For over 20 years, researchers and practitioners have considered ASL/English bilingual education of deaf children. Although there is a wealth of knowledge about hearing bilingual children’s home environment, bilingual cognitive advantage, and the impact of both on academic achievement, what we do not know is the corollary in families with deaf children. This book offers a look into the link between a deaf child’s home environment and their school success, as well as an inquiry into the home lives of these children and their families.

The authors interviewed 10 families with at least one deaf family member who adopted a bilingual parenting approach, consciously integrating both ASL and English into their children’s lives. All came from a single geographical area but spanned a variety of children’s ages (preschool to finishing high school) and family constellations (single parents, two deaf parents, mixed deaf/hearing parents, and parents from a variety of ethnicities and cultures: African American, mixed, and gay). The study used narrative interviews to qualitatively describe the families’ experiences, challenges, and decision processes in raising deaf and hard of hearing children. Each family is highlighted in a separate chapter in ascending order of the children’s ages.

Six major themes emerged across all families from the data analysis: ASL, communication, deaf and hearing interaction, family dynamics, challenges, and support. Three additional topics were discussed by a number of the families (but not all): acceptance, cochlear implants, and advice. What stands out clearly is the great respect deaf and hearing parents have for each other in this process of raising children bilingually. Deaf parents noted areas where hearing parents probably had some advantages, and hearing parents noted the reverse. Each of the five families with hearing parents sought deaf adults and the deaf community for input. All families spoke about pointed efforts to integrate themselves into both deaf and hearing communities. A deaf dad coached both hearing and deaf children in recreational sports programs for years in order to ensure that there was smooth communication between all children. One deaf family noted that while it was easier pre-children to “keep to themselves,” the arrival of a baby spurred on more interaction with hearing people while in public spaces.

Notably, three families opted for cochlear implants with their deaf children alongside their emphasis on ASL. (one parent delayed the implant to ensure a solid foundation of ASL first; another stated the implant was merely a set of tools for the child, not a fix or a cure). All families showed deliberate, careful thought in their decision-making processes even though their choices and decisions varied. Most families expressed concerns beyond language and literacy development such as social areas and friendships.

This book offers profound insight to the stories of families with at least one deaf family member raising children bilingually using ASL and English. The study deciphered similarities across this group, which point to issues worthy of follow-up. For example, several families mentioned that their children were at or above grade level. Adding a mixed methods approach would allow one to extend the results to predicting academic success. As a qualitative study, this book offers a solid contribution to the field and leaves one appreciating the depth of choices and thoughtfulness inherent in parenting children with a difference.

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