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Climate Change and Sustainability Education in Music

The Current Situation in England

Abstract

Der Artikel zeigt eine Momentaufnahme der aktuellen Entwicklungen in Bezug auf die Einbettung von Klima- und Nachhaltigkeitsbildung in verschiedene Bereiche der englischen Musikpädagogik. Er schildert die jüngsten politischen Entwicklungen des Ministeriums für Bildung und des Arts Council England und betrachtet potenzielle Auswirkungen auf Schulen und andere Bildungseinrichtungen. Es werden Forschungsergebnisse präsentiert, die good practices identifizieren und Bereiche aufzeigen, in denen perspektivisch mehr getan werden muss, um Musikpädagog:innen an Schulen zu unterstützen. Schließlich werden anhand des 4E-Rahmens für umweltfreundliches Verhalten Beispiele für weitere Kampagnen und Initiativen von Organisationen dieses Sektors vorgestellt.

Introduction

In the United Kingdom, education policy is a devolved matter, meaning that England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have separate policies and curricula. This article offers a snapshot of current developments regarding the embedding of climate change and sustainability education into areas of English music education. It charts recent policy developments and considers potential impacts on schools and other educational organisations. It reports new research findings into the perspectives and practical experiences of a sample of English school music teachers, contributing to the limited evidence base in this area. Finally, using the *4E framework for pro-environmental behaviours* (an organisational and auditing model well-used in the nations of the United Kingdom), it highlights further campaigns and initiatives run by organisations within music education and the wider music industry. The paper identifies good practices and areas where more must be done to support those working in English music education. Consequently, it also outlines areas where further research is required.

The policy context

Publicly-funded music education in England has traditionally taken two forms: (1) classroom-based curricular music lessons in primary and secondary schools, and (2) individual, small-group and ensemble-based instrumental and singing work led by teachers

employed by local government ‘music services’ or, latterly, via ‘music education hubs’. The two types of provision are informed by distinct curricular and policy documentation, although there are overlaps between these.

School music curricula

The *National Curriculum programmes of study* loosely govern the teaching of music in most English state primary and secondary schools (up to the age of 14). The most recent versions (DfE, 2013, online) are brief and open-ended, offering educators motivated to relate music lessons to environmental matters considerable latitude to do so. For instance, the stipulation that Key Stage 2 pupils (aged 7 to 11) should compose music for a “range of purposes” and perform in “solo and ensemble contexts” was used as the curricular basis for lesson resources produced by the UK branch of the *World Wide Fund for Nature* (2017). These encouraged pupils to use percussion and recycled junk instruments to accompany themselves in self-composed raps highlighting links between food production and climate change.

A current development relates to the *General Certificate of Secondary Education* (GCSE) in Music offered by the *Eduqas* examination board. Around nine thousand 16-year-olds in around 760 schools take this version of the GCSE Music examination annually as part of qualifications marking the end of their compulsory schooling period (Eduqas, 2023a). 15% of the total marks available for this qualification are linked to a composition written in response to the pupil’s choice of four descriptive briefs, set annually. One of the briefs set for submission in summer 2024 is to “compose a piece for performance in a youth environmental event dealing with climate change” (Eduqas, 2023b, online). Given the contemporary interest in nudge theory as a means of subtly encouraging individuals towards pro-environmental actions (Wee, Choong & Low, 2021), it will be interesting to see how many young people elect to submit a composition in response to this brief.

The English Department for Education’s Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy

The DfE published its *Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy* on 21st April 2022 (DfE, 2023). This is applicable to early years providers (which in England covers the 0–5 age group), schools, colleges, universities, and

children's social care facilities. The Strategy has various aims but of relevance here are plans relating to young people's learning and progression. Neither music nor other arts subjects are explicitly mentioned in the Strategy, which instead focuses on curricular developments related to science, natural history, and agriculture. However, there are also nascent plans to introduce a co-curricular *Climate Leaders Award* to recognise schools who strongly promote sustainability and celebrate the work of pupils who pursue new skills in the process. Designed and delivered by the *London Natural History Museum*, this is envisaged as a credit-based, structured programme which would be "recognised and valued as supporting progression to employment and further study" (DfE, 2023, online). It is unclear yet whether young people will be able to undertake musical activities within this, although existing programmes on which the Award is to be modelled (such as the *Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme*) do embrace practical music opportunities. Another notable initiative within the DfE Strategy is the requirement for every school to appoint a designated lead teacher for sustainability by 2025. It will be interesting to see if music teachers choose to apply for this additional responsibility.

