

# **The challenges of educational inclusion: arts education in and as alternative education in England**

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**Abstract** The arts are often assumed to be inclusive because they offer a wider range of media, platforms, processes, and genres than are usually found in other academic subjects. For this reason, the arts often feature in programmes intended to include students on the edges of schooling, or those who have already left formal education. This chapter reports on a national vocational arts education award in England which makes just such claims.

The chapter is based on an ethnographic study of sites where the award was taught. These sites range from mainstream high schools to alternative education provision. We used a critical incident approach to interrogate two alternative education projects. One project focused on street dance and another on graffiti. Graffiti art activities, creating artwork using spray cans, is a common practice within alternative education provision. But, as we show, the art form's rebellious and subcultural image was superseded by engagement in the acquisition of demanding artistic and performative skills. Similar to graffiti art, the second art form, dance offers a space for identity-formation and embodiment through which young people can express themselves, explore ideas, and communicate their experiences. However, this only happened for some members of the group.

We draw on three related bodies of literature –the pedagogies of poverty, funds of knowledge and the performative cultures of contemporary formal and informal education to suggest that the arts do not necessarily promote inclusion. We argue that the pedagogies employed with these most economically vulnerable young people were largely exploitative. Students were denied access to the social, political, and historical aspects of the artforms and their rich repertoires of practice, international influences and situated creation. We argue that these critical incidents

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allow us to understand how an arts curriculum can perpetuate rather than counter injustice.

## 1. Introduction

Two decades ago, the arts and arts education in England were doing well. The then Labour government were keen to see the creative industries as a significant contributor to the economy and to the representation of a new “cool Britannia” (Buckingham & Jones, 2001). In schooling, the government funded Creative Partnerships (2003-2011), which put artists and arts organisations together with schools to transform pedagogies and learning outcomes (Parker, 2013). In 2005, Arts Council England together with the accreditation agency Trinity College London, developed the Arts Award, a suite of qualifications complementary to the formal school curriculum which could offer an extra curricula pathway for young people in schools, or act as an alternative programme for young people out of the formal educational system. Despite new Conservative Coalition government (2012) prioritisation of core subjects, excluding arts and causing arts subjects enrolments to plummet, the Arts Award remains as an important pillar of the youth component of the national arts policy agenda.

The Arts Award aims to “support young people's creative development, help under-26s experience and understand the arts, reach young people of all backgrounds, interests and abilities”<sup>1</sup>. It was/is to be universally accessible - “available in any educational setting, embrace all types of art and craft, including emerging art forms and technologies and put young people at the heart of the learning process”<sup>2</sup>. At the heart of the Arts Award are “transferable skills” such as “creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, communication, leadership and entrepreneurialism”<sup>3</sup>. The Award had inclusive goals – it aimed to appeal to all young people and particularly those young people already marginalised by their schooling, and it aimed to be inclusive of all art forms, popular and elite, representing diverse heritages and cultures<sup>4</sup>. As the website puts it, “The Arts

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.artsaward.org.uk/site/?id=1977>

<sup>2</sup> Arts Award website: <https://www.artsaward.org.uk/site/?id=1346>

<sup>3</sup> Arts Award website: <https://www.artsaward.org.uk/site/?id=1977>

<sup>4</sup> The curriculum for the Arts Award is set through dedicated units, which increase skill levels, self-management, and leadership as the levels progress. Core to the Arts Award offer is participation via artform specific clubs, workshops and regular arts-based projects and engagement with online tutorials and video content. A research element to the award involves learning about the work of arts organisations, artists, and arts careers. At higher award levels young people can undertake placements

Award nurtures and celebrates hidden creative talents and skills, legitimising young people's achievements in non-mainstream art forms of artistic practice, often providing first-time accreditation for young people who have not yet achieved success in mainstream settings"<sup>5</sup>. The Arts Award also offered a meaningful qualification with five levels of award; the highest standard Gold is the equivalent to a Level Three qualification (on par with an A level subject) and garners points for university entry.

