



# Episode 8: Present tense

## The Climate Connection

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## Transcript

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## Episode eight: Present tense

You can find the show notes and link to the podcast at <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/professional-development/podcast>.

**Duration:** 47:17

**Quote:** I would worry about people that weren't feeling eco anxiety because we measure mental health by looking at our capacity to respond to external reality, and the external reality is frightening. We only respond to threats that's here, so until it's here, right in front of our nose we delay our emotional response to it until we become informed, until we wake up. So teachers are crucial in this because they're in the centre of educating and enabling children to get information about this, which is accurate.

**Sting:** The British Council presents The Climate Connection. Climate action in language education. This is Episode eight: Present tense.

**Chris Sowton:** Hello and welcome to The Climate Connection, a British Council podcast focusing on climate action in language education. I'm your host, Chris Sowton. This is Episode eight: Present tense, in which we look at how anxiety about the climate is a serious and growing problem, in particular, amongst young people. In this episode we'll be speaking to Caroline Hickman. And because Caroline had so many interesting things to say in our discussion, we've divided her interview into two parts, so please sit back and enjoy the double bill.

**Caroline Hickman:** So eco anxiety is an emotionally healthy response to the reality of what we are looking at is happening in the world today. It's not a mental illness, it's not a pathology, I would worry about people that weren't feeling eco anxiety because we measure mental health by looking at our capacity to respond to external reality, and the external reality is frightening. It may not be frightening, as you look out of your window in Wiltshire, but if you take a global perspective and you look at what's happening with the fires in Australia, in California, in Portugal, if you look at the ice melting and the sea level rises, if you look at the fact that the waters are warming at the equator so fish can no longer live there. If we think about the impact of climate change and the number of climate migrants it's going to be creating, then we can immediately start to see this as a global concern, it's a global perspective. So as soon as you start to take that perspective, you will feel anxiety, and you should. As I said I would worry hugely about people that didn't. Now adults can often defend against that far more than young people and children. And to be fair to adults, frequently adults would be far more worried about pressing concerns like feeding your children, or keeping them safe, or paying the rent. So that can push away those anxieties for adults but what we need to do is bring them back into conscious awareness, because these are often at the forefront of young people's minds. So eco anxiety is both the anxiety that we feel as we look at external reality, but it's not just that. People think that's all it is, it's not. It's the anxiety we feel about that external environmental degradation, but that's only half the story. The other half is the anxiety is made worse, and not fixed at all because of adults' failure to act on it. And it's not just adults, it's governments' failure to act on it, it's the people with the power to act, whether it's oil companies or governments. So we then look to our elected governments and expect them to act in our best interests to take care of us, to take care of the environment, to make wise



decisions. So we look at the evidence and we think: well hang on a minute, we've declared a climate emergency, but we're still building another runway at Heathrow, hang on a minute. Hang on a minute, you know, why are we not taking more action on this? And what happens is our anxiety is raised, realistically, but then it can't go anywhere because the people with the power to act are failing to act. So the anxiety then becomes ten times worse. And then people dovetail into a spiral of depression and despair and grief and rage and helplessness and impotence and don't know where to go with that. So that's all part of eco anxiety, eco anxiety is not just anxiety, it's also the depression, that despair, the helplessness that we feel when these people with the power to act are failing to act in our best interests. And that can leave you feeling helpless and impotent and powerless with rage, and that is a global issue isn't it, if you want to talk about eco anxiety come and talk to me and, you know, it's working quite well

**Chris Sowton:** and all the different sort of media that you've used to do that, it's, you know, from blogs, podcasts, academic articles...

**Caroline Hickman:** Just to get people to understand this stuff because the distress it's causing, particularly children and young people, is extraordinary, and people don't get it, you know, the gap between those who get it and those who don't is enormous at the moment. And I think that will close in the next few years as more and more people wake up to the realities of what we're facing, and I just want us to be ahead of the curve when it comes to the onslaught of mental health problems I think it'll bring.

