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Citation:

Thompson, P and Harding, P (2023) Creativity and Education: The 'Service Model' of Pop Music Songwriting and Production in Action. IASPM Journal, 3 (1). pp. 157-181. ISSN 2079-3871 DOI: [https://doi.org/10.5429/2079-3871\(2023\)v13i1](https://doi.org/10.5429/2079-3871(2023)v13i1)

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# Creativity and Education: The 'Service Model' of Pop Music Songwriting and Production in Action

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## Abstract

Songwriting has been a feature of the PME curriculum for some time now but there are few studies specifically employing contemporary models of songwriting in the classroom (Butler 2014; Bell 2020; Moir & Medbøe 2015; Bennett 2015; Söderman & Folkestad 2006; Gooderson & Henley 2016; Marrington 2016; Anthony, Thompson & Auvinen 2020). This study explored the application of the 'Service Model' for Pop Music, Creativity and Commerce (Thompson and Harding 2019) at Westerdals University in Oslo, with 16 music students and pop music producer, Phil Harding (Kylie Minogue, East 17, Boyzone), acting as both researcher and 'Executive Team Leader' (ETL). The study showed how the input of an industry professional's experience can give students important access to the social interactions of a specific field of pop music production and help them gain a critical understanding of the criteria for selection that operates within it or: 'educating for creativity' (McIntyre et al 2018: 115).

KEYWORDS: songwriting, higher education, creativity, pop music production

## Introduction

Formal popular music education (PME) faces a number of challenges; not least how to sufficiently engage learners in creative tasks that help to develop their skills and knowledge whilst, at the same time preparing them for employment in the: 'seemingly ever-changing dynamic of the industries they hope to work in'

(McIntyre et al 2016: 2). The music industries have undergone significant change over the last three decades and PME is challenged to keep up with, and respond to, these changes to maintain a relevant and comprehensive curriculum.

In the UK, songwriting has been a feature of the PME curriculum for some time now but pop music songwriting and production is still a burgeoning area with a limited number of studies specifically employing contemporary models of songwriting in the classroom (Butler 2014; Bell 2020; Moir & Medbøe 2015; Bennett 2015; Söderman & Folkestad 2006; Gooderson & Henley 2016; Marrington 2016; Anthony, Thompson & Auvinen 2020). A distinct concern within all of these studies is how classroom-based assessments can make the connection to a realistic scenario that songwriters would usually be presented with in the industry, whilst also allowing students to develop their skills and knowledge within a safe and supportive learning environment.

Integrating sociological theories of creativity and cultural production into the design and delivery of educational programs is one way to help meet this challenge (Thompson & McIntyre 2013; Gooderson & Henley 2016). A useful starting point is the term 'creativity', which is often considered to be something mysterious or inexplicable (Boden 1996), or the preserve of gifted geniuses. However, Daniel Halpin (2018) argues that the idea of musical genius has been superseded with a more inclusive view of creativity in which it is acknowledged that creativity is available to everyone if it is encouraged and supported. Contemporary research in this area supports this view and has moved away from focusing solely on individuals and acknowledging the other elements that contribute to creative work. Because of the complex factors that govern creativity, research in this area has shifted towards models of confluence where creativity can be seen to occur through a convergence of multiple factors within a dynamic system of circular causality (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988, 1997, 1999 & 2004). In other words, creativity results from the interaction between all of the various elements within a creative system.

One of the most persuasive and widely used of these systems models is The Systems Model of Creativity (Csikszentmihalyi 1988), which has three distinct but interconnected and co-dependent elements. A domain, which is a knowledge system and cultural matrix; a field, which is a social organization that understands, uses and alters the domain and then an individual or agent. The individual's task as songwriter for example, is therefore to use the domain of songwriting to create something with some form of novelty within it and then present it to the field of songwriting for assessment (McIntyre 2008). If accepted by the field, the individual's contribution becomes integrated into the domain and the system of circular causality can be seen in operation. Although relatively simple on the surface, this creative process is often incredibly complex and requires sufficient time for songwriters to learn the required domain knowledge, which has been shown to be an important factor in the process of songwriting (McIntyre 2001, 2008, 2016; Bennett 2015). For example, in his study of songwriters, Phillip McIntyre (2001) showed that developing knowledge of songwriting, or in his words 'domain acquisition', was important but not enough on its own for a practitioner to be a successful songwriter. He concluded that songwriters also need opportunities to be involved with the field of songwriters, which is the social organization that uses, understands and alters the domain or knowledge system that songwriters are taught.

Educators in formal PME are therefore challenged to provide educational environments and opportunities for creativity to occur, whilst adhering to a formal framework, which typically includes: 'a prescribed learning framework, an organised learning event or package, the presence of a designated teacher or trainer, the award of a qualification or credit, the external specification of outcomes' (Eraut 2000: 114). If students are required to become immersed into a domain of songwriting, and also need to be socialized into its field, where they can learn the mechanisms and criteria for selection of creative work, then the ways in which educators create learning opportunities becomes paramount (Anthony 2015, 2018). Some educators have addressed these concerns in teaching songwriting by introducing constraints. For example, Andrew Krikun and Stephen Ralph Matthews (2019) designed four songwriting assignments that employed different song forms such as AAA narrative song form and the AABA thirty-two-bar song forms. These assignments were developed in response to Bennett's process-based and content-based constraints in which the use of constraints: 'are intended to help students to develop new creativities that may not be common in their personal habitus' (2015: 51). Other educators have broken the process down into phases in order to teach songwriting and production. For example, in the delivery of his Song Machine project, Adam Patrick Bell (2019) introduced a four-phase structured approach which: 'rather than teach the skills associated with production in a piecemeal tool-by-tool fashion, as is common in lecture-based university programs, the Song Machine project is holistic and scaffolded; students learn by producing and doing it (2019: 181).

Another way in which educators can address these issues of supporting the creative process in songwriting pedagogy is by implementing specific songwriting approaches that were, or are, used within specific industry contexts. For example, the most commercially successful pop production team in the UK during the 1980s was Pete Waterman Limited (PWL) and the team of Mike Stock, Matt Aitken and Pete Waterman adopted a complete in-house approach to their productions. This included the staged tasks of songwriting, recording and production and collaboration with artists that fronted the records. This specific model of pop songwriting and production had two central features; firstly, a division of labour amongst the collaborators and secondly, a team leader who consulted, managed and oversaw the process. Previous studies into this particular pop production process at PWL in the 1980s, and P&E Music in the 1990s, framed this phased, structured approach to pop songwriting and production as a 'Service Model' (Thompson and Harding 2019; Harding and Thompson) in which the various personnel who make up the production team such as songwriters, programmers, musicians, lyricists, top liners and a team leader are 'in service' to a client such as a record company. Collaborators go through a series of production stages that include pop songwriting, pop vocal recording, post vocal production and then mixing. Each of these production stages were overseen by a team-leader, who in the example of PWL was Pete Waterman, and he was responsible for managing the team's activity and ensuring the project reached a successful conclusion.

The following study builds upon previous studies of the pop production process at PWL in the 1980s (Thompson and Harding 2019) and at P&E Music in the 1990s (Harding and Thompson 2019) and brings together contemporary research into creativity, education (McIntyre et al 2018) and songwriting pedagogy (Bennett

2015; Krikun & Matthews 2019; Bell 2019) to explore how the implementation of the Service Model of commercial songwriting, within a pedagogical context in HE, can introduce students to the 'field' of pop songwriting and production as well as its 'domain' and thus encourage creativity. Beginning first with an introduction to the context of the study and a framework for creativity, the 'Service Model' is introduced with an overview of how it was adapted and implemented in the classroom context. The study concludes by introducing some of the ways in which these ideas can be applied in the PME curriculum.