The Arts Award can be, and often is, seen as an exemplary government sponsored initiative to widen participation in both education and the arts (Robinson et al., 2019). It works with and from young people's interests, it puts youth and popular cultures on a par with elite arts cultures, encourages the use of adult education pedagogies, supports young people to reflect on their experiences and offers a recognised pathway which supports access to further and higher education. This chapter holds the Arts Award intentions up against two real life examples to ask how inclusion happens on the ground, and whether the programme is always the life trajectory game changer it wants to be.

We begin by describing the location of the empirical study reported in the chapter and then introduce the research, before going on to analyse two critical incidents from two separate Arts Award programmes offered to two groups of 'youth at risk'.

## **2. Alternative provision and the arts**

Our study is set in alternative provision (AP) which, in England, is offered to young people permanently excluded from school, or designated as at risk of permanent exclusion. AP can be full or part time, short or long term, on or off site, offered by state or private providers. Young people are generally referred to AP, many of them with a long history of difficulties in meeting the requirements of the official curriculum and the structures and cultures of mainstream schools. AP is also a growing sector. There are currently some 60,000 school-age young people in AP in England. These are the most marginalised young people in the education system, yet many of the issues they have with their schooling – repetitive and authoritarian pedagogies and carceral school cultures – are also experienced by their more well-behaved peers.

The research investigating the benefits of arts education in AP highlights several areas – knowledge and skills, communication, self-confidence and self-esteem, and enjoyment (e.g. Wilkin et al., 2005). When the arts are offered in AP, pupils report enhanced subject learning – they learn the art form, and associated techniques and

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and work experience in order to reflect on the wider arts sector, as well as taking a leadership role in arts projects - setting up exhibitions, managing performances and running a series of workshops for example. The assessment criteria for Arts Award 'portfolios' include art form knowledge and understanding, creativity, planning and review and communication.

<sup>5</sup> Arts Award website: <https://www.artsaward.org.uk/site/?id=1977>

skills. The arts are said to produce self-belief, agency and creativity (Finney et al., 2005). As Ing (2004) puts it,

*... the arts can provide a responsible and productive escape from the problems that have damaged so many of these young people; ... engaging in creative work can restore a young person's sense of identity and purpose; the development of group and teamwork skills; ...can connect young people with the adult community they will soon be entering; ... can lead to the discovery of genuine artistic talent. (p. 9)*

The emphasis in the literatures on personal development (for exceptions see Ennis & Tonkin, 2018; Murphy, 2011; Riddle & Cleaver, 2017) resonates with AP goals - because young people are referred to AP for behaviours that are seen as problematic, staff see changes in behaviour as an important goal, and one necessary for the young person to return to mainstream education or work. Relevance, active participation, and interest are seen as key to success, as young people are assumed to lack motivation, persistence, and patience with 'the academic'. It is hardly surprising then that AP educators seek to find links with engaging, popular, and often commercialised, youth cultures. In England, this pedagogical interest often leads AP staff to the Arts Award and contemporary youth cultural forms such as hip-hop.

Some educators concerned with changing the educational outcomes of young people marginalised by their schooling now engage seriously with hip-hop cultures (e.g. Lamont Hill, 2009). As a cultural and social movement, hip-hop encompasses not only music, but visual art, spoken word, dance and turntablism. A range of resources are now available to teachers (not just in AP) which show how various aspects of hip-hop cultures can be used as part of the formal curriculum – from using rap to teach history, poetry and writing<sup>6</sup> to break dance as a form of fitness training<sup>7</sup>, to graffiti as a process in just about any subject<sup>8</sup>.

