**School E teacher interview transcript – Miss Covington (MC)**

Researcher (R) – So, first question – it’s just about your journey with MF really, so kind of where it all started, what kind of experiences have you had, any major decisions or events that have happened that have kind of influenced your track?

MC – Yeah. So when I started my PGCE, I was based in a school in XX that didn’t run anything like Musical Futures (MF) at all, which I find that really hard, for my first placement, sort of wondering ‘is this what I want to do? Have I made the right choice?’ Just wasn’t sure at all. And they took us to a MF XX, also in XX, XX, which then became my second placement school. After my first school, I was offered, like ‘which school do you want to go to next?’ And they wanted to put me into a sort of all girls, very classical kind of route of teaching, and I said ‘well can I go to XX please? I think I’d get on really well there’. So yeah, MF XX, and I just loved it. The Head of music there did a lot of work with MF, he did a lot of their training courses. So while I was working there, I did take part in one of the training days, and I kind of got to know a bit more about what it was, and how it works, and how it works in school. And again, a challenging area, some very challenging students, but music was like a real focus of the school, and the lessons were brilliant, the teachers were brilliant. Everyone was so positive. And I thought ‘right, okay, this is what I want to do’. And that’s how I kind of got into it. Then sort of took my ideas from there as I moved on in my career, sort of further down the line, and always kept in touch with them on twitter and what was going on, applied for the pilot scheme for the Find Your Voice initiative in 2013, which was successful, and obviously that meant that I could work with the MF team a bit closer, get to know those a bit more, and really trial some new ideas. And then from there, I’ve continued to work with them really from there, and keep an eye on what’s going on, get involved in the training, and also lead on some of the training with them.

R – Can I ask what year you did your PGCE in, so when you started to become involved?

MC – 09/10, so it would have been around Christmas 2009.

R – And you mentioned training courses, so what training courses have you been on, and which ones have you led?

MC – So the first one that I did when I was at XX was called An Introduction to MF. The ones that I’ve kind of led on, or led with really - not on my own - the ones around Find Your Voice. So, because we were a pilot… so all of the pilot teachers, depending on where they were in the country, sort of spoke at different events, to where the training was in relation to where they were based. Just about the experience of it. I’ve led the Twitter chats that they do weekly, I’ve led those before. And were hosting here a Just Play session next year as well.

R – So the Find Your Voice, what did you do for the pilot, and like did you feed back ideas, and were they taken on board and things like that?

MC – Yeah. So okay, it was a few years ago. We all met for two days, and worked with two sort of Find Your Voice people, as well as the MF team. XX, the singing teacher, and XX whose very much percussion and beat boxing. We had sort of two days of intensive training of the kind of things that we would run with the students. So the first half of the project was focussing on voice - really getting the students to sing more in school, but making it very sort of forward thinking and modern, and not ‘let’s go on…’ I’m not going to mention any websites! (both laugh) ‘Let’s go and sing a song or a hymn on’, or get them to use their voice without necessarily thinking that they were singing. So things like they would vocalise different riffs through different instrument parts, mimic the sounds with beatboxing as well. So using their voice in sort of different ways. The second half focussed on technology. One of the sort of hurdles I think that sometimes people… well they say is a hurdle, is their lack of instruments, or their lack of resources, lack of space, and this was to do with mobile phones. So, a tiny little resource that everyone, nearly everyone, has got, and using it to record and manipulate sounds, and downloading free apps. So making it really inclusive and accessible for everybody. Yeah, downloading apps and experimenting with them, and sort of getting a bit of an introduction with music technology really. So yeah, we trialled it in lots of different ways with the music tech side, and obviously with me being on a rotation, it was quite nice, the way that it worked with my group compared to those maybe that could spend longer, because I could trial it lots of different ways each time, so I trialled it with using apps I knew really well, so that I kind of knew what they could do. But then I also trialled it where I gave them a bit list of apps that were out there or told them to find any others, and let them sort of have free reign. So yeah, it was really interesting to see, but I did notice a real significant difference in the students the following year after that with singing. They’re not shy about singing in front of each other, or when we do the band project, it’s not an issue that they might have to sing in front of each other, or. So, yeah.

