

PUBLIC WEB EDITION

MUSIC JOURNAL

BY MR DAVE

A Practitioner Case Study

Version 1.1 - June 2026

This public edition contains the complete Version 1.1 case study. One handwritten student name has been removed for privacy. The study describes the original classroom testing context. References to the school identify that research setting only and do not imply endorsement, ownership or an ongoing commercial relationship.

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MUSIC JOURNAL BY MR DAVE

**A Practitioner Case Study in Developing a Scalable
Music Education System at Maple Bear Sofia**

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Version 1.1

June 2026

Music Journal by Mr Dave

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1. Introduction

This case study documents the development, implementation, and ongoing refinement of the Music Journal by Mr Dave within Maple Bear Sofia. What began as a practical response to everyday classroom challenges gradually evolved into a central component of a broader, interconnected music education system.

The original intention was modest: to reduce reliance on loose worksheets, simplify organisation, and provide students with a consistent place to record their work. Over time, however, the journal began to support additional pedagogical functions, including reflection, behaviour management, creativity, and student ownership of learning.

This study explores how the journal functions within the classroom, how it interacts with teaching practice, and how these combined elements contribute to improvements in engagement, behaviour, and musical understanding. It also considers the extent to which this system may be transferable and scalable.

This implementation was carried out primarily across Grades 4–7 over the course of one academic year and involved approximately 100 students within Maple Bear Sofia. Additional informal observations also emerged through private teaching contexts outside of the school environment.

As the journal developed, revisions and adjustments were made iteratively in response to classroom experience, student feedback, and practical teaching needs.

2. Context and Author Perspective

When I joined Maple Bear Sofia approximately two years ago, the music programme was relatively unstructured. In some cases, lessons consisted primarily of singing songs without clear systems for tracking or evidencing learning.

A recurring comment from students was that “the previous music teacher just sang songs with us.” This raised a key question: how could we be certain that students were developing musical understanding in a meaningful and measurable way?

This became the starting point for change.

Over time, this led to the development of:

- a structured, Kodály-inspired curriculum
- the Music Journal
- classroom routines and expectations
- behaviour and reflection systems

- creative outputs (school song, Canada song, student-led work)

Together, these form an emerging, coherent music education system.

2.1 Origin (Practitioner Perspective)

The idea for the Music Journal began about ten days before the start of term. I was thinking practically and, to some extent, under pressure.

How do I get students writing music? Reading music? How do I stimulate imagination and reduce inhibition? How do I manage the volume of paperwork?

I searched for alternatives to the standard music notebooks available locally but found nothing that supported these needs.

At that point, I decided to create something myself.

2.2 Origin (Design and Development Perspective)

The Music Journal was designed to address several practical and pedagogical needs within the classroom.

These included:

- reducing reliance on loose worksheets
- providing a consistent place for all student work
- supporting revision and retention
- accommodating different learning speeds
- enabling both structured and creative activities

The journal incorporates a range of page types, including lined, blank, squared, and manuscript paper, allowing flexibility in how students engage with it.

It also includes reference materials, activity pages, and reflection tools, forming a multi-functional learning resource.

Over time, it became clear that the journal was not simply a workaround, but a structured system that could support teaching and learning more broadly.

3. The Music Journal: Design, Structure, and Intent

The Music Journal was created to provide a centralised space for musical learning.

Students are encouraged to use it flexibly and are often told:

“Write this somewhere in your Music Journal — I don’t mind where.”

This promotes autonomy and ownership.

The journal supports:

- note-taking
- composition
- drawing and visualisation
- reflection
- revision

3.1 Assessment Storage and Learning Continuity

The journal includes a designated space for storing completed tests (“Keep your tests here”).

Although originally intended to include a physical pocket, the current implementation encourages students to retain assessments within the journal itself.

This supports continuity, revision, and awareness of progress over time, allowing the journal to function as a cumulative record of learning.

4. Implementation in the Classroom

The journal is used consistently across Grades 4–7.

Students use it for a wide range of tasks, including written work, creative activities, and reflection.

Over time, it has become a normalised part of lessons, with most students bringing it independently and using it without prompting.

5. Findings and Observations

5.1 Ownership and Personalisation

Students frequently personalise their journals through drawings, colour, and layout choices, including illustrations such as robots, aeroplanes, and abstract designs.

This suggests a shift from viewing the journal as a required school item to treating it as a personal learning space.

5.2 Organisation and Responsibility

Most students bring their journals consistently. When journals are forgotten, students are unable to participate fully, reinforcing responsibility through natural consequences.

5.3 Behaviour and Focus

The journal provides a default task structure. During transitions or downtime, students continue working independently, reducing off-task behaviour and maintaining lesson flow.

5.4 Whole-Class Participation

The journal supports participation across a wide range of engagement levels. Even students who might typically disengage are able to contribute at a basic level during creative tasks.

