



Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals

ABMP SCHOOL FORUM

Better Thinking, Better Learning, Better World

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Are you doing your best, highest-quality thinking? What could you achieve with the space and time to deliberate on things more meaningfully versus the "in the moment" survival mode we've accepted as our current reality?

These are the core questions asked in Lenovo's 2022 *Think Report*. Lenovo surveyed a global audience of Gen Z and Millennials on the state of thinking. Why Gen Z and Millennials? Because they'll make up almost 75% of the workforce by 2030 and most of the students in our classrooms right now.

The *Think Report* illuminates something many of us feel but haven't had the time to think about. If deep, quality thinking is declining, what does it mean for our schools, classrooms, students, massage profession, country, and the world?

In this session, we'll think deeply about thinking. First, we'll define quality thinking and its too prevalent opposite – survival thinking. Next, we'll muse on the state of our thinking processes before we explore mental models to unlock more exploratory and expansive cognition. Finally, we'll turn on our thinking powers to help our students move out of survival thinking and into their classroom lessons.

QUALITY THINKING DEFINED

First, let's discuss quality thinking. As we explore this term, think about your thinking and the degree to which you can and do think in the ways I'll describe. With a little effort, everyone can improve their thinking.

Quality thinking is the ability to think clearly, deeply, and productively. It has several overlapping parts, including higher-order, critical, reflective, collaborative, and creative thinking.

Higher-Order Thinking

The term higher-order thinking traces its roots to Benjamin Bloom's learning taxonomy. It refers to thinking at a higher level than remembering terms and facts. This type of thinking requires you to analyze knowledge, compare and contrast concepts to differentiate between them, connect information, and evaluate yourself, others, or things.

Sometimes educators forget that you can't think at the top of Bloom's taxonomy if you don't first think at the bottom. People can't progress to high-order thinking without knowledge of key terms, concepts, and facts.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is the objective analysis and evaluation of an issue to form a judgment. It includes differentiating between facts and opinions and reliable and unreliable information

to make an informed decision. Like higher-order thinking, critical thinking requires mastery of lower-order thinking skills.

Reflective Thinking

Reflective thinking is contemplating one's experiences to derive meaning and to understand the patterns of one's life. Educators often refer to John Dewey's (1859-1952) concept of reflective thinking. Dewey encouraged learners to assess their experiences to determine their knowledge level, skill level, and learning gaps. In Dewey's model, students must formulate a plan to bridge their own knowledge and skill gaps.

The current emphasis on metacognition (thinking about one's thinking processes) and self-awareness in education are examples of reflective thinking in our classrooms.

Collaborative Thinking

Collaborative thinking is working effectively with others to brainstorm, appraise, and filter ideas. Collaboration requires people to build off other people's ideas to arrive at conclusions or solutions and then assess outcomes to understand how they impact stakeholders.

Collaborative thinking necessitates several skill sets that involve effective communication, including building rapport, reading body language, listening actively, sharing ideas assertively, negotiating, and compromising.

Creative Thinking

Creative thinking is the ability to generate diverse ideas and manipulate them in unusual ways to develop novel combinations from old elements, make something completely new, or find unconventional ways to perform a service or solve a problem.

Now we understand that quality thinking has several overlapping parts, including higher-order thinking, critical thinking, reflective thinking, collaborative thinking, and creative thinking, that help us think deeply, clearly, and productively.

Survival Thinking

Survival thinking is short-term thinking that gets us to the next goalpost. This type of cognition involves rapid responses to challenges and continuous multitasking. For example, we hustle to finish the presentation, get dinner on the table, make rent, study for the quiz, or fit in a workout. Competing deadlines and conflicting commitments split our energy and attention.

Lenovo's *Think Report* revealed that Gen Z and Millennials are burned-out, struggling to make ends meet, and distressed by societal unrest. As a result, their thought lives revolve around immediate challenges rather than more meaningful thinking that can lead to better long-term outcomes.

