Youth Arts Research

A list of research on children, young people and the arts

This is a summary of key research and data about Children and Young People in Australia. This summary focuses on research from 2012 and onwards.

YOUNG PEOPLE – THE CONTEXT

The resources below highlight key sources of data on young people in Australia, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Foundation for Young Australians (FYA)

FYA’s Unlimited Potential is a data and information source on young Australians. While not specific to the arts, this data source provides a contextual picture of young people in Australia and the challenges they face.

FYA also does research into specific topics of relevance to young Australians, such as the transition from school to work, and program evaluations. Their top 20 data sources relating to young people is a particularly useful guide on where to find both general data and data on specific topics, such as the health and welfare of young people.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) – NATSISS

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) is a longitudinal social survey which provides information across key areas of social interest for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The 2014-15 NATSISS reports findings for both children (aged 0 to 14) and adults (aged 15 and over) and is a useful source of data on both general social statistics and cultural engagement.

The ABS has also done a deep-dive analysis on the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth using 2008 NATSISS data.

Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies

Although no longer being updated, the ACYS has a number of useful resources on young Australians.
CREATIVE ENGAGEMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Data on creative engagement of young Australians is limited. The two main sources of information are the Australia Council and the ABS. The Australia Council is currently refreshing the Arts Participation Survey and updated findings will be available in 2017. The ABS will be re-running the Cultural Participation and Attendance survey in 2017-18.

Australia Council Arts Participation Research

The Arts Participation Survey 2013 looks at arts engagement across the entire Australian population. Age breakdowns allow for analysis of how young people (aged 15-24) are engaging with the arts (including creative engagement, attendance, reading and engagement online). It highlights the importance of childhood arts attendance on engagement as an adult, and explores Australian perceptions about the benefits of the arts for children.

ABS – Surveys of children’s participation in culture

The ABS surveys of Children’s Participation and Attendance in Culture and Leisure Activities are a robust national source of data on children aged 5-14. Data is presented on a range of cultural and recreational activities, including participation in organised cultural activities and recreational arts activities. It also covers other leisure activities, such as sport and use of the internet as a comparison point.

Australia Council Children and Reading research

While the Children and Reading literature review doesn’t focus on creative engagement, it is a useful summary of data on the leisure reading of children aged 5 to 14. It covers leisure reading habits and preferences.

This list of research was completed as part of the 2016 Youth Arts Summit. It is not a comprehensive list and we encourage participants to submit relevant research to k.dupreez@australiacouncil.gov.au.
BENEFITS OF THE ARTS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

The sources below are large systematic reviews of the research on the benefits of arts engagement for young people. Arts engagement in this context includes both passive involvement and creative engagement. While much of the research on the benefits focuses on arts engagement through education, some also includes extra-curricular activities.

Overall, the research suggests some evidence to support the benefits of the arts for children and young people. However, the research is mixed and it is difficult to make causal inferences from the data because of a lack of high quality studies.

Australia Council and University of Sydney - The Role of Arts Participation in Students' Academic and Non-Academic Outcomes

A joint study by the Australia Council for the Arts and the University of Sydney found that engagement in the arts benefits students in a variety of areas such as wellbeing, motivation, engagement and academic outcomes. The longitudinal study tracked children over two years and compared children who participated in dance, drama, music, and visual arts to those not participating in any arts.

Impact of the arts for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people

The Culture and Closing the Gap and Supporting healthy communities through arts programs factsheets summarise the impact of the arts for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and include references to useful research. While not specific to youth, there is a discussion of the impacts for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (International) – Art for Art’s Sake? The Impact of Arts Education

Art for Art’s Sake is a comprehensive review of evidence for the impact of arts education on subject-based skills, critical and creative thinking, and behavioural and social skills. The researchers suggest that the main impact of the arts is in arts specific skills such as arts practice, observation, exploration, persistence, expression, collaboration and reflection.
Durham University (International) - Impact of arts education on the cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes of school-aged children

This literature review explores the evidence of impact of arts education on cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes of children aged 3-16. Similar to Arts for Art’s Sake, the lack of quality research made it difficult to establish causal relationships between arts education and outcomes. However, the researchers highlight that there is promising research on creative engagement with music and theatre. They suggest that enjoyment of arts activities is one of the key mechanisms for the positive impacts of the arts in education.

National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) (International) – The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth

A longitudinal study exploring the academic and civic behaviour outcomes of teenagers and young adults who had engaged deeply with the arts in or out of school. The focus is on the role of arts in the lives of young people from low socio-economic backgrounds.

NEA (International) – Literature review of the benefits of arts participation in early childhood

The Arts in Early Childhood explores the links between arts participation and early childhood social-emotional development through a review of 15 years of research. It includes multiple artforms, although most of the evidence is focused on engagement with music.

INNOVATION

Arts are often seen as a way of developing creative thinking in young people, with the idea that this will lead to greater innovation later in life. Recent research from Michigan State University suggests that creative engagement in arts and crafts as a child is linked to greater levels of economic innovation later in adulthood.

Creative thinking skills and knowledge of innovative practice are also highlighted as key focus areas for The Australian Curriculum: The Arts. However, some research suggests that while the arts can develop critical and creative thinking in students, the skills required to do this need to be further developed in teachers – particularly generalist primary school teachers.