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### Original Citation

Pulman, Mark (2014) Popular Music Pedagogy: band rehearsals at British universities. *International Journal of Music Education*, 32 (2). pp. 296-310. ISSN 0255-7614

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International Journal of Music Education: Research (in press)

## **Popular Music Pedagogy: band rehearsals at British universities**

**Mark Pulman**

Dr Mark Pulman MEd, PhD, FHEA  
Senior Lecturer in Popular Music  
UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD  
University Campus Barnsley  
Church Street  
Barnsley  
S70 2YW

Tel: +44 (0)1226 644254

Fax: +44 (0)1226 644278

# Popular Music Pedagogy: band rehearsals at British universities

## Abstract

There has been little published pedagogical research on popular music group rehearsing. This study explores the perceptions of tutors and student pop/rock bands about the rehearsals in which they were involved as a part of their university music course. The participants were 10 tutors and 16 bands from eight British tertiary institutions. Analysis of participants' interview responses suggested their perceptions could be grouped into three over-arching categories: operational mechanics of rehearsing; rehearsing activities; and group dynamics in the rehearsal. These categories, comprising a master list of twelve themes, are used to provide a basis for establishing twelve pedagogical guidelines for tutors involved in undergraduate pop/rock band rehearsal activities. Abstracted from the research are two illustrative pedagogical models, which are offered as suggestions for practice and further debate.

## *Key words*

bands, groupwork, informal learning, pedagogy, popular music, rehearsals,

## Introduction

Little seems to have been reported about group-based rehearsals of popular music. Although there is a large body of research enquiring into musical ensembles, it often focuses on performance rather than rehearsal pedagogy, and rarely involves popular music genres (Hunter, 2006). Further, as Lebler (2008) describes, popular music is usually learned in the broader community as a self-directed activity, including interactions with peers and group activities, rather than under the direction of a tutor. Nevertheless, there are a number of interesting studies about group rehearsing in a range of popular music contexts such as community youth rock projects (Horn, 1984), high school rock/pop groups (Byrne & Sheridan, 2000; Lindgren & Ericsson, 2010; Westerlund, 2006), teenage bands (Berkaak & Rudd, 1994; Fornas et al., 1995), hip-hop groups (Söderman & Folkestad, 2004), in addition to a much larger literature involving classical music genres including, for example, undergraduate ensembles (Davidson & King, 2004; King, 2006), string quartets (Young & Coleman, 1979) and chamber music (Ford & Davidson, 2003). An important contribution to popular music pedagogy, however, is that of Green (2002). Her study, which discusses various interviews conducted with band members at differing levels of ability and experience, offers an informative insight into informal learning practices.

Group work, integral to many curricular areas of higher education, is especially common in popular music practice where, in both real world and undergraduate contexts, working within a small group team is typical.

Popular musicians, for example, usually work together combining their creative and musical abilities in, for example, rehearsing performing, sound recording and music production. Group work can help students to develop important social skills, self-esteem and satisfaction, enhanced personal skills, personal identity, self-achievement, self-confidence, intrinsic motivation, communication, negotiation, self-initiative, resourcefulness and conflict management (Bryan & Clegg, 2006; Kokotsaki & Hallam, 2007, 2011); qualities that, in the context of band rehearsals, would be highly prized. There is a large literature on the theory of group work that has relevance to band rehearsing including applications of the ‘task’ and ‘maintenance’ ideas of Douglas (1976), and the ‘team roles’ theory of Belbin (1981). Hartley (1997), a group communication theorist who has also worked as a drummer in a professional band, brings together three levels of analysis needed to comprehend group interaction: social and cultural background; tasks and procedures; and, what he has entitled, ‘the interpersonal underworld’. Concerning the first level, there are many activities manifest in the band rehearsal that can be readily located within social and cultural contexts. The second level, where Hartley defines the ‘surface behaviour’ level of groups in terms of ‘task’ and ‘procedures’, a concept not dissimilar to the task and group maintenance ideas of Douglas, may also resonate with band rehearsing. Finally, and perhaps the most interesting level is Hartley’s ‘interpersonal underworld of emotional attachments’, which certainly has a correspondence with the tensions which can often exist between band members as they rehearse. Bennett (1980) also considers similar insights, from a sociological perspective, in his earlier study of group dynamics.

