

Sport, culture and the internet:

Are Australian children participating?

The Smith Family Research Report June 2013



everyone's family

Introduction

Participating in sport and cultural activities provides children with opportunities to develop in a range of areas, including physically, socially, emotionally and cognitively. Participating in these types of activities in childhood can also increase the likelihood of participating in them in later life; active young people, for example, are more likely to become active adults (Quin et al., 2007). Children's ability to access the internet at home also provides them with a range of educational, entertainment and social opportunities.

This publication looks at the participation of Australian children in sports and cultural activities, as well as their access to the internet at home, using new data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). It highlights that levels of participation are much lower for children living in disadvantaged communities. It also canvasses a range of research which identifies the potential benefits of children's participation in sports and cultural activities, as well as how they use the internet at home.

Survey of children's participation

In April 2012, the ABS carried out its regular survey on the participation of children, aged 5 to 14 years, in sport, cultural and leisure activities. The survey provides information on children's participation outside of school hours over the previous 12 months. It also provides information on their access to the internet at home. In 2013, The Smith Family commissioned the ABS to provide this data using the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD). This analysis helps to understand the extent to which participation varies according to the level of advantage or disadvantage of the community in which children live. This data is provided below in Tables 1 to 3 and in Figure 1.



The value for children of participating in sport

Children experience a range of benefits from participating in sport. Regular participation is associated with physical development and competence (Findlay and Coplan, 2008), as well as longer and better quality of life and reduced risks for a variety of diseases (Bailey, 2005). Sport also provides opportunities for children to interact with their peers and an environment that can foster social support, security and self-esteem.

Children who participate in sport tend to have higher social competence, exert more self-control and report greater wellbeing than their non-participating peers (Findlay and Coplan, 2008). Sport can offer children a range of experiences, including taking on a particular role within the team or group, communicating with others, learning similar skills or tasks and working towards common goals. It also provides children with a sense of belonging and connection with their peers (Findlay and Coplan, 2008).

Sport, culture and the internet:

Are Australian children participating?

The value for children of participating in cultural activities

There are also a range of benefits for children and young people participating in cultural activities such as music, drama, dance or art. They provide an opportunity for emotional and creative expression and developing mastery in these areas is likely to positively influence a child's ability to persist with tasks (Črnčec et al., 2006).

Participating in cultural activities can challenge children's perceptions about their world and themselves and enhance their belief in what they can achieve. These activities can support the development of self-confidence, self-awareness, communication and social skills, particularly when they are done with others. Drama for example, provides children with opportunities to develop collaborative skills, to listen to and extend the ideas of others, express their own views, problem solve and reach agreement with others (James, 2005). Dance has also been shown to increase physical and psychological wellbeing, in areas such as aerobic fitness and self-esteem (Quin et al., 2007).

Participating in a variety of activities

Participating in both sports and cultural activities has a valuable role in promoting mental health and wellbeing (Bungay and Vella-Burrows, 2013). Both provide opportunities for young people to gain leadership experiences, set goals, and develop initiative and a sense of identity. They provide opportunities for children to build networks with a diversity of people, which can contribute to social inclusion. They also offer exposure to the positive influence of non-parental adults such as coaches, tutors and instructors, enabling young people to expand the networks they can draw on to support their development (Annear, 2010). These networks can potentially be utilised in a variety of ways, well beyond the direct sporting or cultural activity the young person is involved in.

Importantly, participation in a combination of activity types appears to provide benefits above and beyond those related to participation in one type of activity. Recent longitudinal research with young people aged 12 to 14 years suggests that those who participated in a greater variety of activities had higher levels of academic self-concept, general self-worth and social self-concept.¹ The research also showed that the positive association between participating in a variety of activities during early adolescence and one's sense of self, continued through the mid-adolescent period (Blomfield Neira et al., 2013).