**Chris Sowton:** Absolutely. What kind of support do you think teachers need to prepare for that?

**Caroline Hickman:** We've been doing a number of different things with groups of teachers, with Teach the Future, and with other teacher organised groups, and the Science Teachers Trust as well who've been approaching us saying can you come and provide some training, some support to teachers because it's often science teachers, geography teachers who are being asked to teach about climate change. And then so they teach the science, they teach the facts, but they're not being asked and they're not equipped and they're not trained to teach the psychology and the emotional impact of that, but unless we join that up in our minds to understand what we're seeing, and then start to respond emotionally to what we're seeing, then we just push it away, we go into a kind of disconnect, to disavow and say: oh well it's a bit scary, isn't it, but anyway, we'll be, we'll be flying again soon, and, oh the government will sort it out, or oh technology will save us. We have a way of displacing the concern about it psychologically, through our defences, and we only respond – we're fundamental or basic creatures psychologically – we only respond to threats that's here, right. So until it's here we won't, right in front of our nose, we, we delay our emotional response to it until we become informed, until we wake up. So teachers are crucial in this because they are in the centre of educating and enabling children to get information about this which is accurate, because children are online, they're Googling, they're finding out for themselves

**Chris Sowton:** and that can be more terrifying I guess as well if they're getting that information raw and not filtered or not curated by teachers or out of their adults that can lead to sort of more negative situations.

**Caroline Hickman:** Well I think it's complicated, so I think on the one hand, you're absolutely right, it can really traumatise children and frighten them. It's like watching a





horror film, you've got all this information but you've got no way of doing anything about that. On the other hand, children are often feeling quite betrayed, neglected and abandoned by adults who are failing to talk to them about it. So I think it goes both ways, so I'm delighted that children are taking action and informing themselves. And on the other hand I want them to be able to do that in partnership with adults, so that they can then have those conversations with adults, whether they're teachers or whether they're parents, or just more mature, or slightly older children and young people. I think there's a role to be played for all of them. I'll give you another really good example. So, the Eco Awareness Day a few weeks ago, and invited young people, young people organised it, they spent a year organising it, which is brilliant, and they were getting the children wild swimming, cooking food, digging gardens, lots of practical, engaged, and all of the whole of the Upper School was involved in this. So what was brilliant about this was it wasn't an add-in to the curriculum, everybody was involved for the day, all the teachers and all the children. So it normalises it and doesn't split it off and make it something that you have to add into the curriculum, and they had me there, they were like right here's 50 teenagers, you know, educate them about eco anxiety. So yeah, you know, unless we've got the systemic understanding, we won't find the solutions and I think teachers, back to your original question, teachers are crucial in this because teachers can really educate children in how to not just think about this, but also how to integrate how they feel about this and start to use their emotional understanding in order to take action.

**Chris Sowton:** And what sort of support do you think teachers would need for that? Because of course, when you're talking about those sorts of issues I guess there's the risk of things like vicarious trauma that they can suffer, so if the teachers themselves are not protected and don't have those mechanisms, their own mental health is at risk as well.

**Caroline Hickman:** Absolutely. Well, teachers, and parents, one of the reasons they can sometimes struggle, from my experience of talking with a lot of them, is because they've not fully processed their own feelings about the climate and biodiversity crisis, and they're parents themselves, they've got young children, or they've got grandchildren. And so what that does is it triggers lots of guilt and shame and grief, in anybody who's thinking about the younger generations, because we're facing this, because my generation, I'm older than you, and my generation has failed, your generation is failing the younger generations, and the generations before me have failed. And I'm very clear in the way I communicate about that now that this is a failure. And we are culpable, and we need to take responsibility for that, but not collapse in guilt and grief and shame, but stand in that and take responsibility and say sorry. Psychologically, it's about rupture and reparation and repair in what psychologically, the only moment, psychologically that you can start to change things, is because you realise things are broken. And you say, oh I'm sorry we've really messed up. Or, oh gosh, I'm sorry, you know, I'm really not dealing with this part of my life. And every therapist breathes a sigh of relief at that moment and says: phew, now we're going to get somewhere. Because you recognised that there is a problem so I think teachers themselves are really crucial in terms of speaking about the education system and lobbying to put pressure to change that system, but in turn they need to be supported in making space in the curriculum to talk about this, they also need emotional support, they need information about it, but they also need emotional support to process their feelings, because you're absolutely right, they will sometimes be faced with the children's trauma. And what that does in adults is it triggers guilt, we want to protect children from frightening things we don't want to expose them to frightening things. But the way I talk to parents and teachers about this now is that, from my research, because I've worked a lot with parent groups as well as the teacher groups over the last six, seven years. I talk to them about