Kleiman (2004) presents several benefits arising from small-group learning in a collaborative environment including celebration of diversity; acknowledgement of individual differences; interpersonal development; actively involving students in learning; more opportunities for personal feedback. Indeed, face-to-face interaction and collaborative skills are often a part of every day life in the world of work and, as Race (1999) reminds us, that many employers value cooperative and collaborative skills highly. The interaction between individuals as they participate in the complex ‘life-world’ of the band rehearsal has pedagogical implications for peer learning also. Not only, for example, might band members learn from each other but individuals also might learn much about themselves from this experience (Green, 2002; Pulman, 2009).

Among the practicalities of a band rehearsing pedagogy, would be that of the method for determining an appropriate group size and basis for selecting band members. Exley & Dennick (2004) propose that the 'optimum size' for small group teaching 'is between 5 and 8 per group' (p.2) which, happily, corresponds to the typical number of personnel to be found in pop/rock bands, featuring a core line-up, for example, comprising drums, bass, two guitars and a vocalist. Such musical considerations have implications for determining the membership of bands, for one based on a randomised selection of instrumentalists would be inappropriate. A more usual method would be one in which bands are formed on the basis of including individuals who provide the core of the band. For groups comprising more than five, however, tutors might need to be especially alert, as Biggs (2003) suggests, to the occurrence of 'social loafing'. Biggs also draws attention to the important pre-requisite that students should have sufficient background knowledge or skills in order to be able to contribute to the ensemble including, as Bryan & Clegg (2006) add, to its dynamics.

A rationale for employing tutor-determined groups might be founded, in part, on matters of principle: many academics, and students also, share a belief out of professional and ethical reasons, that tutors, alone, should determine group membership. Further, if establishing a positive group dynamic is key to the group's potential for success (Bryan & Clegg, 2006), then the tutor, having a knowledge of the entire class, would seem to be well placed to configure student combinations in order to achieve the optimum band dynamics. Students who are allowed to select their own bands might so do using criteria including, for example, friendship groupings, shared musical tastes and similarities in musical competence; but how are those who, as a consequence of the self-selection process are group-less, to be accommodated?

Finally, informal learning practices among rock musicians are well known in the discourse of music education (Green, 2002, 2008; Soderman & Folkestad, 2004) and pedagogical approaches based on informal learning practices can benefit a community of higher education students. This brings to life the idea of a community of learners including the university tutor, who becomes a facilitator adopting a cooperative and collaborative role (Feichas, 2010; Folkstad, 2006; Green, 2008; Rodriquez, 2009) in the rehearsal studio.

Given the apparent lack of literature on band rehearsing of popular music within higher education curricula (Creech et al., 2008; Daniel, 2006; Lebler, 2007), despite there being a number of studies involving group work practice, there is a demonstrated need to further investigate this particular rehearsal environment and its associated pedagogy.

## **Research process and analysis procedures**

Interviews with tutors and undergraduate bands were employed in this study in order to gather respondents' perceptions of their band rehearsing experiences. A total of ten in-depth interviews were conducted with experienced tutors at seven universities and conservatoires in the United Kingdom<sup>1</sup>, who were responsible for tutoring undergraduate popular music bands. This sample was selected from those who initially volunteered to participate in this research, from an invitation sent to all UK Higher Education institutions that were known to include band-rehearsing activities as a part of their popular music degree programmes. Tutors were interviewed at their own institution in the natural rehearsing studio environment of their work with bands.

Sixteen group interviews were conducted with undergraduate bands drawn from six institutions.<sup>2</sup> As students rehearsed together in their bands on a common purpose (Watts & Ebbutt, 1987) with their experiences being regarded as intrinsically collective, a group interview approach was considered appropriate. Conducting a group interview also enabled the 'potential for discussions to develop, thus yielding a wide range of responses' (Cohen et al., 2000, p.286). All bands were interviewed in the natural and familiar setting of their rehearsing studios that, it was thought, would be conducive towards creating a relaxed atmosphere and friendly interviewing environment. Students were assured that individuals would not be identified in the transcripts of the recorded interviews or in subsequent publication. Permissions to

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<sup>1</sup> Bath Spa University; University of Westminster; University of Hull; University of Liverpool; Leeds College of Music; Leeds Metropolitan University; Royal Northern College of Music.

<sup>2</sup> Bath Spa University; University of Westminster; University of Huddersfield; University of Hull; University of Liverpool; Leeds Metropolitan University.

conduct and record interviews, which took place between 2010 and 2012, were obtained from all participants in the study.