There are social and educational challenges in working with hip-hop cultures. The "each one teach one"<sup>9</sup> philosophy of hip-hop is rarely compatible with performative school regimes. The exploration of hip hop cultures can instrumentalise rather than offer opportunities for young people to engage with the

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.edutopia.org/article/power-rap-and-hip-hop-classroom;>  
[https://charanga.com/site/writing-raps-classroom-7-steps/;](https://charanga.com/site/writing-raps-classroom-7-steps/) <https://theconversation.com/why-hip-hop-belongs-in-todays-classrooms-128993>.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.tes.com/teaching-resource/break-dance-6127456;>  
<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/mojave54/pe-dance-brain-breaks-rhythm-and-energizers/>.

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.weareteachers.com/graffiti-walls/;](https://www.weareteachers.com/graffiti-walls/)[https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/graffiti-boards;](https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/graffiti-boards) <http://geiendorsed.com/blog/curriculum/how-graffiti-can-be-an-educational-tool-in-your-classroom/>.

<sup>9</sup> See for example <https://hiphopheaducatorz.bandcamp.com/album/each-one-teach-one-2>

cultural, institutional, structural, economic, historical, social and political concerns of our time (e.g. Persaud, 2011). There is a real risk of cultural appropriation; youth subcultures are often mobilised and depoliticised by mass media and consumer markets (Moore, 2005). MTV is the case par excellence - an intensified musical 'advertising stage' through which the female body in particular is viewed as a commodity (Ovalle, 2008). It cannot be assumed that students will automatically be well served through engagement with hip-hop cultures (Stabler, 2020), and this matters acutely for young people already at the educational margins.

### 3. Researching the Arts Award

The critical incidents reported in this chapter are drawn from a doctoral investigation of the Arts Award and focus on two of the five sites that were studied<sup>10</sup>. Although a former youth worker who had taught the Arts Award and was a national moderator for the program, Frances' intentions, in designing an ethnographic study, was to be as much a part of the young people's Arts Award programmes as possible. Her approach was to experience the programmes alongside the young people. Moving away from more traditional adult-centred research approaches, such as interviewing, was an ethical choice. Building rapport and relationships with participants was key. Joining in arts activities alongside the young people helped to address the power imbalances; as Frances was much less skilled in the art forms than the young people: she often took an apprentice role, being taught by the participants<sup>11</sup>.

The data used in this chapter are derived from Frances' ethnographic fieldnotes which were taken during and after the project sessions. The chapter offers two ethnographic critical incidents (Tripp, 1993, 1994) in two different AP sites. The tradition of critical incident study understands a critical incident not as an event which is dangerous or associated with a health and safety or criminal activity. Rather, a critical incident provides a lens through which a larger 'whole' can be seen. While the critical incident is often an event which is vividly remembered, it is

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<sup>10</sup> Frances had come to doctoral research as a practising youth worker who had taught the Arts Award and was a national moderator for the programme. Pat was her supervisor and had conducted a number of studies in AP settings as well as creative and arts education more generally.

<sup>11</sup> The methods for this study were based in this participation in arts activities and consisted of participant observation, informal discussions, and video analysis. A 'talk-around-art' approach was taken where the creative work the young people made, or were involved in, was used as springboard for conversation and as data in itself. Although ethnography is both subjective and spoken from insider positioning, the long-time spent with the participants, and the experiential data generation using an assortment of methods produced rich insights into the young people's worlds which allowed for an exploration of diverse experiences. The research was subject to ethical approval by the University of Nottingham and participants' consent was gained both from parents and project gatekeepers.

also a synecdoche which reveals more general patterns through analysis and interpretation<sup>12</sup>.

The two critical incidents reported here were memorable events. They were also chosen because they represented the major themes emerging from Frances' overall analysis of The Arts Award (see Howard, 2022). We briefly discuss each art form before describing the event.