## Context

Popular Music Education (PME) is still a burgeoning area within the broader sphere of music education and it is taught across a range of subject areas and departments as varied as sociology and cultural studies as well as music. In his 2014 investigation into the teaching and assessment of songwriting in Higher Education in the UK, Martin Isherwood found that: 'despite the centrality of songwriting to popular music Higher Education, songwriting has established itself in an isolated, unplanned, uncoordinated and organic manner in a range of institutions and programmes' (2014: 9). Because of its multifarious, complex and interactive components, Isherwood questioned whether: 'songwriting is actually just one activity that can be taught as one module rather than as separate subjects: theory, harmony, composition, lyric writing, production, arranging, collaboration, etc. that would possibly deserve more attention and specific stand-alone modules' (ibid.). Berklee College of Music in the USA is one of the few institutions that address Isherwood's point and, in their Songwriting Bachelor of Music program, offer a range of classes such as 'Arranging for Songwriters', 'Advanced Lyric Writing' and 'Harmony' for a more comprehensive approach to learning the practices of songwriting (Berklee College of Music 2021: online).

In a similar way to Pamela Burnard (2012), Joe Bennett argues that songwriting involves multiple 'creativities' (2015) citing seven distinct creative contributions of 'production, instrumental performance, vocal performance, arrangement, melody, lyric and harmony' (ibid.) and uses the term 'Track Imperatives' to define the ways in which they all contribute to the production of a track because: 'recorded popular music has always required these and continues to do so, regardless of how these tasks may be distributed among individuals' (ibid.). Bennett depicts these contributing creativities in Figure 1.

Bennett's insightful work (2015) acknowledges that cultural tradition is an essential part of any creative work because new products that are accepted have a firm grounding in what has come before and: 'true originality evolves as the individual goes beyond what others had done before' (Weisberg in Sternberg 1988: 173). And so, in order to create something new, it is first necessary to acquire knowledge of what came before. Learning a cultural tradition's language, symbol system, rules, skills and techniques that make up the content of a particular domain, is a process called 'domain acquisition' (McIntyre 2012) or 'domain immersion' (Bennett 2015). Bennett's study explored the ways in which domain immersion of songwriting could be factored into curriculum planning and delivery in order to deal with issues of value in student songwriting. He posits that: 'A free-for-all

songwriting curriculum where all songs were valued regardless of their content or quality would clearly be meaningless as a learning experience' (2015: 41) and suggests that constraint is a necessary aspect of a curriculum in order to nurture creativity (ibid.).

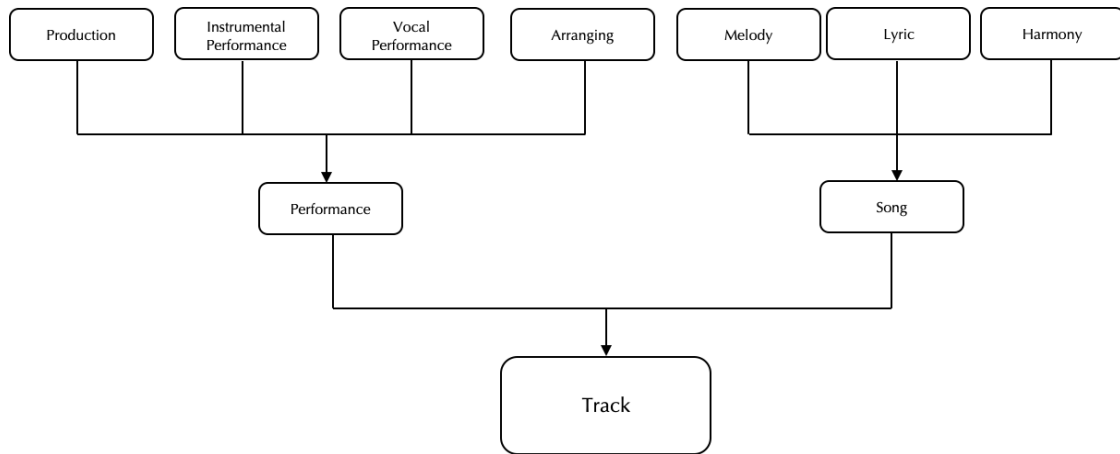


FIGURE 1. Track Imperatives: Creative Activities Leading to a Track (Bennett 2015: 45).

The process of 'domain immersion' can take many forms both inside and outside formal education (Thompson & McIntyre 2013). Contemporary formal PME programs typically teach elements of contemporary western songs, their structure and form (i.e. verse chorus, middle eight etc.), their lyrics and lyrical themes, instrumentation and arrangement and so, students can acquire knowledge and an understanding of previous pop songs to learn the content and rules of pop music's domain.<sup>1</sup> This could take the form of a course, module or, in the case of Berklee College of Music, an entire program. However, because of the structured nature of formal PME, it can emphasize 'domain immersion'; that is the transfer of domain-specific knowledge to the individual (Jorgensen 1997). Although this is useful for the formal delivery and assessment of Popular Music concepts and practices, it can limit creativity (McIntyre, 2012). In other words, formal education can focus a little too much on the delivery or transference of a particular symbol/knowledge system to the learner (Jorgensen 1997) and, in doing so, may overlook the importance of teaching the mechanisms and criteria that govern the selection of creative work.

The field is the social organization in a given area that can be seen as the gatekeepers to a particular domain and: 'this social organisation is able to assess, reject and accept novel ideas, products or designs. It is this social organisation that mediates the process of music production' (Thompson & McIntyre 2013: online). Crucially, the field is just as important in the system of creativity as the domain and the agent:

No matter how gifted a person is, he or she has no chance to achieve anything creative unless the right conditions are provided by the field...it is possible to single out seven major elements in the social milieu that help make creative contributions possible: training, expectations, resources, recognition, hope, opportunity and reward. Some of these are direct responsibilities of the field,

others depend on the broader social system (Csikszentmihalyi 1997: 330).

In the context of PME, the field is the set of experts who evaluate the knowledge base (the domain) and: 'in this instance, teachers are the main focus of the field although some industry practitioners and student peers, as well as administrators and technical support, also act as members of this specific educational field' (McIntyre et al. 2018: 130). In addition to learning the content and rules of pop music's domain, songwriters and producers must also be able to identify the mechanisms and criteria that govern the selection of particular pop songs by the field (Csikszentmihalyi 1996: 47). A songwriter's field includes their:

peers, members of the recording and publishing arm of the industry, operatives within the live performance arena (McIntyre 2003) and the various functionaries of management, with each of them deploying degrees of social, cultural, symbolic and economic capital (Bourdieu 1993) in the form of networks, contacts, demonstrable skills, awards, sales figures and contracts with financial imperatives attached. Many working in these areas are cultural intermediaries (Negus 1996: 62) existing within specific institutional structures (McIntyre 2016: 53).