Acquiring knowledge and understanding about rehearsing, for students and tutors alike, can be created in the participatory and social context of the activity itself (Green, 2002, Pulman, 2008). Band members and tutors each learn by doing, through their engagement in the social learning setting that characterises popular music rehearsing and, from a theoretical perspective, this research resonates with social constructivist pedagogy (Bruner, 1986; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978).

Each interview was transcribed by the author, in order to acquire a greater familiarity with the data, which proved beneficial during the analysis procedure. Care was taken not to add inferences to the narratives, since the aim was to capture the respondents' perceptions of their rehearsing experiences. The data were analysed using WeftQDA, a software package for the analysis of qualitative data. The interview transcripts, for tutors and for bands, were each subjected to qualitative analysis based on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis adapted from Smith et al., (1995, 1999). Phenomenological research involves exploring each respondent's perceptions of what was of importance to him or her in relation to the phenomenon being studied (i.e. band rehearsing).

The coding process involved close scrutiny of data in order to identify the emergent themes by a process of abstraction. Maintaining separate coding analyses for tutors and bands, the concepts that seemed to apply to the same phenomenon were then grouped into clusters illustrating each theme. 26 clusters were identified from the tutors with a further 25 clusters arising from the bands data set determined by prevalence and power of the responses. These clusters are presented in Table 1 and Table 2 respectively; indicative themes for each cluster are provided for interest.

**Table 1:** Clusters of indicative themes (Tutors Interviews)

**Table 2:** Clusters of indicative themes (Band interviews)

The thematic process continued by exploring connections within and between these groups in order to begin to generate an explanation. It cumulated in a final master-list, illustrated in Table 3, which integrated the separate tutor and band clusters into twelve ‘super-ordinate’ themes (Smith et al., 1999).

**Table 3** Master list of themes

Connections among these integrated categories suggested a focus of three over-arching categories comprising operational mechanics (course aims, context, rehearsal objectives, process of implementation), rehearsing activities (the rehearsing tasks that the bands were working on), and rehearsing dynamics (group relationships including band members’ personal qualities). A brief description of these over-arching categories, representing respondents’ perceptions of band rehearsing, follows below.

*Operational mechanics*

One of the three over-arching categories arising from the analysis, *Operational Mechanics*, encompassed respondents’ perceptions of band rehearsing about course ethos, aims, learning objectives, knowledge, understanding, skills and abilities to be developed, and whether the rehearsing itself was assessed. The data also included topics such as tutor contact time, decisions about rehearsing covers and/or originals, set lengths, the rehearsing environment, attitudes to risk or pressure, and preparation for real-world professional practice. For tutor respondents, it included decisions about the method for determining the membership of bands: tutor selected bands, for example, would be expected at the outset of the course in view of students’ unfamiliarity with each other. Tutor-selected bands were thought desirable by some respondents for the purpose of avoiding unwanted cliques developing, or to prevent groups forming around friendship circles or, as one tutor interviewee observed, on ‘ethnicity, or popular music genre’ preferences. Alternatively, student selected bands, it was claimed by some tutors, produced stronger group cohesion and more productive band ‘chemistry’, particularly if the creation of original songs formed part of the assignment or learning outcome. One difficulty faced by tutors who allowed students to select their own bands, however, was that of



accommodating group-less students. In such cases, tutors might need to consider whether the chosen method of assessment has implications for band rehearsing; for example, if the contribution of individual band members to the rehearsals is, in itself, assessed.

### *Rehearsing activities*

This, the second over-arching category, comprised respondents' perceptions about the skills and abilities that were being developed and experienced in the rehearsals including specific instructional tasks, such as arranging a particular cover song, as well as normal band rehearsing. The majority of rehearsals, as explained by tutor respondents, revolved around two interlinked activities: specific skills and tasks, occupying perhaps one rehearsal session only; and on-going assignments, such as preparing a short set. The *Rehearsing activities* category also included phenomena relating to tutor feedback, developing a set, individuals leading the rehearsal as a musical director and 'sub-group rehearsing' in which a band rehearses in smaller units; backline, vocalist and keyboard, backing vocals, and horn section, for example.