It would be fair to say that general reactions to the Strategy from the education sector, environmental campaigners and policy analysts have been mixed (Greer et al., 2023a). It is also difficult to discern any specific impacts of the DfE Strategy on music education practice in English primary and secondary schools. Indeed, an official report into the current state of teaching of school music was published by the schools inspectorate *Ofsted* (2023) seventeen months after the release of the Strategy. However, the report made no reference to it, nor to any environmental issues. One exception is found within the early years, where third-party guidance documents responding to the Strategy briefly stress the practical role of music in enhancing young children's feelings of nature-connectedness (Boyd et al, 2022; Kemp et al., 2022). Moreover, professional development materials have been produced by a commercial training provider for primary and secondary music specialists (National College, 2023). These focus on "understanding how to incorporate sustainability and climate change education into the... music curriculum to provide a broader perspective on the issues" whilst "gaining familiarity with the DfE's sustainability and climate change strategy" (ibid., online). This training also seeks to help educators make links between the Strategy and the 2022 *National Plan for Music Education*.

The National Plan for Music Education

Whilst evidence of the DfE Strategy's impact on English school music *practice* remains scant at present, there has been a more discernible level of influence on music education *policy*. In June 2022, the DfE (2022) published

a new *National Plan for Music Education in England*, updating the previous version from 2011. The Plan has significant ramifications for instrumental, vocal and ensemble tuition and activities provided by local music education hubs. The latter are defined as "partnerships that support, deliver and enable access to music education for children and young people within a local area. These partnerships are co-ordinated by a hub lead organisation and can include schools, local authorities, community groups, music organisations, industry and more" (ACE, n. d., online). In many cases, hub lead organisations are the same local government music services that used to offer a similar range of services before hubs came into existence in 2011.

The 2022 version of the National Plan sets out a series of refreshed aims and strategic functions for music hubs. One of these functions is 'sustainability', interpreted in various ways which go beyond core environmental definitions of the term. For instance, the Plan uses the terms 'sustainable' and 'sustainability' in relation to the musical opportunities offered to young people and their ability to access and engage with them over time, along with their ability to progress to professional musical careers. It also borrows further language from environmental science when it describes the local "eco-system" for music education (p. 5). Whilst it is certainly the case that the concept of 'sustainability' is multifaceted and often regarded as embracing the 'triple Ps' of 'people', 'profit' and 'planet' (Kane, 2011), the term has also become a buzzword frequently employed within political rhetoric: "it is precisely the widespread use and the 'use' of its diffuse character that provides the concept with its capacity to 'go around the back' to legitimize a given agenda" (Grindsted, 2018, p. 57). In the case of the National Plan, the term 'sustainability' is prominently used in reference to financial matters. Hubs are encouraged to diversify their income beyond their core public funding to ensure that the fees to schools and families remain accessible. This encouragement is not new, and hubs have been told to seek alternative funding due to reducing public subsidy for some time (Savage, 2021). The economic framing of the term sustainability resembles similar usage of the term within the DfE's Strategy itself (Dunlop & Rushton, 2022).

