**School B teacher interview transcript – Miss Lightfoot (ML)**

Researcher (R) – So first of all, can you talk me through your journey with MF, stuff about how you found out about it, when you first experienced it?

ML – Five years ago when I first came to School B. Obviously, it was the band skills was one of the first topics I taught, so that’s informal learning. And like I said, I taught in two previous schools, and music wasn’t like that. Music was at a keyboard, people were in front of you, they worked in pairs. There weren’t pupils on different instruments or anything like that. So it was five years ago. And then from that, obviously then there was the whole fuller music project which was MF, and then XX sent me on a Find Your Voice training course, and we started doing Find Your Voice here as well. And then basically, I really massively got into MF though probably about a year, a year and a half ago. And we had all the Australians - 20 Australians come over here and everything like that, which was brilliant, and they came and watched our lessons and did all that. And then I then went to the Music Learning Revolution (MLR) in London, and I was like just buzzing from that – the Australians coming here, meeting them and hearing what they do in the MLR in London. And that’s where I first saw Just Play as well, in MLR in London. And I was just buzzing about, I just wanted to come in and I just wanted to teach, and I really like loved it. And just since then… so I got Just Play to come in our lessons here at school, and I said to XX now I want the resources, and XX got me the resources and I just started doing it. And from that, I’ve been on the training courses, I’ve been invited to go and spent a week in Australia and I went to their MF conference in Australia, and I saw MF out there, and it was just absolutely amazing. So a year ago from the MLR, I was just like this stuff is just brilliant. So yeah. So that’s just really been it, and I’ve just been doing it ever since, and I’ve been running training courses, done one here at the school. I’ve been to XX running one. We have XX students that come in here as well, so they’ve watched me teach and observe me. So you know, it’s just been absolutely brilliant.

R – So you first familiarised yourself with it when you were employed here or during your training?

ML – Well, I remember at my training it was briefly mentioned, but I wasn’t… and I was always aware of MF but I didn’t fully understand what it was about or in my previous schools as well it was never mentioned. But I knew there was something MF - I knew it was out there. It wasn’t until I came here that I fully understood what it was about and the like, all the different programs and all the different things that they do. I never really knew. So it was whenever I came to School B.

R – What is MF about? What is it?

ML – Well for me, it’s basically pupils are playing and they’re learning practically first, so that they basically learn practically, they get it all done, and the understanding comes from what they’ve been doing. Like for example, in my previous school it was they would have to in their books write about everything first, before they actually do it like. I remember doing Indian music with Year 8s, and they wrote everything down. They wrote about what instruments were played, what they rhythms were, what a raga was, raga. And it’s like to me, they’re bored before they even go and actually start to play it, before they actually start to do it. Like why not get them doing it and then discussing ‘well what are you playing for the melody?’ And that’s what’s different from here. The pupils are playing and creating music. In my previous school it was ‘let’s write about it first, and then do something about it’. So, that’s what it is for me - that they learn through more practical learning. And as well, putting the ownership more on them, than learning to… it’s not me standing over them, directing them and telling them what to do. You give them the skills, give them what they need, and then they go off and do it and you facilitate the learning when they’re doing that, I think. And you know as well with the informal learning, they choose their instruments, they choose what song they want to do, and I think they enjoy that a lot more because, to be honest, like some of my Year 9 boys, they’re all into this rap and hip hop music. I don’t have a clue what the latest song is out for it, I don’t listen to that. And I’ve got boys there like in my Year 9 that have been kicked out of school, like he’s been kicked out of school once and things like that, and he’s coming back all the time, and he wants to… we’re getting a DJ person in to work with them, and he absolutely loves it. But if I was choosing the music for him, for like band skills or Live Lounge, he wouldn’t be interested, so…

R – Has it got any other advantages, like the informal learning pupil autonomy, like choice and things, apart from motivation?