For example, during a Grade 5 composition activity, students were asked to create short rhythmic patterns before gradually developing them into melodic ideas. While some students engaged at a more advanced level, others participated through simple rhythm writing, drawing, or partial notation. This allowed nearly all students to contribute meaningfully within the same task structure.

Participation is not uniform in quality, but it is significantly broader in reach.

5.5 Reflective Practice

The journal includes structured reflection prompts such as:

- What did I learn today?
- What was a challenge for me?
- What do I want to get better at?

These support metacognitive thinking and provide a calm transition at the end of lessons.

5.6 Behavioural Reflection Systems

The journal is used alongside school behaviour systems. Reflection tasks reinforce expectations and encourage students to consider their behaviour in a structured way.

In some cases, students who finished activities early or became distracted were redirected back into independent journal work rather than entering prolonged behavioural confrontation. This appears to reduce downtime-related disruption while maintaining a calmer classroom atmosphere.

5.7 Student Co-Authorship and Critical Engagement

Students actively identify errors, suggest improvements, and engage critically with the journal, including recognising design issues and questioning content.

5.8 Extension into Musical Culture

Student contributions extend beyond the journal into classroom culture. In one instance, a shared classroom interaction was incorporated into the school song, demonstrating co-creation.

5.9 Perceived Value and Demand

Students demonstrate clear value for the journal. When additional copies become available, they are met with enthusiasm, while lack of access can result in disappointment.

5.10 Legitimacy Perception

Despite being independently created, the journal is treated by students as a legitimate and official learning resource, indicating that value is driven by use and integration.

6. Discussion: Why the System Works

The effectiveness of the Music Journal appears to emerge not from the journal alone, but from the interaction between the resource, the classroom routines surrounding it, and the broader teaching philosophy in which it is embedded.

One significant factor is consistency. The journal creates continuity across lessons by providing students with a stable and familiar learning space. Rather than relying on disconnected worksheets or isolated activities, students repeatedly return to the same resource throughout the year. Over time, this appears to strengthen both organisation and learning habits.

Ownership also plays an important role. Students personalise their journals, store work inside them, and increasingly treat them as individual creative spaces rather than disposable school materials. This may contribute to a greater sense of responsibility and emotional investment in learning.

At the same time, the journal balances structure with flexibility. Students are frequently encouraged to use the journal freely rather than follow rigid formatting expectations. Instructions such as, "Write this somewhere in your Music Journal — I don't mind where," reduce anxiety around correctness while still maintaining a structured framework for participation.

This flexibility appears particularly important in creative tasks. Students who might otherwise disengage are often able to contribute at an accessible level, whether through rhythm patterns, drawings, graphic notation, or partial musical ideas. The journal therefore lowers the threshold for participation without removing challenge entirely.

Reflection is another key component. Structured reflection prompts encourage students to think about their learning, behaviour, and progress. These moments appear to support metacognition while also helping lessons transition calmly between activities.

The system also benefits from the integration of humour, shared classroom culture, and student contribution. Students are not positioned merely as consumers of content, but as participants in an evolving musical environment. Classroom jokes, recurring references, student suggestions, and creative contributions all become part of the wider culture surrounding the journal and music programme.

Importantly, the journal appears capable of functioning both as an independent learning resource and as part of a broader pedagogical system.

Its use within Maple Bear Sofia suggests that classroom culture, routines, and teacher implementation can deepen engagement and consistency. However, observations from private teaching contexts indicate that the journal may also support highly individualised forms of musical exploration outside of structured classroom environments.

In some cases, students appear to engage more freely with the journal when it is experienced as a personal creative space rather than as a formal institutional tool. This suggests that part of the journal's effectiveness may lie in its flexibility and adaptability across different teaching contexts and learner personalities.

For this reason, the Music Journal should not be understood simply as a workbook or behaviour system, but as a flexible framework capable of supporting multiple approaches to music learning.

7. Limitations and Considerations

- teacher-dependent system
- influence of teacher presence (“rockstar effect”)
- specific school context
- inconsistent use of some tools
- primarily qualitative data

This case study is primarily practitioner-led and observational in nature. The findings presented are based largely on classroom experience, informal student feedback, and reflective teaching practice rather than controlled quantitative research methods.

While recurring patterns of engagement, organisation, and participation have been observed across multiple classes over an extended period of time, these findings remain context-specific and should be interpreted cautiously. Further testing in different educational environments and with different teachers would be necessary in order to evaluate broader transferability and scalability.

8. Future Development and Next Steps

The next step is external validation through pilot implementation in another Maple Bear school (e.g., Plovdiv, Kraków, or Prague).

This will test transferability and scalability beyond the original context.