There is, however, one paragraph in the new National Plan which specifically refers to "environmental responsibility", although detailed implications are not considered in the document:

The UK requires the education sector to play its role in positively responding to climate change and inspiring action on an international stage. This includes Music Hubs. The [Department for Education] recently published its sustainability and climate change strategy, and we will expect Hubs to consider how they contribute to this strategy's aims. [Arts Council England] is committed to supporting cultural organisations to lead the way in their

approaches to environmental responsibility, and we will work with them to set out in greater detail how Hubs can ensure they are achieving this. (DfE, 2022, p. 58)

This extract refers to *Arts Council England* (ACE), the public body which distributes government and *National Lottery* money to arts and cultural organisations. As part of their remit, ACE oversees the commissioning and funding of music education hubs and will announce a new round of hub lead organisations later in 2024. ACE's 2020–30 strategy document *Let's Create* situated environmental sustainability as one of four investment principles for awarding its funds. The influence of both the DfE and ACE strategy has required those bidding to become the next generation of hub lead organisations to provide information on how they will “act upon [their] organisation's and the wider hub's environmental responsibilities, setting appropriate targets that align with the Department for Education's Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy” (ACE, 2023a, p. 21). Given that the lead organisation appointment process is ongoing at the time of writing, application documents remain private and so the range of responses to this requirement is not yet known. However, very little detail will have been expected in answers, since applicant organisations had a maximum of 4,000 characters to explain how they would address this point. This same space had also to be used by applicant organisations to demonstrate their commitment to “strategic, financial, operational” (ibid.) forms of sustainability as well.

Once the newly appointed hub lead organisations are in place towards the end of 2024, they will be able to access a new *Capital Grant for Musical Instruments*, also administered by ACE (2023b). Here, there is already a suggestion of inconsistency between ACE's stated investment principle of environmental sustainability and the new sustainability expectations placed upon hubs. This is because the financial restrictions of the grant mean that the repair of existing stocks of instruments is very unlikely to be supported; the focus is on the purchase of new instruments and equipment. This is despite the National Plan recognising that hubs must be supported to “build on existing best practice around developing sustainable instruments stocks” (DfE, 2022, p. 19).

One significant related development concerns *Music Mark*, the UK membership organisation which represents hub lead organisations along with many other bodies and individuals concerned with music education. As an ACE *Investment Principles Support Organisation* (IPSO), *Music Mark* has recognised its role in supporting its members to adopt more environmentally sustainable working practices and is also taking action on its own organisational environmental footprint (*Music Mark*, n. d.). It is soon to launch a two-year national promotional campaign entitled *This is not a rehearsal*, which will focus on engaging members with matters of environmental sustainability and the climate crisis.

Perspectives from English teachers of music

The recent policies discussed above are most influential on organisations, particularly at the level of local music services, hubs and their partners. These policies also emphasise collaboration between these organisations and those teaching music in schools. However, we currently know relatively little about the extent to which English school music education professionals are responding to environmental sustainability and climate change in their work. A doctoral study conducted by Cheng (2015) in four English secondary schools identified the potential to embed principles of sustainability education into Key Stage 3 Music lessons (for pupils aged 11–14). Cheng found that composition and performance lessons featuring junk instruments and lyrics addressing environmental issues could be more successful in engaging some groups of young people than those in Geography and Science.

More recently, questionnaire-based research was undertaken into the perspectives of the English school teaching workforce regarding climate change and sustainability issues. A small number of music teachers were amongst those who took part and, whilst their responses cannot be construed as generally representative of the English school music teaching workforce, they nonetheless give us an indication of how some music teachers are responding to environmental issues. Between October and December 2022, *University College London's Centre for Climate Change and Sustainability Education* (CCCSE) invited teachers in England to complete an online questionnaire entitled *What do climate change and sustainability education have to do with me?* Overall, 870 responses were received from teachers working in Early Years, Primary, Secondary and Post-Compulsory educational phases. An initial report of overall findings is provided by Greer et al. (2023b) but the present paper includes additional analysis at the subject level, and an analysis of data which pertains to the teaching of music. Of the 870 responses, 88 were from teachers who taught music in the Early Years ($n = 17$), Primary ($n = 70$), Secondary and Post-Compulsory phases ($n = 11$) – with some respondents teaching the subject across the primary and secondary phases.

