**School B teacher interview transcript – Mr Reed (MR)**

Researcher (R) – Okay, so first of all, you do want to talk through your mind map if that’s okay, and just explain the points to me and why you’ve chosen to put what you have?

MR – Do you want me to go through it all?

R – Just pick out the important bits if you like, or…?

MR – Okay. So, I guess I came to know about Musical Futures (MF) in 2007 whilst I was doing my PGCE. That kind of initial exposure to MF was like a kind of lightbulb moment because it sort of raised this kind of like, ‘of course kind of music’s not right in school because…’ and it kind of like resonated with my own experience. Because I had a really great music teacher, but he was great like outside of the classroom in terms of inspiring, and not inside. So lessons tended to be very sort of like… just like glockenspiels and very like sporadic, behaviour wasn’t great, and I was just sent out either to practice or like… I think the only thing I do actually remember is like a worksheet on the blues. That’s all I remember doing in secondary school music. But like outside of that, lunchtimes and all that kind of stuff, I was really involved with music. So then obviously I became aware of Lucy Green’s work, and her book on how popular musicians learn, and again, that kind of really resonated with how I thought we need to do things in school. So, I went to XX to observe MF there, because that was one of the pathfinder projects of MF, and I also followed and kind of helped out some staff from XX Music Service who were delivering MF in PRUsand in school settings. And then I kind of embarked on an enrichment project. So I wanted to actually trial the informal stuff and see if it worked. So I borrowed some instruments from here actually - I don’t know how that I was to come to know about the instruments here, I can’t remember - but then did a project in XX. And here actually, so I did the enrichment project in two schools. So the project was to see what impact it would have in those two settings. So we just had literally like really basic equipment – table-top drum kits, piano, guitar, bass, drums – and used that informal learning method with the kids. And saw some great results really, obviously in a limited time. And with limited skills as well, with you know, a new teacher. But I saw some really great results. So then in two… Do you want me to shorten it, or should I carry on like this, because…?

R – No, it’s fine. It’s cool.

MR – Yeah, I’ll go for it. In 2008, I started here, and attended some MF training. And I wanted to really kind of build up that informal learning thing in our school. Because I guess when I started, it was a really good school and it’s really known for the arts, and I was a bit uncertain to what I could bring to it, because it seemed really good. But actually, it kind of reflected what was happening in my own education, with classroom lessons, they weren’t that great, but there was lots of extra-curricular stuff, but it tended to be focussed on a certain type of kid. So the brass band was really big, and then it tended to attract a certain kind of kid, but actually in lesson, they weren’t being catered for really, because every kid was playing keyboard. But also, the kids who didn’t play in that ensemble, like the jazz band or the brass band, were kind of almost invisible really. And there was this thing that, you know, everything was done on keyboard. So I introduced the pilot, so we spent about five grand on equipment, and did it with my classes, and basically videoed some of the sort of worst kids in school engaging with this project, and made a little video, which I could show you if it would help, and showed that to the Head, because I wanted to become a XX. So we applied for MF XX status, we got that, and then the way that worked is that we got about, I think it was around 30 to 40 grands worth of equipment. That was all on loan for a year. At the end of that year, you could buy it at half price. So, you were getting 16 grand in sort of in funding essentially, because you were getting it reduced. So I used that video to basically get the other half through my Head, and I said ‘look, this is really working’, and showed him the evidence really. And then he gave us the funding to keep the equipment. So, it kind of existed at that point as a stand-alone project. So we did what we did, and then like I taught like this informal learning thing, and then slowly other staff began to teach it. Obviously with training and that. And then we started delivering… or I was delivering MF training in school and in other schools. So we had maybe three training sessions a year, and focused on the different strands of MF. Obviously initially it was all based around the informal learning side. And then there was a conference at the XX in 2008. I took like one of the first kind of little bands I had in school called XX. We took them down on the train, and had a really great time in London. It was a fantastic opportunity for the kids, to actually be involved in something like that, professionally, and to engage with people from outside of school. And from that we set up Rock School, which was really successful, attracted over 50 kids. We had Clint Boon came down to see what was going on and stuff, and lots of gigs, and the gigs used to be like really just like going to a normal gig. There was kids like mosh… there was a mosh pit you know. We used to have hundreds of kids. It were brilliant. And all based on that informal learning side. So it was a bit chaotic, but actually, the stuff that came out of it was really fantastic. Then the next bit I’ve kind of just said like 2009 to 2015, so I started a new job here in 2009 as Head of XX, and it was then about how could I take that MF ethos, and actually some of the stuff that had been done in the Learning Futures. I don’t know if you’ve come across that?

