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The policy and practice of music education in England, 2010–2020

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Since the introduction of the National Plan for Music Education there have been significant changes in music education within England. Whilst some celebrate figures that report increased access and engagement, many teachers and others continue to have legitimate concerns regarding the quality of the music education on offer in schools and Music Education Hubs. There are concerns that the provision of music education is incoherent and patchy across the country. Many would argue that the opportunity to access high-quality music education has become a ‘postcode lottery’. There is a sense that the fragmentation of music education as a result of curriculum reforms and the diversity of approaches taken by Music Education Hubs and other bodies has significantly enhanced this incoherence. This article seeks to review the policy and practice of music education in England over the last 10 years. It draws on recent research from various sources and maintains a particular focus on government policy and the consequences of this for the field as a whole. It reflects on how things could be improved in the future. It argues for a clearer focus on a practitioner-led approach to research and advocacy, in particular one led by the notion of ‘policy as practice’ rather than continuing with the current approach and its intrinsic failings.

Keywords: advocacy; curriculum; music education; policy as practice

Introduction

The day-to-day business of music education in England, what Kemmis (2012) calls the ‘practice architecture’, revolves around contested policy and pedagogical approaches. The roles that schools and Music Education Hubs play in the provision of music education are often unclear, with the specific requirements of a National Curriculum and wider roles and responsibilities set by government agencies such as Arts Council England causing tension, conflict and division. Music education has been under sustained criticism for many years. Constant bickering between different organisations, underpinned by contrasting ideologies about the importance of their particular ‘type’ of music education, has frustrated policy-makers (Ward, 2019). The arguments put forward for music education vary from those related to the intrinsic benefits to those that highlight an ever-increasing list of external ones (Cohen, 2006; Clift *et al.*, 2008; Hallam, 2009). However, what is often missing from these studies is a closer examination of the organisations that deliver music education programmes, such as schools, Music Education Hubs and a host of other private companies. The

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result has been a lack of a sufficiently cumulative and robust evidence base associated with the value of music education. Competing, dissonant voices have left policy-makers bewildered, confused and frustrated. In recent times, it has given them an excuse to marginalise what is seen as a noisy and vocal cacophonous group, and press ahead with ill-informed solutions to complex problems. The resulting ‘crisis’ (Masso, 2018) was sadly predictable (Savage, 2018a, p. 215).

Alongside the trials and tribulations within the music education community, curriculum reform more generally within England has been dominated by a narrowing of the curriculum around subjects that the government consider to be priority areas (English, mathematics and the sciences), and a test-based, numbers-driven accountability (Anagnostopoulos *et al.*, 2013; Lingard *et al.*, 2013, 2015). The consequence of a system that has been built on increasing the values attached to outputs and efficiencies seen as important to our economic well-being as country, as opposed to a carefully considered implementation of a broad and balanced curriculum for young people’s development, has been well documented (Cochran-Smith *et al.*, 2009; Lewis and Hardy, 2015).

The work of those charged with the ‘delivery’ of that curriculum has also fundamentally changed, principally through a performativity agenda that prioritises things that can be supposedly easily quantified and measured (Ball, 2003; Cochran Smith *et al.*, 2009). Many have argued that the resulting reforms have changed not only the educational system itself but also those that work within it, resulting in a new ‘type’ of teacher and a new, ‘multi-faceted’ transformation of what we understand by the ‘meaning and value of education’ (Ball, 2018, p. 589).

