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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Using and Abusing the Arts with 'At-Risk' Youth

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Abstract
Arts programmes are frequently provided for youth who are deemed unfortunate or unruly. Globally, arts programmes for at-risk youth have been widely recognised as beneficial; however, there has been a lack of criticality on how arts experiences can have an adverse impact. Research into a UK-based programme—the Arts Award—is presented to highlight the different, and lower quality, offer for at-risk youth. Multi-sited ethnography captured the experiences of participants accessing the programme through five diverse youth settings. My research demonstrated that often the most disadvantaged young people receive the weakest arts programmes, that are deficit-oriented, mechanistic and instrumentalised. This article offers a unique perspective on the ways in which the arts can fail at-risk youth.

Keywords Youth · Arts · At-risk · Youth work · Alternative education · Inequality

Introduction

Arts programmes are frequently provided for youth who are deemed unfortunate or unruly. However, for those who are signposted to arts programmes as part of youth offending interventions or school exclusion programmes, the offer is questionable. These young people are frequently depicted as 'in trouble' or 'in need of intervention' (Kelly 2003), and for them arts education becomes a 'targeted' approach predominantly concerned with behaviour modification, rather than a universal offer of cultural and intellectual development (Hickey-Moody 2013; Thomson and Pennacchia 2015). This article explores the ways in which a particular arts programme—the Arts Award—has been differentially offered to young people, who are categorised as 'at-risk'. I offer a unique perspective on the ways in which the arts, whilst

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often thought of as a catalyst for learning, can fail at-risk youth. This research has implications for future practice with those deemed most 'in need'.

Claims made in previous research around the assumed benefits of arts programmes with young people under deficit labels such as 'at-risk' will be questioned. For example, several research reports, including *Doing Well and Going Good by Doing Art* (Catterall 2009) have reported that arts-involved young people with low socio-economic status have improved 'academic' and 'civic behaviour' outcomes compared to those who are not arts-involved. Projects that engaged young people in cultural opportunities were assumed to be in and of themselves a good thing, with increased participation benefitting both individuals and society. The taken for granted assumption that all arts activities are positive activities through which young people can 'better themselves' needs to be questioned (Denmead 2019). This ethnographic research, conducted in five sites of alternative education and youth provision in the UK, highlights a global issue where the misuse of valuable resources may work to unintentionally reinforce marginalisation and poverty.

This article draws on empirical research to highlight how young people identified as 'at-risk' were likely to receive poorer quality, deficit-oriented, mechanistic and instrumentalised arts experiences. Some arts programmes aimed at at-risk youth can be seen as an attempt to make young people fit social norms, by credentialing them, developing 'transferable skills' and monitoring and controlling behaviour. This research has demonstrated that often the most disadvantaged young people receive these kinds of programmes. Therefore, there is value in interrogating the assumptions that arts practitioners and researchers bring to work with at-risk youth.

Youth Arts Programmes

The benefits of youth arts programmes have been well documented to increase self-confidence and self-esteem (Bungay and Vella-Burrows 2013; Ennis and Tonkin 2018) and have enabled participants to overcome vulnerabilities through self-expression, regulate emotions and process trauma (Pope and Jones 2021). Youth arts programmes can support young people's identity development (Howard 2017), and nurture positive social connections (Fanian et al. 2015). As vehicles for engaging young people in positive activities, the arts afford personal, emotional and therapeutic journeys (Development Services Group 2016; Maree and Pienaar 2009), the arts also offer an end product, that a young person can take pride in (Batsleer 2011). Graffiti art, for example, is a popular artform within youth arts programmes, and previous research has demonstrated the power of legal street art to conceptualise alternative modes of citizenship practice (Baker 2015). In addition, music-making with at-risk youth can focus on aspects of subculture as sources of resilience and strength, teaching values such as healthy lifestyles, relationships and community engagement (Brooks et al. 2015).

