Arts for Multicultural Diversity: A Case Study from England

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Abstract Britain was culturally diverse before it was even a nation. Centuries of migration and mobility can be seen in the landscape, in the fabric of cities and in the language, as well as in the polyglot DNA of the population. Museums, heritage associations and galleries conserve and curate artefacts which attest to this long-standing diversity, and entire academic disciplines are devoted to its exploration and interpretation. Yet today, questions of cultural diversity and of culture itself are, arguably, as unsettled as they have ever been, if not more so. It is no surprise that arts educators and arts organisations are concerned with contemporary debates about cultural diversity, ethnicities, religion, immigration, mobility and Europe. However, enacting this commitment is both pressing and difficult. Against a back-drop of the increasing value of British creative industries, reducing secondary enrolments in England in arts subjects and reductions in primary arts curriculum, the mandatory teaching of 'British values' and elevated national security, artists and arts organisations and educators must now position their work in relation to multiple cultural and political agendas.

Keywords England · Arts · Youth · Multiculturalism · Diversity · Community · Creative industries · Employability · Engagement

In this chapter, we offer a case study, an examination of the work of A New Direction (AND), one of the ten Arts Council England-funded youth arts bridge organisations. Located in London, one of the most multicultural cities in the world, AND's mission is to develop arts 'solutions' that inspire and enable change in the cultural, creative and education sectors, championing equality and the rights of young Londoners. We

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begin by firstly giving some information about cultural diversity in Britain and secondly the background to the case study.

1   Britain: Multicultural and Diverse

In 2016, the British population numbered 65.6 million.[1] The most recent census in 2011 had White British as the largest ethnic group (80.5%) with Asian British (7.5%) and Black/African/Caribbean/Black British (3.3%) the next largest groups. However, ethnic diversity has been increasing, and it is not evenly distributed around the country: London is the most diverse city with only 44.9% of White British residents. Some London boroughs, such as Newham and Brent, have under 20% White British residents. The 2011 census contained a question about national identity, and over 90% of respondents ticked a British identity category[2] suggesting that at least some do not see their primary affiliation as the UK.

The census figures must be put alongside those related to immigration. Government data suggests that some 230,000 people came to Britain between June 2016 and 2017. Notably, during this period, there was a statistically significant decline in immigration from the EU,[3] hardly surprising given the uncertainty caused by Brexit[4] negotiations which failed to guarantee the rights of European citizens to permanent residence. Official immigration figures are 'adjusted' to include both asylum seekers and visitor and migrant visa 'switchers' (e.g. those who successfully move from a temporary visitor, work or student visa). The Red Cross[5] estimates that there were 118,995 asylum seekers living in the UK in 2015, a tiny proportion of the overall population. The majority came from just three countries: Syria, Afghanistan and South Sudan. And in 2015 less than half of those who applied for residence were successful and allowed to stay once their cases had been fully conducted. But numbers are slowly increasing: around 169,000 refugees, asylum seekers or stateless people were in the UK in 2017.[6]

Nevertheless, despite these relatively small percentages, and the overwhelming number of residents identifying as British, immigration has been a very hot topic in recent times. While analyses of the vote to leave the EU point to a complex set of economic and social reasons, the media was dominated by discussions of European

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[1] Office of National Statistics: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/articles/overviewoftheukpopulation/july2017

[2] Office of National Statistics: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/articles/ethnicityandnationalidentityinenglandandwales/2012-12-11

[3] Office of National Statistics: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration

[4] Brexit is the name given to the UK decision to leave the EU.

[5] http://www.redcross.org.uk/What-we-do/Refugee-support/Refugee-facts-and-figures

[6] http://metro.co.uk/2017/06/19/refugee-week-2017-how-many-refugees-are-there-in-the-uk-and-worldwide-6718632/

hordes, terrorism and a crisis in community values. Brexit can be seen as a manifestation of an ongoing national 'identity crisis'. Since late 2014, schools have been required to teach 'British values'. According to education guidelines, British values are an understanding of how citizens can influence decision-making through the democratic process; that the freedom to hold other faiths and beliefs is protected in law; that people having different faiths or beliefs to oneself (or having none) should be accepted and tolerated and should not be the cause of prejudicial or discriminatory behaviour; and the importance of identifying and combatting discrimination.[7] These may seem uncontentious aims. However, various interventions under the 'Prevent' agenda – for example gathering of information about citizenship status and religious affiliation in schools and universities, banning extremist speakers in schools and universities – have been critiqued for infringing on human rights and for promoting an authoritarian assimilation policy rather than understanding and respect.