Ball’s earlier work (Ball, 2003) on the markets, managerialism and performativity in education provides an important starting point for this study of music education in England. Whilst much time will be spent considering the infrastructure of music education, the locations in which it takes place and its relationship to the National Curriculum, it is important to remember that teachers themselves are at the heart of the curriculum and its delivery and, as we have already considered, their identity and role have already been fundamentally changed. As Ball comments:

Policy technologies of education reform are not simply vehicles for the technical and structural change of organizations but are also mechanisms for reforming teachers (scholars and researchers) and for changing what it means to be a teacher, the technologies of reform produce new kinds of teacher subjects. Such reform changes one’s ‘social identity’ (Bernstein, 1996, p. 73). That is, education reform brings about change in ‘our subjective existence and our relations with another’. (Rose, 1989, p. ix; Ball, 2003, p. 217)

Ball’s notions of markets, managerialism and performativity play a fundamental role in this process. They can help us examine the changes in music education over the last decade in England. All knowledge is political, subjective and tainted by its context and the means through which it is expressed. The original survey of the state of music education in England presented here is constrained by the researcher’s own assumptions, world view, relationships and personal context (as a teacher of music, teacher educator, Chair of Trustees of a Music Education Hub and company director). However, Ball’s framework provides a helpful starting point through which the journey of music education in England over the last decade can be explored and

through which key moments in its development can be made visible as it were, and the reasons behind these can be explored more fully.

Music within the National Curriculum in England

Music has been included as a core subject within the National Curriculum in England since its establishment in 1992 (NCC, 1992). At that point, there was a 33-page folder of curriculum orders alongside a 42-page of non-statutory guidance. When the National Curriculum was revised in 1999, the Qualifications & Curriculum Authority produced a 39-page booklet comprising the curriculum orders and advisory materials (QCA, 1999). Following on from this in 2007, the Labour Government's revision of the National Curriculum resulted in a 2,270-word statement that represented music's key concepts and processes and wider opportunities (QCA, 2007). Yet the current National Curriculum for Music consists of 209 words (DfE, 2013), 55 words for the Programme of Study for Key Stage 1, 130 words for Key Stage 2 and 200 words for Key Stage 3; a combined total of 594 words.

What should be read into the gradual shrinking of the National Curriculum for Music's text? One of the most significant developments in recent years has been the addition of a number of other policy frameworks for music education that could be argued to have supplanted the National Curriculum for Music as the key rationale and organising framework for music education in England's schools. The National Plan for Music Education is one such document, written by Darren Henley and published in 2011. But before we turn to the detail of these, I will consider the consequences of educational reforms over the last 10 years that have diminished the role that the National Curriculum plays in state schools and the impact that this has had on music education in those schools.

Music education in schools

Prior to reforms instigated by the coalition government from 2010 onwards, schools in England were all required to meet the demands of the National Curriculum for England. For 25 years, this legal framework had provided a coherent development framework for students' progression during their compulsory schooling. It outlined the state's rationale for what could be considered as a 'broad and balanced' curriculum entitlement for all students.

The situation schools face today is very different. With the 'academisation' of many schools, together with the establishment of Free Schools, this notion of a broad and balanced curriculum offer in all state-funded schools has significantly weakened. Schools now have the legal freedoms to design and implement their own curriculum arrangements. Whilst in theory these schools are still required to meet the outline principles and content of the National Curriculum, how they do this is entirely within their control. There are few checks or balances to temper their approach.

Alongside these freedoms, there have been significant changes to the ways that schools can be held accountable. For academies and free schools, this accountability structure relates directly to the Department for Education; for those schools that have not changed to the academy structure, there is still a degree of accountability to local

authorities. In either case, educational reforms and the imposition of frameworks such as Progress 8 and the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) have led to significant reorganisation of the curriculum within schools.

The Paul Hamlyn-funded research project *Inspiring Music for All* was one of the largest reviews of music education in schools. The aim of the review was to inform the development of the Foundation's strategic plans for the next decade, and it was completed in 2014 (Zeserson *et al.*, 2014). The research examined a range of literature, conducted interviews and held discussions with key participants including teachers, teacher-educators, instrumentalists and other interested stakeholders. A mixed-methods approach was adopted to address the research aim and objectives, with a series of inter-related stages capturing primary and secondary qualitative and quantitative data.

