

What is a Think Paper?

It's the term I use for a piece of writing. I borrowed the term Think Paper from my brother Andy. He's co-director of a business coaching and consultancy service called Know and Do that trademarked the term. I like the term because it invites engagement and holds uncertainty.

An alternative term could be Position Paper but this offers less movement and feels static and decided. Position Paper suggests a type of power that seeks dominance and is declamatory. It could also indicate authors' commitment to making a statement - a potentially beneficial stance that doesn't negate its relationship with power-over. I am looking for ways to make power more collaborative, and I think this possibility is inherent in the term Think Paper. The term also captures the fact that I value the process of knowledge building through co-creation and criticality.

I could write the ideas as academic journal articles instead. I'm not an academic but I've written journal articles before and I might write some in future too. In my more hopeful moments I allow myself to believe that articles can be strategically useful. They carry respectability simply by association with the establishment, maybe this kudos can catalyse change. On top of this they're seen as reliable because they undergo a peer review process. This might help ideas gain purchase as they're deemed credible, though in reality, peer review doesn't weed out flawed scholarship and can be used to suppress critique.

The disadvantage of writing articles is that it circularly reinforces elitism and knowledge hierarchies: it implicitly perpetuates the normative belief that academic knowledge is a cut-above knowledge from other repositories, and it limits who gets access. Also, the whole process of finding a journal through to finally getting published is very time consuming. There's a pay-off for this if you have or want an academic career, it might even be something you are paid to do. But it can also be a huge amount of unpaid work and feel like misdirected energy that just ends up feeding the voracious and often undiscerning academic machine.

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