Reviewer's report

Title: Factors confounding the assessment of reflection. Critical review

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Reviewer: John Sandars

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This critical review is potentially very useful to all medical educators. However, I consider that several essential aspects have not been covered and the presented paper requires major revision.

The authors highlight the difficulties of assessing reflection due to different definitions of "reflection". However, there is [1] no critical discussion of the wide range of terms used, such as "reflection" and "reflective practice" and [2] no critical discussion of different intended outcomes of the process, which range from identification of learning needs (eg Kolb), through professional practice (eg Schon) and lifelong learning/transformative learning (eg Mezirow) to a wider democratic society (eg Dewey). Often these intentions are very unclear or multiple.

The authors also highlight the difficulties related to assessment methods but there is no critical discussion of [1] levels (eg Moon), phases (eg Boud) or indeed whether it should only be assessed as descriptive or reflective - as a passport assessment [2] whether any assessment at all can be valid and should only be used formatively [3] limitations of textual narrative where the writer selectively presents a persona but this may be different using different narratives eg digital (blogs/social networks) or visual (eg digital storytelling) [4] selectivity due to the nature of the content and self-concept, as well as hindsight bias of the writer [5] presenting self to the requirements of the assessment [6] reflection as a developmental process.

The authors also do not highlight the importance of a mentor/facilitator/supervisor. Schon clearly advises this essential role and it is potentially confounding, both supporting and hindering reflection.

Several sections could be more clearly written and this appears to be possibly related to English not as a first language. The summary is very unclear.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.
Declaration of competing interests:

'I declare that I have no competing interests'