

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

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Considerable effort has been devoted to measuring and tracking the incidence, intensity and volume of training (Machin and Wilkinson, 1995; Keep *et al.*, 2003; Spilsbury, 2003; Dearden *et al.*, 2005; DfES *et al.*, 2005: 6-14). All of these studies have attracted the attention of policy-makers. However, they are all based on large scale survey data, with the key variable being whether or not respondents have undertaken or funded training during a specified period of time. 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. 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 (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 will argue 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. In particular, the paper focuses on the delivery of exercise to music (ETM) classes. The paper examines the proposition that – by standardising and branding the product, hence leaving little room for instructor creativity and innovation – ‘pre-choreographed’ exercise programmes have done ‘for exercise what McDonald’s did for hamburgers’ (reported position of the International Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association). These classes are compared with ‘freestyle’ forms of delivery in which instructors have ownership of the product in terms of music selection, the moves made, combinations used and choreography.

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 interviews with a number of stakeholders in the sector. A total of 20 management level interviews have been carried out with health and fitness club operators as well as 14 instructor interviews which, in most cases, have been preceded by participant observation. In addition, the lead author of the paper has also attended and participated in a 2-day fitness convention and a 2-day training event for ETM instructors in order to watch and see how these workers learn.

References

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