parenting and teaching into the Anthropocene that where traditionally we would protect children from traumatising things, we now need to learn how to educate them about this, to prepare them because otherwise if we protect them too much, they will be traumatised too much later. So we need to introduce it to them, but I'm gonna tell you what Sophia says no, not only am I allowed to use her name, I have to use her name, otherwise I'm in trouble with her. Sophia was eight when I had this conversation with her. When I started my research with children about how they feel about climate change, so this was six years ago. And so before I started my research I started talking to lots of children about how do I talk to you about this without scaring you? How do we have these conversations, because that was part of my, kind of, preparation for my research. So I'm going to tell you what Sophia said, she said well, she said, you got to tell me the truth, she said because if you don't tell me the truth you're lying to me. She said and if you're lying to me I can't trust you. She said, and if I can't trust you I can't tell you how I feel. And if I can't tell you how I feel, then I'm left on my own with my feelings. She said, and then I feel abandoned by you. I love this child, I wish she was running the country

**Chris Sowton:** I mean, she's amazing, to be that astute at the age of eight is incredible!

**Caroline Hickman:** She totally understood but she then went on to say she said but listen, she said don't tell me all the bad news all at once. Tell me the bad news, then the good news, then the bad news, then the good news, then the bad news, then the good news. She said don't tell me the bad stuff all at once, or, all the good stuff, she said because I'll know you're lying to me, she said. And anyway, she said, I'm not a baby. So Sophia has totally nailed it as far as I'm concerned about the way we need to communicate with children. We need to have the courage, children need us as adults to have the courage, and to find ways to communicate and talk about it, but some of that is about using creative methods, and some of it is storytelling, as well as the science and the facts and some of it is about teaching the emotional resilience. So I spend a lot of time working with groups of young people and children, teaching them about mental health, teaching them about emotional resilience, teaching them about emotional intelligence. In order to prepare them for managing those facts about climate change. So we have to do the groundwork, which is really useful to them in all aspects of life anyway. So we need to actually be doing that, prepare the groundwork. Now teachers and adults also need some of this. This is about raising the awareness of the whole population, to know how to navigate difficult truths, the Climate Psychology Alliance, talks about facing difficult truths. So this is about developing the skills to not, to not hide these things from children, but understand how to talk to them about it, so that they can understand and then they don't feel alone, children tell me they feel abandoned by adults, if they don't talk to them about this.

**Chris Sowton:** And we'll hear more from Caroline later in the show.

### **Vox Pop:**

Hi, everyone. My name is Catherine Njau, an English teacher in the Tanzanian English Language Teachers Association regional coordinator in the Kilimanjaro region. In my classroom, I teach environment issues to the students, such as how to keep the environment clean, to address the challenge that the students are facing. And we come to agree that the students face challenges during their menstrual period. So what we discussed together is how to solve those challenges, by starting the project of establishing reusable sanitary pads, which help girls to stay in school and receive the same education as boys. So what we did first in a class, we teach them how to make their body clean, that