ML – Yeah, I think it helps them to do it independently as well. It helps them to actually… like for example, whenever we do Year 7, like the whole Just Play thing and they know then how to read the music and read the tab. Things like that means that whenever it comes to them doing band skills in 8 or 9, or even still in Year 7, I don’t have to sit and go through ‘this is how you play this part and this is how you play that part’. It really really does transfer the skills. And I think again, that’s something that whenever they do choose their own music, they don’t need me to go to them - ‘and this is how you play this and this is how you play this’, they can work it out themselves and get on with it, and I think they do it independently, so…

R – Do they do that quite quickly, or does it take some getting used to for them?

ML – It depends on the pupil.

R – Sure, of course.

ML – It really really does. Some people struggle obviously a bit more than others, but if they even do need a little bit of help with like working out something, they pick it up then quickly. But you do get pupils who will just look at the tab and they just go away with it, and run away with it, or they’ll look it up themselves. It’s harder as well sometimes with the bass tabs, so if they can get the chords and I’ll maybe work out the root notes for them. But once I give them that, then they’re flying with it. Sometimes they might just need that little bit of input if they can’t get something themselves, but yeah.

R – Sure. Okay, thank you. Before, you mentioned about band skills and informal learning. Are they different, and if so, how are they different, or are they the same?

ML – No, that’s just what we call it (laughs). That’s just what we call our topic - band skills. That’s how we do it though, with the informal learning, because that’s basically… that informal lessons aren’t… they’re not teacher-led. A lot of the time we do that, we call it band skills topic, where they’re doing it in their own little rock bands. That type of thing. So it’s just what we call it, but it basically is their informal learning, so…

R – Okay, so do you do informal learning in any other topics apart from that band skills module?

ML – Yeah, we do Live Lounge as well. So it’s basically again where pupils take a song, and it’s like Radio One Live Lounge, where they take a song and they basically then learn how to play it, and then they change it and do their own arrangement of it. So again, with my pupils, it’s free choice of song, free instruments. I think XX and all might do it in smaller sizes, but I just say wherever you can do it by yourself, you can do it in pairs, you can do it as a group and just basically leave that up to them. And then sometimes as well as a class we will work on Live Lounge clips from the Radio One Live Lounge and look at how they have changed it, or sometimes I tell them to go away with the iPads and maybe listen to a couple of examples and then come back and then we feed back to each other and things like that. So that’s done very very informally as well. It’s not me saying ‘and this is the piece we’re learning and make sure you change your piece by changing the tempo or changing this’. I don’t tell them any of that. And it’s actually quite funny - one of the other classes, they’re trying to do it in a reggae style at the minute and I didn’t… They’ve learnt how to play Artic Monkeys, and they said to me ‘Miss, let’s listen, can we do it in reggae style?’ And they were listening to it, and they needed a little bit of help, and I said ‘well what beats can you hear? If we count to four, what beats can you hear the chords on?’ And they’ve been trying to do all that, so that’s like completely taking it to the next step, rather than just slowing it down and changing the instruments and they’re actually trying to change the whole thing (both laugh). And they’re changing like… it’s really really good what they’re trying to do, so. And again, if I was there telling them what to do, they would have never thought of actually doing something like that, because you limit… like I would have limited them, so.

R – Absolutely. Are you familiar with Lucy Green’s work on informal learning?

ML – A bit, yeah. Like I’ve heard of her and stuff, and I know she’s massively into MF, and she writes loads of books and all that, so…

R – What do you think of her principles of informal learning, like free choice of song, working in friendship groups, learning by ear, stuff like that?

ML – Well, I think it’s really really good, basically. I think that’s the way music teachers should be going. I don’t think everything should be done by ear. I think there needs to be obviously some notation in there, so I think there needs to be a happy balance between… Because like I was very classically trained, and I wasn’t ever taught anything by ear, or anything like that. So I think… and I wish I had that training, whenever I was younger. So no, I do completely agree with her. And I think like working in friendship groups, you’re more comfortable working in friendship groups. Like I know if I was in a group with people I didn’t know, I wouldn’t want to say much, and you kind of hide back a bit. But with your friends and stuff like that, you chat away and you tell them what you think. If they’re out of time, you’re more comfortable to say they’re out of time. So no, I do agree with what she says.

R – Okay, so do those principles just inform your approach to like band skills and Live Lounge, or does that effect your overall approach no matter what unit you’re teaching?