For example, fewer than 1 in 5 participants said their life is getting easier, while 4 in 5 say their life is either getting harder or staying the same. In addition, respondents said that having too many things on their minds (63%), distractions (62%), fatigue (58%), burnout (56%), and not feeling mentally healthy (55%) were significant obstacles to effective thinking.

Participants said that the work-from-home experiment known as the pandemic introduced "tech clutter" that hampered their thinking ability. According to Forbes, well-meaning employers doing their best to keep their teams connected adopted a plethora of web-based tools. Unfortunately, they provided little training on how to use them effectively. Instead of

facilitating collaboration and better thinking, these apps and programs led to distractions, multitasking, and frustration.

We've learned survival thinking involves equal parts of hustle and frustration with a hefty dollop of anxiety and exhaustion. Unfortunately, all of us fall prey to survival thinking because of the commitments of our busy lifestyles.

Activity 01: The State of Our Thinking

GOAL: TO THINK ABOUT THINKING

Format: Think-Pair-Share

Directions:

1. **Think:** Read the question prompts below and think about your thinking over the past 12 months. Is your thinking deep, clear, and productive? How much of your thinking is survival-based? Then, when urged by the facilitator, note what stands out as important.
2. **Pair:** When prompted by the facilitator, discuss thinking with a peer. Identify shared experiences and essential insights.
3. **Share:** When prompted by the facilitator, share your findings with the large group.

Questions:

- How much and in what ways did the events of 2020 through 2022 impact your ability to think clearly, deeply, and productively?
- What challenges do you face when you try to think clearly, deeply, and productively now?
- Are there any methods you use to facilitate clear, deep thinking?
- Remember a time that exemplifies your best thinking. How did you think, and what did it produce or achieve?
- How much and in what ways does survival thinking rule your thought life? What broader effects (impacts) result from your survival thinking?
- What observations can you make about your students and their thought lives? What benefits or challenges do their current thinking modes pose for their careers and your school?
- In your experience, how does technology improve quality thinking? Conversely, in what ways does technology erode quality thinking?

Oprah Winfrey once said that what we focus on expands. So, when we take the time to think about our thinking, we expand our ability to think more deeply, clearly, and productively.

The core recommendations of health professionals and researchers say we can improve our brain to enhance thinking using these methods:

- Exercise regularly
- Get 7-9 hours of sleep each night
- Eat a Mediterranean diet
- Play games like crosswords or trivia to sharpen your memory
- Remain socially active and involved
- Manage blood pressure
- Manage blood sugar
- Manage stress

In Lenovo's *Think Report*, respondents said that these things improved their ability to think deeply, clearly, and productively:

- Spending time in nature
- Listening to music
- Practicing mindfulness
- Creative pursuits like drawing and painting
- Adding more greenery to home spaces

Most of us are aware of health and wellness recommendations that improve thinking. At any time, we can focus more on brain health and general wellness to boost cognition.

<heading 1> Mental Models for Better Thinking

A mental model is an idea of how something works. It is a concept, framework, or organized mind representation that helps us interpret the world and understand the relationship between things. Examples of commonly applied mental models are:

- **Supply and Demand:** A mental model that helps us understand how the economy works.
- **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs:** A mental model that explains human motivation.
- **The Scientific Method:** A mental model that tells us how to acquire knowledge.
- **Natural Selection:** A mental model that helps us understand how species change over generations to survive and thrive.
- **The ELAP Learning Taxonomy:** A mental model of how people learn.

All of us are operating from mental models whether we are aware of it or not. These models may increase our productivity and clear thinking or feed faulty assumptions and beliefs that limit our cognitive range of motion.

I might apply the ELAP taxonomy as a mental model to help structure lessons, but I must also recognize its limitations. The ELAP taxonomy doesn't emphasize learner emotional states – something researchers tell us we must address if we want better academic outcomes. If I don't have a plan to get my learners in a receptive emotional state at the top of my class, then all my carefully designed lesson structure might not mean anything.

So long as we can recognize that all mental models have their limits, we can use different models to enter deep, clear, productive thinking states. Moreover, experts say that the thoughtful application of various mental models expands our cognitive potential, builds our thinking toolbox, and improves our critical and creative thinking ability.

