

A Literacy Guide for Parents

Stewart, D., & Clarke, B. (2003). *Literacy and Your Deaf Child: What Every Parent Should Know*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press. 240 pages. Paper. \$21.95.

All children need substantial help from their parents to enter school ready to read and write. It is not easy to make a complicated topic such as literacy accessible to parents. That is why a book such as *Literacy and Your Deaf Child: What Every Parent Should Know* has the potential to be beneficial. The authors' two major goals are "to provide parents with background information . . ." and "to suggest activities that parents can do at home that will help their deaf child become literate" (p. vii). They have attempted to accomplish these goals in nine chapters and 240 pages.

In several chapters (1, 2, 7, and 8), the authors provide background on selected concepts of literacy and on the interrelations among language, reading, and writing. Chapter 5 on the value of experience is interesting, especially the timeless idea of using written labels throughout the home. The treatment of caption literacy (Chapter 6), particularly the section on improving caption literacy skills, is excellent. Another benefit is the inclusion of strategies for teaching reading and writing in Chapters 7 and 8, respectively.

The authors have accomplished their major goals; nevertheless, I have a few concerns with the inclusion of some information. For example, much of the background on amplification systems (hearing aids, cochlear implants) and modes of communication (oral, signing) in Chapters 3 and 4, respectively, should have been placed in an appendix. Albeit important, much of this information is not related in this book to the development of literacy. Chapter 9 presents critical information on parental participation in schools; however, only the last section addresses literacy.

My major concern is the presentation of complex information, which may be oversimplified in a book for

parents. Granted, I disagree with the authors' points; however, these statements are still problematic. Here are a few examples: (1) "The language skills that deaf children learn using ASL can be transferred to their learning of English" (p. 21); (2) "We can say that deaf children's acquisition of ASL and signed communication in general facilitates their progress to literacy" (p. 84), and finally, (3) "Overall, there are insufficient data to show whether a deaf child needs phonological processing to learn to read or whether he acquires phonological processing because he has learned to read" (p. 145).

Taking the above statements out of context might be shortsighted; however, these issues are too complex to present in a book for parents. Furthermore, the use of the term *deaf* to refer to either deaf or hard-of-hearing children (p. viii) is not effective because many hard-of-hearing children, for example, do employ phonological processing in learning to read. Finally, although the list of literacy suggestions are adequate, it would have been helpful to link them more strongly to theory and research.

Yes, I know that this book is intended for parents. Providing sufficient background information would create a lengthier book—and this might be counterproductive. This book is a good start, but parents and others need to read the background information with a critical eye.

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