embraced the newer technologies despite the learning curve and initial access issues due to affordability, “It’s all so expensive!” In the context of home is where Wade utilizes the largest variety of digital literacy practices. He especially enjoys his videophone and spends hours when not working talking to friends and family members. Being able to access news and other happenings around the country and world in ASL has also been an exciting development in his opinion.
Wade makes choices when utilizing oral literacies, refusing to vocalize at times and not taxing himself trying to lipread when that is very difficult to do with accuracy. He truly appreciates people who try other means of “talking” with him and those who do not merely ignore him due to his deafness. He also understands the importance of facial expression and body language to a degree where he can make himself understood on some level by people who do not understand ASL.

Next Chapters

The next chapter is another interview analysis of the final participant, Karen. The same five main contexts (home, workplace, marketplace, school, and social) are explored looking at the same four categories of literacy practices (textual, visual, digital, and oral). The answers supplied by Karen were analyzed to determine the use of those literacy practices. A couple different sub-contexts will be explored due to differences in workplaces; otherwise, the contexts are broken into the same sub-contexts. This additional interview analysis will also compare and contrast the literacy practices of the previous participants. After the final interview analysis, I compare and contrast the literacy practices of the participants in order to answer the remaining research questions, and I explain how I met the goals of the study and recommend further research.
CHAPTER 5. ANALYZING AN INTERVIEW WITH KAREN

As mentioned in the previous two chapters, the aim of this study was to investigate the literacy practices of working-class Deaf adults within typical contexts: home, workplace, marketplace, school, and social. The previous two chapters discussed two participants in this study and their literacy practices. This final interview analysis chapter focuses on the data collected via an interview conducted in American Sign Language (ASL) with Karen, the last of the three participants being discussed in this project. As mentioned in the previous two chapters, analysis of the answers to the interview questions (see Appendix A), which did not specifically mention “literacy,” provides answers to the first three research questions, outlined in the earliest two chapters, as they reflect Karen’s experiences:

1) What are the literacy practices of individual participants?
2) What literacy challenges does each individual participant face?
3) How are various hearing contexts negotiated?

After conducting the interview with Karen, I interpreted and transcribed the signed words, facial expressions, and body language to create a written text that could then be analyzed. The analysis of the interview conducted with Karen was based on the constant comparative method. Using this method, four broad types of literacy practices took form: textual, visual, digital, and oral. In addition, utilizing this method, various sub-contexts became apparent.

Discussing the literacy practices of each participant broken down into these sub-contexts allows a better understanding of how context affects which literacy practices are utilized. According to Victoria Purcell Gates in *Cultural Practices of Literacy*, literacy practices “cover a range of contexts and explore a number of relevant dimensions in the evolving picture of literacy as situated, multiple, and social” (197). The contexts and literacy practices within each are
As mentioned previously, textual literacies are important to discuss due to the emphasis placed on perceived correctness in Standard English and the difference in syntax used for writing Standard English in comparison to writing in what Linda refers to as “ASL” (see Chapter 3), which is acknowledged by Karen. According to M. Virginia Swisher in “The Language-Learning Situation of Deaf Students,” “Deaf students have problems acquiring functors such as articles, prepositions, the copula, and markers for verb tense and aspect, as well as difficulty mastering complex structures such as complements and relative clauses” (240). If these skills are not acquired during their school years, as adults, they will continue to struggle to write in a prescriptive manner. Nevertheless, textual literacies are one of the main literacy practices found in this analysis when in hearing contexts.

Visual literacy is the second type of literacy practice used in all contexts. Visual literacy obviously is the reading of signs, facial expressions, body language, and setting. Visual literacy practices are necessary for communication and situational understanding. The communicative aspect of visual literacies is evident because ASL is a visual language that relies heavily on multiple modes for understanding: signs, facial expression and body language. In addition, the situational understanding is significant due to entering spaces and needing to be able to read the room. For example, when walking into a classroom, a visual scan of the room lets Karen, an ASL instructor, know which students are engaged, which are tired, and which are distracted.

Visual literacies are used more than textual literacies and convey a wealth of meaning that textual literacies often lack.
In addition, digital literacies overlap with visual and textual literacies. For Deaf people
digital technologies are basically visual and/or textual at all times due to not being able to hear.
These technologies, especially in the last two decades, have significantly changed how Deaf
people communicate and stay in touch with one another. They have also made many things
possible for people who are deaf than ever before, like calling one another instead of visiting or
writing.

The final category, oral literacies, is one that deaf people are encouraged to learn. In
residential deaf schools, they are taught to lipread and speak mainly due to the fact that the
dominant culture is oral and aural and being able to “fit in” is important. There is a move for
people who are deaf to “pass” for hearing and assimilate to the dominant hearing culture.

However, Deaf people have their own language, and the challenges inherent in learning
to speak and read lips make either activity difficult for many.

The use of, or amount of use of, each category of literacy practice listed above is
contingent on context. The context always determines the literacy practice used and how it is
used as well as to what extent. Each of the five contexts is explored briefly below to examine
Karen’s literacy usages in each that were determined based on her answers to the interview
questions. Within each context are sub-contexts that further delineate the four types of practices
for a more accurate view of how Karen utilizes those literacy practices.

**Interviewee #3: Karen**

Karen is in her early fifties and lives in New Munich, Minnesota. She is married to a Deaf
man, and they have one hearing daughter. Her husband is one of seven children, and two of his
siblings are also Deaf. Like Linda and Wade’s children, Karen’s daughter learned ASL before
she learned English. Karen works as an ASL instructor at five area colleges and also teaches courses for interpreters on occasion.

I have also known Karen since my childhood although not as well as I know the other two participants. When asking people to participate, I thought of Karen due to her education and occupation. I thought she would offer a different perspective due to these differences. My goal was to interview a diverse group of people. I used the recruiting script (Appendix B), and we set up a time to meet. Karen was the most excited of the participants to be a part of the project.

**Context #1: Home**

I met with Karen at her home and we spoke for approximately an hour although Karen had more questions for me than I did for her. Based on her responses to the interview questions, I extrapolated the literacy practices found within this first of five contexts and divided them into the four essential types: textual, visual, digital, and oral. In the case of Karen, similar to Linda and Wade, a large number of her literacy practices take place or culminate in the home. For ease of discussion, this context is subdivided into childhood and adulthood home lives.

Sub-context #1: Childhood

Karen was the only deaf child born to hearing parents. The textual literacies during her childhood were limited. According to Madeline Maxwell, “[Hearing] Parents report that they do not exchange written messages with their children, …Very few hearing parents write anything at all while in the home. Similarly, neither hearing nor deaf children in these homes write anything, except for young children’s scribbling” (216). Karen had very little to say about textual uses in the home except that they were expected to follow Standard English forms. She very much faced
the “frustrations in learning the language” discussed by M. Virginia Swisher in “The Language-Learning Situation of Deaf Students” (253). These frustrations stem from the “drastic limitations on input” (253) hearing contributes to learning syntax. What limited experience Karen mentioned mirrors these frustrations.

Utilizing a signed language can ensure a strong use of visual literacy, but for Karen that had to wait until school. According to Swisher, “Most deaf children are born into hearing families who do not know or use a natural sign language. Some will be exposed to a natural sign language, such as American Sign Language (ASL), when they enter a residential school for the deaf” (239-40) as was the case for Karen. Her visual literacies were initiated by learning to read lips. Her parents had very limited signing abilities; therefore, Karen needed to learn to read lips in order to communicate and understand what was being said to her. Swisher explains that there are two major limitations for reading lips. The first is “In order to read someone’s lips, the deaf person must be looking at the person’s face….Trying to follow a multiparty conversation by lipreading is particularly taxing” (242). The second limitation is the most serious, “The linguistic information available on the lips is far from complete. Many of the sounds that are visible on the lips look identical, so that without sound, one can detect no difference between, for example, /b/, /p/, and /m/, or between /t/, /d/, and /n/, and many vowels are confusable as well. Worse, sounds occurring farther back in the mouth are not visible at all” (243). These are issues when people are trying to converse with someone who lipreads; however, the issues are exacerbated when someone is mumbling or barely moves their lips or keeps moving her or his head. However, school helped to establish a signed language for Karen, which would further enhance her visual literacies.
Digital literacy practices were not part of her childhood for the most part. Similar to Linda and Wade, those literacy practices had been limited to calculators in school.

As for oral literacies, Karen’s parents spoke orally and expected her to respond in kind. She developed oral literacy practices at a young age in order to communicate with her family. Fortunately, the residential deaf school in Minnesota admitted students early. Speech therapy helped to clarify her speaking and helped her learn to modulate tone and volume.

Karen provided limited information regarding her childhood. The little she did discuss she signed in a manner that lacked animation or emotion in general. The lack of emotion speaks volumes in regards to the level of frustration she felt during those years. Because ASL relies heavily on facial expression and body language, when either, or in this case both, are null, the words being shared are more report-like than anything else and not at all personal; however, Karen was speaking about herself; there should have been some expression of remembrance.

Again, this lack of expression demonstrates a lack of happiness when remembering, yet When speaking about her current family, Karen was very animated and her enthusiasm demonstrates the pride and caring she has for her family.

Sub-context #2: Adulthood

The first type of literacy practice encountered and most often used by Karen is textual, and the traditional forms of reading and writing and are used on a daily basis in Standard English. Karen enjoys reading as a hobby, so she often has a book nearby. She is also an instructor and reads for her classes and to stay apprised of the field. Most of her reading takes place at home whether for pleasure or work. She enjoys reading and spends as much time as possible engaged in various texts.
Unlike during Karen’s childhood, leaving notes for one another is a major form of textual literacy between her and her husband. Because her husband works as a truck driver, he works odd hours, so the couple leaves notes for each other in order to know what is happening and keep an up-to-date calendar with various activities on it. Karen says she shortens the text for those notes and does not tend to use Standard English. Using ASL syntax, as mentioned in the previous chapters, is an economical means of providing the information needed to understand. Writing is about communicating; therefore, there only needs to be enough for the other person or people to understand the message. Once again, Madeline Maxwell explains, “The sort of notes written does not require great facility in the writing of English sentences. Most such notes lack complete sentences, much less developed text” (216).

As an adult, Karen has strengthened her visual literacies in ASL, and she taught her daughter ASL when she was very young. Like the other two participants, Karen taught her daughter simple signs, such as “milk,” “cookie,” “mama,” and “dada.” These common signs were important to her and her husband for their daughter because having language is important at an early age, and signing is sometimes easier than vocalization at a young age. In addition, the simple signs broadened Karen’s visual literacies by forcing her to focus on the more simplistic forms that are taught to small children and then, in turn, how small children actually sign those signs as was discussed in the previous two chapters.

Once again, overlapping with textual and visual literacies, digital literacies play a major role in Karen’s home life. Like the other two participants, the earliest digital technology that Karen utilized was closed captioning. This digital literacy overlaps the most with textual literacies due to the use of printed English text. However, Karen does point out that often it goes somewhat fast and does not completely follow what is on the screen. She would much prefer
fewer words to get the basic meaning across; however, she acknowledges that captioning will not change, and she agrees the current closed captioning is much better than not having anything to mediate spoken language. Like both Linda and Wade, she also gets frustrated when watching something live, such as the news or a morning show, that is captioned because the captioning is always delayed, so final statements are often never seen by the viewer due to commercials or the running of credits. Her concerns mirror what Patricia S. Koskinen and colleagues write about in “Captioned Video and Vocabulary Learning,” stating that some captioned programs are fast-paced and have a large number of words per minute and that the captioning may be imprecise (40). However, despite the faults that she describes and the others, she uses captioning for all television shows and movies that she watches, which has allowed her to develop a digital literacy but also improve her textual literacy of reading. She enjoys learning the slang that her students are most likely using.

Another early technology that Karen has used is the teletypewriter (TTY). This technology also overlaps with textual literacy practices due to the writing and reading involved. TTYs allowed deaf people to contact one another via telephone lines. They could type messages to one another and read what the other person had to say. According to Elizabeth Keating and Gene Mirus in their article “American Sign Language in Virtual Space,” “The TTY changed communication habits and other social habits in the Deaf community. People no longer had to drive around to communicate face-to-face but could instead communicate visually through typed English messages” (698). Karen does not use this technology any more. It is an older technology, but it was one of the first to engage Karen in digital literacies and utilizing a digital technology to communicate with others, requiring not only the knowledge of how to use the technology, but also textual literacies.
As mentioned in the previous chapters, video telephones have taken the place of TTYs and created another means to communicate and further develop digital and visual literacies. For Karen, this technology allows her to speak with others who use ASL. Using a webcam, the video phone transmits signed conversations over the phone lines or online to be viewed either on a computer monitor or a television. The digital nature of the technology aids in improving and developing digital literacies for Karen in addition to further practicing visual literacies, utilizing her ASL. Like Linda and Wade she agrees that the best aspect of this technology is that she can see all missed calls on the screen and easily call people back when she has time. Understanding how to look back on missed calls requires a higher degree of digital literacy skills than the older technology, or TTY, required. Unlike Linda and Wade, Karen frequently takes advantage of the relay service for the videophone to call various businesses in order to check on different items for purchase, especially availability. The relay service takes her call and then calls whomever she chooses. While she signs, the interpreter speaks to the listener. When the listener speaks, the interpreter signs the responses back to Karen. She sets up appointments regularly using the service and likes the independence it affords her.

