



The Creative Lives of SA Children and Young People

Under Article 31 of the UNCRC, children have a right to enjoy rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to their age, and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

This means that having an opportunity to participate fully in a culturally and artistically rich life is something parents and carers, as well as governments and the community, have a responsibility to promote and provide to all children and young people.

Infrastructure and activities that encourage appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activities enable children and young people to develop creative skills and learn how to express themselves in different ways.

In 2024, I ran a series of school consultations on the topic of arts and creativity to find out what creativity looks like for children and young people in their daily lives, and to hear their ideas for making their communities more creative.

Through these consultations, I heard from 129 children and young people, across a range of socio-economic backgrounds and regions.

They told me that creativity was important to them and a big part of their everyday lives. In fact, you could say most SA children and young people see themselves as being inherently creative.

Exposing children and young people to art and creativity from an early age means supporting their capacity to appreciate the world around them and to develop a strong sense of individual creativity, imagination, and critical thinking skills.

Learning to express themselves creatively through the arts, as well as through participation in cultural activities, sport, and other recreational pursuits, fosters numerous aspects of a child's development, including their sensory perceptions, their language and communication skills, and their hand-eye coordination.

Singing, dancing, dressing-up, and other forms of imaginative play provide opportunities for children to explore their abilities and to develop their basic language and social interaction skills.

Research shows comprehensively that exposure to culture and arts education means children perform better in school and in life more broadly, and that they are generally happier, more confident and more connected to others.¹

Through creativity children learn to integrate feelings with tasks. When we ask a child to paint, draw or tell a story about how they're feeling, they learn how to express their feelings safely and creatively. This in turn allows them to integrate knowledge and skill relating to creative expression into social settings, helping them to learn how to regulate their behaviour appropriately.

Through creative play, children also learn problem-solving skills and gain confidence to explore the world around them, thereby enhancing their intellectual and cognitive development. The importance of providing children and young people with opportunities to develop creative skills and express themselves creatively cannot be understated.

Children and young people have many ideas for ways in which their lives at home, at school, outside, and in the broader community can be made more creative. They also have a keen understanding of the importance of expressing themselves creatively and would like to see more safe places and spaces for creative expression be made available in their daily lives.²



I like being creative because if we were in a world with all the same things the world will feel very dull and boring.

What creative things do children and young people engage in?

While this was different for each child or young person, every student who participated shared something they did that they considered to be creative. The list of what they do is long and includes a wide range of interests, hobbies, and activities.

Some of the ways children and young people described how they engage creatively included through music, craft, fashion, sketching, stories, programming, cooking, nature, video games, workouts, painting, sport, gardening, cubby houses, dance, hair and make-up, knitting, 3D modeling, playing instruments, metal work, wood tech, handball, Lego, comics, jewelry making, interior design, bike riding, baking, singing, songwriting, clay work and coding.

This extensive list highlights the depth and breadth of children and young people's understanding in relation to what it means to be creative. Creativity is part of their world and something they express throughout their daily lives. It can't necessarily be separated out from the things they love and enjoy. They view being creative as part of who they are.

Where are children and young people creative?

There were three key places students spoke about being when they are creative; at home, at school and outside.

Home came up most often and was associated with free time, family time and alone time spent in their bedroom. School came up nearly as often as home, with some children and young people linking this to a particular class such as art or PE. Children also mentioned outside as an important place where they are being creative. This was related to being in nature, or doing something they enjoy, like going to the skate-park or playing sport.

Who are children and young people creative with?

In many ways the responses children and young people made to this question came down to whether they see themselves as being more introverted or extroverted. Many students were clear and adamant that they like being creative by themselves. Others said they love being creative with other people, including with their closest friends, siblings, or family members. It was clear the 'who' of creativity was a personal choice, and it revealed more about a child or young person's individual preference for either working alone or collaboratively. This provides a good reminder for adults to ask children and young people how they would like to work and to take different approaches when engaging with individual students who may prefer to opt for quiet individual space rather than be involved in a group-based activity.

Creativity is almost anything since it is finding a passion that you like and can show your love. I love Netball.



When are children and young people creative?

While school came up as a place *where* students are creative, when asked *when* they are creative, the most common answer children and young people gave was 'on weekends' and 'after school'. This could be due to the strong connection children and young people have between creativity and their recreational interests and hobbies.

Children and young people also shared that feelings spark creativity. For example, students said they were more creative when they were feeling calm, inspired, bored or upset. One student even acknowledged that feeling intense emotions sparked their creativity. The ability for students to recognise that their emotions can influence when and whether they feel creative or not, highlights the depth of creativity that exists within each child and young person.