### *Rehearsing dynamics*

The data corpus relating to group dynamics in rehearsals was particularly rich. *Rehearsing dynamics* comprised phenomena relating to group communication, individuals' personal attributes, and the various tensions that were manifest in rehearsals. Students' perceptions of their rehearsing experiences often involved concerns about poor personal rehearsal qualities shown by certain individuals in their bands, together with their thoughts about what they considered should have been displayed by those band members. Tutors' perceptions about the rehearsal dynamic included suggesting strategies that might develop trust between band members and improve their rehearsal chemistry. Other issues raised by students included rehearsal fatigue and their frustrations about wasting valuable time, such as playing through the whole song rather than simply practicing the particular part that was weak. Concerns expressed by tutors included the impact on the rehearsals by certain stereotypical characters, often to be found among popular music groups, such as the 'alpha male', the 'loner', and the 'free rider'.

## Discussion

This section considers the above framework and its implications for band rehearsal pedagogy. It presents and discusses the outcomes of the research, acknowledges participants' voices, and offers a number of pedagogical approaches that colleagues might wish to consider in their own practice. These pedagogical guidelines are organised into twelve principles or modes of working abstracted from the master list of themes appearing in Table 3.

- **Align rehearsing activities with the overall course philosophy**

Course aims, values and ethos can shape the approach taken to rehearsing as in any other activity (Jørgensen, 2000). For example, where course philosophy places a premium on the development of intellectual property (i.e. original songs) and encouraging students' creative choices, this might be reflected in how the rehearsals are organised:

We are very specific in that we don't engage with students' creative choices at all, even choosing whom to play with. We never tell the students what or with whom they should play, or style; the entire programme is style agnostic [and] none of our assignments have any style or genre implications'. (Tutor interview)

Undergraduate courses exhibiting a vocational ethos, such as preparing students for work as performers, might, among other objectives, aim to develop musicians' adaptability for professional engagements. Facilitating students' ability to engage with other musicians in a range and variety of contexts and styles and to develop a professional workplace attitude may require specific approaches. One interviewee, an instructor on a course having a similar philosophy, explained:

We choose everything for them so they have a broader experience in various styles, writing techniques and performance. We put the groups together for the first three semesters this allows projects to be more diverse [and] relevant to what my experience had been of the kind of equivalent situations in the real world. (Tutor interview)

- **Recognise individual contribution**

Tutors and students were united in the view that an optimum group rehearsal condition is one in which there is an equal contribution and commitment from every single person. Measuring what might constitute an

individual band member's contribution, however, is not a straightforward procedure and, in this study, the assessment of rehearsing itself was uncommon. Peer assessment was sometimes employed and another method was described in which a tutor awarded a combined mark comprising 50% for individual contribution and 50% for the band performance. Tutors might wish to reflect on the balance of process (rehearsing) and product (band performance) when considering the learning opportunities, course outcomes, assessment strategy and overall aims.

- **Employ an appropriate mix of tutor-selected and student-selected bands**

Band membership, considered elsewhere in this article, was often uppermost in students' thoughts. The prevailing view, for students and tutors alike, was to employ tutor-selected bands for much of the first year of study, with bands selected by students in year two and three. As students are unfamiliar with each other at the outset of the course, it is for the tutor to form balanced line-ups from knowledge of the instrumental and vocal expertise available within the class. Individuals may soon develop their own social groups and relationships however, that, as one tutor describes 'are hard to break through'. A rationale for employing tutor selected groups during first year of rehearsing, offered by one tutor, was that it allows many students to work with, and learn from, others with a range of particular styles and experiences and to 'let them see where their friends might be and what their interests are.' As a student remarked, 'for the first years, put them together; it gets people to broaden their horizons. Second year should self-select, unless their band isn't working out'. One tutor also expressed the view that 'if you allow them to pick groups they play it safe; most musicians are conservative by nature'. Student-selected bands were typically found among second and third year classes particularly where the assessment was focused on the individual rather than on the band as a whole. Students stressed the importance, during the student-selection process, of being able to 'network quickly to get into a band'. It was also typical for individuals to belong to more than one band, especially where there was a lack of particular instrumental expertise: drummers, for example, often obliged in this respect. Several tutors allowed students to form additional ensembles (in addition to their 'official' band) and gave approval also for these to participate in assessments. Imbalances among instrumental and vocal expertise within the cohort sometimes caused selection problems: individuals who had been side-lined

usually required the tutor to intervene in the process. Attendance, or lack of, was a factor; one tutor adopted a motivational approach wherein people who attended the most had first choice in the self-selection activity that ‘acted as a sort of motivation or deterrent to overcome that problem’.