Teachers were asked to indicate the frequency with which they incorporated climate change and sustainability into their teaching. Of the teachers of music who responded to this question (66 of the 88), thirteen (20 %) indicated that they made links between music and these issues “occasionally”. Two (3 %) indicated that they did so “most commonly”. By contrast, 51 (77 %) reported that they made these links only “rarely”. In fact, only teachers of mathematics reported rarer links between their subject and these environmental matters (78 %). Conversely, some 80 % of Geography teachers, 68 % of Science teachers and 53 % of Citizenship teachers indicated that they most commonly

made links with their subjects. Whilst subjects such as Geography and Science are the traditional locations for coverage of environmental issues in English schools, the questionnaire findings nonetheless indicated that creative subjects such as Art were incorporating these topics more frequently than music.

Some teachers of music who *were* incorporating climate change and sustainability gave examples of lesson activities in their questionnaire responses. These included outdoor musical activities giving pupils opportunities to focus on sounds of trees and birds, and to make instruments from natural materials. Others had designed listening and composition activities drawing on music inspired by nature and climate change, and which were intended to stimulate pupils' environmental engagement. Some used music teaching to raise awareness and demonstrate change, for instance introducing songs about *COP26*, showing pupils how they had reduced paper usage in their own practice, and explaining to pupils why it was important to turn off keyboards at the end of the day.

Other teachers gave reasons why they felt unable to make stronger links between music, climate change and sustainability in their teaching. Several indicated that they saw no relevant links between these areas despite being personally very concerned about the issues. Another, who was already very active in their school's extracurricular environmental activities, nonetheless admitted that they had never thought of bringing these issues into music; they reflected that it was their "own lack of knowledge" which prevented further links being made. Further barriers cited included a need to teach an already "packed curriculum", and limited time to engage with topics perceived to be very complex. One secondary music teacher pointed out that since *GCSE* and *Advanced Level Music* qualifications did not require coverage of environmental issues, it was harder for teachers to incorporate this into exam-focused teaching. Two mentioned that they taught music to pupils with special educational needs, and therefore needed to find particularly imaginative and sensitive ways of bringing issues of climate and sustainability into their classrooms – a matter considered by Clark (2013).

Eleven survey respondents taught only music, either within secondary schools or across both secondary and primary age groups. All but one of these held graduate or postgraduate qualifications relating to music, suggesting that they were 'music specialists', a term used in the English context to describe teachers with particular responsibilities to teach, lead or coordinate music in their schools (Holden & Button, 2006). Although small in number, the questionnaire responses of these individuals are nonetheless insightful because they are focused exclusively on teaching music; by contrast, the answers of the remaining 77 respondents are likely to have been influenced by their experiences of teaching other subjects as part of a 'generalist' timetable as well.

In many cases, responses by those teaching only music mirrored those of all respondents, and so the reader is directed to Greer et al. (2023b) for a representative synopsis. However, this subset of eleven tended to answer some survey questions differently and – although the numbers involved do not allow testing for statistical significance – these differences prompt questions to be addressed in future research. For instance, a third of survey participants as a whole mentioned that pupils raised the subjects of climate change or sustainability "often" or "very often" in their lessons. In contrast, none of eleven respondents teaching only music reported that their pupils raised these issues. To an extent, this might be a chicken-and-egg situation whereby pupils are less inclined to bring these matters up when, according to the findings reported above, so little of the music teaching they receive addresses them. Simultaneously, music teachers may perceive this absence of comment on the part of pupils as a reason to continue 'business as usual'. However, it is already acknowledged that young musicians who continue to study the subject in higher education are increasingly well informed about climate and sustainability issues and aware of their own environmental footprints (Mosley, 2020). Whilst further work is needed to understand the reasons for the correlation they report, recent UK research by Shaw et al. (2022) has also suggested that individuals who are more actively engaged with music tend also to be more concerned about climate change than the general population. Thus, it seems plausible that young people might begin to raise these issues within school music lessons as well.

