

AAPA Guide to Reflective Practice

Reflection Handbook

PO Box. 36248, London SE19 3YD

☎ 0208 653 9152 Email: enquiries@aapa.org.uk

<u>Contents</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Purpose of this Handbook.....	3
2. Introduction to Reflective Practice	4
3. How to use Reflective Practice as a Therapist	7
4. How to use Reflective Practice as a Student	11
5. How to use Reflective Practice as an aromatherapy tutor	13
6. Reflection and Continuing Professional Development (CPD).....	15

1. Purpose of this Handbook

The Aromatherapy & Allied Practitioner's Association (AAPA) is committed to high standards and to regulation of the profession. Within the AC Core Curriculum for training in aromatherapy, reflective practice is now included as part of professional and personal development during training, and once qualified, aromatherapists can use reflective practice to evidence continuing professional development (CPD). CPD is required by all AAPA members to certify that their knowledge is current, thereby ensuring public safety.

The purpose of this handbook is to offer guidance on what actually constitutes effective reflection and also how it can be used both whilst training as a professional aromatherapist and also to use it to evidence ongoing lifelong learning whilst practicing as an aromatherapist, to show both personal and professional development. There is also a section for tutors as they need to also be using reflection in order to encourage their students and in turn the aromatherapists they have taught to use it. Using reflection can re-ignite commitment to your practice, to your studies and to what you are trying to achieve in your personal and professional life. We get so bogged down with the mundane routine parts of life that we often become numb and forget all the aspirations we once had when we started out.

Once therapists and students become familiar and comfortable with reflection, it can be used as a tool in all aspects of life, learning to assess and evaluate ones experiences and then to make necessary changes in order to improve ones environment for all concerned. In essence it is a way of celebrating our work through reflection. Reflective practice essays will be placed in your portfolio both during training and as a professional aromatherapist to provide demonstrable evidence of some structured and written reflective work.

These guidelines will provide an overview of how to reflect, some examples of reflective models and tools that are available to guide this process, in such a way that reflective activity can support the development of the personal and professional portfolio. Good reflective practice underpins good professional practice and it is an opportunity to review progress to date and help you as a student today and a professional aromatherapist tomorrow, to identify areas of practice which are in need of further development and those areas of practice which may have already been successfully developed. The crux of effective reflective activity is to review your effectiveness and progress to new ways of thinking or behaving in practice. As a student it helps to identify and evidence your learning and as a practitioner, helps you to assess your weaknesses and recognise what you need to undertake for continuing professional development. It can also be used as evidence of continuing professional development when you are reading articles and published research.

2. Introduction to Reflection

Reflection is a process of reviewing an experience of practice in order to describe, analyse, evaluate and therefore inform learning about practice. When describing reflection we can use four key words; change (occurs), honesty, qualitative & evaluation. It is a crucial technique for aromatherapy professionals to think about what they are doing in practice and to develop themselves into better and more effective practitioners. By doing reflection, we are learning for work, learning at work and learning through work. Aromatherapists are dealing with individuals who require clients/patients to be responsive and reflective instead of just carrying out a routine "by-the-book" treatment. Whilst training in aromatherapy reflection encourages the student to become a thinking therapist rather than just going through the motions. This in turn benefits the client/patient as the aromatherapist is more likely to be adaptive and effective in their treatment plans. For qualified aromatherapists, much like many people in the workplace, it is easy to fall in to the "working on auto-pilot" syndrome and going through the motions. Effective practice requires us to be constantly aware of our actions, striving to improve on the service we offer. In some ways this is more important for aromatherapists as we tend to work in isolation. Ultimately, reflection is about one's personal journey and it can literally free you.

The basic elements of a reflective process are:

- Keeping an open mind about what, why, and how we do things
- Awareness of what, why, and how we do things
- Questioning what, why, and how we do things
- Asking what, why, and how other people do things
- Generating choices, options and possibilities
- Comparing and contrasting results
- Seeking to understand underlying mechanisms & rationales
- Viewing our activities and results from various perspectives
- Asking "What if...?"
- Seeking feedback and other people ideas & viewpoints
- Using prescriptive (advice) models only when carefully adapted to the individual situation
- Analysing, synthesizing and testing
- Searching for, identifying, and resolving problems & result limitations (Roth (1989))

There are also stages of reflection. At first there is the initial shock (Oh my, I have never done this before, I don't want to do it, I haven't got time to do it etc.); then early difficulties as you attempt it for the first time, then finally acceptance, followed by familiarity (you start to make connections), then as you continue you will learn to reflect more deeply and then your perspective will transform as you start to make changes and then you will internalize this (a natural thing to do) and finally you will be able to communicate that learning and feel really positive about the whole experience. So don't dismiss this as

nonsense or that it does not apply to you – give it a go and you will be in for an amazing ride!

