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Moving to the Music: Learning Processes, Training and Productive Systems – The Case of Exercise to Music Instruction

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# **LEARNING AS WORK:** Teaching and Learning Processes in Contemporary Work Organisations

**Moving to the Music: Learning Processes, Training  
and Productive Systems – The Case of Exercise to  
Music Instruction**

**Alan Felstead, Daniel Bishop, Alison Fuller,  
Nick Jewson, Tracey Lee & Lorna Unwin**

**Learning as Work Research Paper, No. 6  
June 2006**

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**MOVING TO THE MUSIC:  
LEARNING PROCESSES, TRAINING AND PRODUCTIVE SYSTEMS –  
THE CASE OF EXERCISE TO MUSIC INSTRUCTION**

**ABSTRACT**

Closing the productivity gap with other nations has become a mantra of public policy in the UK since the late 1990s. Promoting participation in learning and training is seen as the principal means of narrowing the gap. While tracking episodes of training is relatively easy, it is not clear what is learnt, by whom and why. This paper examines these questions among a specific occupational group – exercise to music instructors – whose numbers have grown significantly in recent years. It identifies two productive systems through which these exercise classes are delivered. Each has different consequences for learning. Under one regime, training expands horizons and develops abilities, while under the second instructors are taught to conform and follow scripts written by others. The paper argues that ‘training’ can lead to different learning outcomes and that these are best understood through an analysis of the productive process which puts training and learning in context.

**MOVING TO THE MUSIC:  
LEARNING PROCESSES, TRAINING AND PRODUCTIVE SYSTEMS –  
THE CASE OF EXERCISE TO MUSIC INSTRUCTION**

**1. Introduction**

Policy-makers of all political persuasions across the industrialised world believe that ‘learning’, ‘training’ and ‘skills’ are the key levers to enhance productivity and raise standards of living (see Porter and Ketels, 2003; DfES *et al.*, 2005a; HM Treasury, 2005). Considerable effort has therefore been devoted to measuring and tracking the incidence, intensity and volume of training. This belief is based on two assumptions. First, that training teaches individuals new skills and prompts a thirst for learning. Secondly, that it enhances labour mobility, employability and pay for individuals, and that it raises business performance. Training has therefore been seen to be undeniably ‘good’ and so studies have mapped the incidence of training, estimated its volume and calculated the economic returns to the parties involved (Machin and Wilkinson, 1995; Keep *et al.*, 2003; Spilsbury, 2003; Dearden *et al.*, 2005; DfES *et al.*, 2005b: 6-14). However, all of these studies have been based on large scale survey data, with the key variable being whether or nor respondents have undertaken or funded training during a specified period of time (for individuals the period typically spans the four weeks before interview, whereas employers are commonly asked to provide answers with respect to the year prior to being questioned).

Getting a handle on training content, and in particular, what skills are taught is inevitably more difficult using survey questions that are designed to have generic appeal – often we know little about what is learnt by whom and why (Fuller *et al.*, 2005). Nevertheless, there have been a few attempts to assess the ‘quality’ of training in one-off surveys by asking respondents what they thought employers expected to get out of training provision (Felstead *et al.*, 1997) or by asking employers more regularly what generic skills their training was aimed to develop (Spilsbury, 2003). However, the survey method is a relatively blunt instrument capable of collecting only limited information on this issue. In addition, it records and presents training events out of context (albeit with some generic contextual data attached such as the extent of worker involvement, see Felstead *et al.*, 2005). The survey method is, therefore, not best placed to examine the trajectory of productive systems which have many layers linking labour,

equipment and materials at each stage of the productive process (Birecree *et al.*, 1997; Wilkinson, 2002). A fuller understanding of what role and function training plays in a productive system and how this has changed over time requires a case study approach. By adopting such an approach, this paper argues that, in some circumstances, training can stifle and prevent learning by drilling trainees to carry out their jobs in a standardised and prescribed manner. A more nuanced approach to the study of training and learning is therefore required with an acknowledgement that training sometimes means nothing more than working according to script and that in these circumstances the specialised knowledge of the script writers may reside upstream in the productive system and away from the point of delivery.

The empirical evidence for the paper is taken from the health and fitness club sector in the UK which has experienced rapid growth since the early 1990s. During this time the sector has reported spiralling membership levels and club openings have reached dizzy heights. More recently, however, the expansion of the sector has reached a plateau as nationwide coverage has been achieved. In response, organisations have switched their emphasis to increasing the productivity of the sites they now have. As a result, they have devoted more resources to keeping existing members than hitherto (Mintel, 2005). Membership retention has, therefore, become the ‘hot’ topic in the sector. Most notably, this has led to the Fitness Industry Association (FIA) – the employers’ body – sponsoring an extensive programme of research on this issue. A stream of reports based on data collected from around 72,000 gym members who joined one of 64 clubs in 2000 have been produced (FIA, 2001a, b; FIA, 2002; FIA, 2003a, b, c). One of the key findings of this research is that when a new member joins a gym there is a ‘period of plasticity’ during which it is easier to set and establish exercise routines, but after three months these routines are largely set. Another finding is that those who visit once a week in the first three months maintain their memberships for 13% longer than those who visit less frequently. However, if those who begin as low frequency users are converted into weekly users by month three, similar retention rates can be achieved.

These results have led to a host of management initiatives designed to ensure that new members are quickly ‘socialised’ into the health and fitness club. These initiatives include: group inductions to introduce new members to those who joined at about the same time; appointments to devise exercise programmes; weekly reviews of progress in

the first few weeks of membership; free personal training sessions; social events; and the promotion of group exercise classes through ‘taster’ sessions, in-club marketing and recommendations. It is on the delivery of exercise to music (ETM) classes that this paper is focused. In particular, the paper examines the proposition that – by standardising and branding the product, hence leaving little room for instructor creativity and innovation – some of these exercise programmes have done ‘for exercise what McDonald’s did for hamburgers’ (reported position of the International Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association). The paper is, therefore, structured as follows. Section 2 outlines the two broad types of exercise to music classes currently on offer: ‘freestyle’ classes in which instructors own the product in terms of music selection, the moves made, combinations used, choreography and image conveyed; and ‘pre-choreography’ classes in which instructors deliver a pre-packaged product which has many of these decision rules in-built. Section 3 outlines the methods of data collection used. Section 4 focuses on the consequences these two different productive systems have for instructor learning. Section 5 concludes the paper by outlining some of the implications the paper has for existing studies that treat ‘training’ as largely homogeneous and tend to ‘average out’ its meaning.

## **2. Evolution of Exercise to Music**

The principal product of the health and fitness industry is the supervision of exercise in a controlled environment. This is characterised in physical form by the provision of exercise equipment in a room which is supervised by staff (in a fitness room or gym). There are three main types of equipment: (1) cardio-vascular machines (e.g., treadmills, rowers, steppers and bikes); (2) single station resistance machines which exercise single muscles or groups of muscles (e.g., leg extensions, tricep pushdowns, abdominal machines and chest presses); and (3) free weights (e.g., dumbbells, barbells and bench presses). These types of equipment mean that time is individualised by participants who come and go as they please, and the space in which they exercise is bounded by the ‘reciprocal inattention’ of all those around (Goffman, 1959: 222-230)

In addition, around three-quarters of health and fitness clubs in the UK also provide facilities for group training in a fitness studio. This is usually a dedicated room set aside and equipped with a music system, loudspeakers and full-length wall mirrors

(Mintel, 2005). By contrast to machine-based workouts, time is collectivised through the class timetable and participants openly share a wider field of vision, focus of attention and even physical space. As a result, industry research suggests that participation in group exercise makes club attendance more habitual and is more effective at building social bonds between members. It is therefore an important means of stemming the outflow of members from private clubs and keeping membership levels high (FIA, 2003b).

The activity itself is led by an ETM instructor who is visible in front of the class or on a platform. The instructor wears a headset radio microphone for large classes or simply uses her/his voice for smaller classes (or when the headset does not work!). Music is used to accompany the different stages of activity, and the instructor's voice is made audible above the sound tracks. Although usually in front of the class, either facing or with her/his back to them, the instructor may also move around giving brief comments to participants. However, in general, the instructor participates fully in the class and, therefore, directs, describes and teaches movement sequences at the same time as moving their own body in time with the music.

What the instructor says (Delin, 2000; Collins, 2002), how the accompanying music is used to structure human agency (DeNora, 2000; Sayers and Bradbury, 2004) and in what ways participants react (Sassatelli, 1999; Crossley, 2004) have received considerable attention in recent years. However, how the instructor's work is organised and the consequences this has for their learning has received very little, if any, coverage. The aim of this paper is to redress this imbalance, firstly, by identifying two different ways of delivering safe, effective and popular group workouts, and secondly, by tracing the consequences these systems have for learning.

### ***The 'Freestyle' Approach to Exercise to Music***

The concept of exercising to music in the company of others – rather than at home and alone in front of a video – was popularised in the late 1980s with the launch of step aerobics. This involved participants lifting their body weight onto and off a platform in time with music. The basic moves and floor patterns adopted were those originally used in floor aerobics. However, the addition of the step had the added benefit of



strengthening the primary movers of the lower body (quadriceps, gluteals and hamstrings), while continuing to improve cardio-vascular abilities. At that time, the moves were uncomplicated and easy-to-follow and the music was slow by today's standards. This allowed many participants to gradually learn and adapt to this new exercise concept and hence its popularity grew.