R – I have, yes.

MR – Yep. So looking at that, and how could I expand that across my sort of areas of responsibility, which was the vocational courses across school. And that kind of fitted really well. Also, we’re building up this network of teachers through MF. So, the most useful thing was to build up that network and to have other people who were doing the same thing, or you could ring up or just text and ask, ‘what are you doing on such a thing’ or just share ideas with. And the more you see, the more it kind of validated your belief in kind of the kids. Because I think much of MF is about actually believing in the kids and empowering them and have them engaging in their own learning. And I think that helps to do that. The more you see, it kind of validates it, if that makes sense. Getting other staff on board. So obviously, you know I wanted it to be like across the department. And in some respects worked well, and happened quickly, but in other times took… it seemed to be quite frustrating because it was like the small steps regarding people who probably weren’t that comfortable with doing it. Also dealing with misinterpretation of MF, or people do it in a way that wasn’t really… didn’t really reflect the intentions of the sort of… Lucy Green’s work if you like. And then obviously I came to sort of lead training at conferences and things like that. And then using MF to kind of see a way forward for music and the arts. A big thing recently has been assessment and the need for being told that we needed to get books, we need to write stuff down and all the rest of it. And actually I really fought against that, but I’ve been able to do that really because of the sort of validation from MF, and from the people who are involved with MF. And from the people that they’re connected with, like XX and people like that. So being able to put a case together really to say ‘I’m not doing that, and this is why’, ‘this is what we want to do instead because this is better for the kids, it’s better for their learning’. That’s also helped with this kind of gradual loss of importance of the arts subjects nationally, and being able to use that MF network as a support network. Which kind of like exists… MF kind of exists despite all that nonsense. It kind of provides really a practical solution, and I think allows you to kind of ignore some of that stuff that’s going on. In 2015, I joined the XX, and I had more of a kind of XX role in MF. I also started a new role here in September as Director of XX, basically in charge of the arts, and it was about transferring that ethos across the Faculty. So again, really being strong on the arts are about doing. So I want kids doing drama, doing music, doing art. I don’t want them writing about it in books. And again, it’s kind of like if you look at drama now, that ethos has spread over to drama. So, I always say, in the past - and this used to be true in music - you could probably… I could watch a performance and I could tell you who’d taught those kids, because there was the same things in every performance. The same teacher would have certain things within that performance that they’d use all the time. Whereas now, they’ve taken the principles of I guess Lucy Green really, and adapted them to drama so that they kids are now… First of all, there’s a choice of role, so not all kids have to be doing acting, they can be doing lighting or technician or staging. The kids are working in teams, it’s independently led, they’re all working in different plays, different projects. And it’s totally different, so I would have no idea who’s taught those kids. It’s like watching a performance blind, because it’s from the kids. So that’s interesting to see how that’s expanding across the Faculty. And then also, I’ve had to hand over some of the responsibility that I have for like training and stuff, which is a bit difficult, because when it’s like your thing, but seeing people like XX get involved, and it’s good for her development as well. And also, I think the success of this is a bit like leadership really. The sort of indicator of success is if I leave, it carries on. And I think that’s important. I don’t know if that makes any sense but…

R – It does. Thank you. Do you mind if I ask you a few questions about that?

MR – Go for it.

R – I’ll go from the start. Just to clarify, you’ve talked about doing your PGCE, and that’s when you were exposed to MF. Were you familiar with it because of your PGCE, is it something you were taught?

MR – You know, I can’t remember. I don’t… I honestly, I don’t know if it was just… There certainly wasn’t any specific training on it. Maybe it was mentioned in a lecture or something. I’ve no idea. I can’t remember how I originally kind of got on to it. And then I just kind of like… I don’t know, just got interested in it, and then like got the pack sent through, and all that kind of stuff. I did it that way really.