There are two main types of reflection:

Reflection-in-action (thinking on your feet) and **reflection-on-action** (retrospective thinking).

Reflection-in-action is relevant when you are working in practice and meet a situation that you have not previously encountered or perhaps a situation that requires you to adapt to a specific patient/client need. The resulting action you decide to take depends on your knowledge to date. It requires you to think on your feet and take appropriate action. This may include deciding on a specific treatment plan or making up blends for clients/patients to take home or even deciding on the type of treatment to do at a particular time in response to the information that client/patient has given you during the consultation. By writing this up, even as part of the consultation, you are evidencing your learning of the situation and thus you develop and this leads onto:

Reflection-on-action can be viewed as a retrospective activity, looking back and evaluating current skills, competencies, knowledge and professional practice. It includes writing up what you did, and after looking up the information or after discussion with your tutor/mentor/other aromatherapists, reflect back on how you could have done things differently now that you have learned more information or perhaps retrospectively decide on a different treatment/blend of oils for next time.

An essential part of reflective practice is learning from practical professional experience. According to Schon (1983), practitioners can either engage only in superficial problem solving according to tradition or under pressure of work, or preferably engage in a deeper level, which would be potentially more meaningful and difficult. It may however be more appropriate for the busy and practical professional aromatherapist to aim somewhere between these two extremes and nevertheless be actively involved in research and evidence based practice.

So in summary:

Reflection-on-action- Involves thinking about and reviewing an area of practice after the event. For the student of aromatherapy this will also be reflecting on case studies, homework and other assignments given to allow for assimilation of knowledge and competences. This approach can facilitate self-critique, thinking through options for further practice development and an evaluation of current understanding of the relevant issues. For the professional aromatherapist this can mean evaluation of a treatment, looking at the oils used and advice given or evaluating the need for further study in a particular area.

Reflection-in-action- is arguably a more dynamic approach to reflective activity, in that the practitioner can reflect during the event rather than after it.

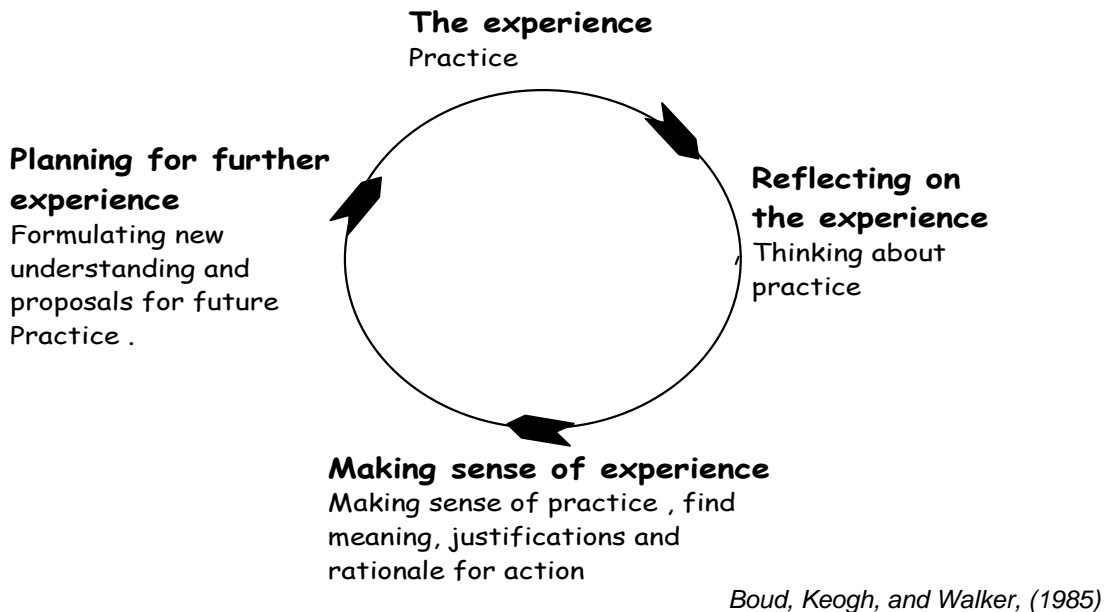
Alternatively this may be referred to as reflection-for-action as well. This type of reflection enables the student and/or practitioner to examine their decisions and surface the knowledge that has evolved within practice. Furthermore it is suggested that by examining where and how formal theory contributes or could contribute to professional practice the gap between the two can be reduced, (*Heath, 1998*).