R – How does that fit in with your school rules? Like are there any rules about having mobile phones, or?

MC – Yeah, I had to break the rules (smiles). Yeah, well, the students have to hand their phones into the office in the morning, but they were allowed to use them for the purpose of this, and obviously just really clear guidelines for them ‘if you mess around on it, it goes’. And they can’t access Wi-Fi here or anything. It’s all on lock down. They could go on 4G if they’ve got it, but the majority of them didn’t have, haven’t got it.

R – So what does MF mean to you?

MC – It means getting the students involved in making music as much as possible. So, the majority of the lesson is them playing music or composing music. It’s not writing about music, or... Obviously listening to music is as important, but it’s really about getting them an experience of being a musician, rather than going away and researching about musicians, or finding out about previous musicians. It’s about getting them confident in playing, getting them confident in making music, about it being accessible to everybody. It’s not about if you’ve got money, or if you’ve got money to have private one-to-one lessons. It’s about everyone has got the right to have a good music education, and that KS3 curriculums should prepare them for GCSE, whether or not they’ve had private lessons in the past is irrelevant. It’s just about getting all of them involved in all of them making music, and all of them seeing themselves as a musician as well.

R – And do they here?

MC – I think so. Yeah, I mean we offer it to… music is obviously compulsory to all. It’s not a choice throughout KS3. They all get to experience it in Year 7 and Year 8 through the curriculum. They also all get the opportunity to have their own instrument and learn their own instrument, which goes home with them, with a specialist teacher, completely free of charge. They’ve all got the option to go onto GCSE or BTEC music if they want to. They’ve all got the opportunity to come to any extra-curricular, whether it’s music tech or music - there’s plenty of things for them to get involved with, and they all see that. I’d like to think anyway that they all think they can. I hope they do (laughs).

R – (Also laughs) I’m sure they do. Okay, so has your understanding always been like that, or has it changed at any point?

MC – No. I think it has changed, definitely. I mean, that first school I worked at for my placement, they didn’t see themselves… they weren’t confident musicians at all. When I first started here, there’d not been a permanent music teacher here for a while. They’d kind of had long term supply, and that maybe it was sort of covered by other members of staff. So it wasn’t really an ideal situation in terms of them making music. And I had real issues with the Year 9s when I first started with performing: ‘we’ll do the work, fine, but I’m not performing it to everybody’. And it was a real problem. They really, genuinely didn’t want to. It wasn’t sort of a refusal, it was a fear I think, of ‘we don’t want to show it to anyone else, we don’t want to perform what we’ve done’. Whereas I embed that, straight away from Year 7, and I think that I can fairly say within the last three or four years, I’ve not had any students who’ve said ‘I’m not performing’. So it’s just the norm for them. They don’t know any different, so yeah.

R – Has your understanding of MF changed, or has that always been…?

MC – No, I think that’s always been just about getting them all playing and getting them all confident in themselves as a musician.

R – Okay, and I presume that’s kind of answering my next question, so what do you value in music education?

MC – Yeah. They’ve all got the opportunity, regardless of what their background is, regardless of what their parents earn, or where they’re from, or what kind of area they live in, that they all get the same opportunity really. Or the opportunity to learn an instrument that they want to play, or to sing, or you know, to be a musician.

R – So what are the problems of school music, and how does MF kind of solve these?