And so, teaching songwriting must also involve an opportunity for songwriting students to learn the ways in which new songs are judged, accepted or rejected. Phillip McIntyre et al. have demonstrated how these opportunities can be implemented within a Systems Centred Learning (SCL) model. The model overlays the elements of student, which is the choice-making agent; the course, which holds the body of knowledge, cultural matrix and symbol system; and the field, which is the teacher or lecturer with expert knowledge who offers vital critique on students' creative contributions. The SCL model is shown in Figure 2.

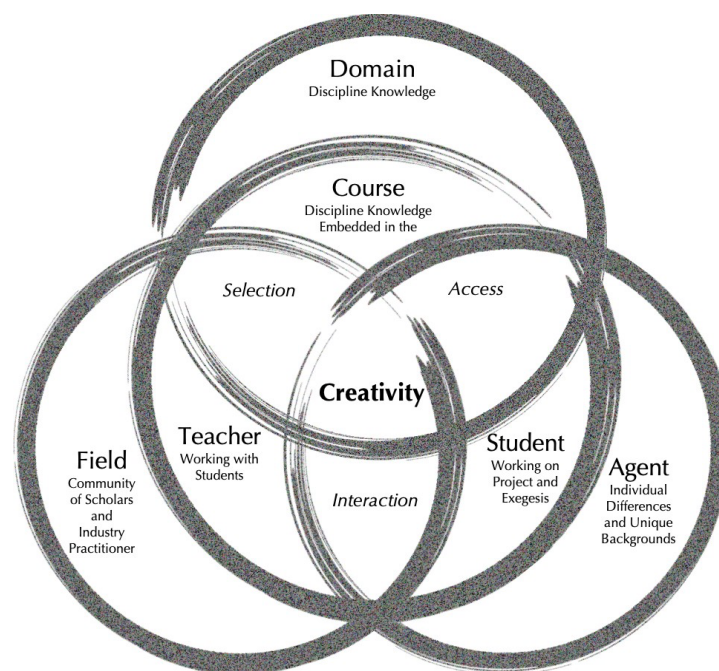


FIGURE 2. 'Systems Centred Learning Model' (McIntyre et al. 2018: 113).

McIntyre et al. argue that the model is not prophetic, rather it highlights the conditions that are necessary for creativity to occur and, importantly, without these conditions then creativity is unlikely to happen. They argue that: 'what we are doing is setting the conditions for creativity and allowing the dynamic actions of the systems to afford the emergence of creativity in this educational setting, hence we are educating for creativity' (ibid.: 115).

In his studies of songwriters, Phillip McIntyre (2007) showed that developing knowledge of songwriting, or in his words 'domain acquisition', was important but not enough on its own for a practitioner to be a successful songwriter. He concluded that songwriters also need opportunities to be involved with the field of songwriters, which is the social organization that uses, understands and alters the domain or knowledge system that songwriters are taught. Joe Bennett concurs and argues that the: 'curriculum, then, must engender four things: increased domain immersion, an ability to be self-critical and edit work, genre-agnostic creative freedom, and the building of an improved portfolio of work.' (2015: 47) If students are required to become immersed into a domain of songwriting, and also need to be socialized into its field, where they can learn the mechanisms and criteria for selection of creative work, then the ways in which educators design their curricula around these ideas becomes paramount (Anthony 2015, 2018).

A systems centred approach to creative activities such as songwriting then, can address some of the difficulties of curriculum design within the formal structures of PME (Dylan Smith et al. 2017; Moir et al. 2019) and, instead of focusing on a student's ability to recall, or reproduce, parts of the domain then, the student's interaction with the field can encourage creativity to occur.

## The Service Model for (Pop Music) Creativity and Commerce

Outside of the classroom, the contemporary system of music-making in commercial pop music usually involves a dedicated production team that comprises an array of personnel that including music producers, songwriters, programmers and musicians (Harding 2020). Commercial songwriting models introduced by the Brill Building and Motown in the USA during the 1950s and 1960s continued into the 1970s and 1980s in the United Kingdom, the most commercially successful of which was Pete Waterman Limited (PWL), who produced a large number of records with artists such as Kylie Minogue, Rick Astley and Dead or Alive, amongst others. The production team of Mike Stock, Matt Aitken and Pete Waterman became known to those in the industry as the 'Hit Factory' because of their unrivalled commercial success throughout the 1980s. PWL adopted a complete in-house approach to their productions, which included the tasks of songwriting, recording and production.

PWL's model of songwriting and production practices were used by P&E Music in the 1990s who produced pop acts such as Boyzone and East 17, and also employed: 'electronic or computer-based instrumentation with a distinct division of labour, particularly in writing top lines (melodies), lyrics or the programming of electronic instruments...[retaining] the complete 'in-house' style of writing and production from earlier commercially successful models' (Thompson 2019: 50). Previous studies into the pop production processes of PWL (Thompson & Harding: 2019; Harding & Thompson 2019) have framed the staged, in-house approach to songwriting and production adopted by PWL and P&E as a 'Service Model for Pop



Music, Creativity and Commerce', which begins with the team leader, ideally a person with proven economic, cultural and the symbolic capital in the domain of pop music. In the case of PWL this was Pete Waterman, and for P&E Music it was Tom Watkins (See Watkins 2016 for an in-depth biography), both of them had an entrepreneurial outlook and evidence of commercial success in the music and media industries. They needed interpersonal skills to successfully deal with commercial clients at the front end of projects, to persuade them that their team is the best suited to deliver to the client's specific requirements and requests, and demonstrating a working knowledge of the pop music domain and a desire and ability to fulfill the client's brief with their creative team of agents (producer, programmers, musicians, lyricists, singers and engineers). Once this initial hurdle is successfully navigated and budgets agreed, the individual stages of the service model outlined below were usually progressed systematically:

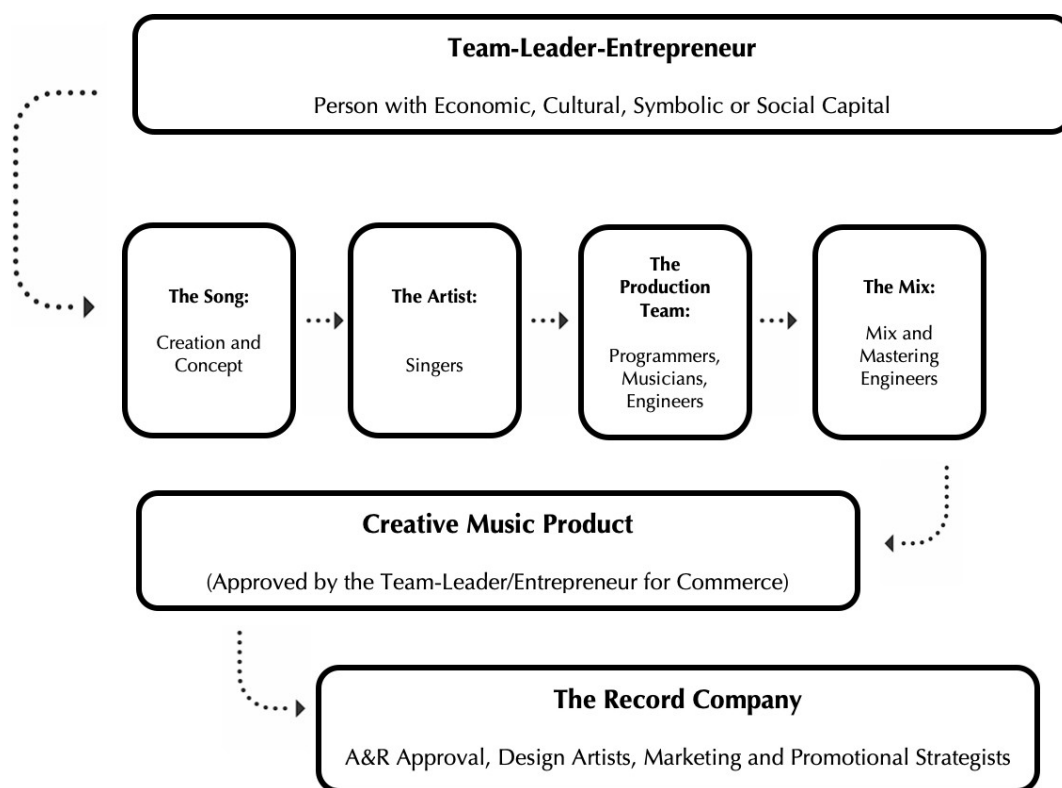


FIGURE 3. The Service Model for Pop Music, Creativity and Commerce.