Arts-based educational programmes are often targeted at 'at-risk' youth, and previous research has shown that these programmes have had life-changing impacts on participants. Engaging and empowering young people from all social backgrounds, the arts can offer long-lasting psychological, social and ultimately economic benefits

(de Roeper and Savelsberg 2009). Studies by Parker et al. (2018) have shown how arts programmes offer an alternative means of expression for young people's emotions and by Hense and McFerran (2017) have highlighted the promotion desistance through making improvements to attitudes and behaviour. The 'affective experience' which the arts can deliver, includes feelings of self-satisfaction and achievement, has been linked to altering offending behaviour and enhancing the criminal justice sector (Bilby et al. 2013; Davey 2021). Furthermore, arts activities have been employed to attract and retain young people, reducing offending behaviour and social exclusion by keeping them 'out of trouble' (Caulfield et al. 2019; Jermyn 2004). 'Soft outcomes', such as confidence and communication skills, are frequently reported (Stickley and Eades 2013) which can be seen as contributing towards hard outcomes such as employment (Gartner-Manzon & Giles 2016) and academic outcomes (Catterall 2012). Pedagogically, therefore, the arts offer a style that mirrors the behaviour, techniques and values evident in those professionals who work with 'at-risk' young people (Kuttner 2016).

Despite compendiums of evidence around the value of arts programmes for 'at-risk' youth (Deasy 2002; Fiske 1999; Hetland and Winner 2004), the quality of the programmes they receive is seldom questioned. For example, particular genres such as hip-hop, have replicated themes of deviance, which fail to develop the 'creative' self and instead enact a 'citizen to offender' discourse (Baker and Homan 2007). Re-enforcing a binary divide between the 'high-functioning' and 'remedial' young people, differing art forms can pathologise particular behaviours, which can result in the limitation of creative expression to issue-based work (de Roeper and Savelsberg 2009). Within these programmes, inferred narratives of 'soul-saving' and transformation of 'troubled youth' into 'creative youth' are problematic (Denmead 2019). However, whilst funders of youth arts programmes often look to provide 'structured' and 'positive activities' as stimulus for 'correct' behaviours, as a result, symbolic creativity and meaningful engagement is limited (Rimmer 2012). Furthermore, positive youth development approaches have led to unquantifiable claims about social and economic impacts for 'disadvantaged' youth (Montgomery 2017) to whom deficit labelling, such as 'at-risk' is frequently attached.

At-Risk Youth

Within the field of Youth Studies, the focus of academic research on youth 'at-risk' is not a new endeavour. The definition of at-risk is based on the analysis and intersection of different factors in a young person's life: problems in social relations (family, friend or school), exposure to risky behaviours (parental use of alcohol or drugs), behavioural problems or familial offending (Dukes and Stein 2001). At-risk also covers young people's leisure time practices which may be seen as 'risky', such as alcohol or substance use (Cullen 2011). At-risk youth are often equated with 'urban' youth, who face challenges, such as being born into families of lower socioeconomic status, lower educational outcomes, high drop-out rates, inadequate health care, gang violence and exposure to the premature death of family members and friends (Stuart and Tuason 2008). However, the concept of risk has proliferated

across a range of youth-related fields, in so much that it becomes a social, political and moral entity in itself (Turnbull and Spence 2011). Risk has become normalised language used by services for young people today (Turnbull 2016) whereby social conditions become individualised. In this way, young people are depicted as both 'risky' and 'at-risk' and to blame for social problems.