#### 4. A graffiti art workshop

The first ethnographic critical incident focuses on 'tagging'. From the art form's humble beginnings as wall-based scratchings in New York and other U.S. cities during the mid-1970's, graffiti has emerged as an integral part of hip hop culture. Early graffiti writing, consisting mainly of 'tags' appeared in subways and on the side of trains. Tagging is the writing of a name or nickname on a surface by a graffiti artist. Most frequently found in the public domain, tagging becomes a competitive practice for graffiti writers who strive to reach the most unreachable yet highly visible locations. Tagging is also loosely associated with various forms of protest and the largely illegal grey economy<sup>13</sup>. But while there is a counter-politics to tagging, it often lacks connection with vernacular theorisations of injustice. Tagging is often seen as a subcultural and illegal practice and is most commonly associated with deviance and vandalism, rather than art.

'Throwing up' your tag was one way to get attention and to compete with others (Hochtritt, 2008). Some young people are particularly attracted to the artform due to the recognition of risk and respect earned by the graffiti lifestyle (Taylor, 2012). But the art form's rebellious and subcultural image can be superseded by engagement in the acquisition of demanding artistic and performative skills (Encheva et al., 2013). While graffiti cultures are often aligned with a masculinity that is dangerous, aggressive and takes risks, the artform itself invokes story-telling and enables emotions to be expressed (Lombard, 2013).

Graffiti art activities, creating artwork using spray cans, is a common practice within AP (de Roeper & Savelsberg, 2009). Research highlights the benefits of

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<sup>12</sup> Researchers typically write a description of the incident using all available data sources, and then look for the ways in which the incident has been produced through the combination of micro, meso and macro interactions. The researcher looks for mediation and negotiation, interpretation and translation, disruption, and refraction, continuing to ask why and how the observed and recorded phenomena have come to be this way. It is the researcher who makes the incident critical through their exploration of context, relationships, practices, held truths and historical framings. Selection of critical incidents thus depends on careful and thorough reading of the wider 'case' of which it is emblematic.

<sup>13</sup> Tagging is literally making your mark in a landscape in which working class and Black and Ethnic Minority young people are educated poorly, criminalised, and stigmatised; they often have few opportunities for secure paid work, safe neighbourhoods, and housing.

engagement in graffiti cultures for urban youth in particular, in terms of network capital and social and spatial mobility (McAuliffe, 2013). Despite the representation of young people engaging in graffiti as the anti-thesis of the ‘good citizen’ (Baker, 2015), graffiti art can offer knowledge exchange, axiological models and an educational contribution that can critically construct alternatives (Avramidis & Drakopoulou, 2012). The potential affordances of this artform in relation to identity formation are unmissable.

### *Painting by numbers*

“Fresh”<sup>14</sup> is an alternative education day-time provision run by a local education charity. Its funding was from schools via referrals of excluded students. Running three days per week over a school year, the arts were a core curriculum. The prevalent artforms were graffiti and music production. As a compulsory AP, Fresh was required to offer access to, and successful outcomes in, mainstream curriculum and qualifications.

“Fresh” was dominated by particular forms of ‘safe teaching’. Modifying the young person’s behaviour came first and academic learning second. Low-level behavioural activities of the kind often packaged as ‘soft skills’ dominated the curriculum, reducing the amount of time young people had for the learning that they had missed in mainstream schooling. Learning was strongly teacher-directed with a heavy presence of worksheets and paper-based procedures used to ‘show’ development. There was little freedom to learn and explore whatever subject was on offer. Counter to some of the literatures (Quinn & Poirier, 2007; Sliwka, 2008) the arts followed the same pedagogical pattern, rather than acted as a counter or disruption, as we will show.

Frances’ fieldnotes record the production of ‘individual signatures’ by two participants in the ‘Fresh’ graffiti art programme. Educators had selected the tagging for two reasons - it was assumed it would be of interest because it was ‘popular culture’, and it had links with youthful, largely male, criminality. This choice thus re-confirmed participants as engaged in deviant behaviour. The intent here was to use art as a diversionary tactic as well as to show that it was possible to make graffiti in legal ways. This intention was in keeping with the AP’s focus on responsabilising practices - because creative tasks were seen by the educators as one way for young people to come to terms with their own accountability and responsibility, they frequently chose issue-based work as a way for young people to explore their previous ‘risk-taking practice’. The opportunity to ‘get things off their chest’ (Baker & Homan, 2007; Parker et al., 2018) was understood as integral to behaviour change.