A handful of students shared that they were being creative 'everyday', 'always', or 'all the time'. Again, this highlights the importance creativity has in children's lives, particularly when it is framed as being something bigger than just 'arts'. Children and young people view creativity as being an inherent part of their lives, perhaps far more than adults realise.

Why do children and young people like being creative?

The resounding answer to why children and young people like being creative is because 'it's fun!' If having fun is part of childhood, then creativity is too. Some students added that 'it makes me happy', 'makes me feel like myself' and 'means I can do things I'm good at'.

Children and young people said they also like being creative because it provides them with an opportunity to express their feelings, relax, regulate and/or reduce their level of boredom. It was clear that many students recognise how being creative helps them to manage their emotions.

The final area many secondary students shared as being a reason for why they like being creative was because creativity helps them understand the world around them and to see new perspectives. This includes providing them with an opportunity to try out new things, 'test new stuff', and inspire others. Some young people even recognised that creativity opens future opportunities and 'makes you think better'.

For children and young people, an artist is...

The answers students gave to this question were thoughtful and considered. Children and young people expressed their admiration for artists. Those from socio-economically advantaged schools were more likely to see themselves as being or becoming an artist, or to have a wide perspective about art and creativity that they could confidently express. Some responses included an artist is 'ME!', 'anyone who creates something', and 'an artist is a person who is brave enough to be themselves'.

Primary school students from lower SES schools (Category 2) tended to be more specific around the things they traditionally see as art. Some responses included an artist being 'someone who either draws or makes music', someone 'who draws beautiful paintings', with these descriptions sitting alongside quite specific examples such as an artist is 'Leonardo da Vinci [Vinci], Bob Ross, The Weekends, Pacaso [Picasso], Einstine [Einstein], Michael Jackson, Bruce Lee, Kanye West, Jackie Chan'.

Secondary school students also had some interesting responses that highlighted their depth and appreciation of art. These included seeing an artist as being 'anybody who creates with intention', 'a human being who is very imaginative and creative', and 'someone who expresses their thoughts, emotions and imaginations through their craft'.

What helps children and young people be creative?

The most common response to 'what helps you be creative?' was a safe space. For many students a safe space is one that is quiet, calm and includes music or colour; in fact, music came up a lot! For some a safe space where they can be creative is somewhere you can be alone, such as in your bedroom. For others a safe space has the support, energy and encouragement of friends, family, or other trusted adults, including teachers.

Another important aspect of a safe space is the opportunity it provides children and young people for freedom to explore and create without fear of judgement or criticism. When children and young people have a sense of freedom or permission to use their imagination, then being in a safe space helps them to focus and to find the inspiration they need to be creative through art and play, and through other forms of creative expression.

For high school students, having time was considered something that helps them to be creative. For many young people their time is being pulled and stretched across school and homework, part-time jobs, family time and a busy social life that includes sporting commitments. At this time in young people's lives, finding time to dedicate to dreaming, exploring and being creative, can be quite challenging.

What doesn't help children and young people be creative?

A lack of freedom and being forced to do something they don't want to do, were seen as the key things that are least helpful to supporting children and young people to be creative. This sense of 'being forced' may be coming from a rigid or old-fashioned understanding of creativity as something that involves simply being told to sit and do art or draw at school. It could also stem from a greater desire from children and young people to be heard at school, and to have opportunities to shape the way they engage with their learning in more creative ways.

Other common themes relating to what doesn't help children and young people be creative included being distracted, either by the behaviour of other students, or by noise and environmental distractions, such as being in a space that is too loud or chaotic. Some students shared that not being able to see friends is a barrier to their creativity, particularly not having opportunities to play with friends outside of school.

Mindset was another noted barrier. This involved the criticism, judgement and negative thinking of others, predominantly adults who are in the spaces in which they are trying to be creative. Students said that these things all impact on how confident a child or young person feels, and therefore their desire and motivation to be creative and to explore new forms of self-expression.



Time:
When time is provided, I can create unique art; however, when time is not provided it's difficult to create art!

What would make children and young people feel more creative in their communities?

Children and young people had lots of ideas for how to make their homes, schools, communities and public spaces more creative:

At home...

Parents and carers could provide more creative materials at home, including colouring-in books, pencils, paintbrushes, posters, Lego and building blocks – ie more art resources generally. More dedicated spaces in which to do art would also help, such as having your own bubble tea area, big Cheeto puffs, hidden rooms with gaming set-up, personal soccer or basketball courts, cooking tutors, comfier seats and a personal gym or sauna.

