

**S L O W
L E A R
N I N G**



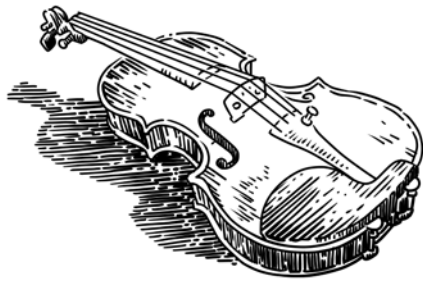
***A path to a meaningful
and mindful future of learning***

SLOW LEARNING



***A path to a meaningful
and mindful future of learning***

“Per me, lavoro è respiro.”



These were the wise words of a master violin maker in Cremona, Italy when asked to describe her profession at the ITCILO Learning Innovation Programme's study visit on 11 April 2022. Not many people can describe their work as a breath of fresh air or a therapeutic release, yet violin making proves to be one of the few 400-year-old crafts that still provides this respite. Here began our deep dive into slow learning.

On 16 September 2022, we gathered a group of more than 15 curious learners, trainers, and slow advocates to brainstorm what slowing down means for learning and eventually write their own interpretations. In parallel, with our partners at Posterheroes, we launched the global "Mindful or mind full? Shifting the learning paradigm" poster competition asking the creative community to visually express their vision of slow learning.

What follows is the result of this literary and visual journey.

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Introduction

_____ **W**e live in an age of information overload, ever-accelerating technologies, and split-second learning. Citizens, learners, and workers today are required to continuously reskill, upskill, and newskill to keep up with this new pace. How might we slow down in this sped-up society to make learning a more human experience?

The Slow Food movement paved the way for a good, clean, fair future of food. And now, we're putting on the brakes to also learn at this new tempo. The latest research demonstrates that to learn we must allow time for repetition, reflection, and regeneration. Slowing down to go faster, because our society's incessant need for speed is not sustainable.

Lessons from the tortoise and the hare taught us what happens when we're slow and steady. Could a snail-like pace make learning more sustainable? How might we transform existing learning and training models? How might we address the limits of the current paradigm? How might we reimagine the future of learning?

This is why we're here to rewind, pause, and play.



Bill of rights

You have the right to...

ONE

**Focus
on direction,
not destination**

— don't get too focused on the last station. Immerse your-
D self completely in the journey and you will reach your
— final goal gradually. It is this immersive process that
will lead us to realizing our dreams and sparking a change with-
in us. Lifelong journeys are about learning and growing from
moment to moment.

Asking questions is a fundamental human right. Humans strive to understand. Questions are more important than answers as they keep the learning conversation alive, they accelerate the exchange of ideas, they fuel innovation. Questions have the unique power to unlock learning and build value.

TWO

Raise your hand

THREE

**Learn
at your own
pace**

— Find your rhythm, find your flow. Don't compare yourself to others, compare yourself with the person you were yesterday and embrace your pace. Start more slowly than you think you should and adapt to learning according to your own terms. Reflect on your unique growth. It's about being better than you were yesterday.

— You have the right to disconnect and move your attention towards what's essential. Learn unplugged, far away from digital distractions. Create space in the offline zone for deep, reflective immersion. Shut your computer down, activate your brain, eliminate any digital amplifications. It's time to concentrate and focus.

FOUR

Unplug

FIVE

Change your learning path (and mind)

_____ hanging your mind is the right thing to do. Don't get
C too comfortable in the habit zone and start with chang-
_____ ing the aversion to change. It keeps the brain agile.
Think differently and learn new things. It is the only door to
new perspectives and creative insights. As Churchil said, "To
improve is to change, to be perfect is to change often."

Micro-breaks, lunch breaks, and longer breaks will all improve your learning performance. You have the right to rest. Relaxing increases the flow of blood and energy levels. Resting boosts your brain and improves concentration levels. Stop for a minute, right where you are... Sometimes you need to take a little time for yourself. Inhale, exhale.

SIX

Take a break

SEVEN

Make mistakes

A.I.L. is not failing but the First Attempt In Learning.

F. Don't fall into despair but Fail Forward. Become a resilient learner and adjust yourself based upon what you have learned. You will learn about yourself and who to trust. Innovation and creativity are often lessons of failure. Follow Becket's mantra: fail again, fail better.

————— We live in a super busy, multi-tasking, results-oriented
W society. Step away from your long to-do list and enjoy
————— once in a while the beauty of an unstructured day. This
intentional step out of the race will generate the necessary ener-
gy to be more productive afterwards. Take control of the list, cre-
ate space, and sometimes it's OK to leave things in draft mode.

EIGHT

Leave it unfinished

NINE

Unlearn and forget

harness the power of unlearning. Reboot your mind,
H abandon old knowledge, actions, and behaviors to cre-
ate space. Discard the old and welcome the change.
Follow Alvin Toffler: “The illiterate of the future are not those
who can’t read or write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn,
and relearn.”

_____ slow down your own personal time clock. Sometimes
S slow and steady will win the learning race. The world
_____ is moving at lightning speed, but that does not mean
you need to keep up. Sometimes slowing down is the best thing
to do. Lessons from the tortoise and the hare taught us what
happens when we're slow and steady. Make haste slowly.

TEN

Slow down



What does slow learning mean to you?

This is the question we asked 19 authors, thinkers, and slow gurus. Each writer received a poster to serve as a prompt for their writing. These posters were created by Posterheroes' international social communication competition founded by the Plug cultural association in 2010. Their goal is to foster dialogue on environmental and social issues through creativity. Over the years, more than 15,000 posters have been created by an international network of designers and creatives, and here you will see 19.

The power of slow learning in a fast world

When actress Mae West observed that “anything worth doing is worth doing slowly”, she wasn’t thinking about schools or classrooms.

Yet her famous dictum applies to learning, too.

After all, the best way to ruin education is to turn it into a rat race. Speed, stress and distraction foster a culture of box ticking. Deep learning takes time. It requires slowness.

To me, ‘slow learning’ is a basic human need – and a basic human right. It is so much more than just doing things more slowly. It is a mindset that can reshape every aspect of education.

Slow learning honours the pace and rhythms of each child. It promotes calm reflection. It encourages you to go down rabbit holes, take wrong turns, play with ideas, change your mind and then change it again.

Slow learners are at ease in the rich, liminal space between knowing and not knowing. They challenge received wisdom. A slow learner knows there is no such thing as a stupid question.

Slow learning prizes the journey over the destination, hard questions over easy answers, understanding over remembering.

Slow learning means spending enough time away from screens. To rest and recharge. To move your body in ways that keep you mentally and physically fit.

Slow learning demands more meaningful ways of measuring achievement.

Slow learning can turn anyone into a free thinker and a life-long learner – exactly what the world is crying out for right now!



Carl Honoré
Slow Czar

“*It is so much more than just doing things more slowly. It is a mindset that can reshape every aspect of education.*”



Learn Everywhere



SOMETIMES,
SLOW LEARNING;
DEFINES US BETTER ;

Punctuated artistry



The humble comma arose when a Greek scholar invented a single dot system to show the breath needed between phrases. Small, yet mighty, the comma can change meaning: “Let’s eat grandma!” “Let’s eat, grandma!” Commas save lives.



The comma’s more complex cousin, the semicolon, is the most misunderstood punctuation mark. Dating back to when an Italian scholar wanted to allow for a slightly longer breath, the semicolon acts as a prolonged pause without losing the train of thought.

Maple shavings, oil varnish, and dim light fill the workshop. Patience, precision, and passion ooze from each workbench. A master passes from bench to bench adjusting scrolls, bridges, and purfling; woodworkers measure, scrape, pause, analyze, and repeat. Nestled in the whimsical town of Cremona, artisans learn one of the slowest art forms: violinmaking.

These hallowed halls make up the International School of Violinmaking, training the next generation of violinmakers. Observing these creators at work not only unveils the utmost artistry behind each instrument, but also the conscious construction of time. Each learner takes about 1 year to make their first violin. Slow is commonplace.

Remember the punctuation lesson? Commas and semicolons should be as prevalent in our lives as in our writing. When was the last time you took a comma coffee? Or a semicolon sabbatical? Whether brief or prolonged, a pause gives time to reflect, collect thoughts, and proceed with clarity. In living, learning, or violinmaking, we always have the right to contemplate like a comma or study like a semicolon.



**Delphine
Dall’Agata**
Slo-Mo Dancer

“Let’s eat, grandma!”

Ecological lessons you can, and can't, learn from books

Books can teach us a lot about natural environments, in ways that might not be obvious.

You can get an eco-centric lesson by looking at a printed book or magazine. It works with other analog media, too – like vinyl and film. Listen to a record. Watch a DVD. Think about the lifecycles of these media materials. What supply chain brought them to your hands? Where will they go when you dispose of them? Along with tactile pleasures, print and analog objects offer knowledge of their physical properties and planetary implications.



Jennifer Rauch
*VP of Print
and Analog
Reassessment*

We lose touch with our physical environments when we submerge ourselves in content. Screens even more so than books. A whole world of sensory information disappears. That's why unplugging and taking a break are Slow Learning tools. Using physical media like books can transform your sense of pace and scale. So does finding times and places to *not* use them.

