Countours of teenagers' reading in the digital era: scoping the research

Citation:
Rutherford, Leonie, Waller, Lisa, Merga, Margaret, Mcrae, Michelle, Bullen, Elizabeth and Johanson, Katya 2017, Countours of teenagers' reading in the digital era: scoping the research, New review of children's literature and librarianship, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 27-46.

©2017, The Authors

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in the New review of children's literature and librarianship, 2017, available at:

Downloaded from DRO:
http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30086505
ABSTRACT
The study of teenagers’ reading practices is a dynamic and rapidly changing field, and one in which digital innovation continues to reformulate old concepts and generate new practices. This scoping review aims to capture the extent and range of international research on the topic. It explores what is known about teenagers’ reading practices; identifies the relevant disciplines, and how they define reading. It also documents the frameworks, themes and study designs guiding research in the field. We argue that a scoping review is especially helpful for identifying gaps in the existing evidence base and informing future directions for research, particularly in the Australian context.

INTRODUCTION
Digitization and the introduction of new media platforms, networks and technologies have radically altered the way in which young readers source, consume and interact with literary and non-literary texts. The digital era has also changed how and where professionals and institutions publish and archive texts and deliver their services. “Literature” is now available to read on a variety of new and traditional media platforms, altering understandings of literacy in schools and transforming libraries into digital repositories and geographies of technology. The idea of the library as a physical space to house and read books is being progressively superseded. Clearly, the effects of the digital revolution, and the changing reader practices they precipitate, will continue to influence the future design of library and educational infrastructures, services, programs, and cultural goals. How they do so will be informed by what is known about readers and reading, including teenagers as current and future library users.

Several Australian institutional, commercial and cultural bodies have implicitly or explicitly formulated a research problem around the changing face of youth reading. Australia’s adult literacy has emerged as a concern in recent times, with the results from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) indicating that many Australians aged 15 to 74 are
operating below an optimal level of functional literacy (ABS 2013). The Centre for Youth Literature at the State Library of Victoria (CYL) linked these literacy concerns to the “related decline in reading interest among young people aged 12–18” as “a worrying trend that correlates to educational attainment and employment opportunities, as well as cultural and social wellbeing” (CYL 2014, 1). The Centre identifies a significant gap in knowledge about teen reading behaviours. This hampers the design of future resource development, service initiatives and “engagement strategies for our young people and the professionals that work with them” (CYL 2014, 1). The Australia Council for the Arts shares these concerns, suggesting evidence about children’s leisure reading practices is needed in order to ensure lifelong reading, especially in the context of the “shift from paper to digital technologies” (Dickenson 2014, 5).

Finding and synthesizing research to inform evidence-based policy and practice in Australia is challenging in many ways, not least because several academic disciplines generate studies on youth reading. The change in titles of prestigious international and national academic publications from journals of “Reading” to journals of “Language and Literacy” in the 1990s as a consequence of the rise of New Literacy Studies reflects the conceptual changes brought about by digitization. This change is also an important reminder that the study of teenagers’ reading practices is a dynamic and rapidly changing field, and one in which digital innovation continues to reformulate old concepts and generate new practices. This article aims to map the extent and range of research on teenagers’ reading with the view to identifying gaps in the existing evidence base, particularly in the Australian context.

Studies of young people’s cultural practices—of which young people’s media use is one of many—frequently employ a narrative literature review technique. They usually cover a broad range of literature, but take more editorial license in selection, framing and evaluation of evidence than a systematic review. We propose a third model, the scoping review, which is considered useful in contexts where the field is complex or has not been subject to a prior, comprehensive review (Arksey and O’Malley 2005). Unlike the systematic review, which generally focuses “on a well defined question where appropriate study designs can be identified in advance,” drawing on “a relatively narrow
range of quality assessed studies”, the scoping review “tends to address broader topics where many different study designs might be applicable” (4; our italics). This model is less evaluative. Thus, although it may not detail research findings exhaustively, it constitutes a mechanism for “mapping fields of study where it is difficult to visualize the range of material that might be available” (6). Such an exercise is particularly pertinent to the Australian context, because of the lack of national studies providing data on youth cultural practices of relevance to academic researchers. By scoping the literature, our aim is to map the contours of the research field in order to suggest future directions for the research on teen reading.

**Method**

This research was conducted according to the five stages of the scoping study outlined by Arksey and O’Malley (2005).