The service model begins with The Song and it is vital for the team leader and the production team to have the confidence, knowledge and skills to creatively contribute to the writing and production of the song. If there is any doubt about the song, whether written by the team or presented by the client then the project should ideally be declined. Taking on the production or remixing of a song that shows little commercial potential could lead to issues in the final stages of the project, which may result in multiple revisions because the client remains unhappy. Having already consulted with the client on their views and suggestions for tempo, key, arrangement, musical direction and specific track references such as other tracks at

a similar tempo and with a similar groove, the team leader spearheads the next stage of pre-production in which they are responsible for presenting the music and rhythm programmers' specific musical references.

The next stages involve vocal Sessions. A full pop production will always require vocal sessions and sometimes there is a need to add extra backing vocals to a remix where the team leader observes that they are lacking on the original production. Two distinct vocal sessions occur in this 'Service Model' example; the first is really part of the pre-production in which a hired session vocalist maps out the team's vocal concept for the artist. It typically begins with a guide lead vocal to enable a full backing vocal arrangement to be created under the guidance of the team's main musical arranger and team leader. All harmony-backing parts are double tracked at least once to allow for stereo panning. The second session is the all-important lead vocal day with The Artist. Ideally within this model, this day is a short and efficient creative 3–6-hour session using the pre-recorded backing vocals (especially on the choruses) to guide the artist's phrasing and timing. Here, the creative recording team concentrates on attaining the best possible performance from the artist, focusing on character, dynamics and emotion with the added knowledge that performances can be re-tuned and re-timed in the post vocal editing sessions.

Once the lead vocals have been compiled, tuned and timed, the Production Team, specifically the music programmer and rhythm programmer, provide the best possible backdrop to the vocals, enhancing hooks with keyboards, guitars and orchestration, grooves with drum fills and breaks in order to highlight the dynamics of the song and vocals.

The penultimate stage of production in the model involves completing The Mix and then Mastering it for commercial release. This is where each of the various tracks of audio are blended to make a coherent final mix (often stereo) and then prepared for commercial release. There is an example of the Harding 'Top-Down Mix' system in 'Pop Music Production' (Harding 2017, 2020) that Harding has used since his time at PWL and it is recommended for this service model of pop music production; specifically because it places an emphasis on vocals as the starting point for the mixing process. This is the process of beginning with the central element of pop music, the vocals, and then working 'down' to the remaining elements. Mastering of the client-approved mix is normally carried out by an independent mastering engineer who is not part of the production team but has cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984) in the field of pop music and knowledge in the pop music domain.

The final stage in the service model is the delivery of the Creative Music Product to the client. Again, this is a two-stage process; once to approve the final mix and then again to approve the mastered product. Through his experience of working at PWL, P&E and PJS, Harding found that at his stage of the process, there can be disagreements and it is the team leader's responsibility to steer the team through the potential myriad of client and artist requests for mix adjustments and recalls to a successful outcome.

One of the main aims of the Service Model is to create a systematic structure that will satisfy the commercial client, whether that is a record label, manager or self-funding artist with an end product that matches their initial requests. That does not mean to say that the model guarantees a hit record, as was claimed in 'The Manual: How To Have A Number One The Easy Way' (Cauty & Drummond, 1988, 1989).

The service model is closer to the Lamont Dozier description of how Tamla Motown ran like clockwork where: 'we worked constantly. Our work ethic was spot on. We wrote all the time from nine o'clock in the morning' (Barber 2011: 57). Implementing a commercially successful model of songwriting and production in combination with a systems centred approach then can help educators to offer a 'profession-based' experience that can be formally delivered within the classroom (King 2016) whilst also educate students: 'for creativity' (McIntyre et al. 2018: 115).

## Study Design

A Practitioner-Based Enquiry (PBE) methodology was employed in this study where the practitioner, Phil Harding, undertook the role of Executive Team Leader (ETL) and was also one of the researchers. Harding began his career at the Marquee Studios, London, engineering for acts such as The Clash, Killing Joke, Toyah and Matt Bianco. During the 1980s, Phil was chief mix engineer for Stock Aitken Waterman (PWL Studios), working with acts such as Dead or Alive, Mel & Kim, Bananarama, Rick Astley, Pet Shop Boys and Kylie Minogue. In the 1990s, Phil and Ian Curnow ran P&E Music Studios from The Strongroom Studio complex, producing hits for East 17, Boyzone and 911. Phil's recent team, PJS, have completed mixes and productions for Holly Johnson, Samantha Fox, Belinda Carlisle, Curiosity and Mel & Kim.

A PBE methodology was specifically implemented in this research environment because of its utility in practitioner-led studies such as teaching (e.g. Burton & Bartlett 2005). In addition, a fundamental affordance of PBE is that it employs the 'insider's perspective' within the research and can present useful enquiry into the researcher's own practices, as well as the practices of others (Murray & Lawrence 2000). This methodology helped Harding as the practitioner to move: 'towards the acquisition of intellectual autonomy, improved judgement making and enhanced technical competence' (Murray & Lawrence 2000: 10). In this case, it allowed Harding to reflect on the Service Model from earlier incarnations at PWL Studios in the 1980s and then P&E Music in the 1990s and the ways in which this could be adapted for educational contexts. The PWL core model for example revolved around team-leader Pete Waterman, which was supported by the main songwriters, musicians and producers Mike Stock and Matt Aitken. For most projects, the team also included recording engineers, mix engineers, additional keyboard players and backing singers. This type of model reflected working practices at the time and 'The Service Model for Pop Music, Creativity and Commerce' described earlier in this study has been adopted by Harding's current PJS Music production whose members are Julian Wiggins (music programmer and arranger) and Simon Dalton (rhythm programmer and arranger), with Harding as Team Leader and mix engineer.

Because Harding was undertaking the role of ETL and researcher, the original model was adapted for this study (see next section) so he could guide the student teams with his knowledge and experience of working on a pop production client brief. Participating in the activity, and acting as ETL, rather than Team Leader, afforded Harding the opportunity to take a more holistic view of the process and observe all of the student teams at different times, rather than solely working with one. In this case, a PBE approach provided some valuable insight into the process

of delivering the Service Model of Production, Commerce and Creativity in HE, where more common researcher-as-outsider approaches may have not (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 2009).