- **Utilise informal learning practices**

The tutors typically described their input as ‘moving in and out of each rehearsing studio’, joining the band and ‘honing in on the specifics skills of the ensemble and their creativity’, rather than adopting more formal practices or methods of knowledge transmission that tend to be unidirectional. It is illustrative of a shift in the focus of practise from teaching to learning, from how to teach to what to learn and experience (Folkestad, 1998; 2006; Lebler, 2007) a role which Jørgensen characterises as being ‘hidden’, ‘tacit’ or ‘implicit’ (Jørgensen, 1997). Such informal learning practices in formal contexts, such as a university course, suggest a paradigm shift in the tutor’s role, where the band and tutor develop a partnership. The tutor is part of the community of learners (Green, 2002, 2008) a role that is more complex and nuanced than transmission and credentialing (Lebler, 2007). For first year students especially, it was also about helping each band develop productive rehearsing and time management protocols. As part of the community of learners that is the band, the tutor’s impartiality and primary objective in helping the ensemble to improve (King, 2006), should be clear for all to see:

I think what’s good about a tutor’s relationship is that a tutor in general has only one motivation and that the work gets better and the students get better at doing it. I think, for the most part, students do value somebody who has nothing to gain out of the situation other for seeing it flourish on their watch. (Tutor interview)

- **Decide on the balance of covers and originals appropriate for the course philosophy**

At the outset of the first year of study, the majority of tutors set assignments involving straightforward covers for students to rehearse. Specific songs were sometimes given, rather than allowing bands to choose for themselves from a song list, in order to minimise the indecision or loss of time that often occurs where band members are unfamiliar with each other. Originals were sometimes encouraged later in the students’ first year although, as one tutor observed, even when bands became ‘settled after the first semester, from a

practical point of view they tend to play more covers'. There was more flexibility over covers and originals in students' second year however, alongside the expectation that bands should attempt material that is more challenging:

We always attempt to introduce material that they will not have heard recently: 10cc has a complexity of structure and is harmonically rich [and] we push the boundaries a little, to find something new. For example it is interesting to introduce Karen Carpenter and her light 'floaty' vocals; also Liz Fraser, of the Cocteau Twins. We introduce songs with different time signatures, all this stuff that has now disappeared, and remote modulations.

Concerning originals, several students expressed a preference for rehearsing material that was largely pre-written, either by a main songwriter, or developed prior to the full band rehearsal:

By the time we polished that up we all really like learned the song and then we took it to the rest of the band. (Band interview)

- **Promote a conducive rehearsing environment**

The rehearsing environment was a theme that attracted many examples of problems, such as inappropriate sound levels and rehearsal fatigue, and solutions also. Concerns about sound levels in the rehearsing studio, for example, were widespread among tutors and students alike with one rock guitarist admitting that 'for five years I thought I should be louder than everyone else [but] I learned to tone it down'. The threat of fatiguing in the rehearsal studio was also raised by several respondents in which one tutor likened 'an hour in a rehearsal studio is like four hours in any other kind of work'. As one band member put it:

We can get fatigued over time and you lose focus. I've been in situations in rehearsals where we've been hours going over songs and it gets to a point that you do it so much, nothing changes, and it's so monotonous.

Tutors should also need to watch for groups who appear to be suffering from rehearsal fatigue. As one student advised, simply 'rehearse the section that is not working rather than wasting time repeating the whole song'. Similarly, bands could be reminded about dividing into more efficient units: the backline working to tighten the groove, singers arranging vocal harmonies, guitar and bass working on instrumental

breaks, for example. Much is about effective time management: two tutors even arranged for rehearsals to take place off campus, hiring commercial studios, for bands to experience rehearsing under strict time limits and an hourly charge, in order to help promote a professional working ethos and, as a tutor described, ‘alter the mindset’.

- **Explain the context of the songs that are being rehearsed**

Most rehearsing activities in this study involved bands preparing a short set to perform for an assessment. Although set lengths varied, it was typical for tutors to expect 10-15 minutes, about 3-4 songs, for a year one assignment, and longer sets of 20-25 minutes or 5-6 songs for a year two or year three assignment. There was a range of assessment methods reported, with tutors employing what was appropriate for their context. Rehearsing then, requires a band to understand the rehearsal context, including the assessment criteria and, if the performance takes place as a live gig, audience entertainment. The context and assessment criteria, for example, might indicate to band members that they should rehearse their stagecraft and role in the ensemble, especially if assessed as individuals within the band. Incorporating a virtuoso solo however, may not be appropriate for either the track, or the gig:

it’s about having authority in your playing, about being committed to the band and understanding what your part is within that group. So, if someone plays crazy and brilliant but it’s not suitable for the track, he will be marked down. It’s all about empathy with the group. It’s possible for an unsophisticated musician to achieve a higher grade than others who excel with their playing skills if they are more aware of what’s going on around them and understand the context of the performance. (Tutor interview)