MC – (Sighs and pauses) well, I think that’s quite restrictive, isn’t it, to certain schools. From speaking to people in the past, again, like space is sometimes an issue, or budget is sometimes an issue, and I mean from speaking to other teachers that have sort of raised these problems, budget quite often comes down to an issue which is why I think the ‘find your voice’ scheme is brilliant. Everyone’s got a voice, everyone’s got… well a majority of people have got a phone in their pocket, or some kind of device that can download apps, or could make music. I had one student who brought in his Nintendo DS in and I’d got no idea it could download anything, or could do anything like that, and I mean there’s loads of guidance on there as to ‘right okay, well what could we try instead of having a…’ If you’ve got no break-out spaces for example, you’d do something as a whole class, or that it does challenge some of those sort of fears or worries that sometimes other teachers have, or what they see as barriers. And I think again, they’re the main ones. There’s lack of space, and lack of equipment, and I think if you look on the website or if you look at some of the work that the other MF teachers have done or on twitter or on the resource page, there are lots of things on there that break those down, so…

R – What difference has MF made to your pupils, your school, and your own practice?

MC – I think it’s made me feel, or made me realise that actually they are more creative than you might give them credit for. You might have seen with the Samba lessons today, I don’t give them an awful lot of guidance. It’s sort of a very vague criteria really. So they have to go and be creative. They have to go and explore. And I think when I first started teaching, I might have felt ‘okay, well I need to tell them what dynamics to put in’ or ‘I need to give them a clear structure’. And then that kind of sometimes restricts their creativity. So giving them a really vague… well it’s quite frightening sometimes, just give them a really vague topic and then off they go. When they got to Year 9, I did a project last year, a song writing project, and we spent the first lesson, just sort of discussing what goes into a song, writing some ideas down onto the board, and then just screenshot a picture of it and gave it to them. And I kind of left them to it, and the songs they came back with were brilliant. Whereas that would have been a real fear when I started, first started teaching, just letting them go, because I would have been ‘ah no, they need more guidance’ or ‘they’re not going to come back with anything any good’. But actually, they came back with something amazing, and I wouldn’t have expected that when I first started teaching, and I would have thought they needed constantly ‘okay, well first of all we’re going to do this, then we’re going to build it to this’. Whereas actually, I think it’s given me a confidence to think ‘well actually, the students can go away and they can be creative on their own’. Also the trust. Trust with them. I think I would have been frightened as a teacher at first, to let them go off into different rooms, go and work outside the classroom. I think I would have been frightened that SLT might have walked past and they might not have been doing… they might get distracted. But I don’t tend to have that very often. The majority of the time, they are focussed, because I think they’ve got an ownership of their own learning. So I think they value that sometimes. They might not always get that in the more academic subjects.

R – So how is music different from the other school subjects?

MC – (long pause, exhales)

R – Is it different?

MC – Well, yeah. I imagine, I mean, we have no desks, we have no tables. It’s quite a spacious sort of environment. They do have books, but the books are for the whole of the performing arts, through the rotations that they go round. So they don’t do an awful lot of written work which I know they obviously do in some subjects. It relies a lot on discussion, and being able to talk about what they’ve learnt, and talk about what they can hear, and what they’ve found. Which I know that does happen in a lot of the other subjects as well. I think the main difference would be that they’ve not got a book with them all the time. They’ve not got a pen with them all the time. They’re being creative and they’re exploring what they do. Which obviously is more linked to the sort of art, dance and drama. Maybe a bit further away from your maths and your English lessons.

R – How does that fit in with the philosophy of your school? Like, are there any sort of things that you need to do to fit in, which aren’t necessarily like for music?

MC – Yeah, the books. That’s like a whole-school policy that we all have books. They all have a feedback sheet at the end of each rotation to say what they’ve done, they’ve achieved, and what they need to work on. But really that’s the only requirement that we sort of do as a whole school. And marking policy. But again, we don’t have an awful lot of work to mark, in terms of sort of book work. Obviously not in musical work, there’s plenty of that (*adds in this sentence quickly and laughs*). But no, other than that, I think the ethos of our school is that it is a musical school. Our Head teacher is a music teacher, as I’ve said. They upped the XX scheme up to the whole of Year 8 and 9, after school. Our Head teacher, as I say, she believes that hooking the students in through creative arts or sport is what really hooks them into school, and then that helps them to achieve well throughout their other subjects, rather than it be a focus on ‘right, these are the other subjects, and that comes second’. We have got a very strong sort of performing arts, creative arts ethos. Our Head teacher’s music, our Deputy Head is a dance teacher. Our other Deputy Head’s a PE teacher. So it, yeah, there’s a very strong focus on sort of practical subjects, and just having a broad range of everything really. If there’s some of the local secondary schools round the area don’t have as much, well some of them do offer, but they don’t all have to offer dance, or have to offer drama as part of the curriculum at KS3, whereas we want them to have that sort of broad balance curriculum, with all the creative subjects. And we’ve got double the amount of art on our timetable for the Years 7 and 8 as well, whereas it’s not, it’s not all… it’s not extra maths, or it’s not extra English, it’s giving them a good balance of everything.