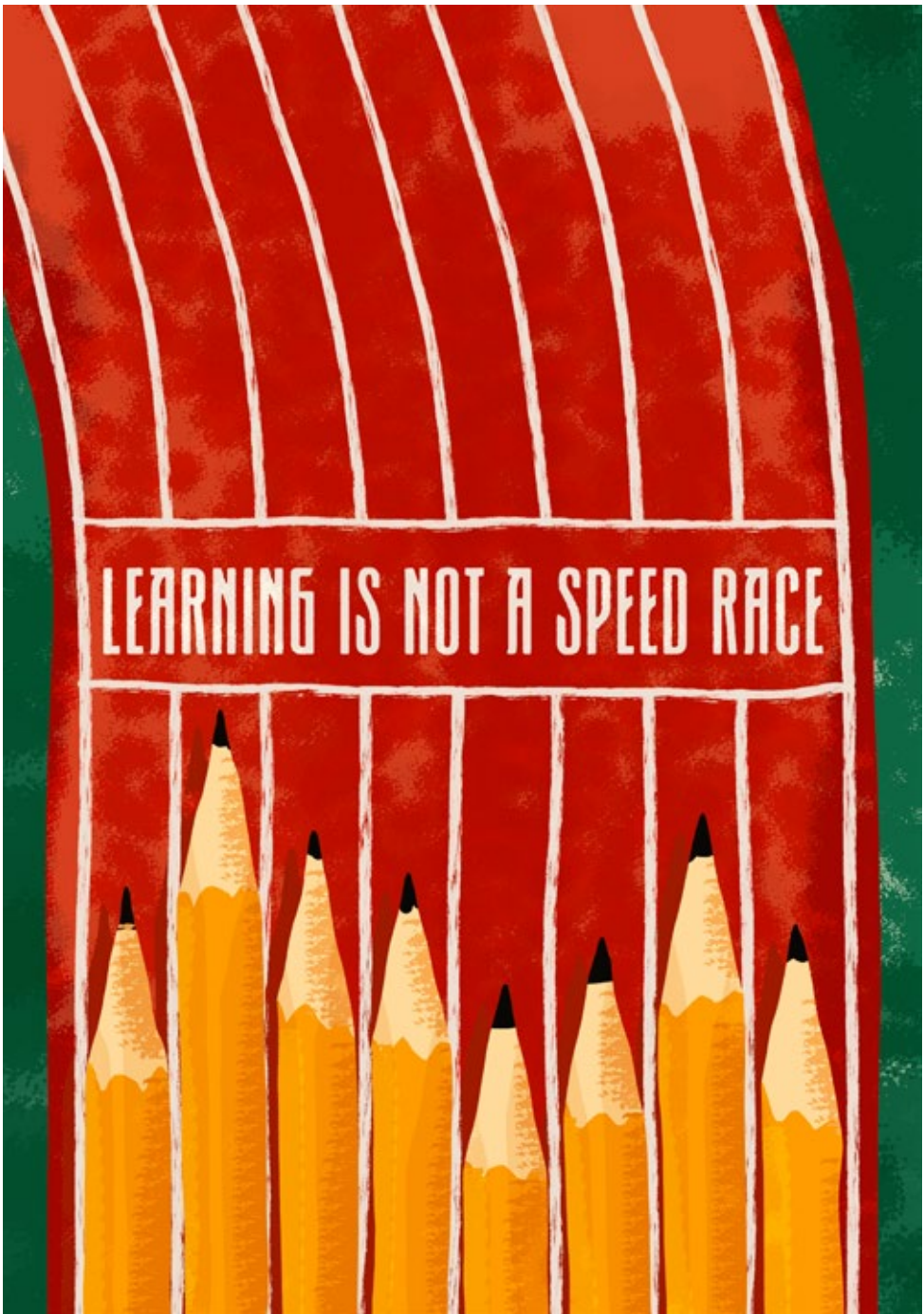
Practice immersing yourself in real places more, and in media less. To learn what a marsh is, looking at images or reading descriptions is not enough. To really understand the ecology of a marsh – or a lake, forest, sand dune, park – you need to spend time there. You need to experience first-hand the air, water, flora, fauna. You need to squish the proverbial mud.

Slow media practices help us synchronize personal rhythms with the natural world. They help us better understand local ecologies and use resources more wisely. They help us connect with our own physical presence, love for fellow animals and sense of the sublime.

“Practice immersing yourself in real places more, and in media less.”



Michela Brolese — Italy



Mauricio Gaitán, Sergio Bohada — Colombia

Learning is not a speed race

— n a world full of speed
| Where “the digital”
— Takes no head
Of “the marginal”

Let us walk slowly with the slow, the marginalised:

Those who can’t see as we can;
Those who can’t hear as we hear;
Those who can’t run as we run;
Those who think differently from us;
Those who can’t feel what we feel...

The cool of the mountain air,
The soft buzz of insects across the meadow,
The voice of the prisoner,
The pain of the tortured,
The silence of the silenced.

It takes time – a lifetime – to learn,
Really to learn.
We cannot (yet) take a vaccine against ignorance;
There is no magic pill to pop education.
We cannot (yet) plug in a chip or neural device
To connect us to all knowledge:

The instant, always accessible LMS,
The wisdom of Wikipedia
The social dystopia of social media
The paroxysm of peer learning –
Instantly available, instantly forgotten.

Learning, real learning takes time;
It evolves as we do;
It requires experience
Of hard-felt failures, and of satisfying successes,
Of diverting differences and complex challenges.

We the teachers, the mentors, the facilitators and friends
We are the learners too.
Learning the speed of the marginalised
Learning their touch
Their kinds of music and rhythms
Their voices and vexations.

Let the slow and marginalised walk slowly with us
Let us be the ones upon whose backs they climb.
Let us together regain our humanity,
Let us together be children of nature
Let us overcome the demonic, dominant, death-dance of the digital.



Tim Unwin
*Catalyst
and Provocateur*

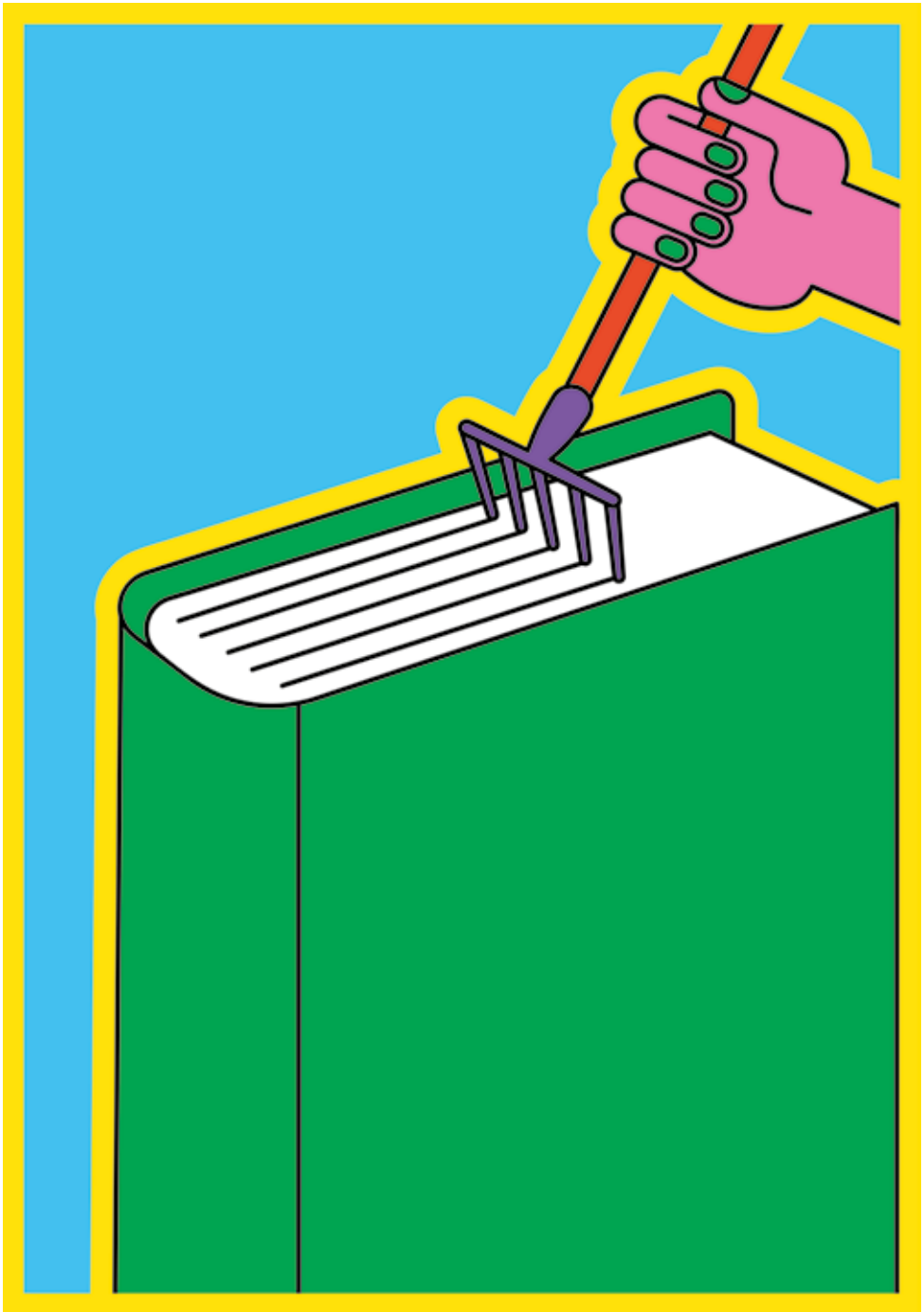
Slow learning is a 5-day game of cricket!