ML – I think it does with most things, for example like the blues music thing. I’ve taught it and I think whenever I first came here I used to teach it very differently to how I teach it now. Whenever I first came here, everyone did it on keyboard and stuff like that. As how I’ve taught it like a set, the 12 bar blues for example, like what do you call it? Like Just Play. I was like ‘what do you call that thing?’ (Laughs). Like Just Play. And then they’ve learnt how to do everything else, and then basically they go off into their groups and you give them again the tools and they go off into their groups and they create it however they want to create it. As beforehand, I taught it quite rigidly – ‘and today we’re going to do this, and today you’re going to this, and today, by the end of today, I want to hear that you’ve got your lyrics written and…’ - all that sort of stuff. And I teach it very very differently. What else do we do? Yeah, even like the stuff on the computers and everything like that. I give them the skills to begin with, and I leave them to get on with it. It’s not ‘by the end of this lesson, I expect to hear that all of your chords are played in…’ Or whenever they’re doing their song-writing as well, like I used to teach like this – ‘today we’re going to write chords for a verse, and next lesson we’re going to do the chords for the chorus, and then we’re going to put a melody line on top’. As now I teach it as ‘this is how you write your chords, this is how you write your melody, this is how you write your lyrics’ - give them all the tools, and then basically they go off and do it, however they want to do it. Because you used to have different versions of the same thing. And it seemed… as GCSE composition, as well, like I have gone to other schools. I’ve been to Head of Department meetings in XX and we’ve been talking about compositions, and they have different things – ‘if you want to write a blues song, do this and this. If you want to write this type of song, do this this and this and this’. And I’ve been to schools where all will do a blues song, and the teacher has different chord sequences for them written out. And I think that’s completely wrong. I think if it’s a free-choice composition, those pupils should have a free choice of what they’re going to compose. And if you listen to my GCSE compositions, I’ve got ones doing classical music, I’ve one’s doing blues, I’ve got ones doing dance. Such a variety, I think that’s the way it should be. So yeah.

R – Okay. Can I jump back a minute? You mentioned about your background, being classically trained. What is your background, like did you do your Undergraduate degree in music, or…?

ML – Yeah, so I started playing piano - piano was my instrument, I started since I was four. I basically went through one grade to the next really quickly. I got my grade eight when I was 13. And then like I went on and did my diploma and stuff like that. But in a way, and like, my school music was awf… like you played recorder rubbishly. I wouldn’t have continued with music if I… I went to a grammar school and it was very very traditional, and stuff like that. And it was obviously from me taking my lessons outside of school that like I loved doing music. But again, I was only taught those pieces. I perfected those pieces, so my sight reading was really bad. And again, learning by ear was really bad. I couldn’t sit down and read music. And piano was my instrument, and I didn’t know how to play a drum kit or like anything like that. So it was all piano based, all very very classical. And then I went to XX, the University, and I did my music degree, and again, it’s all piano. And then I did my PGCE. And it was basically since coming here… because even in my previous two schools, it was all keyboard. All keyboard, and a bit of singing and things like that, so I’d taken choirs and everything. But it wasn’t until I came here, and with all the instruments, you have to play them. So that’s basically it. It was all piano until I came here.

R – And how many years did you teach in other schools before you came here?

ML – Two. Two years. My first job was part-time, because I got what I could take. It was in an unsatisfactory school (laughs). Behaviour wasn’t great at all. And it was just all keyboard basically. And there were two classrooms. So one was just filled with keyboards. The other classroom, the keyboards were put away in the cupboards, so you’d have to take them out, then plug everything in, and there were battery packs everywhere. So whenever I was in that classroom, I just used to do loads of singing with them. So it was either singing or playing piano. And then in my previous school, it was an outstanding school, and I thought ‘hadn’t I landed…’ it was really good and stuff, but it was all keyboard. But whenever I first went to that school, I thought ‘isn’t the music here brilliant’, because I went from one extreme to the other. But it was until I came here… and I remember in my interview going ‘wow’, and then I went to one of the Christmas concerts, like a summer concert before I started in September, and I just thought ‘ohhh’, like the standard was just so high, you know.