Aromatherapists may complain that there is not enough time to bother with reflective activity, either during or after practice and surely don't students have enough to do! It is however important to recognise that the process of reflection need not be intrusive or time-consuming and can in fact become most enjoyable and beneficial once you get into it. It should not be seen as a chore, but something that you do automatically. You are doing it all the time and by taking a few extra moments to jot down your thoughts this becomes less of a burden. In the long run it will help prove competency and development whilst training and provide evidence of CPD once qualified (see the AAPA CPD policy for further information).

Reflection is not difficult to do! Think of it as writing a story as you would in a diary and use it for self-exploration and a catalyst for change. Think how much fun it is to look back at information and thoughts you wrote years ago only to see how much you have grown. It has also been proven that we remember facts more readily when we have written them out in a story format. Tony Buzan has demonstrated this as part of his evaluation of how the mind works and shown that we are more easily able to remember a shopping list as a story than as a linear list. Try it for yourself! Use it to further your understanding of your work and yourself and even learn to appreciate yourself, identifying personal strengths. Like wise, it can also help you identify any blind spots or personal blocks. Then you can take action to improve things if necessary.

Reflective skills can include the ability to be self-aware, descriptive, analytical and constructively evaluative. There may be a perceived gap between knowing and articulating this knowledge. However this process can be simplified and/or shared and group reflection can help towards this and overcome some of the perceived barriers to reflection. We therefore encourage aromatherapist's support groups to include such activity where individuals can interpret the experiences of others and identify with it, as they may have experienced similar situations within their own practice. It can be an opportunity to think about the depth and range of aromatherapy practice and the scope of professional practice. As even working within the current agreed baseline levels as published in the National Occupational Standards for safe and competent therapists, it is possible for the qualified practitioners to perform competently with different levels of knowledge and experience and work to best practice.

3. How to use Reflective Practice as an Aromatherapist



This learning cycle highlights essential stages in the learning process.

- **Having an experience** is the starting point
- **Reflection upon or thinking deeply about the experience** is the next step. This involves asking sufficient questions in order to encourage the reflective process.
- **Analyse possible courses of action.** Was the most appropriate course taken or could there have been a better alternative?
- **Make sense of the experience.** Find meanings and justification for future development and practice.
- **By critically analysing** experience and **selecting a plan of action** for future experimentation and practice.

N.B. The cycle is a continual process. When the opportunity arises for experimentation as part of your ongoing experience the cycle begins once more.

The reflective model above gives you an idea of how easy it is to reflect. When using reflection in action in the treatment room, you start by describing the activity you are involved in (which in practice would be the consultation sheet), then how you felt about it (in the notes section of your consultation sheet), then you would evaluate the treatment (which you do in the notes section of the consultation sheet), analyse the treatment (notes section again) and reach a conclusion of everything that has transpired during the treatment, followed by writing up a treatment plan, or in the figure above the "action plan". Wow, so you are already using reflection without even knowing it!!

It might be a good idea at this stage to review your client consultation form and include a section where you can reflect-in –action, capturing the moment, the event and your thoughts feelings at that time. You could include space to write down observations (as you probably do anyway), what your knowledge was about that specific situation, how much experience you have with this situation/problem, how confident you felt about handling it and making a decision on treatments type and blending. How did you feel this affected your relationship with the client or even with colleagues, where appropriate. Was it a positive experience and has it motivated you in any way, or was it a less positive experience and if so mark this up for later deeper reflection on what you are going to do about it.