Step classes quickly spread throughout the south east of the US with clubs constructing makeshift platforms out of wooden boxes or benches. However, these handmade devices were cumbersome and often unsteady. More robust and safer alternatives quickly became available. The first mass produced platforms were manufactured and sold by The Step Company in 1990. Their design remains much the same today and can be seen in many gyms, private health clubs and leisure centres around the world. The platform is green with a black non-slip mat on top with square stackable purple and pink blocks (known as risers) used to adjust the height of the platform. In 1993, Reebok went on to design another version of the platform – a one piece black and grey interlocking version with three adjustable heights. Packaged with this platform was the first instructional step video which demonstrated basic moves and pattern variation. A year later the first manual was produced and instructors from the US began to give educational workshops to instructors in other parts of the world. However, step classes were never standardised and instructors were not expected to use particular music or follow a pre-determined routine. In other words, step instructors put together their own 'freestyle' classes by using instructional videos and manuals, attending workshops or conferences and/or consulting other informational sources such as the internet. This is in marked contrast to 'pre-choreographed' classes which are highly prescriptive in several respects and therefore constitute an alternative productive system (see below).

### ***The 'Pre-choreographed' Approach to Exercise to Music***

The largest producer of pre-choreographed ETM classes is Les Mills International which has seven separate programmes in its repertoire, all marketed under the Body Training Systems (BTS) brand name. In 2005, BTS classes were being offered in some 10,000 venues in 55 countries with an estimated 4 million participants a week. Each programme or discipline focuses on different activities in order to deliver contrasting

workouts. These foci include stepping, dancing, kicking, punching, weight lifting and cycling (see Table 1). Given the history of ETM, it is unsurprising that BodyStep was the first to be launched in 1990. BodyPump and BodyJam quickly followed with another four programmes being added by the end of the decade (see Table 2).

All of the BTS repertoire originates, and was first launched, in New Zealand. This represents a service-based example of a ‘producer-driven global commodity chain’ (Gereffi and Korzeniewicz, 1994; Kaplinsky and Morris, 2001) with the international roll-out driven by the appointment 17 agents who were awarded the rights to replicate the BTS concept in an allotted territory (covering one or more country). In the UK, the roll-out was gradual. BodyPump was launched in 1997, but it was not until BodyAttack became available in 2004 that the UK roll-out was complete.

All BTS programmes are club-driven and instructors must be affiliated to a club that holds an agreement to operate the appropriate programme. Club licences run for 12 months with monthly payments being made to BTS for each type of class regardless of the number of classes on the weekly timetable. For example, a large chain may be charged £75 per month for the first programme licence, £50 a month for the second and third, and £26 a month for each additional programme thereafter. Charges are made on a per venue per programme basis. Smaller operators, therefore, have weaker bargaining power and as a result they are typically charged higher monthly rates for the right to use the same programme. In addition to the right to host particular classes, operators receive marketing materials to promote interest in the class and enhance awareness of the BTS brand. These materials include large ceiling banners, wall posters and informational leaflets.

**Table 1:  
Body Training Systems –  
Description of Programmes**

Programme	Description
BodyAttack	A 45-60 minute class of cardio-vascular interval training that combines high intensity aerobics, strength and stabilisation exercises. This involves jumping, kicking and running.
BodyBalance	This hour-long class consists of controlled breathing, concentration and a series of stretches, moves and poses. This mind and body conditioning programme combines eastern disciplines such as Yoga and Tai Chi with new methods such as Pilates.
BodyCombat	An hour-long energetic routine that combines moves and stances from a range of self-defence disciplines including boxing, karate and Tae Kwon Do.
BodyJam	This is an hour-long dance class that offers a pot-pourri of movement and music including hip-hop, funk, Latin and chart-topping tracks.
BodyPump	A 45-60 minute class using barbells and adjustable weights. Major muscle groups are worked via a series of weight-bearing exercises including squats, presses, lunges, curls and lifts.
BodyStep	This is an hour-long cardio-vascular class that uses a height-adjustable step. The intensity of the class is controlled by altering the height of the step and/or adjusting the range of movement.
RPM	An hour-long indoor cycling programme with endurance and strength training including sprints and hill climbs (using the adjustable resistance controls on the bikes).

*Source: researcher observations as participant, promotional material and club descriptions.*

**Table 2:  
Body Training Systems –  
History of Pre-choreographed Programmes**

Programme	Quarterly Release (as of December 2005)	Number of Years of Operation	Date of Launch
BodyStep	62	15.5	June 1990
BodyPump	56	14.0	December 1991
BodyAttack	51	12.75	March 1993
BodyJam	35	8.75	March 1997
BodyBalance	31	7.75	March 1998
RPM	29	7.25	September 1998
BodyCombat	26	6.5	June 1999

*Source: derived from information published on the UK licensee's website, [www.fitpro.com](http://www.fitpro.com), accessed 7 January 2006.*

Instructor affiliation to a licensed venue is required in order to receive training and hence attain BTS-qualified status. Instructors can either be employed by the venue operator or be self-employed. Either way, the instructor needs to provide written confirmation to BTS that they will be given a regular class to teach on completion of their training. In addition, instructors need to have a National Vocational Qualification level 2 (or equivalent) which provides the underpinning knowledge of anatomy and physiology needed to teach exercise and meets standards set down by the Register of Exercise Professionals (REPs) (see Lloyd, 2005 for an assessment of the effectiveness of REPs) . Only three of seven programmes (BodyAttack, BodyJam and BodyStep i.e. those with a heightened emphasis on choreography) require this qualification to be specifically targeted at teaching exercise to music classes.

**Table 3:  
Body Training Systems –  
Profile of Programmes by Venues<sup>1</sup>**

Programme	Number of Venues Offering Programme	Percentage of Total BTS Licensed Premises
BodyPump	1,224	94.8
BodyCombat	951	73.7
BodyBalance	761	59.0
BodyAttack	348	27.0
RPM	288	22.3
BodyJam	215	16.7
BodyStep	205	15.9
<hr/>		
Total Number of BTS Licences	3,992	
Total Number of BTS Licensed Premises	1,291	

*Note:*

1. The figures presented here only refer to venues in England; data available for Britain were not listed at the time of the research.

*Source: calculated from downloading the location of classes for each programme using the 'class locator' function published on the BTS originator's website, [www.lesmills.com](http://www.lesmills.com), accessed 5 January 2006.*

The growth of BTS classes has been phenomenal. Although the UK launch only began in 1997, BTS has a presence in almost 1,300 venues in England alone (see Table 3). This accounts for around a fifth of all health and fitness facilities in the UK (there are

an estimated 2,671 private clubs plus 3,959 local authority leisure centres and swimming pools which are open to the general public on a pay-as-you-go basis) (Intel, 2004 and 2005). Each of these venues holds licences for an average of three types of class. BodyPump is the most popular (with 95% take up in licensed venues), followed by BodyCombat (provided in 74% of venues) and BodyBalance offered in well over half (59%). However, even the less popular programmes are on offer in literally hundreds of venues.

The relative popularity of the various programmes can also be seen by examining the take-up of licences among the main multiple site operators (see Table 4). BodyPump and BodyCombat, for example, have become almost standard entries on the studio timetable of clubs run by the top six leading operators. BodyBalance classes have achieved a similar status in two cases (Fitness First and Holmes Place), while RPM has achieved near blanket coverage in clubs run by the largest club operator (Fitness First).

**Table 4:  
Body Training Systems –  
Profile of Programmes by Main Club Chains<sup>1</sup>**

Chain	Programme Prevalence
Fitness First	All, but 5, of the 142 sites are licensed for the same four programmes – BodyBalance, BodyCombat, BodyPump and RPM. No other licences are held.
LA Fitness	All, but 3, of the 68 sites offer BodyCombat and BodyPump. There are fewer licences for other programmes – RPM is held at 6 sites, BodyBalance at 6, BodyAttack at 4, BodyJam at 3 and BodyStep at 2.
David Lloyd	All 58 sites are licensed for BodyPump. In addition, 35 have a licence for BodyCombat, 28 for BodyBalance, 12 for BodyAttack, 8 for BodyJam and 2 for RPM.
Cannons	All, but 7, of the 54 sites have a licence for BodyCombat and BodyPump. In addition, 43 have a licence for BodyBalance, 33 for BodyAttack, 18 for RPM, 17 for BodyJam and 16 for BodyStep.
Esporta	All, but 4, of 52 sites have a licence for BodyCombat and BodyPump. In addition, 35 have a licence for BodyBalance, 28 for BodyAttack, 22 for BodyJam, 15 for BodyStep and 10 for RPM.
Holmes Place	All, but 6, of the 48 sites have a licence for BodyBalance, BodyCombat and BodyPump. In addition, 38 have a licence for RPM, 29 for BodyAttack, 22 for BodyJam and 7 for BodyStep.

*Note:*

1. The figures presented here only refer to clubs in England; data available for Britain were not listed at the time of the research.

*Source: calculated from downloading the location of classes for each programme using the 'class locator' function published on the BTS originator's website, [www.lesmills.com](http://www.lesmills.com), accessed 5 January 2006.*

After meeting the prerequisites required for BTS training course registration (demonstration of licensed venue affiliation and possession of a relevant qualification), prospective instructors are required to complete two training modules. These are specific to each of the seven disciplines, are held at a variety of locations across the UK, and cost £100-£120 each. The number of courses offered per discipline mirrors the demand for qualified BTS instructors. So, in the first half of 2006, 13 courses are scheduled for BodyPump, 10 for BodyCombat and 8 for BodyBalance. Fewer courses are planned for the other four programmes. The courses last 2-3 days with assessments made towards the end of the course. Within 16 weeks of completing the course, all participants are required to submit a video of one of their classes which uses a variety of camera angles to show the assessor the instructor's movements and facial expressions as well as those of some of the class. Video assessments cost £20. At this point, full certification is awarded or an instructor is invited to resubmit another video that corrects and addresses any failings identified. The certification received allows holders to teach in any club in the world provided it holds the appropriate licence. Around 12,000 certificates have been issued in the UK.