Just like was true for the other two participants, cell phones have also increased Karen’s digital literacies. Communicating readily with family and friends aids in maintaining relationships. Before the availability of all of these various digital technologies, deaf people would either need to ask a neighbor to call a Deaf friend’s neighbor or write a letter asking for a day to visit or just drive over and hope that someone was home. Karen likes the ease of sitting at home and finding out what is happening without the lengths to which she used to go. Also, texting does not rely on Standard English as its main form of writing. Most people use abbreviations and skip words to keep the communications short. For example, “u” is used instead
of “you.” In addition, emoticons are used rather than texting words and have the added ability to show emotion. Karen likes that she can also easily access the Internet from her phone and look up information she wants to know or do some shopping.

In addition, Karen’s digital literacies have also been greatly developed due to the computer and Internet. Email, while also textual, is one of her main forms of communication after the videophone and texting. She uses email when longer messages need to be sent. Many of the emails she sends are work related, so she does use Standard English for the most part. She says that some people correct things that she writes because the wording is slightly different.

While I have not seen Karen’s “errors,” I have seen other Deaf people’s writing that may be thought of as wrong. For example, one person wrote “I'll be seeing you then.” The statement is not necessarily incorrect; it is just that we hearing people would not necessarily say it that way. We would say “See you then” or “I’ll see you then.” Email is a less formal form of communication and lends itself well to looser grammatical rules than other forms of writing, but some people still expect proper and perfect grammar and punctuation and for what is written to be what they would write themselves.

Karen also does a large amount of online shopping. Because she lives in a town that is smaller than either of the other two participants, goods and services are very limited. She likes the ease of online shopping and having purchases delivered directly to her home. The ease of returns is also appealing. She wonders why more people do not take advantage of this convenience, especially Deaf people. Karen’s comfort level with digital technologies is very high, and her knowledge of how online tools work is higher than that of most people who were not raised with these technologies, increasing her digital literacies.
At home, Karen has no need for oral or aural literacies because everyone signs. Karen can lip read and speak when necessary, which was good for her daughter when she was young. It is also beneficial when workers go to the house to do repairs, which is what happened while I was there. A repairman needed to set up another time to continue the work, and Karen was able to read his lips and then speak with him, which made continuing the interview quicker. She says she would rather make people use creativity to try to communicate, but sometimes quicker is better.

Karen’s comfort in utilizing a number of different literacy practices is evident. Her high level of digital literacy eases some of the frustrations of dealing with a hearing world. As Erting explains:

One fact above all others is helpful to keep in mind about the political context in which deaf and hearing people interact. That is the power differential. Hearing people have a great deal of power over deaf people’s lives. In the wider society, life is structured according to the requirements of a hearing, speaking population. Deaf people earn a living, are consumers, and participate as citizens within a society that defines them as abnormal and is structured in ways that make it difficult for them to share equally with hearing people the benefits of that society.

(227)

When at home, Karen maintains a distance from the structure of the wider hearing society to a high degree by relying on her digital literacies. While many people, whether hearing or deaf, consider their homes a retreat from the world at large, Karen regards her home as a refuge from the hearing world that judges her as lacking.
Context #2: The Workplace

During the interview, Karen shared that she works as an ASL instructor for up to five different colleges and universities in the area. She teaches different levels of ASL as well as interpreting classes. Based on her answers to the questions about her work, I was able to determine that she relies on a variety of literacy practices to communicate with three main groups of people she encounters in this context – students, colleagues, and administrators.

Sub-context #1: Students

Textual literacy practices play a role in Karen’s work with students because she has to supply students with many documents for their courses, whether online or face-to-face. She has to create syllabi and handouts as well as assignment sheets and exams. Most of the exams utilize ASL, and students take them in person or on Skype, but some exams are on Deaf culture and are written. Obviously, due to the school setting, all writing for students is done in Standard English as much as possible. The qualifier is there because Karen says that Standard English is still sometimes a struggle, especially idioms and more casual phrasing. Language changes constantly, and for someone who does not hear those changes being spoken, it can be difficult to pick up the latest saying or catch phrase. Yet, most changes eventually make it into written language and can be somewhat confusing when it does not conform to perceived correctness. For example, the use of “lastly” is confusing because “last” is already an adverb. Adding “-ly” does not change the part of speech or meaning, yet it has become a common usage and has made its way into professional journals. We had a very spirited conversation about this point and how difficult it can be for her to understand the rationale behind these types of changes when they do not always make sense. She says, “It’s crazy that this is okay when other things aren’t.” According to Karen,
students are not afraid to argue for points when they write something that she has marked incorrect, such as “lastly,” that has become acceptable even if not necessarily prescriptive in form.

Karen’s visual literacies are constantly utilized with students. Signing with people who are learning ASL requires more attention because the signs are often not precise and at times jumbled; therefore, Karen’s visual literacy is challenged and expanded by teaching and speaking with her students. As Marlon Kuntze explains in “Turning Literacy Inside Out,” “An important objective of literacy development is the development of skills to think about information and to respond to it thoughtfully” (154). Also, teaching a subject means one must know the subject matter very well, which indicates a very high level of proficiency. Because Karen teaches future interpreters, her skills and vocabulary are much higher than most people who speak ASL, indicating a high level of visual literacy in ASL.

Karen definitely uses digital literacies, “skills to operate technology” (Boechler et al.) when working with students. For online classes, she needs to use the Learning Management Systems of the various schools. In addition, she needs to record herself giving the lectures and then grade students’ video responses to various assignments. The technologies one can use for teaching online are extensive, and Karen likes to try new programs and applications to ensure that her classes are always meeting the needs of students. Testing all of these various forms of software takes time and a higher degree of digital literacy.

Because Karen is teaching ASL, she does not use oral speech in class nor is she willing to read lips (she admits to “eavesdropping” on her students though). Total immersion is her approach to teaching. Students need to find alternative means of “talking” if they do not know certain signs. She pushes them to think outside of their comfort zones of using speech or writing
notes and to develop creative ways to communicate when they cannot sign. She says that her students never know that she can actually speak and read lips because then that would be an expectation. She expects them to sign and fingerspell whenever possible.

Sub-context #2: Colleagues

Based on her responses, it is clear that Karen has limited contact with colleagues due to being an adjunct at multiple schools. Due to her busy schedule spent traveling from one school to another she relies on her textual literacy practices to an extent in order to contact colleagues. When she does need to contact colleagues, she does use a formal tone and English sentences because she does not know many of her colleagues very well.

Karen’s visual literacies are even more limited than her textual literacies with colleagues due to the lack of contact and the lack of others who speak ASL. For the most part, her visual literacies are limited to nods and slight waves when passing in the hall. Again, as an adjunct, she is not on any one campus for very long and does not have an office on any of the campuses, so her path only crosses with colleagues near classrooms.

While the only literacy practice Karen really uses with her colleagues is textual, it is usually accessed in a digital environment. Email tends to be the major form of digital technology Karen utilizes when dealing with colleagues whether asking questions or responding regarding their questions. The emails are always very formal. Karen admits that sometimes she has some difficulty because English is not her strongest language and she pushes others to not fall back on their strengths when trying to communicate with her, so she does not feel confident when writing in such a formal setting.
Karen’s colleagues, similar to her students, do not know that she can speak or read lips. She likes to maintain this secret because otherwise it is too easy for hearing people to fall back on what is comfortable for them and make Deaf people accommodate them rather than both parties working together to find a common means of communicating that is outside of both person’s comfort zones. This expectation harkens back to Lennard J. Davis’ claim that “the norm for humans is to speak and hear, to engage in communication through speaking and hearing” (15) and expect that from everyone. However, he goes on to state, “the aural/oral method of communicating, itself seen as totally natural, like all signifying practices, is not natural but based on sets of assumptions about the body, about reality, and of course about power” (16). Speech is a learned practice not naturally occurring which is no different from a signed language needing to be learned.

Sub-context #3: Administrators

Karen has very minimal contact with administrators where she teaches. Again as an adjunct, she is generally just asked if she can teach particular courses. The only solely textual materials she receives or sends are her contracts because everything else is handled digitally. Karen has been working as an adjunct for a number of years; therefore, the contracts are fairly straightforward and do not change annually in this setting.

Karen rarely utilizes her visual literacies with administrators because she is not required to attend meetings or perform service to the institutions where she works. When there are meetings or training sessions, interpreters are hired to ensure that Karen knows what is being discussed. While having someone who can communicate information to her in her preferred language is “wonderful,” Karen says that sometimes interpreters sign words a little differently.
and she needs to ask for clarification. Because she teaches future interpreters, it is rare that she would not understand, but once in a while it does happen.

Karen’s digital literacies are used on a limited scale with administrators. For the most part, she will be contacted in order to establish days and times for her to teach specific courses. Other than that, she does not hear from administrators or staff at the school except for the general mass emails that go out to all faculty, including part-time people. She does not have cause to contact anyone unless there is an issue with a student, but those instances are rare in her classes because students only take her classes as electives or as a foreign language requirement.

Similar to her students and colleagues, administrators at the various schools do not know that she can read lips and speak. Again, Karen does not want to be expected to cater to their comfort. She feels it is important that all parties are equal in their attempts at communication and she does not feel the onus falls on her to make others more comfortable, “No one tries to make me comfortable or make things easier for me.”

While discussing the workplace, Karen’s confidence is demonstrated by her straight posture and ease of signing. Her decisions regarding her use of oral literacies is somewhat unique for someone who actually possesses those abilities. However, even though her refusal to utilize the literacy practices at her disposal causes some frustration for hearing parties she encounters, Karen’s rationale is clear and her actions equalize communication situations.

**Context #3: The Marketplace**

As mentioned previously, the development of digital technologies has greatly benefited the Deaf community by allowing online or relayed contact with others. The marketplace is the context where that benefit is seen to a high level. As Karen explains, she lives in a very small
town; therefore, she is required to go outside of the town in order to get items or to go places not often frequented, such as insurance agents, car sales, specialists, and so forth. Her descriptions of these encounters offered insight into the literacy practices utilized in this context and its sub-contexts of shopping and professional services.

Sub-context #1: Shopping

Karen’s textual literacies for shopping are limited to making a list. Having a written list assists her when shopping because if she needs help locating something she can just point to her list and the person helping her knows exactly what she needs. When further questions and answers are required, Karen tries to use other means to “speak” with workers. Writing letters in the air with her fingers or gesturing is how she tries to engage people. Again, she likes to push people to be creative and not rely on what is comfortable. Writing in the air and gesturing utilizes different visual literacy practices because what comes from these informal, and sometimes surprising, ways of “speaking” needs to be “read.”

Karen’s digital literacies are used extensively for shopping. Much more is available online than in person, and she prefers to take advantage of the convenience. Shopping online makes other parts of her life easier too because she spends so much time teaching that the convenience of online shopping means she does not have to take time to drive to other towns in order to get the items she needs.

Karen refuses to utilize oral literacies unless absolutely necessary, such as when I was at her house and she wanted to get rid of the repairman quickly. When shopping, it is never that important for her to stop attempting other means of communicating. Every moment is a teachable moment for Karen.
Sub-context #2: Professional Services

Karen, like Linda and Wade, limits her use of textual literacies when dealing with people in the professional services realm due to possible legal implications. Reading over policies or contracts is about all she is willing to do in these situations. Most interactions for insurance, medical concerns, and other professional services are handled face-to-face.

Karen utilizes her visual literacies to a great extent in this particular context because when dealing with professional services, interpreters are generally required. Any medical appointments require an interpreter to be present when possible. Setting up appointments requires timing because the doctor’s office is responsible for obtaining the services of the interpreter, which requires at least a two-week notice. The licensing for medical interpreting requires more training, making these interpreters more difficult to hire in the area where Karen lives. Even with the additional training, because the medical field is so jargon based, interpreting is difficult and relying on a go between can be taxing for Karen or anyone. In emergency situations, interpreters are not available due to the two-week-notice requirement. In these cases, Karen generally will resort to utilizing other literacies.

Sometimes businesses, such as banks and insurance companies, hesitate to call in an interpreter. The cost is a factor and something they would rather share with their Deaf clients than pay themselves. Karen stresses the need for an interpreter and reschedules appointments if she arrives and is told that an interpreter is unavailable. In these situations, she wants a certified interpreter present rather than relying on other communicative forms. Some matters are not worth the chance that something is misunderstood or not clearly articulated. Plus, it is within her rights to insist on this accommodation rather than rely on printed text. Her visual literacies are stronger than her textual literacies, and she fully understands her limitations.
Only in emergency situations will Karen forego an interpreter and utilize her oral literacies. She says these are extremely rare instances. Because other family members are hearing and can sign, often she can rely on these in-laws if there is a hospital emergency for someone else in the family. Because of her work, she does know a number of interpreters, and sometimes they will come in to help, which then brings her back to utilizing visual literacies rather than oral literacies.

**Context #4: School**

As mentioned previously, education for deaf children generally takes one of two forms: oral-only or Total Communication. ASL is the language of Deaf culture perpetuated and continually developed by members of the culture and the community. Some schools for the deaf, fortunately, respect language choices and while they may encourage oral literacies to aid assimilation and competencies within the hearing world, do not insist solely on them. The context of school is where textual literacies, especially, become formalized. Karen’s responses to the interview questions about school focused mainly on understanding why the two languages are so different.

**Sub-context #1: Childhood**

Karen attended a school for the Deaf in Fairbault, MN. She started at an age earlier than five, when most children enter kindergarten. She needed to begin language learning. Being born to hearing parents who had only learned a minimal amount of sign language and spent most of their time talking to her despite her lack of hearing, made language acquisition of the utmost importance. Because English was spoken at her at home all of the time, learning to write English
was not as difficult for her as it was for the other participants. Granted, she wanted to learn and did not regard English in a negative way at all.