Then you need to go back a few days later and review, which would be called reflection on action. Read up the case notes and then write up some thoughts and ideas for this particular case. Ask yourself questions like:

- How do I feel the treatment went now?
- Has the client re-booked immediately and does this reflect the quality of the treatment given?
- Could I have handled the situation better? How might I have responded differently?
- Did I act in the best interests of the client? Did I act ethically? (This can open a Pandora's Box!)
- Could I have done anything differently in terms of client care?
- Did I use the best blend of carrier and essential oils in the right dilution for the client's individual needs?
- Did I choose the right type of treatment for that particular client?
- Was the pressure I used right in a massage?
- Should I have offered different/additional post treatment advice or offered any blends for them to take home to enhance their well-being?
- Did I feel I communicated my intentions in a positive manner to the client and did they fully understand the treatment plan
- Was the treatment plan I chose correct now that I look back and do I need to change anything?

Then look up oils that you might want to use next time using research from books/magazines and the internet. Research any specific findings. If this was a client with a pathology or emotional problem you had not dealt with before, look up information on it and reference your findings. Use this to help you decide on an alternative treatment plan if necessary and different choice of oils or use it to affirm your correct handling of the situation. Write up any amendments to the treatment plan in the clients notes and explain this to them at their next appointment. They will be impressed at the attention and time you have taken for their well-being and this in turn will help build confidence and trust between you, benefiting the whole experience and therapeutic relationship. Develop an action plan that is a new innovative way of approaching a certain situation and then write up the results and get it published.

Reflection can also help you to pinpoint where your marketing will have the most effect and make sure you include the question in your consultation form "Where did you hear about me" so that you can reflect and only spend money on advertising that is really working for you.

THE REFLECTIVE PROCESS - an Example in Everyday Terms

- Experience** - My journey to work by car was difficult. I was half an hour late because of the heavy traffic.
- Reflection** - I felt stressed on arrival at work. My explanation for lateness was not understood. This left me feeling more frustrated. My colleagues were very busy. I felt out of place all day.
- Making sense** - I was not intentionally late. Road works were in progress along my usual route. Although I felt angry at my colleagues attitudes I realise that they were also under stress. My being late made the situation worse. How can I avoid this happening again?
- Plans** - In order to avoid a repeat of the experience I will have to either:
- choose a different route
 - or
 - leave home earlier
- Learning** - After experimenting I will discover how I can effectively manage my journey to work.

In reflective practice, practitioners engage in a continuous cycle of self-observation and self-evaluation in order to understand their own actions and the reactions they prompt in themselves and in learners (Brookfield, 1995; Thiel, 1999). You can also use reflective practice to enhance your skills and knowledge base as an aromatherapist and use it to provide evidence of ongoing learning and personal and professional development. You will put this evidence in your portfolio. ,

So why is it so important to have a personal and professional portfolio?