- **Provide opportunities for students to develop their arranging skills**

Both students and tutors identified building in opportunities for students to develop their skills of arranging musical material, an ability that is especially important for pop/rock musicians, as important. Respondents suggested bands should be able, within the rehearsing experience, to develop skills particularly in arranging backing vocals, dynamics and texture. Tutors suggested providing opportunities to work on material having delicate textures, in particular, to help bands consider texture in their arrangements and to remind ensembles

about variety of texture and dynamics within the mix. As one tutor commented ‘when someone has an electric guitar strapped on them in a rehearsal studio they feel they should be making a sound all the time!’ and it is sometimes the case, when arranging the instrumentals of the song, that ‘less is more!’

- **Offer feedback which suggests ideas rather than simply opinions**

Many respondents’ comments involved feedback and tutors described a range of feedback mechanisms. One suggested that the first piece of feedback might usefully be about students’ rehearsal room practice and many tutors facilitated peer feedback through ‘show and tell’ sessions where bands performed to each other. Indeed, where bands performed the same songs tutors thought it especially useful for them to compare standards, stylistic choices and interpretations. Comments from tutors and students alike, however, suggested that tutors should take care over the language of their feedback; as one student explained, tutors should, ‘step back from being an MD... [instead ask]... is that working?’ and suggest ideas:

as long as you don’t say ‘I want’! Better would be ‘try this; think about that’. How you are saying it completely changes what you are trying to get across. (Band interview)

- **Include activities that are focused on building specific rehearsal skills**

Incorporating a number of short structured tasks designed to be completed in one or two sessions only, was recommended by tutors for helping to instill, in year one, a culture of effective rehearsal practice. Such activities, for example, might focus on developing efficient rehearsing habits, time management, effective team working, delegation, song transcription skills, promoting a culture of using chord sheets, and working under pressure. Examples offered by tutors, in which bands were given just one hour of rehearsal time before performing in front of the class, included the following: learning a song picked at random from a bag of CDs; learning a cover using chord charts only; learning a familiar song but relying just on their memory of it; and learning a familiar rock song using acoustic instruments only.

- **Provide opportunities for each student to lead rehearsals as a musical director**

The study by Lindgren & Ericsson (2010) found that ‘where no clear leadership is formed in rehearsal groups, the work fell apart completely’ (p.43). Encouraging individuals to lead a rehearsal can help to prevent a band from becoming adrift: ensembles with a regular leader are likely to be more stable and make better progress than those without (King, 2006). In this study similarly, tutors described the benefits that individuals obtained, particularly for those who had not previously ventured forward, from their experiences of leading a band as its MD. Rotating the role can promote mutual respect and develop professional working relationships as each student experiences leading and being led. It provides a preparation for scenarios that individuals will likely encounter when working as a professional musician.

- **Evaluate the group dynamics and personal attributes being displayed in rehearsal**

A considerable number of comments, from students and tutors alike, related to the importance of establishing a positive group dynamic. For example, tutors commented on the importance of students’ personal rehearsal qualities with regularity:

Their personal qualities are something we focus on; technique is one thing and having your chops is a kind of a given. To be able to function in the dynamic, with personal qualities towards other musicians, to get on, organise, negotiate, be organised and be professional, are qualities that are fostered.(Tutor interview)

For at least one tutor, group dynamics were a priority when mentoring year one bands:

With the first years I start by observing the group dynamics and to see if there is a leader. There’s usually a leader – if there’s no leader they can easily fall apart. Hopefully the leader has a vision of where he can take his band. (Tutor interview)

Several students, citing their own personal experiences, commented about band members’ personal attributes and among the personal attributes they considered particularly important to be displayed in rehearsals were: attitude (‘not looking like bored; attitude is such a big issue’); listening to others (‘Listen to each other, that’s the main thing. Don’t be selfish: listen to people, it’ll never fail’); confidence (‘Confidence is just simply about going for it: the more you rehearse more confidence you get’); modesty (‘Personal qualities are needed: to be humble and sensing when to sit back’); being open-minded; patience; criticism



(‘It works well to give feedback to bands performing outside, but in university, band members can be sensitive to personal criticism’; ‘it’s difficult in a public context [but] we try to tell each other after rehearsals what’s good or bad’; ‘criticising in a constructive way is important, and people have got to be open about things’).

