

At what point does it stop being Pilates?

Some thoughts from Michael King, SPM Director.



Over the years I have taught many different types of group exercise. Step, aerobics, dance fitness, all of them have been part of my life. And I have also spent 47 years teaching Pilates. That mix gives me a perspective I do not think we talk about enough. Here it is. If you have more than ten Reformers in a class you are no longer teaching the Pilates Method. You are running a group fitness class.

Pilates is built on observation, correction, and progression. It is not about giving out a sequence and hoping everyone keeps up. It is about looking at the bodies in front of you, cueing alignment, adjusting positions, and helping people work with the principles of breath, control, and flow. That level of attention is demanding. My studio in London had eight Reformers and even with decades of teaching experience those eight tested me every time. Once you go past ten it is not realistic to keep the method intact.

This is where we see the rise of large Reformer classes. And to be honest they are not Pilates classes. They are group exercise with springs. That does not mean they have no value. They can be fun, they can deliver a good workout, and clients may enjoy the atmosphere of a busy class. But we should stop calling them Pilates. They do not allow for the corrections, the personalised attention, or the detail that define the method.

Technique matters. If you are teaching Pilates, you need the space to teach it. Beyond ten Reformers that space disappears. You stop teaching and you start managing. For me that is the dividing line.

Megaformer also falls in the same category. It is not Pilates. It is a piece of fitness equipment with a Pilates-inspired feel. Nothing wrong with that as long as we are clear about what it is and what it is not.

Pilates deserves honesty. If we want to protect the detail that defines the Method, we need to say it out loud. More than ten Reformers is group fitness. Up to ten is where the Method lives.