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## Learning from lapses

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# LEARNING FROM LAPSES

How to identify,  
classify and  
respond to  
unprofessional  
behaviour  
in medical  
students



Marianne Mak-van der Vossen

## **‘Untitled - 2009’ by Merijn Bolink**

The cover of this dissertation shows the piezographic “Untitled, 2009” by Merijn Bolink. Hanging in the author’s office, it is viewed by students who, after an unsatisfactory judgement of their professional behaviour, come to discuss their lapse. Over time, and through students’ reflections, the artwork came to represent the symbolic union of the three domains of medical education - the development of knowledge, skills, and professionalism - and the indispensability of self-reflection in this process.

The skeleton, cut out by the artist from a medical book, represents objective knowledge. The little dancer - a Degas sculpture cut out from an art history book - represents delicate skills. Leaning on one another, the two step off their pedestal and into the unknown. Equally vulnerable in their new context, the two contrasting figures both display courage. They embrace uncertainty, with only their mirror image guiding them, echoing each step they take.

This interpretation mirrors the core proposition of this thesis. Professional development requires knowledge and skills, but also honest self-reflection and adaptability. Learning from lapses demands that students adapt to new and challenging situations with adequate guidance. Becoming a professional physician is an uncertain, personal endeavour which requires support from peers, educators and the medical schools.