There are other strains in multicultural Britain too. Under equal opportunity law organisations and institutions are forbidden to discriminate on the grounds of race, religion or ethnicity. But increasing public attention has been drawn to the ways in which this legislative framework has failed to allow people of colour to achieve the same promotion and salary benefits as the White British population. The arts have come in for particular criticism. While there are increases in the numbers of BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) artists employed in the creative industries, in 2015 only 6.6% of all those in music and the performing and visual arts were black, Asian or from an ethnic minority, compared with 11.3% of those in the UK economy as a whole.[8] Like many other organisations, Arts Council England has recently focused on diversity, taken to mean the proportion of various racial and ethnic groups within the total workforce. Arts Council England now makes annual 'diversity reports' on employment across the sector. In 2016, it reported that '17% of the workforce in England's 663 national portfolio organisations[9] is BME. That is an increase on a figure last year of 13.9% and higher than the wider working population average of 15%. For major partner museums, the BME workforce is 7%, up from 2.3% in the last data'.[10] While this is good news, there are also some issues with the ways in which diversity is understood within arts – and other government – policies.

While the discourse of diversity can produce (slow) changes in a workforce, this does not necessarily equate to changes in practices. For example, it is quite possible that a more diverse media workforce might still produce programmes and products in which whiteness – the histories, languages, experiences, interests, needs and cultural practices of the White British population – is featured (Ahmed 2012). Diversity as it is understood in the official policy does not generally address ques-

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[7] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/guidance-on-promoting-british-values-in-schools-published

[8] https://www.thestage.co.uk/news/2016/number-of-bame-performing-arts-professionals-up-by-60-since-2011/

[9] A national priority organisation gets its core funding from the Arts Council.

[10] https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/dec/12/number-of-minority-arts-workers-must-improve-arts-council-england

tions of representations, mores, truths, narratives and conventions. Thus, the Arts Council conflation of diversity with funding, workforce and projects, can be seen as symptomatic of wider fractures in public discourse.

British citizens live everyday with cultural contradictions. On the one hand, there is a deep concern about radicalisation and extremism which often appears as a kind of nostalgic discourse about Britishness, values and cultural practices. On the other is concern that the minority of British citizens who are categorised as BME/BAME are discriminated against in the distribution of employment and funding opportunities. What is missing in public life is a way to connect the two concerns. This could well be affected through a focus on cultural difference, the intercultural communication and the promotion of everyday representations of multicultural families, neighbourhoods and communities.

The arts are in a position and possess the media, genres and expertise, to take forward a public multiculturalism which decentres White Britishness (Saha 2018). A 'multicultural' focus may in fact be the missing link which makes both agendas, diversity and Britishness, a reality. And while this may not be the focus of Arts Council reports, it is the concern of many of the arts organisations that they fund.

2   Arts Research Concerns

The remainder of this chapter reports a case study from A New Direction, London. The case study shows how one organisation addresses both diversity and multicultural issues. However, it is helpful at the start to signpost some relevant research. Arts researchers in Britain, including those in education, have recently been very exercised by two questions – how the value of cultural participation can be understood and, secondly, the unequitable composition of the arts and culture industries.

Concerns about the lack of diversity in arts and culture are well founded. There is now quite substantive evidence of the ways in which a privileged background is an advantage in gaining in employment in the creative industries. The top ranks of British theatre, for instance, is dominated by White men who have attended a small number of high-fee independent schools; similar stories can be told about film, music and visual art (Bull and Scharff 2017; Friedman et al. 2016; O'Brien et al. 2016; Oakley and O'Brien 2015). Practices of unpaid work experience and internship are the norm across the creative industries and are difficult for young people of even modest means to afford (Allen et al. 2013; Percival and Hesmondhalgh 2014). The difficulties of most young people in gaining employment in the creative industries, difficulties arising from not having the right gender, ethnicity or class 'positional goods' (Marginson 1997), have driven one of the projects reported in the case study in this chapter.

The Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded Cultural Value project[11] focused on new avenues for arts and cultural participation to be recognised, theo-

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[11] http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/research/fundedthemesandprogrammes/culturalvalueproject/

rised and researched. The final analysis of results from the suite of funded projects offered a rubric of 'value' which included well-being, citizenship and cross-cultural understandings (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016). This wider value framework provides an alternative to the largely economist and human value orientations that arts advocates use to defend arts policy and public investments – a practice that Eleonora Belfiore (2012) has helpfully called 'defensive instrumentalism'. The largest of the AHRC-funded research projects *Understanding Everyday Participation*[12] (UEP) investigated how and why apparently mundane, everyday cultural activities have meaning and significance for those involved. UEP has also exposed the ways in which traditional boundaries of culture and the arts create economic, social and geographic inequalities.[13] The same focus on the everyday and ordinary people's arts and cultural practices features in the case study presented here.

Arts education researchers in England have had similar concerns about 'value'. The long-standing discourse of the arts as hand not head, nonacademic not academic and soft not hard skills has supported a new curriculum which removes the arts from key qualification frameworks. In tune with the wider arts research community, arts researchers have been focused on producing 'evidence' of the importance of arts education. There is, for instance, research examining the ways in which working with writers might enhance teacher agency and students literacy (Cremin and Oliver 2017),[14] the benefits of arts in intercultural practice and communication (Burnard et al. 2016),[15] the conjunction of science and technical education and the arts (STEAM) (Colucci-Gray et al. 2017), the ways in which teachers use their professional arts learning for the benefit of their students[16] and the process of arts-led school change (Hall and Thomson 2017). Much of this work also seeks new conceptual tools and theoretical resources. The case study below shows a similar interest in generating evidence and new approaches to theorising young people's arts learning.

3   About *A New Direction*

A New Direction (AND) is a not-for-profit organisation that exists to ensure that all children and young people in London can develop their creativity and play an active part in the culture and heritage of the city. At the centre of its work is an emphasis on shared heritage, stories and imagination.

The organisation aims to create system-wide change by working with partners to ensure that the infrastructure that supports young Londoners – schools, the cultural

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[12] http://www.everydayparticipation.org

[13] Results from the UEP project are reported in two special issues of the journal Cultural Trends http://www.everydayparticipation.org/4438-2/

[14] https://www.arvon.org/schoolsandgroups/teachers-as-writers/

[15] http://bibacc.org/blog/

[16] http://researchtale.net

sector, local authorities, the youth sector, etc. – take into account the importance of creating opportunities for children and young people to play, be creative and experience culture and the role this may have in supporting them to be active and engaged citizens of their city.

With equity of opportunity a key concern, *A New Direction* works to identify where different disadvantages lie – be they related to wealth, geography or background – and seeks to address barriers through a holistic approach which emphasises youth voice and empowers young people to be creative. Based on the recognition that a range of factors including (but not limited to) class, race, gender and (collective) memory shapes the way young people experience their surroundings (Wilson and Gross 2017), the organisation actively seeks to listen and respond to the diversity of ways in which young people within London define and understand culture and the role of their creative engagement within this.

Since the organisation was established 10 years ago, a key strand of its research programme has focussed on exploring the factors that govern young people's cultural engagement in order to ensure that its interventions and support are useful and respond to the multiplicities of cultures from across the city.

4   My Culture, My London

In 2014, AND published *My Culture, My London*, an ethnographic research investigating the lives of young Londoners. The study examined young people's relationship with arts and culture in a day-to-day basis, their perceptions of London as a cultural city and the deeper motivations that were at the heart of their engagement. The 20 participants that were recruited for this study represented a broad range of young Londoners, from differing backgrounds and with varying levels of interest and engagement in arts and culture. For a 2-week period, each participant signed up to an online platform and loaded a corresponding app onto their smartphone. Researchers then posted instructions and questions to the platform, instructing participants to carry out tasks and record their experiences. In addition, participants were asked to reflect on questions including how would they sell London as a place to live and how would they describe 'arts and culture' in their own words.