R – So how long have you worked here for?

ML – I think five or six years. I think I’m in my seventh year. Yeah.

R – And when did you become a XX for MF?

ML – Last year.

R – What made you want to do that?

ML – Well, it was just… I got asked. XX – I remember she sent me a message, she was going ‘it’s about time Missy’, and I was like ‘oh, brilliant’ (both laugh). So that’s why, basically. Just because I was doing loads of stuff for them, and whenever we had training sessions coming to the school, and XX was leading them because obviously he’s ‘the man’ isn’t he. I started doing more and more for that. And obviously whenever the Australians came over and things like that, I worked a lot with them and kept in contact with loads of them and set up a project up and stuff with them too. And XX was just like ‘it’s time’. And then whenever… then I got asked to go over, so…

R – Very good.

ML – Yeah (laughs).

R – What do you value in music education? What’s important for students to learn?

ML – What, for them to… what do you mean? Or just for them to actually learn?

R – Yeah, or what’s important in general, so is theory important, are practical skills important, what about confidence, creativity?

ML – Well, probably the creativity I think, over anything. I think they need to enjoy it, and for them to be given the space to be creative. Because like I said, I think loads of music teachers put barriers in. Like for example if you’re writing music, ‘do this, do this do this and this’, and you see the same thing. And it’s like with some of my GCSE kids, I’ve had ones that are the top top kids, and I remember last year, one of my guys that I had wrote a suite of music. (R – ‘wow’, ML – ‘exactly’). But if I would have limited him, he would have never have been creative, and I wouldn’t have done that. So I’d probably say creativity.

R – Okay. What do you think the problems of school music are, and does MF address any of these? And if it does, how?

ML – Yeah, I think lots of the problems are they’re taught very like the way I was taught. Which, like looking back, you just think… Very traditional, very old school, very teacher-led, ‘do this do this do this’, not very engaging. If I was a pupil and I had to sit down and listen to a teacher talk at me for half a day about something before I got to do it, I would switch off. Do you know what I mean? And I think MF does address it, because they try and make it… it’s more like I say… it’s more focussed on the students themselves, and what they enjoy doing, and put the emphasis on them and making them do the work independently, and I think yes it does. And like I say, it’s like when I was younger, everyone always wanted to play drum kits. And for example, like mine would then just play Year 7 stuff. My Year 7s are learning how to play the drums and things like that. And I think a lot of schools, they don’t have that, and they don’t even… like the drum chair drumming and stuff like that. It’s so much fun you know, even if you don’t have drum kits in school. And I think yeah, it makes it more… I don’t know what the word… like appropriate for students, or, yeah.

R – No, it makes sense. Like relevant for them.

ML – Yeah, yeah, exactly. That’s what it does. Instead of, you know… And even like the whole On Cue thing that’s just come out, learning by ear. I just think that’s absolutely brilliant, like what XX’s done with that, you know, and I can’t wait to get that started here, and try and get more traditional instruments put into it as well, so yeah.

R – Is notation important for students to be able to read?

ML – I think so, to a limit. I think there are different types of musicians, and I think, for example, I was massively into Metallica when I was like 16 (laughs), but it’s like if you listen to Metallica, some of it is quite complicated and intricate, but they did a big thing with the San Francisco orchestra, and they commented on how, they were all reading the music, and Metallica - they’d written everything and if you would have handed them a sheet with what they’d written, they wouldn’t have a clue. There’s just different types of musicians. And I think to give a well, a broad… you know like education, I think students do need to know how to read music, but I don’t think it’s the be all and end all. Because like I say, I could read music, but for me to do stuff by ear, because that’s the way I was trained. I just think a bit of everything (laughs).

R – Yeah, absolutely. What difference has MF made to your students and your own practice?