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<sup>14</sup> The names of the projects have been changed.

Connor and Ezra<sup>15</sup>, one White British and the other of Black British origin, were aiming to write their own names using spray cans. They were guided through the process of completing their own large-scale spray-painted board.

*When I arrive Connor and Ezra are working on the large-scale graffiti boards that they started earlier in the week. I watched them practicing graffiti style 'bubble' lettering to write their names after flicking through a graffiti magazine for inspiration. I sit in on the session where they are working on the large-scale versions of their names. One young person tells me that he didn't get to do graffiti art when he was at school because 'they didn't trust him with the cans'. They start by spraying over existing tags on the boards. They outline the letters of their names on the boards. One participant realizes he has done the 'N' the wrong way around. He decides to leave it. Next, they add the 3D background to create bolder lettering. Paint has dripped down the letters because the cans have been held too close. The participants approve of this accidental effect. With the letters outlined the participants select colours to fill in these shapes. They have a discussion about which parts of the lettering will be visible. Then they work on colour blends to create two-tone lettering. Connor walks off as he has given up and Ezra asks what he should do next. "Colour in that letter" replies the staff member as he outlines the sections in the lead colour for the participant to fill in. (Fieldnotes)*

The two young men had had little opportunity to focus on design. In response, both displayed an expectation of being formally instructed step-by-step in how to make their tags. As Frances saw it at the time, their experience was a step-by-step box-ticking exercise, rather than an opportunity to explore artistic processes and materials.

At issue were:

- The assumption that the young men had no prior knowledge of tagging. The use of students' "funds of knowledge" (Gonzales et al., 2005) is common in arts education and is integral to socially just practice (Thomson & Hall, 2023). However, these young men were assumed to have neither used spray cans before nor to have any views about whether the activity was art or simply something that was usually associated with mindless vandalism.
- The lack of connection to the art curriculum. There were missed opportunities for curriculum connections to be made – for example, with histories of mark-

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<sup>15</sup> The names of the young people have been changed.

making, the design histories of letters, fonts and typefaces and links to mediaeval manuscript production and illustration, alphabet books, learning to make letters, sewing samplers. Nor did the activity extend the young people's artistic understandings. There was also no specific discussion about colour, design, properties of materials and surfaces, as might be expected in a mainstream art class. There was no occasion where the students were able to discuss the various aesthetic qualities of graffiti and develop critical evaluative criteria which might apply to this as well as other art forms – the resource magazine was simply used as a source of a style to copy, rather than an opportunity to engage in interpretations. There was no connection made with murals, or with famous 'wall' artists such as Banksy and Keith Haring.

- The lack of opportunity to discuss the social and economic contexts in which tagging occurs, nor the identity issues of young taggers. There were potential direct links to sociological discussions about protest and the use of posters, the ways in which street art forms become commercialised, youth justice, design and ownership of buildings, questions of public and private.

There were numerous other curriculum connections to be made. But it can be seen from this very partial listing that the reductive focus on the simple production of a tag seriously reduced the potential for meaningful discussion and learning. Educators simply did not make connections with knowledges that might have helped the young people understand themselves and their world. Both the art form and the apparent interest that the participants had in it, were exploited in the interests of diversion from criminal activity and learning appropriate ordered behaviour. The lack of recognition of young men's vernacular knowledges, and the lack of connection with knowledges that were both needed for formal qualifications, but which also had potentially powerful explanatory capacities about society, constituted a curriculum injustice (Connell, 1993).