The PBE approach involved a number of methods that were implemented to gather data during the weekend-long mini course with a group of 16 students at Westerdals University in Oslo, Norway. Methods included ethnographic approaches such as direct participation, participant-observation, sound recording, in-situ and unstructured interviews and field notes. Direct participation provided the opportunity to include personal thoughts and reflections without structured prompting or questioning at various points during the sessions and helped to document some of the interactions between the student production teams in real time. In both instances, session notes, field notes and the resultant sound recordings produced by the production teams proved to be a useful asset in illustrating the creative process and connecting it to broader research in this area. Finally, industry feedback from Carl Cox of Prolific Music was sought on the four final productions. This allowed the students to gain insight from other industry practitioners and representatives who were not directly involved with their productions and helped students to measure their work in relation to commercial market standards (or the mechanisms and criteria for selection that operate within this field of pop production).

## Adapting The 'Service Model' for (Pop Music) Creativity and Commerce for HE

In order to implement the Service Model in action within Higher Education, the Service Model was first adapted to address some of the constraints of the educational context. Firstly, in order to undertake the production process, the cohort of students needed to have a variety of knowledge and understanding of pop music production; some technical and some musical. The selected students at Westerdals University were studying BA Popular Music and BA Music Production; half were production students and half were performance students. This allowed the array of tasks involved to be completed in-house where necessary. Secondly, rather than a single production team, the students were formed into four production teams by the course leader, consisting of four members; each with their own (volunteer) team leader, keyboard programmer, secondary musician (guitar or keys) and a lyricist / top-liner.

Harding then assumed the role of ETL who could provide leadership and guidance to the team leaders of each group. Finally, as the ETL, Harding conducted an initial briefing session to help the newly formed teams understand the criteria and mechanisms of selection in the field with the following objectives:

- Define the tempo and key for the song.
- Introduce recent commercially successful pop songs that can be used as references for the selected production style.
- Introduce alternative commercially available pop songs as additional references.
- Illustrate a current pop song arrangement to follow as closely as

possible.

- Play a reference song and production of the 'target' artist as a guide reference for the singer's character, style and vocal key range.

The 'Service Model' for Pop Music, Creativity and Commerce was adapted to fit both the time-frame and the educational context. Harding led the groups through each of the model's stages as shown below:

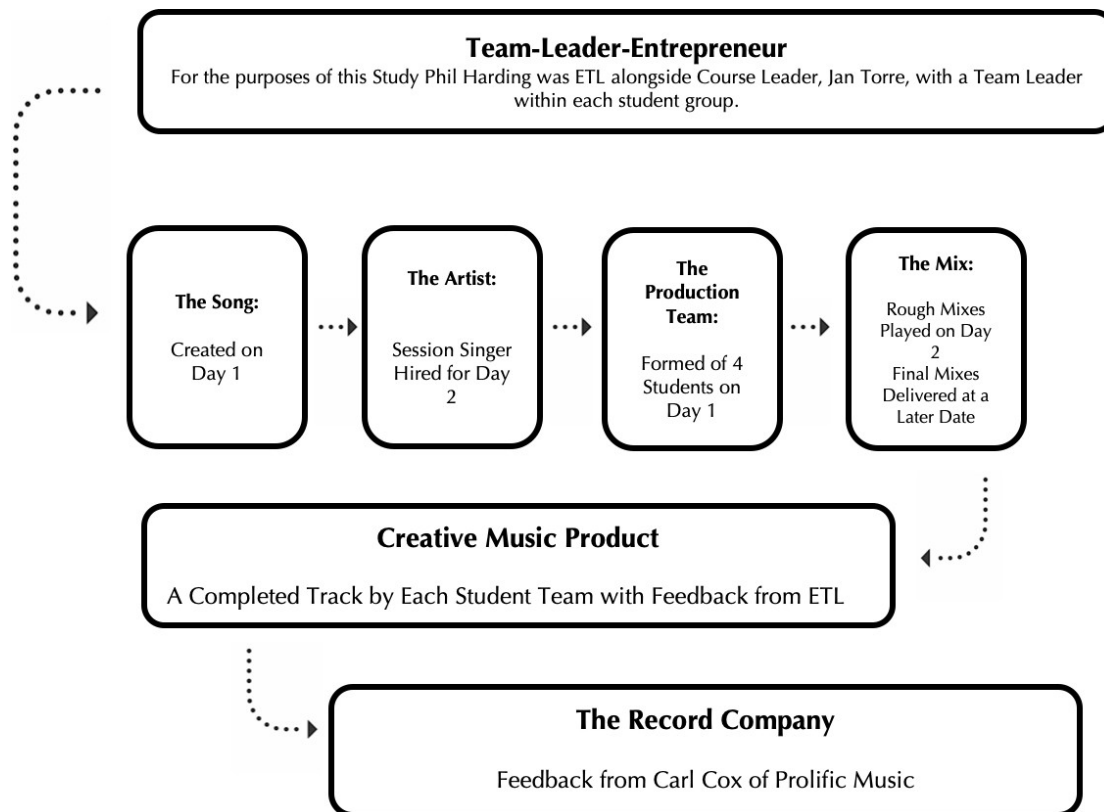


FIGURE 4. The Adapted 'Service Model' for Pop Music, Creativity and Commerce.

The sessions in this example took place across 48 hours at the recording studios in the Westerdals School of Arts, Communication and Technology over a weekend in February 2015. In keeping with the PBE approach, the following sections include anecdotes, thoughts, observations from Harding as the practitioner in first-person.<sup>2</sup>

## The Service Model for HE in Action—Introducing the Domain

In order to be creative, creative practitioners must first internalise the domain of pop music and pop music production, as this is essential knowledge. The domain of pop music is expansive so for ease of analysis, the cultural matrix and symbol system of pop has been divided into three broad areas: musical, technical and cultural.

Firstly, the musical area of the domain in pop is centered on the contemporary western song, its structure and form (verse chorus, middle eight, outro), its lyrics

and lyrical themes, its instrumentation and arrangement. A number of these elements, especially form, have undergone notable developments during the 2010s (See Appen & Frei-Hauenschild 2015 for an extended discussion of form). Pop music producers must acquire knowledge of all of these essential parts of the domain. Secondly, the technical part of the domain includes the vast array of recording formats, recording and music technologies. This essential knowledge area also includes a working knowledge of computers, samplers, microphones and monitoring equipment and the ability to use all of these in combination.

Thirdly, the socio-cultural area of the domain has developed in response to the environment of the recording studio in pop music production. This relates to the social and cultural etiquette of collaborating with artists, how to communicate with them, their managers and their record company A&R representatives about musical and technical ideas. Finally, the commercial area of the domain includes remuneration systems of pop production, royalties and the different types of business deals that exist within the music industry. Pop music producers need to develop an understanding of these in order to continue to operate financially within the field of pop production.

