Abstract

Research into literacy development continues to be essential, especially considering the alarmingly high levels of functional illiteracy observed in various contemporary contexts. The primary purpose of the present study was to investigate associations between adolescents' literacy levels and their text messaging, reading, and writing habits. Previous studies have consistently shown positive relationships between literacy attainment and traditional forms of reading and writing, while the research results into the associations between the new-literacy practice of texting and literacy have been decidedly mixed and inconclusive. Uniquely for this area of research, this study distinguished between the potential influences of different types of reading and writing (i.e., texting versus more complex, traditional forms) on literacy development. Consistent with the general trends observed in previous research, the present study found that text messaging practices were not significantly associated with literacy levels in the adolescent sample under investigation; reading, in the traditional sense, exhibited more positive associations with literacy attainment than all the other practices considered.

These findings, similarly to previous research, suggest that the type of reading occurring while texting is substantially different, in terms of its associations with literacy development, from more traditional forms of reading. Yet recent large-scale survey data indicate that while the amount of time spent by young people on new-literacy practices such as texting is rising rapidly, the amount of time spent reading (and writing), in the traditional sense, remains low. In addition to the limited reading quantity, the complexity level of the traditional forms of reading that are occurring in adolescence is often significantly lower than the advanced standard required for post-secondary studies or many careers. Rather than focusing on potential technological solutions, increasing the quantity and complexity level of more traditional forms of reading in adolescence appears to be a more prudent strategy for enhancing functional literacy in society.

Keywords: Literacy; new literacies; texting; reading; writing; adolescence