R – What has surprised you about MF?

MC – Probably what I said earlier. It’s just how much independence you can give them. It surprises me every time what they come back with, with not a lot of guidance really. I think really, I see my role sometimes as being a facilitator of what they’re doing, as opposed to standing at the front teaching in the sort of old-fashioned kind of ‘this is what you’re learning’ way. The thing that surprised me the most really was how much I’ve learnt from them, in terms of what they’ve come back with sometimes, and that they can work really independently and that they can learn from each other, I mean they can learn from YouTube, or from the things that they go home with. So with XXs, they go away and look on YouTube, they teach themselves, they come back and they’re playing a song that they’ve not learnt at school, and you know, the skills that they’ve learnt here, in music, I think that they take away and they can pick up then, they can go onto YouTube and they can access something that they might not have known how to, if I’d sort of sort of stood here and said ‘well you do it like this, and they you do it like this’, I think it’s made them more independent.

R – What are the disadvantages to formal teaching, apart from you’ve mentioned that it’s a bit old fashioned and things like that?

MC – I don’t think that it’s creative. I think that it can hinder their creativity. I think if you’re too specific with a subject like music, they’re not able to think for themselves as much. So like if I’d said to all of the group in the samba lesson, ‘right you all need to have really quiet dynamics at the start, and then at the end it needs to be…’ - that’s just one example. Or if I’d given them a song-writing topic but told them that they all had to use the same chord sequence - it just means that they get to be more creative.

R – What do you think about notation and technical terms? Like is it important for them to be able to read traditional notation and know things like that?

MC – I don’t think it’s important for them to be able to read it to be a good musician, at all. I haven’t got any formal grades - I mean I went through a very sort of non-traditional route if you like. But I think that people feel that that is important because of the pressures of the GCSE. So, in terms of them being a good musician, I would say I don’t think they need it, but in terms of them getting through their GCSE, depending on which exam board they are taking, then I would perhaps say they do need a certain understanding of it. I don’t think they need an in-depth understanding of it, and I think a majority of that can be picked up at GCSE level, or at least towards the end of Year 9 for those students who want to go on and do that further. But I don’t think it makes them any better a musician, no.

R – But you think that they can build up those skills starting from Year 10, or do you think they need them earlier on?

MC – Yeah, I think they can. In terms of how much they need for GCSE. I mean, I’m obviously slightly different, in not teaching GCSE at Year 10 and 11, but I do teach it to Year 8s and 9 here, and some of them have a very limited understanding of notation. We’ve had a singer go through the course and get an A\* a couple of years earlier without knowledge of theory. We’ve had drummers who’ve gone through, who’ve only had understanding of drum notation as opposed to treble and bass clef, which they need a bit more for the GCSE, and have come out with As, Bs and things. So I don’t think it’s the be all and end all of it. But again, I suppose it all depends on the exam board that they went through, it was 40% performance, 20% exam, so… But I also, with the compositions, they don’t have to produce an actual traditional score anymore. So yeah, I don’t think it is necessary.

R – What’s your background then? I know you’ve mentioned that you’ve had a non-formal background.

