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Building better learners: Reflective practice for student development

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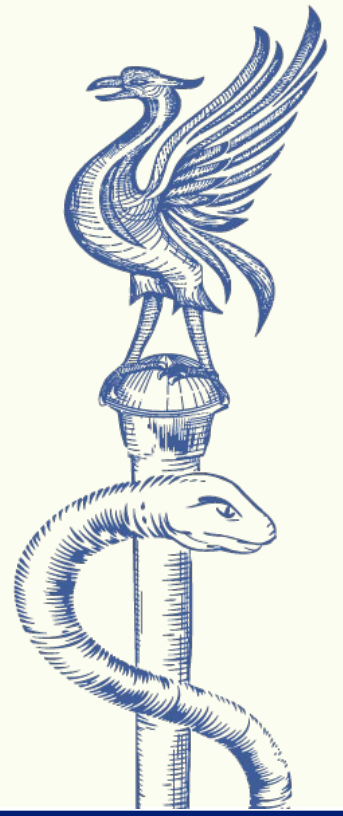
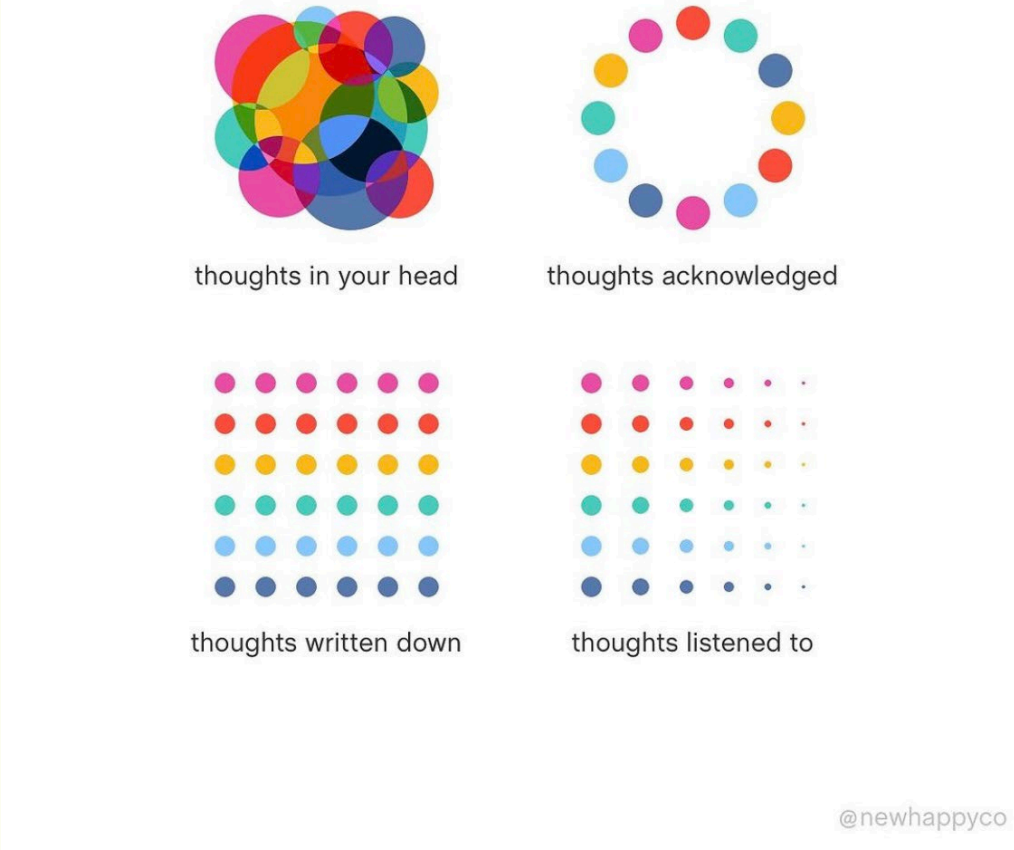
GP Tutor Conference, 2026



Session outline

- Reflection for learning
- LEGO® Serious Play® Principles
- LEGO building and discussions
- Closing discussion



What is reflection?

"Reflection is a metacognitive process that occurs before, during and after situations with the purpose of developing greater understanding of both the self and the situation so that future encounters with the situation are informed from previous encounters".

p.685 Sanders, J. (2009) The use of reflection in medical education: AMEE Guide No. 44.

