

# Emerging Research about School Age Care

Symposium

Early Childhood Australia Conference, 2014



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SEASONS OF CHANGE EARLY CHILDHOOD AUSTRALIA NATIONAL CONFERENCE 2014

# Australian school age care

- Before school care, after school care and vacation care
- Located on school grounds
- Managed by variety of service providers (e.g. P&C, YMCA, local councils, not for profit orgs, for profit companies)
- Seen as a service for parents rather than fulfilling children's needs



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# Australian school age care

- Fastest growing sector in child care
- Numbers have more than doubled over the last 10 years
- Numbers are predicted to grow by another 40% by 2020



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SAC settings have become important contexts of childhood; particularly as they sometimes constitute the main locations outside of school where children play and socialise together (Bell, 2013, Smith, 2010).



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# Presenters

- Families use of and Needs for school aged care (Australian Institute of Family Studies)
- Children's Voices about School Aged Care (Jennifer Cartmel, Griffith University and Kym Simoncini, University of Canberra)
- Transition to school age care (Kathryn Hopps, Charles Sturt University)



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Australian Institute of Family Studies

# FAMILIES USE OF AND NEEDS FOR SCHOOL AGED CARE



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Jennifer Cartmel, Griffith University\*  
Kym Simoncini, University of Canberra

\*Presenter

# Children's Voices about School Aged care



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# Australian SAC research

Paucity of research

Children's voices  
are missing



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# Our study

- Based on English national study of out of school care (Barker, Smith, Morrow, Weller, Hey & Harwin, 2003).
- What are children's experiences and perceptions of afterschool care?



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# Services

14 schools

- 4 independent
- 4 Catholic
- 6 government schools
  
- 9 Not-for-profit organisations
- 3 Church organisations
- 2 Schools



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# Sample

Year level	n	%
Kindergarten	36	27.1
1	37	27.8
2	29	21.8
3	27	20.3
Missing	4	3.0
Total	133	100.0



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# Survey questions

1. What is the best thing about afterschool care?
2. What is the worst thing about afterschool care?
3. What would you be doing if you weren't here?
4. Are there any activities that you do here that you don't get to do anywhere else?
5. Have you made new friends at afterschool care?
6. How could afterschool care be made better?



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# The best thing about ASC

Children's responses	n	%
Play	33	24.8
Craft	20	15.0
Friends	18	13.5
Games	17	12.8
Computers	11	8.3
Sports	11	8.3
Other	8	6.0
Everything	6	4.5
Activities available	3	2.3
Food	3	2.3
Nothing	1	.8
Missing	2	1.5
Total	133	100.0



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# What children do when they are not at ASC

Children's responses	n	%
Screen time	37	27.8
Playing	30	22.6
Being at home	26	19.5
Other	14	10.5
Extra- curricular activities	8	6.0
Doing homework	7	5.3
Nothing	5	3.8
Going to a relatives	3	2.3
Parent's work	1	.8
Missing	2	1.6
Total	133	100.0



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# Activities children only do at ASC

Children's responses	n	%
Nothing	27	20.3
Craft	26	19.5
Play games	22	16.5
Other	22	16.5
Toys	14	10.5
Computers	13	9.8
Play sports	5	3.8
Play with friends	3	2.3
Missing	1	.8
Total	133	100.0



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# New friends

- 75% of children had made new friends at afterschool care



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# Free play

- Children can engage in free play every day
- Services offer a range of toys, outside equipment and other resources for play that may not be available to children in their homes
- Children can engage in longer periods of play than is offered at school during lunch breaks and they have variety of peers to play with who may or may not be the same age



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# Games

- Games were also frequently nominated by children as the best thing
- Services can offer a large range of board games that children may not have at home. They can also play these games with a variety of peers and educators rather than just parents or siblings.
- Services play a lot of physical group games such as Dodge Ball, Murder Wink and Simon Says



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# Friends

- ASC allows children to socialise with children of all different ages. Most schools assign different play areas for the different year levels
- School age care also allows children to socialise with children outside of school



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# Conclusion

- The hours after school are an important context for childhood.
- Rather than a service for parents that provides care for children in a safe environment, school age care should be viewed as a developmental opportunity where play is promoted and protected and children can socialise with friends and experience new activities.



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# Conclusion

- School age care provides children with time, resources and space necessary for children to engage in play and gain the benefits associated with play. As opportunities for play diminishes school age care can safeguard play for children in an environment that is supportive and safe.



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SAC enables contexts for friendships to develop. This is important as making friends is produced by context, rather than relying only on children's individual skills and personality (Jackson, 2009; Peters, 2003).



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# Children's friendships

Friendships give children the opportunity to practice and enhance their social, emotional, communication and language skills through their engagement in conversations, cooperative and pretend play, conflict, and the sharing of feelings and experiences (Dunn, Cutting & Fisher, 2002; Newcomb & Bagwell, 1996).



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# Time children play

Reasons for this decline in children's play:

- more time spent on screen entertainment
- competing extra-curricular activities
- parental fears about children's safety
- parents' lack of awareness about the benefits of unstructured activity and play and
- shortage of quality play spaces near children's homes

(Singer, Singer, D'Agostino & DeLong, 2008; Witherspoon & Manning, 2012)





# Play

SAC protects and promotes children's play

SAC affords children time, space, resources and peers to play.



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# Play

- Play fosters children's social, emotional, cognitive, physical development (Ginsburg, 2007; Singer et al, 2008; Vygotsky, 1976)
- Play affords children opportunities to learn about themselves, the world around them, life skills, creativity and imagination (Witherspoon & Manning, 2012).



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Kathryn Hopps, Charles Sturt University

# TRANSITION TO SCHOOL AGE CARE



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