Every three months fresh choreography and music is supplied to qualified instructors. These are known as Quarterly Releases and are issued without variation across the world, so that a class following the current BodyAttack release in Swansea is the same as it is in Stirling or Singapore. As part of their continuing professional development, each year qualified instructors are required to attend three out of the four Quarterly Workshops staged to launch each new release. These are usually held over two consecutive weekends at locations across the country. The workshops for each discipline last 1-2 hours with up to all seven running back to back on the same day (known as 'The Magnificent 7'). At these events, instructors are required to participate in a 'Master Class' for their respective programme in order to have their BTS Passbooks validated. These may be inspected in cases of complaints received from other BTS instructors, class

participants or operators. At the end of the Quarterly Workshops instructors are issued with a choreography booklet for the new release, a DVD (comprising a ‘Master Class’ and an Educational Update) and a CD of the tracks for the new class. Payments are made for each part of this package (costing £25-£30 for the workshop, DVD and notes, £15.50 for the CD, and £80 annually for the rights to play the music in public).

These arrangements have all the hallmarks of a ‘licence to practise’ system of occupational regulation (Kleiner, 2000). To become a BTS instructor new entrants have to find an appropriate venue to ply their services, demonstrate a certain level of competence (through possession of a fitness qualification) and successfully complete a training course for each type of class they wish to teach. They can then teach at any venue that holds the appropriate BTS licence. In turn, the BTS organisation licenses venues, maintains an instructor register, provides regular training updates and collects fees from clubs and instructors for the services it provides. It is therefore illegal (from a commercial law point of view) for an unlicensed outlet to have BTS classes on its studio timetable or for an unregistered instructor to take a BTS class even though they are certified to provide exercise to music instruction.

This particular example is interesting for three reasons. First, despite being relatively widespread in Germany and the US where an occupational licence is required to do certain jobs (such as a barber, electrician, estate agent and librarian), occupational regulation is relatively uncommon in the UK. Secondly, the cases that do exist tend to be underpinned by government regulation. The most commonly cited example is the CORGI registered gas fitter. The Council for Registered Gas Installers (known commonly by its acronym, CORGI) was founded in 1970 in response to public concern about unsafe gas installations. Initially, gas installers affiliated to CORGI on a voluntary basis. However, in 1991 the Health and Safety Executive asked CORGI to maintain a register of competent gas installers. In 1998 registration became a legal requirement for businesses and self-employed people working on gas fittings or appliances. Around 48,000 gas installation businesses employing approximately 98,000 gas fitters are currently registered (CORGI, 2005). Local government, too, has pushed the licensing of certain occupations. Some local authorities, for example, have made participation in local bouncer registration schemes a condition of awarding Public Entertainment Licences to clubs and bars (Lister *et al.*, 2001). However, the granting of taxi and private

hire car licences by local authorities is more widespread and has a much longer history (Frontier Economics, 2003). Lastly, but by no means least, policy-makers in the UK have occasionally hinted at the possibility of introducing more ‘licence to practise’ style regulation (e.g., PIU, 2001: 68-70; Strategy Unit, 2002: 76-78; DfES *et al.*, 2003: 55-58). However, as Lloyd (2005) has pointed out we know very little about how the few ‘licence to practise’ arrangements currently operational in the UK actually work and in particular what implications they have for skill development. The following is intended to shed some light on this issue.

### **3. Types, Sources and Methods of Data Collection**

The paper draws on a range of different types of data sourced in a variety of ways. However, the primary method of data collection was through interviews with a number of stakeholders in the sector. Some of these interviews were specifically focused on ETM, but in others ETM was just one of the subjects under discussion. The interview process began by focusing on sector-wide bodies responsible for skills, qualifications and business development. A total of 3 interviews were conducted at this level. From these informants a list of organisational contacts was drawn up. Interviews with human resource/training managers were subsequently carried out. These 11 respondents represented 5 operators – 3 stand-alone, multi-site, private chains and 2 contract-managed, local-authority owned, leisure centre operators. At club/gym level, we conducted 9 interviews with general/studio managers based in private chains, publicly owned leisure centres and single site facilities (2 of whom were also instructors).

The lead author of the paper also attended and participated in a 2-day fitness convention and a 2-day training event for ETM instructors. The latter provided a platform to draw up a list of instructors for interview. However, previous studies of service work – such as Leidner’s (1993) study of McDonald’s counter staff and insurance sales representatives – suggest that interviews alone can only give a partial account of the experience of doing and learning ‘the ropes’ of service work. Participant-observation is required in order to get more of an insight into their working lives. Similar calls for observation have also been made by those studying workplace learning (see, especially, Eraut, 2000). Both make the case on the grounds that workers’ recall is often limited to the extremes and the extraordinary. This means that the routine, everyday and ordinary



are taken for granted and therefore tend to be unreported in verbal accounts given to interviewers. As a result, in 8 out of 15 cases ETM interviews were preceded by the interviewer participating in one of the classes taken by the interviewee. All of these participant observation/interviews took place in the evenings and at weekends when most ETM classes are held.

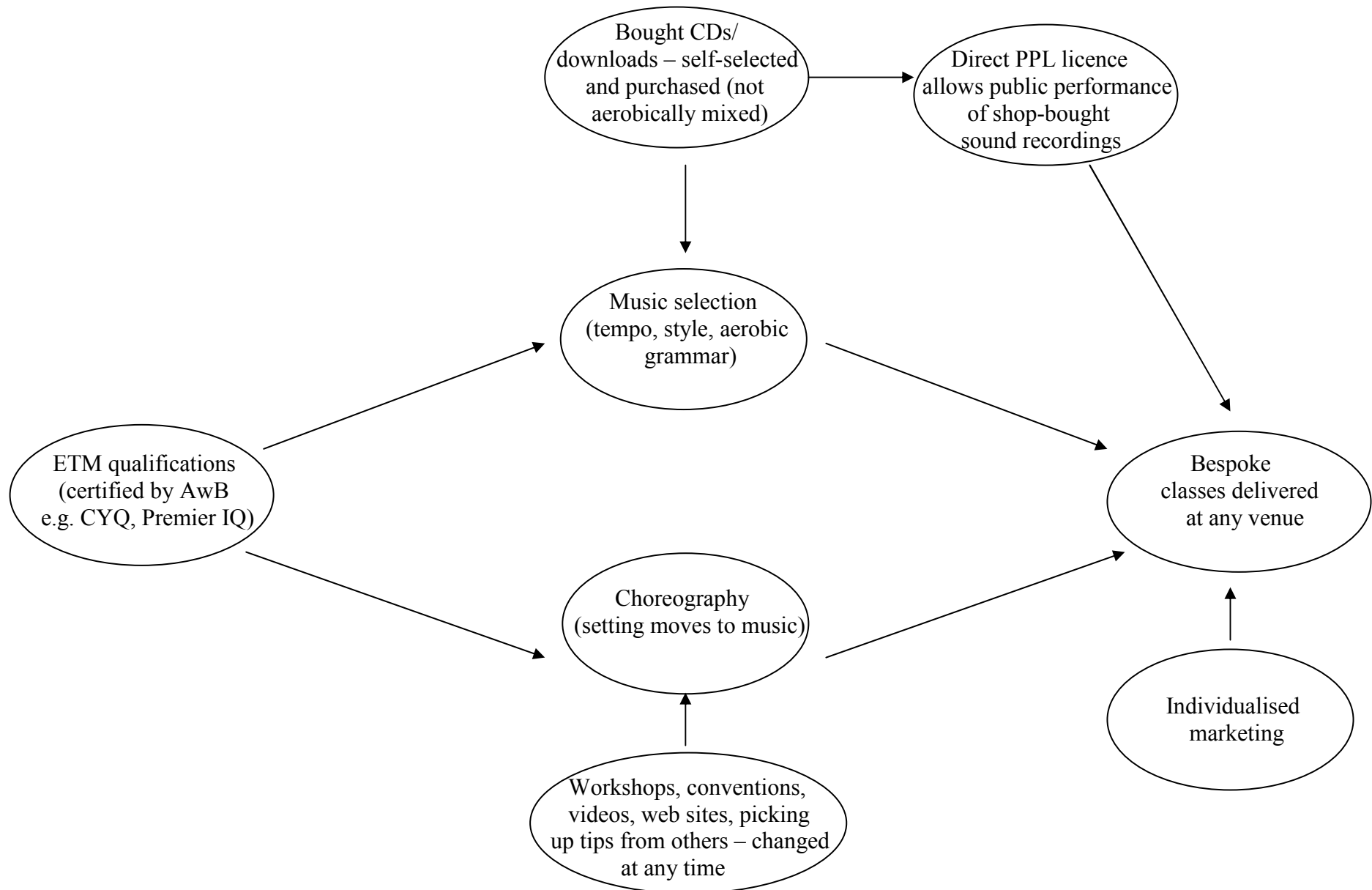
The instructors we interviewed were drawn from a variety of backgrounds (see Table A1). Five had got their ETM qualifications over 10 years ago, 6 were instructing as part of their current job and were employed, 7 were freelancing for a number of operators and 2 were employed on a casual basis by a single employer. Nine out of the 15 interviewed were practising ‘freestyle’ instructors but also held ‘pre-choreographed’ licenses (note that FX programmes are similar to those offered by BTS). These interviewees were therefore able to make direct comparisons between the learning and training required under the two productive systems identified above. However, even those who did not have direct experience of the two productive systems themselves were keen to offer observations and comments. All interviews have been fully transcribed and have been analysed using Atlas.ti. Most of the interviews were carried out in 2005. To protect the anonymity of individual respondents, interviewees have been given pseudonyms in the qualitative data presented below.