is hygienic education. And they get the chance to name the body parts from there to improve the English vocabulary by understanding and mentioning their body parts. Also we established these reusable sanitary pads, they wash and use it for many years which will reduce the cost in their families. Also what we did together was, I and my students was move the discourse to help the girls to know the challenge that they're facing and how they can keep the environment clean. When I get this chance to explain about this, I thought this is a very interesting things that we work together in the environment in the, in the body issues, and from there is when we develop in different language that they use it in their classroom and also they put it into practice with the maintained environments which are living in and their surroundings. As a result, the toilets are not blocking and we are not seeing the disposable which can be displayed in different parts of the school, and the environment outside of the school. So we are not seeing the disposable pads which are being disposed in different areas of the environment. So by giving this education to them inside the classroom. Now when they go to the environment, they get to maintain the cleanliness, inside the school and outside of their communities, that is how I use the environmental issues in my teaching classroom. Thank you so much, and I'm happy for sharing. Thank you.

**Chris Sowton:** When we think about the climate crisis. One of the first phrases we think of is fossil fuels. In this episode of the Green Glossary, we dig down into the history of this phrase, and learn how it has changed and evolved over time.

**Sting** The Green Glossary. The Green Glossary. Brought to you by Oxford University Press

## The Green Glossary

Hello, my name is Trish Stewart, and I'm the Science Editor at the Oxford English Dictionary.

In this episode, I'm going to talk about the term 'fossil fuel', and how its meaning has changed over history. Fossil fuels are the world's primary energy source and provide up to 85 per cent of the world's energy. However, it is now understood that the burning of fossil fuels releases large amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, which contributes to global warming and climate change. Although our concerns about the environmental impact of using fossil fuels are relatively recent, the term itself is not, and its meaning has shifted significantly over the past 400 years.

When we hear the word 'fossil', we tend to think of petrified dinosaur bones, that is, bones which have turned into stone. However, the origins of the term have nothing to do with dinosaurs at all. In fact, the word was used long before humans knew what dinosaurs are. The word 'fossil' was first used in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century to mean 'a rock or mineral substance dug out of the earth'. Therefore, any object which was removed from underground could be described as a fossil. A 1606 quote in the OED talks of the 'mines of metals and fossils', and lists iron and lead as different kinds of fossils. This usage dies out in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is replaced by our current understanding of the word.

The current definition of 'fossil' in the OED is as follows: 'something preserved in the ground in petrified form, recognisable as the remains of a living organism, or as preserving an impression or trace of such an organism'. Basically, the stony remains of something which was once alive – or at least an impression of their shape. This usage appears around the



start of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. A quote from 1736 describes fossils as ‘stones... that have either the impressions, or else the regular form of shells, leaves, fishes, fungi, [etc]’.

‘Fossil fuel’ is probably the most common compound of ‘fossil’ and was first used in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, primarily to refer to different kinds of coal. This reflects the original meaning of ‘fossil’ – something that is dug out of the earth. For example, the OED has a quote from 1789 stating that the township of Coleshill in Wales is ‘so called from its abundance of fossil fuel’. And in fact, the author goes on to state that he doesn’t know why the County of Flintshire in Wales is so named when the county ‘is totally destitute of the fossil usually so called’. [As an aside, current place-name guides to Wales interpret the name ‘Coleshill’ as ‘Col’s hill’, that is, a hill associated with a person called Col.] So here we can see that flint is also referred to as a fossil, because it is dug out of the ground, but it’s not a fossil *fuel* because isn’t combustible. Coal is both a combustible fuel and it is dug out of the earth. People in the 18<sup>th</sup> century certainly knew about petroleum, oil, and other substances that we now call ‘fossil fuels’, but they were not mined in the same way as coal, and so originally were not described as ‘fossil fuels’.

It’s only in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that ‘fossil fuel’ comes to be applied to petroleum, oil, and natural gas, rather than just different types of coal. These are all substances that are found in the earth’s crust, can be used as a source of energy and are formed as a result of geologic processes acting on the remains of organic material, such as algae, plankton, bacteria, and plants.

But fossil fuels aren’t made from the remains of dinosaurs, nor are they made from what we conventionally regard as a fossil, as I described earlier. These fossils are created when parts of an organism (the hard parts generally) are replaced by minerals, that is, inorganic or carbon free compounds, or when an imprint of the organism remains in rock. They aren’t combustible and definitely wouldn’t make good energy sources! However, the association of dinosaurs with fossil fuels is persistent.