Questionnaire respondents were also asked to select their top five priorities from a list of possibilities to help further embed environmental issues into teaching. Four of the top five selections made by those teaching only music matched those of respondents as a whole: there was a desire to see "more sustainability actions in school to reinforce student learning", "more opportunities to collaborate with colleagues to develop teaching materials", "more support from external organisations to develop teaching materials" and the "inclusion of climate change/sustainability in *Ofsted* inspection procedures". However, there was a difference in relation to the relevance of the *National Curriculum*. Whilst survey respondents as a whole felt that promoting climate change/sustainability issue within the *National Curriculum* for their subject(s) would provide an important additional source of support, those who taught only music did not agree. Instead, they selected "more time to develop my own curriculum". This distinction could relate to the very open-ended nature of the English *National Curriculum* for music noted above. Moreover, in England there is a tradition of school music teachers drawing widely upon various materials and methods to suit the practicalities of their individual circumstances rather than following any single textbook

or curriculum (Plummeridge, 2000). Further evidence of an independent, individual approach to the topic was found in music-only teachers' responses to another question regarding resources. Amongst questionnaire respondents as a whole, the most commonly used resources for teaching climate and sustainability issues were "films or videos". However, amongst those teaching only music, "resources I create" was most frequently cited. This said, at least one music-only teacher felt that this open-endedness was a doubled-edged sword, pointing out in another part of the questionnaire that "no mention of [these issues] in the *National Curriculum for Key Stage 3*" meant that it was "left up to the school to be inventive in its planning". Collectively, this suggests that further research should try to tease out the kinds of support for climate change and sustainability education that would be most beneficial to those teaching music in English schools. This will need to balance the desire of some music teachers to design their own materials with the needs of those who wish to draw on external expertise. Understanding the appetite for the latter is important because third-party organisations are more likely to invest in developing support materials if there is clear evidence of demand.

Taken together, these CCCSE questionnaire results suggest that a small minority of those teaching music in English schools are already including climate and sustainability issues in their lessons to some extent. Some are passionate about the topic, having sought out relevant knowledge themselves and developed their own imaginative teaching approaches and resources. To do this, they must be adept at exploiting the open-ended requirements of English National Curriculum for music. However, these colleagues currently remain in the minority, and it is likely that a far greater number of teachers of music are only engaging with climate and sustainability matters rarely at most. Of course, one would never expect to see coverage of these issues overshadow the core responsibilities of music teachers towards their subject. Nonetheless, it is likely that more might be achievable if the barriers outlined above could be tackled. Even amongst those teaching only music, there is evidence of a desire for more school-wide and external support, along with additional time to develop teaching materials and greater opportunities to collaborate with colleagues. One way in which this might be possible is through the development of further links between school-based music teachers and those working in other areas of provision and support. Thus, we now turn to these other areas in the final section of the paper.

Framing organisational action

Despite official policy being very recent, it is nonetheless the case that individual English music education organisations have been actively responding to environmental concerns for some years. We next offer

a representative range of examples framed by the 4E model. This was developed around fifteen years ago by the English Government *Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs* amid efforts to prioritise voluntary, informed changes in citizens' pro-environmental behaviour (Defra, 2011).

The four Es in the model refer to 'engaging', 'exemplifying', 'encouraging' and 'enabling' people and groups to make changes in their lives and activities which will benefit the environment. The 'encouraging' aspect emphasises rewards, recognition and feedback. It also offers scope for equivalent disincentives through legislation, tax, enforcement and social pressure. Examples include grants and increased expenditure, rewards schemes, league tables and social recognition. Within music education, there is a limit to what individual practitioners and organisations can accomplish with regards to funding, law and regulation. However, arts and music funding organisations can use their grants in ways which encourage pro-environmental activity. Outlined above, *Arts Council England's* emphasis on environmental sustainability is a pre-eminent example within the English music education context at present.