An important task of Youth Studies scholars is to seek to trouble and problematise processes of normalisation, which denote the exclusion of particular groups of young people, whilst at the same time acknowledging the increasing governmentalization of the ways of knowing young people (Kelly et al. 2018). Instrumental shifts in youth policy have resulted in targeted interventions and accredited programmes for 'labelled youth'. This has led to increased practices of criminalisation which govern youth, and aim to 'responsibilise' young people (Kelly 2011). Policy discourses construct youth 'at-risk' as deficit model, as a form of social control and governmentality through a simplistic focus on the personal attributes of young people (Riele 2006). These pervasive and problematic discourses present particular ways of being that are deemed worthy of intervention should they deviate from expected norms of behaviour or transition to adulthood (Kelly 2006). Therefore, programmes aimed at 'positive youth development' have drawn on the arts as a mean of social control, through governance modality, whilst targeting 'at-risk' youth as handmaiden to a strategic neoliberal cosmopolitanism (Crath 2018). Using one particular youth arts programme, the Arts Award, as an example from the UK, I explore this tension, which can be seen to reinforce stereotypes and prejudice. As this article will argue, an ethical dilemma is presented, for those working with the arts and young people with concerns for social justice.

The Arts Award

This article is drawn from my doctoral study which explored the Arts Award. Launched in 2005, Arts Award is a major initiative set up by Arts Council England and is now accredited by Trinity College London. My research sought to explore what shapes disengaged young people's educational experiences of the Arts Award and to further investigate the opportunities and constraints that the award offered. The award has been previously described as "a government-initiated programme, … charged with developing an arts learning framework for all young people, and especially those less likely to engage in the arts or benefit from existing cultural provision" (Fleming 2008). Now in its fifteenth year, Arts Award holds a vocational qualification that had been achieved by 580,905[1] awards young people to date. The award makes both publicly funded arts and culture, and emerging and technological practices aligned with the Creative and Cultural Industries, accessible to all young people.

Due to its 'easy' application to informal learning environments, Arts Award is growing in popularity within youth settings and the alternative education sector. Not

[1] Figure as of 1 June 2021. Source: www.artsaward.org.uk

only a school-based programme, young people can work towards the award at an arts and cultural organisation, a youth club or anywhere that registers itself as 'centre'. Often the programme is run by youth workers or informal educators who are also arts practitioners themselves and this was the case for this study. There are five levels: Discover, Explore, Bronze, Silver and Gold, with the latter three levels, explored in this research, being open to ages 11 to 25. For this award, young people can work with artists and arts professionals to create new and original work in a variety of artforms from visual arts to music production, including a variety of dance styles and drama practices. Young people are required to create a portfolio by collecting 'evidence' of their journey and skills development. Funders such as Arts Council England and Youth Music look favourably upon projects with an Arts Award component; however, the qualification has often been programmed as an 'add-on' rather than as a programme for the intensive creative development of young people.

Methodological Approach

Multi-sited ethnography captured the experiences of the young people accessing the programme across five diverse sites, which included youth work settings, informal education and alternative education programmes. This long-term engagement and multi-sited approach with the 46 participants in the study built rapport and engagement with the young people. A decision was taken to avoid sites of formal education and schools, who often run the award for gifted and talented students and instead to focus on non-formal programmes which worked with marginalised youth. My particular cohort were categorised as 'at-risk' by the organisations and funders running the programmes for a variety of reasons: they had been excluded from the school, they were deemed to have behaviour or disability issues or they had 'risk factors' within their social or family life, such as living in care, having a parent in prison or being a young carer. All of the sites were situated within urban areas of the East Midlands of England, with three projects providing alternative education and two youth programmes offering informal arts education. In some sites, attendance was compulsory, whereas others were open access.

The particular focus of my study was on youth settings and alternative education provision, stemmed from my background as a youth arts worker working with the award in these contexts. I brought particular dispositions to the research including an understanding of young people's lives, an emphasis on the importance of building relationships and trust with young people as well as the use of informal conversation to facilitate learning. Previous research has argued that youth workers are in a strong position to conduct research due to skills of engaging in conversation, the co-creation of knowledge and enabling young people's voices to be heard (Gormally and Coburn 2014). As a critical cultural ethnographer, I was able to acknowledge multiple ways of knowing and interpreting data, supporting the assertion that we always look in relation to ourselves (Rose 2016). Experiencing different settings of Arts Award programmes was an important element of the research,as this provided data for the comparison of these situations and meant spending time with young

people in the informal environments, where they took part in their arts practice such as youth centres, local arts venues and nightclubs.