MC – My parents aren’t musicians. I haven’t really got anyone in my family who’s a musician, apart from my Dad who used to play about four chords on the guitar in the kitchen and sing along all the time. But I think that’s what sparked it for me, that’s what allured me, I used to just love singing along with him - Elvis songs since I was about five (laughs). My next-door neighbour was a pianist, a really good one. When I was sort of around seven or eight, he was at University, so he’d come back and I’d just hear him play like through next door, and I’d be like ‘wow, I really want to be able to play like that’. But obviously he was away, meaning he couldn’t teach me, but his Mum kind of played a little bit. She was an English teacher at this school actually, quite a long time ago, and she said she’d come round and teach me, just like a little bit. The plan was that maybe she’d teach me for a little while, see how I got on, and then I could always have lessons later down the line. I never did go and get lessons anywhere else (laughs). She used to keep coming round until I went to University she ended up coming round. So we’d kind of gone from like a seven, eight year old who’s going to have a few lessons, to being like a 17 year old who was still doing it. So, yeah, but it was really nice, and she always said to me ‘look, I’m really happy to teach you, but, I’m not going to put you through any of the formal qualifications. I want you to do it because you enjoy it.’ And that’s what I always did, and that’s what, I think that’s kind of followed on through my teaching. I want them to do it because they enjoy it. Not because they’ve got to sit down and do an exam at the end. I then applied for University. I applied for XX University as one of them, which is where I went. I didn’t really have any… you need your grade eight for most of the time (laughs). I had a really good teacher at my upper school who didn’t want me to do the music course at first because I didn’t have any of the formal grades, but my Mum complained (laughs), so I did get to do it. He made me sit downstairs in a room, gave me some sheet music, and said ‘right, can you play it?’ I played it, and he said ‘right, can you sing?’, ‘Well, I don’t really know, I don’t really sing’. So I sat down to sing, and he said ‘oh, why aren’t you in the school show?’ And anyway, he led lots of choirs, that was his focus outside of school, and that’s where I started singing. So, I got myself a singing teacher from there and he came in through the school, and then specialised in singing when I went to University, and he spoke to the University before, and said ‘look, I know she hasn’t got the grades, but, can I talk to you about what she’s done’… and then from there, I went on to do my PGCE and actually, that was a real good point because I’d done my GCSE at the upper school, but they didn’t offer an A-Level course, they just did the BTEC performing arts course, which I did, but again, going off to University without the grade eight, without an A-Level in music it was a bit… they weren’t sure. So I went and did that anyway, they spoke to the music teacher, it was fine, I got through… did my degree there, did my PGCE at XX of Music. But again, it was quite a bit of a talking point for the PGCE, because most people had gone through that traditional route of GCSE, A-Level, grade eight, University, PGCE. Whereas I’d done it completely different. And I think it’s benefitted me really, I’ve not, I’ve been able to see that you can access things through a different way if you need to, and… yeah, that’s how that was, so…

R – Very good. Can I ask you about informal learning then? So do you use it?

MC – Informal learning?

R – Informal learning.

MC – Yes.

R – How?

MC – I hope you’ve seen some of it today.

R – Yep, okay.

MC – By letting the students go off into groups, letting them have some of the ownership of learning, giving them very sort of limited guidelines sometimes. They can, and have done in the past, accessed things through the internet or through Sound Cloud, and through listening and sort of… I think with the informal learning, it’s a focus on like the band project that I spoke to you earlier about. They go off, they listen to the track, they start to figure it out for themselves, they have to do a lot of the work. I think that’s embedded through most of my schemes of work, a student-led process.

R – So you mentioned the band work. Do you kind of use Green’s model of informal learning as like a basis for that, or have you adapted it?