Karen’s visual literacies improved greatly because she learned ASL. This offered a different type of challenge for Karen that the other two participants did not have. She started school with a much lower degree of ASL knowledge than they did and had to “catch up.” Because ASL and English are so different in syntax and use, she often questioned why word order was what it was. Her natural curiosity made learning both languages simultaneously easier for her.

While in school, Karen’s digital literacies were limited to calculators in math and some science classes. Her digital literacies would wait until later in life to develop in any significant way.

For oral literacies, Karen went to school during the oral-only movement and before Total Communication. Again, Brenda Jo Brueggemann explains the rationale for the movement, “If deaf people are to function and communicate at all, the argument goes, they must do so as if they can hear; if they can’t get along in the hearing world, they can’t get along at all…” (410).

Classes in speech and lip reading were required. Karen embraced the learning, and while she may make the conscious decision to limit the use of these literacies in adulthood, she needed to learn them at a young age to make life easier at home.

Sub-context #2: Adulthood

Karen has attained the highest degree of education of all of the participants. She loves learning and continues to read new publications in her field. The vocabulary of college and graduate school were the most difficult aspects, but this is true for many students who are new to
those environments. Because of her love of learning she embraced the challenge. During post-secondary education, textual literacies are required for the vast majority of classes, and as she graduated, she utilized the textual literacies well enough to pass her courses.

Karen had interpreters for face-to-face classes. The challenge for her was determining signs along with her interpreters for jargon used. For example, there is no official sign for “rhetoric.” She would need to repeat the process every time there was a new interpreter. Also, remembering the signs for those words was not always easy for her or the interpreters due to lack of use and them being “made-up” signs rather than standard signs. There is ontology for signs, and Karen and her interpreters attempted to use that for development of their signs. For instance, the word “rhetoric” could be signed with two R’s at the mouth, which is the sign for “communication” using two C’s, or it could be signed in front of the body using two R’s moving at intervals with a shake of the wrist similar to how “language” is signed with two L’s. How the word is defined would determine the sign. The development of new signs was a challenge for Karen’s visual literacies, but also led to her desire to teach ASL for interpreters.

Karen’s digital literacies have also been challenged during her education. Some of the courses she takes now are online and rely on her computer skills and ability to use all of the online tools. Fortunately, she teaches online and is familiar with most of the formats. Sometimes video material is not captioned; therefore, she needs to request a transcript and advocates for her rights in doing so. However, this is slowly changing across the country to ensure that ADA accommodations are met. Nevertheless, she enjoys being able to continue to learn new information in her online courses.

The issue of oral literacies was overcome by the use of interpreters who would help with all of Karen’s face-to-face communication needs. The interpreters would step in and speak on
behalf of Karen either in class or to the instructors personally while signing to her what was said verbally by the instructors and her classmates. The only drawback was the fact that discussion generally went faster than could be signed, so she often was not able to participate without stopping the conversation and going back to a previous point to say something. Even at those times when she stopped the conversation, though, she utilized the interpreters that were there.

Context #5: Social

This final context overlaps somewhat with the context of home because some social events are in the home while others are outside the home. Regardless, based on Karen’s responses to the interview questions, I was able to extrapolate specific details that fit better with a social context and spending time with friends than that of the home. Also, based on her responses, I was able to determine the literacy practices at use in those social situations.

Sub-context #1: Neighbors

Karen will occasionally use note writing with neighbors because they sometimes bring a note over to ask to borrow something or to let her and her husband know about something. Writing quick notes back and forth can cover a large amount of material. Again, as Maxwell points out, “Most such notes lack complete sentences, much less developed text” (216). Notes written in this context are meant to be read immediately followed by an immediate response. The lack of complete sentences in this context does not seem to be an issue as neighbors respond and carry on conversations.

None of Karen’s neighbors sign; therefore, her visual literacies are limited to the other contexts and the second sub-context here.
The only digital literacy Karen utilizes with neighbors is texting, and this particular literacy is only utilized in cases of emergency for the most part. Again, as far as digital literacies are concerned the difficulty of those literacies lies in understanding the technology not necessarily in the information being shared or how it is shared. Karen likes that texting allows easy communication among neighbors because there is no need to wait for people to arrive home or to leave notes hoping that they will be found.

Once again in this context, Karen does not utilize oral literacies not because she does not know how but because it is a choice that she makes. She says, “If there were an emergency, then I could speak, but it hasn’t happened yet.”

Sub-context #2: Friends

Karen only utilizes textual literacies with friends when those particular friends either do not sign or only sign minimally. In these cases writing notes is a means to communicate fully. This note-writing is often accompanied by gesturing, drawing, and other visual cues. While Karen prefers not to write notes, sometimes the social circumstances make it necessary.

With friends who are not proficient in signing, gesturing can often take its place in addition to writing notes back and forth. As mentioned previously, several gestures are easily understood by both hearing and deaf people, such as making shapes in the air and pointing.

Between pulling the notepad between the two to write ideas, thoughts, and opinions down and gestures, the conversation is animated. Karen enjoys this because her friends are trying to utilize other literacies than solely oral or textual ones that seem to be the default for many hearing people.
In addition to gesturing, ASL is a major visual literacy employed by Karen when with friends because the majority of her friends are Deaf or part of the deaf community. While most of her friends who sign do not live in the same town or nearby, they visit each other as often as possible, as most people do. For Karen, spending time with other people who sign is always preferable.

Karen’s digital literacies are mainly utilized with friends. She uses email and Facebook on the computer along with the videophone and texting. As previously discussed, these technologies were somewhat difficult to learn, but Karen enjoys utilizing the most recent technologies available. Karen maintains relationships utilizing these technologies while increasing and developing her digital literacies. Understanding how each individual technology works and how best to use each one takes time, but for Karen it is time well spent in order to have greater contact with those people she considers friends.

Because her friends either sign or use other forms of communication, Karen does not need to utilize any oral literacy practices. Even in cases where the mouthing of words would normally work, she does not feel the need although she does mouth at times, like most Deaf people.

Summary

In this chapter I used the answers provided by Karen to the interview questions (see Appendix A) to determine what literacy practices she utilizes in the five main contexts: home, workplace, marketplace, school, and social. The literacy practices fell into four categories: textual, visual, digital, and oral. Context is important insofar as the literacy practices change somewhat, such as Standard English being used in school, and to some degree, such as visual
literacies being challenged by either interpreters or novice signers due to lack of familiarity with their particular signing regionalisms or precision. Because context is important, the main contexts were broken out into sub-contexts to gain a better understanding of which literacies are used and to what extent as well as the challenges inherent in each type of context based on those sub-contexts, such as students versus colleagues versus administrators.

Karen’s literacy practices are quite complex. She has a high educational degree and keeps apprised of what is happening in her field, which requires a higher textual literacy than most people have, both hearing and Deaf. Of the three participants, she uses Standard English the most. Her use of Standard English is based on context. When writing to students or administrators whether on campus or from home, she uses Standard English. When writing notes to friends or family, she does not use complete sentences or English grammar. She demonstrates very clearly how audience, part of the context, determines language use.

Karen’s visual literacies are used in every context and to a high degree. Because she is Deaf, her world is visual; there is no sound. Everything is taken and processed via her eyes. Teaching ASL also requires a higher level of visual literacy because she needs to make meaning of imprecise signs and not only correct them, but respond to them.

In addition, Karen has embraced digital technologies. Her ability to use many different platforms, applications, and software packages demonstrate a high level of digital literacy. Because she keeps trying new technologies that are developed and finding new applications to use in her online classes, her digital technologies keep growing. Socially, they may remain static, using only email, texting, and the videophone, but in the other contexts of her life, she is always trying new technologies.
Karen, like Linda, has also consciously made literacy practice choices in the realm of oral literacy, refusing to read lips or speak unless absolutely necessary. While this choice may present challenges, she is adamant that she should not need to change just because that is the expectation of the hearing culture. She would just appreciate if people would try to communicate in different ways and not always rely on what they know or are comfortable with. Drawing letters in the air or trying to make the shapes with one’s hands would be preferable to writing notes in her opinion because then both parties need to try to build understanding.

**Final Chapter**

The final chapter focuses on the final two research questions regarding the Deaf community as a whole as well as the initial conclusions that I draw from the interview analyses. In addition, I discuss implications for the field of rhetoric and writing along with recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 6. THE FINAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

The previous three chapters focused on the literacy practices of three individuals – Linda, Wade, and Karen – within the contexts of home, workplace, marketplace, school, and social. The analysis of the interviews with the three participants provided answers to the first three research questions:

1. What are the literacy practices of individual participants?
2. What literacy challenges does each individual participant face?
3. How are various hearing contexts negotiated?

Identifying the literacy practices within specific contexts and sub-contexts allows for a deeper understanding of literacy in general. According to Julie Lindquist and David Seitz, “To put literacy somewhere is to stabilize it long enough to take in its complexity foregrounding particular aspects of literacy as a human accomplishment, an activity, and a social predicament” (13). This study of literacy practices also provides a voice for those who have been too long silent (Sullivan 58). The previous three chapters provide a look at the accomplishments, activities, and predicaments of the Linda, Wade, and Karen. Looking at the specific practices of these three individuals, as determined by their answers to the interview questions (see Appendix A), provides a small glimpse at literacies not often studied outside of academic settings. While school is one of the contexts discussed in each of the interview analyses, it is not the focus and offers a contrast to other contexts where literacies change and become more complicated, especially when attempting to define what it means to be “literate.”

The first part of this chapter focuses on the remaining two research questions:

4. What are some of the common practices for the community?
5. What common challenges does the community face?
In order to answer these questions, I compared and contrasted the literacy practices of the three participants within each of the five contexts: home, workplace, marketplace, school, and social. Comparing and contrasting the practices of the three participants provided some insight into the literacy practices of the community and when they are used. After completing the discussion of the common literacy practices and challenges faced by the Deaf community, I discuss how I met the goals of the project, the implications for the field of rhetoric and composition, and future research that needs to be done.

Community Literacy Practices in Context

One of the key elements that has been discussed or demonstrated throughout this project is how context affects literacy practices. Lindquist and Seitz note that people often stress the importance of literacy but use the word in disparate and vague ways, losing the meaning even though that meaning is thought to be static (7). When examining the practices of each individual participant, the various literacy practices require knowledge of when to use which practice, such as digital versus visual, and to what extent, creating a form of *kairos*, the right thing at the right moment to the right degree. Whether note writing, gesturing, silence, or other form of communication is in use, the situation will dictate the method, requiring instant understanding of the context in which one finds her or himself. The context changes the extent to which each literacy practice is utilized and the focus of each literacy practice.

As the analysis of the interviews for each of the three participants indicates, the home is where the majority of their literacy practices culminate. The level of textual literacy required by members of the community when they were children would depend upon whether their parents were hearing or deaf. Madeline Maxwell states, “Very few hearing parents write anything at all
while in the home. …In marked contrast, deaf parents and their children regularly leave notes for each other about their whereabouts and plans” (216). Linda’s hearing parents were an exception but only due to her mother’s experience with Linda’s uncle and her understanding of the great need for communication that resulted from that experience. The majority of deaf children are born to hearing parents who have had limited, if any, exposure to deafness (Swisher 239). Very few of those children would be exceptions similar to Linda. Maxwell explains:

‘Deaf children in hearing homes have many memories of awakening in the morning, searching the house, and finding no one at home and no indication of where anyone is. Deaf children in deaf homes do not tell such stories. Deaf parents generally include their children in conversations and have fewer conversations that the children are unable to follow because of the mode of communication. (216)

As adults, the members of the community use textual literacies with their other family members but in abbreviated forms that tend to utilize ASL syntax. These written missives are short and highly contextualized to the degree that only the family or close friends who know the same places and people would understand the notes (Maxwell 216). Standard English is limited to items such as cookbooks, manuals, and novels, which are not of their own creation. Again, looking at the analysis, Karen is the only one who reads a significant amount for pleasure.

Within the community as a whole, very few people read for pleasure, and the responses from Linda and Wade in regards to reading provide an understanding of how great a challenge reading can be. If the primary language of the members is ASL, then English is regarded as a second language and presents the challenges any acquisition of another language would create.
All members of the community utilize a high-level of visual literacy due to signing. Any who have or had small children taught their children to use simple signs. As adults understanding the needs of children is difficult. When those children are communicating, the lack of precision when signing leads to misunderstandings and frustrations on both the child’s and the adult’s parts. Learning the particular way that each of their children signs does take time and patience; however, the ability to communicate and establish understanding is important. Among members of the Deaf community, teaching their children, whether hearing or deaf, ASL at a young age is typical. This positive example of parenting would benefit from examination utilizing “a disability culture perspective” discussed by Megan Kirshbaum in “A Disability Culture Perspective on Early Intervention with Parents with Physical or Cognitive Disabilities and Their Infants.”

The practice of learning multiple signed languages is as common for those in the Deaf community as the learning of foreign languages is among hearing people, especially outside of educational settings where foreign languages are often required. In this study, two of the three participants speak more than one signed language, but even they admit that learning another signed language is fairly rare. Deaf people who move to America are expected to learn ASL just as hearing people who move to America are expected to learn English.

The home is also where many digital literacy practices take place for the community. While these technologies tend to overlap with their textual and visual literacies, the members have developed a number of digital literacies, beginning with the teletypewriter (TTY). Once that technology became obsolete, they moved on to using videophones that further utilize their visual and digital literacies by signing with friends and family utilizing a webcam and either a computer or television. Elizabeth Keating and Gene Mirus explain the challenges inherent in using videophones, “Some aspects of the activity of communication (re-)mediated by the new
technology we discuss include communicative space, use of the body, virtual images of self and other, production of signs, and interpretation of signs” (700). Understanding how to use the videophone and set the camera in order to be seen and what to do if issues arise takes a higher degree of digital literacy than the older TTY. Overall, videophones enable Deaf people to use their preferred language to stay in touch with friends and family as well as conduct business without resorting to a second, sometimes less efficient, language.