### **A street dance workshop**

Alongside graffiti are the dance forms that accompany hip-hop and rap music. Dance can be an inclusive practice capable of acknowledging difference, accommodating the diverse needs of all learners and enhancing the appreciation of the unique abilities of each student (Zitomer, 2017). Similar to graffiti art, dance offers a space for identity-formation and embodiment and offers affordances to contest institutional desires to construct 'docile' bodies and 'normalised' citizens (Atencio & Wright, 2009). For young people considered 'at-risk' dance, and street dance in particular, is often seen as an intervention which provides opportunities for confidence building, social levelling and bonding (Gunay & Bacon, 2019). However, researchers (e.g. Beaulac et al., 2010) have noted that dance programs for

disadvantaged youth can reproduce ‘dividing practices’ that supported racial, gendered and classed hierarchies. Street dance projects in AP are almost invariably gendered in their practices, with more take-up from young men compared to other dance genres (Atencio & Wright, 2009). The social construction of gender and the gendered meanings associated with dance play a pivotal role in influencing young people’s involvement.

The second ethnographic critical incident features a street dance workshop which centred on twerking. Twerking is a movement where dancers thrust their hips forwards and backwards, often in a low squatting stance; it can be seen as highly sexualised. Originally derived from the ‘bounce’ music scene of New Orleans in the 1980s, this dance move became mainstream after Miley Cyrus performed it on stage at the 2013 MTV Music Video Awards.

### ***Twerk like Beyonce***

The “Beat-Boxers” dance project was aimed at young people Not in Employment, Education and Training (NEET) and was funded and named by the local authority. The name calls to and for participants who have prior cultural experience with hip-hop cultural genres. Attendance was on a voluntary basis, but some young people were referred to it. Held on one evening per week, dance instruction was to be provided by a young dance company of white middle class young women with professional training. Despite the efforts of neighbourhood youth workers, the project failed to attract the designated participants: only seven of the 20 were in the NEET category. One of these was the only young man in the group. The majority of 13 were middle class and female, like the instructors and the participants in most other dance school programmes.

Frances was particularly interested in the seven young people, all white working class and British, who were the funder’s target, the NEET group. The critical incident we report here relates to a time-extended process of dropping out.

Frances noted the initial interest of the NEET group in street dance. Frances observed them using YouTube on mobile phones to learn/copy particular dance movements. Young people also talked about using online tutorials as a way of teaching themselves.

*They share a dance they have recorded on the iPhone. This routine is from a Beyonce music video and they are all learning to copy. The girls are slowing down the moves and counting in, learning to hold positions. This dance has a persona, which they are trying to emulate: flicking hair, strutting, shimmies, kicks and confidence. They break group formation and practice individual sections perfecting micro-moves. One young person moves low to the ground whilst rotating her hips. Her friends laugh at her saying “twerking”. (Fieldnotes)*

The dance instructors however were not on their phones – they organised sessions in typical dance school mode. Each session followed the ritual studio-based practices of warm up, mirror work to learn steps, putting together a small routine which was then performed several times, then warm-down. In addition to street dance, contemporary dance and Bollywood routines were included. While the lesson structure and movement repertoire were familiar to most participants, much of it was new to the seven young people Frances was observing closely.

One of the seven dropped out very early in the programme. She had a baby and no access to evening care. Childcare was not something that the organisers had factored into their plans and after a few evenings where she and others shared child-minding, she stopped coming. The single male participant also had difficulties staying involved, but for different reasons. He found the over-feminisation of the dance movements, through sexualised practices such as twerking, alienating. The 'dancey' instructional approach of the workshop leaders also left him feeling excluded. He affiliated himself with a style he considered 'street' (muscular, gymnastic, body-controlled), and what was offered did not meet his expectations or frame of reference.

*One participant refuses to remove his shoes. This is a symbolic barrier he is putting up. Reluctance through body language. The routine is fast, the movements bring the group to life apart from Harrison. So, the dance leader works with him individually. He is lack-lustre, says he can't dance like that. "This is not street dance" he says. The dance leader adds some more 'masculine' movements into the routine so Harrison can improvise a different part. ...The following week Harrison does not return, and the girls are now in a group on their own. (Fieldnotes)*

Harrison had a school history of failure, and this was just one more to add to his list. The dance class reproduced a narrative of someone incapable of sticking to things. Frances did not have the opportunity to talk with Harrison about his view of himself as a learner, but it is unlikely that "Beat-Boxers" was a positive experience. Even if Harrison was able to locate pedagogical exclusion rather than his failure as the reason for his departure, he would probably be more suspicious of future invitations from youth workers to participate in a learning programme.

