**Kit’s story**

**Kit** is a primary education lecturer in the Northwest of England, delivering music sessions to primary generalist trainee teachers (undergraduate and postgraduate). Kit was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) aged eight. Kit says that ‘there’s a music teacher who I attribute where I am today because of her’. ‘She recognised in me that I needed that music and that rhythm … because of that hyperactivity.’ Kit was awarded a ‘music prefect badge’, which was an invented responsibility by their teacher, ‘to give permission’ to hang out and play music. Kit self-taught themselves piano and guitar as a child (aged eight), and self-taught themselves ukulele as an adult. Kit believes they’re ‘not a sight reader … concentration is really difficult’, although they can play by ear. Kit began their career as a primary school teacher – they ‘could bang out a couple of tunes at Christmas on the piano’, which resulted in them leading music for 18 years in their school of employment. Kit reflects that ‘I wasn’t a specialist, I was a blagger … school was delighted as they didn’t have anyone else’. Kit then learnt to play the piano ‘properly’, i.e. with two hands, both a melody line and chords. Kit loved their music lead role, and says it’s ‘why I stayed there for so long’.

When Kit was in secondary school, music lessons were too formal, with a traditional, strict teacher. Kit was not interested and didn’t take music as General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). However, Kit was involved in youth groups where they played music with friends outside of school. They had ‘managed to access music and the skills involved in music without being able to sight read’. Kit believes notation is not ‘important for primary, but secondary (yes) … for music, I think the enjoyment of music is more important at that [primary] age’.

During their time in Higher Education, Kit noticed that for ‘the trainee teachers that were coming it, it was about giving them confidence because a lot of them felt that they weren’t musical, they didn’t have the skills, and [they] knew what that felt like, to feel unequipped.’ Kit focused on providing tools, strategies, games, tasks, and activities to build their confidence. Kit used warm up game to assess trainee teachers, where they had to move to different zones depending upon how they felt. Kit recalled that they all stood in the ‘cold zone’, which mean that they didn’t feel confident to teach primary education at first, but they all moved to the ‘hot zone’ when asked whether music is important in primary education. Kit questioned how students could value music in the wider life of the school – to make it more meaningful. Kit emphasised that having continuity of group is important when teaching trainee teachers, which wasn’t always possible due to timetabling. Kit believes that during their taught sessions in university, ‘it's possible to give [trainees] something to go into school with. It’s like learning to drive a car. So we learn so we’re safe enough to go out but then we have to really learn it on the job’. Kit thinks ‘that’s all teacher training is. It’s making us safe enough to learn it for real’.

Kit states that trainees ‘definitely’ don’t have to be ‘musical’ to teach music in school. According to Kit, ‘you do not have to be musical to facilitate a musical experience of children’, and it is a limited idea that you have to play something to be musical. When reflecting upon their pedagogy, Kit says that ‘I think it’s about embedding music in life as a holistic experience … embedding it in all aspects and giving an example in a context that is relevant’. For example, by not separating out musical components, and integrating music throughout school day rather than having discreet music lessons. Cross-curricular lessons are important, linking music up to other subject areas. In higher education, Kit ‘felt that there was more of a structure around what had to be covered in order to meet to the requirements … but would still have opportunities to throw in [their] own experiences, which [they] think is more important. Kit ‘would have loved to have written [the curriculum themselves], but that wasn’t [their] role’. Kit would have liked to include ‘more work on discussions about how we value music in school, for example whole-school development, culture, diversity and relevance, cross-curricular, everyday life, rather than about ‘ostinato’ for example’. Also, Kit thinks ‘there needs to be practical activities in every single [university] session’.

Kit’s practice has ‘massively changed’ and evolved over their time in education. Kit acknowledges that traditional music is ‘very Western’, and was their ‘childhood stuff’. Kit now realises that ‘not everything has to be Westernised’. Kit admits that they were probably teaching music in this way when they first started out as a teacher – ‘how terrifying’, ‘that’s all I knew when I was 22’, ‘regurgitating the same old stuff that happened to me’. Kit reflects that at times, the students they teach at university sometimes ‘don’t even get the opportunity to teach music’ during their teacher training qualifications. This is attributed to a lack of time and there often already being a music specialist based in their placement schools – hence the importance of cross-curricular teaching – to bring music into other subjects. Kit had not taught music during their own teaching qualification either. Barriers included limited capacity of the university to facilitate it, the story of core subjects being prioritised, sense of limited resources, and a lack of time. Kit says that ‘we’re not necessarily going to be able to change the system in schools, but if we can add music in, at least we can provide access in other ways’.