9. Student Voice

Student Feedback and Perceptions

Student feedback was collected through structured review lessons conducted with Grades 5 and 7. Students were asked to reflect on how they use the Music Journal, what they value, and what they would change.

Responses revealed a wide range of perspectives, from highly engaged and reflective to humorous, critical, and occasionally resistant. This variation provides useful insight into how the journal functions across different learners.

Common Uses of the Journal

Students reported using the journal for a variety of purposes, including note-taking, creative work, revision, and informal engagement.

Some students described the journal as a place to “lock our information so we don’t forget it,” while others used it more flexibly for games, drawing, or personal ideas. This suggests that the journal supports both structured learning and open-ended use.

Perceived Strengths

Several consistent positive themes emerged.

Students valued the variety of page types and activities. One student noted that the journal “has a lot of different pages and activities,” while another highlighted “the games, the design and the free place, so we can create things.”

Creative freedom was also a key strength. One student wrote that “the best thing is that you can make as many mistakes as you want,” suggesting that the journal supports a low-pressure environment for experimentation.

Games and interactive elements were frequently mentioned as a motivating factor, with multiple students identifying “the games at the back” and “the fun stuff” as their favourite aspects.

Some students also appreciated the simplicity and accessibility of the journal, describing it as “very simple” and easy to use.

Areas for Improvement

Student feedback also highlighted several areas for development.

A clear tension emerged between students who wanted more games and those who wanted more theory. For example, one student stated that “there’s not enough theory,” while another wrote that “there is not enough fun stuff.” This indicates the need to balance engagement and academic content more carefully.

Organisation and navigation were also raised as issues. Some students found it difficult to locate content, noting that “it is hard to find what you need to work on,” and that there were no page numbers.

Design and layout were identified as areas for improvement. Students mentioned font readability, a desire for more colour, and the need for space for dates and titles. There were also practical concerns about materials, such as the plastic cover becoming scratched.

Older students, particularly in Grade 7, noted that some elements felt “too childish” or repetitive, suggesting a need for better age differentiation.

Student-Generated Ideas

Students proposed a range of practical and creative improvements.

These included adding structured theory sections, incorporating music facts, improving reflection tools, and redesigning certain pages for clarity. Some suggestions focused on increasing interactivity, including the addition of new games and creative tasks.

Several ideas were imaginative and detailed, demonstrating a high level of engagement with the journal as a design concept rather than simply a classroom tool.

Range of Engagement

Not all responses were positive or serious. A small number of students expressed minimal engagement or used humour and exaggeration in their feedback.

For example, one student wrote that they would “throw the prototype to trash” and “ate it.” While not constructive in a traditional sense, such responses still indicate active participation and emotional engagement.

This is significant when compared to passive disengagement, where students do not respond at all.

Additional Informal Student Feedback

Some of the most revealing feedback emerged informally during everyday classroom interactions rather than through structured review tasks.

For example, one Grade 5 student commented:

“Mr! This journal saved me so many times! I lost my maths workbook and used my music journal instead. Thank you Mr!”

Although humorous, this comment suggests that students increasingly view the journal as a dependable and multi-functional organisational tool rather than simply a subject-specific workbook.

Key Insight

Student feedback suggests that the Music Journal functions as a flexible, multi-purpose tool that supports both structured learning and creative exploration.

At the same time, it highlights a central design challenge: balancing structure and freedom, theory and play, and simplicity with depth.

Conclusion of Student Voice Section

The feedback process reinforces the idea that the Music Journal is not a fixed product, but an evolving resource shaped by both teacher and students.

Students are not only users of the journal, but active contributors to its ongoing development.

10. Visual Evidence / Artefacts

Figure 1. Student-owned Music Journals

Examples of student journals in regular classroom use, including personalised covers and signs of sustained handling and use over time.

Figure 2. Student use of manuscript paper

Example of a student-created drawing integrated into manuscript notation pages, demonstrating informal creative engagement with musical materials.

Figure 3. Reflection and behavioural tracking pages

Example of structured reflection prompts and behavioural reward systems used to encourage self-assessment, responsibility, and goal setting.

Figure 4. Student-created graphic notation

Examples of student-generated graphic notation and free-form visual musical representation created during classroom composition activities.

Figure 5. Independent creative journal use

Example of highly personalised student journal pages combining drawing, symbolic representation, and exploratory visual creativity.

Figure 6. Student composition and sound visualisation

Example of a student-created “melody shape challenge,” demonstrating experimentation with musical contour and symbolic sound representation.