The key finding from the research was that the place and status of music in schools varied widely across the country. In the best cases, music in schools was found to be significantly more inclusive, diverse and better quality than it was a decade previously (Zeserson *et al.*, 2014, p. 16).

However, this was not the whole picture. In many other schools (the survey does not specify how many), the quality and reach of music education in primary and secondary schools was considered highly inconsistent. The reasons for this were complex and included 'negative impacts associated with recent education policy changes' (Zeserson *et al.*, 2014, pp. 20–31).

Before turning to secondary schools, I will consider some of the specific issues facing primary schools over the last 10 years.

Music education in primary schools

As long ago as 1998, the *Times Educational Supplement* reported the 'horrifying findings' of their survey, which showed that one in five primary schools in England and Wales had cut down on music education as a direct result of government policy to emphasise 'core' subjects such as numeracy and literacy. Moving ahead 20 years, one can find pillars of the music education community, such as the Director of the Royal College of Music, criticising the 'steady decline' of music provision in state primary schools (Santry, 2018).

Hardly a month goes by without articles appearing in the national press championing the cause of music education for primary school children. On the eve of the 2018 final of the BBC's *Young Musician of the Year*, all past winners of this prestigious prize wrote:

... that they are now deeply concerned that instrumental music learning is being 'left to decay in many British schools'. They are calling for a universal right to learn an instrument that protects parents from any costs. (Savage, 2018b)

Herein lies one of the many difficulties for proponents of music education in schools. Music education in the broad sense, as described by several decades of National Curriculum reform, does not solely equate to the provision of an opportunity to learn to play a musical instrument. This is only one part of a broad approach to music education within the National Curriculum model, which also includes

composition, listening, reviewing and evaluating. This approach has been exemplified in the work of music educators such as Swanwick (1988, 1992), Mills (2005) and Green (2008). These educators, amongst others, were successful in influencing the text of the National Curriculum and ensuring it promoted the idea of a holistic and interrelated model of music processes (including performing, composing and listening). However, the subtleties of their work did not fare well against simple statements such as those made by David Blunkett, Secretary of State for Education and Employment, within the Labour Government's Green Paper (UK Parliament, 2001), that 'every primary school child will have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument'. The consequences of this statement have had a significant impact on the nature and provision of music education in England.

More broadly speaking, the argument over whose job it is to deliver a music curriculum offer to children in primary schools has been well rehearsed over the years. The amount of specialist musical training that a potential primary school teacher receives as part of their undergraduate or postgraduate training has diminished significantly in recent years. For many, this is cause for alarm and a further sign of the decline of music education in primary schools (and evidence of the need to send specialist instrumental teachers into primary schools to rescue the situation). However, it is important to remember that this is not the only solution. For example, Janet Mills, former Chief HMI for Music, was a strong advocate of an alternative approach. This is outlined in her book *Music and the school*:

Some of the finest music teachers that I have observed, particularly, but not only, in primary schools, have no qualifications in music, and teach many subjects—in some cases the whole of the primary curriculum. They may never have learned to play an instrument, and they may not read staff notation well, or at all. What they bring to their music teaching is their ability, typically developed in other subjects, to diagnose where students are, and work out ways of helping them to learn, frequently coupled with a degree of humility about their music skills that leaves them continually questioning how well their students are learning, and whether there are approaches that would enable them to learn more rapidly. (Mills, 2005, pp. 28–29)

This argument, advocating generalist primary school teachers teaching music, has fallen out of favour in recent years. However, as we will consider below, the alternative of providing all students with an instrumental music teaching 'opportunity' has proved difficult to implement in other ways and result in an incoherent patchwork of provision.

Music education in secondary schools

Despite the rapidly diminishing text in the curriculum documentation itself, music has remained a subject within the National Curriculum for England. As such, it is requirement for music to be taught to students within all schools. However, how and when this is done, and by whom, varies considerably from school to school. This has been a consistent finding in many pieces of recent research and is particularly evident with secondary schools.