Closed captioning has also adds to their digital and textual literacies. However, captioning has drawbacks. Patricia S. Koskinen et al. explain further:

First, the match between what one hears (the audio) and the print one sees (captions) is not precise. While major concepts and ideas in the dialogue are presented in print, some words and phrases may be omitted due to the limited space available for displaying the text or to reduce the speed of captions. Second, the rate of the caption presentation is also a concern. The captions on many cartoons, situation comedies, and educational programs are presented at a rate of approximately 120 words per minute… (41)

Nevertheless, closed captioning is for anyone with hearing loss not just Deaf individuals. Live captioning also has its drawbacks because the ends of many news reports or other live events are missed. However despite some of the drawbacks, most members would agree that closed captioning has made watching television and movies much better than before. The technology is used by the Deaf community at large and became more accessible when televisions had the technology installed rather than as a separate device.

Along with closed captioning, texting has also added to the Deaf community’s textual and digital literacies. The ability to communicate with friends and family at any time from any place
has made keeping in touch easier than ever before. In the past they would need to write letters or attempt to visit friends and family in hopes that people would be at home. Texting has changed all of that for many in the Deaf community, including the three participants. The majority of the Deaf community enjoys the relaxed nature of texting, which does not require Standard English. Christina Haas and colleagues, in “Young People’s Everyday Literacies,” state, “Some of the features are ones that attach to writing, while others attach to speech” (391). For those in the Deaf community, the writing features would resemble their writing with ASL syntax while the speech features would also draw from ASL.

The internet has made the viewing of signed news programs and online shopping convenient for Deaf people. In addition, attendance at club meetings historically relied on everyone’s knowledge that they met on a certain day every month and relied on word of mouth for membership growth. Now, those clubs have websites and email lists. These conveniences are ones that Deaf community members enjoy especially for their area Deaf Clubs and other affiliations. Knowing what events are happening in addition to meetings has been a great help for the members of the community and has contributed to their textual as well as digital literacies.

Online searches for digital natives are a simple task, but for people who are used to different means of finding information, it can be quite daunting. However, the majority of the community members utilize the internet to varying degrees.

As adults, the majority of the Deaf community does not utilize oral literacies in the home. Typically, the use of ASL by all family members in the home eliminates the need for lip reading and speaking orally. Many adults who have been raised using hearing aids or with cochlear implants learn ASL in order to be a part of the Deaf community. Marlon Kuntze, Debbie Golos, and Charlotte Enns explain:
nowadays the majority of deaf children go to public schools, where ASL and Deaf culture models are often absent. In fact, the majority of deaf children from preschool through elementary school have never met a Deaf adult who is fluent in ASL. Many of these children may not even socialize with deaf peers. A lack of exposure to ASL and Deaf culture means less opportunity for healthy development of identity and self-esteem. (214)

Each of the participants discussed knowing people, usually younger, who were raised under these conditions. These people have sought out the Deaf clubs and organizations in order to gain a sense of belonging. However, being deprived of ASL until adulthood marks these individuals as oral. As a personal example, I remember being introduced to a man at my father’s retirement party, and the point was made to tell me that he was “oral,” meaning he grew to adulthood without speaking ASL. The three participants of this study advocate for deaf children to be taught ASL in order to avoid stigma as adults. Oral literacies cannot replace a natural sign language for most people who are deaf rather than who only have some hearing loss.

In the workplace, members of the Deaf community have fewer choices as to how they communicate and which literacy practices are utilized. All of the members need to rely on interpreters when they have meetings or training. When a known interpreter is not scheduled on a regular basis, Deaf people need to adapt to the “tone” of the new interpreter’s signing, pushing their visual literacies to a higher degree. If interpreters are not available, workplaces would like to rely on textual devices, but the margin of error is too great because many of the members of the community are not as proficient in English as they are in ASL. Misunderstanding something just written down by someone else further complicates the situation because then it may not have the level of detail necessary for full understanding. Reading the minutes of a meeting or
someone’s notes cannot substitute for the dialogue that takes place. In general, most members of the Deaf community would prefer to utilize their visual literacies in the workplace than their textual literacies.

Digital literacy practices in the workplace vary according to occupation. Among the three participants, the level of utilization varied greatly. Linda’s position required no digital literacies to be used unless she was unable to work. Wade’s position in the factory required the monitoring of workflow via computers. While he is required to be able to respond to any discrepancy, he does not need a high level of digital literacy. Karen is the only one whose job relies on a very high level of digital literacy because she is an instructor and often teaches online. She uses various forms of software and applications in order to teach her courses and manage her courses.

Trying new applications and tools for aiding students’ educations requires her to keep developing her digital literacies. The range of digital technology usage among the participants would be indicative of the specific context determining the level of digital literacy required in the workplace.

The marketplace offers slightly more choices of literacy practices than the workplace does. Only in the case of professional services like doctors, insurance brokers, bankers and lawyers do the members of the Deaf community require an interpreter. At times, a family member or friend who signs can act as an interpreter, but usually for very important appointments, a certified interpreter should be in attendance. The majority of the Deaf community knows when they require an interpreter or when someone who signs is sufficient. Each member determines her or his needs and acts accordingly.

The internet offers shopping options that members of the Deaf community can utilize in the comfort of their homes. However, some Deaf people prefer to go to shops while others
embrace online shopping fully, similar to Karen discussed in Chapter 5. Online shopping is another element that relies on the development of digital literacies. In addition, it also depends on textual literacies. Individuals can choose how much or how little they want to deal with hearing people in shops versus digital environments where they can find what they need without challenges to their preferred language, ASL.

Whereas the other contexts offer choices, school remains the context with the least amount of choice in the use of literacy practices. School is where many literacy practices are learned, so it stands to reason that choice is limited. The majority of the members of this particular Deaf community attended schools for the Deaf where they learned how to sign and utilize traditional literacies, like Standard English. However, more and more people who are deaf are being mainstreamed in public schools because they will be accommodated now due to the passing of the Americans with Disability Act. However, mainstreaming does pose its own issues as discussed above.

Everyone in the Deaf community has learned Standard English at least to an extent, particularly if they graduated from high school. Some members of the community may not have graduated, but determining if the failure was based on not learning Standard English would be difficult to assess. According to Peter V. Paul and Ye Wang, “Traditional forms of reading and writing are only one way, and not necessarily the most effective way, for students to acquire and use information,…Current state achievement and graduation tests rely solely on script literacy as the only, or the major, legitimate avenue for academic learning and achievement” (306). The education setting is the most critical setting for the attainment of standardized literacy practices; however, the level to which those practices are attained varies along with the level to which the practices are required. The moment when an individual moves from being illiterate to being
literate is not measureable because the definition of “literate” does not provide an expectation of level. As mentioned in the first chapter of this project, we need both literacy and illiteracy to define either term – one lacks the other. The dichotomy does not provide a specific moment when one ends and the other begins, which creates an issue.

The social context returns many of the literacy practices utilized by the Deaf community to the same as those practices utilized in the home. Obviously, each individual determines the literacy practices that she or he is willing to utilize. However, in this context with whom they are socializing can often determine those practices. If friends do not speak ASL well, other practices may be utilized. Social contexts tend to allow for choice but also dictate the choices to a degree due to whom participants are speaking.

Context plays a major role in literacy practices. If a context calls for a particular literacy practice, like Standard English in a writing class, then that is what is generally used by members of the Deaf community. However, the individuals that the members interact with become part of the context also. While members can pick and choose the literacy practices utilized with strangers in settings such as the marketplace, they would not intentionally make friends or family feel uncomfortable by insisting on a high level of ASL when the friend or family member is in the early stages of learning ASL. However, there is some expectation that friends and family will at least attempt to communicate in ways that work for each individual, and those attempts are always appreciated and encouraged.

**Meeting the Goals of the Project**

In this project the goal was to identify the literacy practices of working-class Deaf adults who identify as culturally deaf rather than merely as people with hearing loss. The element that
sets these two groups of people apart is the fact that those people who are culturally deaf have been raised as deaf individuals who speak a common language – ASL. As such, these individuals have become part of a culture that has been formed and has been developing for over a century. The culture is considered a linguistic minority that has rarely been the subject of study outside of educational settings, creating a state of “otherness” that my feminist approach attempted to alleviate. However, according to Brenda Jo Bueggemann in “The Coming Out of Deaf Culture and American Sign Language,” “In exploring, more specifically, the realm of literacy, deaf people might enlighten us” (415). My only disagreement is with the word “might” because examining their use of various literacy practices in a number of contexts has been very enlightening.

Another goal was to focus on a particular Deaf community in order to determine shared literacy practices. The community of Deaf people, of which Linda, Wade, and Karen are members, is located in central Minnesota, a primarily agricultural area made up of several small towns. A person who is deaf moving into these small towns may find herself or himself to be the only one who is deaf in a particular town. The solitude was an important factor because rather than being able to find constant support near home, members of this Deaf community needed to go outside of the towns where they live in order to find that support, to build community with others who share a common spoken language and common experiences in the area, including those like me who speak ASL (insider) but are hearing (outsider). In a few situations, the members of this community have grown up in the area with siblings and other relatives who are also deaf and provide support, but those members are few. Meeting others outside of family is also important, and many people attend Deaf club meetings, which typically happen monthly, even though members may live a hundred miles away. The clubs are part of Deaf culture and one
of the many elements that bind Deaf people together similar to their having a shared “spoken” language.

Further, the goal was to look specifically at the literacy practices of working-class Deaf adults. The people in this particular Deaf community have made their livings as factory workers, truck drivers, construction workers, ASL instructors, and many other occupations. While many conflate the terms “blue collar” with “working class,” a distinction needs to be made. “Blue collar” refers to the type of occupation that often requires few skills and little education; whereas, “working class” is not limited to occupation or income. In addition to the fact that the majority of the community work in what are typically considered “blue-collar” occupations, what marks the people in this community as working class is the lack of power that the group has even as a whole. Michael Zweig states, “The working class is made up of people who, when they go to work or when they act as citizens, have comparatively little power or authority” (4), which would include many Deaf individuals. And while some members are in positions that would normally provide an appearance of power, the language barrier lessens their authority in some ways, such as requiring an interpreter or needing to write ideas and concerns down rather than state them, especially in confrontational moments. The language barrier also marks the community as a whole as working class. Barbara Jensen explains, “most working class people’s native tongue is more metaphoric than literal, more personal and particular than abstract and universal. It is more implicit than explicit, more for members of a defined social group, also more pithy, colorful, and narrative. It reflects cultural differences from the middle class” (177). While she was not writing about the Deaf community, she captures the language differences that sets it apart and defines it as a working-class community.
In regards to power also, the dominant hearing culture has all of the power. Carol J. Erting, in “Cultural Conflict in a School for Deaf Children,” states:

One fact above all others is helpful to keep in mind about the political context in which deaf and hearing people interact, That is the power differential. Hearing people have a great deal of power over deaf people’s lives. In the wider society, life is structured according to the requirements of a hearing, speaking population. Deaf people earn a living, are consumers, and participate as citizens within a society that defines them as abnormal and is structured in ways that make it difficult for them to share equally with hearing people the benefits of that society.

(227)

As a working-class group, the Deaf community has limited ability to affect change in this political context, including how deaf children are taught, especially now that the majority are mainstreamed into hearing schools where they have limited if any exposure to ASL or Deaf culture. The power differential that Erting discusses is an element that requires further research.

This project responds to calls from a variety of scholars (Brueggermann, Janks, Kuntze, Lindquist, and Seitz). As literacy studies is interdisciplinary, the project also responds to calls from a variety of disciplines for further literacy studies outside the realm of education. The project also examined literacy practices in context to lay a foundation in order to begin to understand what it truly means to be literate. The objective of this project was to respond to those calls and create a starting point for not only studying this particular Deaf community, but also other Deaf communities and working-class people. Utilizing only interviews and only interviewing three individuals provided a small glimpse into how these three people utilize literacy practices in their daily lives. In addition, their responses and the analysis thereof
demonstrate the varying expectations they face and how they react to those expectations while still maintaining their Deaf identities, providing a voice for people who are often silenced due to language constraints.

In addition, this project sought to educate others about the Deaf community. While the project was limited to only literacy practices and to the lives of only three participants who were never mainstreamed, their experiences are shared by many Deaf people. Mainstreaming adds another dimension that needs to be examined more closely as it affects literacy practices and life choices.

Finally, the goal of developing a more complex definition of literacy or what it means to be literate remains. Unfortunately, a single definition would not suffice. The definition varies from one context to another. What would be considered “literate” on the job can be very different from what would be considered literate in a school setting. As discussed in Chapter 1, measuring literacy is difficult. What should one be able to read or write? To what level? Who decides? Unfortunately, much of that is not quantifiable and, therefore, not measurable in a way specific enough that there is a definitive moment when one is deemed literate. That moment would vary from evaluator to evaluator. Again, the degree of literacy would also vary between each because it is difficult to quantify. A suitable definition may never be determined; however, my hope is that this study shows how literacies change, how what is considered literate varies from context to context, and how our focus may need to change.