1. **Identifying the research questions**

   Although a scoping review does not require research questions, we developed three questions to ensure a focused and efficient search strategy, but also breadth of coverage:

   (RQ1) What is currently known about teenagers’ reading practices in the digital era?

   (RQ2) What disciplines are interested in this question, and how do they define reading, including reading via new platforms?

   (RQ3) What frameworks, themes and study designs have been employed to guide research studies in the field?

   These questions provided the roadmap for subsequent stages.

2. **Identifying relevant studies**

   Electronic databases, reference lists and relevant organizational publications were searched for studies on youth reading. While breadth is important, so are practicalities (Levac, Colquhoun and O’Brien 2010). We limited the search to research published since 2005. A rapid increase in digital affordances since this time has shaped new reading ecologies. Both Facebook and Youtube launched publicly in 2005 (Graham 2005; Phillips 2007). Sony’s LIBRIe, the first e-Ink
EBook reader, came on the market in 2005, followed by a massive spike in EBook reading and distribution with the launch of Amazon’s Kindle in 2007 (Baron 2015; Merga 2015). Exceptions to this general search limitation included some foundational studies frequently referenced in later research. EBSCO Discovery Service (EDS) was used to search 483 online databases. Initially, the truncated terms teen* and read* were entered. Approximately 400 results were reviewed. Of these, 68 were identified as significant to a broad understanding of teenage reading.

3. Study selection

We accessed the 68 articles and books identified in Stage 2 and conducted reviews informed by the research questions. Further searches were undertaken, guided by the secondary material cited in the initial corpus and our greater familiarity with the literature. We hand-searched journals identified as most relevant to the project, including Australian Journal of Language & Literacy; Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy; and New Review of Children’s Literature and Librarianship. We also conducted a Google search, again using teen* and read* as search terms. The final step in this discovery stage is iterative and involved an EDS search for terms and concepts appearing in the initial set of 68 studies. To this end, “social capital”, “geography read*” and “read* uses gratifications” were used. A further 22 relevant studies were identified and reviewed by two members of the team, yielding a total sample of 90 studies.

4. Mapping the data

A qualitative content analysis approach to the studies was used to identify their research questions, definitions, methodologies, themes, evidence and disciplinary lenses. Altheide (1987) says the aim of qualitative content analysis is to be systematic and analytic, but not overly rigid. This means thematic categories may initially guide the study, but others are expected to emerge through the analytic process.

5. Collating, summarizing and reporting results

This stage involved qualitative thematic analysis (Bryman 2012), a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns in data. This analysis considered the scoping study’s overall purpose in visualizing the range of available material.
The following sections of this article present the qualitative thematic analysis and discuss implications for future research, practice and policy that emerged from the data.

**WHO CARES WHAT TEENS ARE READING AND WHY?**

The reading habits of youth in the digital era are the object of empirical study and theoretical discussion across a range of disciplines, particularly education, literacy studies, psychology, library and information science, and studies in human-computer interaction (see Liu 2005, 701). This section outlines current research foci and debates in order to identify the key trends in this literature, with an emphasis on Australian research where feasible. It aims to provide an overview rather than an exhaustive review. Given that the studies we discuss reflect the various conceptual, methodological and professional frameworks of the authors’ disciplines, we have organized our discussion accordingly.

Education studies is a diverse and often contested field, but has a clear mandate to assist teachers to improve classroom practice and educational outcomes, including literacy. Within the sub-discipline of literacy research, one strand seeks to rectify the decline in “long form reading” for pleasure—that is, reading of fiction or non-fiction books/eBooks—with a view to improving school and vocational outcomes. According to Margaret Merga, the benefits to literacy of regular, independent reading of electronic and traditional books include: improvements in “word recognition and vocabulary”; enhanced “range of cognitive abilities”; and better “vocational outcomes post-school” (2014b, 161). New literacy studies (NLS) take a more expansive view of literacy when it acknowledges students’ ability to read, create, and produce texts across a range of platforms and multimedia forms and genres, rather than print-based reading alone. In this paradigm, clearly measurable outcomes may be less important than recognition and facilitation of students' technological fluency and ease with digital platforms and texts. The result, Alvermann (2009) argues, is the emergence of “a new ethos” in schools. Refusing the “dominance of the book”, this ethos acknowledges “literacy practices that require collaboration and
participation in disseminating knowledge” among affinity groups as factors that index “achievement and communicative competence” (Alvermann 2009, 22).