Today, I want to talk about two models I use as thought experiments that help me think deeply, clearly, and productively about life's challenges or education. These models are handy because they are applicable personally, in a faculty meeting, during strategic planning, and to help students apply concepts in the classroom.

Entropy

Entropy is a mental model from chemistry. It is the Second Law of Thermodynamics and a law of nature. Entropy is the natural tendency of things to lose order. Left to its own devices,

life will always become less structured. Weeds overtake gardens, houses fall into disrepair, cars begin to rust, and mountains erode.

Many people experienced entropy during the pandemic because it pulled people out of their orderly routines when everything shut down. According to various surveys, people's lives moved toward less structure. They:

- Went to bed later and woke up later
- Ate food they avoided before and gained weight
- Stopped working out or participating in their favorite sports
- Spent the day in their pajamas
- Watched more T.V.
- Didn't host friends or family
- Didn't travel for events or holidays

Many people expected to return to their former structure and discipline as the world opened back up, but they didn't. The pull of entropy is relentless. Disorder always increases unless we fight back. If we want to conquer entropy, especially at the beginning of any new endeavor, we must:

- Give the situation our energy and attention (exert effort)
- Plan ahead (reduce opportunities for chaos)
- Simplify (decrease complexity)
- Add structure (increase order)

Let's apply what we know about entropy to an unproductive faculty meeting. If we want faculty meetings to be more productive, we must:

- Give faculty meetings our energy and attention (exert effort).
- Plan ahead (reduce opportunities for chaos) by writing a practical agenda we can easily achieve in the dedicated time.
- Simplify (decrease complexity) by prioritizing discussion items and focusing on no more than three things.
- Add structure (increase order). For example, we won't let people discuss problems willy-nilly. Instead, we'll use the think-pair-share format we just learned. First, participants will journal about a solution for one or two minutes. Next, they'll discuss their ideas with a peer for five minutes, and then each pair will share their best idea (not all their ideas).

Let's apply what we know about entropy to an unproductive lesson that led to students failing a quiz. If we want the lesson to produce better academic outcomes, we must:

- Give the lesson our energy and attention (exert effort).
- Plan ahead (reduce opportunities for chaos) by revising the lesson plan to focus on need-to-know (instead of nice-to-know) information.
- Simplify (decrease complexity) by eliminating a group activity that always causes confusion and replacing it with a teacher-facilitated discussion of the concepts on the quiz.

- Add structure (increase order) by giving students a study guide of the key terms and concepts on the quiz and a series of example quiz questions.

Let's say we want to launch a new web-based tool to facilitate some processes on our campus. We won't just sign everyone up and expect them to work it out independently. If we want the launch to be successful, we must:

- Give the new tool our energy and attention (exert effort) by becoming an expert on the program ourselves.
- Plan ahead (reduce opportunities for chaos) by gathering everyone together for a staff meeting where they will learn about the program simultaneously.
- Simplify (decrease complexity) by writing up step-by-step directions to get started.
- Add structure (increase order) by talking people through the program's features and giving them an activity sheet so they practice essential functions in groups of two during the meeting.

We can apply the mental model of entropy to almost every problem we face. When things are going in the wrong direction, give the situation energy (effort), plan ahead (reduce opportunities for chaos), simplify (decrease complexity), and add structure (increase order). By applying entropy, we think deeply, clearly, and productively about problems and solutions.

Inversion

You've probably seen social media posts or bumper stickers advising "Good Vibes Only," but the ancient Stoic philosophers would argue for *premeditatio malorum*, which translates to a "premeditation of evils."

The Stoics believed we should imagine the worst-case scenario to overcome fear and better understand potential roadblocks and pitfalls. For example, imagine the most important goal or project you are working on right now.

Fast forward six months, and assume the project or goal has failed. Tell the story of how it failed in as much detail as possible. Through this process, you'll identify hazards you didn't see and challenges you can prevent if you think ahead.

Similarly, instead of imagining ways to make more money, imagine how you could destroy your financial health. Using this inverse thinking will help you figure out how not to lose or overspend the money you have.