In addition to the collection of interview data – sometimes preceded by participant observation – artefacts such as training videos, choreography notes and training manuals have been gathered in the course of the research. Where appropriate insights gained from this material are presented below.

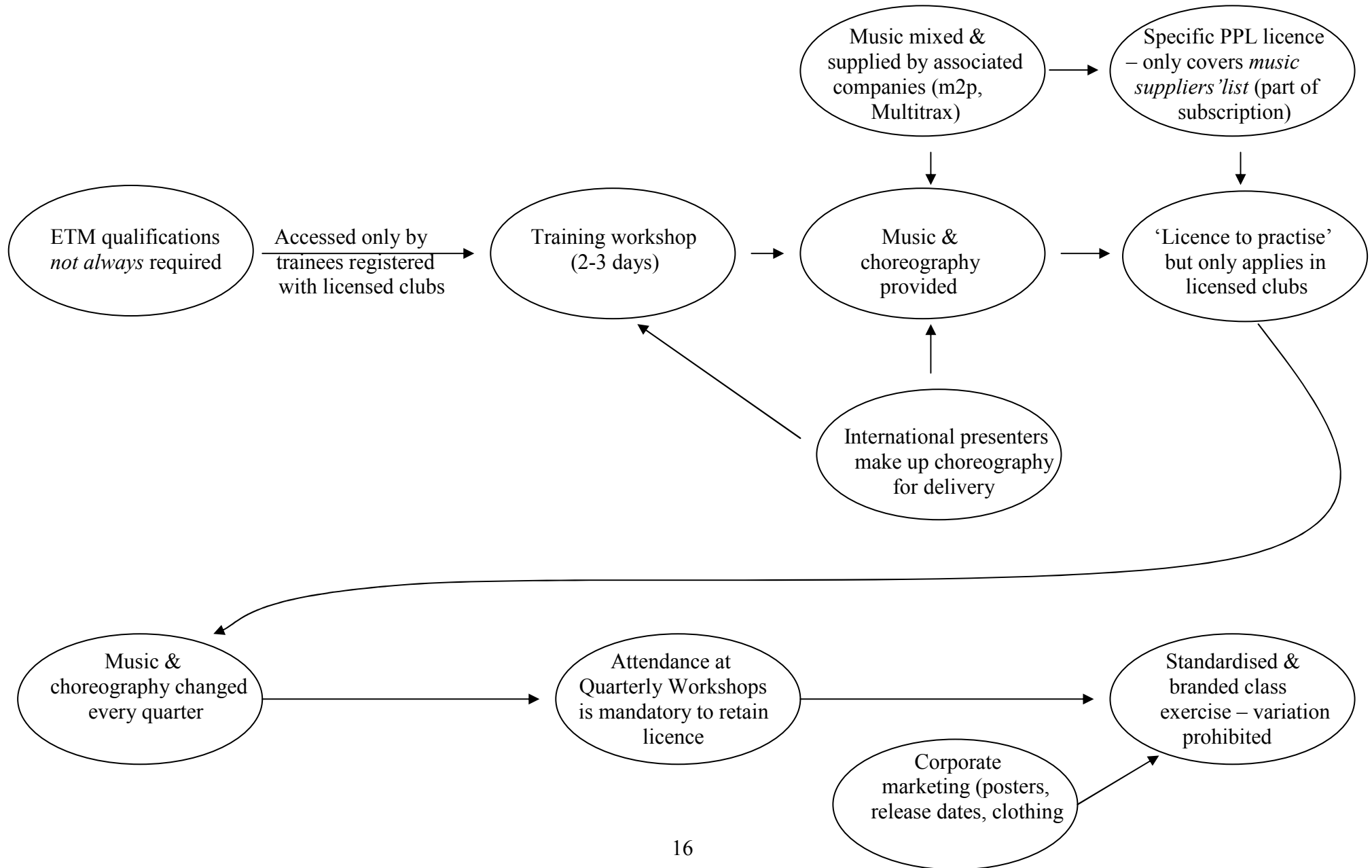
#### **4. Learning Processes and Training in Two Productive Systems**

The two distinctive ways of providing exercise to music classes to participants – ‘freestyle’ and ‘pre-choreography’ – cast the instructor in a profoundly different role. In the former, the instructor is centre stage – selecting the music, choreographing the moves and presenting an image entirely of their own choosing. In making these decisions instructors have to call upon their scientific knowledge about anatomy, physiology and musical form to deliver safe, effective group workouts for members of the public (see Figure 1). However, in ‘pre-choreographed’ classes the instructor delivers a package in

**Figure 1:**  
**Sources of Skills and Knowledge in 'Freestyle' Exercise to Music Instruction**



**Figure 2:**  
**Sources of Skills and Knowledge in 'Pre-Choreographed' Exercise to Music Instruction**



which these decisions have been taken by other actors in the productive system – such as music suppliers who remix sound tracks, choreographers who fit movement to music, and image makers who promote the wearing of particular clothes and the use of certain dialogue to match the mood of the class (see Figure 2). This represents a classic case of the simplification of the labour process in which specialised knowledge is increasingly held by relatively few and is embodied in the ‘scientific tools and artefacts’ used by the many (Braverman, 1974).

In this section, we contrast and compare these two productive systems in terms of the consequences they have for instructor learning. The section considers how instructors analyse and select music for their classes, how the choreography is determined, and the scope they have to put their own personalities across while teaching in front of a class.

### *Analysing and Selecting the Music*

For many years music has played a key, if relatively unnoticed, role in social organisation of employment (Korcynski, 2003; Korcynski and Jones, 2004). In contrast to the human eye which can close, rivet and focus, the ear is always open. Sounds therefore appear fleeting and mercurial since they cannot be pointed out or seen. This makes it difficult to be aware of and remember the sounds we hear. Nevertheless, they can be manufactured into music which can, in turn, be played to structure human agency. The emergence of broadcast media and the record industry has heightened these possibilities. In particular, it is now commonplace for retailers to use in-store music used to shape the mood and feelings of consumers as they enter stores. These sounds vary in terms of the musical style, volume and time of day they are played (DeNora and Belcher, 2000).

In the ETM setting music is to the fore since it is the key organisational device around which exercise activities are structured. The sounds, style, tempo and lyrics of each musical track are used to frame the workout and distract participants from feelings of tiredness and/or boredom (cf. Sharma and Black, 2000). As such they act as an ‘aesthetic prosthetic’ by prompting the instructor’s dialogue and the physical movement of the class (Sayers and Bradbury, 2004).

In most ETM classes, the sound tracks that accompany sessions are played at full volume and there is no escape. An hour's workout typically contains around 10 tracks, each lasting about 5 minutes. The components of a class are structured around the musical tempo of each sound track which take participants' heart rate up and down what is known as the 'aerobic curve'. This begins with a warm-up segment, an aerobic core, isolation of particular muscle groups, and ends with a post-exercise cool-down and stretch. The tempo of the class rises, peaks and falls accordingly. In musical terms, tempo refers to the beats per minute of a track. A pop song runs, on average, at 130 beats per minute (BPM). Warm-ups begin at or below this rate, core segments use quicker tracks running between 140-150 BPM, while cool-down/relaxation exercises are carried out using tracks which run at less than 100 BPM.

In both 'freestyle' and 'pre-choreographed' classes this structure is (or should be) followed. However, in a 'freestyle' setting the instructor has to choose appropriate tracks for each segment of activity, whereas in a 'pre-choreography' situation these decisions are in-built in the CD that accompanies each new release. Moreover, the CD and accompanying notes do not indicate the BPM of the tracks used as the instructor's delivery of the class does not depend on this information. In conceptual terms, this is another example of how 'pre-choreography' separates the conception and execution of the labour process, and thereby reallocates scientific knowledge to the few who design the class for worldwide delivery. 'Freestylers', on the other hand, have to search fitness music catalogues (such as Pure Energy, Multitrax and m2p) and/or count the beats per minute of shop-bought music in order to design 'aerobically ordered' classes for their clients with tracks running at a variety of speeds.

The music used for exercise to music also has to cope with other aerobic grammar rules. The most important of these is that the music is mixed into 32 count blocks which makes setting moves to music easier to devise and enhances participants' ability to follow (a method known as music phrasing). In musical terms, it is the repetitive pulsing sound usually made by the bass line, which is the element we normally tap to when listening to music. Just as words are put together to form sentences, then so too are beats of music grouped together to form phrases. These consist of eight beats with the first count in a phrase normally being the heaviest or loudest. We then put sentences together to form paragraphs which compare to groups of music phrases, known as blocks. Each block

consists of four phrases. Often the music changes dramatically at the beginning of a block in comparison to the preceding one. Listening for the beginning of a new block is one of the major challenges facing instructors, but this is easier when blocks have different content such as verse, chorus or instrumental. However, these song segments may be more than 32 counts long and/or segments may not last for the entire 32 counts that comprise a block (this referred to as a musical bridge).