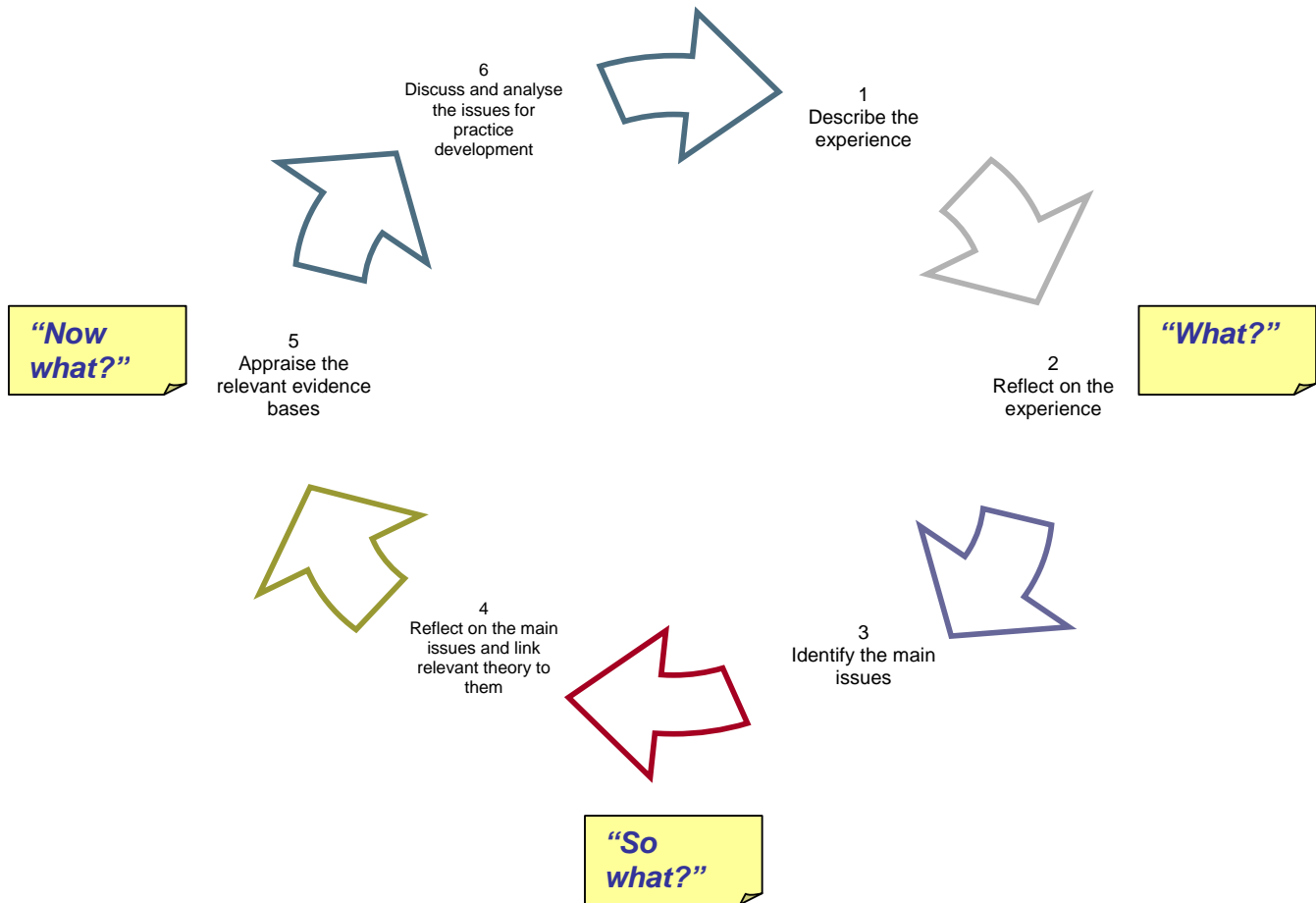
It is important from the point of view of demonstrating evidence of advancing professional practice. It is also useful for career planning, for marketing you for potential career options and highlighting transferable skills. Portfolios are more likely to help you obtain a position in a workplace environment as it demonstrates your skills and competences far better than a certificate does. It can be seen as an important facility in order to prepare for individual performance reviews in a workplace environment if you are working in a hospital or other unit. It can also be kept as a record of **lifelong learning**, which is again an expectation within professional practice now.

There are two aspects of the portfolio-the **personal** and the **professional**. The personal portfolio is a private document and involves individual records of the development of practitioner's skills, knowledge, attitudes, understanding and achievements. It may also include structured written reflective accounts of individual case studies and critical incident reviews. When we reflect we enter into a dialogue with ourselves with whatever we are doing and we are moved along thought processes following sensations, interchange and choice rather than following a predetermined intention or idea. Our personal feelings are the gateways into our stories.

The professional profile is alternatively to be seen as a public document, which will be structured with the consideration of sharing this document with a specific audience. It may include accounts of professional experience and direct observations of practice development, it may include shared ideas and opinions that have been discussed with colleagues. It may also include evaluations of new working methods that may be being tried out within the area. The reflection should not all be on issues of concern but rather should be a more balanced evaluation of individual practitioner abilities and potential.

4. Using Reflective Practice as a student

An experiential learning cycle:



Adapted from Gibbs by C Preen (2006)

The Reflective Journal is an important way of bringing together all your experiences in learning about aromatherapy. Central to these are the practical experiences of both the course and your home based work. There will also be times, however, when your own memories or your own social or personal experiences are highly relevant. Likewise, the reading that you are doing alongside your course will contradict or confirm your reflections. Reflective journals naturally have very different styles and all are equally appropriate. It is an academic endeavour, however, and should be quite different from a personal diary, or record of events. The journal is a forum, for using writing to think, for speculating, for hypothesising, and for crystallising your aromatherapy learning experiences into active principles.