R – Okay, sure. And maybe that was how you found the pathfinder you visited?

MR – Yeah.

R – And the project you did, that was kind of your own?

MR – Yeah, yeah.

R – In 2008, you wanted to become a CS. Why was that?

MR – Because I thought I wanted to develop it in school. I saw that as a way forward for us, and as a way to engage more kids in music, and to improve what was happening in the classroom. And sometimes, you need a bit of a sort of stimulus to do that. You need something to sort of hang stuff on and say ‘we’re doing it because of this’. So that gave me an excuse really.

R – Fair enough. If it works.

MR – And for the equipment as well. The fact that we were getting… I can’t remember the exact amount, well maybe 16 thousand pounds worth in sort of in a kind, sponsorship, if you like. It’s not a small thing.

R – Okay, you’ve talked about misinterpretation of Green’s work initially, when you introduced it into this school. What kind of misinterpretations were happening?

MR – So, you get things like, people will all just hand out a sort of pack to help the kids, with no CD, with no audio involved. So it just involved the kids just using their sort of… you know like basic chords, basic melody, and putting it together from that. But a key component of you know Lucy Green’s philosophy is to combine auditory learning with other ways of learning. So things like that. Things like, sometimes teachers aren’t confident with the sort of lack of control, in a sense. And I think it takes… it’s a certain kind of person who can kind of get hold of that. Be comfortable.

R – Okay. How did you kind of overcome that?

MR – I don’t think you ever can, 100 per cent. Because I think, as professionals, everybody does it in a different way. I think it’s just again, it’s like small steps. So, it’s just kind of like constantly reaffirming how it should be. Observations, sending people on training. I think MF, it’s like marmite, isn’t it. When people hate it - and I think for some people, it’s a step too far. I think it’s a perceived notion of control. And this is the difficulty with MF nationally. There’s a perception that if kids are sat behind a keyboard with headphones on, and it’s quiet, they’re learning the melody line to… I don’t know, Oberon or whoever, that that is better. And that all kids are sort of learning. Whereas maybe when you have them in groups, you’ve got noise, you’ve got people who may be sort of are learning at different rates, you might have issues with social interaction. But actually I think that sometimes, it’s not learning 100 per cent of the time, is it. And I think that sometimes that’s more apparent. Whereas on the keyboard, with the headphones on, you can be very… you cannot be learning and not be engaged, but it not being apparent. So I think it’s a misconception that there’s more learning occurring. And it’s quieter than in that sort of more sort of… chaotic environment. If that makes sense.

R – That does make sense. I agree.

MR – That’s good. And what I didn’t say actually, sorry, is that originally, it was a stand-alone project. And then obviously now, we use all the strands of MF. But if you asked our kids what MF was, they would have no idea. And because it’s just the way that we do things. It’s filtered into everything that we do. So like I always use film music as an example. In the past, we used to say ‘right, we’re going to do this Wallace and Gromit film today’. Everybody always knows Wallace and Gromit, I don’t know why, but the kids then compose some music for that film. And lesson one, we start at the beginning, and we say ‘right, we’re going to do our first 30 seconds today, and we need to use… you know… and he’s going round the track, so we need ostinato, we need a pedal, we need… you know, blah blah blah’. And it’s like a tick box thing. So ‘yes, you include that, you include that’. And then the next lesson we’ll move on to the next 30 seconds. And it’s all a sort of very staged process. And really, you know what you’re going to get at the end of it. You’re going to get 30 versions of what you want. 30 ostinatos, blah blah blah. Whereas the way we teach it now, the kids choose the film clip that they want to work with, so they automatically have ownership of it. They work at their own pace, so they can start with the end of the video, whatever they want to. And they’ve got a series of tutorials that show them how to do the things that they need to do within GarageBand. So they can access them at any time. So it’s less teacher-led. It’s more self-directed by the students. And that’s kind of… there’s similar examples of everything we teach, to a certain extent.

R – So when you started the pilot, initially, that was just the informal learning model?

MR – Umhm.

R – So then now it’s branched out?

MR – Yep.

R – So, did you use the model as it is, like the five principles of Green’s work to the letter?