The students at the University had acquired parts of the domain of pop music production formally, through engaging with their programme of study, and informally outside of education. However, to refresh, update and contextualize the students' domain knowledge, I delivered a session introducing the Service Model and various elements of the domain of pop music production. This intervention continued the students' domain acquisition; specifically, by introducing the constraints (and affordances) of structuring pop music in a particular way. Specifically, I demonstrated:

- The elements of a commercially successful, contemporary pop song in terms of sound or aesthetics, highlighting some of the typical song arrangements or formulas of pop music.
- I played pop songs such as 'I Found You' (2013) by The Wanted as an example of the current pop production arrangement requirement of a 16-20 bar chorus with hook variations on the same theme. This chorus length has been dominant in chart pop music throughout the 21st Century and highlights a significant difference between pop of the last two decades of the 20th Century and now.
- I played a number of examples such as 'I Found You' (2013) by The Wanted and 'Story of My Life' by One Direction and 'Sorry' by Justin Bieber. The choruses in these tracks, all popular at the time, contain a substantial dynamic uplift during bars 9-16, achieved by rhythm elements or expanded keyboard arrangements and usually a variation of the vocal hooks and lyrics. In other words, I wanted to show that the 16-bar chorus could be split into two sections with a clear distinction between bars 1-8 compared to bars 9- 16.
- I played some chord progression examples such as 'Better the Devil You Know' by Kylie Minogue. This illustrated the style of song chords and movements requested by the project client.
- I also played a current Tina Charles song example to show how my PJS

team have adapted these above references into a new song with novelty by rearranging the domain that is suitable for today's market and client expectations/requests.

It is important to note here that the musical examples discussed above come from a broadly similar mainstream, Anglo-American commercial pop musical culture and this relates to the specificity of the client-brief given to the students (see next section). A brief could be redesigned for a K-pop, Latin-pop or Hip-hop production and then the ETL could include musical examples from these pop music styles to introduce domain-specific elements.

## The Service Model for HE in Action—Expectations of the Field and A Client Brief

At the same time as continuing the students' domain acquisition, I also introduced students to the mechanisms and criteria for selection that operate within the field of pop music production. Students on the course hadn't previously worked on a project like this; specifically, one that involved a client brief, with a chosen artist and with clear requirements from a record company. In this way, the field is brought more tangibly and explicitly into the University environment as it introduces the students to the mechanisms of this field and helps to socialize them into the criteria for selection that operates within it. This often takes the form of a 'client brief', but it is not always possible for the industry music producer involved with the brief to oversee the student sessions.

The field's criteria were introduced through a real client brief that had previously been submitted to PJS productions for a female artist. Each of the student compositions had to adhere to the following:

- The tempo was set at 128 bpm.
- The key was set to suit this specific female artist—D major.
- A recent UK boy band (The Wanted) pop hit was presented as a useful reference that illustrated modern production style.
- A hit song with a different famous female singer (Kylie Minogue) was presented as a reference song style.
- A song arrangement was presented to follow as closely as possible.
- A reference song that had been written by Harding's current songwriting team (PJS Productions) for the same female artist to illustrate the singer's character but it was underlined that this song was not to be copied.

The final stage before songwriting and production began was to introduce the required 'pop form', which: "describes the large-scale musical structure of a composition" (Sloan & Harding 2020: 47). The pop form and structure for this version of the service model, including the bar lengths of each section, are shown in Table 1.

After continuing the students' domain knowledge, introducing the expectations

of the brief and the target structure of the song, myself and Jan-Torre then set the groups off to work in four separate studios. My role as ETL involved using my tacit knowledge to routinely check on song progress during day one with the students and steering the teams toward the required pop song arrangement.

TABLE 1. 21st-Century Pop Song Arrangement Formula.

<b>Section</b>	<b>Intro</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Verse</b>	<b>Pre-Chorus</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Chorus</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Verse</b>	<b>Pre-Chorus</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Chorus</b>	<b>Middle-8</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Chorus</b>
<b>Duration</b>	8 bars	8 bars	5 bars	16-20 bars	8 bars	5 bars	16-20 bars	8 bars	16-20 bars
<b>Requirements</b>	Reflecting the chorus hooks		4 bars plus 1 bar drop that rises into the chorus	Hook variations enter on bar 9	Will need a dynamic rhythm or vocal variation to verse 1	4 bars plus 1 bar gap ending with a rise into the chorus		Variation of the Chorus or Pre-chorus	Hook variations x 2.

On day one, I spent the majority of my time with the students and encouraging the teams to write a 4-bar pre-chorus with an extra 1-bar drop at the end of it, which rises into the chorus. This is then followed by the extended 16-20-bar chorus with different hook variations, especially by bar 9 as the chorus moves into its second half. This required rotating through each of the four studios and encouraging each team to 'stay on track' with the song arrangement formula.

Feedback to the students on day one was well received but the most common issue was that the songwriting teams did not include the extra bar at the end of the pre-chorus and just before the chorus. Keeping a continuous flow of feedback and direction throughout day one helped me to assimilate more of the 'client' role in representing their requirements. In order to maintain separation between me and the team, all feedback and comments were directed to the Team Leader so that it could be actioned by them. Song 1 'Stand Up' (see the discography for song links) for example, demonstrated how this feedback was implemented, showing the 4-bar pre chorus and the dynamic flow created between the pre-chorus and the chorus with the 1 bar drop. In addition, 'Stand Up' also shows evidence of an extra hook entering on bar 9 in the second half of the chorus with the introduction of the 'Woh Oh' backing vocals. Song 3, 'I Can't Wait' also contains a good example of hook variation on bar 9 of the chorus, with both a rise in the vocal register and a change of lyrical hook. 'I Can't Wait' also delivers an excellent example of introducing a third variation of chorus hook at bar 17 of the chorus. Day one concluded by setting the task to each group's topliners to complete the lyrics for the chorus and at least one verse by the following morning. This was essential so that day 2 could begin without delay, and the session vocalist could begin recording their parts.

The second day involved a series of two-hour sessions for each group with a session vocalist performing their songs. As ETL, I took the role of executive producer for those vocal recording sessions, with the students engineering and feeding the lyrics and melodies to the vocalist. The time restraint on these vocal sessions was



tight, so I assumed the role of ‘communicator’ to the session vocalist to maintain an efficient workflow. This introduced the students to the domain of professional communication between the control room and the recording space occupied by the session vocalist. It allowed me to demonstrate the need for expediency and clear messaging from the control room personnel to the vocalist, in a manner that would produce a finalised lead vocal and vocal harmonies within the 2-hour time frame allotted to each team.

These kind of fast-moving pop vocal sessions require a tremendous amount of energy and performance input from the singer. As four songs were completed in 8 hours, each with lead vocals and harmonies, the students were notably astonished that this could be achieved professionally in such a short period. Day two concluded in the evening with a valuable playback session involving all of the student teams listening to each other’s songs. I initiated peer to peer feedback between the groups by engaging the comments of course leader Jan Torre and another course lecturer (Arve Furset) who kindly offered to join this session as a “fresh pair of ears”.

I gave feedback on each of the tracks and I recorded the following observations in my fieldnotes:

‘Stand Up’ – This track exemplifies the dynamic effect of the 4-bar pre-chorus with the rhythm drop on bar 4 creating a wonderful uplift into the rousing pop chorus. The extra chorus vocal chant that enters on bar nine caused spontaneous applause among the peers present and a positive discussion took place at the end of the song playback. The student group agreed that this pop form (Sloan & Harding 2020), suggested by my brief 48 hours earlier, was a revelation to most of them. The four members of this student team said that they had never enjoyed a project so much and the opportunity to work with myself, and the professional session singer on day two, was very informative toward furthering their individual skillsets and their enthusiasm toward future group collaborations.

‘Whole Again’ – This is another example of effective song dynamics that can be created by the pre-chorus, bar 4 rhythm drop out. This student group were easy for me to work with, there was a clear understanding from the keyboard programmer of what was required to match the client brief.