‘Freestylers’ have to break down music according to these principles (a technique known as music mapping) before they add exercise sequences. Shop-bought music is more of a challenge since tracks do not always conform to a regular 32 count pattern. This has prompted some instructors to derive innovative (if illegal) solutions. For example, one of our instructor interviewees described how, in the past, he got a disc jockey friend to remix tapes to produce tracks with the appropriate tempo:

‘... there was no stereos around then [in the early 1990s] that had pitch control. It was how your tape played there and then, you couldn’t make it go fast, you couldn’t make it any slower, so it wasn’t easy. He’d [a disk jockey friend] speed them up on the turntable and remixed them for me and if I needed a certain beat he’d mix them for me’ (Steve Jones, Instructor)

However, the growing popularity of ETM classes has led to the emergence of music suppliers who serve the specific needs of the fitness industry, hence minimising the need for illegal copying and remixing of sound recordings. These suppliers offer an extensive selection of high quality original artist music. Tracks are remixed to follow the 32 count structure required for simple choreography (see below), grouped into particular styles such as step, combat, cycling and aerobics, and labelled according to their speed. In some cases, further support is built into the tracks with faint additional sounds – such as an extra drum roll or symbol – introduced towards the end of each 32 count block. This helps ‘freestyle’ instructors switch between different movement sequences but the sounds are so faint that they go unnoticed by class participants. These sound recordings have, therefore, been modified for fitness use and as a result they can only be purchased by those who hold a licence to play them in public. These specific Phonographic Performance Limited (PPL) licences are included in the subscription packages purchasers have to take out in order to buy these special compilations (see PPL, 2004; Monopolies

and Mergers Commission, 1988). To play shop-bought music, which does not always conform to the requirements of ETM, a direct PPL licence is required.

Delivery of ‘pre-choreographed’ classes, on the other hand, does not require instructors to break down the music themselves. Instead, the music is supplied ready-phrased and each block/segment of the track is formally indicated in the notes that accompany the CD (the first count in each block is often pinpointed by words used in the lyrics). However, without regularly using music mapping skills, instructors can often find it difficult ‘hear’ the beats of the music and move accordingly. One of our management respondents regularly encounters this difficulty when observing ‘pre-choreographed’ trained instructors such as the instructor referred to below:

[BTS] is totally regulated by the music, totally music mapped ... [But] if you can’t hear a beat, how the hell are you going to know when it’s [the next move] coming? You know, this poor guy’s taught two tracks of BodyPump, he was off the beat throughout the whole of the track. So for me, because I can hear a beat, it puts me off what he’s doing. But they don’t know how to hear a beat ... in my day if you couldn’t music map, you didn’t do exercise to music’ (Group Trainer 2, Multiple Site Operator).

Nevertheless, it is possible to ‘get by’ without these skills, but only by delivering ‘pre-choreographed’ classes:

‘... you’ve got to be able to count music, count phrases, have an understanding of different types of music, different styles, because if you haven’t got that it’s very, very difficult for someone to do freestyle ... there are things out there, like the BTS stuff ... where you don’t necessarily need those skills at a high level, because it’s all pre-choreographed, and you just copy what they tell you’ (Jessica Smith, Instructor).

More strikingly still is the contrast between ‘freestyle’ and ‘pre-choreography’ classes in terms of what musical tracks form the bases of the workouts. For many ‘freestylers’ the musical selection is their way of stamping their own personality on the classes they teach:

‘... my personality is so through the music and it’s coming from you isn’t it and you can project you, I think, better than you can project somebody else’s programme’ (Melissa Bowley, Instructor).

However, making musical choices can be daunting, stressful and time-consuming as the same instructor went onto explain:

‘It’s more stressful and you think, “Oh Lord, what music am I going to use now?”, you know, and the thought of picking the right music for the customers ... whereas with BTS they give it you ... it’s exercise to go, you know, just look at it, take it and go’ (Melissa Bowley, Instructor).

Other instructors we interviewed also recognised the paradox of having the music selection decided for them by the producers of ‘pre-choreographed’ classes:

‘Music-wise, I don’t have the freedom. To a certain degree, I like it because I don’t have to do the thinking’ (Jade Burnett, Instructor).

Inevitably not all tracks selected are liked by all instructors who have to listen to them time and time again when learning the choreography and taking the same class over a three month period. Those with a backlist of CDs can avoid this problem by substituting tracks they do not like with similar tracks from their backlist. To maintain aerobic integrity of the class, these tracks must be like for like in terms of tempo and exercise activity (for example, track 2 – squats – from BodyPump 55 substituting for track 2 taken from release 56). However, the pressure from class participants and other instructors to refresh the class every quarter puts a limit on avoiding sound tracks in this way. Our interviewees revealed other coping strategies. One is to fake interest and enjoyment in the music. In Hochschild’s (1983) terms this is an example of surface acting; that is, disguising one’s real feelings. One instructor revealed that she never let the class know her real musical likes and dislikes, and instead she was most passionate about those tracks she liked least:

‘Those tracks I don’t like I’ll say, “I love this track. This is an amazing track” ... I don’t ever say I don’t like a track ... The minute you say, “It’s awful”, then you’ve set the scene haven’t you, you’ve killed your track ... [sometimes] I don’t like the music, but it looks like I really like it ... You have to act’ (Melissa Bowley, Instructor).

Another tactic is to deflect criticism of the music onto the unknown individuals who have selected it for worldwide use. In these circumstances, rather than defend the music selection and fake their interest in the chosen tracks, instructors openly join forces with participants to criticise the choices made.



## *Choreographing the Moves*

Choreography is quite literally the process of ‘dance writing’ which puts together a sequence of steps or movements in time with musical accompaniment. At the heart of exercise to music are a number of basic moves. Depending on the style of class, these are drawn from disciplines such as aerobics, karate, boxing, pilates and yoga (cf. Table 1). When adapted to ETM these movements are performed in time with the beat of the music – sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly. So, for example, a bicep curl may take 16 musical beats to complete (8 up, 8 down – known as 4/4 rhythm) or the same time may be used to complete four repetitions of the same movement (2 up, 2 down – known as 1/1 rhythm or single-single). Particular movements and repetitions need to be attached to each block of music. To further complicate the picture variations can be added. These include the direction of travel the body is moving towards while performing the basic move (i.e. forward, back or sideways) and the direction the class is facing (i.e. front, back, left side, right side and the diagonals).

Although 32 count music supply has taken out unhelpful musical bridges and other discontinuities of shop-bought music, the ‘freestyler’ still has to command high choreography skills because ‘you’ve still got to work your own routines out’ (Bethany Fowkes, Instructor). In practice, this means taking some of the basic moves such as grapevine, v-step and knee repeater, adding variations and arranging them in different sequences. The source of these ideas varies from instructor to instructor. However, prominent on the list of those we interviewed was picking up ideas from other instructors by watching them on stage at fitness exhibitions, participating in their classes or observing them asynchronously on videos/DVDs. More experienced ‘freestyle’ instructors have the confidence and ability to ‘just do what the music tells me’ as one of our interviewees repeated several times:

‘I love music ... the music tells me what to do. I don’t write out a routine anymore ... even when I’m listening to the radio I’m thinking we could do a grapevine and a hop and turn and a hamstring curl and one behind, one forward’ (Tamara Wall, Instructor).

These instructors frequently compared this situation to the restrictions that ‘pre-choreography’ places on the introduction of new moves into ETM classes:

‘I absolutely love it [‘freestyle’ teaching], it’s stimulating, it gets you to places where you’ve never been before and you learn it yourself, therefore it’s not mechanical. It’s not been given to you, you have to go there yourself and explore it ... Whereas in BTS, for example, you’ve got to do exactly the same thing to exactly the same count throughout the whole class, which is a real restriction’ (Emanuelle Lenska, Instructor).

‘The easy aerobics class is just basically a bog standard aerobics, but the choreography I teach will probably change every week ... So it makes me remain creative and it makes me want to keep doing it ... the reason that Body Training Systems is there is to categorise everything and everyone the same. I want to be completely different to that, I want to be creative and do different things as much as I can to stay fresh’ (Manager & Studio Co-ordinator, Single Site Club).

By designing all the moves, codifying them in choreography booklets issued with each new release, requiring instructors to attend Quarterly Workshops and supplying videos of ‘model’ classes, much of the scientific knowledge that instructors would have been introduced to in their ETM qualification is never built upon. Sector representatives were acutely aware of this conflict:

‘The focus of all exercise to music qualifications is all about designing your own choreography and doing it yourself – taking a range of movements and designing something around that. Body Training Systems is completely different – it’s completely pre-choreographed, there’s no option to show your design skills and choreography’ (Sector Representative 2).

The danger, therefore, is that these skills degrade and wither through lack of use. This is a particular danger for recently qualified instructors who tend to take the ‘easy route’ and copy what they are given as the following examples illustrate:

‘I won’t ad lib as much in pre-choreographed classes, no, because it’s already pre-done so I just work to what they’ve got. I’ll change the tracks as in I’ll change track 5 to track 5 off the CDs and that, but I won’t deviate from what they’ve given me ... I won’t no, because the easy option is just to follow it’ (Jade Burnett, Instructor).

‘It’s all done for you and you don’t have to think what should I be doing now’ (Chelsea Purnell, Instructor).

‘... when you do [‘pre-choreography’] you’re doing somebody else’s stuff, you’re just a clone of somebody else ... whereas if you’ve gone out and you’ve put stuff to music yourself and you’ve taught the classes, you get to know what classes like, what they don’t like, you get to know what works and what doesn’t work’ (Jordon Watts, Instructor).