Research conducted by the University of Sussex (ISM, 2017) examined the situation in over 700 state schools. Responses were from academies, local authority-

maintained schools, free and independent schools, with 80% having an Ofsted grading of 'good' to 'outstanding'.

Although the number of schools not offering any curriculum time to music was quite small (2.4%), the research reported that the timetabling arrangements for music had shifted with the dramatic curtailment of time for the delivery of music education. Carousel teaching across Key Stage 3 (in which students only study music for one term in rotation with other subjects) was prevalent. This led to a significant decrease in the time given for music, particularly between the academic year 2015/16 and the year following, with the average number of hours given for music over the year for Year 8 students dropping from 20.8 to 17.5 h. The least amount of time offered for music via a carousel approach was 25 min for 6 weeks in the year. This equated to just 2.5 h across the entire academic year.

Despite music still being a National Curriculum subject for the entirety of Key Stage 3, an increasing number of schools have made music an optional subject beginning in Year 9. In 2012/13, music was compulsory for all Year 9 students in 84% of schools. By 2015/16 this had dropped to 67%. In 2016/17 it decreased even further to 62%. In many schools, students start their GCSE studies in Year 9 rather than in Year 10 (see below). This has resulted in a complete cessation of all subjects that fall outside the student's own GCSE choices at the age of 13.

At Key Stage 4, the imposition of the EBacc has had huge consequences for music education. 59.7% (393) of the schools surveyed highlighted the EBacc specifically as having a negative impact on the provision and uptake of music in the school (within and beyond the curriculum). Conversely, just 3% considered the EBacc to have had a positive impact on music.

An Education Policy Institute (EPI) report on entries to arts subjects at Key Stage 4 showed a prevailing downturn in the number of entries to arts subjects between 2007 and 2016 (EPI, 2017). As with the University of Sussex research, the report identified the imposition of the EBacc and Progress 8 accountability measures as central to the general decline.

The Cultural Learning Alliance (2017) reported a 9% drop in arts subjects at GCSE entry from 2016 to 2017, and a 28% drop from 2010 to 2017. The percentage of schools offering GCSE Music at the start of the 2016/17 academic year was 79% (down from 85% in 2012/13). Students in the remaining 21% of schools do not have an opportunity to take GCSE Music at all.

These trends are also confirmed within the University of Sussex's research:

- The number of students taking music qualifications other than GCSE has decreased. There has been a 70% reduction in schools offering a BTEC at Level 2, from 166 schools in 2012/13 to 50 schools in 2016/17.
- 18% of schools reported that not every pupil was able to choose music as an examination subject at Key Stage 4 if they wanted to do so. Evidence from the data showed that the EBacc had a detrimental impact on whether students were able to opt for music when it is offered.
- Of those schools offering GCSE Music, 11% taught the course outside of core curriculum time.

- Teachers felt the two most common factors that impacted negatively on students choosing music at Key Stage 4 were the EBacc (57.3%) and changes in options available to students when they selected their GCSE subjects (25.1%).
- Other changes the researchers identified that impacted negatively on the provision of music education at Key Stage 4 were: booster classes (36%), shortened lunch-times (31%) and fewer extra-curricular opportunities (12%). (University of Sussex, 2018).

Finally, the research examined the changes in staffing levels for music education in these schools. They found that the average number of full-time (or equivalent) music staff is declining year-on-year. 39% of respondents reported falling staffing levels for music departments, with only 17% indicating levels had risen. Specifically, the number of music departments staffed by a single teacher was up from 22% in 2012/13 to 30% in 2016/17.