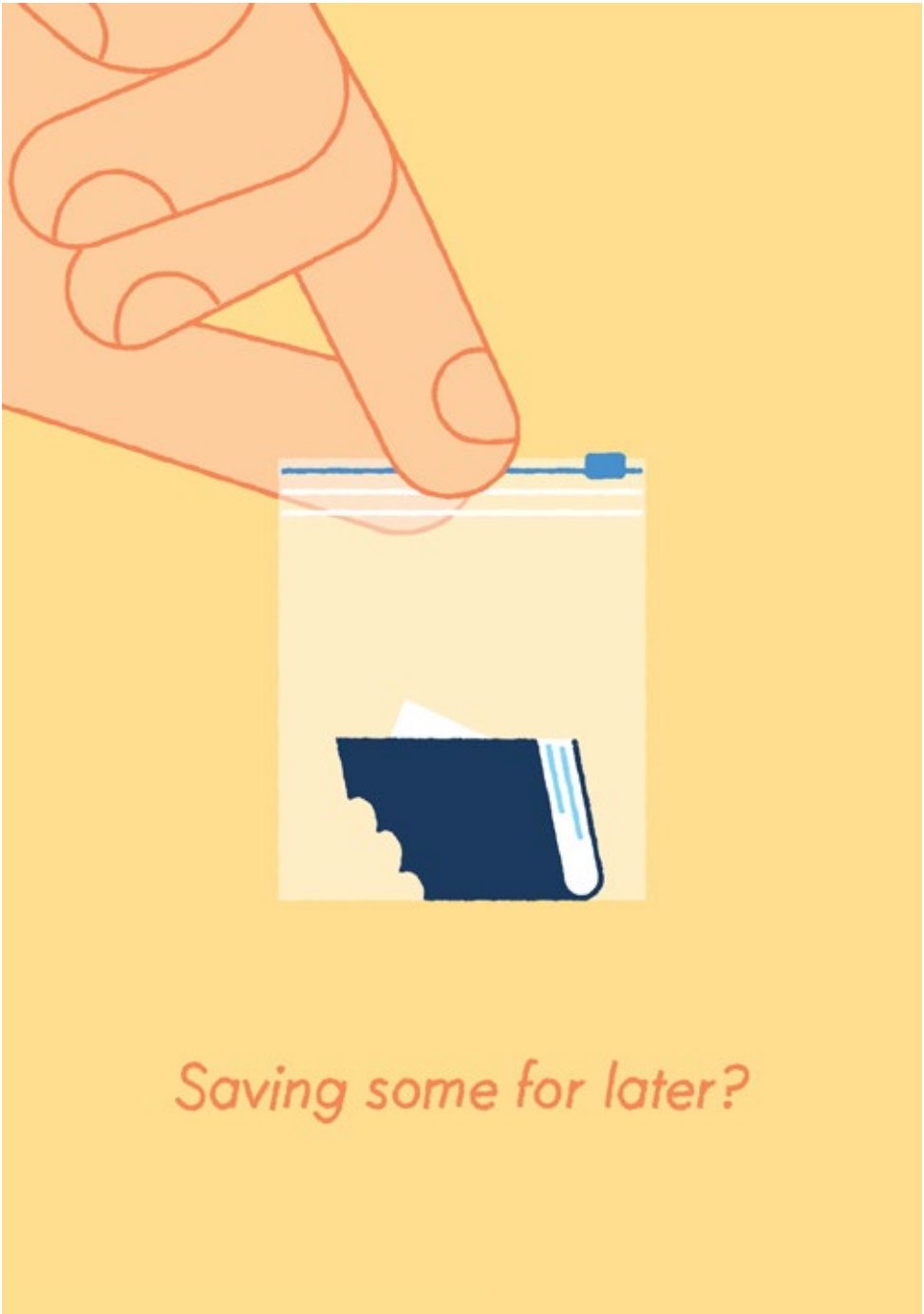


Snehal Soneji
*Resident
Representative
of Patience*

The game of Cricket has 3 versions – one that lasts for 3 hours, a full day, and the longest lasting 5 days. As an avid cricket fan, learning very much reflects these three forms of the game that I love. The longest form – one that lasts for 5 days (much to the amusement of my football loving friends!) – signifies learning at its best! Just like a 5-day game which is interspersed with phases that are exciting and the seesaw battle between winning and losing but also those where ‘nothing is happening’ and the game seems to be barely moving along even inducing sleep, so is slow learning! Many of my deepest learning experiences have been where one moment it seems I am absorbing it all and at another, nothing at all. To me, both these phases are sign posts on my slow learning journey that my brain maybe subconsciously records. Sometimes when it seems like I will have to leave it all unfinished, these are the sign posts that remind me of how far I have come and the direction I have travelled. They also remind me that the learning path traversed is perhaps more important than the destination itself. Just like in cricket where some of the best matches are the ones that have no result after all the ebb and flow and in-action, slow learning is a process that I submit to enjoying the experience in all its forms and shades.

“ *Many of my deepest learning experiences have been where one moment it seems I am absorbing it all and at another, nothing at all.* ”





Silviu Chiriac — Romania

Learning with your whole self

Slow learning happens when we engage our whole self, our mind and body. With attention and concentration. Using our brain, our heart, and our gut.

A question we should all ask ourselves is:

Do I still know how to focus on learning for a long stretch of time?

And why does it matter?

Slow learning is the only way to learn.

It's about mindfulness. Learning happens if our muscle of attention is in good shape: concentrating, paying attention, absorbing, processing, questioning.

Our body needs to be involved in learning: our automatic patterns of behavior, conditioned tendencies, habits of mind and biases live in our mind *and* in our body as well, an integral and inseparable part of the self.

In many domains and after a certain age, slow learning is very much about unlearning.

Last but not least, slow learning is about practice: learning is not a mere intellectual exercise. We learn through repetition, through practice. Think about a basketball player. A scientist. A surgeon. A musician. An expert in any subject matter. Whatever you learnt so far in your life that has been absorbed or embodied, took time, practice and repetition.

Slow learning is the opposite of

...scrolling through contents, signing up for programs we do not find the time to attend, listening to what speakers say with one ear whilst doing something else that seems to be “more important or urgent”;

...the bulimic consumption of information and contents we are getting used to.



Silvia Vernaschi
*Mindfulness
Instructor and
Leadership Coach*

“ *Slow learning is the only way to learn.* ”

Welcome to the inner game of slow-flow learning



Tom Wambeke
*Slow-Flow
Orchestrator*

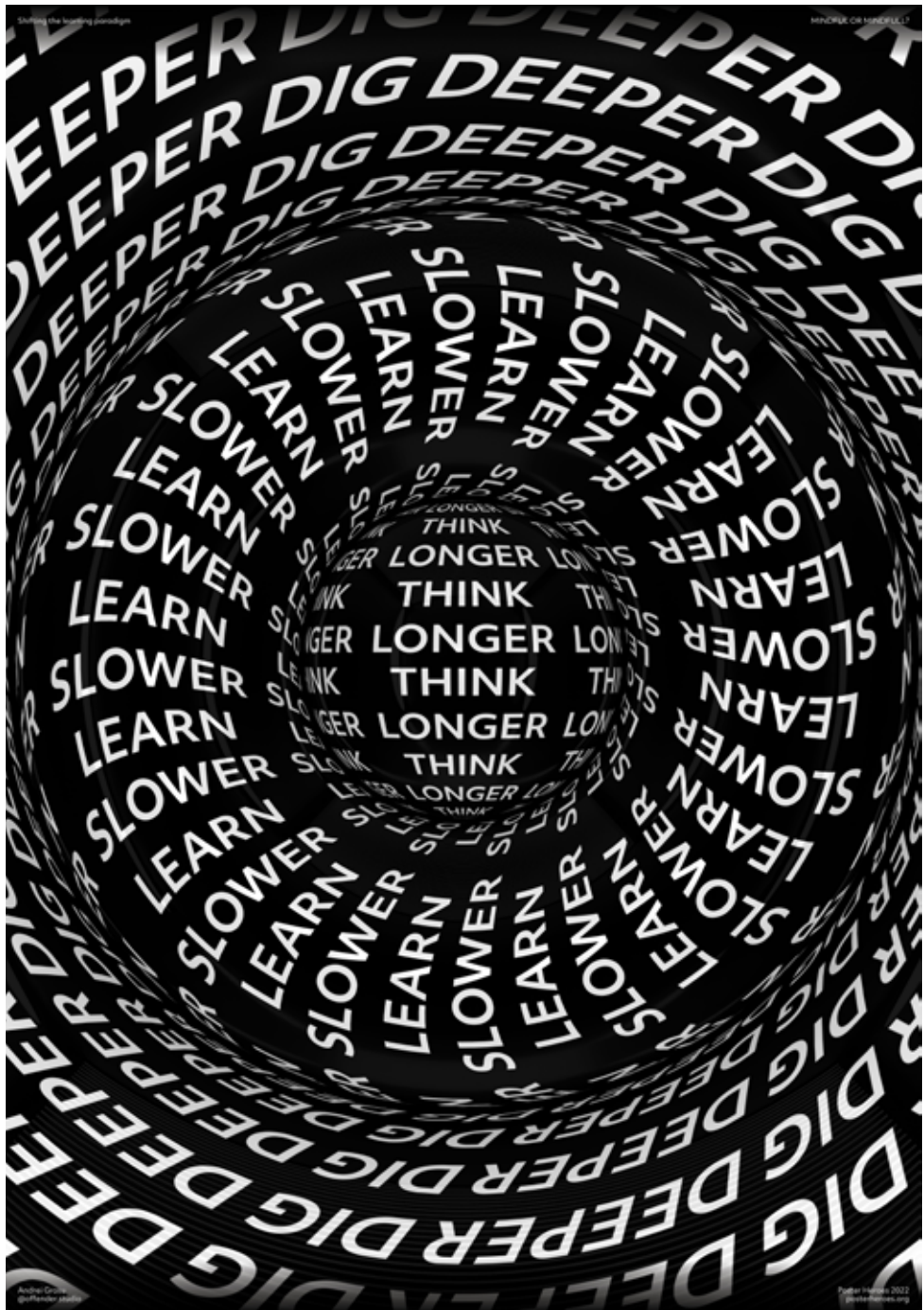
Make haste slowly. Dive deep, think longer and learn slower. Transform yourself into a different time zone of deep reflection and full absorption. **Festina Lenta.**

Looking at this brings you in an optimal state of flow, a kind of energised focus, fully immersed in the now and no sense of time is passing. In accelerated times of info-tention these moments need to be worshipped because they give a proper balance between urgency and diligence. Gradually slow learning becomes flow learning. How slow is your flow?

In Greek this reflective timezone is called Kairos and when applied to learning it could be a new conception of time and opportunity. Taking quality time into consideration to act, learn and innovate.

No more accelerated just-in-time, but rather waiting...
for the right time
for the right moment
for the right space
to harvest your learning.

“ *Kairos is the perfect, delicate, crucial moment; the fleeting rightness of time and place that creates the opportune atmosphere for action, words, or movement; also, weather.* ”



Andrei Grosu — Romania



Weixin Ma — China

Slow learning is a lifelong therapy session

If you've ever been to therapy and try to work on your issues, you've most likely experienced that eureka moment when you realize something about yourself that would be obvious to anyone who knows you well, but has somehow managed to escape you. With that premise, therapy, in my opinion, captures the essence of what slow learning means to me.

Visiting a therapist implies you are proactively allocating time of your very busy schedule to talk about your life, listen to different perspectives and reflect on what you have the capacity to change. You are slowly but surely attempting to learn from everything and everyone around you. Similarly, we can achieve slow learning in other contexts by being fully present in the moment, listening openly with your whole being and allowing yourself the time to reflect and digest the situation.

Slow learning, therefore, means leaving your ego to the side (anyone can teach you anything at any time!) and giving yourself the chance to grow by truly contemplating what you can actively do to improve. And just like therapy, it can be an arduous experience, but as long as you are open and prepared to put in the work, you will find yourself often enjoying the ride and encountering many eureka moments along the way.

“ You are slowly but surely attempting to learn from everything and everyone around you.



Nicole Pallares Ferrer
Dynamic Reflections Developer



**Massimiliano
Leone**
Monotasker

Time.
There's no time.
Have to get things done.
Need to do that fast. ASAP.
Deadline isn't negotiable. Send it now.
Find the time, don't make them feel you are slow.

Slow.
Slow down.
Space up your life.
Take the time you need.
Did you learn anything today?
Anything new, surprising, to be proud of?

Make yourself.
A learning being.
Do that constantly.
Do that slowly.

“ *Space up your life.* ”



Danilo De Marco — Italy



LEARNING TAKES TIME

Ayse Ezgi Yildiz — United Kingdom

Homemade tomato sauce must cook for a long time

On a Sunday morning, in my grandmother’s kitchen there was always the intense smell of tomato sauce, rich in basil and homemade with real tomatoes.

I still seem to hear her saying: “Il vero sugo deve pippiare”, “Real sauce must cook for a long time.”