The research found that, in general, children and young people do not use the term 'arts and culture' to describe the activities that they engage with. Rather, their creative participation encompasses a broad range of activities and practices – for example, beauty, make-up, tattoo design, graphic design, street dancing, computer animation, cookery, political demonstrations – which are often dynamic, interactive and inspired by other aspects of their lives. Crucially, the research found that young Londoners' value creative activities which are interactive and respond to their desire for co-creation and quick results.

As well as offering a rich account of the diversity of ways in which young people engaged with arts and culture in the city, the research illuminated key challenges to engagement. The findings pointed to familiar barriers such as perceptions of cost,

time commitment and lack of awareness of opportunities and travel as factors putting young people off engagement with arts and culture. However, while such barriers undeniably effect engagement, the research also suggests that young people tended to use these as a way of post-rationalising a decision not to engage and that in fact what lay underneath the surface were questions related to identity (is this for me?). These underlying questions were key in determining whether and how the young person would engage. Although not easily articulated, it is evident that when participants were questioning how they might feel when actually taking part in an activity, they were also subconsciously deciding whether the activity is 'for me' or 'not for me'.

The research raised the importance of reassuring young people of the democratic nature of arts and culture – a challenge which *A New Direction* responded to in the immediate period following the research by hosting co-creation workshops with young people and setting up means of regular and direct communication with its young stakeholders. Importantly, *My Culture, My London* also laid the groundwork for future interrogation of how, as an infrastructural organisation supporting young people's cultural engagement, *A New Direction* could respond to notions of cultural democracy, cultural freedom, and the role that cultural and creative engagement plays in supporting young people to give form and value to experiences of self and self-in relation.

5   Caring for Cultural Freedom: An Ecological Approach to Young People's Cultural Learning

Completed in 2017 in partnership with Kings College London, this research explores young people's cultural learning within the London borough of Harrow. It explores how cultural opportunities for young people operate within cultural ecosystems, loosely defined as 'complex networks that operate within and across a range of areas including home, school, the borough, the region and the nation' (Wilson and Gross 2017, p. 3).

In analysing the findings, report authors Dr. Nick Wilson and Dr. Jonathon Gross looked to the notion of a 'capabilities approach' (Nussbaum 2011; Sen 2000) which offers 'a way of examining social progress in terms of substantive freedom: people's ability to choose to be and do what they have reason to value' (Wilson and Gross 2017, p. 3). The capabilities approach situates children and young people's cultural learning within the framework of cultural democracy; the assertion that it is only through all people having the capability to engage with and make culture that democracy, in a civic sense, can be realised. The research thus positions young people's relationship with cultural opportunities as an issue of rights, agency and voice.

The empirical research was located in the north-east of London; the borough of Harrow is one of the most ethnically diverse areas in England. Sixty percent of the

population are estimated to be from BAME groups,[17] with the main migrant populations coming from India, Kenya and Sri Lanka.[18] Harrow also has high levels of religious diversity. Twenty-six percent of the population are Hindu, and the proportion of people of Muslim and Jewish faiths are higher than that of the national average.[19] The borough has one of the highest numbers of supplementary schools – community organisations offering home language studies and/or cultural activities and religious studies – in the capital.

In order to explore how cultural opportunities operate for young people within such a diverse setting, the research adopted an open and multi-methodological approach. Definitions of what counts as cultural activity and even the labels 'art' and 'culture' were avoided, in favour of more open questions such as what young people did in their free time. Methods included:

- Interviews with adults (teachers, head teachers, youth workers, council staff and the owner of a creative business)
- Interviews with 19–25 year olds
- Interviews with secondary school students
- Focus groups with secondary school students
- Questionnaires completed by secondary school students
- Questionnaires completed by the parents of primary school students
- Activity diaries completed by Year 5 pupils
- Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) workshop – an approach which looks to establish sustainable development by building on a community's strengths and potential