The remaining five young NEET women all dropped out not long after, frustrated at the mismatch between what they saw and did with their phones and the class. After they had gone, the instructors introduced elements of improvisation which allowed participants to insert their own choreography and interpretations. This may have been the pedagogical strategy that kept the NEET group involved – a case of too little, too late, Frances noted.

Beat Boxers was funded for a mere 3 months but closed early due to its high drop-out rate. The project failed, and failed to deliver any kind of curriculum justice to the very young people who were its intended beneficiaries. There are four processual points key to its failures:

- a lack of understanding of participants' lives. The organisers and dance instructors appear not to have consulted youth workers about the young people and their particular needs e.g. childcare
- a lack of understanding about participant's learning practices. The process of watching, learning, copying hip-hop from phones that Frances observed – the MTV dispositions of young people (Ovalle, 2008) – can be understood as heutagogy<sup>16</sup>. To learn independently from an online source calls on learning strategies that may not be apparent or used in formal educational settings. The young people's familiarity with self-directed learning might have alerted the dance instructors to their students' motivation, pre-existing knowledges, and approaches to learning.
- a lack of appreciation of young people's funds of knowledge, dance experiences and interests, and preparedness to both use and discuss them. Instructors did not take into account the particular popular forms with which young people were familiar nor the gendered nature of street dance forms. The imposition of dance class practices - shoes off, routines and ritual formats - was not understood as classed, and thus potentially problematic for the target group.
- lack of connection to wider social and disciplinary knowledges. It would have been possible for the instructors to have offered more connections with examples and knowledges that supported students to know what they were doing and why. For instance, they might have discussed twerking as part of movement lexicon with strong ties to various forms of African dance. Making this connection connects twerking with the histories of enslavement and resistance via music, dance, story, and performance. But because twerking is highly sexualised, there were also possible conversations about gender, the commercialisation of sexuality and the appropriation of BAME cultures. However, there was no contextual or historical introduction to street dance, no examination of its multiple forms, and no scaffolding to understand this particular form beyond what young people were viewing first-hand on their screens. Nor was there any opportunity to discuss how problematic practices in street dance might be changed and additionally support wider social changes.

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<sup>16</sup> Heutagogy is an educational term which refers specifically to self-directed learning which takes advantage of the sociality, flexibility and multi-modality of web-based devices and content. Heutagogy requires no formal 'teacher' but rather has the learner decide what to learn, when, where, how and with whom. Heutagogy usually requires the learner to practice outside of their screen 'instruction' time in order to acquire the level of expertise and proficiency that has been displayed.

### *Critical incidents combined*

Across both the projects, we noted deficit pedagogies and exclusionary practices that exploited the young people and the arts curriculum. We acknowledge that these processes were largely unintended but the consequences for young people's futures, self-perceptions and learner identities needs to be highlighted. In order to develop a cross case analysis, we return to three key patterns of exclusion and suggest how these can be avoided in future contexts of AP:

| <i>Exclusionary aspect</i>                                                              | <i>Alternative approach</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Overlooking young people's funds of cultural knowledge                               | Engage with young people as the starting point for the activity: What do they already know? What are they interested in? How could this be developed?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 2. Lack of connection to arts curriculum and social and economic contexts               | Ensure that young people have access that the three 'domains of knowledge' (Ofsted 2023) <sup>17</sup> 'practical knowledge', which is about developing technical proficiency, 'theoretical knowledge', which is the cultural and contextual content and 'disciplinary knowledge', which is what young people learn about how art is studied, discussed, and judged. How can what is being offered be transferred to mainstream curriculum? What social and historical contexts surround the art form? What are the opportunities to discuss wider social and economic landscapes? |
| 3. Failure to explore young people's needs and learning conditions prior to the project | Engage with people who have prior knowledge and experience in working with the cohort. What are the specifics needs of the young people? What might be barriers to their engagement? What are the participant's motivation, pre-existing knowledges and approaches to learning?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