The value of sports and cultural activities for disadvantaged young people

Research involving adolescents suggests that participation in sports and cultural activities is particularly beneficial to those from more economically disadvantaged backgrounds. A large Western Australian study of adolescents' participation in activities outside of school hours, showed a stronger positive association for young people from more disadvantaged schools, compared to their peers from more advantaged schools (Blomfield and Barber, 2011).

Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who were interviewed for the *Making a difference* (Skattebol et al., 2012) research, also highlighted the value of engaging in sports and arts based organisations, as they provided opportunities for them to meet other young people on an 'equal footing'.

Children's participation in sport and cultural activities

Table 1 shows the extent to which Australian children aged 5 to 14 years participated in organised sporting activities and/or cultural activities, such as drama, playing a musical instrument, singing, dancing or art and craft, outside of school hours, over the last 12 months.

Close to half (46.9%) of all children living in the most disadvantaged communities did not participate in either sport or cultural activities. This equates to 207,500 children. In comparison around one in 10 children (13.3%) living in the most advantaged communities did not participate in either type of activity.

Similarly, only 12.5% of children living in the most disadvantaged communities participated in both sports and cultural activities, compared with 36.6% of their peers living in the most advantaged communities, as highlighted in Figure 1.



Sport, culture and the internet:

Are Australian children participating?

Table 1: Participation of children aged 5 to 14 years in organised sporting and/or cultural activities outside school hours in the last 12 months

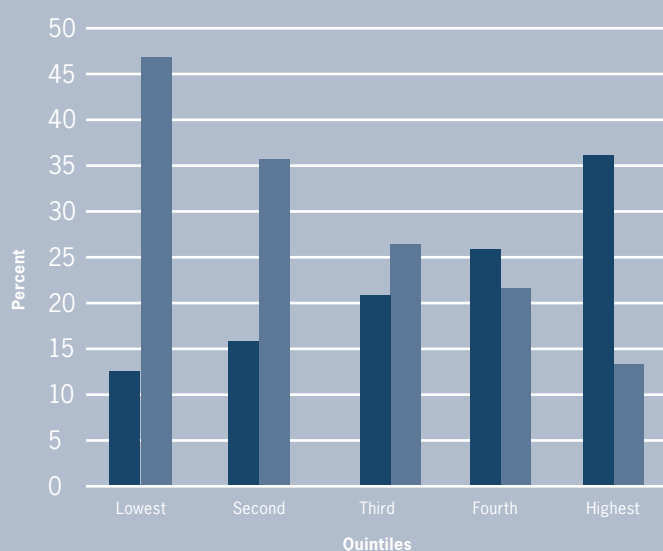
Type of community	Involved in cultural activities and sport	Involved in cultural activities only	Involved in sport only	Not involved in cultural activities or sport	Total
	Proportion (%)				
Lowest quintile (Most disadvantaged areas)	12.5	10.2	30.3	46.9	100.0
Second quintile	16.2	12.9	35.4	35.4	100.0
Third quintile	20.9	13.0	39.4	26.7	100.0
Fourth quintile	26.1	12.5	39.9	21.5	100.0
Highest quintile (Most advantaged areas)	36.6	11.4	38.6	13.3	100.0
Total population aged 5–14 years	23.1	12.1	37.1	27.7	100.0

Source: Unpublished data using IRSAD from the ABS (2012) Children's participation in cultural and leisure activities, April 2012

Figure 1: Participation of children aged 5 to 14 years in organised sporting and/or cultural activities outside school hours in the last 12 months, by type of community

- Involved in cultural activities and sport
- Not involved in cultural activities or sport

Note: The lowest quintile refers to the most disadvantaged areas and the highest quintile refers to the most advantaged areas.



Sport, culture and the internet:

Are Australian children participating?

