

More young children taking music, art and dance lessons outside of school



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Very little statistical information exists regarding the arts participation of Canadian children. *Young children's participation in the arts and reading outside of school in 2008*, the 35th report in the *Statistical Insights on the Arts* series from Hill Strategies Research, provides a first look at data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth regarding the frequency with which Canadian children between three and seven years of age participate in certain arts and reading activities outside of school. The report finds that:

- **18% of children between three and seven years old take weekly lessons or instruction in music, art or other non sport activities.** On the other hand, 80% “almost never” take lessons or instruction in music, art or other non sport activities. The remaining 2% take lessons or instruction in music, art or other non sport activities “about once a month”.
- **35% of children between three and seven years old take weekly lessons or instruction in dance, gymnastics or martial arts (or “other organized physical activities”).** In contrast, about two-thirds (64%) “almost never” take lessons or instruction in dance, gymnastics or martial arts. Only 1% of children of all age groups take lessons or instruction in dance, gymnastics or martial arts “about once a month”.
- **A majority of children read on their own on a daily basis:** 73% of three year olds do so (including those who “look at books”); 68% of four and five year olds do so; and 70% of six year olds read daily. The percentage is lower for seven year old children, 52% of whom read for pleasure daily. *Note: The slightly different phrasing of the question for seven year olds (“read for pleasure”) may have an effect on these results.*

Between 1998 and 2008, there was:

- An increase in the number of four to seven year olds taking lessons in music, art or other non sport activities at least weekly, from 14% in 1998 to 19% in 2008.
- A substantial increase in the number of four to seven year olds taking lessons in dance, gymnastics or martial arts at least weekly, from 27% in 1998 to 38% in 2008.

(Note: Because of changes in the age ranges asked the above two questions between 1998 and 2008, the analysis focuses on the participation of children between four and seven years of age, the years in common between the two surveys.)

- Essentially no change in the percentage of three or four year old children looking at books, magazines, comics, etc. or trying to read on their own.
- A decrease in the number of six year olds who look at books or try to read on their own on a daily basis, from 77% in 1998 to 70% in 2008.
- A decrease in the number of seven year olds who read for pleasure on a daily basis, from 58% in 1998 to 52% in 2008.

Full report also available

The full report also examines the frequency with which parents sing or read with their children. In addition, the participation of children in multiple arts and reading activities is analyzed. Variations in children's participation in the arts and reading based on a variety of demographic and geographic factors are also examined.

Funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage, the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council, the report is available free of charge on the Hill Strategies Research website (<http://www.hillstrategies.com>) and the websites of the funding organizations.

Media contact

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Methodological notes

The National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) asked the "person most knowledgeable" in the household (usually a parent) to report on the activities of the child during the 12 months prior to the survey. For the ages covered in this report (three to seven year olds), the number of survey respondents was 10,309.

While the arts are not the main focus of the NLSCY, an analysis of the few arts and reading-related questions in the survey may begin to fill in some gaps regarding this important topic area. However, only participation outside of school hours is covered by the survey. In addition, the arts and reading-related questions combine a number of activities that, ideally, the arts community might like to examine separately. Further, not all art forms are covered by the arts-related questions.

This report provides information only for children between three and seven years of age. The NLSCY could provide some data for younger children, but this report focuses on the activities of children between three and seven years of age, as this is the age range of some key arts-related questions.