“Pippiare”, a term from Southern Italy, meaning “to cook for a long time” but also “to think.” Tomato sauce, to be good, must cook for hours, slowly, “puffing,” one bubble at a time, unhurried, with an odor that, as time passes, spreads throughout the house and fills the air with a familiar, reassuring scent.

Tomato sauce is a traditional dish that expresses patience and reflection.

As a training professional, I often find myself reflecting on how similar cooking and designing, eating and learning are.

Slow cooking brings out the flavor in foods. When you eat slowly, you digest better. Yet you also feel more satisfied with each meal.

Does time matter for learning?

Learning is an encounter with thoughts, to be done unhurriedly. The effectiveness and efficiency of any training not only depends on how resources are used and how many people are reached but on how much learning is retained in the long-term.

It takes time to learn.

It takes good design to learn effectively.



Alessia Messuti
“Chef” Learning
Officer

“*Il vero sugo deve pippiare.*”

How far can a canoa bring you?

How many times have you stopped and taken the time to reconsider your education and professional trajectory, questioning if the choices you have made (and you are continuously making) were able to bring you where you really want to be, doing what you enjoy, and making a contribution to society? Probably not many, and even when you did, you maybe thought “I don’t have time for this” and you got back to your studies or to your job.

Look at the picture on the opposite page: if the person were riding a jet ski, he would surely go faster, but he would not be able to see what is under the water’s surface. With his attention on reaching his destination as fast as possible, he would not have time to think about his trip and surely, he would not enjoy the journey as much on a canoa.

The concept of Lifelong Learning does recognise the importance of developing personally and professionally. Still, rethinking the choices one has made and deciding to undertake new life paths requires a brave and open mindset, especially within our increasingly competitive education and labour markets. Indeed, to make this happen education and training systems should actively facilitate these reflective moments, putting citizens in the position to pursue their talents throughout their education and professional life through lifewide learning and lifewide guidance approaches.

Slow learning is also about this. Every individual should have the right to reconsider where they are sailing to and to guide their boat in other directions. And for this to happen, a canoa is much better than a jet ski.

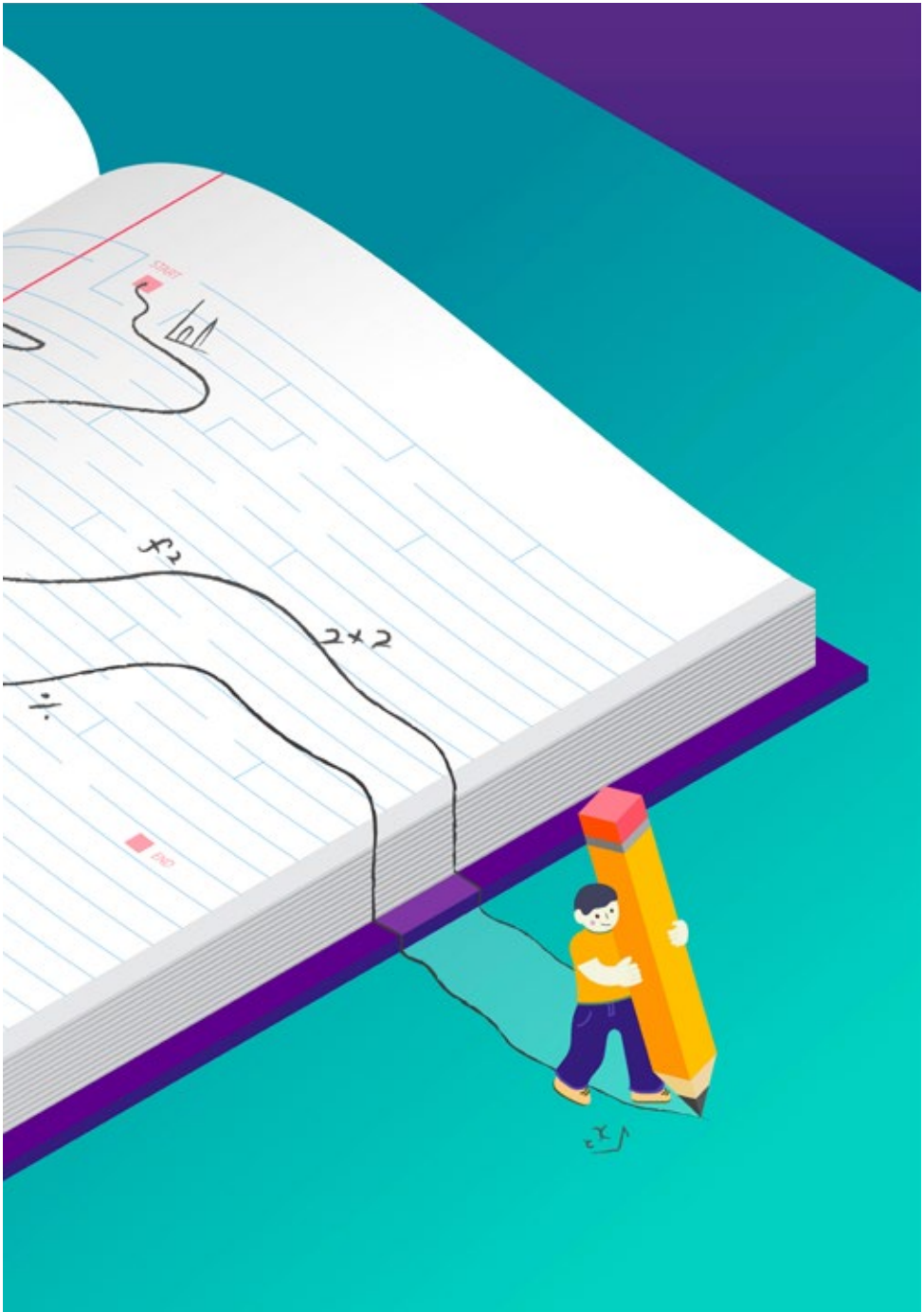


Fabio Nascimbeni
*Chief, Impossible
Ideas Department*

“ *He would not enjoy the journey as much as if on a canoa.* ”

SLOW EDUCATION

Slow schools and slow education can refer to different aspects of education. Some people use the term slow schools to refer to schools that are attempting to bring slow food to the cafeteria or dining room. For others it has far more implications and includes aspects of connection to knowledge, tradition, moral purpose and all that is important in life. In this sense it refers to the curriculum, the way it is delivered, the process of learning, management of the school, and even if school is the best vehicle through which to educate our children. So in this sense, it refers to bringing the slow movement into education. Where has the education system in schools gone wrong? It started with taking the responsibility for education away from parents and families and making it compulsory for children to go to school. While schools were accountable to the parents and community the education process had some chance of meeting students and community needs. But where governments have acquired central authority over education, education seems to have become a matter of outcomes - standardised test results. Slow education is also about slowing down to knowledge and to learning - real learning. It is about leading a skilful life - doing no harm - and having respect for life in the slow lane. The process of education is not about supplying students with lumps of information to be memorised. It is about enabling students to learn how to learn. It is also about giving them opportunities to hear what they know (knowledge) and to then discuss, argue, and reflect on this knowledge to gain a greater understanding of its truth for themselves. Slow this knowledge will be of use to them. Slow Schools as part of the Slow Food movement are able to build edible gardens. Students are involved in all aspects of planting, tending and harvesting. Then in the classroom they prepare, serve and eat organic food, much of which they have helped to grow. In many Western countries that have Anglo-Saxon origins, governments and schools have rigid control structures in place and schools are driven by standardised curricula with tests and targets to ensure uniform outcomes. The emphasis is on the outcome not on the process. The process is about things like how are ideas conceptualised, how can we support learning and the knowing of how to learn, as well as the love of learning and investigating. Schools can go beyond slow food and incorporate other real life experiences as a way of educating students in the important (and sometimes the not so important) things in life. This approach that uses experiential, value-oriented practices with participation at its core is not new nor is it the exclusive domain of slow schools. The most well known schools following this approach are Montessori and Waldorf and they have been doing it for a long time. Most home schooling systems also use this approach. It is an approach that is interlaced with moral living values and stewardship ethics. Text from : https://www.slowmovement.com/slow_schools.php



Sarah Bae, Christy Zo — USA

Picture this: you're in class. Any class.

_____ The topic of discussion is not particularly appealing. You
T sit there, knowing that you're expected to take notes
_____ or at least pay attention. You look at your pencil as if it
were too heavy to hold. You've only made few scribbles.

Then, something magical happens: distraction.

Your mind drifts away, taking you to another place, an inner space. The outer world keeps sending signals but your mind dodges them, bounces them back. You start to collate information, processing it all effortlessly, like an observer of your own intuition. In just a few seconds that wicked little problem you had yesterday suddenly makes sense, a new and brilliant idea crosses your mind, mixed with a tender memory of the past. You've jumped out of that unappealing notebook and are now creating, miraculously, a learning thread of your own. Day dreaming...

People start to notice. You can feel their stares pulling you back down into the room: you're awake again, trying to recollect your lost concentration. You look at the faces around you, smiling sheepishly, embarrassed, wondering if you've been caught. You look back at your pencil and notebook, hoping they will offer you a new invisibility.

You try to recollect that brilliant idea: but it's gone. Those realizations and memories... all out of reach.

Does anyone ask you what you were thinking? Probably not. And if they do, you lie. But deep inside you feel the urge to share how beautiful it felt to get lost in your thought bubble.

She asks you, *Were you paying attention?*

“ Well, *I have been paying attention all my life.*



Sofia Exarchou
*Mindful Distraction
Officer*

Ode to nuance

low...

S Take your time. Pronounce the word without a rush.

Listen how it starts with the hiss of its opposite ‘speed’ and gently transforms into a kind of womb-like warmth. Slow’s connotation with time morphs into a notion of space, a place of comfort and protection where time itself evaporates and new things can grow.

If anything, slow learning is an attractive shelter for depth and nuance, for criticality, shielding us from the relentless allure of lazy thinking. It allows us to see the true face of knowledge – not as chunks of information – but as a vibrant ecosystem of contextualised relationships and a pluriverse of meanings.

By engaging in slow learning, we grow a world of new becomings. For it is in the playful dance between facts and imagination, between knowledge and creativity, between people and their surroundings that new pathways emerge, connecting past, present and future.

Being such a fertile place, a moment of such great value, slow learning merits not only our esteem but also our protection. For as it increases the aperture of our mind’s eye, it also exposes its own fragility.

Slow learning invites us to cherish the seeds of potentiality it awakens in each of us individually and between us together. We are invited to nurture them, protect and care for them so that they can grow stronger and one day burst into wonderful new tomorrows.

Slow... is likely to make our futures blossom sooner and brighter.

“*By engaging in slow learning, we grow a world of new becomings.*”



Nik Baerten
*Hunter-Gardener
of Delightful
Understandings*



Gloria Di Bella — Italy



FAST LEARNT. FAST FORGOTTEN.