**Implications**

In the field of rhetoric and composition, we tend to assume that students have a certain level of knowledge when they come into our classrooms. The assumption is that if students
graduated from high school, they should be able to write at a proficient level. However, what “proficient” means is not always clarified. “Proficient” is what Richard Venesky considers:

one of that class of autopositive terms, like liberty, justice, and happiness, that we assume contain simple, primal qualities—necessary and desirable attributes of our culture—but that under scrutiny become vastly more complex and often elusive, yielding to no simple characterization of definition. … most have accepted without debate its desirability and have focused on methods by which it could be endowed on entire populations. (2)

As anyone who teaches developmental or first-year writing knows, only a small percentage of students enter our classes without needing to be taught some elements of grammar, mechanics, and punctuation. The majority need significant lessons but not necessarily for the reasons we assume.

Studying the responses provided by the participants of this study provides some insight as to what our students may be facing. All of the participants learned how to write while in school, but Karen is the only one who still utilizes Standard English. Also, she admits that it is challenging because there are elements that are difficult and that do not always make sense, such as the acceptance of “lastly” when “last” is already an adverb. This acknowledgement is true of any student whose first language is not English. There are elements of the English language that are very confusing. For example, we read a book today, but we read a different book yesterday.

One word can have different pronunciations, which can be confusing. When someone cannot hear the differences in pronunciation, those irregular verbs may become even more confusing as the word does not follow the standard usage rules. Brenda Jo Brueggemann states:

We—students and teachers alike—cannot ignore the dominant social grammar.
Students, both deaf and hearing, need to be able to use Standard English. About that assertion I have few questions. But for me, the more crucial question is how to legitimate a student’s native language (whether spoken or signed), how to affirm a student’s sense of both individual worth and social belonging that arises from her native language at the same time she might be learning the conventions of written Standard English. (416)

Brueggemann hopes that looking to deaf students may provide an answer. Looking at the Deaf community as a whole may also aid in finding an answer to that question in order for us in rhetoric and composition to better understand how to engage students and aid in their learning the “dominant social grammar” not just English grammar.

The challenge of the situation becomes even more understandable for non-traditional students when regarding Linda and Wade and their dearth of Standard English usage. Literacy practices take just that, practice. Most of us studied algebra at some point during our school careers, but not many of us could actually work through quadratic equations today because we have not practiced that particular literacy for some time. The same is true of prescriptive English usages. If those usages are not practiced, they can be lost and need to be relearned or reintroduced. Usually, a little practice is all students need to remember what they learned in the past. However, there are still other issues that may complicate their English usage.

Many students in developmental writing courses have learning disabilities, and a number of those students do not disclose the information due to the stigma attached to disability. Some may have other physical or cognitive disabilities, and among those disabilities some may be invisible. As instructors, we have an obligation to acknowledge the reported disabilities, but also the non-reported ones. One way to accomplish the acknowledgement is to bring disability studies
into the classroom. This method is advocated by Margaret Price in “Accessing Disability” as well as by Tara Wood, Jay Dolmage, Margaret Price, and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson in “Where We Are.” Price cautions anyone considering adding disability studies to a course to beware of the “pro/con” or “add-and-stir” approaches that are found in many textbooks (71). Wood, et al. advocate teacher workshops to help people to integrate disability studies in a way that avoids those two approaches to be avoided (148). Because most writing and composition courses work toward the development of critical thinking, how disability studies is introduced and integrated is important to eliminate an “us/them” mentality among students. Also, open discussion of disability may enable students with disabilities to realize that they are not alone.

Another way to address disabilities in the classroom is the use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson and Brenda Jo Brueggemann, in Disability and the Teaching of Writing, explain that UDL “developed out of the accessibility movement of the ADA, emphasizes a range of flexible, multimodal practices and a philosophy for teaching that stresses the importance of addressing different learning needs and styles by offering many pathways to achieve class goals” (6). UDL is more than making the minimum accommodations required for students with disabilities; utilizing a UDL approach means that any student with a disability will already be accommodated upon entering the classroom. Jay Dolmage in “Mapping Composition” advocates utilizing UDL. He states, “Too often, we react to diversity instead of planning for it. We acknowledge that our students come from different places, and that they are headed in different directions, yet this does little to alter the vectors of our own pedagogy” (21, emphasis author’s). We need to become more proactive and begin to alter our pedagogy to one of automatic inclusion. As Dolmage explains, “One of the central tenets of UD is that it helps all students, regardless of their ability” (25).
Additionally, not just disability needs to be addressed in our courses. Julie Lindquist, in “Class Affects, Classroom Affectations,” advocates addressing issues of class in our courses as well. The issue she states is that in composition studies we acknowledge class as an issue and that it has effects on literacy acquisition and access, but we only approach it as a critical issue, utilizing critical pedagogy (189-191). She advocates, “students need to get their emotions into play in order to interpret their class injuries, and teachers need to actively create an empathetic space for this to happen” (195). This action may also be beneficial for students with disabilities. Dolmage, in Disability Rhetoric, states, “Taking this [disability] rhetoric seriously in the modern classroom, we would create space for embodied knowing, advocate a heightened respect for all bodies, and perhaps even seek to endorse and enhance bodily difference—creating educational exchanges against the grain of the normative” (290). While Dolmage does not offer suggestions as to how to integrate disability rhetoric into the classroom, Stephanie L. Kerschbaum does in “Avoiding the Difference Fixation” where she argues for a new way of approaching difference “in which teachers and researchers can practice a kind of attention to difference that cultivates awareness of new details, provides opportunity to interpret and re-interpret those details, and contextualizes them within specific moments of writing, teaching, and learning” (622). Utilizing this approach demonstrates the relational aspect of difference based on markers of difference, which could potentially lessen the often created “us/them” dichotomy we see when teaching about difference in our classes.

Another issue that we see in composition is the emphasis on prescriptive versus descriptive views of grammar. Prescriptive grammar very much attends to what is found in the large number of handbooks available to help students with writing. The high-level demand of rule following sometimes does not allow for stylistic choices, like using a fragment for emphasis.
Descriptive views of grammar lean toward common usage and are more likely to be how we speak, which is not as stilted to the ear as prescriptive grammar may seem. Without being able to hear the differences between how people speak and how they write, even when that writing is somewhat casual, people who are Deaf are at a disadvantage to understand the differences between what is acceptable and what is not, especially when dealing with prescriptive grammar. Adding to the challenge, almost every grammar rule has an exception if not multiple exceptions.

Prescriptive usages are further complicated by writing preferences versus actual writing rules. These preferences may be created due to language changing. For example, the Oxford comma is no longer required in a list, but many of us prefer it to be there because there are instances where meaning can change due to whether or not that comma is present. We do not want a chance of misunderstanding. Writing preferences can be very confusing for students, especially students for whom English is not their first language. That language changes along with the rules also requires everyone to stay updated and for us to teach students the difference between a writing preference they may encounter versus an actual rule.

Looking at the literacy practices of the individuals who participated in this study demonstrates the need for the emphasis to be on multiple literacies rather than a specific literacy, like Standard English, that does not lend itself to all contexts. Multiple literacies provide options for a variety of contexts. We need to better understand the role that context plays when determining which literacy practices to rely on. As the participants demonstrate, rarely do their textual literacies rely on Standard English, yet they would be considered incorrect due to the style of their textual literacies. Some would even go so far to say that Linda and Wade are bordering on illiterate due to their lack of Standard English skills because neither of them has a need for those skills, much like many of us no longer use algebra or geometry on a regular basis.
However, we can see that all three individuals are very literate, each in their own fashion. What becomes very clear is that there is no set demarcation between illiterate and literate. There is no specific point at which a person is deemed no longer illiterate and now literate. Only varying degrees of literacy in varying contexts exist. Literacy in these terms becomes a social construct of what is and is not allowed in various circumstances.

In addition to the composition focus, this research has implications for the field of rhetoric. As Brueggemann explains, “When we question and explore our attitudes toward deaf people—toward their culture, language, and education—we explore as well our attitudes about our own culture, language, and education. Thus we explore some of the realms of rhetoric and literacy” (“The Coming Out” 415). The contexts within which literacy practices are explored offer a way to examine our “culture, language, and education.”

In addition, this research and research like it is a means to increase awareness about the intersections of class and literacy, literacy and Deafness, and Deafness and class for other scholars. Such awareness may certainly help hearing individuals approach Deaf people and communities more mindfully. This project also provides a perspective of the interlocking of literacy practices and what it means to be literate. Moving to the sites where literacy lives enables us all to consider the many facets of literacy that often go unnoticed.

For Future Research

This study very narrowly focuses on three individuals and the analysis of their responses to a set of interview questions. While the literacy practices extrapolated from those responses are diverse and multiple, there is still much work to be done to fully understand how literacy works. Linda, Wade, and Karen demonstrate that they all meet different expectations in their daily lives.
in regard to literacy practices. The three have also developed a large number of literacy practices to meet those expectations and make choices amongst those practices based on context.

However, to gain a better understanding of people who are Deaf, a larger group would need to be interviewed and observed.

In addition, for this study I did not observe or collect any samples of their literacy practices other than their visual literacy when signing during the interviews. More specific instances of literacy uses would benefit our understanding of literacy as a social construct, which is an interest for many scholars:

The social construction of literacy has been a particular concern of cognitive psychology and sociolinguistics in the last few years, reflecting a new interest in those disciplines in examining cognitive activities in their contexts... In the contextual view of literacy individuals may vary in how, where, and when they use literacy. Different demands and uses of literacy may exist for the same individuals in different settings or contexts. Work-related literacy differs both in content and in style and purpose from reading for pleasure or in school.

(Merrifield et al. 1-2)

Understanding literacy as a social construct could lead to changes in how we view literacy overall. It would call into question hegemonic forces that shape our expectations and potentially what we teach. Acknowledging that literacies at which we excel will be utilized more than literacies where we are weak or that we have forgotten is another step toward this recognition of literacy as a social construct.

Furthermore, ASL is quintessentially multimodal. While Jody Shipka, in *Toward a Composition Made Whole*, explains that all communication is multimodal (10), many individuals
still think of multimodality as tied to digital mediums. Discussing the visual literacy of ASL, as well as Mexican Sign Language, makes another avenue of research in multimodality explicit.

Despite the limitations of this study, I hope to one day publish my findings in the form of a monograph. Brueggemann and Lennard J. Davis, both scholars in Deaf and disability studies, have called for more exploration of the lived experiences of Deaf people. In addition the literacy practices of various cultures and minority groups have been a focus of several literacy studies scholars (Heath, Purcell-Gates, and Sohn). However, this is a minority culture that has been studied for the most part in the limited setting of education. The study of workplace and working-class literacies has been on the rise, and this research also fits that body of scholarship. The intersections of many types of studies meet in this project, which gives me hope that it will be of interest to others and one day published.

In addition, doing the same study with much younger members of the Deaf community that participated would provide an interesting comparison between those members whose only education took place in residential deaf schools and younger people who have experienced mainstreaming along with a few individuals who have been in both educational environments. There is also one member I know who has graduated from Gallaudet University with a degree in English education. She would be able to add another point of view that would differ greatly from others, especially in regards to Standard English.

Many possible avenues for future research exist not only for myself, but also for other scholars interested in literacy practices and specifically the literacy practices of Deaf people or who are interested in Deaf studies. The possibilities would take lifetimes to accomplish, which is why having so many interested individuals makes this an exciting area and, more specifically, an exciting project.
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Merrifield, Juliet, Mary Beth Bingman, David Hemphill, and Kathleen P. Bennett deMarrais.


Venezky, Richard, Daniel A. Wagner, and Barrie S. Ciliberti, Eds. *Toward Defining Literacy*. 


APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

“Traditional” Literacies

1. What roles does reading play in your life?
2. What roles does writing play in your life?

Communication Literacies

1. Do you encounter hearing people where you work(ed)?
2. If yes, how do you communicate with them? What methods do you use? Can you provide any specific examples? Can you provide examples of when it worked well and when it hasn’t? How did you decide?
3. Please describe some of your encounters when shopping or running errands. How do you communicate with people who work in shops, restaurants, banks, post office, grocery store and so forth? What about going to the doctor, dentist, or optometrist – scheduling or receiving reminders? Dealing with police, officials, fire persons, emergency situations? When buying your home or a car? What about when you need to check on something or an order is wrong? Getting a cell phone? How did you decide?
4. What are some of your experiences with hearing people in school involving communication? From when you were in school or your children’s schools? How are parent-teacher conferences handled? What about school functions and activities? How did you decide?
5. How do/did you communicate with hearing family members? Spouse, children, parents, extended family? How did you decide?
6. Do you have hearing neighbors? Do you ever need to communicate with them? How
do handle these encounters? What are the deciding factors for handling it in that manner?

7. Do you encounter hearing people in social situations?

8. How do you communicate with them? What determines your manner of communication? What difficulties have you encountered?

9. Tell me about your communication with other Deaf people. What challenges do you encounter in these situations, if any?

10. How have videophones changed your communication?

Skill-Based Literacies

1. What type of work do you do? How did you receive training? If you have questions, what do you do? When/If problems occur, how do you respond or handle them?

2. What activities do you participate in? Hobbies? How did you learn those? Please describe each one.

3. What other skills do you have? How were those learned?

4. Do you use Closed Captioning? What are your experiences with that?

5. What about interpreters? How often do you use interpreting services? Under what circumstances? What other services do you use?

