

BA (Hons) Commercial Dance

Assessment Cover Page

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Final Production

ADPA6008

Reflective Essay

12 Reflective Essay

On the 29th May I was part of the dance production, '12'. My main role in 12 was being a dancer. This involved learning the content from the choreographers and being able to sell their choreography back to them alongside the audience. This involved being technically clean and performing the concept of the number to the audience to help portray the overall narrative of the show. Due to the limited backstage crew, I had to take on this role alongside the rest of the cast of 12. This role involved safely manoeuvring props throughout the production such as blocks, metal chairs, fans, bandanas and most importantly mirrors. It involved knowing the location of each prop throughout the shows. This includes each prop's location during the whole shows and who is manoeuvring each prop, whether they are set on or off stage in their specific designated spot. Along with managing to perform and remain in character when having to manoeuvre them to its next location. Throughout this reflective essay I will be evaluating my final personal performance in 12 along with my individual development as a professional dancer in the 6-week rehearsal period beforehand, starting from the 20th of April to show day on the 29th of May. It also involved learning new skills like being a part of the backstage crew and the responsibilities involved in that role.

As an individual I have previous experience dancing and performing on stage in front of a large audience. This is from the 3 years of university and 5 years of college. During these 7 years I have performed on many different stages with various sizes. This includes:

- The Olympus Theatre (See Appendix A)
- Studio 22 (See Appendix B)
- The Mount Without (See Appendix C)
- WAVDA's Studio Theatre (See Appendix D)

From this list we can see that I have been able to perform on a variety of different stage sizes and layouts such as End-on and Thrust.

However this was my first experience with having to be a part of backstage crew, especially having to manage that number of props so precisely. It is also my first experience in an Industry level production. My method to help me adapt to this new experience was to be flexible, and attentive alongside being professional. After this experience I have now gained the necessary skills that will be vital on any Industry job, especially as a dancer. Such as:

- Adaptability
- Initiative
- Resilience
- Observation Skills

For this process I decided to apply Schön's Reflective Model (1983) to aid me in my development as a dancer on this production. Initially I was also considering using Gibbs reflective model (1988) however unlike Schön (1983) the Gibbs method (1988) is too rigid and can be time consuming. Compared to, Schön's (1983) uses both in action and on action; is more flexible and focuses on professional growth and applying your initiative. This in turn is an ideal reflective model for this experience. For instance,

once in rehearsal, when dancing made me feel nauseous, I was able to use Schön's (1983) in-action method to guide me into finding a solution. I was able to communicate with the Creative Director and Choreographer to allow me to sit out and watch; take notes on my own transitions and other notes that came up. This was very beneficial as I was able to use that time to my advantage without overexerting myself. (Look at Appendix E).

In the past I have struggled to pick a lot of choreography quickly, partly due to my dyslexia. Therefore, from early on I knew it would be vital to get the routines in the body early on as muscle memory is vital for a performer in a production. According to Google Gemini "muscle memory is the fundamental blueprint that allows you to execute complex choreography seamlessly, freeing your mind to focus on artistic expression" (Google Gemini, 2026) from this can infer that relying on muscle memory isn't only important when trying to execute the movement but is extremely beneficial when adding the performance and narrative in the numbers. Repeatedly going over routines full out with the right counts, slowly and up to speed, was what allowed me to rely on my muscle memory. This gave me the space to work on my performance for each number. For 12 there was a large amount of content I had to retain along with any of the changes that had to be made during this process. The method I implemented that allowed me to keep up to date with all the changes and running order, was writing detailed notes in my notebook. This involved any changes to choreography or spacing, transitions, areas I needed to improve on and order of the show (including my personal pathway) (look at Appendix E). Oxford Learning states,

“The process of writing by hand reinforces memory pathways and enhances comprehension and retention.” From this we can see that physically writing things down was beneficial when having to learn and retain choreography as it creates new memory pathways in the brain whilst naturally improving my ability to retain complex choreography. I found this to be very beneficial especially later in the process when I already had so much information (including choreography, narrative and transition) and was getting more new information, including any new changes.