The research found that young people in Harrow particularly value conditions where they are able to feel 'free' and 'creative', regardless of what setting this may be in. Importantly, however, as the report states, "the experiences of freedom described are not reducible to the absence of structures. Rather, they are supported by particular kinds of structures that enable freedom" (Wilson and Gross 2017). According to the research, these conditions – which can be labelled as 'supported autonomy' – can be created in a number of practical ways. For example, the research highlights the importance of offering 'safe spaces' and 'holding environments' where children and young people can relax and feel secure and in which the conditions for unexpected creativity can occur. As the research states:

> Reliable conditions that allow for absorption, vulnerability and creativity play a crucial role in enabling young people's cultural capability. Based on research of the kind presented in this report, the contexts and conditions in which young people's cultural growth occurs can – to some extent – be anticipated. But the forms and consequences of this growth cannot be predicted. One of the roles organisations such as schools, youth clubs and arts centres

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[17] GLA Round Population Projections http://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/2013-round-population-projections (2013) via London datastore.
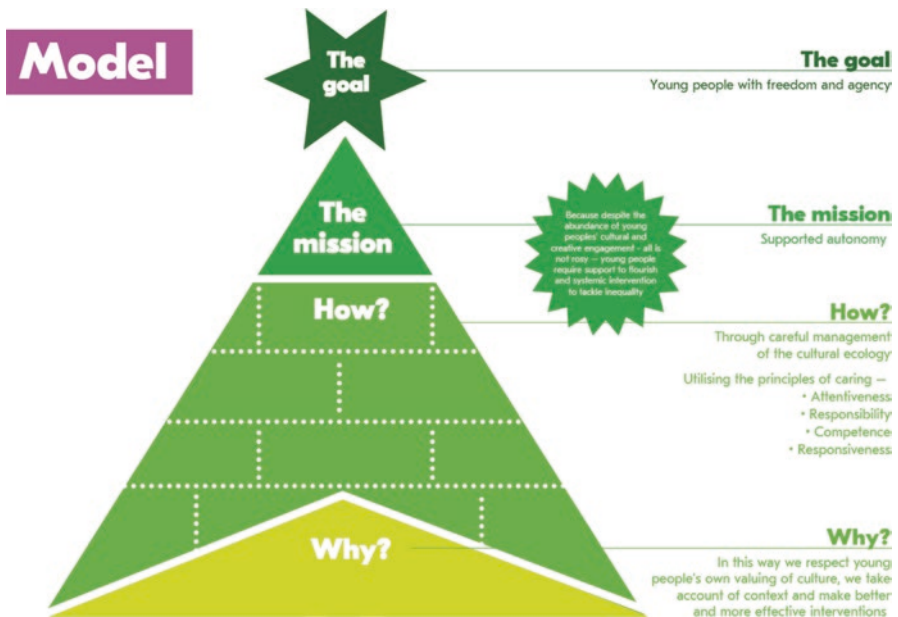
[18] Census 2011.

[19] http://harrow.gov.uk/www2/documents/s129163/Harrow%20Updated%20Joint%20Strategic%20Needs%20Assessment%202015%20V2.pdf

can play is to actively cultivate the conditions of care – the safe spaces and holding environ-ments – that enable unexpected flowerings to occur: expecting the unexpected. (Wilson and Gross 2017, p. 7)

The research also highlights the importance of the co-production of knowledge in ensuring conditions where supported autonomy can flourish. A key way of achieving co-produced knowledge, according to the research, is through creating listening spaces where the views, needs and values of children and young people are not only voiced but responded to with attentiveness. Understanding the 'whole per-son' is crucial; this includes a person's ethnicity and the cultural norms of their family and background.

However, this was not always the experience of the research participants. The researchers spoke to young people in Harrow who saw a distinction between the culture that was part of their origins and racial identity and the culture that was taught at school. A lack of acknowledgment of multiple cultural influences and backgrounds within an institutional setting can be seen as a form of exclusion which is not conducive to propagating cultural freedom for young people or meaningful community integration.

Building on these findings, the research puts forward a new model for supporting cultural learning, in which the supported autonomy of young people is a central mission achieved through an approach to managing cultural learning ecologies based on the practices of care. In other words, being attentive to the need, taking responsibility for those needs, being competent at caregiving and being responsive to feedback can help cultural practitioners, managers, teachers, etc. to understand how to manage a cultural ecosystem, in a way which is tending and cultivating, rather than imposing or demanding.

