

The Importance of Reflective Practice

Reflective practice is a structured process that encourages dancers (and teachers) to examine experiences, identify learning, and make intentional improvements

Engaging in reflection helps dancers:

- **Develop self-awareness** about their strengths, progress, and areas for development.
- **Build resilience** by reframing challenges as opportunities for learning rather than failures.
- **Strengthen problem-solving skills**, improving their ability to self-correct.
- **Strengthen motivation** through recognizing achievements and incremental progress.
- **Support emotional wellbeing** by reducing negative self-talk and balancing critique with affirmation.

For teachers, reflective practice supports more responsive, learner-centred teaching by providing insight into what methods are effective and how to adapt instruction to different dancers' needs.

The WWW–WWI–WIN Reflection Model

The WWW / WWI / WIN model is a simple, structured reflective framework often used in education, coaching, and performance settings. It provides a balanced approach that encourages acknowledgement, constructive critique, and forward-focused planning.

1. WWW — What Went Well

This stage focuses on identifying successful actions, improvements, and positive outcomes.

- Builds confidence and motivation.
- Reinforces effective technique and behaviours.
- Encourages dancers to notice progress.

2. WWI — What's Worth Improving

This is a constructive, non-judgmental reflection on areas that could be enhanced.

- Shifts thinking from criticism to growth.
- Helps dancers identify specific technical or artistic goals.
- Encourages dancers to view mistakes as information, not inadequacies.

3. WIN — What's Important Now

WIN shifts the reflection into action. It clarifies next steps and immediate priorities.

- Turns reflection into a practical plan.
- Helps dancers focus on manageable, short-term goals.
- Reduces overwhelm by identifying the *one or two* most important things to apply next.

Integrating the WWW–WWI–WIN Model into Ballet Classes and Rehearsals

Teachers can incorporate this model in simple, time-efficient ways that strengthen dancers' resilience and reflective habits:

1. End-of-Class Mini Reflection (2–3 minutes)

- Ask dancers to silently consider or briefly share:
 - **WWW:** "Name one thing that went well for you today."
 - **WWI:** "Identify one thing you want to continue improving."
 - **WIN:** "What is one focus you will take into your next class or rehearsal?"
- This encourages routine reflective thinking without taking significant class time.

2. Small-Group Sharing

- Place dancers in pairs or groups of three to discuss their WWW–WWI–WIN.

3. Reflective Journaling

- Have dancers bring in a notebook to record their reflections weekly.

The Importance of Verbalizing When Cognitive Distortions Are “Hooking” Dancers

Dancers and other high level performers are particularly vulnerable to cognitive distortions: unhelpful thinking patterns that can feel true in the moment but distort reality. When dancers get “hooked” by these thoughts, their focus, confidence, and emotional regulation can unravel quickly.

For teachers, verbalizing what you notice in a calm, nonjudgmental way can help dancers pause, name the distortion, and regain perspective. This kind of gentle intervention supports resilience and mental wellbeing and teaches dancers to recognize these patterns within themselves.

A teacher might say:

“It looks like you’re getting hooked by a really unhelpful thought right now. What might help you get some space from that thought or allow you to think about it in a different way?”

This approach:

- **Normalizes the experience**—all dancers get hooked sometimes.
- **Models emotional regulation**, showing that the goal isn't to “stop thinking negatively,” but to create space and perspective.
- **Helps dancers shift from reactive to reflective**, stabilizing their mindset for learning and performance.

When teachers consistently use this language, dancers begin to internalize it, strengthening self-awareness and mental flexibility—key elements of psychological resilience.

How to Help Dancers Create Space From Unhelpful Thoughts

When a dancer is hooked, teachers can guide them with questions such as:

- *“What would you say to a friend who had this thought?”*
- *“Is this thought helping you dance better or making things harder?”*
- *“What’s one small action you can take right now?”*

These prompts help dancers shift from emotional fusion (“This thought is true”) to cognitive distance (“This is just a thought, not a fact”).

Common Cognitive Distortions in Dancers

1. All-or-Nothing Thinking (Black-and-White Thinking)

Believing that anything less than perfection is failure.

- *“I fell out of my pirouette, so the whole class is ruined.”*

2. Catastrophizing

Expecting the worst possible outcome.

- *“If I don’t nail this today, I’ll never be ready for the performance.”*

3. Mind Reading

Assuming you know what others are thinking—usually something negative.

- *“The teachers must think I’m terrible.”*

4. Overgeneralization

Drawing broad conclusions from one event.

- *“I messed up once during ____, so I always mess up ____.”*

5. Discounting the Positive

Ignoring successes and focusing only on mistakes.

- *“Yes, my jumps were better, but that doesn’t matter because my port de bras was awful.”*

6. Emotional Reasoning

Believing that feelings represent facts.

- *“I feel unprepared, so I must actually be unprepared.”*

7. Should Statements

Putting rigid, unrealistic demands on oneself.

- *“I should be able to get this variation perfectly by now.”*

8. Personalization

Taking responsibility for things outside one’s control.

- *“The corps de ballet felt off today—it’s probably my fault.”*