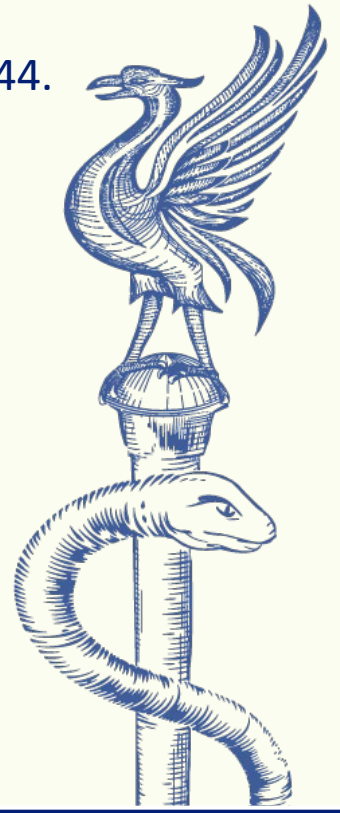
Reflection = Bend or Turn back

Do – Plan – Review

What? (what happened)

So What? (feeling / meaning)

Now what? (do differently next time)



Why talk about it?

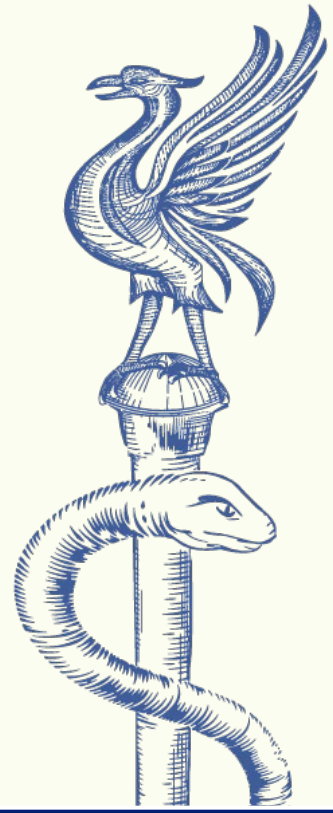
GMC requirement

'explain and demonstrate the importance of engagement with revalidation, including maintaining a professional development portfolio which includes evidence of reflection'

Outcomes for graduates (para 2t), 2018

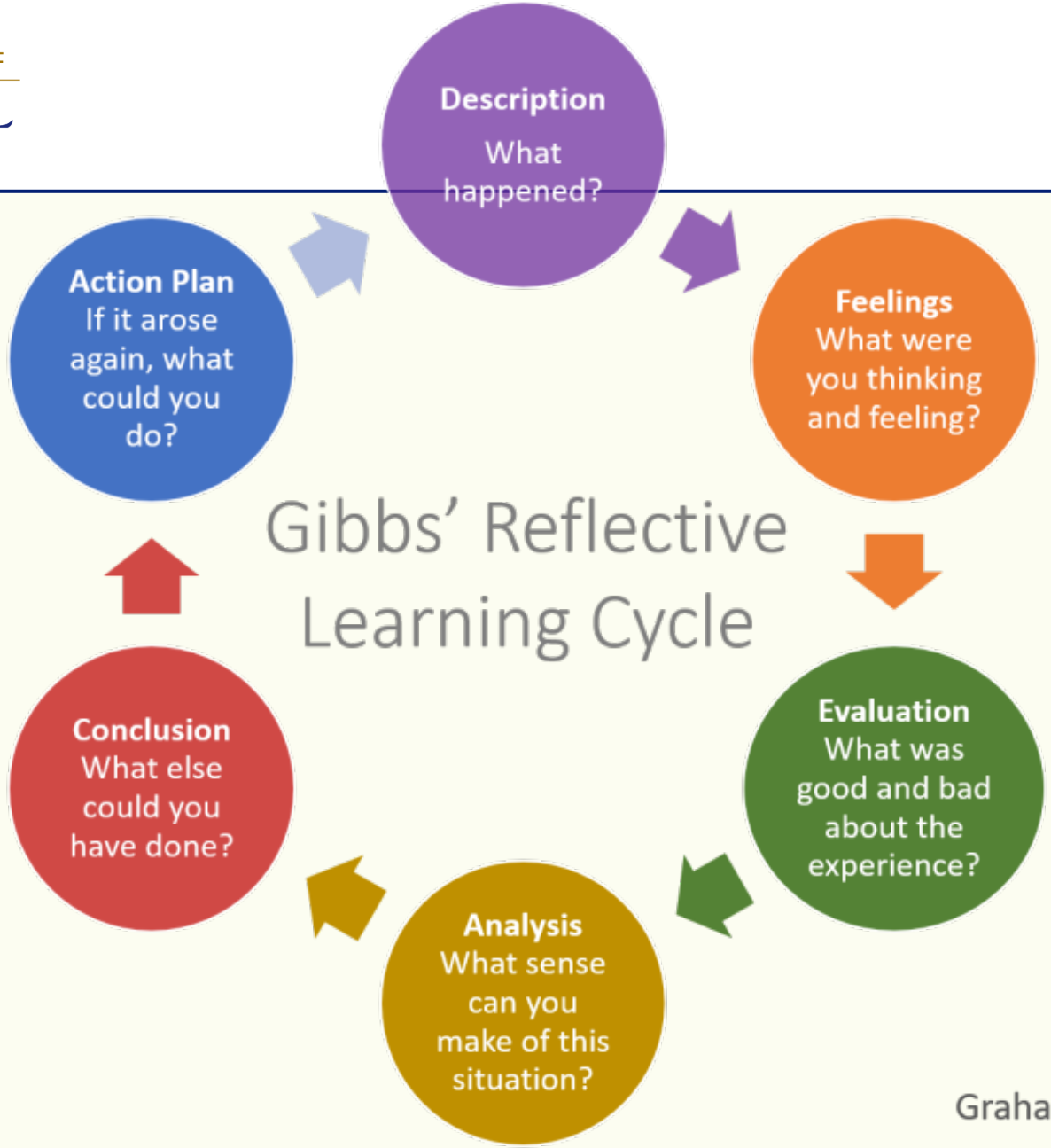
Improve:

1. Learning (knowledge, skills)
2. Therapeutic relationships (behaviour, emotional response)
3. Develop professional practice - integrate skills, cope with complexity / uncertainty, resilience



Systematic review (Mann 2007) – improved diagnostic reasoning (no convincing evidence it improved competence!)

Improving self-reflection (Chen) – students less stressed, higher grades



Graham Gibbs, 1988

"It is not sufficient to have an experience in order to learn. Without reflecting on this experience it may quickly be forgotten, or its learning potential lost"
p9, Gibbs (1988)

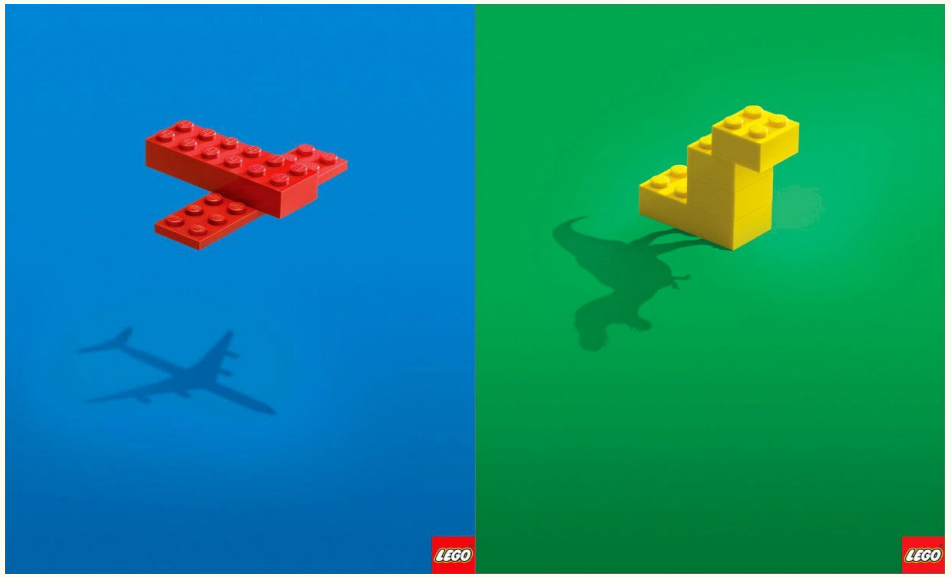
LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY ® methodology

"An experiential process designed for use in guided workshops with adults to prompt dialogue and encourage reflection, as well as develop problem-solving skills and use of the imagination." LEGO website