6. Do you own a computer? What do you use it for? How did you learn to use it?

7. Do you own a cell phone? What do you use it for? How did you learn to use it?

8. Do you own any type of gaming console? What do you play? How did you learn to use it?

9. What other technologies do you use? How did you learn about them?
APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

(To be read to relay service interpreter)

Hello. This is Chris Garbett, Cliff(ord) Garbett’s daughter, who moved to Ohio for school. I am currently working on my dissertation that is about Deaf adults and their literacy practices. In our field, literacy is more than reading and writing in English. Using a videophone, for example, is a form of literacy. I would like to interview you for my project and discuss different forms of communication that you use and in what circumstances. The goal is to provide others with an understanding of how complex the literacy practices of the Deaf are and how they change in various contexts, such as work, shopping, home, and community. Would you be willing to speak with me for about an hour about your experiences?

If you have questions, please do not hesitate to ask. My goal is to educate other hearing people about the Deaf.

I will videotape the interviews so we can keep talking instead of waiting for me to write everything. I am the only one who will see the video. Will that be okay?

I will be in Minnesota (dates) and can meet with you at any time during those weeks and can either drive to your home, meet at my parents, or meet somewhere public if you would rather. Do you have any time to talk with me? What works best? Your place, my parents’ or a different place?
APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Christine Garbett
Graduate Student
English Department
Bowling Green State University
Bowling Green, OH 43402
garbett@bgsu.edu

Informed Consent for Research Participants: Literacies in Context: Deaf Adults

Introduction and Background Information

You are invited to participate in a research study. The study is being conducted by Christine Garbett from Bowling Green State University, Department of English as part of her dissertation. Your participation in this study will last for approximately two hours.

Purpose

The purpose of this research study is to understand the literacy practices of Deaf adults and the contexts in which they happen. Literacy consists of more than reading and writing Standard English, and this project will explore the contexts that make literacy possible. This study will include interviews with approximately 5 Deaf participants.

Procedures

This semester, I will interview a number of Deaf adults to determine what literacy practices are used in a number of contexts: workplace, marketplace, school, and home. Interviews will be video taped to limit interruptions that would be required to write notes. Research notes will not be published or shared with anyone unaffiliated with the research study.

Throughout the writing process, you may be asked to review transcripts, notes, and portions of the dissertation on a purely voluntary basis.

Potential Risks

There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study.

Benefits

The possible benefits of this study include hearing people having a better understanding of the literacy practices of Deaf adults in a variety of contexts. Also, this study could initiate future studies within the area of Deaf Rhetorics.
In addition, participants who share their stories are able to be as engaged in the research as desired. Transcripts and profiles will be sent to participants for approval before being part of the final dissertation project.

Confidentiality

Although absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, confidentiality will be protected to the extent permitted by law. Pseudonyms will be used to refer to participants. All collected documents will be kept indefinitely by me and will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, to which I have the key. Only the researcher will have access to the information you provide, and your identity will not be revealed in any published materials unless you specifically request identification.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You are free to withdraw your consent at any time without penalty.

Research Subject's Rights and Contact Persons

You acknowledge that all your present questions have been answered in language you can understand and all future questions will be treated in the same manner. If you have any questions about the study, please contact Christine Garbett (cell): 612-360-3199 or (email): cgarbett@bgsu.edu. You can also contact Dr. Donna Nelson-Beene, my project advisor, at dnelson@bgsu.edu.

If you have questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of Bowling Green State University's Human Subjects Review Board at (419) 372-7716 (hsrb@bgsu.edu).

Consent

By signing below you agree that you have read and been informed of the above information and hereby consent to voluntarily participate in this study. You also agree that you have been given a copy of the consent.

Informed Consent for Participants: Literacies in Context: Deaf Adults

Signed ___________________________ Date ___________________________

BGSU HSRB • APPROVED FOR USE
ID # H-11-01412
EFFECTIVE 3-11-12
EXPIRES 3-1-14
APPENDIX D: HSRB ACCEPTANCE

February 15, 2011

TO: Christine Garbett
ENG

FROM: Hillary Harms, Ph.D.
HSRB Administrator

RE: HSRB Project No.: H10D299GB

TITLE: Literacies in Context: Deaf Adults

You have met the conditions for approval for your project involving human subjects. As of February 11, 2011, your project has been granted final approval by the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB). This approval expires on May 4, 2011. You may proceed with subject recruitment and data collection.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is attached. Consistent with federal OHRP guidance to IRBs, the consent document(s) bearing the HSRB approval/expiration date stamp is the only valid version and you must use copies of the date-stamped document(s) in obtaining consent from research subjects.

You are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB and to use only approved forms. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures, send a request for modifications to the HSRB via this office. Those changes must be approved by the HSRB prior to their implementation.

You have been approved to enroll 5 participants. If you want to enroll additional participants you must seek approval from the HSRB.

Good luck with your work. Let me know if this office or the HSRB can be of assistance as your project proceeds.

Comments/ Modifications: Stamped original consent form is coming to you via campus mail.

Dr. Donna Nelson-Beene

Research Category: EXPEDITED #7
APPENDIX E: TRANSCRIPTS

Linda: What do you want to know?

Me: Let’s start with the role that reading plays in your life.

Linda: Reading? I don’t like to read. I like crafts, especially building birdhouses. Anything I can think of, I build with my husband. You remember he works in construction.

Me: Yes, I remember.

Linda: Yes, we build them together. I draw pictures or sometimes just explain what I want, and he puts it together. I help and do a lot of the painting and finishing work. But, no, I don’t read much.

Me: What about writing? What role does writing play?

Linda: At home, here?

Me: Anywhere.

Linda: Here it is just me and my husband now, so we sign with each other and don’t need to rely on writing. [pause while she thinks] Yes, sometimes I work nights, and I leave him notes. I have the two children, a boy and a girl. They’re both grown now, but I would write them notes sometimes so they would know where they were going and when we would make plans. You teach English, right?

Me: Yes.

Linda: Writing?

Me: Yes.

Linda: Oh well. [laughs then gets serious] Write in English? Me, write in English? No. [sits back and smiles] I write in ASL. English has too many words. ASL is easier, faster. I don’t have to think through what I want to write, like I would in English; I just write it.
My children write in English, but I never bothered with that. I left it to them. Go on [this as if telling her children (off to the side) to go on and write].

Me: Okay. I understand that. Do you encounter hearing people where you work?

Linda: Oh, yes. Many!

Me: How do you communicate with them?

Linda: It depends. I work with patients mostly. I am a CNA now. I went back to school and got my certificate.

Me: Wonderful [overlap]

Linda: It was so much work. I had to take classes after so long not going to school. I work at the nursing home up at the hospital as a CNA. It’s the lowest level. It’s not an LPN or RN, but it’s my classification. I work with patients and help them get dressed. I feed them if necessary. Help them bathe and dress sometimes if they can’t move well or at all. So, I help them with their movements and stuff and getting dressed and moving from room to room. Yeah.

Me: And, how do you communicate with them?

Linda: I use a sign that I printed that lets them know what I’m there to do. Some of them I’ve taught to sign, so we can talk more. Many of the patients I work with have dementia and many of the others are deafened, so it doesn’t bother any of us. It really depends on each individual how we communicate. If they are yelling, I will write notes and ask them what they need, like going to the bathroom or something like that. [Pause to think] I’m very patient, so they like that. Some patients yell a lot or get mad, but I can’t hear, so my co-workers and supervisors like that I’m patient with them. It’s welcome silence with those people.
Me: You mentioned co-workers and supervisors…?

Linda: Oh, yes! They can all hear. A few can sign.

Me: Co-workers or supervisors?

Linda: [laughs] Co-workers. We write notes – only during break time – and joke and talk then. They sometimes learn new signs and surprise me. My daughter works there too, so she teaches them. I’m really lucky she works there so she can tell me what’s happening sometimes. She’s been there almost one year. Sometimes she has to interpret, but I don’t like that because if a supervisor is there and has a meeting, then there has to be an interpreter to make it official. If it’s official there must be an interpreter; that’s it. Co-workers sometimes tell me about changes. And, if I need to change my hours, I will ask a co-worker. I usually leave them a note.

Me: English or ASL?

Linda: ASL of course. English is only for school, and I’m done with that.

Me: Okay. How do you decide what to use when communicating with all these people at work?

Linda: Depends on the person. If I know they can sign, then I want to sign with them. Otherwise, notes work unless it’s official then there needs to be an interpreter. No one pushes me to talk. I can’t lipread. I like that no one pushes. Pushing makes me mad.

Me: Please describe some of your encounters when shopping or running errands. How do you communicate with people who work in shops, restaurants, banks, post office, grocery store and so forth?

Linda: Writing in public mostly, and it’s usually alright. Or, my daughter can run and quickly interpret. Some people sign. [Makes a face] They try; that’s what matters. You know,
[names two people we both know] work at [store name]. [Pauses thinking] Sometimes the companies that we deal with will pay for an interpreter. They should, always, but sometimes they won’t. Banks will help pay for an interpreter to come, but then there is the issue of time because they have to plan ahead. You know they need two-week’s notice in order for an interpreter to come in, and if I need to go in sooner, then we are stuck. When I can decide, I try to plan for two weeks.

Me: What about going to the doctor, dentist, or optometrist – scheduling or receiving reminders? Dealing with police, officials, fire persons, emergency situations?

Linda: Same. I try to plan for two weeks in advance so we can schedule an interpreter. For the doctor, you have to have an interpreter. Without one there is no way of understanding anything that’s going on. I can’t hear, but my husband has some, and he can lipread. I’m lucky they have always gotten a good interpreter in. If there’s an emergency, then things have to be written or wait for an interpreter. Sometimes, we can’t wait. Luckily, it’s rare.

Me: What about when buying your home or a car? What about when you need to check on something or an order is wrong?

Linda: My husband. Sometimes my son or daughter are there mostly. If buying a car, my son will check it out. Also, my brother-in-law works on cars, so he’ll check it out. But, my husband can usually communicate a little bit or my daughter will come. They still try to talk to me sometimes. Why do they do that even when I tell them I am Deaf? I have someone there for them to talk to.

Me: I don’t know.

Linda: I hate that.
Me: What are some of your experiences with hearing people in school involving communication? From when you were in school or your children’s schools?

Linda: For me it was quick, boom, school. I was only two or three. I was sick and lost my hearing, so I was deaf. The same thing happened to my uncle, my mother’s brother. I’m lucky because my mother didn’t want me to be like him. She wanted me to know things and to be independent. I was put in the school in Puerto Rico. I’m lucky my parents put me in there, but it was great that I instantly knew good people and learned to sign. I learned Mexican Sign Language [referred to MSL for the rest of the interview]. You know that that’s what they speak, right?

Me: Now I do. I didn’t realize that before.

Linda: Yes, they speak MSL. My parents put me in school. I’ve been to schools in Pennsylvania and New York. I don’t remember the names. They put me in a lot of different schools, so everything was always changing.

Me: Like the language?

Linda: Oh yes! The languages are different – English and anything. It’s all different. But MSL and Spanish and ASL have some elements that are the same. It helps.

[Thinking] MSL and ASL. They are only a little different. English [shudders] it was very, very hard. There are just too many words in English. [Pause, thinking] Then I went back for my certificate in Alex. It was so hard, and I struggled. Everything was in English and they would show videos without captioning. My daughter helped me a lot. The online classes made her helping easier. She could interpret the videos. She also helped me understand the reading and helped with my writing – only fixing a few things to be more like English. I remember the tests were so hard. Some were
timed. But, it’s the little things that make them so hard, like the word “always.” That one always made me make mistakes. See, I said “always.” They don’t write it like that. [“Always” is emphasized physically by the head going back while it’s signed.]

Me: How do/did you communicate with hearing family members? Spouse, children, parents, extended family? How did you decide?

Linda: My parents learned MSL. That’s what I use to talk with them. We wrote notes a little. My husband and my children sign, so we sign. My children did need to go to speech therapy in school because I couldn’t teach them to talk. I counted on them [the schools] to teach them to talk. So, family, we mostly sign. You know my husband and his brothers are deaf. You know their wives too, so you know, we all sign. But some of the children don’t go to deaf schools. They are mainstreamed. I’m lucky my parents never forced me to mainstream. I didn’t want it. I don’t understand it. Same with talking and lipreading, I don’t do it, and my parents didn’t force me. I grew up deaf, and I am deaf, and that’s good enough. Mainstreaming. [Shakes her head – disgust is evident.]

Me: Okay. Do you have hearing neighbors? Do you ever need to communicate with them? How do handle these encounters? What are the deciding factors for handling it in that manner?

Linda: Neighbors?

Me: Yes.

Linda: I don’t remember the name, but there’s a teacher who lives across the street and over who can sign a little bit. Not good, but a little. Yeah, communication is very simple with neighbors. It’s nothing important. I just write it and give it to them. But, there is
not much contact. Normal chatter – weather, you know [shivers to show how they acknowledge the cold], kids – easy stuff.

Me: Do you encounter hearing people in social situations?

Linda: Yes, always.

Me: That word again. [Laugh] How do you communicate with them? What difficulties have you encountered?

Linda: I’ve lived here for twenty-five years, so I’m lucky I’ve met a lot of people. Some people want to learn how to sign, so that’s nice. You’re lucky you encounter them. Others, we write notes. It’s fun to be with people.

Me: Tell me about your communication with other Deaf people. What challenges do you encounter in these situations, if any?

Linda: You know I grew up out East and now I live in Minnesota. It’s different. Signing is very different. Plus, MSL is different, so completely different, but it doesn’t bother me. Both are fine. Either way. My kids know both languages. I taught them when they were about nine months old. You know the signs “mama,” “dada,” “milk,” “eat,” “more,” “thank you,” “please.” My daughter even took French in high school. Puerto Rico is a different culture, you know Latino, so when we go there on vacation, I need to use MSL. I can read the signs and know everything around there. We love it there. It’s wonderful. Every day it’s different, but the weather is beautiful. No pollution. It’s beautiful.