In summary, recent years have seen secondary schools undergo huge changes that have had an adverse impact on the provision of music education. These changes include:

- significant budget cuts;
- rapid changes to the qualifications framework (including the introduction of new specifications for GCSE and A Level examinations, and the abolition of AS Levels);
- the introduction of the EBacc and an associated marginalisation of music education in many schools;
- the removal of music from the curriculum of some schools, and a decrease in the class time allocated to it in many others;
- significant reductions in the numbers of students studying GCSE and A Level music qualifications.

The National Plan for Music Education and Music Education Hubs

As evidenced in the above, music education in schools has been subject to a period of considerable change. Following the election of the coalition government in 2010, the government appointed Darren Henley from the Classic FM radio station to undertake a review of music education across England. In 2011, Henley's review called for:

... the need for measures to be taken to increase the probability of children receiving an excellent Music Education and of decreasing the possibility of them receiving a poor one. (DfE and DCMS, 2011, p. 5)

The National Plan for Music Education was the government's response. Nick Gibb, the schools' minister who oversaw the process alongside colleagues such as Michael Gove and Nicky Morgan, stated that:

The National Plan for Music Education sets out a vision for music education that gives children from all backgrounds and every part of England the opportunity to learn a musical instrument; to make music with others; to learn to sing; and to have the opportunity to progress. (Gibb, 2018)

The establishment of 123 Music Education Hubs was the government's key response to Henley's National Plan for Music Education. Formed by Arts Council England in 2011, they were created in every region with the intention to provide access to high-quality musical experiences for all children. Many hubs were organisations that mapped onto the existing structures of music services, while some were conglomerations of existing organisations with shared services or other overarching organisational or strategic principles (e.g. the Greater Manchester Music Hub). Others, like the Love Music Trust in Cheshire East, were completely new charitable organisations that replaced or incorporated existing provision.

The work of Music Education Hubs was underpinned by four core roles that were set up by Arts Council England, the organisation responsible for managing the funding which had been devolved by the Department for Education. The core roles were:

- To ensure that every child aged 5–18 has the opportunity to learn a musical instrument (other than voice) through whole-class ensemble teaching programmes, ideally for a year (or a minimum of a term) of weekly tuition on the same instrument.
- To provide opportunities to play in ensembles and to perform from an early stage.
- To ensure that clear progression routes are available and affordable to all young people.
- To develop a singing strategy to ensure that every pupil sings regularly and that choirs and other vocal ensembles are available in their area. (DfE and DCMS, 2011, p. 26)

Over the last 8 years, Music Education Hubs have collated information about their work and submitted this to Arts Council England in their quarterly returns. The analysis of the collected data was originally done by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER, 2014, 2015, 2016) and, from 2017, this work has been done by researchers at Birmingham City University (Fautley and Whittaker, 2017; , 2018).

There is a common view amongst researchers that the data returned by Music Education Hubs is flawed and findings drawn from it should be treated with some scepticism. For example, in the ISM's recent research report (ISM, 2018) researchers state:

Respondents also felt that the focus on the activity metrics by the Department for Education/Arts Council England in the data returns completed by Hubs, rather than quality of experience and a longitudinal and diverse view of progression and continuation, does not provide an accurate picture of the lived reality of many of the respondents working in schools and Hubs. (ISM, 2018, p. 11)

But even if one takes the data supplied by Music Education Hubs at face value, the challenges faced within their work are only too evident. The most recent analysis done by Fautley and Whittaker (2018) reveals that the number of pupils receiving a weekly instrumental lesson (through whole-class teaching) for less than one term has increased significantly, from 24,289 to 35,340; a change of 42% over 4 years. For many respondents, these instrumental teaching programmes had been reduced to around 10 weeks in total (Fautley and Whittaker, 2018, p. 15). As discussed above, these changes have taken place alongside the disappearance of music as a National

Curriculum subject in many schools. The Department for Education itself has noted that there is a ‘legitimate concern’ about the narrowing of the curriculum in this way (Westminster Education Forum, 2018). Similarly, Ofsted have recently noted that the accountability framework that primary (and secondary) schools currently work under has had a detrimental impact on the provision of National Curriculum arts subjects in many schools (Ofsted, 2018).