MC – Yeah, I’ve adapted it slightly. Mainly because of time. The In At the Deep End model, well I run it like that with my Year 9s, because they have more time, that they can go and listen. They might access things like the tab on the internet if they want it, but a lot of it’s done through ear, so listening to the song, picking out riffs, trying to figure out how to play them. In Year 7 and 8, because they’re on sort of this 10 hour long rotation, I don’t always feel they have enough time to sort of really explore it and really get to grips with it that way, so I will give them sort of the riff. So when I spoke to you about the Smoke on the Water thing yesterday, I give them the riff, in tab, give them the song too to listen to, they go away and figure it out sort of with the bank of resources that they’ve got. So they’ll have the song, so like the original of the song. Again, they might have recordings of our technician who would have broken down each part and played what it sounds like on each instrument, and you can hear it sort of isolated, and they’ll have a very vague sort of lean sheet that gives them the main riff or the chords that it uses, but it doesn’t give them necessarily ‘right, okay, this one first, then you play this one’. It just gives them like a lean, then they’ve got to put it all together. So yeah, I kind of run it slightly differently for Year 7 and 8, because of the rotation. Whereas in Year 9, because we’ve got the whole year, and they’ll have got a bit more time if I need to, to let them explore a bit further. If it runs over half term, then it runs over half term. But I will still see them again. Whereas with them only having these 10 hours and then they move on, I can’t expect to pick that project up again, sort of four months down the line, so…

R – Okay, so for the Year 9s, do the students get to choose what music they play?

MC – Yeah.

R – Okay. Completely free choice?

MC – Depending on the topic that we’re doing. Yeah. I mean we do some sort of cover tracks with them. I change it around. I mean like this time, one thing we’ve done for the first part of Year 9 this year, is give them a piece of music that is notated, does come from a graded syllabus, but they have also had access to the recording. Some students have found that really hard, because they’re not really used to that notation. There are some students who’ve actually taken the notation and re-written their own version of it, because they find the notation really restricting. So they’ve kind of gone away, listened to it, and scribbled their own version down, so they don’t have to follow the notation. So that’s quite interesting. Whereas obviously the students in here that play the music, they’re not… sorry, that read music already, they’re not really restricted by it, because they’re used to it - the ones maybe that have gone through a sort of one-to-one route. So yeah, I’ve not done it with my Year 9s yet this year, but there is a project that I did last year where lesson one, we booked a computer room, they went down, they listened to a few songs, they sat in their groups and decided what they wanted to cover, what they wanted to do, they had that lesson to print of any tabs they wanted, any resources, download any versions of the song they wanted to hear, and they’ve got five lessons, keep listening to the end of each one and going through it. But they just worked together to put the whole song together, so yeah. I’ve kind of done it both ways. It’s kind of tailored to what kind of students I’ve got, and sort of how far I think I can push them. But this year again, because we’ve now developed an XX partnership, some things have slightly changed due to what the upper schools want them to study by the time they come to them. They would like them to have a bit more of an ownership on, or a bit more of a knowledge and confidence I suppose, around notation, which is one reason why I’ve started to embed that a bit more. It’s not necessarily that they’re all learning about notation and being confident and fluent in reading it, it’s just that they’ve got it there and they can access it if they need to. And if they want to adapt it or come away from it, they can. It’s not ‘you’ve got to be fluent in reading notation by the end of Year 9’. Not at all. But yeah, I have tried to embed a bit more of that. Mainly for the purpose of the upper school.

R – Is that why you’re using like a graded piece for Year 9 at the moment? Sort of to fit in with that?

MC – Yeah. Yeah.

R – Before you said it depends how far you feel you can push them. Does that mean how much informal learning you can do? So if they’re high in ability or skill-set, would you go more down the informal route, or would you then take them more towards the formal route? Like what do you regard as pushing them?