The methods for this study, as well as participation in arts activities, consisted of participant observation, one-to-one interviews and video analysis which captured a wide range of data, including lyrics, visual artwork and films. Utilising visual and digital artefacts as research data was in line with how young people experience the arts today and encompassed an ethical strategy for voice (Thomson 2009). This enabled an investigation into what young people chose to take up and how they benefitted from the programme in different settings.

Data shared in this paper is drawn from interviews with youth workers, young people and my ethnographic fieldnotes. Film clips from sessions and arts activity recordings taken for young people's portfolios were also analysed. The transcripts for two of those clips appear in this article.

The analysis focused on identifying the opportunities and constraints for young people undertaking the Arts Award in youth settings. Due to the length of time spent in the field and with participants, a grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2014) was utilised to collect data. Themes were identified from the observation of programmes and interviews whereby activities were designed in order to generate further data, hypothesis building and theory testing as the study progressed. The analytical approach of this study was to start with the small, in-depth personal experiences of a small group of participants and then to work outwards to consider the wider impacts and implications for at-risk youth through often unintended exclusionary outcomes of the programme.

Using and Abusing the Arts with 'At-Risk' Youth

My research demonstrated that often these programmes were weaker in artistic content and opportunities for personal development, where young people identified as 'at-risk' were likely to receive poorer quality, deficit-oriented, mechanistic and instrumentalised arts experiences. Whilst, Arts Award was a good mechanism for stimulating individual creativities and engaging young people in working together, often in collectives or collaborations, with 'at-risk' youth in particular, the award was used to monitor and control. For example, the Arts Award offered valuable opportunities for marginalised young people to engage with the arts; this depended upon how the adviser viewed the individual young person's behaviour and ability. Resultingly, for many young people in this study, their creativity was focused around producing 'issue-based' work, so that the participants could face up to risk taking behaviours from their past.

Poorer Quality Programmes

With the Arts Award, the opportunity to take up new and different art forms enabled participants to develop new arts skills, work with artists and utilise industry standard equipment. These included lyric writing, music production, film making and digital

art/design work, whereby young people to drew on their own life stories and previous experiences. However, access to professional quality arts practice was restricted for some, which in turn restricted what they could do. More challenging and contemporary arts experiences are not introduced or were devoid of critical engagement or cultural scaffolding.

For example, assumptions were made about what the young people were culturally invested in and their artistic abilities. When interviewing young people on the different programmes, I was able to glean why they had taken up the award and what artforms were on offer. The excerpt below is from Tommy,[2] a 15-year-old White British male, who had been excluded from school and had attended various sites of alternative education provision over the last 18 months. Our conversation demonstrates a limited range of artforms on offer and the lack of involvement of this young person in being able to shape the programme:

Frances: Can you tell me what you done on this programme?
Tommy: Art … and that's it
Frances: You do Art …
Tommy: Yeah
Frances: So, can you tell me about what kind of art you do?
Tommy: I forgot … I forgot. Graffiti. Graffiti and stuff.
Frances: Graffiti?
Tommy: Yeah
Frances: How did you get interested in Graffiti?
Tommy: [name of Arts Award adviser]. He told us to do it.
Frances: So, like before you came to this project, did you get to make any choices on what you liked doing?
Tommy: No, none.
(Excerpt from interview with young person)