MR – Yep, yep.

R – So how’s that evolved, kind of? Do you still use the five principles?

MR – Yeah. I say like… maybe not everybody, and that’s something I’m always trying to reaffirm. Particularly with like the aural work side of things. But yes, yeah. I’m a bit of a purist in that sense.

R – Okay, sure. I mean, do you do In At The Deep End in structured stages, or have you begun to adapt that?

MR – That’s adapted slightly. So like in Year 7, with do it with more of a structured approach. So, I think this will change, because we’ve got the Just Play stuff now, which is actually providing a skills-base. But what we did in the past is we all did the same song as a class. And then I might have like the drummers working together, the guitarists working together, the bass players so they could develop the parts within little groups, so then they filter back to their groups or whatever. And yeah, so that was like the sort of original kind of skills development. And then in Year 8, they work on like a selection of songs. They could choose from in Year 9. It’s total freedom. But we have got to the point now whereby we do like a Live Lounge project. So it’s actually a solo project. Well, some do it as a duet. But you might have a class full of 30 kids, and every single person’s doing a different track, playing a different instrument. We’ve got to the point where we can just let them do that and they’ll just work on it, and come back with something.

R – Why is it important that they have a skills-base in Year 7, to then go on to informal learning, like completely as independent learners?

MR – It isn’t really, is it. But I think that we become obsessed with this thing of progression. I think like obviously, the idea with the sort of In At The Deep End stuff, is that you learn the skills as you’re doing it, so there’s that whole thing of learning just in case and learning just in time, so the whole In At The Deep End thing is you access learning as you need it, as you come across a problem, you have to overcome it. But we’ve got obsessed with this thing of progression in education, so it probably moves away from the sort of idealist approach, you know from the informal learning thing. But for it not to be a stand-alone project, there has to be something in other parts of the year. You can’t just do the same thing all the time I guess. So yeah, it’s how you kind of make it sort of different, but it also allows the kids to build up to that point.

R – So Just Play kind of leads nicely on to informal learning?

MR – I don’t know. It’s too early to say that, because we only started sort of last year with it. So I don’t know. It’d be interesting to see if it does sort of make it better. I think Just Play is great. It’s a very different approach to informal learning. It doesn’t sit as comfortably as the informal side does.

R – Why’s that?

MR – I don’t… Because it doesn’t give that choice. It is very teacher-led. And it’s probably not sort of my natural setting, if you like. I think that for those teachers who struggle with informal learning, it offers a way to deliver practical music lessons in a more structured way, perhaps that people are happy with.

R – So it’s important for you to do it as well for that consistency across the department?

MR – Yeah. I mean don’t get me wrong, I think it’s great and sort of lessons to see like Year 7 kids performing songs like that, and be engaged is great. It’s not a negative thing. I just think it’s like a personal preference, with my sort of teaching… I’m probably more suited to teach older kids I think. You know what I mean? I think that informal approach lends itself to that kind of slightly older sort of age group. So it’s just kind of a more comfortable thing. Sometimes I think ‘oh, are you doing the right thing with…’ Although I think it’s great, I’ve not made my mind up yet. I’ll see how it goes.

R – Okay, so it’s like trial and error?

MR – Mmm.

R – Okay, cool. Have you noticed any particular impact when using informal learning?

MR – Impact in what sense?

R – Different to what you would do, say with a more formal lesson.

MR – Yeah. It’s difficult to see that right now I think. It’s difficult to see that impact now, I think. It’s difficult to view it objectively, but at the start, it was significant, I think. Because we were in… like I say, a department where it was really successful - it was one of the first XX, etcetera etcetera. And a really strong extra-curricular sort of focus, but only in one area. And sort of when we brought that in, there was a huge like kind of sea change, in like the type of kids we saw in music, and the number of kids having instrumental lessons. In the number of bands that there were in school, so there was like extra-curricular become much wider, so lots more kids involved in music. Lots more kids that were in the music department wanting to start. And I think that peaked sort of with the whole Rock School thing. But like it’s difficult to view it objectively now, because it’s just what we do, so. And I think some of that… I think that when you look at instrumental lessons, where that effect where they’re sort of involved in instrumental lesson take-up has declined. But I think that’s more to do with finance and because of lots and lots of other factors. It’s seen to be more important now that you’re in lesson, learning and getting ready for your exams than it is to be having instrumental lessons. So yeah, that’s the arrangement.