It’s interesting to note that the American oil company Sinclair uses an Apatosaurus as its icon, created as a marketing tool in the 1930s ‘to symbolise the vast age of the crude oils’ which the company refined into their motor oils. More recently, the term ‘dinosaur juice’ has been used as a humorous name for oil or petrol. And a recent internet meme asks whether plastic toy dinosaurs are actually made from real dinosaurs (that is if plastic is made from oil which is made from dinosaurs). Of course, the answer is ‘no’, because oil isn’t made from the remains of dinosaurs, but the association is hard to shake.

As I mentioned earlier, fossil fuels still provide up to 85 per cent of the world’s energy. But it’s becoming ever clearer that their usage needs to be limited if we want to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and air pollution. The proportion of energy produced by renewable sources, such as wind, water and the sun, is increasing as a result. However, usage of the term ‘fossil fuel’ hasn’t decreased. In fact, it’s more common than ever before – but the contexts in which we discuss fossil fuels have changed. Nowadays, it’s used more frequently with words like ‘divestment’, ‘transition’, and ‘phasing out’. And so it seems that despite the efforts being made to replace fossil fuels as a source of energy, the term ‘fossil fuel’ itself will remain relevant for many years to come.





**Chris Sowton:** As promised we now rejoin Caroline to find out more of her insights into climate anxiety

A project I've been working on for a number of years with the British Council, called Language for Resilience, there's an argument that the act of learning a second language is, it can be a safe space, in order to explore some of those ideas which may be more challenging or distressing or sort of anxiety provoking if done in your own language, in your mother tongue. Do you see that, that sort of, doing it in another language can help to explore some of those issues?

**Caroline Hickman:** So that would make perfect sense. As a psychology psychotherapy technique that we use all the time to help people talk about traumatic painful things, which is called personification. So they ask them to imagine that climate change is an animal. And if you imagine that climate change is an animal, then you are personifying climate change, which is a traumatic thing, and you're imagining it to be an animal, and then I say, and what would that animal say. So it's the same technique, you're taking it slightly outside the person, locating it into some other object, whether it's a language, or an animal or a picture or a poem, you're displacing it into something psychologically, consciously, deliberately. So it's not a defence because you're doing it consciously and deliberately, and then you're using an imaginary bridge to help you to imagine what that would be like. So what it does is it allows you to start to move into painful traumatising material safely, slightly at a distance. I use puppets in the same way with young people and adults all the time, so we use a puppet and we say what would the, what would the puppet say about this? So it would work in exactly the same way in a second language, it's just I've never come across that before. Because you're taking it slightly outside the person, allowing them to imagine what that's like, gradually start to get used to this because we would like people to gradually get used to these things, and then slowly it will be psychologically integrated into their original language, which will allow them to build up that resilience and understanding is really interesting.

**Chris Sowton:** Yeah and I think there's the added advantage as well is that say for adults or for, sort of, the parents of children who might be doing that they might think, well, if they're in a situation where they were refugee and they think, well, why are we even talking about climate change? You know some of the work I've done with Syrian refugees is they don't see it as a priority because of all these other pressing concerns which you, which you mentioned in terms of their hierarchy of needs. This sort of existential threat is actually fairly low down, but with learning English as a sort of tangible real outcome, as well as the benefits that can be accrued by, by talking about this