The Musicians’ Union published its own report on the state of Music Education Hubs in 2014, with a particular focus on the workforce and how they had been affected by changes in working policies and practices. They highlighted the increasing autonomy being given to schools as a particular tension here. The academisation programme resulted in many schools moving away from local authority control, gaining financial independent and setting their own curriculum arrangements. All of these factors sat uncomfortably with an Ofsted demand that schools must engage with Music Education Hubs, whilst failing to set any statutory obligation to do so (Musicians’ Union, 2014, p. 3). Schools had complete autonomy in relation to whether they chose to employ staff to teach music within the curriculum, deliver instrumental music lessons as an extra-curricular offer, or decline to do either of these. There was no power given to Music Education Hubs to enforce the four key aims set out for their work by Arts Council England.

Furthermore, these changes came at a time when local authorities were themselves placed between a rock and a hard place in terms of losing control and influence over schools within their localities, increasing pressures on their own finances, with resultant cuts to services:

Many Local Authorities have used the confirmation of three-year funding for Hubs as an excuse to withdraw their investment as they are under pressure to make significant savings themselves. As Government has withdrawn the power and influence of Local Authorities and cut their expenditure music services have, unfortunately, been one of the many casualties of this process. (Musicians’ Union, 2014, p. 3)

The Musicians’ Union report stated that a highly qualified workforce was at the heart of a high-quality music education offer for young people. Yet since 2014, numerous music services have closed or been significantly restructured, resulting in a significant deterioration in teachers’ pay, terms and conditions. Examples cited within their report included:

- Music services making the entirety of their teaching staff redundant, only to re-engage them on casual or zero-hour contracts or as self-employed teachers.
- Widespread casualisation resulting in the loss of employment rights and other benefits of formal employment.
- Teachers being given no guarantee of work, no pension, no holiday pay or maternity/paternity pay.
- A lack of investment in teachers’ career and professional development.
- An increasing level of control through restrictive employment covenants. (Musicians’ Union, 2014, pp. 3–4).

The Musicians’ Union reported a number of negative consequences resulting from these changes. For individuals, the lack of security paired with the chaotic nature of

instrumental teaching services (within Music Education Hubs, music service or other private organisations) resulted in significant employment fragmentation and an increasing sense of de-professionalisation for their members. Strategically, the key aims of improving access and inclusion, that the National Plan for Music Education aimed to address, suffered greatly. Music education, according to the report, became a 'postcode lottery', with rural areas suffering at the expense of larger towns and cities (Musicians' Union, 2014, p. 4).

There have been few independent evaluations of the work of Music Education Hubs. One of the major studies, the Zeserson review discussed previously, was conducted 3 years after the National Plan for Music Education was published and Music Education Hubs established. The review failed to identify significant improvements. The 'great opportunity' to thread together the National Curriculum for Music with the National Plan for Music Education (Zeserson *et al.*, 2014, p. 35) appeared not to have been fulfilled. More positively, the review urged all involved in music education to work together more effectively to improve the quality of provision, and to disseminate best and next practice. It is this notion of partnership that Music Education Hubs were meant to facilitate but have struggled to deliver.

Discussion

Since the introduction of the National Plan for Music Education there have been significant changes in music education within England. As we have considered, Arts Council England and others celebrate figures that report increased access and engagement. But many teachers have expressed legitimate concerns regarding the quality of the music education on offer in schools and Music Education Hubs (ISM, 2017). There are also concerns about the incoherent and patchy approach to music education across the country. These teachers argue that the opportunity to access high-quality music education has become a 'postcode lottery' and that the fragmentation of music education as a result of curriculum reforms and the diversity of approaches taken by Music Education Hubs and other bodies has significantly enhanced this incoherence.