R – Okay. Has your view of informal learning changed since you started doing it, or is it still the same?

MR – No, I don’t think it has. I sort of had a real belief in it from the start, because of my own experience. I don’t think that’s altered at all, to be honest.

R – What does MF mean to you?

MR – Erm (pauses). Network, I suppose. It’s exciting I guess. It provides… I think it’s the only reason why I’m still in teaching. I think I would have perhaps left teaching, had it not been for the professional dev… First of all, I think the professional development I’ve got from MF has been far exceeded anything I’ve got anywhere else. It’s connection with professional world with musicians. So, a lot of the approaches with, that you’ve seen, like the On Cue I think is a new approach. That’s developed by a professional sort of musician, who works in the industry, and it’s connecting those two worlds, isn’t it. Education and that, to make it real really. So yeah, and I think actually, MF has been the reason that I’ve got the other jobs I’ve got in school that have got nothing to do with music. So like for example, the careers thing - you know I look after careers in school, and I organised a conference a few weeks ago. So it was like the whole of Year 11, about 260 kids, and we had like 60 workshops going on, so throughout the day […]

MR – What I wanted… because our kids are very sort of passive, and they’re used to being spoon fed. Like, the teachers work harder than the kids. And I completely disagree with that, because of all this stuff, because of knowing that stuff. So I think the kids should work harder than me. And I think the kids should be engaging with the kids and not you know kind of shoving them with a stick to make them do better, do you know what I mean. So with this careers conference, like I really wanted to trust the kids. And I wanted to make it professional and I wanted to treat them like adults. So I really wanted like a strong kind of belief that they should come and it’d be like a proper conference, and they have a conference pack, and they decide where they want to go on the day. You know, it’s not controlled by a teacher. And there was a lot of opposition to that, saying ‘are you mad? You know, the kids will like run riot’, or they’ll just sit in the toilets and they’ll not do anything. But having that belief in the kids, which comes from this, actually it was great. […]

MR – And they were in business dress, and it was like… […]

MR – But you know, it’s like taking the principles from MF, which is basically what happens in the real world - ‘right, well let’s take that and put it in the classroom’, so I wanted to do kind of the same thing really. So ‘what happens in the real world when you go to a conference? Right, well we’ll take that. We’ll have a keynote speaker, we’ll inspire everybody. We’ll put all these different workshops on that actually fit what the kids have told us that they need, and we’ll get them to take responsibility of their own future really.’ So yeah, it was like taking the principles and applying them to that.

R – Okay, that’s quite cool.

MR – Which totally relates to what you’re doing, but… (jokes - laughs).

R – No, well actually, it leads nicely onto one of the questions.

MR – Oh, does it?

R – Yes. So I was going to ask you about the philosophy of your school, and how does MF fit into it - the philosophy of your school?

MR – Oh, should I be honest? I don’t know what to say really. On some levels it does, on some levels it doesn’t. As an example, a big thing at the moment is intervention, and making sure that all kids are achieving their targets that have been set on the computer, and… what else… (pause) kind of working backwards from KS4, so that as soon as they walk in in Year 7, you’re preparing them for an exam, and I’m like completely the opposite of that. So like with my staff in the arts, we don’t prepare kids for KS4 in KS3. In my opinion, KS3 should exist separately. Seven per cent of kids nationally - it’s small every year - but seven per cent of kids nationally choose music, so why should 93 per cent of kids study KS3 to prepare for KS4 when they’re not going to do it. So, at KS3, I want to engage kids, I want to make them kind of love the subject - well not everybody, but… Because I think you have to accept that as well - music isn’t for everybody, just as art isn’t. And I think my idea is not to make everybody into musicians - which is why I don’t believe in the whole notat… - every kid should learn to read notation. I think for some kids who want to read notation will benefit from that, then great, but not the whole class of 30. What’s the point? And, I think it’s much better to, when they leave KS3 they’re not going on to KS4, that they have a love of music, and can maybe play a few chords on the guitar or play a melody on the saxophone, or just something, than be able to remember ‘all cows eat grass’. I forgot what your question was…

R – About the philosophy of the school.