One tutor respondent described a ‘sense of jostling and subtle power dynamics’ within bands ‘because many rock bands are young men and young men are notoriously in the process of conditioning themselves.’ The usual gender imbalance, found on undergraduate popular music courses, was apparent in this study with males significantly outnumbering females. In striving to achieve a positive rehearsal dynamic, mood, ‘vibe’ and ‘broader band identity’ (Miell & Littleton, 2008, p.47), respondents identified trust and maturity as key factors. Adjudging levels of trust and maturity among band members and the potential for the development of these was important for some tutor respondents in considering how to bring about an improvement to the rehearsing dynamic. Acquiring knowledge about individuals, through observing or working with them in rehearsals might, for example, enable the tutor to introduce an informal peer learning system, agreeable by the band, as an attempt to raise levels of trust, develop musicians’ maturity and facilitate constructive peer feedback (Pulman, 2009, 2010). An approach such as this could prove to be helpful in rehearsal situations when, as tutor respondents reported, encountering non-engaging band members such as the ‘free rider’ and ‘loner’. Although popular music students do not normally require a motivation to rehearse, having a ‘free rider’ in a band can be problematic, as it would for any other group activity. A private word with the individual might reveal the nature of why s/he was not attending regularly but sometimes the problem can be resolved, as one tutor described, through ‘natural selection’:

Usually the only way I can deal with that is by natural selection: they will leave or be sidelined. I don’t take an attitude that I have to resolve that problem. I think it’s for the students to resolve and acknowledge that they were not there. (Tutor interview)

Tutors should be pragmatic, as one band advised, and ‘suggest songs that the band can still do with or without the free rider. It can be unfair as it can drag others’ marks down.’ Bands might also contain a ‘loner’

or a shy ‘quiet one’ (King, 2006) who has difficulty in engaging with others in the group. Two examples of approaches employed by tutors follow:

One individual, for example, was very unreliable and a loner with no one to work with but went on to form a band using students off different courses. That student was the only one assessed but it was the most pragmatic solution.(Tutor interview)

I will always have time to chat with the quiet ones. Sometimes it’s just a question of getting them to turn their amp up a bit! Their contribution may be quiet musically as well as quiet verbally; sometimes it’s just letting them know I am a kind of ally, just giving them enough confidence. (Tutor interview)

Such experiences, perhaps, are illustrative of the transformative nature of the challenges we often put in front of students and the band rehearsal is an activity where it can happen. Although this discussion affords only a glimpse into group dynamics and rehearsals, such phenomena might certainly be likened, to the aforementioned ‘interpersonal underworld’ (Hartley, 1997) wherein all the likes, dislikes, tensions, admirations, resentments, egos, arrogance and the alpha male in a band, might be found.

## **Pedagogical models**

To conclude, the article now turns to consider emerging pedagogical models of undergraduate band rehearsing. What is clear from the analysis and ensuing discussion is that the aims and course ethos can have an impact on tutor practice when facilitating band rehearsals. The two models appearing in Table 4, which utilise a framework offered by Alix et al., (2011) attempt to conceptualise differing pedagogies for band rehearsing and offer contrasting approaches to the learning experience.

### **Table 4** Pedagogical models

The first model illustrates an approach to teaching and learning predominantly driven by outputs (an end performance marked by professional standards) while the second is illustrative of a pedagogy founded on experiential concepts and a concern for students’ self-development. These examples do not set out to

ascertain which is best, nor should they be interpreted as being dichotomous or incompatible with each other. Rather, the flexibility of the categories and the inter-relationship or interdependency that one has on the other and vice versa is emphasised: tutor practice in this study revealed considerable fluidity across the categories. As such, the models abstract and illuminate different approaches found in the research; the norms of rehearsing practice might, for many courses, bands or tutors, be found somewhere between the two. This was especially so in the study as it appeared that there was little that appeared wholly fixed: much seemed up for negotiation, which can be a challenge for tutors involved in the field.