The value for children of cultural venues and events

Cultural venues such as museums and art galleries are places of exploration and discovery. They offer opportunities for informal and self-directed learning in a range of areas, including maths, science, art, music, history and social science (Henderson and Atencio, 2007). Public libraries provide children with a range of resources and opportunities – the free borrowing of books, DVDs and CDs, an environment in which to sit and browse, listen to stories, enjoy performances, use the internet, access resources for school and socialise with friends. Libraries also play an important role in helping children to develop literacy skills through summer reading programs, storytelling, book discussions and other special programs targeting them.

Table 2 shows the extent to which children attended a cultural venue or event, such as a public library, museum, art gallery, or performing arts event, outside of school hours, over the last 12 months. Two-fifths (41.6%) of children from the most disadvantaged communities did not attend any of these venues or events. This equates to around 184,000 children. In comparison around one-fifth (18.2%) of children living in the most advantaged communities did not attend a cultural venue or event.

Table 2: Attendance by children aged 5 to 14 years at selected cultural venues and events outside school hours in the last 12 months

Type of community	No cultural venues or events	One cultural venue or event	Two cultural venues or events	Three cultural venues or events	Total
	Proportion (%)				
Lowest quintile (Most disadvantaged areas)	41.6	27.0	17.3	14.2	100.0
Second quintile	36.7	28.6	19.0	15.7	100.0
Third quintile	28.4	27.9	27.2	16.5	100.0
Fourth quintile	23.8	26.0	27.4	22.8	100.0
Highest quintile (Most advantaged areas)	18.2	25.1	28.3	28.3	100.0
Total population aged 5–14 years	29.0	26.9	24.2	19.9	100.0

Source: Unpublished data using IRSAD from the ABS (2012) Children's participation in cultural and leisure activities, April 2012

Sport, culture and the internet:

Are Australian children participating?

Children's use of the internet at home

Children most commonly use the internet at home for educational activities. In 2009, 85% of children aged under 14 who used the internet at home, did so for educational purposes. This figure increased for older children, with 94% of 12 to 14 year olds using it for school work or other educational activities. Other common uses for children of the internet at home, are playing online games (69%), listening to or downloading music (47%) and visiting or using social networking sites (22%) (ABS, 2011).

Table 3 shows the proportion of children who accessed the internet at home in the last 12 months. Overall, 81.2% of children accessed the internet, but as with sports and cultural participation, access varied significantly between communities. Only 67.8% (or two thirds) of children living in the most disadvantaged communities, accessed the internet at home, compared to 90.5% of those living in the most advantaged areas.

Why is participation lower for children from disadvantaged communities?

There are a range of reasons why children from disadvantaged communities may be less likely than children from more advantaged communities to participate in sports and cultural activities and events and to access

the internet at home. These include the significant costs that are associated with many forms of participation, such as fees, uniforms, equipment and transport. Many of the young people and their parents who were interviewed for the *Making a difference* (Skattebol et al., 2012) research highlighted costs as a major factor limiting their ability to access and participate in sports and other activities. There are also significant costs associated with having the internet at home and families in disadvantaged communities are less likely to have the discretionary income needed to support such access. In households living on very low incomes, it is understandable that essentials such as food, rent, utilities and health expenses may take priority over internet access or children's participation in sport and cultural activities.

Disadvantaged communities are also less likely to have adequate and well maintained sport and recreational facilities. They may have poorer public transport and fewer local clubs with the volunteers necessary to support such activities. Some families may also lack the knowledge, confidence or time to support their children's participation in sports and cultural activities. They may be juggling a complex range of caring and employment responsibilities. They may also be less aware of the range of benefits associated with children's broad participation in activities or because of their financial and living circumstances these may have to take a lower priority.