‘I would say 75-95% of people that go into BTS training are probably new instructors who’ve never made up their own class, so everything they [BTS] do, they copy exactly ... They have to learn verbatim’ (Group Trainer 1, Multiple Site Operator).

In order to hone nascent choreographic skills, some instructors suggest that a period of ‘freestyling’ is essential:

‘Freestyle is you, how you are and what you’re doing. It teaches you about all these different people. It gives you a chance to build on the information that you’ve had fed at you during the course to learn about the range of movements that people have. Pre-choreography doesn’t allow you to do that. It’s somebody else’s ideas, somebody else’s moves. But I think freestyle is important for you to just consolidate what you’ve learnt on a course. And I think everyone should freestyle, I would say, for two years before you go and do anything like pre-choreography because I think you lose the ability then to act on your own initiative because everything is programmed into you. You become a bit like a robot’ (Tamara Wall, Instructor).

Similar sentiments have also appeared in the pages of the bi-monthly magazine issued to BTS certified instructors:

‘Another popular criticism of BTS is that it stifles instructor creativity. BTS would argue that it takes away the task of finding our own music, checking the safety of our moves and imaginative choreography thus allowing us to concentrate on our presenting skills. This may be true, but some of my fellow instructors only teach BTS and I can’t help but feel that they have not paid their dues. Every instructor needs to experience the frustration of trying to make the music fit the moves ... There has to be room for freestyle in the BTS world’ (letter to Editor, *FitPro*, December 2004/January 2005: 9).

However, in the ‘pre-choreographed world’, instructors tend to rote learn each of the tracks in the session. This means listening to the CD over and over again, memorising the choreography notes and watching the DVD time and time again.

‘I just learn, like, the first few lines. Learn it so I remember it and then learn the next few and then the next few and then try to put two bits together ... I’ll probably watch it [the DVD], you know, like 15 times and I’ll probably watch that little bit ... over and over again and then ... watch it and listen to the music over and over again to try and get the beats to the music’ (Mia Davies, Instructor).

‘I put the DVD on and make sure that nobody’s interrupting me at all ... I must watch it about 5 or 6 times, even after doing the “Master Class” ...

make notes where we're going with each track ... make sure I know what I'm doing. Turn that off. Put the music on because it's completely different when you've got music and no video. You're then listening for the bits in the music where you start to change, you're movement and what you've got to say' (Eve Lane, Instructor).

'I worked myself to death for two weeks at home. At any given time, I was plugged into that music and working with a broom handle in the kitchen or downstairs' (Tamara Wall, Instructor).

Repetitive viewing of the same video not only drills instructors into making same moves at the same time, but scripts other behaviours such as winks, facial movements and posture. These pre-determined actions form a package (i.e. a script) that is an integral feature of the standard product 'pre-choreographed' classes are designed to deliver. The learning artefacts are therefore intended to have a limited role in enhancing the cognitive development of instructors in terms of their understanding and comprehension of the choreography. Instead, they are aimed at instilling, albeit subtly, behavioural conformity (Hall, 1993). Several interviewees were aware of this tendency:

'You've always got to have a guard in Combat – a boxing guard. Now you see this on the videos because you're studying that video so it's like you're getting drilled ... when you're watching the video, it's being drilled into you so you just don't pick up the moves, you pick everything up that they're saying. All the little moves that they do and everything, you pick it up' (Samuel Brown, Instructor).

The emphasis on conformity begins at an early stage in the process of becoming a licensed BTS instructor and continues via the Quarterly Workshops and the new releases that accompany these sessions. The initial training is almost exclusively studio-based. Two modules are normally completed over two separate weekends with the training lasting 2-3 days in total. Most of the time is spent going over and over the current release with some technique work in between. These whole class sessions are taken by a Master Trainer. However, on other occasions participants are led by a fellow trainee whose performance is then discussed. This feedback tends to identify not only poor technique but areas where trainees vary the script such missing out or adding certain moves, not doing the specified number of repetitions or altering the sequence of the movements.

'After the first day you get given a track to learn overnight and then you have to teach it the following day. In the morning, first thing, they video you teaching that track. And when everybody's done their track you then watch the videos. Everybody sits around the video and you have to watch

yourself and she tells you what you're doing wrong. You can see and hear everything you did wrong and you can see and hear everything everybody else did wrong' (Eve Lane, Instructor).

The fear of 'going wrong' and, therefore, delivering a 'non-standard' product persists long after certification has been secured. The fear comes from the 'normalising gaze' of participants and other instructors. For example, new release launch dates are often used within clubs to promote interest in the studio timetable. This, in turn, puts pressure on all instructors in that club to launch the new class at about the same time. The content of the classes can also come under scrutiny by 'expert' participants who go to the same class led by different instructors. These participants are so well schooled that they can tell when an instructor makes a mistake and/or the new release is not being followed. Inventiveness is outlawed in this context:

'You can only stick to their rules so it's choreographed absolutely. You buy their music, you follow their routine and you have to do their workshops ... you don't have any inventiveness ... What you're doing is delivering a format and that is it, full-stop' (Sector Representative 3).

From a club management point of view, standardisation has a number of benefits. First, it routinises the labour process and therefore minimises its inherent unpredictability. What happens in a studio is not subject to direct or intrusive surveillance by club management since the studio is not always easily visible to those outside. However, with 'pre-choreography' the content of each class is prescribed and well-known:

'If you buy in BTS you know what you're getting for your money ... If you leave it down to the instructor, then really it's a bit of a lottery whether the classes are going to be great or whether they're going to be quite crap' (Group Training Manager, Contract Managed Leisure Centres).

The second benefit is that the popularity of a class no longer wholly relies on the instructor and the specificity of their class since the product they deliver is the same. Instructors therefore become more substitutable. In these circumstances, finding suitable cover for instructors who fail to turn up, are off sick or are on holiday is much easier.

'With BTS it's set [the content of the class]. They're going to come in with the same music and they're going to do exactly the same thing. So, if one of my instructors can't do it and I get in another BTS woman in there, I wouldn't expect to hear, "Oh, she was rubbish, she didn't do this, she didn't do that" because they're expected to do it and follow a procedure ...

So in that respect it's better because ... I can just phone them up and I know they're going to do exactly the same thing in the class' (Studio Co-ordinator, Private Chain).

As a result, instructor bargaining power is reduced and their labour power is cheapened. It is noticeable, for example, that freelance instructors are rarely able to negotiate their own rates of pay (see Table A1, column 7). Instead, pay rates are offered by club/leisure centre management on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. However, freelance instructors who regularly turn up to deliver their classes – a key determinant of their performance – are rewarded other ways such as being given popular slots on the timetable and/or back-to-back classes.

Standardisation does, however, have its drawbacks. It is difficult, for example, to differentiate between instructors in terms of their own abilities since these are not really developed in a 'pre-choreographed' setting which provides instructors – as one respondent put it – with 'exercise sessions to go'. The consequence is that instructor skills are not really developed and as a result they learn little to stretch their abilities. A management respondent suggested that class participants, or even club management, cannot always tell how long instructors have been in the industry simply by observing their performance in front of a class:

'You wouldn't be able to look and think that person's been teaching for ten years and that person's been teaching for ten weeks, because the music will be exactly the same, the instructions should be exactly the same. Obviously, the one whose been teaching ten years will be a lot more confident and, you know, their voice projection probably a lot better but you wouldn't actually see a lot of difference in the quality ... [This] is a benefit to the industry but also there's no learning curve for the person who's only been teaching for ten weeks' (Group Trainer 1, Multiple Site Operator).

### ***Conveying an Appropriate Image***

All of the instructors (and managers) interviewed entered the industry because of an interest in health and fitness. Of the 15 instructors interviewed, three were professional dancers, while the remainder described their prior interest in fitness in obsessive terms – describing themselves as 'a fitness junkie', 'catching fitness fever' or 'a gym bunny'. All of the instructors had been avid class participants in their leisure time

before ‘stepping over the white line’ as one interviewee put it. This has two consequences for learning – one relating to the specifics of an ETM class and the other relating to the insertion of economic instrumentality into an activity which they once carried out for leisure purposes only.

Even before studying for ETM qualifications or instructing ‘pre-choreography’ classes, all the instructors interviewed had acquired some relevant expertise as regular class participants. The highly regarded YMCA ETM level 2 qualification, for example, has ‘experience of participating in exercise to music (aerobics) classes’ as a prerequisite for a course that is targeted specifically at those who ‘love taking part’ (YMCAfit, 2004: 10). The reason for the prerequisite is that class participation demonstrates an ability to perform complex tasks which are cued visually and verbally by an instructor. Discourse analysis has suggested that in a typical hour-long class between 1,370-1,500 utterances are made or between 4,500-7,000 words are used by the instructor. Participants have to learn to differentiate between the types of instructor utterances in order to move in time with the music. These include directives issued ahead of particular movements, descriptions of current moves (such as countdowns), teaching points related to new sequences and markers used to warn participants that they must act on the next beat (Delin, 2001). As novice participants will testify, the workout monologue takes some getting used to. In addition, field-specific vocabulary is used as shorthand to refer to particular bodily movements such as grapevine, bow and arrow, superman, mambo, pony, cha-cha-cha, step tap, knee repeater, rocking horse and basic. Moreover, each type of class has its own set of moves and associated vocabulary. This is ‘personal knowledge’ that individual instructors bring with them, it is rarely codified and is gathered through experience (Eraut, 2004). The instructors we interviewed found that this knowledge was taken-for-granted on the courses they attended and as such it was not taught:

‘If I hadn’t been a class attendee, I think I’d have really struggled [on the OCR ETM level 2 course]’ (Tamara Wall, Instructor).