‘Free Your Mind’ – This was the most difficult group of students for me to work with. They resisted a lot of elements within the brief and were the last team to have a complete song structure at the end of day one, the last to complete their lyrics and melody on day two, and therefore the last to record the session singer. Nevertheless, they achieved a better song intro than the other groups and this song overall is more contemporary than the other three and this could be due to the top liner’s resistance to the direct pop form of the brief. The chorus hook and title are not the first line of the section – as suggested by myself, but, despite this, the rhythm drop out of the first eight bars of the chorus is typical of the era, and the overall direction of the song is very creative.

‘I Can’t Wait’ – It was quite a struggle with this student group to get them to understand the concept of the extra fifth bar at the end of the pre-chorus. It took some coaxing from myself and the course leader to encourage the keyboard/programmer in this group to insert that bar. Once he did, the rest of the group (especially the top liner) understood the dynamic purpose of this. Once

again, the extended sixteen bar chorus features an uplift from bar nine by introducing a vocal harmony and an extra keyboard part to lift the second half of the chorus. This was another key part of the original brief to match the songs to the 2015 chart examples that I presented to the group: 'Story of My Life' by One Direction and 'I Found You' by The Wanted.

The students were as surprised as me that, although the four pop songwriting and production teams each had identical reference points and project missions, they all produced unique and differing results. This is a useful example of group creativity (Sawyer 2003) combined with human interaction (Harding, 2020) and the evidence can be heard when the four songs are compared against each other (please see the discography for song links).

## The Service Model for HE in Action—A&R and Asynchronous Feedback

Included in the final stage of the 'The Service Model for Pop Music, Creativity and Commerce' (Figure 3) is where the representative from the record company, usually the A&R person, approves the final creative production. In adapting the model for an educational context, an industry representative, Carl Cox, was asked to take part as an external industry entrepreneur. He is someone who has specialized in the commercial pop and dance music fields since the 1990s and has consulted on re-release packages for Cherry Red Records for artists such as Samantha Fox and Mandy Smith, both of whom are former PWL-produced artists (Harding 2010). Through Cox's own label, Prolific Records, he has overseen releases with classic pop/dance artists as Amanda Lear ('Brief Encounters Reloaded' CD album) and Tina Charles ('Your Love Is My Light' CD single). These experiences with commercial pop production have raised Carl Cox's cultural capital to the point that he signed 1970s pop/dance diva 'Tina Charles' to Prolific Music in 2011 for a subsequent album release.

Feedback from Carl Cox of Prolific Music on the four productions allowed students to gain insight from an industry practitioner on how their final productions are viewed in terms of commercial market standards and expectations. He provided feedback on each of the tracks via email on 19th March 2015, beginning with the overall comment relating to how they met the brief for his artist Tina Charles: 'All songs are remarkably good compositions and I have really enjoyed listening to them. It goes without saying that each group have really met the brief you had set to write a suitable song for Tina' (Cox, Personal Communication 2015). Cox then fed back on each of the students tracks beginning with 'Stand Up' and stated:

Any song with a succession of 'woh-ohs' in the chorus is always guaranteed to strike a chord with dance audiences. That is invariably the hook on this number. The song encapsulates the anthem sound to a tee and would work well as a high octane fuelled dance track. The repetition of the 'stand up, stand up' line sung in counter with the 'woh-oh' makes for a very infectious and memorable chorus, essential for any song. So, this group has made sure that those base elements are there. The minimalist verse serves to give more impact on the chorus and this is a commercially very sound technique to use. The breakdown chorus with the hand claps works to great effect here also'

(ibid).

Cox had the following comments for 'You Make Me Whole Again':

A great soul infused pop song. It's catchy and has a nice hook with the refrain between the end of the chorus start of the verse. The song itself is nicely balanced. The stripped back verse building up to the chorus works tremendously well and is another nice hook. The kick drum and toms are another let down on the production. But that is the only issue really.' (ibid).

Cox commented on 'Free Your Mind' with the following:

This is another great dance inspired track. The chorus on this however, is lacking somewhat. Of all the songs, the guys who have written this have created a more standard intro. It has the best intro of all four songs. The others have quite sudden, even abrupt intros. This song has a great structure too. From a commercial viability perspective, the foundations are certainly there (ibid.).

And finally, Cox fed back to the students who wrote and produced 'I Can't Wait':

Of the four songs this is by far my favourite! It's brilliant and literally leaps from the speakers the moment you play it. From that point it's as instant as 'Bisto' and hooks you right into it! I've had this on multiple repeats and still haven't got bored of it. The verses are pulled back a little, with a hint of the intensity that awaits in the chorus. The chorus then echoes that same euphoria that "Better The Devil You Know" does. To me it's the audio equivalent of an explosion! An explosion of sounds! This song oozes commercial potential! Either as a dance track or with a re-arrangement to sound more like Megan Trainor's recent songs...I would really like to publish this song and record it with Jade [another Prolific Music artist] (ibid.).

## The Creative Process and the Service Model

There were two distinct types of field interaction throughout the course of this project; synchronous and asynchronous. Synchronous field interactions were evident whilst the students were in the midst of the creative process and within each stage of the Service Model. Asynchronous field interactions took place after the students had completed their productions and an industry representative, Carl Cox, offered written critical feedback on each of the tracks.

Synchronous field interactions are an important part of the creative process as they offer in-the-moment feedback on particular creative ideas or actions for students. With enough time and experience of working in a particular area, students will eventually imbibe the field's selection criteria to the extent that they can: 'give feedback to themselves, without having to wait to hear from experts' (Csikszentmihalyi 1997: 116). As this early stage of their creative development in pop music production however, synchronous field interactions were key providing advice and critical comments to particular members of the production team.

It initially took a few hours for the groups to settle into what was required of them

and even though the chosen keyboard programmers displayed signs of reluctance to keep the musical ingredients to musical loops of only a four-chord cycle, their peers within the group offered suggestions that indicated to Harding a good understanding of the brief and their team goal. Phil Harding and course director, Jan Torre, rotated between the four teams and offered suggestions and comments on the group's initial musical ideas and arrangements with a particular emphasis on the 1 bar stop at the end of the pre-chorus to allow the build into the chorus. This 1 bar pause creates an aesthetic opportunity to introduce a major dynamic into the song arrangement, allowing the listener to take a breath before the creator introduces the first major hook of the song. Former UK Performing Rights Society (PRS) Chairman Guy Fletcher has highlighted that 'the most important aspect of writing a successful pop hit is for it to contain dynamics' (Harding 2020). Typically, the musical loops of the verses and choruses should be the same with a musical difference in chord progression introduced for the 4 bar pre-choruses. I then encouraged the top liners to set the chorus melodies to be an inversion higher than the verses to produce an 'uplifting' feeling and hook to suit the domain that the songs were targeted toward.

Throughout the production process the students employed their previous domain knowledge. Their domain knowledge was updated through my analysis of pop song examples, form, arrangement and chord sequences of reference material at the beginning of the process. Interaction with the ETL introduced the students to some of the social expectations of the field of pop music production. (e.g. ETL adopted more of the 'client' role in representing their requirements through constant feedback to the groups, ETL setting tasks such as completing the lyrics for the chorus to the topliners and ETL demonstrating professional modes of interpersonal communication between the production teams and the session vocalist). As a result, the creative ideas and actions of each of the groups emerged as the students (agents) employed their domain knowledge, rearranged it in a novel way and, with the help of the ETL, assessed their contributions with reference to the criteria for selection of the field, which formed a microsystem of creativity (Thompson 2016: 84).

