CultureCase

How the creative and cultural sector can adopt anti-oppressive practice

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Summary

This paper examined a youth arts project in Canada and identified how the wider cultural sector might adopt ‘anti-oppressive practices’. These can help generate ‘more sustainable and more equitable livelihoods’. The author sketches out ‘what the working practices of conflict prevention, accessibility, affirmation, open exploration, scaffolded support, and mentorship could look like when applied in mainstream creative industries workplaces’.

Anti-oppressive practice is made up of some important components of care

‘Conflict prevention’ creates the conditions for diverse participants to work together. For example, one venue offered food on-site, tokens for local transport, and the permission to bring children or pets to workshops. They also had an active welcome and orientation for new participants. ‘Accessibility’ ensures that activities are in locations and at times that are suitable for their audience, with clear information shared in advance. It is also about making sure people are equipped to navigate arts sector bureaucracies. ‘Affirmation’ of participants was important. This took the form of persistent encouragement and was communicated through body language and atmosphere in addition to words. There was no sense in which people were being judged or monitored.

There are also anti-oppressive approaches to learning

‘Open exploration’ is a way to make activities easy and intuitive to participate in – not requiring formal enrolment or strict progression points. ‘Scaffolded support’ is where a more knowledgeable or experienced undertakes activities with a learner – giving them a space in which to experiment and create with the reassurance of an expert. ‘Mentorship’ enabled ‘participants to form supportive relationships with staff or more experienced participants’.

Anti-oppressive practice has its challenges

The lack of formal structure and rigorous performance management meant that underperformance went unchallenged in the case study. Problematic behaviour was not policed, which made some people feel unsafe. An exessive level of care for the wellbeing of others meant that some participants did not pay full attention to their own wellbeing.

Keywords

interview **observation** **young people** **anti-oppressive practice** **Canada**

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