ML – Ah, so much more fun (both laugh). I enjoy teaching so much more now than what I’ve ever done. I think that’s the same as the students. Like there’s more of a buzz around music in this school, than what I hadn’t had in my previous school. Like in my previous school, no one would have really wanted to come back to practice, and here it’s like, the music room, it’s like, do you know what I mean? Well you’ve been. There’s always pupils around, and I think it’s created more of a buzz. Like I’ve had two girls as well in here at break time practicing and stuff, and they say ‘we love music, we love music’, and they’ve gone home and they’ve looked up stuff on the iPads to learn to play. And I think it really really has, it’s given them a buzz. And, even from doing the Just Play in Year 7, I’ve had so many people telling me they’re getting ukuleles for Christmas. And then a boy came up to me as well, and was like ‘Miss, are there electric drum kits here, because I’m getting one for Christmas?’ And I just think that’s really nice, really really nice. So, yeah.

R – It’s motivated them outside of school as well.

ML – Yeah. Well, definitely from doing the Just Play stuff in Year 7. I’ve noticed that massively. So many pupils are saying ‘how much are ukuleles?’ and ‘where can I get a ukulele from?’ (both laugh). I just think that’s really nice. And even some of my Year 8s as well. One of the girls got a ukulele the other day. She brought it in for me, for me to tune and for me to tell her how to tune them, show her how to tune it and stuff, and things like that. And I think that’s just brilliant. And even talking about Rock School as well. I’ve had a couple of pupils say to me ‘Miss, what’s Rock School and what do you do in Rock School?’ So they’re like ‘oh we’re gona come and we’re gona form a band’ and I just think that’s nice. So it has given it more of a buzz, definitely. And it’s just so much more enjoyable to teach. It really really is. And there’s a lot more interest. And it’s just like, even for me doing with my Year 11s, the other day I did African music. But I just got them playing it. We were all there playing. And they loved it. Because I remember they were saying ‘well what are we doing today?’ and I was like ‘African music’, and you see their faces going ‘oh really’ (pessimistic tone), and they had a ball, and we were laughing our heads off and stuff like that. And we taught syncopation, call and response – it’s not me standing there telling them what it is, we were playing it, getting on with it, and they had a ball, so…

R – Did you put the language on after?

ML – Yeah yeah yeah, yeah. So we were talking like, for example, I was doing stuff and then they were doing stuff, and I said ‘well what are we doing?’ And someone said ‘technical texture call and response’ and I was like ‘brilliant’. We did loads of stuff like that, so like learning as you’re kind of like going along, but doing it practically. It’s not me telling them ‘in African music, you know, there’s call and response, let’s listen to it, you know’. They’re actually doing it, because that’s more fun (laughs).

R – What surprised you most about using MF here?

ML – What surprised me the most? (pause) Gosh, I don’t know. (pause) It’s interesting, I think that you can have a full class doing… like they’re all different groups doing different pieces of music, and actually coming out with really good performances. I think that’s quite challenging, because again, you’d normally have a class, like in my previous school, they’d all be doing the same piece and you’d teach them all the same way. And I think that here, they can do their own stuff, and go on different instruments and they don’t need me sitting there telling them how to do every single little thing. They can actually do that. I think it’s nice now with the Year 7s, surprising, that you can have… for example I was just showing you that Coldplay song which is quite tricky to play, and yet my Year 7s now are starting to do that, like they can do something really difficult from that, but on every instrument. It’s not just on one instrument. So the thing is the variety of instruments that they can play.

R – I mean, do you think Just Play prepares them to go onto informal learning?

ML – Massively, yes. And song writing. And yes, everything.

R – Okay, how does it lead them on?

ML – Well, for the first thing is obviously reading the notation. I think their rhythm and their pulse as well, because there’s lots of the rhythm exercises as well, that playing the pulse, there’s that in Just Play. And I think that goes in massively with the song writing, and informal learning, when they’re in their bands. So I think those are two massive big things.

R – How does reading notation help with the informal learning? Do you mean like when they go on to YouTube and get resources, or…?

