**Justin’s story**

**Justin** is a generalist primary teacher in Northwest of England. Justin is in the process of completing his Early Career Teacher (ECT) years after obtaining an undergraduate degree in primary education with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). During his degree, Justin had selected to study a minor music specialist module.

His first recollection of engaging with music as a child occurred in Year Three of his primary school. His Mum had encouraged him to attend an open event organised by the school, to provide opportunity for children to meet instrumentalist teachers and ‘take a look’ at the musical instruments on offer. Justin decided he wanted to play the clarinet, and studied for graded examinations. He had a rather challenging start to his instrumental lessons. Justin remembers being taught in a group of up to five children with different abilities, which his parents had to pay for. Although he felt that this was and ‘inclusive’ way of learning the instrument where children would get to hear each other, there were also difficulties. Justin found this to be a ‘challenge to get the full attention’ of the teacher, and he experienced confusion about the correct way of doing things. Justin also compared himself with the other pupils in the group. At times, he thought ‘if they’re better than me, then what’s the point in carrying on?’. He then had private lessons which his parents paid for, and reached Grade Eight on the clarinet and achieved Grade Five theory. Justin’s Mum also took the five grades of theory alongside him, which was helpful. Justin also believes that music theory also supported his mathematical education, but in a two-way relationship – maths had a positive impact on his music learning, for example, basic principles, organisation and confidence. It was an ‘interactive and fun way to learn maths’, rhythm and note values.

Justin recalls little else from his primary music experiences, but at the time of his Year Five/Six transition, he remembers a negative event that has stayed with him. When his Year Five teacher was passing work across to his new Year Six teacher, a piece of work that his class had completed on the instruments of the orchestra was presented. Justin remembers the Year Six teacher saying: ‘there’s no need for that, it’s not important’. After this exchange, Justin got the impression that music would not be valued in Year Six and that continuing progress was not important. He perceived his new teacher to have a ‘lack of interest in musical education’ and ‘lack of acknowledgement that it was important to some children’. Thus, Justin questioned the exclusion of music during the review of his Year Five work. This was ‘a massive shame and something that was missed’ – the subject was ‘neglected’. Justin says: ‘it made me feel devalued’. Music was an important part of Justin’s life, and this negative experience restricted relationship-building with his new teacher, although he couldn’t articulate it at the time. Upon reflection, Justin has identified the importance of supporting colleagues in gaining confidence to facilitate the creative aspects of music in the curriculum. Justin feels that ‘music has had a massive impact on [his] life’.

Justin also participated in a weekend music group, where he built friendships. Alongside the clarinet, he learnt saxophone and piano informally. In secondary school, Justin enjoyed group composition activities, but not music technology. He found the listening aspects of General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) music challenging, as he was lacking background experience of this area in his school music lessons. Justin went on to study music at A level and found the composition aspect of the course challenging using music technology. Justin comments that there is a need to treat music with great value and respect – ‘it’s such a powerful subject, it can really highlight children’s’ latent talent’ and has the potential to lead to brilliance in achievement. Music education had a huge impact upon Justin’s confidence, self-esteem and achievement in other school subjects in schools. He attributes his current level of skill and confidence to his early music instrumental lessons and engagement. ‘Confidence, determination and resilience’ – ‘these skills are what all children should have, and if musical education can provide that for them, I think educators have a duty to do that’. Justin is keen to focus on such aspects in his future practice.

In his school of employment, Justin’s current year group are learning to play the guitar in school. The lessons are taught by both Justin and a second visiting music specialist. The lessons are sometimes ‘chaotic’, but there is a ‘buzz’, ‘excitement and enjoyment’. Some pupils have bought ‘cheap guitars’ as an impact, which demonstrates the link forged between in- and out-of-school. Justin experiences difficulty in supporting *all* children in the class – ‘when there’s only one of you, it’s difficult to try and make that support always available for every single child’. It is painful for Justin to want to provide support, but not being able to in consideration of the wider needs of the class.

Justin also teaches his class singing, listening and appraisal, game-based activities, reflection, and team-work activities in music. There is a school-based system used by other teachers in the school – a teaching and learning platform – but Justin still feels that he has an element of freedom to develop various resources and explore alternative ideas – drawing upon his previous experience, online resources, and research. Justin comments that: ‘I think of some of the children I teach now, some of the parents would rather buy their child a Play Station Four rather than a musical instrument and musical books’ – as instrumental lessons added on top of this initial cost would become much more expensive in the long run.