The Stoics point out that blindly chasing success can have severe consequences, but preventing failures carries little risk.

Taffie, Kristin, Cindy, and I often used reverse brainstorming during the Instructors on the Front Lines workshops we taught. Reverse brainstorming is a form of inversion because you brainstorm a flipped question. Instead of asking, "How can I be a great teacher?" or "How can I make our school more innovative?" we turn the question on its head to generate surprising insights. We'll ask:

- How can I alienate my students?
- How can I make sure our school is left behind?

Inversion is counterintuitive. We don't naturally spend time thinking about the opposite of what we want. But many great thinkers ask inverse questions or use inverse thinking to generate deep insights into problems or goals.

For example, most of us see opportunities as a good thing. The more opportunities, the better! Steve Jobs would disagree. Jobs once asked Apple employees to identify as many opportunities for the company as possible. When teams proudly shared all the ideas they generated, Jobs told them to crumple their papers and toss them in the trash. He reminded his teams that to do an excellent job on the company's priorities, they had to scrap all other opportunities. Any opportunity that did not focus on the company's priorities wasted resources and time.

Inversion is a good way to challenge our beliefs, step outside our normal thought patterns, and look at situations from a new angle. So next time you're stuck, don't imagine what you want. Instead, imagine what you don't want to happen.

We've discussed just two mental models from the hundreds that exist. Check out Farnam Street Articles (fs.blog) and James Clear (jamesclear.com) to explore more mental models.

Activity 02: Out of Survival And Into The Lesson

GOAL: TO USE THE MENTAL MODELS OF ENTROPY AND INVERSION TO IDENTIFY WAYS TO REDUCE STUDENT ANXIETY AND SURVIVAL THINKING ON CAMPUS.

Format: Peer Discussion

Introduction

Earlier, we discussed that Lenovo's *Think Report* revealed that Gen Z and Millennials said that having too many things on their mind (63%), distractions (62%), fatigue (58%), burnout (56%), and not feeling mentally healthy (55%) were significant obstacles to effective thinking. So we can predict that our students might report similar feelings.

Recently, the Imagine America Foundation combined the results of numerous surveys of college students conducted between 2019-2022 to present these statistics. At one or more points within twelve months, students reported they felt:

- Hopeless: 53.4%
- Overwhelmed by all they had to do: 87.4%
- Exhausted, not from physical activity: 84.3%
- Very lonely: 62.8%
- Very sad: 68.7%
- So depressed that it was difficult to function: 41.9%
- Overwhelming anxiety: 63.4%
- Overwhelming anger: 42.1%
- Seriously considered suicide: 12.1%
- Attempted suicide: 1.7%
- Intentionally injured themselves: 7.8%

While the pandemic exacerbated student mental health issues, even before 2020, students described high levels of significant anxiety (60%) that caused them to achieve lower marks on exams or assignments. So our goal is to use the mental models of entropy and inversion to identify practical ways to reduce student anxiety and survival thinking on campus.

Activity Directions:

1. Pair up with someone at your table or work in a group of three.
2. Use what you have learned about entropy and inversion to explore the issue of student anxiety and survival thinking on your campuses.
3. Identify between one and three practical ways to reduce student anxiety and survival-thinking levels. With better thinking should come greater participation in classroom learning.
4. While having a mental health counselor on campus is an excellent idea, the goal is to find practical solutions that cost no more than \$4000 annually.
5. Groups have 15 minutes to identify solutions.
6. We'll share as many solutions as time allows in the large group.

CLOSING

As we close, let's return to Lenovo's *Think Report*. When participants were asked how deep, clear, productive thinking could benefit society, 62% of respondents said that better thinking would help our society be kinder and more peaceful. In addition, 54% said it would help us solve systemic problems, and 51% said it would help our country be more productive.

We can extrapolate the *Think Report* findings to our message bubble and contemplate how deep, clear thinking might help us change lives through professional touch. Our students will carry forward the legacy of the school environment we create. I hope we can gift our students great thinking to go along with their great hands.

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