

Texting, Literacy and Fitness?

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Texting, Literacy and Fitness?

TWO newspaper articles have recently provided evidence that challenges some myths that computer use is detrimental to the fitness of young people and that texting is leading to the poorer literacy of young people.

How might health and physical education teachers and students use the internet? After all, isn't this about physical activity other than hitting the keyboard with a few fingers, or pumping out 100 emails frequently? Indeed, critics suggest that the internet has been detrimental to the physical wellbeing of young people. Anne Ryman (Arizona Republic, USA, 28/10/05:1) reports that some Arizona schools are now undertaking physical education courses online.

In Primavera Online High School, in Chandler, **'P.E. students there can jog, dance or go on a bike ride, then file heart-monitor readings to their teacher online as proof'** (Arizona Republic, 28/10/05:1).

Elsewhere, Mesa Public Schools and the Murana Unified School District, near Tucson, USA, **'offer courses in which students study bowling online and then bowl 18 games at an alley'** (Arizona Republic, 28/10/05:1). A teacher at Primavera, Sam Richardson, gets curious questions and suggests that many think that students watch him by webcam doing push-ups, but it's nothing like that. Rather, the online course is a well-thought-out combination of an honour system, computer-tracking and events. Among the requirements, students have to be active for about an hour a day, five days each week, and must wear a heart rate monitor. Students also must attend some school-organised events, which have included fishing and indoor rock-climbing. The course takes advantage of online access to course materials, for inputting and tracking student data, and also includes activities in social settings.

A similar set of fears has been that text messaging **'may have ruined the ability of teenagers to write properly'** (The Times, UK, 31/10/05:1). Adam Fresco reports a study by Cambridge assessment, a department of Cambridge University, which used samples from thousands of English language examinations sat by 16-year-old students in 1980, 1999, 1994 and 2004 (The Times, 31/10/05:1). That study compared students' general written ability to express themselves accurately and clearly through a range of grammatical structures. The study included a close look at vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, sentence structure and grammatical adequacy.

Alf Massey, who heads the unit that carried out the study, stated that the study **'found that today's teenagers are using far more complex sentence structures, a wider vocabulary and a more accurate use of capital letters, punctuation and spelling'** (The Times, 31/10/05:1). For example, students who achieved a grade of C in 2004 had better vocabulary than those who achieved a B in 1980. Massey was veracious in stating that **'any tendency to become less impressive has been reversed with a vengeance'** (The Times, UK, 31/10/05:1).

Phrases that might have not been acceptable to examiners in 1980 **'have crept into regular use, even by pupils awarded A* to C grades'** (Arizona Republic, USA, 28/10/05:1). While this was limited to a study of exam papers of the past 25 years, it assists in building a more complex understanding of the evolving and contested nature of literacy.

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NEWSPAPER ABBREVIATIONS

AdSM - Adelaide Sunday Mail
Adv - Adelaide Advertiser
Age - Melbourne Age, Victoria
Aust - Australian
BangkokP - Bangkok Post
BalC - Ballarat Courier, Victoria
BA - Burnie Advocate, Tasmania
BenA - Bendigo Advertiser, Vic.
BerN - Berwick News, Victoria
BM - Border Mail, Albury/Wodonga
BusT - Business Times (Malaysia)
ChinaD - China Daily, Hong Kong
CMail - Courier-Mail, Brisbane
CR - Campus Review
CT - Canberra Times, ACT
DT - Daily Telegraph
DIE - Directions in Education
Dom - Dominion, Wellington, NZ
FRev - Financial Review
FinT - Financial Times (UK)
GA - Geelong Advertiser, Vic.
GCB - Gold Coast Bulletin, Qld
HSun - Herald Sun, Melbourne
IndO - Indonesian Observer
IHT - International Herald Tribune
LEX - Launceston Examiner, Tas.

MelbL - Melbourne Leader, Vic.
Merc - Hobart Mercury, Tas.
NT News - NT News, NT
NZH - New Zealand Herald
PNGP - PNG Post-Courier
PP - Progress Press, Victoria
PhilDI - Philippines Daily Inquirer
Prog - Progress Press, Victoria
SCPost - South China Morn. Post
SN - Shepparton News, Victoria
SingBT - Singapore Business Times
SMH - Sydney Morning Herald
SiM - The Star, Malaysia
SiT - Straits Times, Singapore
SunT - Sunday Telegraph, NSW
SunMail - Sunday Mail, Qld
SunTas - Sunday Tasmanian
TI - The Times of India
WA - West Australian
WS - Warrnambool Standard, Vic.