



The Practicing Mind by Thomas M. Sterner

Think you might want to read this book?

As teachers, it is important to not only teach others how to learn but also how to be lifelong learners ourselves. In his book *The Practicing Mind*, Thomas Sterner highlights ways to transform the way we practice and think about learning. *The Practicing Mind* is about remembering what you already know at some level and bringing that memory into the present, where it will empower you to partake in your learning journey. This book will reintroduce you to a process you followed to acquire a skill before you knew what the process meant, and it will remind you that life itself is nothing more than one long practice session, an endless effort to refine the motions, both physical and mental, that compose our days.

What would Socrates ask?

- How can we remember what it was like before we were “experts” on a topic?
- What can we learn from how kids think?
- What can we teach children so they will have less to unlearn than we do?
- How can we emphasize the process over the product?
- How is homework practice?
- How can homework be more about the process and less about the product?
- What balance between quality and quantity is most important for learning?
- How do you stay in the present with your thoughts and energies?
- How can we turn work into play?

Concepts

- To create a practicing mind you must...
 1. Keep yourself process-oriented
 2. Stay in the present
 3. Make the process the goal and use the overall goal as a rudder to steer your efforts
 - a. “They do, they observe, they correct”
 4. Be deliberate, have an intention about what you want to accomplish, and remain aware of that intention
- Understanding of the proper mechanics of practice
 - Focus on one thing
 - “We are so used to multitasking that when we decide we want to reel in our minds and focus ourselves on just one activity, we can’t.”
 - The practicing mind is quiet
 - Live in the present: “When you focus your mind on the present moment, on the process of what you are doing right now, you are always where you want to be and where you should be. All your energy goes into what

you are doing. However, when you focus your mind on where you want to end up, you are never where you are, and you exhaust your energy with unrelated thoughts instead of putting it into what you are doing.”

- Living in the present helps you realize you are perfect at that point and you are pressured by expectations.
- Have laser-like, pinpoint focus and accuracy.
- Write to learn
 - Reflect on the process
- Understand how proper mechanics makes the experience of the learning process efficient and free of stress and impatience
- Shift intended goal from process to product-oriented: “We become fixated on our intended goal and completely miss out on the joy present in the process of achieving it”.
- Awareness of our own internal workings: “We need to be aware of what we are doing, what we are thinking, and what we are intending to accomplish in order to gain control of what we experience in life”.
 - What we practice becomes a habit.
 - Picking a goal
 - Process goals
 - When you focus on the process, you achieve your goals repeatedly.
 - When you focus on the product, you feel frustrated because your goal is far away and you do not meet your goals often. It increases anxiety.
 - Product goals
 - Use the product goal “as a rudder to steer your practice session, but not as an indicator of how you are doing”.
 - Adjust the process to achieve the product
 - Apply a steady effort to attain the goal
 - Mindset influences everything
 - If we enjoy it, we do not consider it work - we determine if we consider something work or play
 - Mary Poppins - “For every job that must be done, there is an element of fun. When you find the fun, poof, the job’s a game.”
- “As you develop control of your practicing mind, it is important to work in a fashion that makes staying in the process as easy as possible, and these four techniques, each one basic and straightforward on its own, can help you do just that.”
 - Simplify - break the activity down into sections
 - Small - break the goal into small, easily attainable sections
 - Short - short periods of time - you can do anything for a small amount of time
 - Slow - work at a pace that allows you to pay attention/focus on what you are doing
- Teaching application

- Model these concepts with children - teach with your actions.

Quotes from the author

- “Much more important, I was beginning to understand that all of life is practice, in one form or another. Until then, like most people, I mistakenly associated the word practice only with art forms such as music, dance, and painting.”
- “If you have never considered it, think about how everything we learn and master in life, from walking and tying our shoes to saving money and raising a child, is accomplished through a form of practice, something we repeat over and over again.”
- “To me, the reason to work at all that I have been discussing in this book is obvious. It raises my level of control over my life and allows me to choose a path that is filled with more ups than downs. It makes me live in the present and brings happiness and peace to whatever I do in the ever-present moment. It both makes me aware that I am a conscious choice-maker and empowers me with the privilege to make the choice.”
- “Most important, if we make developing our practicing mind our first order of business, then the process of becoming will become an adventure, and we will be filled with peace instead of struggle.”

Implement tomorrow?

- Create a practicing mind in your students by:
 - Model these strategies in our classroom
 - Show students how you learn

Organizations/schools working on answers

- [Mindset Works](#)
- [ASCD](#)

Gateways to further learning

- [Growing Lifelong Learners](#)
- [The Practicing Mind](#)

The applicability of this book to education is



This work is licensed under the [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 International License](#).