**Caroline Hickman:** I think that's really interesting, Chris, but I also have worked with groups of young refugees from Iraq, around this and they have understood that connection with climate change, and I do completely understand that it when you've got these other pressures, it can be hard to keep this at the forefront of your mind. But the way I approach that with young people with refugees themselves, is to talk about having a both/and solution rather than an either/or solution, so it doesn't displace the other concerns, and you don't have the hierarchy in that sense, it's both/and, and that heals that rift, because it is both important, and your other personal needs are important too. But we need to use emotional language in psychological understanding to support people to tolerate both being important, and that is about resilience, but it's also about understanding that it gives us this opportunity for global empathy, it brings something into the frame there that you can't get any other way. Because I frequently talk about my only eco anxiety by saying, I do not want it taken





away. Don't you dare take it away because by reflecting on my own eco anxiety it allows me to empathise and feel compassion for people around the globe who are feeling that immediate terror today. It connects me empathically with them, so it makes me feel connected globally with their concerns, now their concerns then become my concerns, and it stops us, other people seeing this other problem as being located somewhere else, because actually what's happening in Bangladesh and Syria and Iraq and Iran is my problem, because I'm part of this global community, so it helps to heal that rift between us. And it's that empathy and that compassion, brings us back to a shared humanity. It also helps us to start to examine the need to heal the same rift between ourselves and the environment, between ourselves and nature, because we 'other' nature we treat nature as this thing outside ourselves where we only care about the existence of a tree because of its economic value, or whether it's getting in the way of HS2 train line, so we can remove it without care, and without compassion. Sally Weintrobe in the climate psychology, talks about the culture of uncare, and what all of that thinking of othering and uncaring does is it legitimises inhuman treatment to other people, so it legitimises when we 'other' people. It legitimises treating people with a lack of care, and it legitimises if you take it to the extreme, it legitimises torture, it legitimises racism, it legitimises treating people as though they were worth less and that is shameful as part of the collective experience of humanity. So if we continue down that road of othering nature, othering black people, othering the other, then we will continue to create systems that don't care. Don't care about the planet, don't care about children's distress, and we hear that narrative when we see some of what's written in the press about the Youth Climate strikers, they're spoken about as though they were animals and climate migrants and refugees are talked about as swarms, you know, as an invading horde.

**Chris Sowton:** So there are language choices, they are so important there aren't they, how it's presented

**Caroline Hickman:** the language exposes the values underpinning those attitudes, and by examining that language we can examine what we mean by that. And then we can challenge those underpinning attitudes, but we can also understand the psychological harm that is done to people. As soon as you are othered. What it does is it means you are worth less as a human being. And what that does is it internalises that grief, and that separateness, and that pain in that person who is othered, and they internalise that sometimes psychologically, and believes themselves to be worthless, and you know yourself from working with refugees how important it is to build their self-esteem and build their capacity to assert their rights to speak out on their own behalf, and not internalise that because then what happens is this terrible levels of self-harm and mental health problems, right?

**Chris Sowton:** And again just linking back to what you were saying earlier about the primary school in Bath. The same is true there isn't it? It's about giving those students agency, empowering them and making them realise they can make a difference whether that's making a, you know, a crocus wheel or whether that's something much more, you know substantial say with, with a refugee in, in Lebanon.

**Caroline Hickman:** Absolutely, but I also talked to them about the fact that those two things are the same. So, actually, every small act we take is connected to the bigger acts, and the bigger acts are in turn connected to the smaller ones, so I talk about having the importance of a balance between internal activism and external activism but external activism is of course taking action physically out there, but simultaneously we need to do



internal activism, which is about taking care of our own feelings of vulnerability and uncertainty and fear and doubt and shame. So it is about giving people permission and validation to take care of their own feelings and take time to do that at the same time as take action on the outside

**Chris Sowton:** Can I just ask you a little bit there about the use of the word activism there because it's a word that in many education systems, teachers and principals and government ministers would be afraid of certainly in the UK and, and in many other countries just the very use of that word, how can we manage that situation, how can we, you know, present the the positive side of activism do you think within schools and making those links between what students learn and what they then want to do outside of the classroom?