This paper reaches into many areas of pedagogical thought, including course aims, motivations and experiences of students, bands and tutors. It is arguable that, because of the situational nature of the respondents' perceptions, certain phenomena described here could belong to the aforementioned 'tacit' knowledge (Polanyi, 1966; Jørgensen, 1997) in the subject domain of band rehearsing. If so, it is hoped that this present study has given a voice to such tacit knowledge, which can only be useful in the longer term. While there is a large body of music education research about performance, much less explores groupwork rehearsing and associated pedagogies. This paper makes an attempt at such an exploration in the context of the pop/rock band rehearsal. A further investigation of how learning occurs in this informal educational setting can be made, for instance, through observation and video recordings of undergraduate band rehearsals. Such studies will represent additional steps towards understanding how practitioners might better support their student bands in the rehearsal studio.

### ***Acknowledgements***

The author wishes to acknowledge the United Kingdom Higher Education Academy for their support in funding the project described in this article and to thank tutors and students for their valuable contributions from the following British tertiary institutions: Bath Spa University; University of Westminster; University of Huddersfield; University of Hull; University of Liverpool; Leeds Metropolitan University; Leeds College of Music and The Royal Northern College of Music.

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**Table 1: Clusters of indicative themes (Tutors Interviews)**

1	Alpha male	10	Feedback	19	Rehearsal environment
2	Arranging material	11	Group dynamics	20	Rehearsal qualities
3	Assessment	12	Learning	21	Self selected bands
4	Contribution	13	Loners	22	Time management
5	Course ethos/aims	14	Musical Director	23	Trust
6	Covers	15	Originals	24	Tutor contact time
7	Creative choices	16	Peer review	25	Tutor selected bands
8	Developing set/songs	17	Performing to each other	26	Year one activities
9	Extra-curricular bands	18	Pressure		

**Table 2: Clusters of indicative themes (Band interviews)**

1	Acoustic rehearsals	10	Lack of drummers	19	Styles/genres
2	Attitude	11	Listening to others	20	Set/deciding songs
3	Arranging	12	Modesty	21	Self-selected bands
4	Attendance	13	Musical Director	22	Strengths/weaknesses
5	Confidence	14	Open minded	23	Sub-group rehearsals
6	Fatigue	15	Patience/personal	24	Time management
7	Free riders	16	Peer feedback	25	Web 2.0 resources
8	Group dynamics	17	Personal criticism		
9	Guitarists levels	18	Rehearsal comments		

**Table 3 Master list of themes**

**Operational mechanics**

Course philosophy  
 Contribution to rehearsing  
 Selection of band members  
 Tutor practice  
 Covers and originals  
 Rehearsing environment  
 Rehearsing context

**Rehearsing activities**

Arranging song material  
 Feedback  
 Specific rehearsal skills  
 Leading the band as a musical director

**Rehearsal dynamics**

Group dynamics, personal qualities and attributes

**Table 4** Pedagogical models

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Model One</b>	<b>Model Two</b>
Course aims	Outputs, professional standards, work as a performer	Self-development, experiential, songwriter/performer, creative musician.
Descriptors	Defined performance tasks and experiences	Development of intellectual property (the song) at the core
Structure	A sequence of activities and tasks structured by the tutor	Individuals determine their own creative choices with tutor support and guidance
Leadership	Band mentored by tutor	Expertise and experience among the band is shared and rotated
Band membership	Determined by the tutor in year one; by students and tutor jointly in years two and three	Determined by the tutor for the initial rehearsals in year one; by students thereafter, typically involving shared music interests and creative direction
Rationale for band membership	Peer learning arising from rehearsing with various other students; experience of different working practices as preparation for a variety of professional engagements	Creative ownership; recognition and support of individual direction; band stability
Paradigms and practice	Canonic paradigms ('professional'; covers; chosen pieces; existing practice and models of teaching, learning and knowledge transmission predominate); benchmarks and criteria to be judged against are known prior to rehearsing;	Social constructivism; participants construct knowledge during the activities of creating and developing original material in the rehearsal; individual and shared understanding of music; benchmarks are localized within the rehearsing band and arise from the creative process; informal learning practices predominate where the tutor is part of the community of learners;
Rehearsing product	Emphasis on covers displaying variety of genre and style	Emphasis on originals and contemporary styles, remixes, mash-ups, etc
Learning	Expert tutor guidance and sequential structure of course offers maximum potential for achieving prearranged learning outcomes; emphasis on what to learn in the rehearsal	Learning is not confined to a fixed design; outcomes are not pre-set but are established upon reflection and ongoing feedback from peers and tutor; emphasis on how to learn in the rehearsal.