Me: Okay. How have videophones changed your communication?

Linda: I’ve had my videophone since 2003. We still have the TTY for emergencies, but the language for typing is so awkward. The videophone is faster, and it’s nice. I like it.
The TTY was always hurry, hurry, hurry, then waiting, waiting, waiting, but now with the videophone it’s done. I love my videophone. I can’t be without it.

Me: We already discussed work. And you build birdhouses. Any other hobbies?

Linda: [Thinking] I like to cook. I have many cookbooks and look through them sometimes. It’s fun to see new things. I’m pretty good. No one has died. Yes, I like cooking and the birdhouses.

Me: Do you use Closed Captioning? What are your experiences with that?

Linda: Caption, yeah, I have to read it. The kids liked it and they leave it on at their homes. At times it moves too fast, and you just want it to slow down, but I try to keep up. It’s because it’s English. I would rather it be ASL, but whatever. I use it all the time.

Me: I know you use interpreters when there’s a meeting at work and when you go to the doctor. What other times do you use them?

Linda: [Thinking] I had them in school. There were so many words that didn’t have signs. We would have to talk about them. Then next time it would be a different person, and we would have to do it again. It’s so frustrating. [Pause thinking] Sometimes I understand them and sometimes I don’t. If they explain what they’re saying and make it clear, then I’ll back off, but sometimes they just don’t sign it right.

Me: Do you own a computer?

Linda: Yes.

Me: What do you use it for? How did you learn to use it?

Linda: Yeah, I use the computer. My son and daughter made me learn. I’m always learning; they’re always forcing me to do different things. I’m not crazy about it. You know they had it in school, but I never had it before. You know we just typed, so now it’s
different. My husband gets frustrated with it. But, it’s wonderful that they have taught
us, and we use it for email and games. I’m on Facebook, but it’s very awkward for me.
It’s an awkward medium. My son and daughter are always on there, but it just
confuses me. My son does a lot more, like Craig’s List and all that stuff where I don’t
know anything about it. I like to play cards on it. I can email when I’m sick. And, I
used it a lot for school, email, and for online classes. I wrote papers, but I’m glad
that’s over.

Me: Do you own a cell phone? What do you use it for? How did you learn to use it?

Linda: Yes, I text with my son and daughter. They taught me. It’s not English [laughs]. I can
text with friends too. I like that. It’s easier than having to drive over or writing a letter,
like the old days. You remember?

Me: Yes.

Linda: Yes, now it’s easier. It’s so nice. Me: Any other uses for the phone? Work?

Linda: No, we don’t use phones at work. We can’t when we’re working. I leave mine at home
or in my locker.

Me: Do you own any type of gaming console?

Linda: No. My son does at his house, but I don’t play it.

Me: Any other kinds of technologies?

Linda: No, not that I can think of. Me: Anything else you want to add? Linda: This is for
school?

Me: Yes.

Linda: It’s truly sad that people are forced to learn to speak and lipread. The hands are
beautiful things. ASL is a beautiful language. It’s really sad and depressing that people
are forced. Why can’t we force them to sign? How would they feel then? Think of how beautiful it would be if everyone would sign. Yes, the hands are beautiful things.

Me: Thank you.

[Stopped tape]
Me: Thank you for meeting with me.

Wade: No problem.

Me: Let’s start with the role reading plays in your life.

Wade: Reading?

Me: Yes.

Wade: I don’t like to read unless it’s a magazine about hunting or fishing. I tried to read books in school, but I could never remember anything when I turned the page. There are too many words. They really don’t need all of that. I get bored.

Me: Okay. What about writing? What role does writing play in your life?

Wade: You know I’m deaf, right?

Me: Yes.

Wade: We write different. We don’t use English. I write how I talk. It’s simple and fast. Me: Right. What do you write? For what purpose?

Wade: Mostly, I just write notes. I write them for my family to let them know where I am. I work different shifts, so I leave notes for my wife if we need something. She leaves notes for me. I write notes at work a lot and with friends. Yes, mostly notes. I write emails and texts too, but those are like notes.

Me: Do you encounter hearing people where you work?

Wade: Oh, yes, there are only hearing people where I’ve worked. Only in California were there any other deaf people at work.

Me: How do you communicate with them? What methods do you use?

Wade: [Eyes twinkle] With the deaf people?

Me: No, the hearing people. We’ll get to deaf people later.
Wade: I have fun with my co-workers. We write notes and some are willing to learn how to sign. Is this during work or during breaks?

Me: Either, both.

Wade: Well, breaks we always have fun talking and talking, pulling the paper out of each other’s hands to say something more. Sometimes we draw pictures. We talk about hunting and fishing a lot. Sometimes I use my voice. I forget. I get excited and can’t help it, but I know some people aren’t used to it. But, we all are talking and gesturing and sometimes draw pictures to save time. Some can sign. [Pauses] For work, well, that’s different. Where I am now, we have a logbook where we have to write down what was done and when. But, we all write the same short notes in the log because we do not have time to read a lot of information. We have to keep it short: time, what happened, what was done, all that. When we fix things, sometimes we need to talk about what to do or how to fix it. We draw a lot of pictures to make sure we are talking about the same thing and understanding what needs to go where. It’s a lot of back and forth. Oh well.

Me: Anyone else at work?

Wade: Yes, there are always supervisors. If we have meetings, like every month we have a safety meeting, they have to get interpreters. It’s up to them to plan. They know it’s every month, but sometimes the supervisor forgets. Then I get to the meeting and they are all “sorry, sorry, sorry.” They hand me a memo or write things down, but it doesn’t always make sense. I just throw it away now. Too bad. It’s up to them to make sure they call for an interpreter. I don’t like supervisors. They just slow things down. I have work to do, and they should just let me do it. If it’s something right now, then we write
notes, but I don’t like that. My co-workers sometimes check to make sure I understand or that I have what I need. Usually, it’s just them writing something quick and me giving a thumbs up, “Sure, no problem.”

Me: Please describe some of your encounters when shopping or running errands. How do you communicate with people who work in shops, restaurants, banks, post office, grocery store and so forth?

Wade: My wife does most of the shopping, but sometimes I need parts for the car or things to fix the house or to work on other things I’m building. They all know me. I bring a list or the part I need. Some know a few signs so we can talk, but I don’t mind writing notes. Sometimes they need to order things, you understand?

Me: Yes, I understand.

Wade: Good. I have friends, you know [names]?

Me: Yes.

Wade: They work at [store], so I can ask them for things. They stock shelves, so they know where everything is. I don’t like to talk, but you know I understand some things. They order something and tell me it’ll be in “tomorrow” or a day: Monday, Tuesday… I know those words.

Me: What about going to the doctor, dentist, or optometrist – scheduling or receiving reminders? Dealing with police, officials, fire persons, emergency situations?

Wade: Emergencies are rare luckily. My wife takes care of all of that. She goes with me to the doctor and other places. She takes calls from stores and lets me know if I need to go get something or if appointments change.

Me: What about when buying your home or a car or insurance?
Wade: My wife does that too. Those people just talk, talk, talk. I’m glad she has to listen to it rather than me. I check the math, but she handles everything else.

Me: What are some of your experiences with hearing people in school involving communication from when you were in school or your children’s schools?

Wade: For me it was different. I wasn’t always deaf. I was hard of hearing first until I was twelve or thirteen. I was standing next to a rifle when my uncle fired and lost the hearing in the ear that I could hear out of. But, even though I was hard of hearing I went to the deaf school in Rome, NY. We lived there and went home for holidays and things like that. When we moved to California, I lived at home and only went to the deaf school during the day. I didn’t like most of the teachers. They didn’t understand. They wanted us to talk and lipread, but once my hearing was gone, I didn’t want to anymore. I was deaf. Fine. They needed to leave it alone.

Me: Anything else?

Wade: No, I just didn’t like school. I liked math and history, but English was awful. I don’t like to read. I can’t ever remember anything. English just has too many words and everything changes. I don’t like to have to think about which word to use.

Me: How do/did you communicate with hearing family members? Your wife, children, parents, extended family? How did you decide?

Wade: My parents were deaf. Well, my dad could hear a little and talk a little. My three brothers were all deaf. At home we signed. When I got married, it was harder because my wife is hearing. We sign, but I had to teach her. Then with our children she could talk, but they both sign with me. My wife’s family is all hearing. Some know a few signs or fingerspell, but most, we just write notes. It’s good. My family is spread out all
over. I don’t see them, but a few I talk to on the videophone. We sign. They are deaf too. I have many deaf cousins – twenty-one first cousins are deaf.

Me: Do you have hearing neighbors? Do you ever need to communicate with them? How do handle these encounters? What are the deciding factors for handling it in that manner?

Wade: Oh yes! All of the neighbors can hear. Some have learned some signs, but mostly we write notes or just make ourselves understood. You know, gestures. I can lipread a little. I wish I was better now, but it’s too late. But, I can understand some things, and we do fine. I don’t talk, but sometimes I will say a word or two. Not much. It’s hard to understand.

Me: Do you encounter hearing people in social situations?

Wade: Yes, everyone can hear. There are only a few deaf people who live here. You know, [lists deaf people who live in town]. With them I can sign. The others it’s different, writing notes. But, it can be fun too. We fight over the notepad and pen. Everyone wants to say something.

Me: Okay. What determines your manner of communication? What difficulties have you encountered?

Wade: If they can sign or not. If not, then we need to do other things, but it’s all fun. We always have fun.

Me: Tell me about your communication with other Deaf people. What challenges do you encounter in these situations, if any?

Wade: With deaf people, there’s no problem. [Pauses thinking] Well, in California, ASL is a little different than in New York. Some signs are different. Then moving to Minnesota, it was a little different again. [Pauses thinking] Oh, and in California there
were many Mexicans who were deaf. I learned Mexican Sign Language (MSL). It was fun knowing another language. We couldn’t take different languages in school like hearing people. Now, living here, there are a lot of Mexicans moving here for work. I can talk to the deaf ones. Some want to learn ASL, so we talk and help each other. I forget some MSL signs, but they remind me, and I teach them ASL so they can go to Deaf Club and other activities.

Me: How have videophones changed your communication?
Wade: Oh, I love the videophone. I can talk to so many people. My cousin, [Name], lives in Connecticut, and we talk every week if not more. I can talk to friends from school that I didn’t see for years. It’s so much easier now. Everyone lives everywhere, but I can see if I missed a call and call that person back. It’s hard with time changes across the country, but it’s so much better than before. You remember TTYs?
Me: Yes.

Wade: They were awful! Better than nothing but not good. I wish we had videophones sooner. They are so nice.

Me: What type of work do you do? How did you receive training? If you have questions, what do you do? When/If problems occur, how do you respond or handle them?
Wade: I work in a factory. They train there on the job. Mostly, I just watch other people and learn. Some things just make sense. If I need something, I can ask one of the other people working or a supervisor. Most of the time, I’m fine. Problems?
Me: Yes, if something happens or goes wrong.

Wade: Well, most problems happen with the machines. I can fix most of them. If something bad happens to an order, like it burns or gets stuck, then I need to go to the cook and
have them change amounts. Most problems I take care of because I’m the operator.
They all have to follow me and what needs to get done according to the computer. The computer will let me know if there’s a problem that I can’t see too.

Me: What activities do you participate in? Hobbies? How did you learn those?
Wade: I hunt and fish. I went with my father and with my father-in-law. I read magazines too about that stuff. I like to work on cars and I build things, like shelves, windowboxes; I made that table over there.

Me: Nice.
Wade: Yes. I’ve been working to finish the basement. I put in the bathroom by myself. I just like to work on things and fixing things.

Me: What other skills do you have? How were those learned?
Wade: Well, I can fix almost anything. Motors are similar to one another. If I can fix one, I can fix the other. Now, I can look on the computer and see how to fix stuff if I need to. But, mostly I just learned from my father and brothers. Sometimes friends, but mostly my family.

Me: Do you use Closed Captioning?
Wade: Yes.

Me: What are your experiences with that?
Wade: Closed Captioning is fine. I always have it on, and I don’t like when something isn’t in caption. I don’t know why some things aren’t, but it happens sometimes. It’s rare now, though. I don’t read it all. It’s just too much. English – just too many words. I wish they would caption the way deaf people talk, but then other people couldn’t always understand it. Can’t have it both ways. Oh well, it’s better than nothing, and it’s good
to know what they are talking about when watching TV. I like the news, but they cut it off sometimes for commercials. It’s frustrating.

Me: What about interpreters? How often do you use interpreting services? Under what circumstances?

Wade: Oh, I use interpreters. Most often just for meetings at work. We talked about that. Some are better than others. I like [name], she’s good. It’s too bad she’s so good because everyone wants her to interpret for them. If work calls early enough, she always picks me because it’s closer for her to drive. She’s nice. There’s one other one, I don’t remember her name, but anyway, she’s okay. Some are awful [runs hands through his hair in frustration]. Oh my god! Some are just too hard to understand. When that happens, I just sit and nod because I won’t understand the answer if I ask a question. I tell work not to get that one again, though, when it happens.

Me: What other services do you use?

Wade: You mean like relay?

Me: Yes.

Wade: Sometimes I’ll use relay, but it’s rare. My wife takes care of most things, but sometimes she’s busy, so I have to use relay. It’s okay. I don’t know.

Me: Do you own a computer?

Wade: Yes.

Me: What do you use it for? How did you learn to use it?