We argue that, had these two projects considered these questions above, thought more deeply about what young people 'brought with them' in terms of cultural repertoires but also learning needs, then the outcomes would have been more equitable.

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<sup>17</sup> Published in February 2023, Ofsted's Research Review series on art and design: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/research-review-series-art-and-design/research-review-series-art-and-design#curriculum>

Through these two cases and the exclusionary aspects highlighted, we have demonstrated that the arts do not necessarily promote inclusion. Young people accessing these projects deemed most ‘at risk’ of social isolation were largely exploitative but what was denied to them through the arts activities: access to the social, political, and historical aspects of the artforms and their rich repertoires of practice, international influences and situated creation. A cross case analysis of these critical incidents allow us to understand how an arts curriculum can perpetuate rather than counter injustice.

### **The Arts Award – not always living up to its inclusive potential and promise?**

Although our critical incidents focus on AP, there are many young people within mainstream schools who are also close to the institutional edges. Additionally, many more working class and BAME young people do not benefit as they might from their formal schooling. The arts are often nominated as a means to redress educational imbalances. Indeed, longitudinal research demonstrates that arts rich schools can and do make some inroads into the invidious injustices of unequal schooling (Catterall et al., 2012). Our critical incidents suggest some of what is at stake in making a difference, in making not simply AP but also formal education more inclusive.

What was on offer in the arts programmes we studied was remarkably similar to the atomised pedagogies of poverty employed in ‘lessons’ with young people in order to construct ‘orderly youth’ (Thomson & Pennacchia, 2015b). These pedagogies of poverty (Haberman, 1991) require the reduction of major tasks to smaller bite-sized pieces taught via strong direct instruction and slow pacing, combined with the elimination of content deemed intellectually challenging (Howard, 2020). Poor literacy skills are equated to lack of capacity to engage with abstract ideas. Young people are assumed to be poorly motivated, and either unable or unwilling to engage in ‘academic’ work. A head/hands binary and reductive skills orientation dominates. This form of pedagogy, in AP and beyond, neither provides young people with access to the qualifications they need in order to change their life trajectories, nor with the kind of knowledge resources they need to understand their position in the world (Thomson & Pennacchia, 2015a).

While the focus of the Arts Award was on universal access, access is not simply about a programme being available. Access is also dependent on socio-material conditions – in our example child-care, but also potentially transport, a roof and bed, food. However, simply getting to a programme is necessary but hardly sufficient. If arts education in AP is to offer counter-narratives and opportunities for young people to learn about themselves within contemporary society (Chappell & Chappell, 2016), then the arts curriculum must not only be designed and enacted differently from the mainstream, but also refuse disempowering pedagogies. The critical incidents point to the importance of ‘teachers’ actively seeking out the prior knowledges, experiences, and interests of young people as well as the pedagogies

that they initiative and practice themselves. What is on offer to young people most marginalised by formal schooling should be based on pedagogies of recognition – recognition of young people’s interests, pre-existing experiences, established patterns of learning and chosen identities in formation.

Additionally, the potential of the arts themselves are integral to changing educational trajectories. Rather taking a reductive and individualised skills-based approach geared to a product, the potentials of the arts - to encourage collaborative work, collective reflection, connections with diverse histories and challenging futures, links with other bodies of knowledge and social practices and possibilities for social engagement and social action - might be mobilised to counter the unjust educational probabilities facing many young people. Rather than assuming that the arts attract because of their connections with criminalised subcultures, arts can be taken as the basis for learning how to live well in a world worth living in.

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