MC – Yeah. I like letting them have complete ownership of what they want to do, and I like letting them choose their own song, and going from there, but I think to a certain extent, you do have to guide them. Some of the songs they pick might be completely… some of the guitar solos in there, and you think ‘blimely’ (laughs) - they’ve only been playing for a couple of weeks! So sometimes they need guiding in terms of… they might need the guitar solo simplified, or, that kind of thing. They might not always be able to completely exactly replicate the song as it is. They might need guidance in terms of ‘okay, well you don’t need to the fill like that, why don’t you try and do it like this’. Making it so it’s still tailored for them, but it’s still giving them, ‘we’re still covering the song you want to do, it still sounds like the song you’re covering’, it’s just their kind of take on it. So it might be that the key needs changing, or that kind of thing. It’s hard, isn’t it, because some students might pick a four chord song that doesn’t necessarily challenge them that much. And then you have to look at it from the complete opposite end: ‘okay, well how can you make this harder? Why don’t you add more drum fills in, or…’ - that’s what I meant by that. I think sometimes you need… you couldn’t, well, depending on, the group I’ve got, there wouldn’t be that many of them who could go away, choose their own song, and play it exactly as the song is. And I could just sort of leave them to it for six weeks without anything. Sometimes they need a bit of guidance like that. And again, this type of topic gives them that knowledge of how they can do it themselves. We do have some students who do pop in at lunchtimes, and they’ll just cover a song that they’ve decided they want to do, which is very like that module, and I think they then start to learn over time, especially throughout Year 9 when they’re in here for even more time, they start to realise ‘okay, then maybe we don’t need to do the drum fill like that, we could do it like this, or…’ then they start to get their knowledge themselves that they can change the key, or that they can vary it, so, yeah.

R – Have you ever tried to give them the opportunity to do it as per the model, like complete free choice, and just let them get on with it and stand back completely, or…?

MC – Yeah, I have. And again, I think this is sort of a school policy that restricts that sometimes. I mean, obviously, there’s plenty of challenges in there, there’s plenty of differentiation in there because they’re all doing something different, but it’s sort of showing how they’re all making that progress, which sometimes I think is… it can be a fear, can’t it, that they don’t always make a lot of progress through that model. They do from start to finish, but there may be a lesson where they’re just completely lost… So yeah I have, but if they are completely lost, I will go in, I wouldn’t say ‘right, figure it out yourself, I’m off’ (laughs). So, yeah, it’s knowing your students, isn’t it, and sort of guiding them through it in terms of how they need it. And it might be that you don’t go in and do it for them, it might be ‘well okay, well why don’t you have a think about this, why don’t you think about trying this?’ And again, giving them that ownership, that it’s not you telling them what to do, it’s you encouraging them to think about what the options are.

R – Do you think they value that?

MC – I think so. I think so. I don’t know if they always realise it. I think sometimes they might think ‘why’s she not just telling us?’ or ‘why’s she not just doing it for us? I’ve asked her to help us, but…’ I think they do in the long run. We’ve got quite a few students - ex-students now - who are out gigging musicians, and they come back, which, I think that sort of speaks for itself. We’ve got a band who’ve just left school, so are about 18, 19 now, just finishing school, about University age. They’re out gigging all the time, doing really well for themselves, and they come back and play for our prom every year, for free, they come back and say ‘oh, this is where our band started’. They were in my Year 9 class, and I put them in a group together, and they were the first year that I tried the song-writing project with, and it came back, they were the group that I through ‘wow, I didn’t realise I could just give you… could sit together as a group of people and discuss some ideas, and you could go off and produce that’. And again, XX, the frontman, he didn’t sing when he started here, did some Find Your Voice stuff. He’s now the lead singer of the band as well. So, yeah. And I think that stuff like that speaks for itself. We’ve got quite a few students who have left and are now active musicians in the local area, in the community, and their sort of musical life started here, so… And that’s why I think it’s important, because it feeds into… once they’ve left here, they can go out and access a life as a musician, whether it’s full-time, whether it’s a hobby, it doesn’t matter. They can access it, and they can go and be a musician. Yeah. They have to work a little bit harder maybe through the GCSE years to get the coursework element and the listening exam done, but they still can be a musician, and they still can earn a living through doing it. And I think they see that through doing it like this, rather than it being very much a ‘you need to go to University, and then you need to have this, and you need to have this qualification to get anywhere’. It doesn’t set that example. It sets them on ‘anyone can be a musician actually, so’…

R – Absolutely. So we’ve kind of talked about impact, and that’s like a clear impact really of your approach.

MC – Yeah, I think so, yeah, yeah.

R – Okay, so what does your vision for the future of school music look like? What would the most perfect lesson be?

MC – Perfect lesson, or perfect sort of school life?

R – Perfect school music lesson.