Wade: So many things. I play card games. I watch videos. There is news for deaf people, so I watch that and other videos for deaf people. Sometimes I look at how to fix things or build something. Email is good. I can email work if I’m sick. My wife had to call
before. Now, she won’t because I can email. Email is good because I can send to many people at the same time. We have deaf clubs, and I’m a member of Minnesota Deaf Anglers. We email about fishing trips. It’s so much easier now. You have no idea. Before, we would have to plan so far in advance because we had to mail everything. We only meet once every month, so if we forgot to talk about something, it was a mess. Now, it’s so easy.

Me: I bet. How did you learn it all?

Wade: Just from different people and my children. We use a computer at work, so I had to learn there. We can’t play games on that one, but I know where to find them at home. Oh, and I can buy anything online. That’s nice because it’s a small town, and I can’t get everything here. Sometimes it’s cheaper online, which is great.

Me: Do you own a cell phone? What do you use it for?

Wade: Oh yes! Texting all the time. I can talk to my daughters and grandchildren. I text with friends who are hearing. They don’t have videophones. Texting is fun. It’s the same as writing notes, but from anywhere.

Me: Do you own any type of gaming console?

Wade: Yes, we have a Wii.

Me: What do you play? How did you learn to use it?

Wade: I don’t play it here. It just sits, but I do play when I go to my one daughter’s house. The grandchildren like to play. It’s fun, but here I’m too busy with other things.

Me: What other technologies do you use? How did you learn about them?

Wade: I have an iPad. I like it. It’s smaller than the computer so easier to use. My daughter showed me one. It’s nice.
Me: Anything else you want to add?

Wade: I wish hearing people would try to talk. I’m deaf, but I like people. I like that some people make an effort even if just learning the alphabet. It’s good when we can all talk and have fun.

Me: Thank you.

[Stopped tape]
Karen: Ready?

Me: Yes, ready.

Karen: Sorry. I had to talk to the repairman. He’ll be coming in at some point, so sorry that we’ll have to stop for a bit.

Me: No problem. First I’d like to know what roles reading plays in your life.

Karen: Oh wow! I read a lot. [Picks up a book from the end table] See? There’s always one nearby. Plus, I teach, so I read a lot for that. I remember you were always reading. Do you still read?

Me: Oh, yes, but now it’s mostly for school. I try to read something not school related right before I go to sleep even if it’s only a page or two. It helps to stop my mind from going over everything from the day.

Karen: Yes, I can see that. Reading is good and keeps us busy. I like that I can take it with me when I go places unlike some other hobbies.

Me: Okay. Then, what roles does writing play in your life?

Karen: I write a lot too mostly for my job. I take a lot of notes. Email is writing too, and I do a lot with email – students, friends, colleagues. My husband is a truck driver, you remember?

Me: Yes.

Karen: We have to write notes for each other, short ones, but mostly, we text now. It’s more like ASL. So much has changed in the last couple of decades. All of this technology has made life easier for us deaf people.

Me: I’m sure. Do you encounter hearing people where you work?

Karen: [Laughs] Yes, I teach ASL, and all of my students are
Me: How do you communicate with them? What methods do you use?

Karen: I sign. I can talk and read lips, but I won’t do that in class. My students never know because it’s best that they think of other ways to communicate. They learn to fingerspell right away. I use the board, but I want them to try to talk to me in sign as much as possible. I don’t let them write notes for me. Of course they can email me, and I’ll respond, but in class we sign. I have online classes too, but that’s different. We use video more and have other ways of doing everything. I have to ask you something.

Me: Okay.

Karen: Sometimes, when I’m grading I’ll mark something on students’ papers and they complain about it.

Me: That’s normal. I get that too.

Karen: But I’m confused.

Me: About what?

Karen: Isn’t “last” an adverb?

Me: Yes [I chuckle because I know where this is going].

Karen: Okay, so why would you add –ly to it?

Me: I don’t know. It’s one of my pet peeves. Yes, “last” is an adverb, but people started adding “-ly” and now it’s accepted. I’ve even seen it in a journal article in an English journal.

Karen: Really?

Me: Yes. Hard to believe isn’t it?

Karen: Yes. Who decides this?
Me: I’m not entirely sure. But language changes, and sometimes it’s easier not to fight it.

Karen: That’s crazy. It’s crazy that this is okay when other things aren’t. My students hate when I mark it wrong, but it is wrong. It’s the same when they use “they” for one person.

Me: I know. I do the same thing. Well, I don’t take off points; I let them know that it’s not my preference. The using of “they” is happening more and more. I wouldn’t be surprised if eventually it’s allowed as a gender-neutral pronoun.

Karen: I don’t understand how it changes.

Me: I guess it’s just easier than fighting all of the time. We need to change with how people are using the language.

Karen: You’re right. Sorry, I didn’t mean to get off the topic.

Me: That’s okay. Any other hearing people at work?

Karen: Oh yes, I have colleagues, and there are administrators. I don’t see them often.

Usually, I only see colleagues near classrooms. They learn quickly that I’m deaf, so we don’t really talk. We just wave and acknowledge each other. The administrators at the schools don’t really have much to do with me. I’m only part time, so basically, we just email about what I’ll be teaching each semester.

Me: Please describe some of your encounters when shopping or running errands. How do you communicate with people who work in shops, restaurants, banks, post office, grocery store and so forth?

Karen: I like to do most of my shopping online. When I go to the store, sometimes they try to talk to me, but I like to challenge them to communicate in different ways. Most deaf people bring paper, but I don’t. It’s better for people to understand what it’s like to not
be able to communicate readily. Sometimes they’ll draw letters in the air or use their finger on the counter. That’s good; they’re trying something new. I can lipread, but I won’t. I guess I like to make other people know what it feels like.

Me: What about going to the doctor, dentist, or optometrist – scheduling or receiving reminders? Dealing with police, officials, fire persons, emergency situations?

Karen: I always schedule in advance when possible. They need two weeks to get an interpreter. I always make sure there is an interpreter. Too many things can happen if there isn’t one, and legally they have to do it. For emergencies, that’s a little different. Sometimes they can get someone, but that would be rare. I know a lot of interpreters, so sometimes I can call one on short notice. My husband has siblings who are hearing and can sign. They can help, but I can also talk and read lips. I don’t like to because it’s difficult and easy to make mistakes, but I can if I have to. [Pauses thinking] If there were an emergency, then I could speak, but it hasn’t happened yet. I’m glad it hasn’t happened, and [knocks on the table] I hope it never does.

Me: What about when buying your home or a car? What about when you need to check on something or an order is wrong? Getting a cell phone? How did you decide?

Karen: Again, interpreters are good. If they don’t have one, then I reschedule. But, now I use relay to check. I can use relay to talk to anyone, any business. It’s like making a phone call except there is someone in between. You know about relay services, right?

Me: Yes, I know someone who works for one.

Karen: Great! So, you know how easy it is for us. I know a lot of deaf people don’t use it, but they should. It’s a great service for us.

Me: What are some of your experiences with hearing people in school involving
communication? From when you were in school or your children’s schools?

Karen: Well, I work in schools, but when I went to school, most of my teachers were hearing.

I went here. You know Fairbault?

Me: Yes.

Karen: I was behind because I didn’t sign at home, but it was good I could catch up. I knew how to talk and read lips already. I still went for speech and had to practice, but I love to learn, so ASL was no problem. My daughter already graduated. She’s going to college now to be an interpreter. But, I didn’t make her interpret for me when she was here. I don’t like when deaf people use their children for that. [Pauses thinking] School…yes, I love to learn. I still take classes. Now I can take them online. When I went to college, I had interpreters. We had to make up a lot of signs. Do you do that?

Me: Me? Yes, I’ve made up a few signs. Karen: Like what?

Me: Well, my degree is in rhetoric and writing, but there’s no sign for rhetoric, so I’ve always thought about how to sign it.

Karen: Really? What do you think it should be?

Me: It could either be like “communication” [made the sign for communication but used “r” instead of “c”] or like “language” [made the sign for language but used “r” instead of “l”]. It would really depend on how it was defined.

Karen: That’s really good. I like that. You really thought about it.

Me: Thank you.

Karen: See, now you know what it’s like for us. We always have to think of signs because in English there are so many words that we don’t use much in ASL. We need to make more signs, but it’s up to people in their fields to do it.
Me: I can understand that. So, how do/did you communicate with hearing family members?

Spouse, children, parents, extended family? How did you decide?

Karen: My parents are hearing. They don’t really sign, so I talk with them. I was expected to.

It’s probably why I work so hard not to now. I have in-laws who are hearing, but most of them sign. My daughter signs. She learned how to do that early. You know the simple signs for babies.

Me: Yes, I know them. My niece and nephews learned them. I guess I did too when I was little.

Karen: That’s right. If you have parents who are deaf, you learn at a very young age. My daughter was the same way. She was…[stopped because repairman came in]

Karen stood up to talk to him. She was very intensely focused on his face to understand what he was saying. He told her that he had to order a part and he’d be back on Friday. She repeated Friday, and he nodded. She gave him a thumbs up and nodded.

Karen: Sorry. Normally, I wouldn’t talk, but you’re here, so I didn’t want to take a long time.

Me: That’s okay. I could have interpreted.

Karen: No, that’s not your job. It’s okay. What’s next?

Me: Do you have hearing neighbors? Do you ever need to communicate with them? How do handle these encounters?

Karen: Well you drove here. We don’t have many neighbors, and they’re not that close, so we don’t interact with them often. If anything happens, we can write notes. I’d rather not, but sometimes it’s just easier. Sometimes someone needs to borrow something. It’s easier to go to neighbors to borrow things like tools then to go to town and try to find
something for rent. We write notes. They aren’t proper English. Notes are short. [Signs a question mark]

Me: That’s normal. Proper English has its place, and quick correspondence isn’t it.

Karen: [laughs] That’s good that you understand that, but you know deaf people, so you understand how we are.

Me: I try. Do you encounter hearing people in social situations?

Karen: Oh yes.

Me: How do you communicate with them? What determines your manner of communication? What difficulties have you encountered?

Karen: If they can sign, then we sign. If not, then we find other ways. I’ll write notes with friends, but I also try to teach them signs. I don’t have a lot of hearing friends who don’t sign, so it’s not that often. I don’t like to write notes, but you know sometimes we have to. But, with friends, it’s a little different. We gesture and draw pictures to make our points too, so it’s not just notes, which makes it better. You know how we get. It’s exciting and rushed and hurried.

Me: Yes, I know. Tell me about your communication with other Deaf people. What challenges do you encounter in these situations, if any?

Karen: We sign. It’s always nice to be able to sign. We meet people when we travel, so sometimes there’s a difference in signs. You know there are always differences wherever you go.

Me: Yes.

Karen: But, that makes it more fun. I like learning different signs for the same thing. Sometimes they’re better. They fit better, but then there are other ones that confuse
Me: How have videophones changed your communication?

Karen: Videophones are wonderful! We used to have a TTY, but oh, this is so much better. I can do anything with a videophone. Well, I already told you about the relay service, so we can forget about that, but it’s wonderful to talk to friends and family.

Me: We already discussed your work, but is there anything you want to add? Like, if problems occur who do you talk to? How do you communicate with them?

Karen: To add? Not really. I work at five different schools. Be careful when you graduate. Try to get something full time because working for a lot of different places is hard. If anything happens, I can go to my administrator. Usually, I email. No one knows I can talk, and I don’t want them to. I don’t like to try to make other people feel comfortable. It’s not about that. No one tries to make me comfortable or make things easy for me.

Why should I have to for them? I limit my interaction and try to get them to do different things to communicate. I don’t have to do much on campus other than teach, but we sometimes have to go to meetings or training. They have interpreters, so that’s okay.

Me: What activities do you participate in? Hobbies? How did you learn those?

Karen: You know I read a lot. I like to garden. I don’t know. I just do things. I learn from reading. I can learn anything from reading. Gardening is something my mother did, so I helped. I have more flowers than vegetables, but I like that.

Me: Do you use Closed Captioning? What are your experiences with that?

Karen: I love closed captioning. I have it on all the time. It’s a lot to read, and I skip some of it, but it’s nice to have when I need it. Sometimes I can tell it’s not quite what’s on the
screen, but that’s okay. It’s better than nothing. [Pauses thinking] Sometimes they cut it off for commercials, and I miss what was said, like the news or if I watch morning shows. That’s annoying, but again, it’s better than nothing.

Me: What about interpreters?

Karen: I teach interpreting, so interpreters are wonderful. Sometimes, they sign something a little different and I have to ask, but usually it’s not a problem. If I’m following what’s being said, I can usually figure out what they meant. I try not to stop them because there’s no going back. They do the best they can to provide everything they can. Some people talk really fast, and that makes it hard for them. Then they can only give the main points. I’m okay with that.

Me: Do you own a computer? What do you use it for? How did you learn to use it?

Karen: Oh, yes, of course! I teach online and take classes online. I like to look at new tools for my classes to make them better. I’m on email all of the time. I email with my students, friends, people at the schools. I like email to check on other things. Email is the best. I’ve taken classes on computers and have just learned by doing. Anything can be found online, and it can teach you what you need to know.

Me: Do you own a cell phone? What do you use it for?

Karen: Of course, yes, I have my cell phone. I text all of the time and use the internet on it. I can’t use it as a phone because I can’t hear [laughs], but texting is great. I can stay home but still talk to my friends and family.

Me: Do you own any type of gaming console?

Karen: No, I never got into that.

Me: Okay. What other technologies do you use? How did you learn about them?
Karen: I have a tablet. I like that. It’s more portable than my laptop. Smaller, and I can read on it. I read several books at once, so it gives me one more.

Me: Anything else?

Karen: No, I think that’s it.

Me: Okay. Thank you.

[Stopped taping]