A similar focus on building bridges between school and recreational literacy activities informs a number of the chapters in a recent collection entitled Teenagers and Reading, published by the Australian Association of Teachers of English (Manuel and Brindley 2012). They outline strategies for drawing on students’ funds of knowledge in genres and platforms in order to generate motivation for curriculum-relevant engagement with literary and other reading. Such research also emphasizes that a broader approach to literacy is necessary to ensure that “no child is left behind” (Franzak 2006, 211). However, the NLS approach has been criticized for failing to recognize the differing levels of competencies in young people, and for constructing teachers as “digital immigrants”, who lack the technological and social expertise to provide effective learning environments for “millennial” learners (Bittman et al. 2011; Merga 2014a).

Studies from psychology are also critical of the “digital natives” thesis (Bennett, Maton and Kervin 2008). Research evaluating cognitive skills, such as “task switching” (Jimura et al. 2014), now challenges simplistic theories of “multitasking”—the simultaneous use of two or more media platforms—that is so prominent in accounts of young people’s media use (see also Baumgartner et al.). The cognitive processes of reading on different platforms have been investigated; for instance, a recent review of the literature on the impact of the Internet on human cognition supports the premise that reading online involves different processes to paper-based reading (Loh and Kanai 2015), though further research is needed.

The psychology literature mobilizing behaviourism profiles readers in respect to demographics, attitudes and motivation, including readers’ preferences for social engagement related to reading (Coiro 2012; Conradi et al. 2013; Gerlich, Drumheller and Sollosy 2012; Hall 2012; Howard 2008; Love and Hamston 2003; McKenna et al. 2012; Merga 2015; Pitcher et al. 2007; Wolters et al. 2014). Experimental psychologists and information scientists analyse information-seeking behaviours, but have used predominantly adult subjects. However, library and information sciences studies have drawn on research on
information-seeking behaviours that documents both changes in cognitive strategies during reading on digital platforms (Liu 2005), and the serendipitous acquisition of information through the reading of literature (Howard 2008).

Other preoccupations of the library and information sciences include the continuing relevance of libraries in the age of widespread digital access (Ferguson 2012; Howard and Jin 2004; Agosto et al. 2015) and generational renewal of reading publics for literature (McKerracher 2009; Dickenson 2014; Maynard, Mackay and Smyth 2008). Innovation in reader advisory services, youth programming and collection development has led to studies focussing on: genre and platform preferences (Birr Moje et al. 2008; Forsyth 2010; Howard 2010; Maynard, Mackay and Smyth 2008); sources of text recommendations; and profiles of readers’ text selection heuristics. Studies from this field are increasingly looking to online games and digital genres, such as fan-fiction (see Black and Steinkuehler 2009), as staging points for other forms of reading.

However, not all young people have access to digital media. Cultural geographers offer insights into how remote and regional environments create disparate reading experiences (Mackey 2010; Tveit 2012; Asplund and Prieto 2013). Issues of diversity, access and equity are central, with an acknowledgment of the role of place and space in reading. Paulette Rothbauer’s study (2009) of teens in rural Canada, for example, shows how isolation and impediments to mobility fostered solitary and digital practices, while local library services were bypassed. She mobilizes the theory of “place choreography” initially developed by David Seamon (1979) to demonstrate the heterogeneity of reading experiences and reading as located.

Outside of the academy, the book industry conducts research to better understand its market, and to monitor trends in reading and book buying. Scholastic’s Kids and Family Reading Report (2015) is the latest in a series whose secondary purpose is to brand the importance of book reading to the public at large. Proprietary research such as Nielsen Bookscan, perhaps the publishing industry’s key metrics service, aggregates book sale data from a number of countries, including the UK, US and Australia. A number of institutions also monitor literacy (such as the UK-based Literacy Trust) and social uses of media. American benevolent trusts sponsor research that documents trends and broad
changes to social life brought about by digitization (Kaiser Family Foundation 2010; Zickuhr et al. 2012).