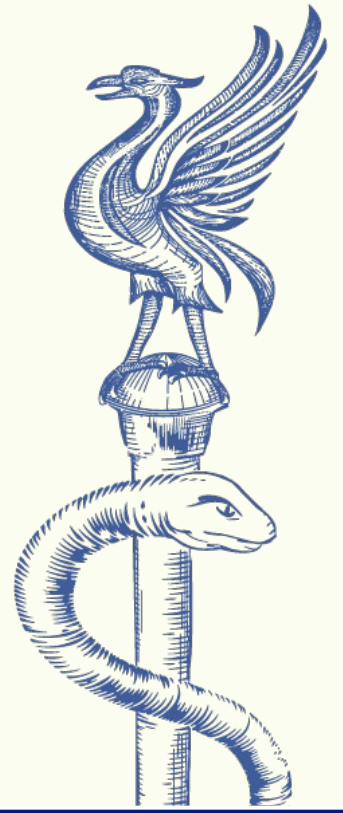
Inclusive: "encourages all voices to be heard" (Medupin et al., 2025)

Improves engagement (James, 2013)

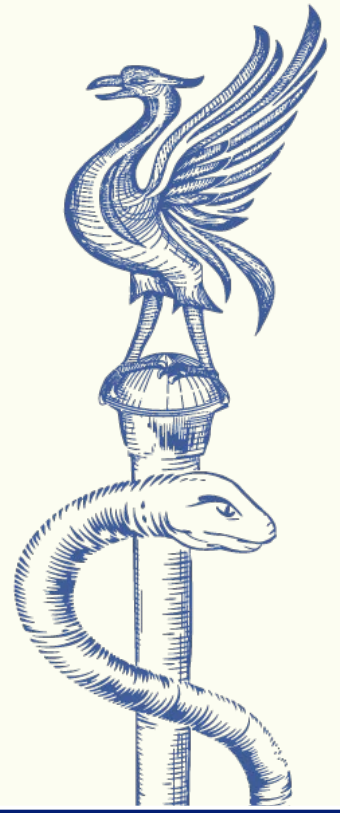
Reduces stress (Shields et al., 2020)



1. When has reflection been particularly useful or important for your learning?



2. What are the barriers to reflection?



Barriers

Low engagement, boredom

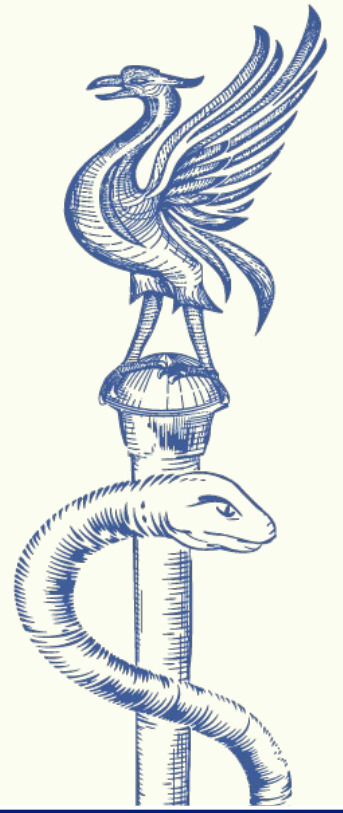
Poor feedback or timing

Strong emotion

Perception that disconnected from learning / real life

Personal and ‘no rules’ - but compulsory task

3. How can we help students to reflect effectively?



Support students

Mezirow – Disorientating dilemma and ‘noticing’

Sense of purpose / motivation – counteracts boredom

Support – peer / supervisor / mentor

Balance:

- support v challenge
- self-awareness v rumination
- too soon v too late
- too emotional v not invested

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Useful resources

The GMC have produced a guide to reflective practice with supplementary guidance for medical students

AMEE have produced two guides on reflective practice in medical education:

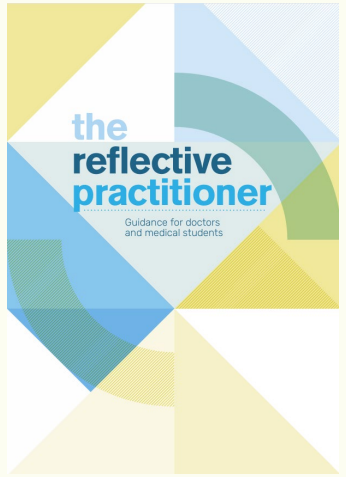
- Sandars, J., Allan, D., & Price, J. (2024). Reflective practice by health professions educators to enhance learning and teaching: AMEE Guide No. 166. *Medical Teacher*, *46*(7), 864–873. **here**
- Sandars, J. (2009). The use of reflection in medical education: AMEE Guide No. 44. *Medical Teacher*, *31*(8), 685–695. **here**

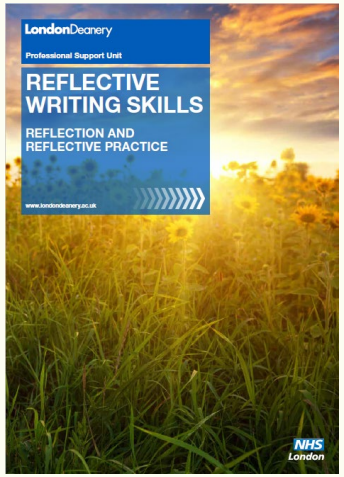
London Deanery Professional Support Unit guide to Reflective Writing Skills

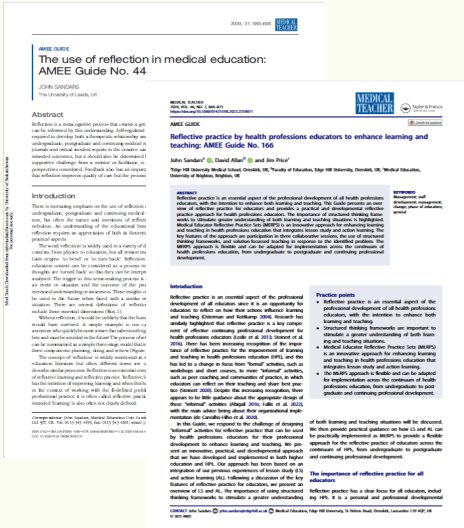
These **online toolkits** from the University of Cambridge and University of Edinburgh provide helpful resources on models of reflection and reflective prompts

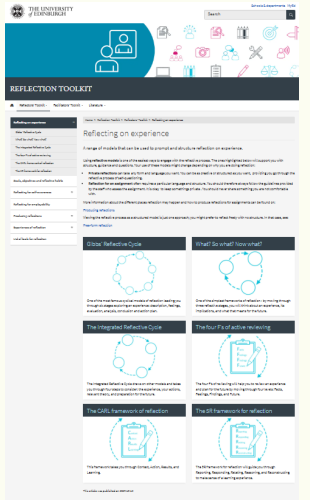
Useful papers:

- Wilson, Anne & Ross, Michael. (2001). From Chump to Champ: People's Appraisals of Their Earlier and Present Selves. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. 80. 572-584. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0022-3514.80.4.572
- Paunesku D, Walton GM, Romero C, Smith EN, Yeager DS, Dweck CS. Mind-set interventions are a scalable treatment for academic underachievement. Psychol Sci. 2015 Jun;26(6):784-93. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797615571017
- Turner, Michelle & Holdsworth, Sarah & Scott-Young, Christina. (2017). … Not drowning, waving. Resilience and university: a student perspective. Studies in Higher Education. 43. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2017.1284193









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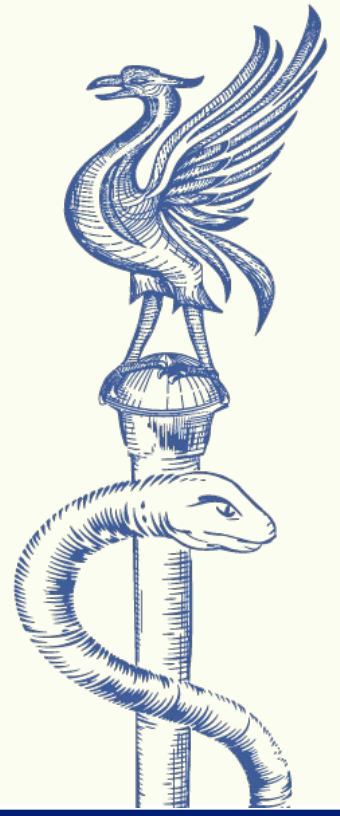
Thank you.