Instructors are often motivated to ‘step over the white line’ because of their genuine interest in exercise to music as a leisure pursuit. This means that for them ETM switches from a hedonistic, pleasurable leisure activity to a site of paid work designed to maximise the fun and enjoyment of others (Guerier and Adib, 2003). However, unlike other front-line workers in the leisure industry – such as bar tenders, restaurant staff,

hotel workers and airline stewardesses – ETM instructors carry out their work while participating fully in the activity. Indeed one of the main roles of an instructor is to lead class participants, not only in terms of technique but also in terms of effort. This cannot be done from the sidelines (as in personal training) and is instead done from the front of the class through active participation. A key attribute of ETM instructors whether using ‘freestyle’ or ‘pre-choreographed’ methods of class delivery is to feel excited, happy and energetic in front of the class. In many cases, instructors reported genuinely having these emotions:

‘Because I am passionate about it ... I come across that I’m enthusiastic about it, I’m enjoying it and I don’t mind looking silly ... I really do enjoy it!’ (Steve Jones, Instructor).

‘As the music goes on I’m away and I’m just away with it. I just love it because I love teaching’ (Bethany Fowkes, Instructor).

‘I mean most people will not get on the stage after me cos it’s soaked, it’s like an ice-rink out there ... every bit of energy comes through, every bit, so I just sweat’ (Jordon Watts, Instructor).

However, there is recognition that this is something that class participants are paying for and therefore expect from instructors (i.e. those working at leisure). Although an instructor’s enjoyment is often authentic, it is now a requirement of the job:

‘It’s like mirroring, if you’re having fun people that come to your class, they will feel that they want to have fun too. They want to feel the same thing that you feel’ (Emanuelle Lenska, Instructor).

‘It’s an entertainment business, you know, you get paid for doing it. But don’t just think it’s a job, it’s a passion, it’s a love, you know, cos if it’s just a job, then you’re not going to be able to pick yourself up, you have to go into it and want to entertain. Those people have paid ... they want you to give them exactly the same as you did last week’ (Jordon Watts, Instructor).

Much of the above applies to both ‘freestyle’ and ‘pre-choreography’ classes. However, authenticity is more difficult to maintain in the latter since they are arranged into a number of styles or disciplines each with its own brand image and associated emotional atmosphere. This is especially difficult for instructors who teach across the range. BodyCombat, for example, aims to provide a ‘fierce, energetic experience’, BodyJam ‘unlocks everyone’s rhythmic and dancing instincts’ and BodyBalance ‘brings



the body into a state of harmony and balance’ (quotes taken from [www.fitpro.com/bts](http://www.fitpro.com/bts)). Nevertheless, instructors are expected to alter their personality accordingly:

‘It’s like putting on a performance ... you have to put a different head on, you know, like Wurzel Gummidge [a 1980s children’s TV series character who changed heads to switch personalities] ... One of the things that they [BTS] drill into you is this playing a role, playing a character ... It’s like Wurzel Gummidge, you put on a different head, depending on what different discipline you’re teaching. Combat, RPM, Balance, Pump are completely different characters in every one. You’ve got BodyBalance, which is mellow, gentle person, so you’ve got be calm. RPM, you’ve got to keep them going. Combat you’re just like an animal, you’re punching ... you’ve got to be different in each class’ (Jessica Smith, Instructor).

‘BodyCombat is easy – for me, I think it’s more natural ... Oh, I’m an animal in Combat but if you see me teach Balance you’d think, “What a different personality”, and if you see me teach BodyAttack ... there’s a different personality again’ (Melissa Bowley, Instructor).

Instructors are reminded of the importance of these personality switches in the Educational Updates that accompany each new release:

‘If you teach a number of programmes, you may need to change costume a number of times in one day – step out of one world almost directly into another ... If you can’t project the feelings specific to each individual programme, it’s going to be more difficult to correctly interpret the specific emotions of each individual track and let the music speak for you ... It’s essential that you step into the character of each programme’ (BodyPump DVD Release 45, 2002).

To help instructors step into character, different styles of dress are suggested. Master Trainers, therefore, encourage instructors to ‘dress in programme costume’ in order ‘to stand in the spirit of the programme’ (ibid). This message is repeated again and again during initial training and via the Educational Updates included on the DVDs that accompany each Quarterly Release. This drilled behaviour begins at the first weekend of initial training with notable consequences:

‘They say to you on the first weekend, “In two weeks’ time, it’s a good idea if you come in something that looks the role, because if you look the part then people are going to want to copy you” ... Most people came back in combats and people had wraps and things like that, so yeah. And there were loads of people who ... had gone out and bought like the whole kit, like the proper Combat trousers’ (Samuel Brown, Instructor).

Here, ‘proper Combat trousers’ refers to a clothing range that is branded according to each of the BTS programmes. Each has its own logo, colour scheme and dress code (e.g., bandanas for BodyCombat and RPM, calf length loose trousers for BodyBalance and elasticated leggings for BodyAttack). The recommended clothing range follows these branding principles. It is a clothing range which some instructors aspire to purchase since they consider themselves to be representatives of the programme-provider. Master Trainers at the Quarterly Workshops and on video are dressed in branded clothing as are many instructors they meet and see at these events. Once again, there is pressure to conform to the format with instructors becoming – in the words of some respondents – ‘clones’ or ‘mini-mes’ of the presenters. However, this does allow instructors to differentiate themselves from class participants:

‘I just want to look a bit different ... I want to look like the instructor, I want to look professional [by] not buying the same stuff as them ... Sometimes they say, “Oh, you’ve got a nice outfit” ... I just say, “Oh, it’s only for instructors”’ (Rula Thompson, Instructor).

More recently, the Educational Updates have extended their reach even further by giving advice to instructors on how to reshape their own bodies. Participation in ETM has been likened to entering ‘a factory in which motion becomes an instrument for dominating and shaping the body’ (Kagan and Morse, 1988: 177). This is echoed in the marketing slogans used to promote these classes. The BodyPump programme carries the slogan: ‘Warning: this will change the shape of your body’, while the BodyCombat programme is sold under the slogan: ‘It’s a constant battle to remain in shape’. This adheres to the dominant reading of group exercise classes and club membership, in general, as a means of keeping thin and losing weight. Previously, instructors were expected to look fit. This was never directly expressed, but implied through the Quarterly Workshops and videos that instructors had to take part in and watch:

‘You’ve got to show that you’re a BodyPump instructor, that you’re BodyPump trained and you can lift these big weights. And they’re really strong on that on the training ... it just keeps covering over and over ... being fit, very fit and having a fit body’ (Eve Lane, Instructor).

However, a recent Educational Update – contained on DVDs across the suite of programmes – has gone a step further by giving instructors advice on what to eat in order to lose body fat and look the part.

Image making also extends to the use of language and particular phrases. While most of the instructional language relating to each exercise is taken from the various disciplines on which ‘pre-choreography’ is based, the coaching cues are the choreographer’s creation. These are codified in the choreography notes which have three columns – one breaks the music down into segments and blocks; another gives the exercise rhythm and repetitions; and the third gives verbal cues to be used at particular points in the class. Often these verbal cues are tied to the music but others are more generic such as ‘real sloooow’, ‘reach for the sky’ and ‘graze the knees’. The notes, video and Quarterly Workshops drill trainees into using this language. Failure to follow the script can result in trainees failing to secure qualified status and hence access to licensed venues where they can ply their trade. Some management respondents saw this as another way in which the skills of instructors are being underused and devalued:

‘I hate seeing ... robotic scripting. So, for example, at a certain point in the music they’ll go, “hoo-ha!” ... they’ll do bicep bicep curl, the music will go, “bang, bang, bang” and they’ll all go “hoo-ha!”, or they’ll say things like, “let’s power up!” and they all use the very same words and I just find it very, very depressing because it takes away the skill of being a teacher’ (Group Trainer 1, Multiple Site Operator).

## **5. Conclusion**

As soon as the latest productivity measures for the economy are released, government statisticians are quick to assess whether this means Britain is catching up or falling behind its competitors (e.g., *Financial Times*, 18 January 2006). The most widely accepted explanation relates to international differences in skill levels and their trajectory over time. The spotlight then turns on training as a key provider of enhanced skills in the workplace.

The aim of this paper has been to question what the subsequent plethora of training statistics really tells us. By focusing on the fortunes of a poorly researched group of workers – exercise to music instructors – the paper reveals that training can actually deaden rather than awaken individual creativity. Much of the training and continuing professional development undertaken by instructors schools them to deliver ‘one size fits all’ types of class. These ‘pre-choreographed’ classes are manufactured and scripted by specialised workers located far away from the point of delivery. These

workers include professional disk jockeys who remix sound tracks in accordance with the rules of aerobic grammar, choreographers who put bodily movement to music, Master Trainers who serve as role models, and marketers who package different types of class for sale. All of these workers are part of a productive system organised and managed by the owners of a concept that is duplicated throughout the world with no variation allowed. Abilities – such as music mapping, choreography and inventiveness – crucial to the delivery of safe and effective ‘freestyle’ exercise classes are no longer ‘must have’ skills in a ‘pre-choreography’ world. Instead, ‘licences to practise’ as ‘pre-choreography’ instructors are only given to trainees who deliver a standardised product. Like other aspects of the health and fitness sector, this formulaic solution cheapens labour, makes high labour turnover easier to cope with and minimises the problems associated with high rates of absenteeism. The development of ‘pre-choreography’ is symptomatic of tendencies first identified by Braverman:

‘The more science is incorporated into the labor process, the less the worker understands of the process; the more sophisticated an intellectual product the machine becomes, the less control and comprehension of the machine the worker has’ (Braverman, 1974: 425).