ML – Yeah, or even just reading tab. I think reading tab, also picking out… because it’s a lot harder to get like drum music and stuff like that. I think because they’re used to doing simple drum patterns through Just Play that they can then take those simple drum patterns and apply it to another piece of music and things like that. So I do, I think some of the notation, just reading tab, or no one… if there’s a C chord, what notes to play for a C chord, they don’t need me to go and say to them ‘it’s C, E, G, this is how you play it’. I think it’s a lot of that. But you’d think even with song writing, because they play so many songs in Just Play, they kind of know that like for example Shake It Off, it’s three chords played over and over and over again, and they can take things like that away from them as well, so… But yeah, I think, pulse and rhythm is a massive thing and that too, as well, so it’s just playing loads of instruments.

R – Do you think you could put them the other way around, like informal learning first and then Just Play later, or would that not work?

ML – I think you could do it. I don’t think it would work as well. Because the Just Play is building all their musical skills and I think that leads a lot better in. Like why do your informal learning and all those different instruments and then go… (laughs) I think you could do it, but I don’t understand the logic behind that. I don’t know why you would do that. So I don’t. it’s building their skills. It’s building like basic rhythmic skills, basic notation skills, and it’s getting them to play and change between chords. I think it would help a lot of the work if you do that first (laughs), before you go onto anything else.

R – Okay. How does MF fit into your school ecology and philosophy? Does it fit well, or is the school a bit more formal, is there a bit of tension or something?

ML – No. I do think it’s quite good. Like I’ve had the Head Teacher come into my lessons, and she just stands and watches. And then I had like a meeting with her and everything, and she was saying… because I was talking about the whole Just Play and how I helped to get it into our school, and took a real lead on the whole Just Play stuff, and she just said to me ‘oh, is that whenever they’re all like on the chairs and all the instruments’ and I said ‘yeah’ and she goes ‘it’s brilliant’ she goes ‘when you walk into a class and you know all that stuff’s going on’. And yeah, and it’s like my school’s quite open to whenever I do have pupils like in different rooms and stuff, there’s never anyone that has said ‘you can’t do that’. Because I do know in other schools, people have said to me ‘oh, so they’re allowed to be out of your sight’ and I’m like ‘yes’ (both laugh), you know. So I do think it fits in quite well.

R – Do you think it’s important that senior management do support it, would it be difficult otherwise?

ML – Yes. Yeah, I do. Very. And, like I say, from meetings with the Head Teacher and stuff like that, she seems to support it, and she supported me going to Australia. I don’t think many other teachers would support someone being out of school to go to Australia (laughs). Any time we have the training events, I’ve always been given cover to do all of that. And I have had time off school to go to training or to lead training and events. There’s never been a problem with that at all. So the same with XX. XX has always been given the freedom to go out and to do MF stuff as well.

R – That’s really good.

ML – Yeah, because I just know like, because I’ve got obviously other teachers who are friends who are music teachers, and they struggle to get time off or to do anything.

R – Especially for professional development sometimes, it’s a difficult one.

ML – Yeah, because you talk about ‘oh, did you go to that course’ or ‘there’s an On Cue training course - the Just Play or the MLR’. And they can’t get the money or get the time, or can’t get someone to cover them. And I just think it’s such a real shame, so…

R – Okay. Last question. What is your ultimate ideal vision for the future of secondary school music lessons in this school?

ML – Oh I would… Just… Just music lessons or just music in general. I think it would be amazing if every single child could have an instrument. I think money is a massive thing for parents, whether it’s buying instruments or getting lessons, and I think it would just be amazing if we could give our pupils opportunity for every single child to be able to learn and get an instrument, on loan, of their choice. I think that would have a massive impact.

R – What impact would that have on the classroom music?

ML – I think they would come in, because I think they would go home and play - and I think just the instrumental skills would be better, I think that their reading or notational, working stuff out by ear, however that they learn, would be much better, and I think our ensemble sizes would be bigger, or extra-curricular. I think it would have a massive impact on extra-curricular as well. But yeah, I think that would be amazing.

R – Cool. Sounds lovely (both laugh).

ML – So I do. Because I went to a school down in XX and they all had orchestral instruments. I think yes that’s good, because I don’t think traditional instruments should die away, but I think it should be not just orchestral instruments, I think it should be whatever they want.

R – A mixture.

ML – Yeah, definitely.

R thanks ML for interview.

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