

BA (Hons) Musical Theatre

Assessment Cover Page

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Throughout this essay I will be using Gibbs' reflective model to reflect on past experiences, recent developments, and explore my progress/areas of improvement in jazz. Gibbs says, "It is not sufficient to simply have an experience in order to learn. Without reflecting upon this experience, it may quickly be forgotten, or its learning potential lost" (Graham Gibbs (1988)).

Over the term, dance lessons have been technique focused, working on flexibility, isolations, and alignment. When we began focusing on jazz, I felt overwhelmed because I had many areas to improve. I had to consciously engage my muscle memory which was difficult due to my ADHD. When things go wrong, I become stressed and overstimulated which makes it harder to concentrate. After conducting research noticed this is common; "A significant relationship was found between ADHD tendency and inattention/memory problems, hyperactivity/restlessness, impulsivity/emotional lability." (Bog Ja Jeoung (2014)). My difficulty with isolations isn't just physical as jazz isolations require precision. Because ADHD affects working memory and emotional regulation, I lose track of movements and become anxious. This aligns with Jeoung's (2014) findings. Understanding this allowed me to identify that my struggle wasn't all due to lack of ability but also due to cognitive processing. In contrast The Cleveland Clinic (2025) says that "Your muscle memory works in phases or stages. You need to physically perform a task several times until the task becomes automatic". This research helped me understand why repetition works for me when my cognitive processing is inconsistent. Relying on muscle memory reduces my mental load. Using Gibbs' model has helped me understand this connection and reduce stress.

Although I have been using Gibbs' reflective model to reflect on my long-term development, I have also been implementing Schon's reflection-in-action process during my lessons. (Schon, 1983, p.68) says that "When someone reflects-in-action, he becomes a researcher in a practiced context...He does not separate thinking from doing, rationating his way to a decision which he must later convert to action". This process has helped me identify problems and adjust in the moment. An example of this was when we were practicing our second position. I have good upper body strength which is positive, but it causes my shoulders to tense and lift. I noticed this and corrected it while maintaining the position. It now feels more natural to me and I struggle less. By using Schon's process, my progression happens at an accelerated pace as I am recalling my thoughts after.

While reflecting on my feelings during Gibbs reflective cycle I discovered that my low self-esteem plays a part in my inability to remember techniques such as isolations and positioning. I tell myself I'm not executing movements correctly, which causes anxiety. These feelings create a mental block which affects my coordination. During my research I discovered that this is quite a common problem in sports. Katherine A. Tamminen and Rachel Dunn say that "Emotions arise in situations that are important to us...In these situations it is natural to want to be successful, and sometimes these situations can feel stressful because it seems like there is a lot at stake... some emotions, like anxiety and fear, can arise when we feel like we do not know what to do, or when we do not have the ability to deal with the situation". This research clarified that I developed negative thoughts because of my fear of failure. The issue isn't lack of skill but instead emotional pressure I'm putting on myself. My low self esteem impacts jazz more than other styles because jazz demands confidence and stylistic clarity.

During the sixth step of Gibbs' stages of reflection, I looked into strategies that could help me combat my confidence issues and I found confidence-based repetition helpful. Beckman, T. (2025) says "confidence-based repetition is a study approach that evens the playing field by focusing your time and attention on the concepts you're least confident in, but without letting you forget your stronger concepts either...Confidence-based repetition works because it mirrors the way your memory naturally strengthens". This highlighted that I focus on my strengths to avoid weaker areas, which limits development. To integrate this into my training, I will focus on weaker areas such as isolations, turns and alignment in private practice to build confidence. I'm going to use confidence-based repetition by alternating my strengths and weaknesses in my individual practice.

Although confidence is my weakness, I work hard. During lessons my determination shows up through Schon's reflection-in-action. This is something I bring to every jazz class. I know that if I am to improve, showing up and trying my best is key. My contribution to the class is positive as I stay focused, ask questions and encourage others. "Strategies for building a supportive learning environment based on psychological understanding include...providing positive and constructive feedback...and creating a learning atmosphere" (Hairul Anwar Dalimunthe *et al.*, 2024). This research highlights the importance of a supportive learning environment. By asking questions, I demonstrate Schon's reflection in action as it strengthens my understanding in real time. My reflective practice contributes to a good learning environment as my curiosity gives others the confidence to seek clarification of their own. My determination and commitment compensate for areas of difficulty and will encourage development throughout my training.

Overall, this reflective process has allowed me to recognise the progression in my training and identify strategies that can shape my development in jazz. By applying Gibbs' and Schon's models I have gained a deeper understanding of how reflection supports my growth in dance. Even though they are different, both have allowed me to develop a balanced and meaningful reflection. I have identified factors that are influencing my progression such as ADHD related challenges, confidence and muscle memory. My research suggests that taking action and physically doing things I'm anxious about may be more effective in reducing my anxiety than trying to change my mindset. I have spent a long time trying to fix my way of thinking in the hope it improves my technique, but it may be that improving my physical execution and just going for it is what will ultimately support my confidence. I'm beginning to understand that correcting my body will regulate my mind, this is something I will be exploring from now on. Moving forward I will continue using reflective strategies and confidence-based repetition to improve and manage emotional barriers. This process has highlighted that my challenges are not limitations but areas for growth. Even though I face difficulties, I have a lot of determination and curiosity that will carry me through and support my training

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