During his undergraduate degree, Justin completed a minor music specialist module, although this was his second option choice (he didn’t get first choice). An advantage for Justin in studying for this module was that ‘not many people are interested in music in schools, in my opinion. And even at university level, some students really worry about music. Out of a year of 240 [students], there was only a group of less than 20 of music minor specialists, which tells a story about the interest people have in music, but also the level of confidence as well’. Justin saw the module as a good opportunity for ‘professional reputation’, perceived that it was a ‘sought after’ subject to enhance employment prospects, and saw opportunity for positive impact upon music education beyond his degree.

Justin would describe himself as ‘quite creative and willing to take risks’, and believes that the National Curriculum (NC) for music could be interpreted in this way. ‘I don’t think the guidance on the NC has necessarily impacted my teaching’ – it is ‘not a basis for my work … I’m probably doing it anyway’. Justin’s teaching and learning ideas come from his musical and educational experiences, not policy. However, Justin would like to be provided with more detailed guidance about how his own practice could be enhanced, which he feels is not included in the NC. What is in the NC ‘could arguably put teachers off teaching music, because as it is the bare minimum and a limited amount, some teachers who are lacking in confidence … it’s hardly going to make them feel skilled to go and teach’. Justin feels that the NC is lacking detail, although he acknowledges that a lengthy document would also be overwhelming for some.

Justin finds teaching music rewarding when he sees ‘happy faces, engagement, children being willing to take risks’. He recalls a successful music lesson he had delivered whilst on placement as a part of his degree. He had planned to use the ‘Alton Towers theme tune’ as a stimulus. The lesson was unexpectedly observed by an external member of staff, but the lesson went ‘so well’. Justin played the melody line on his clarinet, discussed dynamics, articulation, appraisal, encouraged children to add to the piece of music by creating their own sounds and music, followed by a discussion. Justin had also developed a cross-curricular link with art for pupils to engage with – to generate a creative piece of art in response to the music. The observer of the lesson said ‘it was a great lesson … all eyes were on [Justin whilst playing the clarinet]’. This lesson is an example of ‘the power that music can bring’ – increasing the ability of pupils to focus and concentrate, inspired by an instrument. Justin says: ‘I had a real impact in terms of being a positive role model’. The observer actually moved physically closer to Justin and children to become more involved with the lesson – the lesson had a positive impact on the observer, too.

Justin is hopeful for the development of music education in the future – ‘it would be useful to be provided a little bit more sufficient guidance for all levels of teachers [with varying levels of confidence] to make lessons more intriguing, challenging and stretching for children’s abilities … so that’s something I’d like more guidance on’ – not a rigid approach, but with some elements of freedom. When questioned about who should write such a document, Justin responds: ’arguably not the government [due to current policy situation where issues have been identified in the level of detail on the NC], perhaps it should be skilled music teachers and university lecturers’, ‘from the experts themselves’, researchers, teachers, ‘sharing those experiences’ – ‘because we could be waiting a long time for the government to write the high-quality training that we so desire’. Justin would also value music education training in schools and open spaces for discussion about how to improve music teaching. Justin acknowledged that such aspirations also require Head Teachers to value training in music, rather than just the core subjects. ‘A greater focus on music and enthusiasm’ would be of benefit to schools, and for teachers to model a positive attitude towards the subject area in front of pupils. The discipline area needs ‘training, greater guidance from the government, in particular greater guidance for teachers who already feel confident in teaching music to help them make greater progress when teaching music. And also positive role models for music, ‘positive energy from teachers’, and showing an ‘eagerness’ to learning about music, for example by signposting to music ensembles to participate in. Children should also be provided with an opportunity to watch live music.

Justin says: ‘I certainly think teachers can show greater energy, and that’s realistic’. A whole-school approach should be adopted to enhance positivity, encouraged by a school music lead or Head Teacher. Teachers need to be provided with the opportunity to reflect on music education, as this ‘could have a positive impact on changing their perspective’, to have ‘an attitude which inspires children’. Justin points out that ‘that is of no cost’, so there are no financial barriers to this idea. Other training ‘is cost dependant in some respects’, unless free Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is offered. Some large higher education institutions might have the capacity to do this, although access could be dependent on locality, unless delivered online. This should be realistic. ‘Government guidance should [also] be realistic, but whether it is or not remains to be seen and ultimately depends about the priorities of education and the government’.