Lara Gil, Mariana Leal Rato, Leonor Brochado, André Silva, Olívia Matni — Portugal

Transmuting the System

It's too easy to close a window and open another one, digital or not, so let's hack this operating system with *spaciousness*.

*Tearing down the walls:
wisdom as a driver¹ for freedom*

Information societies rely on us switching user profiles across multiple platforms. An existence characterised by fragmented interests, abilities, and qualities—lacking a sense of integrity. A system where our attention gets divided and manipulated. A spacious learning environment revives our abilities to tap into our multiple forms of intelligence, let them dance together, generate insights, and build our wisdom to inform choices along the journey of regenerative freedom.

*Upping the depth:
connections for leaps² of collaboration*

Algorithms often abuse our feelings and perceptions. When over-stimulated or stressed, the brain experiences disrupted synapse regulation and a sense of disconnection. Psychologically safe learning experiences facilitate a sense of empathy and connection within ourselves, our communities, and our environments. This unfolds renewed possibilities for deeper collaboration, providing a founda-

tion for locally appropriate and collective sustainable solutions.

*Widening the space in between:
allow the new to be³*

Slow down and declutter your mind before letting anything else in. We are bombarded with overdesigned stimuli taking us down pre-programmed paths. The space for new insights to emerge is limited. It takes effort to insert a pause between a received stimulus and our reaction. In this gap, whether an extended period or a few seconds, rests our ability to listen, observe and connect with what is not planned for, with our actual capability to *be in the new*.

-
- ¹ Alternative to the concept “trend” as it appears on the poster
 - ² Alternative to “steps” as it appears on the poster
 - ³ Alternative to “to do” as it appears on the poster



**Georgiana
Ward-Booth**
*Spacious Dream
Contributor*

What does slow learning mean to me?

— or me, slow learning involves three essential elements:
F reading, thinking and talking.

— Each of these is a slow process. The slower the better. It's like food. The longer the pan simmers on the hob, the richer will be the resulting sauce. And of course we then need time to digest the dish, to turn over a thought in the mind, to gaze at the ceiling, to take a walk with friends, to do nothing. Rushing about causes indigestion.

I'm inspired by the ancient philosophers. For Socrates, philosophy – meaning a love of wisdom – involved a slow walk towards truth and beauty. Philosophers, he said, are not wise. They are slowly moving towards wisdom. It's all about the process, not the result. Socrates taught through questioning and dialogue. Talking.

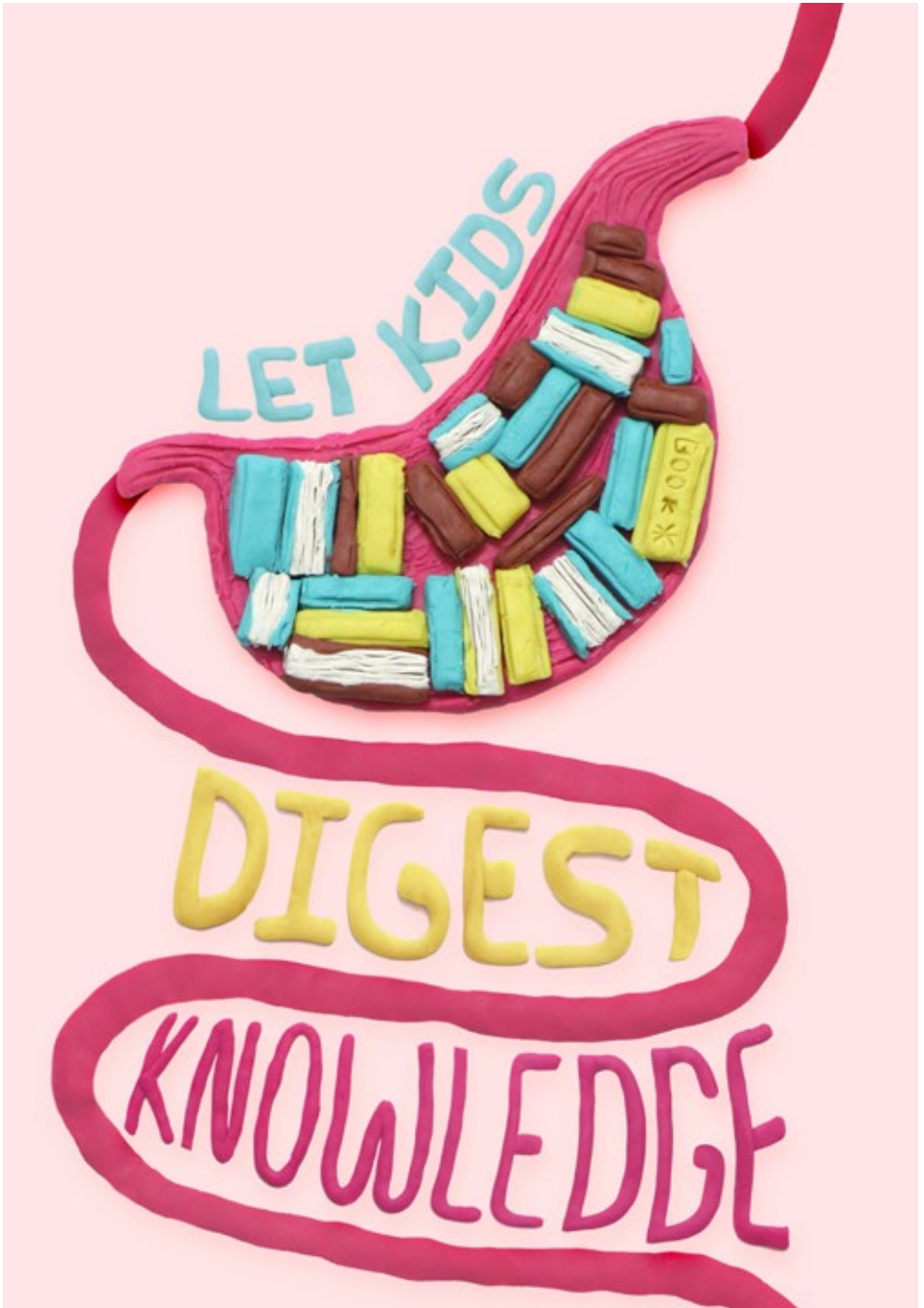
His example produced the Epicureans who lived simply in communes where work was shared; the peripatetics who learned while strolling about, and Plato's Academy, the first university, which survived for six hundred years. These were schools for life, resorts for learning and study, and were open to everyone: women and slaves joined the schools, as well as the free men of Athens.

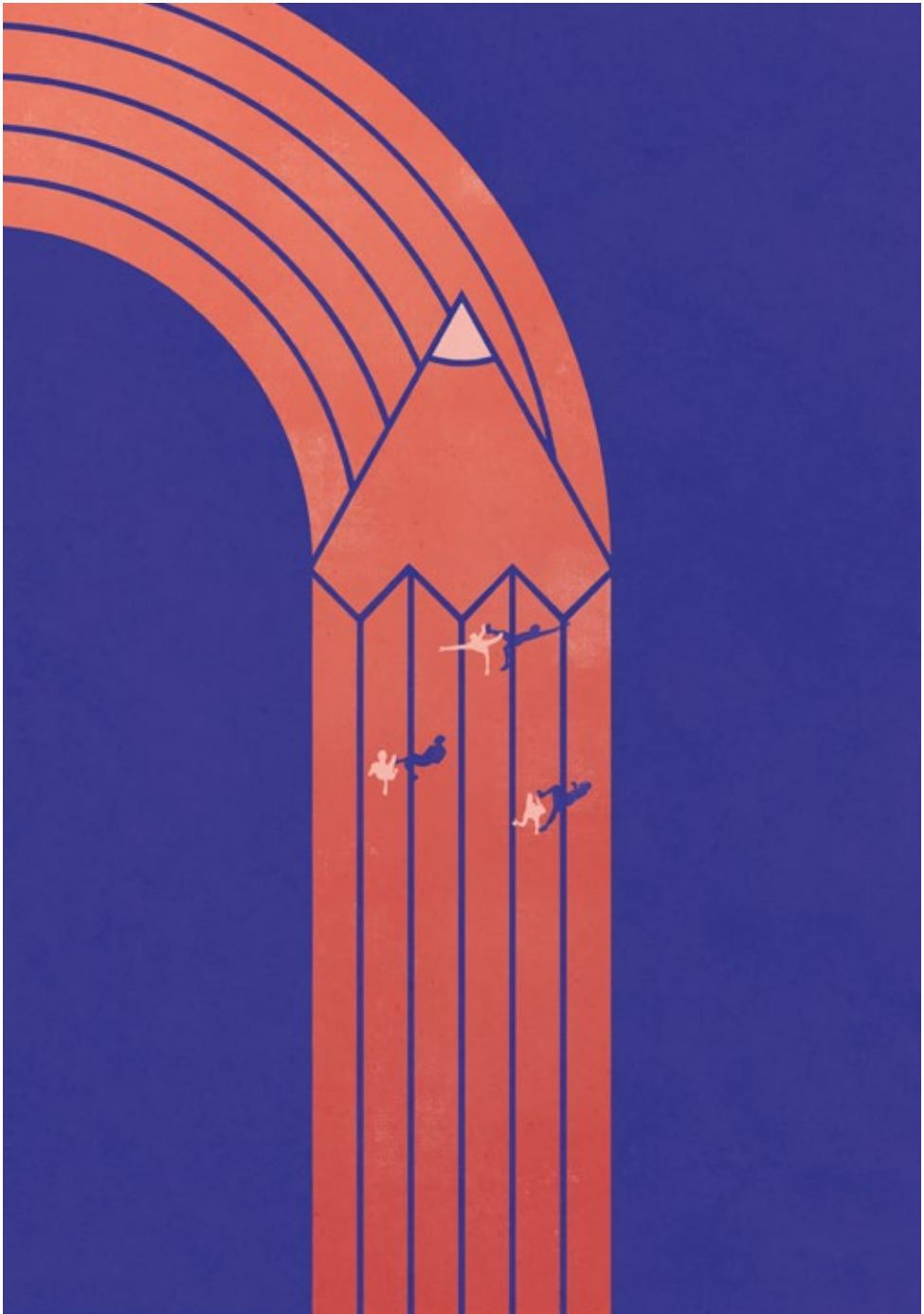
The key element in slow learning is time. We must learn to unplug the phone, turn off the social media, shut the laptop, retreat from the noise. The ancient Greek word for "leisure" or "free time" was "skole" which turned into the Latin word for school.

“ *The first step towards slow learning is to free our time.* ”



Tom Hodgkinson
Idler-in-Chief





Giada Gunetti — Italy

The ingredients of slow learning – practice, collaboration. And time.