As well as taking part in arts activities, with the Arts Award, young people are required to explore the arts as an 'audience member'. This involves observing the art forms of others and visiting a live event, whether this be an exhibition, gig, show and festival. The young people are required to reflect on their experience, what they enjoyed, the creative elements of the event, the artform involved and then share their views with others. This was frequently done through discussions on the experience, and often has an impact on young people in terms of what they aspire to achieve artistically. Arts experiences can be inspiring, challenging but also at times unfamiliar. For example, going to experience an arts event first-hand was reported by the young people as giving them ideas on how to develop their own practice and the new directions to take their work. However, there were examples where young people felt alienated by these arts experiences, demonstrated through the transcript below, taken from film footage of an alternative education programme visiting a street art exhibition. The three people in this film include Tommy (from the previous

[2] The names of the young people have been changed to ensure anonymity.

example), Jamie—a 14-year-old White British male on a temporary exclusion from school and Craig—their Arts Award adviser.

> Craig: Tell me what kinds of things have you seen?
> Tommy: Stuff on walls, like people's names and people's tags.
> Jamie: But Craven Street (local graffiti site) is better.
> Craig: Did you know that many of the artists in this exhibition also paint at Craven Street?
> Tommy: Didn't look like it! That fox (shakes his head in disapproval).
> Craig: Do you reckon you could make something like that?
> Tommy: Yeah, just cut out a piece of wood and spray it.
> Craig: Was there anything that you learnt from going to the art gallery?
> Jamie: Don't go again … it's boring.
> (Film footage transcript)

This critical incident demonstrates a disconnection with the experience, feelings of discomfort with the environment of the gallery space and assumptions that the young people would understand graffiti art. This experience was echoed elsewhere as frequently young people demonstrated indifference to the poor quality artforms on offer by the various programmes. This stereotyping of 'at-risk' youth as non-academic and non-artistic frequently led to the design of remedial programmes, in which the arts are considered as secondary outcomes. These narratives emphasise a key misrecognition of many young people on the programmes as 'good with their hands not their heads' (Thomson and Pennacchia 2015), whereby potential for creative expression and identity development are overshadowed by the opportunities for monitoring and controlling behaviour of unruly youth.

Deficit orientation

With Arts Award, young people are encouraged to experiment with different artforms, which in turn changed their conception of themselves. Young people experienced a reduced fear of failure and began to realise that achievement was a personal factor, not judged against that of others. In the excerpt below, the adviser, who works on an evening youth programme for young people 'facing challenging circumstances'[3] describes this change. They indicate the importance of giving praise, making young people feel good about themselves and opening up future possibilities:

> These young people are being referred to us to help them improve their life situations. By using an informal education route, you're helping them to achieve, even if it is really small steps. You are helping them to realise that they're not all that bad, despite what they are told, despite their own kind of opinions …

[3] This term was provided by the funders of this program and refers to young people with special educational needs and disability (SEN/D); not in education, employment or training (NEET); refugees, asylum seekers and migrants; homelessness; looked after children; youth justice and working in detention settings; mental health, and other health-related settings (such as hospitals); pupil referral units; socio-economic deprivation.

> We notice that kind of spark ignite in them. And actually, when they are getting the positive opportunities and the praise, from us and our team here, that makes them feel good. And they actually think 'ok' and that's opened up the door for us to actually be able to work with them and mentor them with other areas of their lives as well.
> (Excerpt from interview with adviser)

However, this excerpt also reveals a deficit positioning of youth. In describing the participant as "educationally damaged", the adviser highlights attitudes towards them and assumptions made about them, which manifested frequently manifested in low expectations, misrecognition of behaviour and viewing young people as projects to be worked on. With the Arts Award programmes, those who displayed less-compliant, less school-like behaviours received the most didactic instruction, which most reflected the offer for 'at-risk' youth. Several Arts Award advisers referred to young people's work being "really low level", needing to "hold their hands" and their "laziness". Many advisers described their approach in working with Arts Award as "educating by stealth" for young people who "couldn't handle anything difficult". The below interview excerpt, from a youth worker running a programme with youth at-risk of criminality, highlights a common misconception about underachievement and lack of aspirations of those attending the programme:

> Obviously, we work with young people who are not attending school, have reported behavioural issues, lack of co-operation, lack of engagement, people from youth offending services, and we found that with persistence, and this is where the youth work element comes in, you've got to be a reasonably good youth worker to work with young people like that and give them an alternative, informal education. That's the harder end of working with young people, who've really got no initial aspirations, or presenting aspirations anyway.
> (Excerpt from interview with adviser)

Not only did these assumptions about young people through deficit orientation restrict the art forms offered, but also constrained the ways of working with the arts. For example, one programme which worked with digital media, film and music production offered participants in their open access evening programme the opportunity to create a film based on their experience of living in their local community. In comparison, for the programme that worked with youth at-risk of criminality, they were instructed to work together to make a documentary about knife crime. Instead, time spent engaging with and experiencing artforms was substituted by a primary focus on behaviour management and mentoring.

Mechanistic Learning

A beneficial way of working with the arts in youth settings was making work together. There were many examples of collaboration between young people and arts professionals and more informal learning experiences such as 'jamming' together, which did not have a specific outcome. Often these spontaneous and sustained moments of experimentation gave young people more time to learn their artforms

as part of collaborative creativity. Young people were also engaged in discussions about what worked, what did not and where to go next. These kinds of planned discussion activities were empowering for the young people. However, only particular young people were offered these opportunities, which depended upon how the adviser viewed the young person's behaviour and ability. The experience for many participants in the study was defined by an instructional style that has heavy on direction, controlling behaviour and compliance.

The young people on Arts Award programmes designed for 'at-risk' youth were more likely to receive low-level work with mono-direction, be assigned a passive learning role with little scope for interaction, whilst learning in a more tightly controlled environment where behaviour is monitored (Howard 2020). Accompanying this was a general low-level of work, low cognitive demanding tasks dressed up as a less 'academic' option and frequent reliance on worksheets. For example, with the compulsory alternative education programme, the young people had agreed to undertake the qualification, without really being sure what it was or what they would be required to do. They had been told that it was a practical qualification and it was pitched to them as an 'easy' option, something 'hands-on', with 'no-writing'. Despite this cohort's negative schooling experiences, across all sites, young people were tasked with completing worksheets as gathering 'evidence' for the award. Benji, a 16-year Black British old male participant describes this low-level task-based approach:

> Frances: So, what did you do to make your Arts Award portfolio?
> Benji: (leaves through the pages of his portfolio during the interview) Yeah this is what I was doing here, like cutting up bars and that. (points to the worksheets) Planning, planning, planning …
> Frances: Lots of planning. How do you feel about all the worksheets?
> Benji: Writing, and more writing
> Frances: (laughs) how have you found all the writing?
> Benji: Long
> Frances: And worksheets?
> Benji: Long … more there as well
> Frances: Do you think they've been helpful for anything?
> Benji: A task and a pain.
> (Excerpt from interview with young person)

Often, ways of working with the arts for 'at-risk' youth offered low-level engagement, where measures of success were lower. For some, this resulted in highly 'spoon-fed' and directive experiences, as the below dialogue demonstrates. Here Tyler is reflecting back on his experience whilst looking through his Arts Award portfolio. Nineteen year old Tyler, who is a White British male, has been a participant in an evening referral program for over two years due to his status as a looked-after young person. He describes a step-by-step approach, with little scope for interaction, where he is simply following orders:

> Frances: Let me have a look (flicks through folder). So here, in your leadership section…