Asynchronous field interactions were also part of the creative process in this project. Rather than offering in-the-moment feedback, asynchronous critical comment provided students a view into the mechanisms operating in the field of pop music production and its criteria for selection once they had finalized their pop productions. Carl Cox's feedback illustrated elements of this filtering Process of the Field and it can be illustrated in operation in this example as Cox selected one of the songs for commercial release. The Systems Centred Learning Model (McIntyre et al. 2018) that incorporates the Adapted Service Model for Pop Music, Creativity and Commerce delivery can then be illustrated as in Figure 5.

Despite the stringent constraints of tempo, key, references and song arrangement, each of the groups produced entirely different tracks (as can be heard at the SoundCloud link to the four songs). This is because creativity in groups: 'manifest emergence—the outcome cannot be predicted, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts' (Sawyer 2003: 185). However, the feedback from the external music industry client, Carl Cox, was useful in showing students that a criteria for selection operates within the field of pop music production and they can use this feedback to evaluate their final productions for their own self-analysis. The ultimate outcome of this process was that Cox commissioned a

master recording of one of the four songs presented, which gave the students in that team the opportunity to experience the process beyond the classroom and enter into negotiations with a UK music industry publisher and production company.

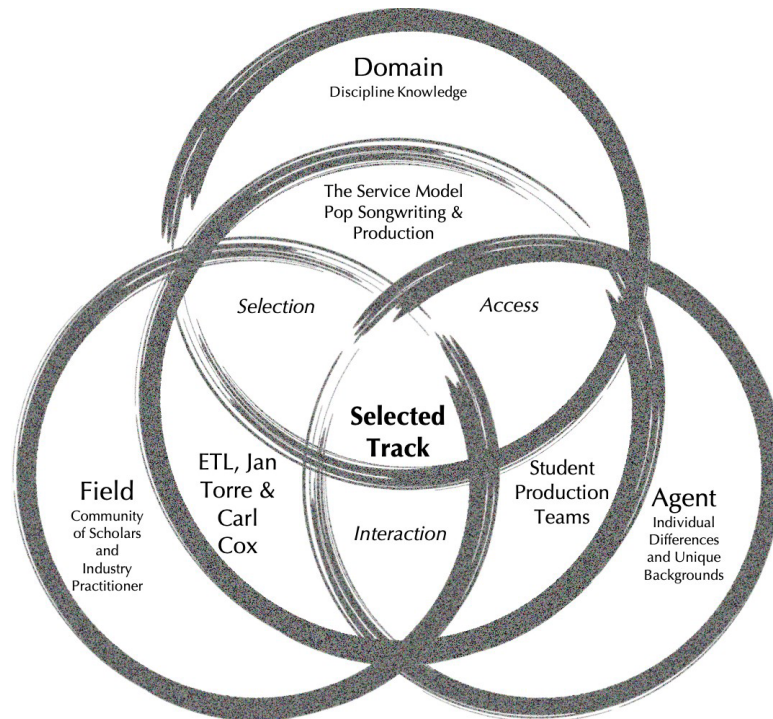


FIGURE 5. Student Centred Learning incorporating the Adapted Service Model for Pop Music, Creativity and Commerce.

## Conclusions, Suggestions and Recommendations

The study built upon previous studies of the pop production process at PWL in the 1980s (Thompson & Harding 2019) and at P&E Music in the 1990s (Harding & Thompson 2019) and brought together contemporary research into creativity, education (McIntyre et al. 2018) and songwriting pedagogy (Bennett 2015; Krikun & Matthews 2019; Bell 2019) to explore how the implementation of the Service Model of commercial songwriting within a pedagogical context in HE could introduce students to the 'field' of pop songwriting and production, as well as its 'domain', and thus encourage creativity. Adopting a Practitioner-Based Enquiry (PBE) approach to this study allowed experienced pop music producer Phil Harding to simultaneously undertake the role of researcher and 'ETL' in order to guide the student teams through each of the Service Model's stages.

Synchronous field interactions during the production of a pop song, where the ETL engaged with participants within the production team, helped to keep the students on track with their productions and offer vital feedback in accepting or rejecting ideas. In this way, the ETL was acting as a representative of the field of pop songwriting and production and reminding students of the criteria for selection of both the client brief and the broader field of pop music. In working to an industry

brief, students also had to employ their domain knowledge, update their domain acquisition with specific examples of Anglo-American pop music and then apply this new knowledge in a novel way. As ETL, Phil Harding helped students to be socialized into the field of pop music production and its expectations by representing and reiterating the client's requirements through constant feedback to the groups, by assessing lyrics and lyrical themes, and by demonstrating professional modes of interpersonal communication between the production teams and the session vocalist.

Asynchronous field interactions were also part of the creative process in this context. Critical feedback from Carl Cox on each of the four compositions allowed students to gain insight from industry practitioners and the criteria for selection that operates within the field. And, as evidenced in his feedback, one student group had rearranged the domain in a novel way, within the constraints of the client brief, enough to be selected by the record company.

There are, of course, a number of limitations within this study as the Service Model is just one example of teaching pop songwriting and production within an educational context. It is also based around one particular staged workflow and relates here to one specific example of Anglo-American commercial pop musical culture with the expectation that an experience practitioner can act as ETL. However, if an experienced practitioner isn't available, we recommend considering the following:

1. If there isn't an experienced industry practitioner in the course team that can act as the executive team leader, a visiting lecturer could be adopted for this project and role as a useful starting point.
2. A live 'Industry Brief' should be adapted for the student teams to work toward – these can be obtained from music publishers, such as the publication 'Songlink', which contains information of signed recording artists that are looking for songs.
3. The ideal option would be to put aside a budget to hire a professional session backing singer. However, if hiring a professional singer isn't an option, perhaps a good vocalist on a related performance course could be called upon by the person running the project.
4. Adopting the Service Model of Pop Music production could allow educators to deliver a project or module across different courses, such as music production and music performance, where students can offer complimentary skillsets needed for the various roles.
5. Industry feedback in asynchronous form was an important factor within this project and this could take the form of a local record company representative or a music publisher contact to offer some useful critique on the students' final productions.

If these five points are taken into consideration, then implementing the Service Model for Pop Music Production is achievable within most HE contexts. In addition, briefs for K-pop, Latin-pop or Hip-hop productions could also be used and then an ETL could include musical examples from these pop music styles to introduce domain-specific elements.

Despite its limitations, this study not only illustrated how to engage learners within an industry-style pop music songwriting and production creative task, but showed how educators can set the conditions for creativity that can allow the dynamic interactions of systems to afford the emergence of creativity. In this case, an ETL's role can give students important access to the social interactions of the field of Anglo-American commercial pop music production throughout the process, which helps them to gain a more critical understanding of the criteria for selection that operates within it. This, in turn, may encourage students to explore the criteria for selection that operates within different cultures of music production, or enable self-producing artists to act as their own ETLs and assess their own creative contributions in relation to the expectations of specific audiences within a range of musical markets. In doing so, educators are further: 'educating for creativity' (McIntyre et al. 2018: 115).

## Endnotes

1. Form is a larger theme within songwriting pedagogy, and PME is still finding ways to usefully codify it (see Appen & Frei-Hauenschild 2015).
2. The four student songs can be found at: <https://soundcloud.com/user-606698363> 'Stand Up', 'You Make Me Whole Again', 'Free Your Mind', 'I Can't Wait'.

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