A management interviewee likened the switch from ‘freestyle’ to ‘pre-choreography’ class delivery to driving a car with manual rather than automatic controls with the boundaries of learning being ‘expansive’ and ‘restrictive’ respectively (Fuller and Unwin, 2003). The consequence is that ‘if you learn in an automatic [aka ‘pre-choreography’], you’ll never learn to go manual [aka ‘freestyle’] ... because you won’t know what to do’ (Group Trainer 1, Multiple Site Operator).

The case study evidence presented in this paper suggests that the training one group of workers receive can only be fully understood by analysing its role in a productive system which links the different stages involved in producing a product or service. Some systems have fewer links than others and are more reliant on front-line workers. ‘Freestyle’ exercise to music classes are a case in point since they are more reliant on the abilities of the instructor to plan and deliver sessions from scratch. However, these abilities are not needed in ‘pre-choreographed’ classes since instructors follow a script devised by a few individuals upstream in the productive system. Therefore, training is not homogeneous even within the same occupational group. This

means that in some circumstances it can expand horizons and extend abilities, but in others it simply teaches workers to conform.

These results suggest that statistics which report the incidence, intensity and volume of training undertaken across the economy should be treated with caution. While studies have shown that workers and firms gain from training activity, these studies are rarely sensitive enough to provide a nuanced picture of what is learnt and why. The suggestion from the results presented in this paper is that the meaning of training cannot be ‘averaged out’ by the insertion of control variables into economic models. Rather, its meaning is better understood in the context of the productive system of which it is a part.

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**Table A1:  
Pen Portraits of Exercise to Music Instructors Interviewed**

Name	Sex, Nationality & Ethnicity	Qualifications (dates)	Classes Taught	Employment Status	Teaching Sites	Pay Rates	Other Comments
Emanuelle Lenska	29, Polish, White European, single woman with no children	ETM NVQ II (2002), Groove and Stomp FX (2003), Multitrax Presenter (2004)	Freestyle floor aerobics, Groove FX & Stomp FX	Group Fitness Co-ordinator in private adult-only gym	Place of employment	NA – part of job description	Takes 4 classes a week. Previously a dancer and has recently become a Multitrax presenter
Melissa Bowley	40, Bahamian, Black Afro-Caribbean, married woman with 14 year old daughter	BA psychology (1991), RSA ETM NVQ II (1991), added BTS, FX etc certificates (all in 2005), Pure Energy Presenter status (2004)	All BTS except BodyStep, Groove FX, Stomp FX & Urban Funk	Originally, on part-time/hobby basis, but from Nov 04 as full-time job (part employee, part freelancer)	Fitness First (as part of job), Holmes Place (as freelancer), local leisure centre (as freelancer)	Paid rates such as £15, £18 and £20 according to type of class and length. For Urban Funk this rises to £40 per hour	35-40 classes a week (16 for Fitness First, 15 for local authority, 6 for Holmes Place & 4 independently)
Lorna Drake	32, English, White British, single woman with no children	Degree (1994), YMCA ETM NVQ II (2000)	Freestyle floor aerobics, circuit training & LBT	Took classes on casual basis as part-time hobby (freelancer)	Worked for parents' gym	£10-£15 per hour	Recently stopped working as ETM instructor

Eve Lane	42, English, White British, married woman with 2 children (9 and 11 years old)	YMCA ETM NVQ II (1993), Added Pump FX, Stomp FX, BodyBalance & BodyPump (2005)	Freestyle floor aerobics, BodyBalance, BodyPump & Pump FX	Freelancer for all classes, no other paid work	Local authority leisure centre & independent gym	Local authority centre £15. Independent gym = £10 for 4-5 participants, rising to £20 for 6 or above & £5 for class cancellation because < 3	Ten years out of the industry, recent returner, takes 3 classes per week
Steve Jones	37, English, White British, single man with no children	RSA ETM equivalent to NVQ II (1988), Step trained (1991), BodyPump (1995), Groove FX (2004)	Freestyle (step, aerobics, dance), BodyPump, Groove FX	Freelancer for a number of venues	LA Fitness, Holmes Place, independent Kingston gym & local authority leisure centre	£20 for all LA Fitness classes, £25-£30 elsewhere rising to £35	Takes around 20 classes a week, entered the industry in 1988 from a dance background
Mia Davies	23, English, White British, married woman with no children, but 6 months pregnant	YMCA gym instructor NVQ II (2001)	Sometime Pump FX, but has not qualified	Gym instructor in private adult-only hotel-based gym	Place of employment	NA – part of job description	Shared classes with others in the gym, but not since becoming pregnant

Samuel Brown	30, English, White British, living as married man with 2 young step-daughters	City and Guilds gym instructor NVQ II (2003), BodyCombat (trained 2005 not yet qualified), Pump FX (2005)	BodyCombat, Pump FX & spinning	Gym instructor in private adult-only hotel-based gym	Place of employment	NA – part of job description	Takes 4-6 classes a week, came into industry after being an office worker
Jade Burnett	32, English, White British, married woman with no children	BAWLA gym instructor NVQ II (1993) BA leisure management (1994), lifeguard (1995), ASA aqua aerobics (1996), YMCA ETM NVQ II (1998), YMCA PT NVQ III (2002), Pump FX (2005)	Freestyle floor & aqua aerobics, boxercise, Pump FX, swimming lessons & first aid training	All done on a freelance basis	Mainly in hotel-based gym with some local authority leisure centre work	£15 per hour in hotel-based gym with £10 for 45 minute class, £9 per hour in local authority leisure centre with £1 extra for every 5 participants over 10 in class	Takes 8-10 classes a week. Became freestyle in 2001 following short career in gym management (all qualifications self-funded)

Bethany Fowkes	52, English, White British, married woman with 25 year old daughter	RSA ETM equivalent to NVQ II (1991), RSA gym instructor NVQ II (1993), Step trained (1995), RSA special populations NVQ III (2001)	Freestyle floor & aqua aerobics, Pump FX, yoga, body conditioning, circuit, stability ball & LBT	All done on a freelance basis	In private adult-only hotel-based gym	£15 an hour, but rises to £20 for yoga and pilates	Takes 17 classes a week but some shared. Started as a hobby in the late 1980s. Became full-time job as a result of a career change. In 1999 became club manager, then became freelance ETM instructor in 2004
Tamara Wall	39, English, White British, married woman with 11 year old daughter & 9 year old son	OCR ETM NVQ II (2002), OCR special populations (2003), Pump FX (2005)	Pump FX, LBT, aqua aerobics & pilates	Casual employee of local authority leisure centre with no contracted hours of work	Local authority leisure centres (x2) plus some private non-paying classes taught at home	£13-£28 an hour depending on numbers, payments increasing at 10, 15 and 20 participants	Takes 10 classes a week, with up to 2 cover classes. Late entrant following childcare responsibilities, but no economic incentive to work

Chelsea Purnell	31, English, White British, divorced woman with two sons, one 10, the other 5	OCR ETM NVQ II (2003), OCR aqua added (2004), Pump & Stomp FX (2005)	Freestyle aqua aerobics, Pump FX, circuits, LBT	Casual employee of local authority leisure centre for half of her classes, freelancer for the remainder	Local authority leisure centre & independent private gym	£12.50 rising to £16.50 when there are more than 8 in a class	Takes 12 classes a week. Began in fitness working behind the bar, began to participate in aerobics classes & then qualified to teach
Brodie Holden	24, English, White British, single woman with no children	Sports and exercise degree (2002), gym instructor NVQ II (2003), BodyPump (2004), Pump FX (2005)	BodyCombat, Pump FX, circuit, abdominals, power walking	Full-time gym instructor/ manager of private adult-only hotel-based gym plus part-time gym instructor at local authority leisure centre	Place of employment (x2)	NA – part of job description	Takes 8 classes a week & provides cover for local authority leisure centre, began working in industry from the age of 18
Jessica Smith	35, English, White British, single woman with no children	ETM NVQ II (1998), BTS modules (1999-2000), Groove FX (2003), Urban Funk (2005)	BodyBalance, BodyCombat, RPM, Groove FX & Urban Funk	Studio and Events Co-ordinator for private adults-only gym	Place of employment	NA – part of job description, but freelancers are paid £18 a class	Takes 14 classes a week. Previously a professional dancer but retired in 1998. Remained in post for 5 years

Rula Thompson	25, Czech, White European, divorced woman with no children	ETM NVQ II (2003), BodyPump & BodyCombat (2003), Stomp FX and Groove FX (2004)	BodyPump, BodyCombat, Freestyle floor aerobics, step, Stomp FX, Groove FX & spinning	Freelancer for a number of venues	Esporta, Dragons, Fitness First & local authority leisure centres (x2)	Ranges from £17.20 to £25.00 for an hour class	Takes 20-25 classes a week, came into industry as hobbyist & sometime basketball player. Began training while au pair
Jordon Watts	43, English, White British, Married with 17 & 21 year children	RSA ETM equivalent to NVQ II (1991), Groove FX (2004), Pump FX (2005)	Freestyle floor aerobics & step, Groove FX & Pump FX	Gym and Studio Manager covering 3 local authority run leisure centres	Place of employment	NA – part of job description	Takes 2-3 classes a week, came into industry 17 years ago from a classically trained ballet background. Started part-time to fit in with the family