Technology can be a wonderful thing, and it has helped us democratise knowledge across the globe. For many, this has meant access to bite-size learning content that is easily digestible and fast-paced.

Just like with other digital content (books, podcasts, inspiring talks), there can be good and bad learning content. Content can inspire and provide a solid foundation on a topic. Or content can be unengaging and an imperfect adaptation of another medium.

In either case, I would suggest that content (good or bad) is not learning. For the magic of learning to happen, we need to bring the content to life through a combination of practice, collaboration and feedback cycles.

While content can be consumed in a fast-paced manner, the practice, collaboration and feedback cycles take time. According to Malcolm Gladwell, it takes 10,000 hours of deliberate practice to become an expert in any field¹. This involves goal-setting, feedback, and countless cycles to improve skills and achieve mastery.

Scientists have also started to establish a critical link between sleep cycles and learning, and how the human brain takes time to process and consolidate newly acquired information². This reinforces the need to build deliberate moments of reflection and time to process and internalise the learning.

Perhaps then, like Aristotle, we may discover how learning and wondering can bring us pleasure³. It may just take time.



Atish Gonsalves
*Founder and Chief
Human Learning
Officer – Gamoteca*

¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outliers_\(book\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outliers_(book))

² <https://healthysleep.med.harvard.edu/healthy/matters/benefits-of-sleep/learning-memory>

³ https://www.loebclassics.com/view/aristotle-art_rhetoric/1926/pb_LCL193.125.xml?readMode=recto

Taking time for reflection is the best investment in your personal and professional growth and development that you can make



Clive Martlew
Reflection Partner

It means... Pause. Step back. Notice. Reflect. Learn. Taking time for reflection is probably the best investment you can make in your personal and professional development. It's often said that we learn best from experience. But in truth we learn best from reflecting on experience. Reflection has significant benefits for improving our learning, mental and physical wellbeing, career resilience and our leadership skills.

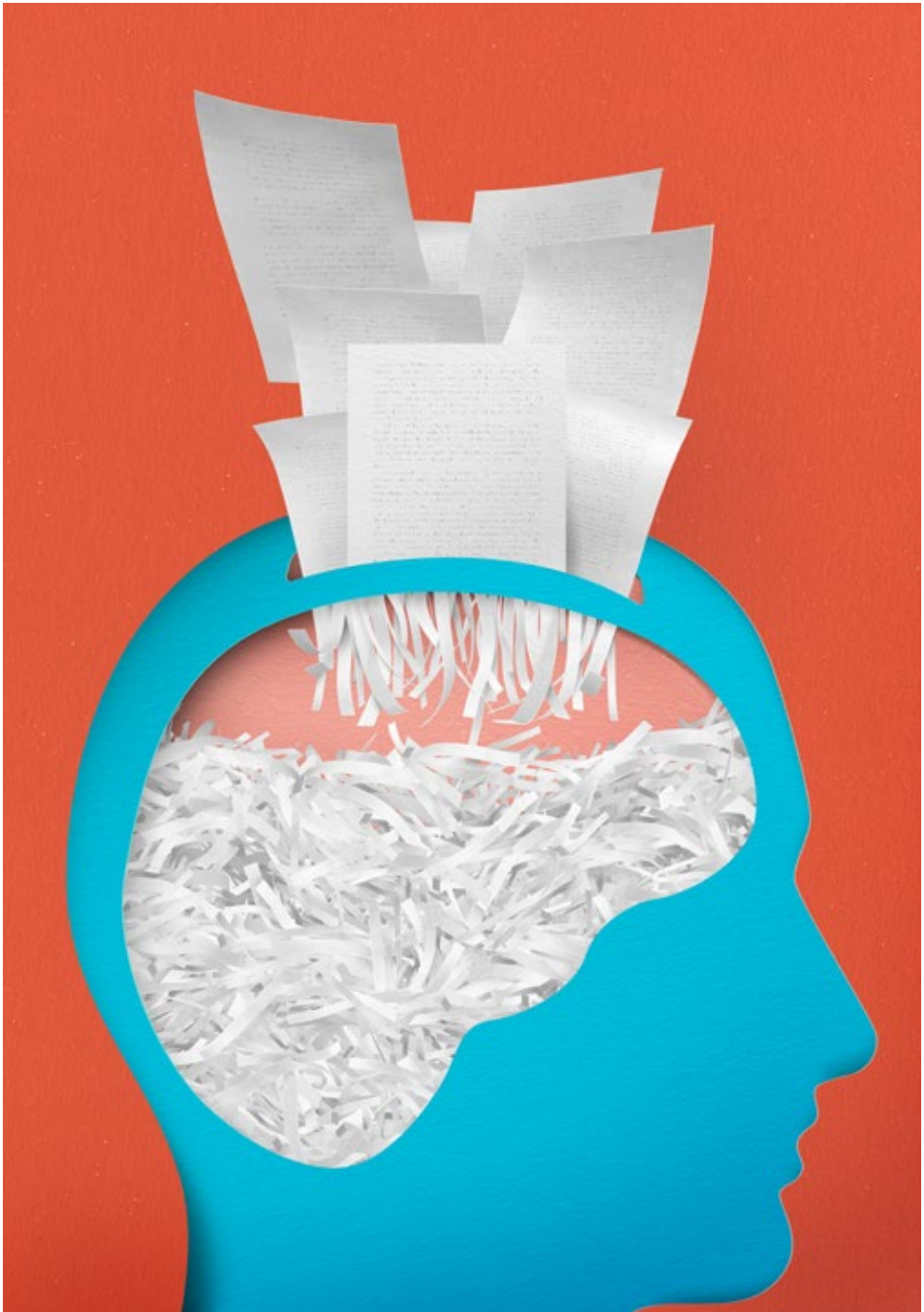
It increases self-awareness and helps us make sense of the world. Reflection is a skill, a set of practices and above all an attitude of mind. It's the very essence of Slow Learning.

The challenge is to make reflection a habit, and grant ourselves and others permission to ask useful, perhaps surprising questions and to see things from new perspectives.

“*I'm not sure whether you really did want me to use the hamburger as inspiration [...] However the Slow Learning idea IS very inspiring.*”



Matteo Bozzo — Italy



Mark Mones — Philippines

You will use the pencil

I was 5 years and 11 months old on my first day of primary school. Soon after, my teacher told me I wasn't allowed to use a pen because my penmanship was unstable. I was asked to use a pencil instead. This lasted for a long time, leaving me the only pencil user in the class. This long process was an opportunity to learn. I learned to observe my friends as they wrote. I learned to identify the meaning behind my teacher's tone of voice. I also learned to correct my own penmanship based on expectations. Honestly, I had no idea why my beautiful, confused, and artistic handwriting mixed with big and small letters was perceived as wrong. But I understood I had to meet expectations.

As I grew up, I learned that my brain worked better in a slow mode. It needed time to put elements together. Until it is not convinced, it doesn't produce a solution. This accelerated very much with time and experience. It even came to a point that some people now ask me how I envision the future in such a fast manner. Fast? What a change in perspective.

Slow learning allows for much more space to bring in ideas, opportunities, experiences, and relations. Since that day back in the '80s, I never worried about being slow. I knew this was the space I needed to fully grasp topics in a wider context. Now, it is the space I need to be fast.

“As I grew up, I learned that my brain worked better in a slow mode.”



Manuela Prina
*Pencil Sharpener
Expert*

A celebration of open-ended noodling*

In the poster by Maxim Dosca, the ingredients of “slow learning noodles” include sketchbooks, pencils, pens, and sticky notes – the quintessential tools for imagination and collaborative brainstorming. I appreciate this particularly because Maxim doesn’t include symbols of institutions of education, rote learning of established knowledge, but rather the tools for exploring new ideas. Slow learning is an open-ended process, much like “noodling”.

I’m a designer who thinks almost exclusively about play. It is the primary lens for my work and an intuitive approach to how I live my life. So it may be no surprise that I think slow learning is nearly synonymous with playful learning. I’ll noodle on one common principle: open-endedness.

Open-ended play is synonymous with slow learning in that they both foster intrinsic motivation, rather than pre-determined extrinsic motives to learn. When we follow instructions designed with right and wrong answers, we are playing for the sake of successfully completing something; we are working toward an outcome or reward and extrinsically motivated to succeed. The missed opportunity here is that we all have intrinsic motivation (like curiosity) to play and learn, and when the goal is defined for us, we aren’t tuned into our own decision-making and drive to understand what we want or need. We lose touch with our internal motivation to learn. Unstructured, open-ended play fosters a relationship with our own intrinsic interests, where we develop habits of proactive learning, exploring, and noodling with curiosity-driven exploration.



Cas Holman
*Facilitator
of Playful
Opportunities*

* “To noodle” is to improvise on an instrument in an informal or desultory manner.