Supranational organizations, governments and their statutory authorities also have a stake in collecting and analysing national and international datasets to inform public policy. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s Programme for International Student Assessment [PISA]—a comparative survey that evaluates educational systems for more than 60 economies by testing the competencies of 15-year-olds, including for reading proficiency—looms large in policy debates around schooling. In the United States, the National Endowment for the Arts’ report, *To Read or Not to Read* (2007), used data from PISA and the National Center for Education Statistics to benchmark the comparative decline in youth literacy (NEA 2007). In Australia, the Department of Social Services funds a number of national longitudinal studies, including *Growing up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children* [LSAC], which uses predictors of developmental outcomes and resilience. The LSAC uses a suite of instruments, with the facility to link to the National Assessment Program–Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). Secondary reviews and policy-oriented reports frequently draw upon these large, nationally representative datasets. Finally, state-based institutions with a stake in generational renewal of reading, such as the State Library of Victoria, also commission studies (McKerracher 2009).

**THEMES: PARTICIPATION, PREFERENCES, PEERS, PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES, PLEASURE, PLATFORM AND PLACE**

Perhaps the most prevalent theme of the studies we reviewed is participation rates in long-form reading. A plethora of international studies show reading by young people is in decline and time spent reading decreases as they age. Reading activity peaks between the ages of 8 and 11 (Howard and Jin 2004; Scholastic 2015). As time-use researchers note, time—like money—is an index of social value as well as a covert economic indicator (Folbre 2008). Time spent reading may indicate family cultures that value and model reading practises and provide access to books and digital platforms. These cultures are strongly correlated with
demographic variables such as educational advantage. As indicated above, the amount of time spent in long-form reading is positively correlated with educational achievement (Merga 2014b; Sullivan and Brown 2013; Clark and Rumbold 2006).

Broadly defined, the concept of participation encompasses matters of access, transmission of social advantage or disadvantage, and diversity. Much of the research attending to diversity focuses on gender. It indicates a still-growing gap between males and females in variables related to reading (Birr Moje et al. 2008; Howard and Jin 2004; Hughes-Hassell and Rodge 2007). As Zofia Zasacka notes (2014), the findings of her national survey of Polish adolescents is consistent with the international literature that shows girls have a “gender advantage in actual reading and positive attitude” (67), performing “better in reading comprehension tasks” (68), and reporting more pleasure from their reading. The impact of socioeconomic status has also been explored in the context of adolescents’ attitudes toward reading, with mixed findings (Bussert-Webb and Zhang 2015).

Reading preferences (for both genre and platform/device) are discussed in multiple studies. For example, a number of British Literacy Trust studies found that young people frequently nominate “magazines, websites, text messages, jokes and books/magazines about TV programs” as their preferred leisure reading (Clark and Rumbold 2006, 13; citing Clark and Foster 2005). Fiction, including adventure, comedy and horror, are nominated, alongside comics, newspapers, fan-fiction, and short-form texts that are embedded in popular culture networks. Birr Moje et al. also highlight overlaps in taste cultures between print and screen genres such as manga/anime, websites supporting gaming (especially cheat-sheets), sites that can be mined for information about celebrities, and sexuality. Informational sites that support affinity cultures such as car enthusiasts feature prominently (2008, 111; 136–137). While long form non-fiction is a category that has received little scrutiny, a recurring theme in the literature is the argument that genre choice is paramount to engaging adolescent readers, though often this choice may need to be supported (e.g. Garcia 2015; Merga, 2014a).
The concept of “screen time” warrants a brief digression, prior to further discussion of platform preferences. The public health literature, in particular, focuses on screen time as a risk factor for obesity (Boone et al. 2007), sleep disorders (Hale and Guan 2014), and other developmental outcomes (Swing et al. 2010). The strength of these findings is not in dispute here. However, as a composite variable (time spent consuming any screen media: television, DVD, video game consoles, and other digital devices), screen time is frequently represented as competing with other activities (mutually excluding physical activity, sleep, reading, etc). This ignores discriminations between types of screen-based activities (such as information gathering, reading news and research) that may be beneficial. For example, an Australian study found computer use (as opposed to game play) was positively associated with reading (Bittman et al. 2011).

A preference for digital media is highlighted in the Kaiser Family Foundation’s *Generation M²* (2010) survey of the media practices of American youth (8–18 years). While it found that reading of traditional print (books) had not declined in the previous decade, newspaper and magazine reading did, at least partially replaced by increased gathering of news and celebrity information online. This study identifies the proportion of “computer time” young people spent on various activities: video sites (16%); social networking (25%); gaming (19%); instant messaging (13%); email (6%); other websites (12%) and unspecified other (5%). Thus, limited time might be devoted to long-form reading.