There were multiple times during this process I found learning the content overwhelming and stressful. This was partly due to the pressure of the high expectations certain choreographers would put on the cast, along with the pressure I would put on myself. To overcome this, I decided to focus on the new content and try to apply as many corrections as could when doing either walk throughs or full run throughs. If it got too much for me, I would take a 5-minute break outside. “Studies have found that breaks can reduce or prevent stress, help to maintain performance throughout the day” (The Wellbeing Thesis, 2019). From this we can infer that breaks can be very beneficial mentally as it can calm the individual down which helps with their overall performance for the rest of the day. I found this method to be very effective for me as I was able to retain new content better than I did before the break whilst being able to control my stress levels more efficiently. However, I would not abuse this and only take the breaks when I absolutely needed to not stop the workflow and so I wouldn't fall behind on the choreography. Plus, whenever they didn't need me for a section, I would find a space close to them, to go over any of the choreography I was

struggling with. Using all these methods was a very beneficial strategy I was able to implement for myself as I was able to maintain a beneficial session.

Being able to have stable communication with the Creative Director was an important part of this production. "Effective communication between a creative director and dancer transforms a show from a series of disjointed steps into a cohesive, emotionally resonant story." (Google Gemini, 2026) From this we can imply communication is key when making a production cohesive. For instance, communicating became vital when building my costume. I needed to find different items of the costume online with my measurements and in the style and then send the link to the Creative Director. However, due to certain issues (delivery time, faulty links, price) I had to find different items to create my costume. I was able to communicate with them swiftly and clearly hence I was able to get the costumes within enough time before show day.

When parts of my costume started to come, I would try them on and I started to practice in them, like the leather jacket. This included dancing in them as well as practicing manoeuvring props in them. According to Samuel Hall from Leighton Dance Project (LDP) "Costume familiarity is essential to ensure comfort and confidence on the stage." (2025) From this we can see having the right costume can make the performer more confident on stage making them more likely to perform. Therefore, it is important the costume is properly fitted for the performer early on, giving enough time for any adjustments that need to be made. Along with giving the performer enough time to break in the costume so they feel comfortable and confident when wearing it.

It was very beneficial as I managed to see how it felt and looked when stationary and more importantly when dancing. The areas I was focusing on was:

- How it fitted on my body,
- How the textured felt on my skin as well as when it contacted the floor and props,
- The breathability of the fabric

Trying it on soon after receiving each part of the costume was very beneficial for me as it meant I was more prepared for the 2 performances, as I was able to perform better when wearing it. Due to the fact, I felt comfortable and confident wearing it which aided in bringing out my performance.

As it was getting closer to the show date (28 May) all the costumes had not arrived yet. To overcome this, I decided to organise a contingency costume. "It ensures you can still participate, reduces stress, and saves money." (Google Gemini, 2026) From this we can see having a contingency costume is beneficial as it gives the individual a costume they can perform in every if it is not as good as the original costume. It also gives the individual time to practice dancing in costume allowing them to see how a dress run feels. Luckily for me I had the majority of my costume, so organising the rest of my contingency costume was straightforward, including the shoes. Having a contingency costume ended up being crucial, as it became my final costume for both performances. Organising my contingency costume swiftly gave me enough time to start practicing in the costume. It also gave us enough time to make any last-minute

adjustments to the costume. Making sure it stayed within the style of the show alongside being functional, making me feel comfortable and confident, which in turn aided in my performance.