MR – So, it’s at odds I think. Very often with national agenda. But I think it’s about having a really strong vision and being really committed. Because there’s two ways of skinning a cat, isn’t there. And I think, our results are great, and the results are great because we have kids who are engaging in music and art and drama and everything else, who want to do well, but because they enjoy doing it, and they’re engaged in it. Not because we make them come to interventions after school, or you tell them their target’s an A and they’re only on a B, do you know what I mean. I want to completely avoid going down that route, and actually, do it the other way, through engagement and the sort of principles of MF really, I guess.

R – Okay. Does that make it difficult for you implement MF a bit more than if the school was kind of with you on that?

MR – Yeah. I mean initially the way I got it in the school initially was through it there was a whole agenda around personalised learning, so that was with a Labour government, that was a big thing David Hargreaves and the four deeps. I don’t know whether you’ve come across that but that was that was a big thing, so that was how it got in, because of the school improvement plan - part of it was about introducing personalised learning, so I just kind of like… and it does fit… I just kind of exaggerated on that and I kind of got it in. Whereas now, if you look at the school improvement plan, and there’s not a lot you can kind of tag in. I think nationally, it’s become less about teaching and learning, it’s become more about results and data and tracking. So I wouldn’t say it’s got to the point where we find it difficult to do in class, and senior management are really supportive of what goes on in the classroom but I think it needs stronger leadership from staff to make that happen, in terms of going against the grain sometimes. But also being able to kind of communicate with senior leadership and say ‘look, you know, this is what we’re doing and this is why it doesn’t look like it does in history or geography, but come and have a look and it’s working’. Does that make sense?

R – Yeah, it does, yeah. Okay, what do you value in music education?

MR – So what do I value in music education. What kind of… in what sense?

R – What’s important for pupils to learn?

MR – What’s important for pupils to learn. I think… (pause)… it’s just… I don’t… it’s important for them to engage with music I think, in some way. I don’t really have a list of things that I want them to learn. I’m not bothered necessarily if they know what, you know, legato means, or… as I say, it doesn’t really interest me. I think it’s less about… it’s more about an experiential thing I think. I think the students that choose to do music at KS4 - obviously there’s a certain set of things that we would like them to leave with, so for my kids who do music, whether they choose you know a vocational pathway or GCSE, I think they should know the basics of music theory, they should know how chords are structured, know how to play a scale, you know how to sort of read different types of notation - I think that is important. For KS3, I think it’s just about experiencing lots of different kinds of music, having basic skills on a range of instruments, and being able to talk about music in a more refined way.

R – Okay, do you think that causes a problem sometimes with transition? So if they’re going from Year 9 and they’ve just been doing, well not ‘just’ been doing, but you know, they’ve been doing a lot of experiential learning and they’ve not shown a particular interest in notation perhaps and they don’t need to use it, then they want to do GCSE, how do you kind of prepare them, or…?

MR – No, I don’t, because I think it’s not one or the other. So like when we’re teaching, we are talking about rhythms and we are using the music, but it’s not like ‘right, today we’re going to learn about the treble clef’. It’s there, and some students will access that, and some students won’t. So yeah, it’s sound before symbol really, isn’t it. It’s as you learn, you’re using that kind of stuff. So for an example, like film music that I’m doing at the minute, we’re still learning about how the composers make you feel a certain way, what tools do they use. Well, they do use a pedal and they do use ostinato, and they do use all these dynamics and all these other things. So it’s still learning about it, but I haven’t got a tick list of things they have to include in a piece. So some might use a pedal if it fits their music or whatever, and some won’t. I’ve not got a kind of like definitive list.

R – Sure. It’s more like a natural progression?

MR – Yeah, yeah. I think actually, for me, it’s about engagement. So I think if you’ve got kids engaged at KS3, they will kind of naturally want to learn more at KS4. I mean, it doesn’t even split like that, does it, but I think if you’re interested in something, you find out more and more and more about it naturally. So, for me, it’s about getting the interest first, and then you’re both independently and part of the school, providing access to different things.