A significant proportion of the existing studies of reading on eReader platforms use experiments to assess reader experience. This includes measuring: text comprehension; platform preferences; visual fatigue (Benedetto et al. 2013); cues for different reading processes and strategies; and narrative immersion or transportation into the world of the story (Bal and Veltkamp 2013; Mangen and Kuiken 2014). An experiment in Norwegian secondary schools comparing print and electronic books concluded that eReaders are more popular with students (in classroom contexts) with no substantial loss of comprehension compared to print (Tveit and Mangen 2014). However, the researchers speculated that the skimming and keyword scanning processes cued by the device might influence
the preferences of reluctant readers. By contrast, Merga’s West Australian Adolescent Book Reading (WASABR) study found avid readers generally prefer print. Although they are not heavy users or borrowers of eBooks, avid readers find the affordances such as easy portability and immediate access (via purchase) of additional series or author titles appealing (Merga 2014a). Questions of a digital divide in device and title access are not widely canvassed (compare Zickuhr 2012), nor were we able to identify studies indicating eBook affordances increased reading for pleasure or recreational participation by any profile of teenage readers.

The research is increasingly preoccupied with the social role of reading in peer networks. In a much-cited study targeting the out of school “literacy practices” of an urban adolescent population, Elizabeth Birr Moje and colleagues analysed reading practices as situated in social networks and generative of social capital in the form of “information, ideas for self-improvement, models for identities, or ways to maintain existing relationships and build new ones” (Birr Moje et al. 2008, 147). This “social turn” involves sharing of reading recommendations as well as promotion of social affinities through symbolic exchange (Zasacka 2014, 68). Howard’s (2008) study of a regional Canadian municipality found recreational teen readers cemented friendships by talking about reading, swapping reading material and following the same series. The role of parents and broader familial influences in shaping adolescents’ attitudes toward reading for recreation is of increasing interest in the research. Matthew Knoester and Mari Plikuhn (2015) invited participants to reflect on how the reading practices of their older siblings influenced their own. Love of reading may be transmitted across generations through parental modelling of a positive attitude toward the practice (Strommen and Mates 2004).

Finally, place is an important theme in the literature. Schools are often situated as places in which a love for recreational reading is expected to be fostered, despite the competing expectations of a crowded curriculum (Garcia, 2015) and variable resourcing, which may have equity implications (Bussert-Webb and Zhang, 2015). Studies of regional library and information services, and studies of minority demographics are more overt in addressing questions of place, diversity, access, and their effects on participation. Rothbauer’s study is
one of the few that frames the question: “if place matters, how does it matter, and what evidence do we have that it does?” (2009, 465). Significantly, her research contests the trend towards the social turn, finding the lone teen reader as norm.

DEFINITIONS OF READING AND READERS

Readers and reading are defined in different ways in different studies. What we might term the “narrow” definition is restricted to long-form reading in print and e-book formats (McKerracher 2009; Merga 2014b; NEA 2007; Nippold, Duthie and Larsen 2005; Scholastic 2015). In contrast, a “broad” definition encompasses short-form reading and a wide range of digital applications, including texting, social media and web browsing (Birr Moje et al. 2008; Braun 2007; Hughes-Hassell and Rodge 2007; Kaplan 2008; Kirschenbaum 2007). Several studies show that when teens are given the power to define reading themselves, they assume the narrow definition outlined above (Birr Moje et al. 2008; Pitcher 2007; Snowball 2008). Others are concerned with what teenagers read and why; for example, distinguishing required reading for school from reading variously described as “voluntary reading”, “reading for pleasure”, “reading for recreation”, “leisure reading”, “reading self-selected material and “reading for fun”.

There is little consensus about how teen readers are characterized. Survey instruments offer various profiles from which participants can self-identify their reading habits. Meanwhile, secondary analyses of nationally representative datasets (for instance, Chen 2008) use proxy measures, such as frequency of holiday reading, to assign a profile, such as “avid reader”. There is a further layer of definitional complexity. Chen's (2008) avid reader reads during leisure time, although the type of reading is not defined. In contrast, Gerlich, Drumheller and Sollosy's (2012) avid reader is one that reads 1.5 books per month. Merga's (2014b) avid reader reads a book twice or more a week in their free time, while her infrequent reader reads less than once a month in their free time. Those who rarely read for pleasure are variously described as “reluctant”, “marginalized”, “struggling” (Franzak 2006) or “alliterate” (Beers 1998). Whereas marginalization and struggle imply social disadvantage, reluctance and
the concept of “aliteracy” (where one can read proficiently but chooses not to) are often attributed to a preference for entertainment media or the inability of schools or teachers to motivate readers. Another definitional complexity concerns age. The lack of an agreed standard age ranges makes it difficult to compare data, as we later discuss.