At school...

Attending a mindfulness group each week, learning anime, establishing an arcade or gaming area, having more free time or free periods (for high school students), better libraries, more colour, music or specialist lessons, more sports competitions, art clubs, making school buildings more attractive and improving their design overall, and providing cleaner toilets is what children and young people said would help them to be more creative at school.

In the community...

Having more playgrounds, trampolines, music, art stores, a Roblox shop, gaming set-ups, free food, trains, craft activities, rooms (like a dog room, cat room, music room, anime room and stress room), and a floor with fish under it like an aquarium were ideas for fostering creativity in the community.

Outdoors...

Live music, treehouses, more engaging free stuff and competitions, treasure hunts, animals, art tables, internet access, a lazy river (you can float in), an underground aquarium, bubbles, curvy slides, flying foxes and ziplines, ninja walls, obstacle courses, vivid colours, themes, bean bags, trampolines, waterslides and a roller-coaster were some of the ideas they had for supporting creative expression outside.

In sporting areas...

Balls that you can use, trampolines, a cafe with lollies and treats, outdoor movie theatre, ice skating, roller skating, patterned courts, a moving basketball hoop with screen to show cool moves, music, pretty lights (LEDs), more colour, making creative graffiti legal and skateparks were proposed for sporting areas.

At the library...

Some couches and low tables, audio books, art supplies, craft activities, manga, fashion design, a jewelry station, a cafe, cafe vibes, spaces and things that are instagramable, soft music, a chess club, study groups, art competitions, displays of school art, and a secret gaming area set-up behind book shelves would promote creativity in library settings.

On public transport...

Karaoke on the bus, eBooks on the back of seats, a sound system to queue songs, murals on the inside of the bus, VAR headsets and gaming chairs, a book and newspaper shelf, themes (like hello kitty or Christmas), toilets, beds and showers, and futuristic features with flashy colours would make children and young people feel more creative on public transport.

Primary school students said they would be more creative if...

- “ If I could ride my bike every day and write and draw more.”
- “ If I had more time to play with my friends.”
- “ We could have trees we could climb on at schools. Areas we could ride our bike we bring to school during recess and lunch. Library should be open at recess and lunch so children can play game inside or draw more.”
- “ I wasn't scared of mistakes in a group with my friends.”
- “ I would be more creative if... I was around my friends. Had a good breakfast, lunch and dinner.”
- “ We could explore more unique places.”
- “ If I could play video games all the time.”
- “ I would be more creative if I had more art supplies.”
- “ I could [have] more of a say in class.”

I had more
Freetime
more ~~staff~~
permission

I had Music



Listening to Music
and Playing games.



I could
go to the
beach alot
and just
sit and
think.

Things
wouldn't
change
so fast.

I had more access
to art supplies so I
can let my mind have
a break. More free
time and fitness.

Secondary school students said they would be more creative if...

- “ Had more patience. I had more of an open mind. I had music to help me focus.”
- “ I felt more comfortable at school. I could listen to music at school.”
- “ I had different clubs to join, different inspiration.”
- “ Another would be able to buy the materials for any pieces I decide to create.”
- “ I spent more time learning art. Being out in nature. Being able to listen to music in class.”
- “ Read more books. Watch less instagram and social media. Use less phone.”
- “ I had the time. School takes away so much of my time that I could be using to do what I love like doing art or sewing/knitting. When I am home I am doing homework, I don't get any 'me' time.”

I had someone to be creative with.

I spent less time worrying about my grades.

I had more time to waste on thinking ideas and trialing them inside my head.



Endnotes

- [What you need to know about culture and arts education | UNESCO](#)
- [ANA-5-Education-InsightReport2-Factsheet5.pdf \(newapproach.org.au\)](#)

The Commissioner's Role

The South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People is an independent statutory position, established under the *Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016* ('the Act'). The Commissioner's role includes advocating for systemic change to policies, programs and practices that impact the rights, development and wellbeing of South Australia's children and young people.

This work is informed by the experiences and issues of children and young people themselves, with a specific focus on those who struggle to have their voices heard.

The Commissioner's strategic agenda was formulated with direct input from children and young people. In particular, children and young people asked the Commissioner to facilitate their involvement in decision making, and to create opportunities for them to experience authentic participation.

The Commissioner is working with a number of partners on this agenda, including ways in which children and young people can have greater input into the design and delivery of policies, programs and practices that affect their lives.

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