

BA (Hons) Musical Theatre

Assessment Cover Page

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Introduction

Throughout this essay I will be utilising Gibbs' reflective model (Gibbs learning by doing 1988) to evaluate my strengths and weaknesses through dance, specifically in jazz. Gibbs says "it is not enough just to have an experience in order to learn. Without reflecting upon this experience it may be lost or quickly forgotten, or its learning potential lost". (Gibbs learning by doing 1988) I will use this theory to reflect on past experiences and find solutions for weakness. Graham Gibbs (learning by doing 1988) follows a six-step process including the following: Description of what happened, what was I thinking or feeling, what went well and even better if, analysis of what happened, conclusion of findings and an action plan. I will also be implementing Schön's reflective practices (Reflection in practice 1983) to assist me in becoming a more industry ready performer.

Main body

Dancing for musical theatre has always been a weakness for me due to my lack of flexibility. Flexibility in dance has become an industry standard and when starting university, I was aware of my drawbacks in this. I have particularly struggled in jazz due to the dance style. Movements such as leaps, kicks and the splits are particularly an issue for me due to my lack of mobility. A study from RUA (Santos 2018) says 'Dance practitioners have adopted stretching exercises – more formally known as flexibility training – not only to increase flexibility in the preparation and completion of training and activities.' The article infers that repetition is the key for sustaining results in any athletic capacity, for example a specific warmup protocol 'The SW protocol consisted of two sets of 15 repetitions of squat exercise in the Smith machine with 50% of the maximum load obtained in 10-RM test and interval of 60 seconds between sets.' The results from this were positive with consistent rises in progress across 76% of participants. Through attending body conditioning classes and taking part in stretches daily I am already noticing a difference in what would be a long-term achievement. Although I have been using Gibbs (1988) to assess myself so far I have also been implementing Schön (reflection in practice 1983) to personally assess myself during each body conditioning session and testing how far I'm able to push my flexibility. I am however not going to be unrealistic as I am aware of my current abilities, and so I will combat these by setting myself a goal to get myself into the splits by March (Gibbs 1988).

Another weakness I've faced during dance is a lack of confidence and in turn not trusting myself. I don't come from a dance heavy background and so being in a dance heavy environment is quite overwhelming at times which makes me anxious during fast paced lessons. A study from the University of Colorado (Salo, Amber 2019) conducted research on anxiety during dance and discovered 'The resounding conclusion was that the participants were nervous and self-conscious while taking the workshop dance classes.' This study was great to reflect upon as I face similar challenges in a rehearsal space. For example, the study states that 'These feelings came up as the participants revealed their expectations for the dance workshop event.' (Salo, Amber 2019). This extends the issue of anxiety to expectations which has a knock-on effect to the way I personally feel in a rehearsal space. I have found dealing with anxiety during dance difficult due to the elevated expectations and others around me having a deeper understanding of the subject, as I am very self critical especially when I feel as though I am not

the best in the room. To combat these feelings, I will use Gibbs (1988) to create an action plan. By using this i'll be able to gain a clearer structure in my mind of personal expectations, professional expectations and in turn hopefully combat my anxiety during dance lessons.

A strength I have within dance and specifically jazz is being able to remember choreography confidently and quickly. A study from Bettina Bläsing (Acta psychologica 2011) says 'The complex movement sequences executed by dancers in solos, duets, and ensemble pieces epitomize the human capacity for sequence learning.' This study shows how as humans our brains learn best through sequences which is why its most heavily represented in dance due to the constant and repetitive movements that make up choreography. I find that learning choreography on the spot is a strong point for me as I have good cognitive skills and so I am able to learn whilst doing. Using Schön (reflection in practice 1983) I was able to learn choreography ahead of my assessments whilst in the room so that if I did make a mistake or I was unsure of anything I had the aid of my tutor and peers to assist me in correcting this. I also used Gibbs (1988) to make sure I was able to lock the movements into my muscle memory. I recorded the choreography and technical practices to reflect on in my own time to allow me to achieve a high standard of practice.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the application of Gibbs' reflective model (learning by doing 1988) and Schön (reflection in practice 1983) have been instrumental in bridging the gap between my current technical abilities and the ambitious standards of the Musical Theatre industry. This reflective journey has been great for highlighting my strengths and weaknesses in practice. Whilst I possess strong cognitive abilities for retaining choreography, these strengths are often overshadowed by my limitations to flexibility and the psychological barriers of performance anxiety. By integrating Schön (reflecting in action 1983) I have been able to extend beyond passive participation and learn to make in time adjustments during body conditioning classes to increase my flexibility slowly and safely. Additionally using Gibbs (learning by doing 1988) has allowed me to deconstruct the overwhelming nature of fast paced rehearsals and creating an action plan that caters to demolishing my external and self-critical expectations. Moving forward, using the reflective models above I believe I can evolve into a more resilient and industry ready performer.

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