**STUDY DESIGN, CONCEPTS AND MEASURES**

Whereas a systematic review is “guided by a highly-focussed research question” and aims to search for and evaluate particular study protocols (Arksey and O’Malley 2005, 8), our scoping study aims to provide a general orientation to the types of research designs identified in the search. Different research questions and disciplinary warrants invite different kinds of approach. Survey designs predominate in the literature we reviewed, seeking some generalizability of findings to particular populations in order to inform policy.

Literature and narrative reviews (Clark and Rumbold 2006; Dickenson 2014; Franzak 2006), together with institutional reports, themselves synthesized from secondary analyses of official statistics, constitute one category of study examined. An example of the latter is the report *To Read or not to Read: A Question of National Consequence* (NEA 2007). It argues that young adults are reading fewer books in general, that reading is declining among teenagers, and that college attendance no longer guarantees active reading habits. This study triggered a heated public discussion, crystallizing the debate between broad and narrow definitions of reading, and advocates of cultural and educational capital. Nancy Kaplan observes the exclusion of online reading from the study. She also argues that the data set is truncated, “representing irregular time intervals with regularized spatial intervals” (Kaplan 2008, 195–196), making the decline in reading scores of 17-year-olds appear more dramatic than it really is. Secondary data analysis of official statistics is rare. One exception is Chen’s (2008) study of the influence of gender, family and teacher variables on avid adolescent readers in Taiwan. Chen used the Taiwan Educational Panel Survey (a national data set using cluster, multistage, stratified probability sampling, with data collected in
and found parents and teachers positively influenced teenagers’ love of reading.

In the surveys examined, probability sampling—“random selection so that each unit in the population has a known chance of being selected” (Bryman 2012, 187)—is also infrequent. However, a number of designs were developed to avoid sampling bias, others to target particular demographics. Zasacka (2014) used a sampling frame that divided secondary schools in Poland according to region and population, with a complex weighting of urban and rural schools. An auditorium questionnaire was administered to all students in one third-year high school class at the participating schools. The Kaiser Family Foundation's *Generation M²* (2010) study, whose instruments include a self-completion questionnaire and (uniquely) a seven-day media diary that documents time spent reading, uses a stratified two-stage national probability sample. However, it over-selected for African American and Hispanic students in order to obtain enough respondents to clearly represent these minorities (weighting procedures being used to correct for design effects). *Scholastic’s Kids and Family Reading Report* (2015), on the other hand, utilized a web-enabled panel (N=2558) designed to be representative of the US population. It was data weighted according to benchmark distributions from the Current Population Survey/Census Bureau (see also Maynard, Mackay and Smyth 2008). Various smaller surveys have been designed to use more limited demographic categories in a purposive way, often to explore effects of gender, socio-economic status or region on variables of interest (Hughes-Hassell and Rodge 2007). Howard and Jin (2004) surveyed teens in Nova Scotia on their reading habits, library use and the influence of librarians on their selection of reading material.

A third group of studies utilize mixed methods. Sometimes qualitative elements were restricted to an open field in a survey questionnaire; others implemented “constant comparison” of survey data using semi-structured or depth interviews. Birr Moje et al. (2008) used the richest set of instruments. They triangulated data from a computerized survey administered during class time (N=716); a computer-based reading diagnostic of a sub-sample of respondents; semi-structured interviews using prompts for a variety of text types (N=79); reading-process interviews (N=52) and ethnographic interviews.
at different sites; school records; and writing samples. Comparison between data types yielded analytic categories that the survey alone would not have captured, such as discrepancies in young people’s conceptions of reading (as print-based, literary reading only). Youth characterized themselves as non-readers despite reading prolifically online (see also Pitcher et al. 2007).

Focus groups are common in market research and in the pilot stage of studies using a survey design. Few of the reviewed studies used this method alone. A study of teenagers talking about reading and libraries (N=41) undertaken in metropolitan secondary schools in Perth, Western Australia, found that teens did not categorize Internet use as reading (Snowball 2008). Another undertaken in Canadian junior high schools employed structured questions to cross-compare responses between focus groups on peer group influences on teenagers’ pleasure (N=68) (Howard 2008). Less concern for cross-comparability of findings is shown in Keeping Young Australians Reading (McKerracher 2009). Combining focus groups of parents and children (N=36) with author, publisher, librarian and teacher interviews (N=55), the report aims for a snapshot of opinions from experts.