Alongside these things, the restructuring of local authorities and their decrease in funding has meant that their support of schools and traditional music services (where they still exist) have weakened. The creation of Music Education Hubs, new charitable trusts and cooperatives such as the Love Music Trust in Cheshire East can be seen as a positive outcome of this process; there is often an increasing dynamism and commitment to music education in these areas compared to the services previously offered by the local authority.

Whatever the future of the National Plan for Music Education, the funding of music education in England has been greatly reduced. Music Education Hubs are constantly being told to find alternative funding streams, while school funding has become a national concern. Head-teachers are increasingly prioritising funding for 'core' subjects, such as those associated with the EBacc (Musicians' Union, 2019; Millar, 2019, p. 7).

The processes by which music education policy and practice relate to each other need serious reconsideration. Kemmis's (2012) three-pronged 'practice architecture'

theory provides a useful frame of analysis. His argument is that the intersection or interdependent fields of ‘cultural–discursive’, ‘social–political’ and ‘material–economic’ create a set of ‘working conditions’ to enable or constrain certain practices. In the earlier part of the article, one can clearly identify specific organisations that have an interest in music education in England, each with their own particular blend of cultural or political ideology. The resultant material or economic practices within organisations that facilitate music education, and the individual teachers within these who provide music education opportunities for their students, have shifted considerably in the last 10 years.

But the field of music education itself is shaped and entrenched by many historical, cultural and contextual factors that have shaped its discourse over the last 150 years (Cox, 1996, 2002). If music education is to become a more critical discourse in respect of its own philosophy, policy and practice, then a new and more consistent focus on practitioner-led research and practitioner-informed policy-making must progress, both theoretically and chronologically, in tandem. Schmidt’s work on practitioner-informed policy is particularly important here (Schmidt, 2019). He argues that traditional approaches to advocacy, whilst important, are limited and limiting (Schmidt, 2019, p. 173). His research argues for ‘policy as practice’. Or to put it another way:

Advocacy is one within several policy practices that are central to the constitution of our programs, from curriculum to recruitment, to pedagogical choices, student engagement, program structure, and diversity and inclusivity policies, among others. Consequently, the framing, planning, revision, and adaptation of these are all, in my view, critical policy practices that music educators are called to address on a regular basis. (Schmidt, 2019, p. 173)

The call for the development of evidence-based policy and practice in music education raises a number of key questions. Firstly, production of evidence is not a straightforward process. Policy-makers will cite ‘evidence’ to suit their own ends and ignore ‘evidence’ that does not reinforce their ideological position. Secondly, key questions about what counts as evidence and the relationship between the research process, educational policy, resultant practices and the democratic process need to be examined carefully. To build on Hargreaves (1996), ‘where is the secure research-derived knowledge base of [music] teachers and teaching?’

Schmidt’s arguments for the relocation of practitioner advocacy as a key component of policy is peculiarly relevant precisely because teachers and those who work in the ‘complex places like schools and community centers, not-for-profits, or arts organisations’ (Schmidt, 2019, p. 174) know things about policy that go far beyond the scope of traditional models that underpin the formation of educational policy (and the advocacy that underpins its formation). Policy, in this argument, is a manifestation of the individual and frames their participation and action within society (Schmidt, 2019, p. 178). The challenge for music education in England moving forwards will be to harness the potential of individual musicians and teachers by helping them see that they are not subjects of policy, but rather ‘policy partners and policy-makers in practice’ (Schmidt, 2019, p. 178).

The debate about music education, its justification and appropriate delivery model, has raged throughout England over the last 30 years. As successive governments have

sought to cut funding at a time of perceived austerity, the demand to do more with less has been relentless. This article has considered longer-term changes about that place of music education in society at large, together with an analysis of the shorter-term jockeying for position amongst music education organisations and the broader sectors that they are positioned within.