R – Yeah, okay. So when we met last time, well, in the summer, you were quite interested in progress. Why was that something that you were interested in?

MR – (pause) I don’t know really. I think that because it’s just banded around all the time. It’s just such a big thing I guess. I suppose, sometimes there’s a thought that say if you’ve got a kid who plays bass guitar in sort of like an informal learning lesson, he might only be playing four notes, and then if you do that project again, he might play bass guitar again and still only play four notes. Is there a real progression? I can see the progression through to college, because you can see sort of on a wider scale. They’ve engaged in music so they do it, and then they go on to study it. But, in terms of progression of skills, I just wondered.

R – Okay. How do you kind of manage that progress? So, if that did happen, where somebody’s on bass guitar, the same four notes when they did that again, would you kind of intervene a little bit, or would you let them carry on?

MR – Yeah, yeah. I mean, the difference is when you look at it over say three years, so there might be a different teacher every year. So obviously to actually communicate that for about 260… well, 800 kids you know at KS3, it is just impossible, do you know what I mean. Especially when you only see them once a week as well, so I just wonder how, other times, does it promote that progress.

R – Okay. Is that about MF approach, or about music education in general?

MR – I guess it’s in general really, yeah. I think the problem with music is we teach projects, don’t we, essentially, so we’ll go from like a composition task to a performance task, and then they’ll go back to a composition task, and is that learning from the first composition task, does that transfer to the second one, even though it might be like six months later, or did we just do the same thing again. I don’t know.

R – Okay. What are the problems with school music and how does MF address them?

MR – That it’s taught really badly, in a lot of places. That there’s too much variance in terms of like a belief of what it should be. I think there needs to be a really strong kind of like steer of what music education should look like. There’s a whole like Eric Clapton word search kind of thing. And I’ve been in schools where you’ve got… I went in one school and there was a grand piano which was… a really small classroom, and there’s probably 30 thousand pounds worth squashed up against the wall, and there was a sign on it – ‘do not touch’. And then on each desk, there was a worksheet stand, and it was all cramped because of this piano in the room, and they basically had like a worksheet propped up on a stand for them to sort of revise and stuff. And that was their music education. I think, for me, you might have you seen that Victor Luton video, music and language? You need to watch that. So google that, ‘music is language’ by Victor Luton. It’s about doing music and writing about it, and I think that’s the issue. And actually, that’s why it’s a bit of vicious circle, that’s why it’s being cut in all the schools, because, as a head teacher, you’re looking to save money, you’re look around and you think ‘that’s absolute crap’. What learning is going on by playing Twinkle Twinkle on the glockenspiel, or completing a worksheet, or writing out the treble clef. It’s bobbins, it’s rubbish. So I think it’s got to be about practical music, I think. I think MF offers a practical solution to make that happen.

R – So what difference has MF made to your pupils here?

MR – I think it’s made lessons more musical, more interesting, more engaging. It’s got more students involved with music, yeah, provide a more sort of enriching, exciting, independently-led curriculum.

R – Okay. What has surprised you most about using MF in your school?

MR – (pause) What’s surprised me the most… Probably that sort of… how difficult some staff would find it to teach in that way.

R – Okay, why did that surprise you?

MR – Because I think there are different types of musicians, like I think there are those kind of… well I think it actually goes back to their own education in school. So I think people who were classically trained and learnt to read music tended to be very academic as well I would suggest probably, and sort of went through school in a fairly controlled way, and kind of then believe that that’s the way that it should be done. Whereas I think like there’s some people who’ve maybe been through a more diverse route and maybe don’t know… because I think the other problem is that people come from school to college to uni, back to school to teach, and I don’t think necessarily that’s a good preparation thing. Certainly when I’m interviewing staff, I like to see they’ve done something different, because I think it brings a perspective to what they do.

R – Okay, like what?

MR – I just think a perspective of the real world.

R – Okay, so does it have to be music related like, or can it just be any life experience?