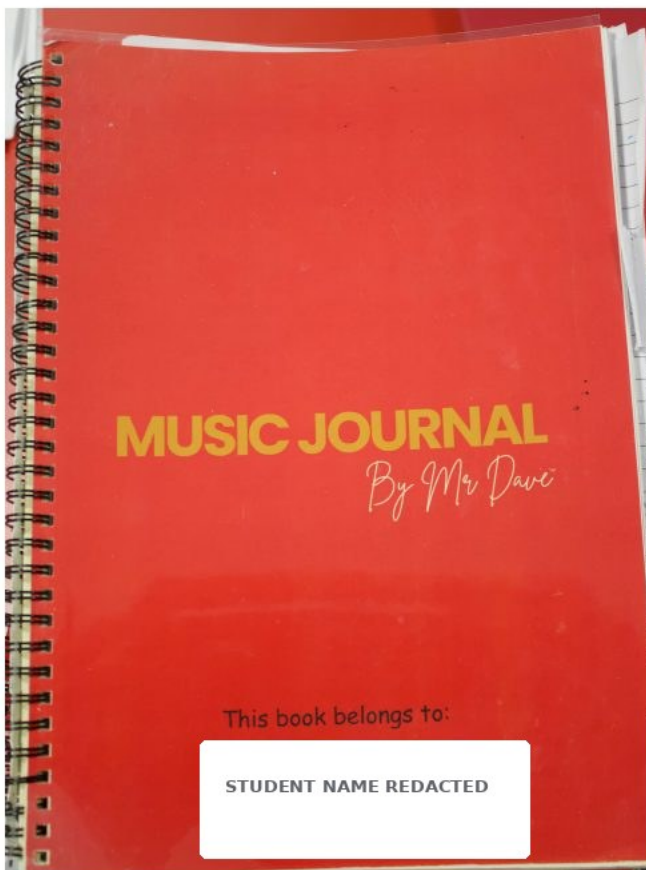


Figure 1.

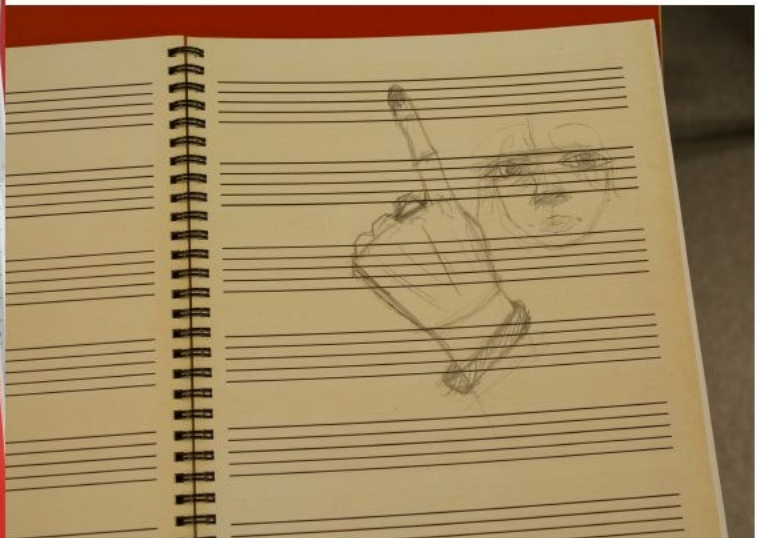


Figure 2.



Figure 5.

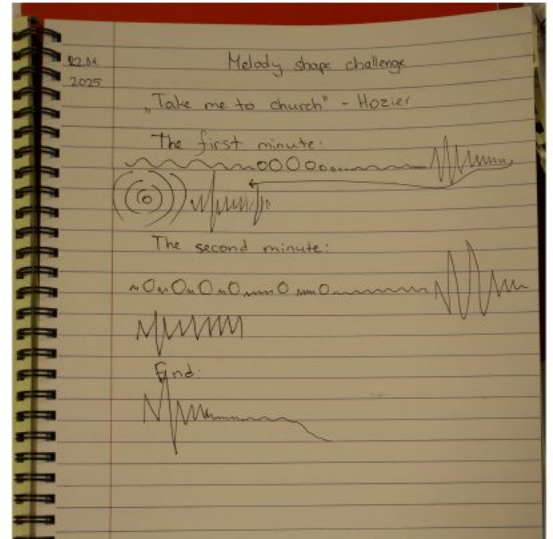


Figure 6.

11. Conclusion

This case study has documented the development and implementation of the Music Journal by Mr Dave within a real classroom environment over a sustained period of time.

What began as a practical response to immediate challenges has developed into a coherent system that supports musical learning, behaviour, creativity, and student ownership.

The evidence presented suggests that the journal is effective not as a standalone tool, but as part of an integrated approach to teaching.

Importantly, the journal is not a fixed product, but an evolving resource shaped by both teacher and students.

At the same time, this study recognises its limitations. The system has been developed within a specific context and influenced by teacher presence.

The next step is not expansion, but validation.

A pilot implementation in another Maple Bear context would allow evaluation beyond the original environment.

If successful, the Music Journal has the potential to form part of a broader, scalable music education framework.

This case study represents the first stage of that process.