A different approach would involve empowering local communities of music education with the capacity to develop themselves, rather than simply having to respond to the dictates of central policy-making and the evaluation of government-designed interventions designed elsewhere. Music has a power and impact on our lives that transcends the boundaries of a National Curriculum statement or an Arts Council England framework. But music teachers need to get better at telling these stories about music education and its impact. To put it another way, music education in its various forms in schools, Music Education Hubs and more generally should exist not because it is right, but rather because of the ‘tangible impact’ that it provides and its ‘alignment with’ (Schmidt, 2019, p. 179) the wider aims of schools within our society. This alternative vision for music education would need to build a greater sense of reflective and engaged enquiry at the local level. It must help music educators think more productively about the form and function of music education in a local context, how this can be developed and how the impact of it will be shared with others. This will take time. The results will not be equivocal, but the ensuing discussion will improve the nature of music education, the questions that are asked about it and the implementations that are co-designed and delivered. Teachers in schools and Music Education Hubs need to be empowered and at the heart of the process.

Conclusion

The Musicians’ Union report (Musicians’ Union, 2019) provides extensive evidence that many teachers of music are experiencing feelings of ‘reluctant compliance’ (Moore and Clarke, 2016, p. 667). They find themselves in the situation of having to do things that they do not believe in, yet also are attached to these prevailing ideologies, and essentially becoming the ‘bearers’ (Moore and Clarke, 2016, p. 668) of those ideas, despite their initial or ongoing reluctance. Following Berlant’s (2011) concept of cruel optimism, there is an obvious cruelty on teachers’ lived experience here, through the deliberate forcing of actions and the subjugation of their own belief systems within a powerful and unyielding policy discourse. But there is also a deliberate and sustained mechanism within the policy domain to promote possible ‘better’ solutions to issues being faced today (a ‘better’-quality music education, a ‘better’ partnership, a ‘better’ more inclusive offer, etc.)—the ‘optimism’ bit of cruel optimism.

The policy discourse around music education in England is celebratory and patriotic. It is characterised as one of positive progress and development by many of its powerful actors and agencies. Yet, the sharp disjunction with the lived experiences of those working at its core are uncovered even within cursory conversations. The conflict of these ‘affective acts’ within one’s own experience and the ‘affective facts that are manipulated within and deliberated on in the world of public policy’ (Massumi, 2002, p. 14) deserves a greater degree of contextualisation and analysis.

Schmidt's 'policy practices' need to be conducted in a way that does not proportion blame (e.g. by suggesting teachers have succumbed to policy pressures), nor should it position them as victims. Rather, it should build on Sameshima's notion that the 'teaching profession is dramatically strengthened when teachers understand who they are, know how their experiences have shaped their ideologies, and find and acknowledge their place of contribution in the broader context of the educational setting' (Sameshima, 2008, p. 34). His call for policy as practice is a vital one in helping reposition the voices of teachers and others working within our educational institutions. It is an important reminder about the importance of finding ways (and taking the time) to share the powerful stories about music *and* music education—how music is an integral part of who teachers are, why they do what they do and what impact this all has on children's lives.

The call for a democratisation of advocacy and an evidence-based policy approach in music education is very timely for music education in England. The current debate is being conducted in an environment influenced by the uncertain status and contested legitimacy of government policy. More of the same will not improve the situation. Government intervention in music education has disempowered music education communities wherever they are located. It has unsuccessfully attempted to influence actions and behaviours in a formalistic manner through the identification of key outcomes and has only served to worsen what was already an incoherent and patchy level of provision. The music education sector needs a greater degree of coherence moving forwards. Schmidt's dialogic approach requires those purporting to represent music education to reconsider their individual stances and practices, to consider their tone and communication with each other and with policy-makers more clearly.

This focus on the 'lived experiences' of music education is where future research will turn. Seeking to tell the story of music education from the perspectives of those teaching music in primary schools, secondary schools and Music Education Hubs will help illuminate the disjunction between policy and practice that has decimated music education in many parts of England over recent years.

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