

## Self Reflection

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Self reflection fascinates me. Why is it that some people find it easy and rewarding, while for others it is such a struggle? Some practitioners automatically keep a reflective journal while others find every reason not to.

My experience has been of teaching self reflection to students, either online to the International School of Homeopathy, Japan, or face to face with mixed discipline CAM students at the University of Westminster. Among both groups there are those who appreciate and enjoy reflective practice - and those who cannot see *how* to do it or have a problem with writing. Finally, there are those few who have yet to see the benefits of it, so don't try.

This year I decided to do a pilot study among established practitioners and offered my services as a long-distance supervisor or critical friend. I would give feedback to anyone who sent me their reflective journal on a weekly basis for eight weeks. Ten people joined me, eight homeopaths and two from other CAM therapies.

Two of the homeopaths knew me personally, and wrote cautiously about individual cases. The rest of them wrote about their deepest, most troublesome, most long-standing issue, that they had struggled with and reflected on to no avail. It was as if they were taking advantage of the anonymity to face their demons, with the added safety net that it was only for eight weeks. From their point of view there was little to lose.

From my research into self reflection and the use of the personal journal, I have come to realise that reflection is the same as homeopathy: it needs to be tailored to the individual. An easy way to identify what style of reflection suits you, is to look into your preferred learning style or styles. These are:

- The fact finder who likes to research the evidence or consider theory
- The critical thinker who prefers to analyse what has happened
- The experiential learner who needs to take part by doing something
- The visual learner who needs to see or draw the issue
- The aural learner who likes to listen to music or tapes
- The tactile learner who learns through touching or practical activities
- The learner who needs to talk things through

Don't take your learning style for granted. Many people assume they are fact finders or critical thinkers, when this is simply the style that was imposed on them at school or college, and does not relate to their own natural inclination.

I have found that by encouraging supervisees, colleagues and students to experiment with different approaches to self reflection they can become more flexible in their thinking and resolve more issues. I was in awe of how fast the practitioners who were supervised by me on the pilot study, moved out of their

stuck positions once they were asked to view their issue from a different perspective. After eight weeks, many were empowered to become independent self reflectors.

My message is that it is okay to use logical thought processes *or* intuition and creativity - or all of them - to reflect. Intuition can always be confirmed through further analysis or further experience.

Self reflection is a process of observing what happens at work or at home, investigating it in order to understand it and making appropriate changes for the future. It is an ongoing practice of refinement, made up of small steps and can take place in a variety of ways. It needs a dedicated time, an attitude of honest enquiry, and a way of recording findings so they can be referred back to. These are my suggestions for effective journal writing:

*Choose an attractive format* - choose a notebook or format for writing that feels good for you. Many find it quicker to type than write, but a handwritten journal will allow you to include drawings, diagrams, mind maps, charts or cut and paste from e-mails.

*Use it often* - get in the habit of writing/creating regularly, even if it is brief. Like any muscle that hasn't been exercised for a while, you may be a little bit stiff at first. Make journal entries a part of your routine.

*Work with freedom* - everything you choose to work with is okay, so don't impose rules on yourself and don't be shy. Follow your intuition and choose whatever style of writing, creating or developing your journal that suits you. Some people enjoy the formality of a reflective framework, such as Gibbs (1988), but others bring their full creativity into self reflection.

*Dare to go* - have the courage to explore parts of your inner self that you haven't examined before. Work with depth, honesty and openness.

*Watch out for your inner judge* - your inner judge always wants to criticise you and put you down. To counteract it, remember to congratulate yourself on what goes well. Note down past and present achievements to cheer yourself up on low days.

*Watch out for your inner justifier* - your inner justifier always wants you to be in the right. It cannot find fault with you and prefers to blame the other person. But you will learn far more about yourself if you admit you might have been wrong, and explore why – in the privacy of your journal.

*Keep what you write or create* - even the most important discoveries about yourself can be easily forgotten, and brief entries may contain seeds that germinate later.

*Date every entry* - dating each entry really helps when you are rereading your journal. You will be able to see patterns of where you get stuck, and where you have energy and flow.

*Have fun* -include things that make you laugh and lift your spirits.

*Be kind to yourself* - remember to record what you did well, and celebrate your successes. This will consolidate good practice. Use the journal to learn from your mistakes, so that it contributes towards your self-development and self care. You will benefit from self reflection, and your practice and patients will benefit as well.