MR – Anything, yeah. I think we become very institutionalised as teachers, within this like… schools are like planets aren’t they, within the confines of like structures and rules and regulations, even sort of the way we dress kids in this like crazy school uniform. It’s like a whole kind of microcosm, within these walls. I think it’s important to kind of see beyond that. So part of what I do like with my staff, is I make sure that they get out to go and see other things. So like XX for example went to London last week to look at another school, XX is going to two schools, she’s going to XX’s school up in the… I can’t even remember where it is… up in XX, to have a look there. And all staff across the arts are going in to visit places, because I think that’s really important to get some perspective. Does that answer your question?

R – Yeah. What route did you take? Were you classically trained?

MR – No. Surprisingly (both laugh). So, I think this is why it obviously kind of resonates with my experience. So I learnt by ear, so my Grandad had a piano and he used to play it and in the house he used to play it and during the war and stuff, so he just played a few tunes. So I just had access to an instrument, and just learnt that way. I started to have lessons - they were sort of religious cheap lessons with like a lady that played the organ at the church. They weren’t very structured or very… I don’t know, I don’t remember them being a negative thing, but they just weren’t… my parents weren’t like ‘oh, you know, we want to make him into a concert pianist or’… it was just something that I did. And then yeah, I was quite academic at school. I didn’t particularly like school, but I got like you know, good GCSEs, and like As and Bs and stuff. And just kind of like fallen into going to XX College, it’s just like quite an academic college, doing A Levels, and I hated it, so I lasted like 6 months and used to like wag it all the time, and I dropped out. And then, I’d started whilst I… yeah, whilst I was at… maybe whilst, maybe towards the end of XX, I’d started having lessons with like a proper teacher who kind of really sort of took me on and said ‘well right, if you want do this, you need to do it properly’. So I left college, thought I didn’t want to bum around, and this teacher that was teaching me piano also taught at XXX College, and they had like a vocational course in music, so I ended up having like a first diploma, and it was like very simple, because it was an entry level course, so I’d come from doing A Levels which was like full on, to this really relaxed kind of like, not really sort of pushing me course. So I just used to spend like four hours a day just on the piano. I’d got no grades or anything, and I did my grade five, and within a year of doing grade five, I did grade eight. So like I really just hammered the practice and stuff. And then kind of thought ‘oh yeah, I’m actually starting to get quite good at it’, so because I had to do this entry level course because I was six months late, so then I was a year behind in terms of education, but then I started on the national diploma, did that, lots of practical based learning, but also did my diploma, like performance diploma, XX College of Music. Because I knew that I needed both sides, I didn’t just want to have that vocation side, I wanted to have that vigour in terms of playing. So yeah, then I went to XX University to do a band musicianship course, which was kind of like, I don’t know, obviously quite academic, but practical - we were actually writing songs, playing the song, conducting, and all that kind of stuff. And then… so I guess that… although I really don’t remember much about what I did for my degree, I don’t think any of us did really - do you actually use anything that you did in your degree, I don’t know. And then obviously then went working on kind of ships playing piano and stuff like that, working as a pianist. I worked in optics for a while as well, making glasses. And then thought ‘oh, I might do a PGCE’, thought I might teach for a couple of years or something. And yeah, did a PGCE and ended up here and then I’ve been here for nine years.

R – Cool. Where did you do your PGCE?

MR – XX.

R – Okay. Can I just ask you, last question now, what is your ultimate ideal vision for the future of secondary school music lessons?

MR – (pause) That they are engaging, that they offer something for everybody, and that they are based around music - music that students like, enjoy and identify with. Instruments that they identify with, and all of the rest of it. But also, expands their kind of horizons as well, so I don’t think it should all be guitars, bass and drums. I think we should be exposing them to classical instruments as well and try and inspire them to engage in that kind of thing. I think we need a sort of central sort of belief in how music should be and some guidance. MF have never sort of preached, we just offer stuff. I don’t think it’s MF place, but somebody needs to say ‘this is a model for music teaching in the classroom’. And moving away from this, at the minute we’ve got the baccalaureate and we’ve got progress eight and all of the pressures from that. We need to move away from that and not have this two-tier system whereby these subjects are important, and these subjects aren’t, but you can go if you want to. So yeah, more of a sort of understanding that creative education is as important as academic, but… well it’s not even, I don’t even believe in that split, but creative education is as important as maths or English.

R thanks MR for interview.

45.04