

Reading for teenagers and young adults

All young people with Down syndrome can enjoy and benefit from reading activities

Reading achievements vary, but most young people with Down syndrome can develop some literacy skills that are useful in their daily lives. Some young people are able to read for pleasure and to write stories or record lessons, but most teenagers with Down syndrome will need support to write a letter or to record school-work. Many will read better than they can write, i.e. they find it easier to understand text than to put their own thoughts on paper. Even those students who find progress with reading rather difficult can benefit from being read to and from being involved in literacy activities, such as making a simple news sheet or book on the computer as a group project. Shared reading can benefit spoken language progress and some young people make progress with reading for the first time in their teenage years.

Teenage readers

The first two articles in this issue illustrate the way in which two teenagers are using their reading skills. In the first article, Jill O'Connor from Sydney, Australia, describes her son's reading preferences as a 17 year old, and the way the family encourage him, in a down to earth and practical article. Many parents will be able to identify with issues raised in this article, especially the need to try to encourage the use of reading skills at this age. They find that it is difficult to find suitable reading materials – ones with simple text but age-appropriate interest – and Jill shares with us books and CDs that Declan enjoys. One of his favourites is a James Bond book and this fits with our experience. We find that teenagers enjoy books about characters from TV series or films. It is likely that their reading and understanding of the text is

supported by their knowledge of the characters – who they are and how they behave – from seeing them on film or TV. Declan also likes material on CD to be read on the computer.

Using reading skills

The next piece demonstrates how David, a young Dutchman with Down syndrome, uses his reading abilities to give talks about his life. David made a presentation at a meeting for educators in Luxembourg. Like all public speakers, he needed his notes to keep him on track, prepared in Powerpoint with the help of his father, Erik de Graaf. David actually presented his talk in English by reading a phonetic transcription based on Dutch pronunciation! David made a great impression on the educators and changed some people's views on the possibilities for people with Down syndrome. In the next issue we will have an article by Erik explaining how they worked together to achieve this.

Reading resources needed

There are not enough age-appropriate reading resources available for our young people and we would welcome any information on books or other resources that readers have found useful.

New projects

There are some exciting projects underway in other countries. For example, at the Center for Literacy and Disability Studies, University of North Carolina, USA, Karen Erickson and colleagues are developing a comprehensive reading programme for teenagers which will be web-based called *ALL-Link* (The Adolescents Literacy and Learning Link) and we have the web contact details on page 5. At the Schonell Education Centre at the University of Queensland, Karen Moni, Anne Jobling and colleagues have developed a literacy

programme for young adults called *Latch-On* (Literacy and Technology Hands-On). They have used a range of activities to engage students in successful literacy activities making full use of computers and have demonstrated progress for literacy and language skills at this age. No literacy skills were needed to be included in the project and significant use is made of photographs to support story telling, descriptions of events and story writing. Texts were created as joint and group activities, with peers and staff. Teachers would write for students whose writing skills are emerging, and full use was made of the computer. They focused on meaningful literacy activities such as creating a newspaper together, keeping a diary or writing a letter. They found a tape-recorder invaluable as an aid for recording ideas for later text, for aiding memory and to provide feedback for improving oral language. They have published some articles on the project (see Resources, page 5) and are currently working to extend this programme with community service providers and the Australian National Training Authority.

We see teenagers and young adults making progress with literacy and would encourage parents and teachers to continue meaningful literacy teaching, maybe starting with making a book about a favourite interest of the student – a football team or pop group. This book will have pictures and simple text, which he or she can then share with others, who will initially read with the student until the text is learned. There are many software programmes to support literacy teaching and make it fun. We will describe some of these in a future issue.

Editor