The easiest way to approach your journal is to set aside a regular time to write it, perhaps once a week. If it suits your way of working, it is much less time-consuming to write directly onto screen and this fits with the using writing to

think philosophy of reflective journals. You might start by brainstorming a few significant moments/thoughts/incidents from the previous week. Choose one or two of these to reflect upon. You will not have time to reflect on everything that occurs to you, and depth is more important than breadth. Do not allow yourself to spend too long writing or too long editing, though re-reading what you have written is an important part of the reflective process.

At this point, try to make connections between your experiences and your reading and research about aromatherapy. Sometimes you may read something relevant some weeks after a particular journal entry and there is no reason why you should not insert a reference into the appropriate journal entry.

Before handing your journal in to your tutor, do check it both for the quality of its reflection and for the accuracy of its presentation. Do not be tempted to rewrite sections, however: if you have changed your mind about a thought or have more to say, you can always insert comments in italic, which indicate these are final reflections. These can often show how your thinking has moved on.

Assessing your journal during writing and before handing in as part of your portfolio:

Check first and foremost that your journal reflects and mulls over the implications of your course experience, and that it is not simply narrating what you have done.

Inevitably, there will be times when the journal is cathartic, even therapeutic! The facility to write out your feelings often helps to keep them in proportion and is a valid function of the journal. However, do ensure that your journal moves beyond this too - if you notice a tendency to too much 'personal outpouring', consciously give yourself writing space to reflect on what you are learning as a professional.

Remember to refer to books you are reading or have read, either as they connect with something you have encountered during the course, or simply because what you have read has prompted you to think about an aspect aromatherapy.

Try to ensure that you opt for depth, not breadth. There may well be many things you would like to reflect upon, but it is better to explore one or two things in detail than to skim superficially across a multitude of ideas.

5. How to use Reflective Practice as an aromatherapy tutor

Why reflect as a tutor? We draw conclusions everyday from our experiences but are our conclusions reasonable and helpful to us as we plan future lessons? How can we know? Through reflection you can assess your conclusions, actions and work process itself to further your personal and professional development.

Reflecting is something we already do as tutors through development of lesson plans and planning new courses in an ever changing environment. We also give students feedback sheets to complete at the end of a course and we need to be able to effectively evaluate the constructive criticisms as well as congratulate ourselves on the achievements and compliments! In the words of Schön:

"Every teacher must, by regarding every imperfection in the pupil's comprehension not as a defect of the pupil, but as a defect in his own instruction, endeavour to develop in himself the ability of discovering new methods".
(Schön 1982: 66)

General Reflections on Education

What are we doing here? The following sets of questions can help you articulate your philosophy of aromatherapy education. When you are done, you can put them in your professional portfolio or share your thoughts with other teachers.

- What is aromatherapy education and who is it for?
- Who am I teaching?
- What should we be teaching?
- Why teach?
- Who teaches?

Classroom Reflections

The following sets of questions can help you think about the atmosphere and design of your classroom.

- How do I want students to interact in my classroom?
- In what ways is it important for students to interact with the community in which they live?
- What resources should be available to my students?
- How can I use the wall space in my classroom to further active learning?

Self-Assessment Reflections

The following sets of questions can help you think about your work this week and this year ... What have you learned this week? What have you taught this week? How are you doing in your work? The questions posed in this section are designed to provide you with some space in which you can consider your own professional development.

- What was the most important thing I tried to teach my students this week?
- What is/are the most important thing(s) my students will learn from me this year?
- What did I learn from my students this week?
- What was I thinking?

Reflective practitioners in academic environments will frequently think about what they are doing while they are doing it, whether it is curriculum design, devising a PowerPoint presentation, setting questions, developing assessment strategies, delivering information or marking coursework. More importantly the professional lecturer will encourage students to think about what, why and how they are doing whatever they are doing while they are doing it. Reflection must therefore be at grass roots level. It is extremely difficult to encourage students to learn reflectively unless the lecturer embodies such an approach. If we practice what we preach and encourage students to use reflection as well as ourselves, then this will make them reflective practitioners and benefit the therapy as a whole.