Kit is ’not sure that [their] values do fit into current policy’. They’re ‘opposed to the way that things are going right now, and value is not given to the arts, funding is not given to the arts, time, energy and training is not given to the arts.’ ‘Value is not given, so there is an incongruence between my values and current policy and practice in schools in real terms’ – particularly post-covid with ‘catch-up’ in core subjects. Music ‘just doesn’t seem to be happening in some schools’ aside from assemblies and learning songs. Kit believes that ‘music isn’t being actively taught in the ways that it could be’ in many schools, as schools don’t have the time, capacity, expertise, or workforce to do it. There is also a pressure on teachers to do ‘other things’ – ‘[music is] the first thing to get dropped’. Kit thinks that for music lessons, the context must be meaningful and teachers must understand what they’re doing. Kit comments that ‘if [teachers] want to be a part of [music education], then there has to be a system in place to be trained to do it’ – or ask a specialist to come in and do it. Music should weave through all aspects to be a more holistic experience – almost squeezing the subject into other aspects of school life. Despite the cost, Kit acknowledges that private music sessions need to be sought to access instrumental lessons if pupils wish to progress along a more formal route education route, such as GCSE music – acknowledging that this is often not possible during curriculum time in schools. In their own primary teaching, Kit taught notation through symbols and introduced rhythmic notation in Key Stage Two (KS2).

Kit’s most painful musical experience was ‘hearing trainee teachers saying they’ve had a bad experience teaching music in school and that’s why they don’t want to teach it now’, for example, being told to mime – it ‘broke [Kit’s] heart’. As a lecturer, Kit’s role is to build trainee teacher confidence. Kit shares that trainee teachers often stereotyped music teachers, feeding back that it was often a ‘classically trained teacher’ telling trainee teachers they can’t do something when they were in school. Teachers who used jazz, popular music etc often inspired the trainee teachers to want to be teachers themselves, upon reflection. Thus, the message is either ‘[trainee teachers] can’t or can’. For Kit, use of language is important, as ’the language we use stays with kids’, and use of word ‘talent’ is detrimental. Instead, Kit says we should praise effort and hard work to suggest talent is not just something we’re born with.

Like their own primary music teacher, Kit ‘spotted the children who were neurodiverse … and [hoped they] used music to help to facilitate them so they felt able … and built confidence’. In their primary class, a child who was labelled as mute was encouraged to sing – to the disbelief of Kit’s colleagues at the time. In taught lessons, music was used to ‘support and sooth’ children.

Kit’s hope for the future of music education is ‘that it’s valued, that teachers feel that they can do it, that they have time for it, that it’s embedded, it’s used holistically to support – not just a treat … [it should be a] part of what happens and valued and considered important. Sadly, it doesn’t feel like it’s heading in that direction because of this curriculum’. For Kit, time, value, resources, energy, and training should be given to enhance the prospects of music education. Kit believes that music is considered as ‘not an academic subject’ by society. This needs to change, for example by not taking students out for interventions in school music lessons.

As a teacher, Kit felt pressure to do ‘less music’ by their Head Teacher, and received comments such as ‘oh, you’re doing singing again?’ when learning the maths times tables to aid memorisation. ‘They thought I was just doing music every day’. Initially, due to the pressures of being a new teacher, Kit wanted to do things ‘right’, ‘but after 10 years, [Kit] just didn’t care]. Kit comments that they ‘did just what [they] wanted to do, because [they] saw the benefits of it’. ‘It’s essential that school leadership values [music], it would be great if we have a government that valued it’, but Kit don’t see that at present. ‘[Music is] not prioritised’, ‘everything gets added but nothing gets taken away’, presenting logistical challenges for teachers in schools. There is ‘not a chance’ that the situation will be improved, which is why teachers need to learn how to integrate the subject area into other aspects of the school day. Challenges to music education include the Tory government, and a Western culture that doesn’t value music. Kit says ‘it’s getting worse, not better’. There are token gestures present in schools, for example ‘art weeks’ and taster sessions, but these are ‘not enough’. Kit hopes that their ‘approach of embedding music in other areas supports teachers in bringing it in, and that’s the best we can hope for. Because it’s not going to be valued as a subject in primary’. Thus, Kit is adopting a strategic approach in their advocacy, encouraging the discipline area to ‘upskill teachers in how to embed it holistically’. Kit has previously tried to achieve this in their higher education teaching, but it was ‘restrictive’. Kit states that ‘I think Initial Teacher Education (ITE) really needs to look at what we’re teaching teachers’. A further negative impact has been the lockdowns due to covid, where many trainee teacher school placements have happened online instead of in person. Kit also highlights that music is not actually named in the Early Career Teacher (ECT criteria – aside from ‘developing creativity’. This leaves music at ‘bottom of the list again’, not being recognised or thought of by those writing the policy documents.