One of the biggest challenges we all faced was the awkward spacing. For me this included the rehearsal room and in the actual space. The biggest issue in the rehearsal space was having a pillar in centre stage left as it took up room and blocked pathways. There were multiple ways I managed to overcome this. I would slightly adjust my spacing to be more inwards in the space, whilst acknowledging where I needed to be when the pillar wasn't there. There were other times where I needed to do choreography but was unable to do it properly due to the limited space caused by the pillar. To overcome this, I would mark choreography when doing a run-through and wherever I had a break, I would go through the choreography full out somewhere else, where there was room. This allowed me to stay on the right timing whilst making sure I knew the choreography and not messing up the spacing. Applying these methods was very beneficial as I was able to perform full out in my right spacing when we were in the performance space.

When we did get in the space, I found the performance was actually smaller than we originally thought, mainly due to the number of props on stage altering the amount of space we had. The way I got around this was doing walk throughs this was by:

- Walking through the production in the space
- Communicate with the other cast and crew
- Keeping choreography under me at certain parts instead of spreading out

- Being aware of my surroundings and adjusting when appropriate.

Applying all these methods allowed me to have a great performance despite the limited space.

After the 6-week rehearsal period we put on the production twelve, twice, in front of a live audience in the Dance House. For both shows my dancing was technically clean and expressive whilst managing to consistently perform full out for each number and transition.

For both shows I was also considerate and helpful towards the rest of the cast. For instance, backstage I would make sure:

- I was not blocking the walkway (especially between numbers)
- Fanned people with the fan to help them cool down for the next number.
- Gave the fans willingly to people who needed them most, like if their number was next
- Gave out my water to a member of the cast who forgot the drink
- Took responsibility for placing all the fans in the Interval to help relieve stress and overstimulation from the other cast mates who also use the fans.
- Didn't overcrowd a cast member who needed medical attention.

All these things aided in keeping the cast calm whilst also benefiting them in a positive way as it reduces stress.

Whilst the first show went well performance wise the use of the props did not go as smoothly. One of the main issues with the props was timing. For instance, at the beginning of Tick me and my partner were out of sync bringing on the mirrors, this

then slightly affected the number as it was the first thing the audience sees in the number. However, I didn't let it affect me and I was able to continue performing full out as well as I did in the rest of the show. After the first show I was able to communicate with my partner on that section on this issue and in the second show the timing was much better as we were more in sync when moving the mirrors.

For the show I decided it would look better if I performed without my glasses. Despite practicing without them and managing to go full out in the production despite my limited vision, I was still getting headaches and getting dizzy backstage. The methods I implemented to overcome this were:

- Sit down or squat near my thing backstage
- Control my breathing
- Drinking water
- Let my eyes focus on one spot to give them a rest.

Implementing each method was beneficial as it allowed me to keep on performing full out for both runs.

I was part of the dance production 12 where we put on 2 live performances which had a 6-week rehearsal period beforehand. Both performances went well for me as an individual and as a company, especially the performance portion of 12. The second showing was better than the first for me as an individual and as a company, as the manoeuvring of the props went much smoother compared to the first showing. I also was able to apply the note of performing more with the props in the second showing of 12. I was able to perform as well as I did due to the 6-week rehearsal period prior.

Applying Schön (1983) from the start was very beneficial to me as it allowed me to come up with solutions to problems quickly and effectively. This was very useful with the limited rehearsal time we had. Using Schön's reflective model (1983) didn't just help me develop as a dancer for 12 but as a performer long term. I'm now able to use my own initiative to apply specific methods I had learnt over this process to aid me in future projects, such as effectively adjusting to awkward performance spaces and how to use my time efficiently even when sick. I will also be using Schön (1983) in future projects to aid me as well as using it as a tool to develop me further as a dancer. Looking back, I can see that this process has prepared me for the dance industry as it was a professional working environment throughout. I now know what is expected of me, not just the dancing and performance level but what is expected of me as an individual such as the ability to take the initiative in the correct way and how to work with different choreographers and their different personalities.

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Appendix



Appendix A

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ADPA6008
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Appendix B

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Appendix C

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ADPA6008
Reflective Essay



Appendix D