**Caroline Hickman:** The reason people become activists is because they feel disempowered and they didn't feel listened to, and they need to get their voices heard. So they are driven to activism, because they are silenced and disempowered. So if schools work alongside, in partnership with the children and young people and say okay so how can we take that energy and that need, and find a way to work together to get your voices heard in the community in a meaningful way, then you're not asking the children then to rebel and have to leave the school in order to have their voices heard. You can't ask children and young people to respect you as a teacher, if you're not listening to them and taking their concerns seriously

**Chris Sowton:** and certainly within the field of English language teaching where skills like critical thinking are very actively promoted, that then seems absurd, when students are reflecting on the situation outside and wanting to do something about it to then shut that down, and treat a skill like critical thinking as something purely academic.

**Caroline Hickman:** Absolutely, but again, it's about having relational solutions. I'll give you another really nice example here so pre-Covid I used to do lots of public talks and I was doing one one evening in Bath, as part of Pint of Science so this is in a pub, which is great. And lots of people were showing out in public, different age groups and a mother and her teenage daughter turned up, and they weren't talking to each other and it was one of those arguments where I think they both forgotten why they weren't talking to each other. And they were both sat there and I gave this talk a little bit like, we're talking here, and the mother emailed me the next day, because, well, part of my talk is encouraging adults to say sorry to children. Every chance I get, every youth conference I speak at, all the young people I meet, I say, sorry, I'm sorry, we failed you, and I am really sorry. And you need to see me as an adult say sorry and mean it, and not collapse, going Oh, I'm this terrible person, or defend and blame you and tell you to shut up and get back into school. That's my defence. You need to know what it's like to have an adult say sorry and ask to repair it. What can we do together to fix this? And when I do that with young people, they say oh gosh, thank you so much, because when they try and talk to their parents, their parents are like, no, shut up. I can't talk about this, you know. So I was doing this in this talk and the mum wrote to me the next day and she said, okay, she said, on the way home, she said, I said sorry to my teenage daughter. She said, so I did what you said. I said, I'm really sorry that we failed you. And her daughter said, okay, right, what are you going to do about it? And the mum said what do you want me to do about it? And the daughter said, well, I've missed the deadline for my extended project in school, to change my extended projects in school, but I want to change it to do it on climate change, and the school won't want me to change it because I've missed the deadline. She said I want you to come into the school



tomorrow and tell the teachers that I'm allowed to change it. And the mum said, okay, so she did, she went into the school the next day and said to the teachers we went to this talk, I'm doing this because this is what my daughter asked me to do. And the teachers went, okay, we'll let her change it. Right. And, you know, this was just so empowering for the parent, and for the young person, and for the school to learn how to listen to each other around this and find ways to work together. I'm going to give you another example, I was working, again this was about three years ago, with a group of young people in Bath and we sat in a park, under a tree, one day, and I said to them, what do you want from education to help to prepare you for the climate crisis. And they said, right, we need schools to not teach us about oxbow lakes, that's not that helpful. They said, we need geography to take a global perspective that talks about the impact environmentally globally, that's meaningful to us. We want to learn about that. They said, we want schools to teach us how to build boats, how to build shelter, how to grow vegetables, which plants we can eat, which plants are poisonous, how to take care of our natural environment, how to take care of our bodies as the world gets warmer, we want to be taught those practical skills because those will be useful to us, they said, but that's not all we want, we also want to be taught how to have complicated conversations with parents who don't want to talk to us about climate change

**Chris Sowton:** It's going back to the language issue isn't it? So what, what language do we need to be able to do that?

**Caroline Hickman:** Well actually, exactly. And the last thing which you're going to love is they said, we want lessons in how to lobby politicians and make a difference, because we want to use the systems that are available to us to create change, but the systems are not listening to us, and we need support to take that forwards and make an impact. So those are what we want lessons in, and they said and then we'll be in school, learning that, right?