In social research, indicators are used to access “concepts that cannot be directly measured” quantitatively (Bryman 2012, 164). The most common indicator for the fluid concept of the teenager is age. However, the studies vary widely in the age-range they use. Most are cross-sectional in design, with a tendency to focus on slightly younger students, for example, either middle school (grades 5–8) (McKenna et al. 2012) or junior secondary school. McKerracher (2009) and Scholastic (2015) collected data on 12–17-year-olds; Generation M² sampled 8–18-year-olds. Most focus on a narrower age-range, typically early adolescence: 14–18 (Agosto 2015; Chen 2008); 12–15; 9–13 (McKenna et al. 2012); 12–16 (Manuel 2012); 13–16 (Merga 2014b). Rothbauer’s (2009) study is one of the few to target older adolescents (15–19), many of whom had left school.

Measures of the volume of teenagers’ reading also vary widely. Generation M² captures reading in minutes per day as does Nippold et. al.’s study (2005) of sixth and ninth grade students from Western Oregon. NEA (2007) reports both minutes and pages per day. Other surveys measure frequency, respondents
being asked how many times per week, fortnight or month they engage in reading books, but without measuring the duration of the activity. This diversity of indicators and measures makes comparability of findings problematic.

**DISCUSSION AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Our scoping review began with three research questions. RQ1 asked what is known about teenagers’ reading practices in the digital era; RQ2 asked about the disciplines interested in the topic, and how they defined reading; and RQ3 asked about the frameworks, themes and study designs guiding research in the field. Summarizing the first of these, teenagers appear to be reading, but their reading practices are diverse and mediated by cultural contexts, social influences, place, conditions of access, as well as factors that can only be labelled as individual personality. The death of the print platform may have been overstated. Teachers and librarians’ interest in promoting new genres such as graphic novels is a case in point. Results are contradictory in regard to a decline in the amount of teens’ print (book) reading. However, it seems clear that some short-form genres, such as news and celebrity, hobby and “how-to” genres are being consumed online via video as well as text. Two factors characterize changes in reading practices: increased dependence on digital technologies, together with the social turn in reading, involving the collaborative selection, dissemination and/or paratextual literacy practices that often, though far from exclusively, take place through social media.

While reading proficiency levels at the national level may not have declined (Kaplan 2008), the media ecology is now characterized by plenitude and ubiquity. Recreational reading faces increased narrative competition. Books and multimodal texts (blogs, celebrity sites, movie and book sites) that form part of the commodity structure of large media franchises are popular with teens. Fan studies researchers contend that the Internet has facilitated the merger of formerly more separate youth “taste cultures”. As a result, literary, screen and graphic fandoms now more readily overlap (Coppa 2006; Rutherford 2009). The logic of narrative competition is also implicated in the rise of the “aliterate” teenager. However, aliteracy may also be a consequence of lifestyle and stage of
life-course factors. Young people often cite lack of time for their reluctance to read. Only the Nestlé Family Monitor (1993; cited in Clark and Rumbold 2006) suggests teens return to reading in later life. Longitudinal research is needed to ascertain whether the digital era permanently affects the lifelong reading of long-form literary or non-fictional narratives.

In regard to the second question asking which disciplines are interested in teen reading, the most invested are literacy education and the library and information sciences. In respect to how the different disciplines define reading, we identify what we refer to as “narrow” and “broad” definitions. These terms are not employed in an evaluative sense. Rather, “narrow” refers to long-form literary or non-fictional reading in print or eBook formats, while “broad” includes “short-form” reading and writing using a range of digital applications, including texting, social media and general web browsing. Short-form reading now embraces (and displaces) genres formerly restricted to print, such as newspapers, published diaries, and magazines. One of the implications, however, is that certain practices formerly categorized as communication are now mediated by digital platforms that require some level of writing and reading as necessary competences.

