

# THE LAST WORD TONY BUZAN

Tony Buzan, the author of *How to Mind Map* and well-known lecturer on learning techniques, put E. Shahid through his interviewing paces.

**Who would you call mentally illiterate? Someone whose mind doesn't work fast enough?**

[Laughs] Well, mental literacy refers to understanding the brain and how it works. I was mentally illiterate for most of my life. When I was at university, I was beginning to do badly at exams and I went to the library and said I wanted a book on how to use my brain. And the librarian said the medical section is over there. And I said I don't want to operate on my brain, I want to learn how to use my brain. And she said Oh, there are no books on that. So mental literacy has not really been available to anybody in the world until the last few decades because it is in the last roughly 20 years that 95 percent of what we have ever discovered about the human brain's internal functioning has taken place. So my goal is to give everybody the operations manual for their brains.

**Tell me more about MindMaps. How do they work?**

Mindmaps are networks of key words or images arranged to clarify thought. The way that the brain thinks is like the branches or the roots of a tree or the networks of nerves or blood vessels in the human body.

**Where would we find more people capable of mindmapping? Does it have anything to do with geography or race?**

That is a deeply profound question. I was just in Singapore and the question asked there was can this material be applied to the Asian brain in the same way that it can be applied to the Caucasian brain? That question is based on the thought that the brains are different when the fact



is that the brains are 99.9 percent the same. The human brain is the human brain and it does not have a nationality. The mindmapping technique works for any human brain. Education, interestingly, while being assumed to be an advantage in terms of learning mindmapping, is sometimes a hindrance because some educational systems base themselves entirely on words, numbers, lists and lines. Now in mindmapping you need words, numbers, lists and lines but you also need color, you also need to be more free in your thinking, you also need to use symbols and quotes and images. The mindmap student who doesn't have such a rigid upbringing would actually be able to learn mindmaps slightly faster than the PhD in linear thinking.

**You talk about the power of thinking. Isn't forgetting a gift to mankind?**

No, I do not believe that forgetting is a gift to mankind.

**I mean if one remembers every sequence of event that happened ten-15 years ago, wouldn't one go mad? Isn't it better to forget and move on?**

It's like saying let's have an infinite size

library and let's just bomb some of the sections of it. Why? Your memory is your storage system and you always want to be able to go back to it. It's also implying that some of the archives are bad because you have had a bad experience and you want to forget it because it's painful. That's really dangerous. What you want to do is to examine that bad experience, examine the pain and draw the lessons from it and then move on, always being able to refer to it. You must be able to refer to it because that is your life. It's your history and if you try to cut out the bad stuff you would end up with a fractured picture of your life which wouldn't be true.

**How does the ability to think change as you age? Can the process be enhanced even as brain cells die?**

Brain cells dying with age is an improper assumption. What has been proven recently is you get a thousand new brain cells a day and if you keep your brain active, it makes new connections within itself. So the false assumption is that the brain gets worse with age. The fact is that a healthy brain in a healthy body gets better and better throughout life. ■