The concept of 'enabling' in the 4E model acknowledges that individuals cannot enact change alone. They must be supported by systems and infrastructure, enhancing their capacity to make responsible choices. To do this, so goes the model, we must remove barriers, give information and build understanding through education, training and the provision of skills. In turn, this requires significant facilities, support and resources. Reference has already been made to the professional development courses for music teachers offered by the *National College* and to the curricular support materials provided by the *World Wide Fund for Nature*. Industry and subject teaching associations also have an important role to play here, and the *Royal Geographical Society* has produced secondary school-age lesson plans and resources for *Greening Glastonbury* (RGS, n. d.). This considers the challenges presented by the famous English festival in terms of pollution, rubbish, sewage, crime, water usage, traffic and electricity demands, and explores organisers' efforts to become more sustainable. The toolkits, checklists and resources created by arts and entertainment industry bodies such as the *Albert Consortium* (wearealbert.org/production-handbook) and *Julie's Bicycle* (juliesbicycle.com/resources) are also available to teachers (Mosley, 2020). Coverage in professional literature is also important, such as the March 2024 article in *Music Teacher* magazine which reviewed musical repertoire responding to the climate crisis (Jackson, 2024).

In the 4E model, the term 'engaging' refers to activities which attempt to address individuals' thinking and beliefs; by involving people at an early stage, we might help them take greater personal responsibility. Characteristics of 'engaging' activities are 'bottom up'

community actions and those which promote debate and co-production. Whilst initiatives might start within small and enthusiastic groups of people, actions can then be amplified through alignment with trusted intermediaries, including professional networks, media organisations and opinion formers. Ultimately within the 4E model, ‘engaging’ is about giving people the *permission* to be concerned, to organise and to act. Reference has already been made to *Music Mark’s This is not a rehearsal* campaign and this offers a good example of a current ‘engaging’ activity in English music education. Another is offered by the *UK Music Education Council’s Music Industry and Climate Change Seminar* held online in November 2021. This brought music industry and education professionals together to “to discuss and solve complex problems in a spirit of collaboration” (Castang, 2022, p. 1).

According to the 4E model, ‘exemplifying’ activities demonstrate shared responsibility. They help show that individuals and organisations are ‘doing their bit’. Of course, the support of others is required if individual actions are to become role modelling examples. Thus, the 4E model emphasises that others must know of these actions, and the actions of likeminded individuals and groups. Ultimately, the goal is to achieve greater consistency within policy and organisational learning as these individual actions become the norm. Some music education hubs were active in this area before the new requirements to demonstrate greater environmental sustainability. In the summer of 2021, the *London Borough of Islington* music education hub ran a home learning-based pandemic lockdown project in which participating children collaborated to compose a piece entitled *Seasons Change* (Bartholomew, 2021). Inspired by the words of famous British naturalist Sir David Attenborough, learners composed orchestral, choral and lyrical material remotely, based on teacher-provided audio cues. A second example is drawn from the southwest county of Cornwall, where the local music hub engaged in a multi-year collaboration with a climatologist, local musicians and schools (Isaacson, 2020). Here young people wrote songs on the topic of environmental wellbeing with the support of a local composer. A third example was inspired by the south coast Isle of Wight’s designated as a *UNESCO Biosphere Reserve*. A *Mardi Gras* parade was co-organised by the Southampton and Isle of White Hub in July 2022 (Little, 2022). Drawing on the *United Nations Sustainable Development Goals* for inspiration, this featured an anthem specially written by a local composer with lyrics provided by local children.

Conclusion

At a policy level, and in terms of widespread educational practice, it would be fair to say that English music education is only just beginning a journey towards a greater foregrounding of climate change and sustainability issues. This is taking place against a

backdrop of policy development, service reorganisation and reduced levels of public funding. However, as we hope the examples above demonstrate, there are also strong examples of longer-term, individual, and organisational efforts in various sectors. The range of current initiatives, campaigns and coverage in the professional literature also suggest an increased momentum at present and it will be vital to sustain this as *Department for Education* and *Arts Council England* policies begins to exert greater influence on the activities of schools, teachers, and local music hubs. Future research should monitor the ongoing organisational impacts of these policies and the greater professional awareness they might prompt. It should also consider how emerging best practices can be identified and shared across the sector. Progress on investigating these matters from the perspective of local music services, hubs and their partners is currently being made through research led by the first author (Music Mark, 2024). Yet we also need to understand in more depth the perspectives and experiences of the English school music teaching workforce, with an emphasis on practical solutions to challenges relating to curricular requirements, resource development and professional learning.

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