Scylla & Charybdis: Caught between examination & reflection in medical education
Thank you
Elise Paradis
Doug Buller
Centre for Medical Education McGill
The Strait of Messina

Scylla

Charybdis
Scylla

swung them up her cliff and thereat
her cavern's mouth she bolted them
down raw—screaming out, flinging
their arms toward me,
lost in that mortal struggle.
"You will find the other rocks lie lower, but they are so close together that there is not more than a bowshot between them. ... there lies the sucking whirlpool of Charybdis"
What is **competence**? And how do we **assess** it? This changes across history and culture.
North America 19th Century

Competence
The “right kind of man”

Assessment
Judgment of Master
Early 20th Century

Competence
Knowledge
Assessment
Written knowledge tests & MCQs
Mid 20th Century

Competence
Physician Performer

Assessment
OSCEs / SPs
Shifting Locus of control

Arms-length Testing Centres /Regulatory Bodies

Medical school /Testing Organizations

Medical classroom /Clinical Teacher
In the 20\textsuperscript{th} century health professionals undergo an almost endless series of written and performance examinations.
We live in Foucault’s ‘examined society: constant surveillance and testing
There are obvious gains

- greater accountability to teachers and the public
- more feedback (though not always with high stakes testing)
- assessment of a wider range of competencies
“America is awash in tests... in a very real sense, tests have invented all of us”

Hanson, 1993
Is our assessment transforming us in the right way?
“I was wondering how important your two lectures are for the exam. I don’t see any questions from your lectures on any old exams and wanted to know if your stuff was ‘testable’ this year.”

University of Toronto
Medical Student
Overuse of External Examination
Think of a word (synonym) for ‘reflection’
“The concept of learner as a mere processor of information has been replaced by the image of a self-motivated, self-directed problem solver”

Ontario Ministry of Education 1980
Self Reflection
“the capacity of humans to exercise introspection and the willingness to learn more about their fundamental nature, purpose and essence.”

Wikipedia 2014
“Human self-reflection is related to the philosophy of consciousness, the topic of awareness, consciousness in general and the philosophy of mind.”

Wikipedia 2014
In many studies, a large number of learners can be found who appear unable to identify their own strengths and weaknesses.

Davis et al. 2006
Questions about ‘reflection’

- What is it for?
- What do we hope it will accomplish?
- What assessment would be compatible with reflection?
- What is the role of medical teachers in relation to reflection?
John Dewey
Donald Schön
Jürgen Habermas
Sioban Nelson
Anne Kinsella
Stella Ng
John Dewey

*How we think: A restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to the educative process* (1933)

Donald Schön

*The Reflective Practitioner Series*

Jürgen Habermas

*Reflection as Emancipation*
“Different theorists and disciplines have theorized and applied reflective practice in a variety of ways, making it confusing for newcomers to navigate their way through the large body of literature”

“The danger in this confusion is the possibility for reflection and reflective practice to be dismissed, misinterpreted, or oversimplified”

Ng 2012
• Teacher: You
• Context: A group of 6 students every week
• Task: Develop capacity for reflection
• What will you do?
4 Practice of Reflection that are influencing Medical Education

• Metacognition
• Mindfulness
• Psychoanalysis
• Confession
Reflection as Metacognition
“awareness or analysis of one's own learning or thinking processes”

Flavell 1979
Purpose of metacognition

• Understand one’s own habits and patterns of thinking and emotion
• Gain humbling appreciation of fallibility of cognition
• Appreciate complex interplay of cognition and emotion

Fleming et al 2013 at Vanderbilt via Eichenbaum

Assessment: Cognitive think aloud
“While individuals reflection is important, one of the critique of reflective practice is its focus on the individual practitioner’s construction of knowledge without adequately attending to the material, social or discursive dimensions of practice knowledge.”

Kinsella 2012
Reflection as Mindfulness
“Mindfulness is a state of active, open attention on the present. When you're mindful, you observe your thoughts and feelings from a distance, without judging them good or bad”

Psychology Today 2014
“The cultivation of mindfulness has roots in Buddhism, but most religions include some type of prayer or meditation technique that helps shift your thoughts away from your usual preoccupations toward an appreciation of the moment and a larger perspective on life.”

Harvard Public Health On Line 2014
“Mindfulness has the potential to prevent compassion fatigue and burnout in that the doctor who is self-aware is more likely to engage in self-care activities and to manage stress better. Moreover, well doctors are better equipped to foster wellness in their patients”

Dobkin and Hutchinson 2013
“All mindfulness techniques are a form of meditation.”

Harvard Public Health On Line

Assessment: Reflective Diary? Incompatible?
In the move to use “diaries” for assessment of competence as reflection:

“Regulators appear quite unconcerned about the lack of coherence between what is being monitored ‘at a distance’ and the actual professional knowledge (needed) to function skillfully and competently”

Reflection as Psychoanalysis
“The unexamined life is not worth living”
Socrates
"However much the analyst may become tempted to become a teacher, model and ideal for other people and to create men in his own image, he should not forget that that is not his task in the analytic relationship."

Freud 1940

Assessment: Insight into the self?
“solitary reflection carries with it the danger of objectifying the other”

He “believes that individual reflection can fail to consider the accounts of “others” (Narcissism)

Sandywell 1999/Kinsella 2012
REFLECTION as Confession
“Before going to Confession you should make a review of mortal and venial sins since your last sacramental confession...”

Catholic on Line 2014
“If you need help especially if you have been away for some time simply ask the priest and he will help you by "walking" you through the steps to make a good confession.”

Catholic on Line 2014
“It’s reflection time!
Take a piece of paper. Write down an experience you have had this week – it could be a professionalism issue or problem you have experienced or witnessed. Write down your reflections.
When you are done – turn them in for marking. I will have them back to you next week”

Medical Educator (Toronto)
"It should not be assumed that reflection is a natural part of everyone's skill set. This process can be done alone, of course, but reflection with facilitators or peers strengthens the process by ensuring that reflection is conscious. Debriefing with facilitators or peers can provide a check of accuracy and objectivity”.

Frankford, Patterson & Konrad 2000
Assessment

• To shape, judge or grade reflections
• Could it preserve the ‘external locus’ of control/surveillance inherited from the 20\textsuperscript{th} century examination?
“The very essence and purpose of reflection is compromised when it is experienced in an overly prescriptive manner, and when it is subjected to formal evaluation instead of critical dialogue”

Ng 2012
Questions for the medical educator using ‘reflection’

What are the goals?
How does it work?
What effects are anticipated?
How does it relate to growth (time), learning, identity, relationships, patient care?
• Are assessment approaches aligned to foster the kind of reflection desired?
• What unintended consequences might there be?
# Practices of Reflection

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<tr>
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<th>Confession</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A better doctor through...</td>
<td>Cognitive awareness and control</td>
<td>Inner peace and balance</td>
<td>Self-understanding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unintended</td>
<td>Overly cognitive focus False recall</td>
<td>Disconnection</td>
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# Practices of Reflection

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<td>Guide (Spiritual Guide)</td>
<td>Analyst (Psychiatrist)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Think aloud protocols</td>
<td>Meditative practices</td>
<td>Verbal reports of thoughts and feelings</td>
<td>Recounting to another</td>
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All practices of reflection in medical education are transformations
Is our reflection transforming us in the right way?


Catholic on Line
https://www.catholic.org/prayers/confession.php