Tyler: I just remember planning where I had to share my skill, and do Photoshop with people. That's all I remember doing planning that one.
Frances: So, that looks like a set of reminders to yourself. Like a set of rules. And is this the worksheet that you had here to help you?
Tyler: Yeah, I had to write it in steps to make sure that I didn't forget anything and that I was doing the steps properly.
Frances: And look, you've got some step-by-step instructions here on how to create a CD cover on paint.net. So, what did you do before you did this leading?
Tyler: I sat down with (the Adviser) at first to see if it would be possible to do it and then she gave me a sheet, that sheet, to fill out and I thought of what I was going to do.
Frances: So, you've got a series of workshops and times, feedback sheets. Did you design these?
Tyler: No, I just had to give them to the kids …
(Extract from interview with young person)

Some arts activities had been broken down like this into simple step-by-step processes or 'dumbed down' for these groups of participants. Analysis of short video clips taken of young people leading arts activities, as part of their 'evidence' for their portfolios, highlighted young people engaging in simple activities of demonstration and repetition, frequently prompted or made to start again. The following transcript, from a film clip titled "Now Everybody Shake the Cans", forefronts the directions and reprimands from the adviser, and reflects a tension between controlling young people and enabling their autonomy. A young person JB, a Black Somali male, is setting up and leading a spray-painting activity for a second young person, Ciara, a White British female. Both attend an alternative education program. JB has been permanently excluded from school, three months before he was due to take his exams and Ciara is a young person who has recently moved into the area to take up a place in a children's home. The adviser, Lexi, supports the session:

Lexi: Be very careful guys of the video camera … it's filming. Don't move it and don't knock it, alright?
(JB putting large dust sheets on trestle tables, whilst Ciara dons a paper suit and face mask)
Lexi: Right, you've got three pots there and some cans there. You basically need to remind yourself how to put on the nozzle and what direction to point the can. Now shake up the cans…
(The noise of spray cans being shaken echoes around an empty hall)
JB: First you got to do one small circle.
Lexi: Wait, what have you got to do first? What have you got to wait for?
JB: Wait for that colour to be dry.
Lexi: JB, is there anything you can suggest to Ciara who has got a problem with one of the caps?
JB: (turns to Ciara) just bang it on the table.
Lexi: So, what you doing next?
JB: Adding another colour on top of it…

(Film footage transcript)

Through analysis of this particular film clip, the low-level of expectation of this particular individual became apparent through the provision of simplified step-by-step art making activities. A limited mono-directional instructional style of the adviser was demonstrated, which in turn assigned the young person a passive role. Through these kinds of pedagogical practices, young people are more likely to be corrected, receive simple explanation, and then be instructed to repeat activities in order to encourage dispositions of obedience. Young people enjoy less artistic freedom and less creative exploration with more time spent on writing, worksheets and copying.

Instrumentalised Arts Experiences

Arts Award provided a framework through which alternative education providers were able to 'report back' to schools on young people progress. Young people were frequently defined in a deficit view by these programmes, and this resulted in demonstration of reluctant behaviour by some young people towards learning and their capacity to learn. Several of the programmes sought to engage the young people in creative tasks not only as a diversion, but also as a way of understanding their own accountability and responsibility—through issue-based work as a way of exploring their previous 'risk-taking practice'. The logic of practice of controlling behaviour manifested in engaging with the arts as a way of alleviating previous offending or anti-social behaviour, where these practices offered the opportunity to 'get things off their chest' (Baker and Homan 2007; Parker et al. 2018). Narratives of performativity manifested in record-keeping, paper trails, a culture of 'ticking-boxes' and pedagogical practices used to construct 'orderly youth' (Thomson and Pennacchia 2015). Within youth, setting policies of non-toleration of misbehaviour were accompanied by rewards or 'carrot and stick' regimes. With Arts Award, in particular, the 'stick' was seen as the evidencing progress for the qualification, as opposed to the 'carrot' of making creative work, which young people saw as more enjoyable. A tension manifested within the Arts Award, as the need to demonstrate 'progress', often overshadowed a focus on creativity and personal engagement:

> The session starts with reviewing young people's progress and behaviour points towards their trip to Ableton Manor (local theme park). A graphic is shown on the school-like whiteboard where microphones are shown as building up to an achievable target. Behaviour deteriorated yesterday and the group are chatting it through to make a fresh start for today, to draw a line under it. (Fieldnotes)