Johns (1996) suggests some questions to help you think more deeply when using an experiential learning cycle.

1. Description of experience

- Phenomenon-describe the 'here and now'
- Causal- what essential factors contributed to this experience?
- Context – what are the significant background factors to this experience?
- Clarifying – what are the key processes (for reflection) in this experience?

2. Reflection

- What was I trying to achieve?
- Why did I intervene as I did?
- What were the consequences of my actions for:
 - Myself?
 - The student?
 - The people I work with?
- How did I feel about this experience when it was happening?
- How did the student feel?
- How do I know how the student felt about it?

3. Influencing factors

- What internal factors influenced my decision-making?
- What external factors influenced my decision-making?
- What source of knowledge did influence/should have influenced my decision making?

4. Could I have dealt better with the situation?

- What other choices did I have?
- What would have been the consequence of these choices?

5. Learning

- How do I feel now about this experience?
- How can I make sense of this experience in the light of past experiences and future practice?
- How has this experience changed my way of knowing: empirics, ethics and personal knowledge?

Johns, C. (1996) Using a reflective model of nursing and guided reflection. *Nursing Standard*, 11 (2): 34-38.

6. Reflection & Continuing Professional Development

The AAPA has a policy document giving aromatherapists a guide as to what exactly constitutes CPD evidence. Within that there are many areas where reflective practice can be used to evidence learning and professional development. In this respect, reflection will make evidencing CPD much easier for aromatherapists and save time and money. Reflection on action also helps you to decide what areas you may need to develop to enhance your knowledge and skills as a practitioner and thus direct you to learning that will be optimal to you and your practice.

The reflective practice elements for CPD evidence are as follows:

- Attendance at local therapy groups/clubs where you are sharing experiences with other aromatherapists and possibly mentoring an aromatherapist who has problems with a client/patient. This must be accompanied by a reflective practice essay of around 500 words to show how you have gained from this experience as a practitioner.
- Reading/researching from books/journals or the internet and writing up a reflective practice essay of around 500 words to show how you have integrated that learning into your practice.
- Attending meetings as part of your association's Council or attendance of meetings on behalf of your association at working parties/forums. You will need to write up a report to go on file in your portfolio.
- Being in receipt of therapy that assists with your personal development as a practitioner, i.e. counselling, psychotherapy, hypnotherapy etc. You would need to accompany this with a reflective practice essay of around 500 words to show how these experiences have benefited you as a practitioner.
- Supervising an aromatherapy student carrying out clinical placement as part of their course. You would need to write a reflective practice essay on how this affected your practice at that time.
- Giving taster aromatherapy treatments at local events/open days or local care groups accompanied by a reflective practice essay of around

500 words demonstrating how this work based learning has benefited your practice.

- Offering free sessions to local groups with specific special needs and or disabilities to enhance your experiences in these areas and accompanied by a reflective practice essay of around 500 words demonstrating how this work based learning has benefited your practice.
- Watching a video/film for educational purposes relevant to professional life accompanied by a reflective practice essay of around 500 words to show how you have gained from this experience as a practitioner.

As you can see using reflection and keeping a portfolio is the best way of evidencing your personal and professional development.

Resources

AC CPD Policy (2006)

Aromatherapy & Allied Practitioners' Association (AAPA) Portfolio notes (2002)

Brookfield, S. (1995). *"Becoming a critically reflective teacher"*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Boud, D. Keogh, R, Walker, D. (Eds) (1985) *Reflections Turning Experience into Learning*. London: Kogen Page.

Fewell, F. (2002) *Assessment of Practice Handbook Supportive Document. Open Learning Handout*. Chemsford: APU

Gibbs, G. (1988) *Learning by Doing: A guide to teaching & learning methods*. Oxford University Press

Johns, C. (1996) *Using a reflective model of nursing and guided reflection. Nursing Standard*, 11 (2): 34-38.

<http://learnweb.harvard.edu/alps/reflect/index.cfm>

Preen,C. Teaching Notes (2005)

Schön - *Reflective practitioner: how professionals think in action* (Harper Collins, 1982)

Thiel, T. (1999). *Reflections on critical incidents*. "Prospect, 14"(1), 44-52