Model

The goal
The goal
Young people with freedom and agency

The mission
Because despite the abundance of young peoples' cultural and creative engagement - all is not rosy -- young people require support to flourish and systemic intervention to tackle inequality
The mission
Supported autonomy

How?
How?
Through careful management of the cultural ecology

Utilising the principles of caring —
· Attentiveness
· Responsibility
· Competence
· Responsiveness

Why?
Why?
In this way we respect young people's own valuing of culture, we take account of context and make better and more effective interventions

In placing young people with freedom and agency as a central goal of arts and cultural programmes and policy, the model engages with complex questions over diversity, inclusion and cultural democracy and offers a way for organisations and stakeholders that work to support young people's cultural learning to avoid (cultural) domination and possessiveness.

6   Create Jobs

While AND's research programme aims to give a microphone to the diversity of young Londoners' experience, its employability programme *Create Jobs* seeks to directly address a key challenge around their future – inequality in access to employment opportunities and the danger of entrenching sustained inequality through an education system which isn't nurturing the right skill sets for future jobs.

One in six jobs in London is in the creative industries. £91.8bn is generated for the UK economy per year. About 796,000 jobs exist in the creative economy.[20] Yet, unemployment rates in London are above the national average with young people, disabled adults, BAME groups and women disproportionately under-represented in the labour market.[21] Where young people are in work, wages are struggling to keep pace with the rising costs of living in London. In addition, low levels of qualifications and skills are holding many Londoners back, exacerbated by a lack of effective career information, advice and guidance offer for Londoners, which limits the ability to upskill/reskill and progress in work. While London's school system is claimed to be world-class,[22] culture, arts and creativity are being de-prioritised in the curriculum. Given economically disadvantaged young people are less likely to engage in culture and art outside of school than their more privileged peers, this curriculum deficit is furthering inequality in London's creative industries.

Focusing on young Londoners aged from 16 to 25 who are under-represented in the creative industries, including women, people from BAME backgrounds and people living with disabilities, *Create Jobs* introduces employers to creative, diverse and talented young Londoners, bringing new ideas and energy to the sector. The programme offers pioneering industry-based training with top employers, helps young creatives in to paid employment and connects raw talent to mentors and peers. Employers across the creative, cultural and digital workforce use *Create Jobs* as a direct route to find entry-level candidates, which fill skill gaps and bring new diverse talent to organisations. As well as addressing the lack of diversity in the creative industries directly by enabling access to opportunities for young people from diverse backgrounds, *Create Jobs* looks to tackle the systemic nature of this lack of diversity across the creative, cultural and digital industries by working

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[20] http://www.thecreativeindustries.co.uk

[21] https://data.london.gov.uk/apps_and_analysis/labour-market-update-for-london-december-2017/

[22] https://fullfact.org/education/london-schools-outperform-rest-england/

alongside employers to develop innovated career progression routes and challenging them to review biassed recruitment practices. Since 2014, 1726 young Londoners have received 1–1 advice and coaching via the programme, with over 500 young Londoners having completed a training programme and over 250 being supported into long-term employment.

An important aspect of *A New Direction's* programme is building an understanding (or category) of arts and culture ground-up, from the creative interests of young Londoners (which includes the multiple influences of ethnicity and diversity), and using this new approach to change the dominant and institutionally driven idea of what constitutes art in London. This approach is not about expanding 'access' to the arts, which implies a fixed idea of art to which more people should be welcomed; it is about expanding and updating what we understand our collective cultural activity to be. In extending what counts as the arts, AND also works for the freedom for young people to express themselves within the dominant culture and, crucially, to get work in these sectors if they want to and thereby to have more control and power.

A New Direction's mission is explicitly concerned with art, culture and creativity, but as the 'Caring for Cultural Freedom' (Wilson and Gross 2017) report shows, these things are closely linked with notions of identity, cultural heritage and therefore questions of diversity, integration and multiculturalism. It may well be that the central idea of trusting young people's creative instincts and nurturing their progression is an underdeveloped strategy for building stronger communities more at ease with their individual differences.

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