MC – Oh, my perfect lesson would probably be… that they walk into the room and then they are, for the majority of that lesson, they are making music, whether it’s on instruments, singing, irrelevant, but they are making music. That they are confident to discuss the music and talk about what they’ve learnt from it and what they’re doing. Yeah, that would be mainly it. That they are playing music, that they’re learning something musical, by doing something musical.

R – Okay, so rather them being taught something, they’re kind of learning to experience it?

MC – Yeah, yeah. I think so, yeah. I mean, obviously I do think it’s really important to have somebody around, and I’m not saying they just come in and there’s no teacher there and they just go off. And I think they could do that - I mean, that’s the standard I’d like to get to. I’d like to be able to know that if I ever did need any cover, or I wasn’t in, that I could leave something, and they would be able to get on with it by Year 8 or Year 9, they’re confident enough to know that they can take ownership of it themselves. I think that it’s important that they have someone around to facilitate it. I mean, in my first school, when they did their band projects, they had quite a lot of staff, and there’d be a member of staff with every sort of group, just to kind of… And then again, it’s not getting involved necessarily unless you need to. Sort of standing back, letting them do it, and only coming in when it’s needed. So yeah, that’s what I’d say it’d be. Having someone there to facilitate rather than to lead if you like.

R – Okay, I just want to ask you about group work. So when we spoke in the summer, you mentioned that you were quite interested to find out does it make a difference between friendship groups, different ability or same ability. Why is that important?

MC – I think because I’ve always gone through the MF ethos that they work in the friendship groups, and I’ve never really challenged it because it’s never really been an issue. So I have always gone with friendship groups for all of the reasons MF state, that they’re more confident when working together, we discussed yesterday that it’s quite a personal thing, so sometimes you might want to be around people that you feel more comfortable around. But we’ve had quite a lot of focus in school in groupings, so certain lessons here would say ‘right, you’re going to go into your…’ - they sometimes name them after subjects, so ‘you’re going to go into your chocolate bar group for this lesson’. So like pupil premium kids might all be in one group, gifted and talented might all be in one group, etcetera. Then they might have their - I don’t know, hot dinners group - and they’re all… that’s suddenly all mixed ability group, so they come in to these groups that have different names, or coloured groups for example. Some are mixed, some are based on ability, some might be based on whether they’re pupil premium, or SEN, or whatever. And for different tasks, teachers put them in different groups. And I found that… that’s quite interesting to hear some of the feedback that’s come from that, about how the students worked in different subjects then they’re sort of placed into these groups that they’ve not sort of really had a say over. And that’s been a sort of trial for the majority of the school have put that focus in. Whereas for me, I’ve always stuck with the friendship groups, which can be sort of a complete variant. Sometimes they are mixed ability, sometimes they do end up as a very much same ability group as we discussed earlier. So it was just interesting, well I thought it would be interesting for me to see what happens when students are in ability groups, as opposed to friendship groups, so…

R – So when you said they’re grouped, is that like a whole-school grouping or does each teacher group them?

MC – No, each teacher, yeah. Each teacher would do it for their lessons. Because yeah, not every teacher would teach the whole school as I will. So yeah, they do it just for their classes. So again, it’s slightly different because, apart from the creative arts subjects, most people’s classes will stay with them for the whole year, rather than sort of keep rotating round.

R – What do you think will be the kind of turning point if you make a decision to go along with that grouping, or to stay in friendship groups? Like, what’s going to make the difference between sticking with what you know and…?

MC – The progress that they make. Seeing whether, whether it restricts them, or whether it helps them to progress and move forward. So yeah. Time will tell I suppose on that one.

R – Okay, so you’re going to try that in music long-term?

MC – Well, see how this rotation goes. I might switch it round next time, maybe put the Year 7s into non-friendship groups and the Year 8s into friendship groups. So yeah, I suppose it’s a… we’ll see how it goes.

R – That’s all the questions I’ve got to ask, unless you want to ask anything or answer anything else?

MC – Not that I can think of.

R thanks MC for the interview.

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