At stake in these positions is what Richard Hoggart (2006) famously referred to as the “uses” of literacy, which include social maintenance, information seeking, identity politics, and narrative immersion. Some continue to see these uses as purely literary phenomenon, while others identify these properties in game-based fictional worlds. Literacy educators have little problem articulating the basis for their concerns about changing patterns in teenagers’ reading. NLS-informed educators are concerned, first, that “no child shall be left behind” by approaches to literacy that alienate disadvantaged or affinity groups whose identities are defined by minority cultural practices. Second, they believe the professions of the future will demand flexible and multiple digital literacies. Other researchers point to a clear correlation, replicated in numerous studies, between long-form reading, literary reading, and reading for pleasure, and better cumulative grade point averages/school results and vocational opportunities. However, there are few in-depth studies investigating digital reading practices during leisure time. Birr Moje et al. (2008) are an exception.
Our third question focused on themes and identified a range of overlapping categories: participation; diversity; reader preferences for genre and/or platforms; and reading in the context of social media. There appears to be consensus that technologies shape the experience of reading regardless of the genre. However, beyond the experimental studies of interface or device-specific reader behaviours (Mangen and Kuiken 2014; Margolin et al. 2013), digital reading by teens is predominantly thematized in relation to gender. As a factor influencing literacy, race attracts research attention in the United States particularly, but much of it focuses on the large “minority” groups. Other forms of diversity (such as sexual preference and disability) and how they are inflected by geography and culture are not reflected in accounts of teen reading. In many countries with remote communities like Australia, the lack of books and other platforms in Indigenous languages has often been noted in programs for younger children (James 2014). There is a dearth of ethnographic studies of reading for various purposes in different embodied locations and social contexts. This approach could generate rich insights into reading preferences, practices and the effects of access and other factors. We note that survey designs predominate in studies of recreational reading, and suggest there is a need for richer qualitative research methodologies that will better account for the various kinds of reading and their located determinants.

There also appears to be little interrogation of the significance of genre preferences in long-form reading. Non-fiction texts used by affinity groups or hobby networks are canvassed in the literature, but given experimental studies showing readers are cued to process non-fictional texts in a less immersive manner (Tveit and Mangen 2014), the effects of genre choices on subsequent reading participation and pleasure deserves further scrutiny. So does the impact of eReaders. A recent Pew Internet Study (Zickuhr et al. 2012) shows that library card holders and avid readers (16–65 years) are likely to be avid consumers of eBooks. However, the rapid global growth of eBook publishing is not yet studied in research on young people’s pleasure reading.

The issue of access is implicated in the structures by which reading is mediated in the digital era. Both teenagers’ access to eBooks and the embedding of devices in global digital rights exchanges warrant further research. There are
clearly urgent questions of equity regarding access to eBooks for young people in
countries outside the United States, particularly where users of market-leading
devices such as Amazon’s Kindle™ are not supported for library borrowing.
What heuristics do teens use for text selection within the digital rights
management structures of supply, demand and copyright? Do all teens possess
the considerable digital literacy required to source publicly available reading
resources and negotiate the process of getting them on their devices (Zichuhr et
al. 2012)?

Reading online might have replaced print for many kinds of informational
purposes, but do space and place have a function in the digital reading economy?
Newspapers and magazines may still be available in print in places such as cafes
and libraries, but we were unable to find much in the way of empirical research
in various locations. We argue therefore for a richer set of methods, including
ethnographic and qualitative components, to develop a grounded theory of
teenagers’ reading in particular contexts, whether located or virtual. This
research should be culturally specific in order to inform evidence-based policy
relevant to national and regional jurisdictions.

References

Really Think a Libraries...And What You Can Do to Improve Their
65-77. Print.
Alvermann, Donna. "Sociocultural Constructions of Adolescence and Young
People's Literacies." Handbook of Adolescent Literacy Research. Eds.
Christenbury, Leila, Randy Bomer and Peter Smagorinsky. New York:
Arksey, Hilary, and Lisa O'Malley. "Scoping Studies: Towards a Methodological
Framework." International Journal of Social Research Methodology 8.1
Asplund, Stig-Börje, and Héctor Pérez Prieto. "‘Ellie Is the Coolest’: Class,
Masculinity and Place in Vehicle Engineering Students’ Talk About
Literature in a Swedish Rural Town School." Children's Geographies 11.1
Australian Bureau of Statistics. Programme for the International Assessment of
Adult Competencies, Australia, 2011-12. Canberra, ACT: Australian Bureau


McKerracher, Sue. *Keeping Young Australians Reading: Centre for Youth Literature, State Library of Victoria,* 2009. Print.