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Slow tools

*Ten ways to experiment
with slow learning*

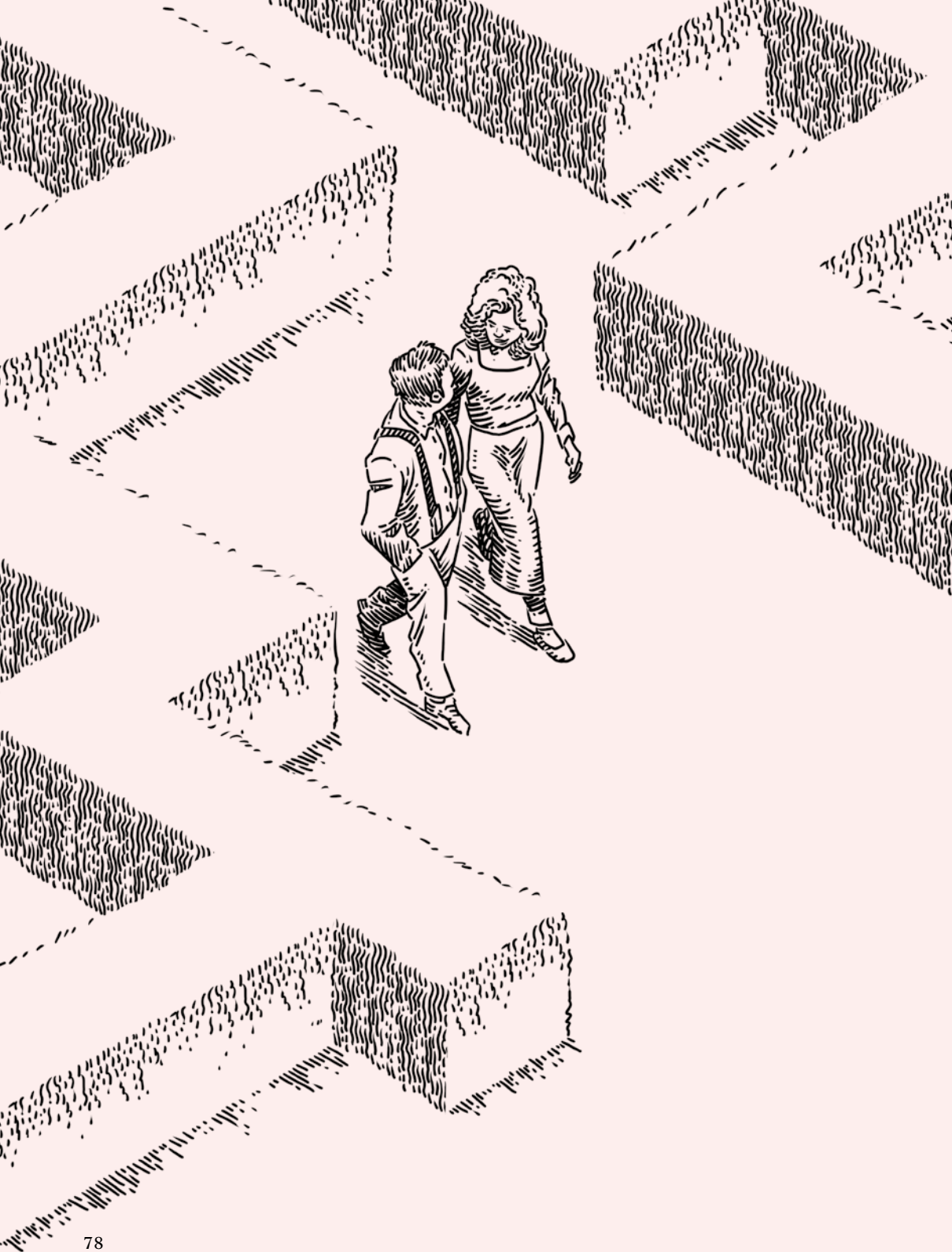


ONE

Ma



— **T**he Japanese *Ma* represents an empty space or pause between actions. It is an intentional interval that allows — for reflection, growth, or simply nothing. *Ma* reflects a Confucian concept between start and finish, between ground and sky, between birth and death. It's the space in which we experience life. Learning with the *Ma* approach welcomes silences, conscious breaks, and empty spaces for thoughts and ideas to conceptualize.

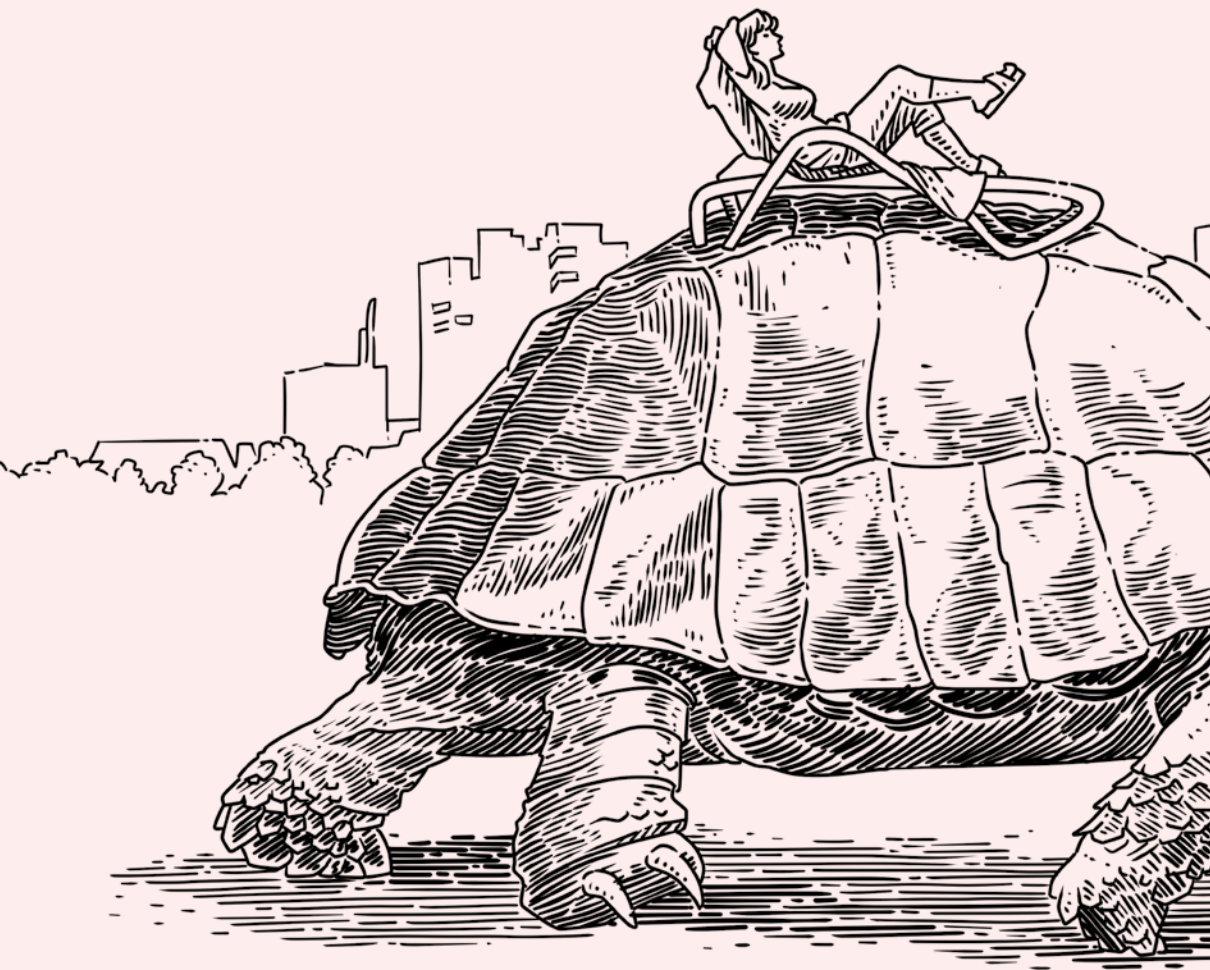




TWO

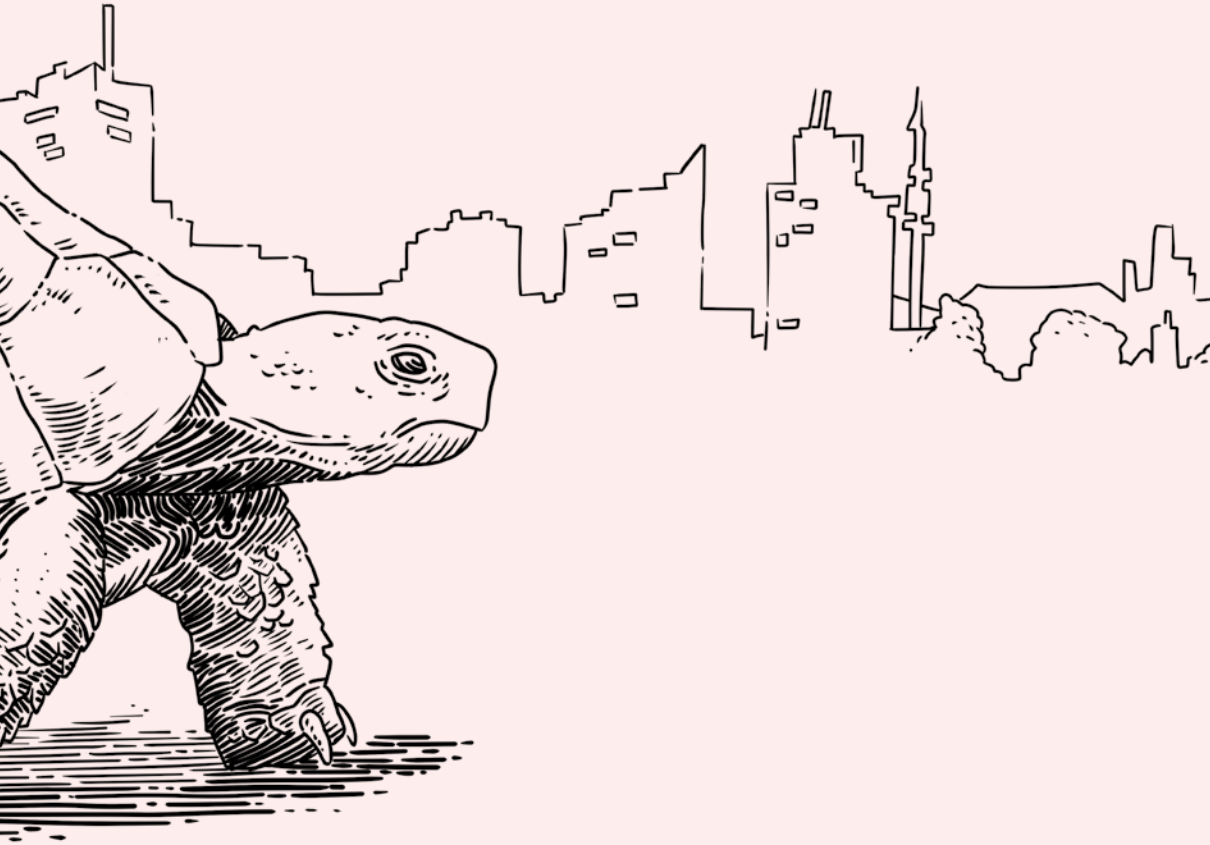
Socratic walk

One person talks (and walks), while the other listens and asks questions (and also walks). Based on the Socratic Method, this application of critical thinking invites learners to engage in a dialogue as they walk. In Plato's writings, Socrates appears in a series of stories where he questions his interlocutor to clarify an issue. Replicable both in-person or at a distance, this ancient Greek practice enables *solvitur amulando* (the solution comes through walking).