Table 3: Internet accessed at home in the last 12 months by children aged 5 to 14 years

Type of community	Internet accessed at home		Internet not accessed at home	
	Proportion (%)	Number ('000)	Proportion (%)	Number ('000)
Lowest quintile (Most disadvantaged areas)	67.8	299.8	31.9	141.2
Second quintile	76.7	443.8	23.0	133.1
Third quintile	80.7	422.2	19.2	100.6
Fourth quintile	86.3	566.7	13.6	89.1
Highest quintile (Most advantaged areas)	90.5	526.1	9.5	55.1
Total population aged 5–14 years	81.2	2260.9	18.7	521.4

Source: Unpublished data using IRSAD from the ABS (2012) Children's participation in cultural and leisure activities, April 2012

Sport, culture and the internet:

Are Australian children participating?

Conclusion

There is substantial evidence of the benefits to children of their participation in sport and cultural activities and events. These benefits are maximised when participation includes a diverse range of activities and they appear to be greatest for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. There is also evidence that children gain a number of benefits, particularly educational, from having access to the internet at home.

Despite these benefits, significant proportions of Australian children, particularly in disadvantaged communities, are not participating in sports, cultural activities or events outside of school hours. A significant proportion of children in the most disadvantaged communities are also not accessing the internet at home. It is not clear from the available data whether some of the children in the most disadvantaged communities are missing out in multiple ways, that is, not participating in sports, cultural activities or events, nor having access to the internet at home. However, it is likely that some children are missing out in all areas, compounding the overall impact of their lack of participation.

This research provides a compelling case for additional efforts aimed at increasing the participation of children from disadvantaged backgrounds in sports and cultural activities and for increasing their families' access to the internet at home.

References

- Annear K (2010) Music, dance, drama: The benefits of extracurricular participation. *Teacher*, June/July, pp. 46-50.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011) *Australian Social Trends June 2011: Children of the digital revolution*. ABS, Canberra.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012) *Children's participation in cultural and leisure activities April 2012*. ABS, Canberra.
- Bailey R (2005) Evaluating the relationship between physical education, sport and social inclusion. *Educational Review*, 57(1) pp.71-90.
- Blomfield C and Barber B (2011) Developmental experiences during extracurricular activities and Australian adolescents' self-concept: Particularly important for youth from disadvantaged schools. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 40(5) pp. 582-594.
- Blomfield Niera C, Barber B and Modecki K (2013) Does Australian adolescents' breadth of participation in extracurricular activities predict their sense of self trajectory. Poster presented at the *Society for Research in Child Development Conference*, Seattle, Washington.
- Bungay H and Vella-Burrows T (2013) The effects of participating in creative activities on the health and wellbeing of children and young people: A rapid review of the literature. *Perspectives in Public Health*, 33(1) pp. 44-52.
- Črnčec R, Wilson S and Prior M (2006) The cognitive and academic benefits of music to children: Facts and fiction. *Educational Psychology: An International Journal of Experimental Educational Psychology*, 26(4) pp. 579-594
- Findlay L C and Coplan R J (2008) Come out and play: Shyness in childhood and the benefits of organised sports participation. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, 40(3) pp. 153-161.
- Henderson T Z and Atencio D (2007) Integration of play, learning and experience: What museums afford young visitors. *Early Childhood Education*, 35(3) pp. 245-251.
- James N (2005) Actup! Theatre as education and its impact on young people's learning. *Centre for Labour Market Studies, Working Paper No 46*. University of Leicester.
- Quin E, Frazer L and Redding E (2007) The health benefits of creative dance: improving children's physical and psychological wellbeing. *Education and Health*, 25(2) pp. 31-33.
- Skattebol J, Saunders P, Redmond G, Bedford M and Cass B (2012) *Making a difference: Building on young people's experiences of economic adversity. Final report*. Social Policy Research Centre, University of NSW.

End note

1 Academic self-concept is measured with items such as 'I have the ability to be good at most school subjects if I try'. General self-worth is measured with items such as 'A lot of things about me are good'. Social self-concept is measured with items such as 'I am very good at making friends'.

© The Smith Family 2013

For more information contact the Research and Advocacy Team via research@thesmithfamily.com.au

The Smith Family Research Report
June 2013

thesmithfamily.com.au



everyone's family