**Chris Sowton:** We go back to the critical thinking discussion, it's an entirely logical conclusion to come to if the mechanisms in place for that are not working you look for alternative solutions

**Caroline Hickman:** And we force children to go to the streets and take this outside if we're not working in partnership with them. But these are wonderful educational opportunities, and it's empowering, isn't it, because you're learning these new skills that you didn't know you had and it builds your self-esteem, learning languages everybody I work with who speaks different languages to me, I always ask them to teach me a few key phrases in their language. And I'm fairly rubbish at speaking different languages, it's just not something that comes naturally to me but I work really hard to learn a few key phrases and learning those few key phrases really feels good to me to be able to say hello to people, and welcome in that language, and it means a lot to them and so we can have that shared humanity. Again in that moment. So this is also about getting them to feel good about teaching me something and I think language transcends all of these borders and barriers and differences, because we are then again talking about that language of humanity of care and concern and compassion, which, for me it's, sort of, if we can find these things that are shared these are so much more powerful than the things that divide us

**Chris Sowton:** Absolutely. Caroline, thank you so much for your time today.

**Caroline Hickman:** You're welcome.





**Chris Sowton:** Thanks to Caroline for her fascinating and hugely valuable insights into this crucial issue, please visit her website [www.carolinehickmantherapy.com](http://www.carolinehickmantherapy.com) for more.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is an enormous, complex country in the heart of Africa. In today's episode of From the Field, we visit Malaika School, a school which focuses not just on education for the girls who go there, but on empowerment for the whole local area, please visit <https://malaika.org> to find out more.

### **From the Field:**

*Quote: Okay, we have to avoid deforestation. That is to say we have to avoid to cut trees. Is it okay?*

I am Noëlla Coursaris Musunka and I founded Malaika in 2007. Malaika is a nonprofit organisation with a mission to empower Congolese girls and communities for education and health programmes, Malaika has become the heart of the community, and it truly functions as a replicable ecosystem, consisting of a free accredited school that provide a comprehensive education to 370 girls, a community centre that offers a range of programme to 5,000 youths, a clean water programme with 20 wells that service over 30,000 people each year, and agricultural programme that provide two nutritional meals each day to students and staff.

We have seen first-hand how educating girls and women can transform an entire community. Guided constantly by the community's needs and wants for all of our initiatives. Malaika serves as a model that can be replicated in other communities throughout Congo, Africa, and the world. Through our school and community centre, Malaika wants to achieve equality for girls and for girls across the world, while empowering them to pursue whatever dreams.

*Quote: Okay, let's go on to the problems or environment or environmental issues. Why do you think it's important to protect the planet? Because it's the planets where we live. Now what are the ways to protect the Earth? By growing trees, avoiding plastics, buying local, less use of cars, use less water, use renewable energy*

Rondine for example, wants to be a teacher one day, Abigail hopes to be an IT engineer and Francine is already well on the way to mastering technology. These young women have incredible potential. And for a top notch, all-encompassing education with a strong emphasis on leadership.

*Quote: Hello, I study at the Malaika Community Centre. My daughter studies at Malaika School. The advantage of having a well nearby is that it's much quicker and easier for us to prepare our children to go to school. When the well is located far away, girls can suffer a lot. Sometimes when fetching water, they are beaten by boys or sexually abused. And other times it just makes them late for school.*

Malaika functions as a self-sustaining ecosystem within our interconnected programmes, but we also teach our students, and community about sustaining the outside. Our agricultural programme serves several purposes. It helps feed our students and staff two nutritious meals each day, and in turn students and community members learn about sustainable farming practices as they tend the garden. Additionally, we are able to provide employment opportunities through this programme.



*Quote: My name is Mursaleen. I am a student at Malaika school in grade four. In a computer class. We learned programming, we are making applications in HTML, CSS, and JavaScript*

Malaika is powered 100 per cent by solar panels. We teach our students about recycling, and youth from a community centre clean up the village each month. We incorporate sustainable environmental education and practices into all of our programmes to pave the way towards a healthier Congo, and a more sustainable world. Thank you.

**Chris Sowton:** That's all for this episode of the Climate Connection. For show notes, bonus material and previous episodes, please visit the show website [www.britishcouncil.org/climate-connection](http://www.britishcouncil.org/climate-connection). And join us next time for Episode Nine: Environmental Writes in which we explore how the global climate crisis is represented in English language textbooks. Until then, goodbye.