Although within youth settings Arts Award gave the opportunity for young people to undertake arts-based learning and development, the structuring of sessions was an issue for those who just wanted to come and 'hang out', sometime being turned away from provision as they were not undertaking the accreditation. For example, as the Arts Award is recognised on the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), and hence deemed a valuable qualification by schools, it is used as a

tool to provide a measurable outcome in return for the funding the school to accommodate its excluded students. Whilst this was an opportunity for some to focus on intensive creative work, for others, they simply wanted to 'hang out' at the youth centres:

> Well, each individual is different. I can see the offer, and some people do. So, you're not doing well in school and here's a way of achieving. You're getting an equivalent to put on your CV to help you get into college. I can see the value for a lot of them... Sometimes it's a struggle though, as I don't think they realise coming here … take those four boys, they didn't come here to do an Arts Award. It was kind of like, do you want to do an Arts Award, do you want to come on Thursday night, well that's the session that we're running. So, they really weren't in the mind frame of saying 'I want to do an Arts Award'. They were kind of steered into it, so what can you expect?
> (Excerpt of interview with adviser)

The frequent 'coercion' of young people to undertake the award, as a 'measurable outcomes' for the youth settings, drew attention to the outcomes of young people undertaking positive activities, increasingly needing to be demonstrated as part of targeted work. Adversely, these agendas to demonstrate instrumental benefits of the arts could be viewed as much less effective than those that simply seek to be creative and experiential. In offering an instrumentalised version of the programme, principally, in order to levy future funding, youth settings were party to the distortion of an artistic programme.

Concluding Remarks

This article has given examples of how a particular youth arts programme—the Arts Award—can be differentially and detrimentally offered to at-risk youth. The diverse offer of programmes within youth settings, in combination with practitioner constructions of the individual young people, heavily shaped their experience. Many young people who access arts programmes under deficit groupings (either voluntarily or compulsory) often experience unequal opportunities due to attitudes towards them and assumptions made about them. This frequently manifested in low expectations, misrecognition of behaviour and viewing young people as projects to be worked on. My research has highlighted that assumptions made about young people's artistic and academic abilities due to their social background, reduced the range and quality of the arts offer. Despite the potential for youth arts programs to be inspiring, engaging and afford self-expression and creativity, in some cases, they are being used as tools of monitoring and control. My findings align with previous research which has questioned whether the desire to 'do good' actually obscures the most innovative and engaging approach to arts programmes, focusing instead on instrumental benefits (O'Brien and Donelan 2009). As with my study, the arts are often considered as secondary outcomes of these programmes, with a large amount of participant's time spent on behaviour management and mentoring. Inadvertently,

arts programmes targeted at 'at-risk' youth, can be seen to re-iterate a negative view of these young people with potentially stigmatising labelling.

This research has highlighted a social justice issue, within a youth arts programme, whereby the most disadvantaged young people receive the lowest quality arts education. Paradoxically, Arts Award is marketed as an open and flexible award where young people are free to make choices and follow up their own interests. However, in reality, this often controlled and confined to the particular offer of the setting and the support of the adviser. The creative abilities of at-risk youth are often misrecognised due to behaviour or assumptions about academic capabilities. Therefore, a key failure has been the lack of acknowledgement on how youth arts programs, which are practised differently in different settings, can exacerbate educational and social divides. What is offered to 'at-risk' groups can be seen to reinforce prejudice, and this represents an ethical dilemma for those working with young people and the arts. Therefore, we need to question assumptions about the arts as a social project and consider how to influence future policy, so that it ceases the instrumentalization of the arts by youth programmes that take a 'targeted' approach.

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Declarations

Ethics Approval Ethical approval was sought and gained from the University of Nottingham ethics committee for this research.

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