THREE

Pole Pole



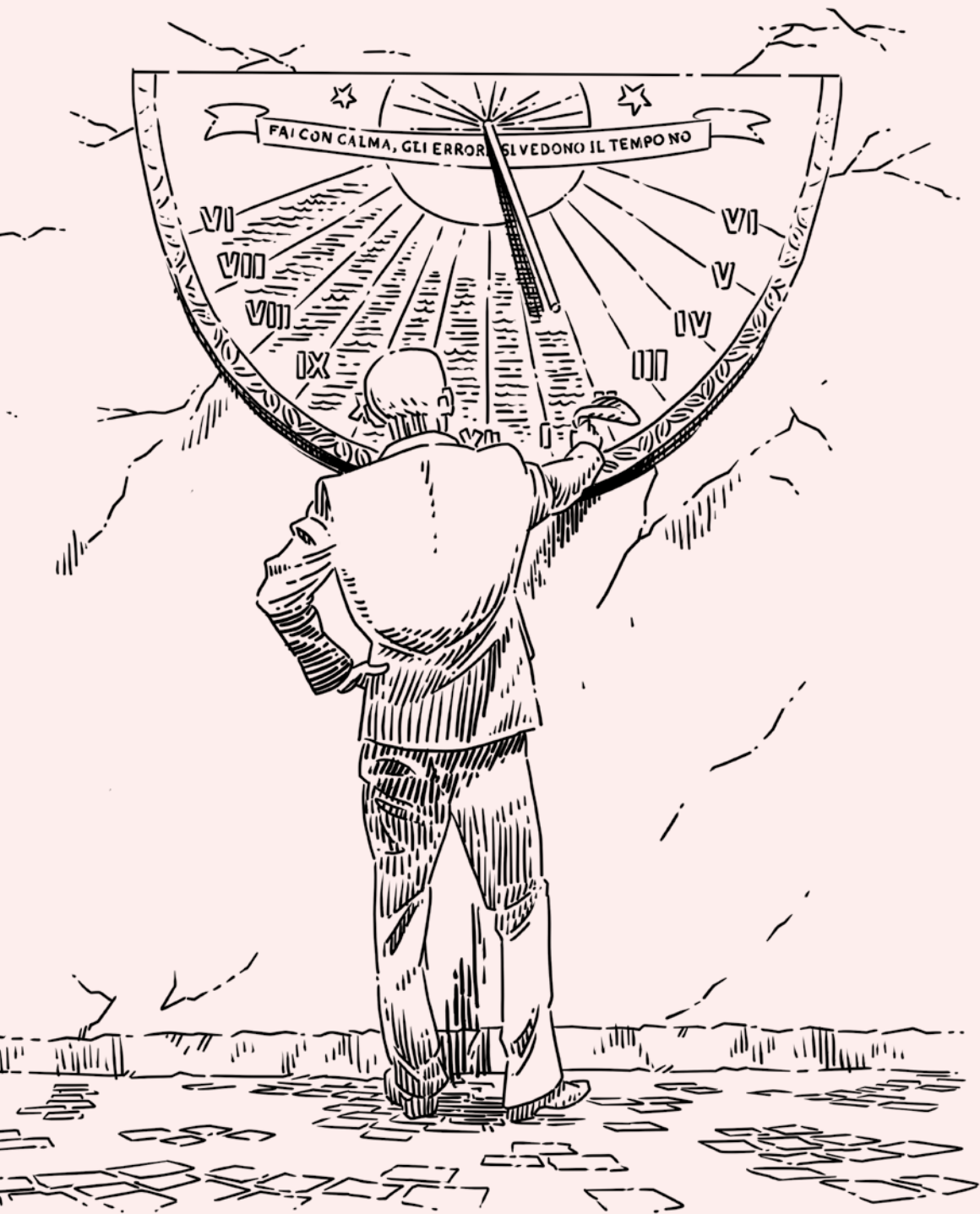
Take things *Pole Pole*, Tanzanian style. From the Swahili phrase, *Pole Pole* means “slowly, slowly.” It’s an invitation to do everything calmly, patiently. It’s an invitation to slow down. This acts as a gentle reminder to take things slowly. When learning, allow new concepts to marinate and distance yourself from distractions. Focus on what you have in front of you. Don’t forget to relax and take things *Pole Pole*.

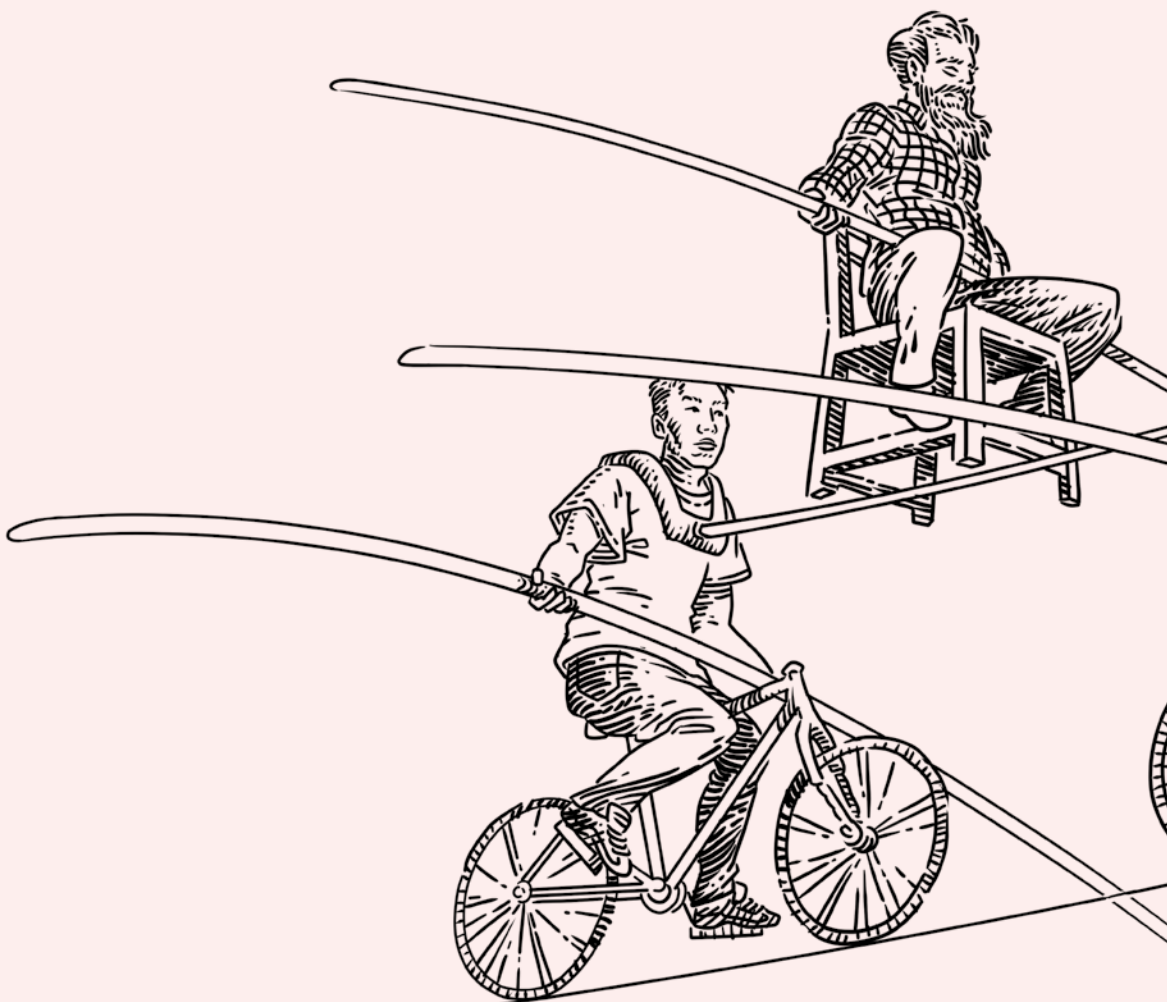
FOUR

Bullet journaling

— **M**indfulness disguised as productivity. The simple act of taking notes, documenting thoughts, and gathering insights in writing is proven to boost retention. Bullet journaling organizes the what while allowing you to be mindful of your why. Encourage learners to practice journaling through guided reflections, personal diary entries, and free writing. You'll be amazed at the power erupting when pen meets paper.

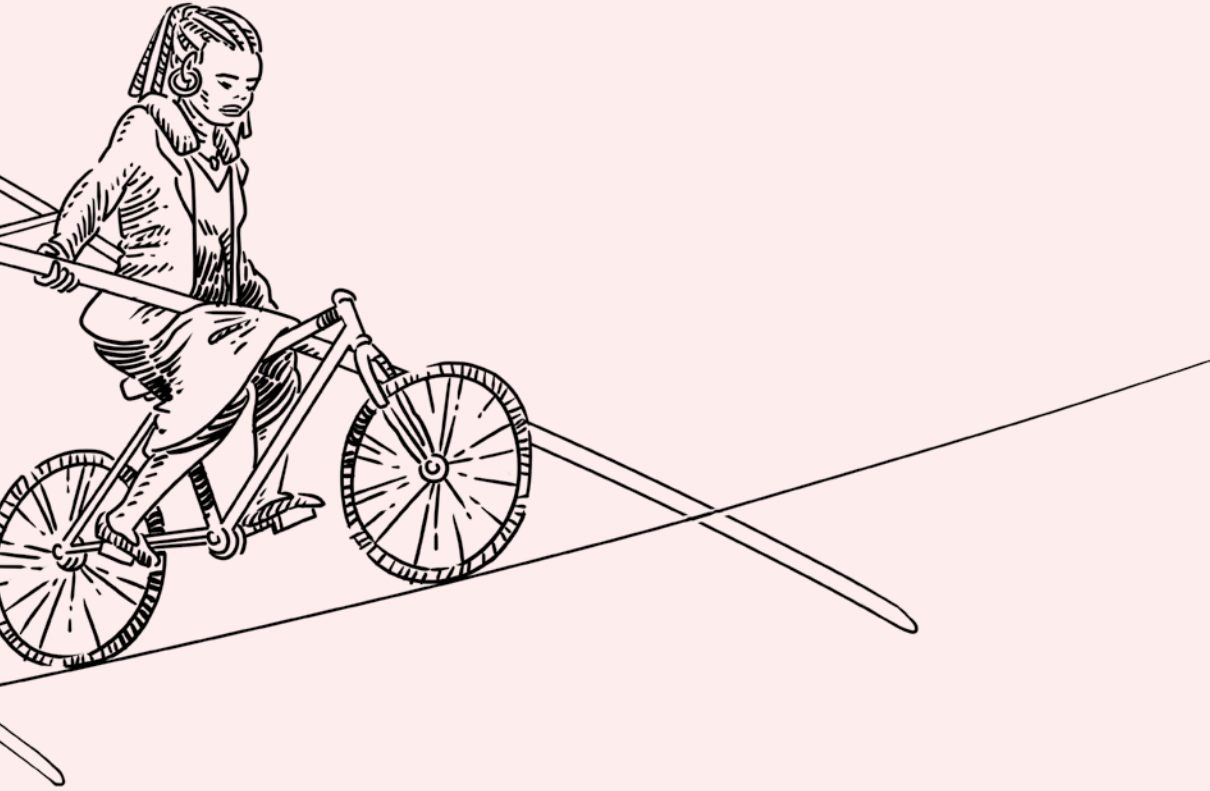






FIVE

Peer learning

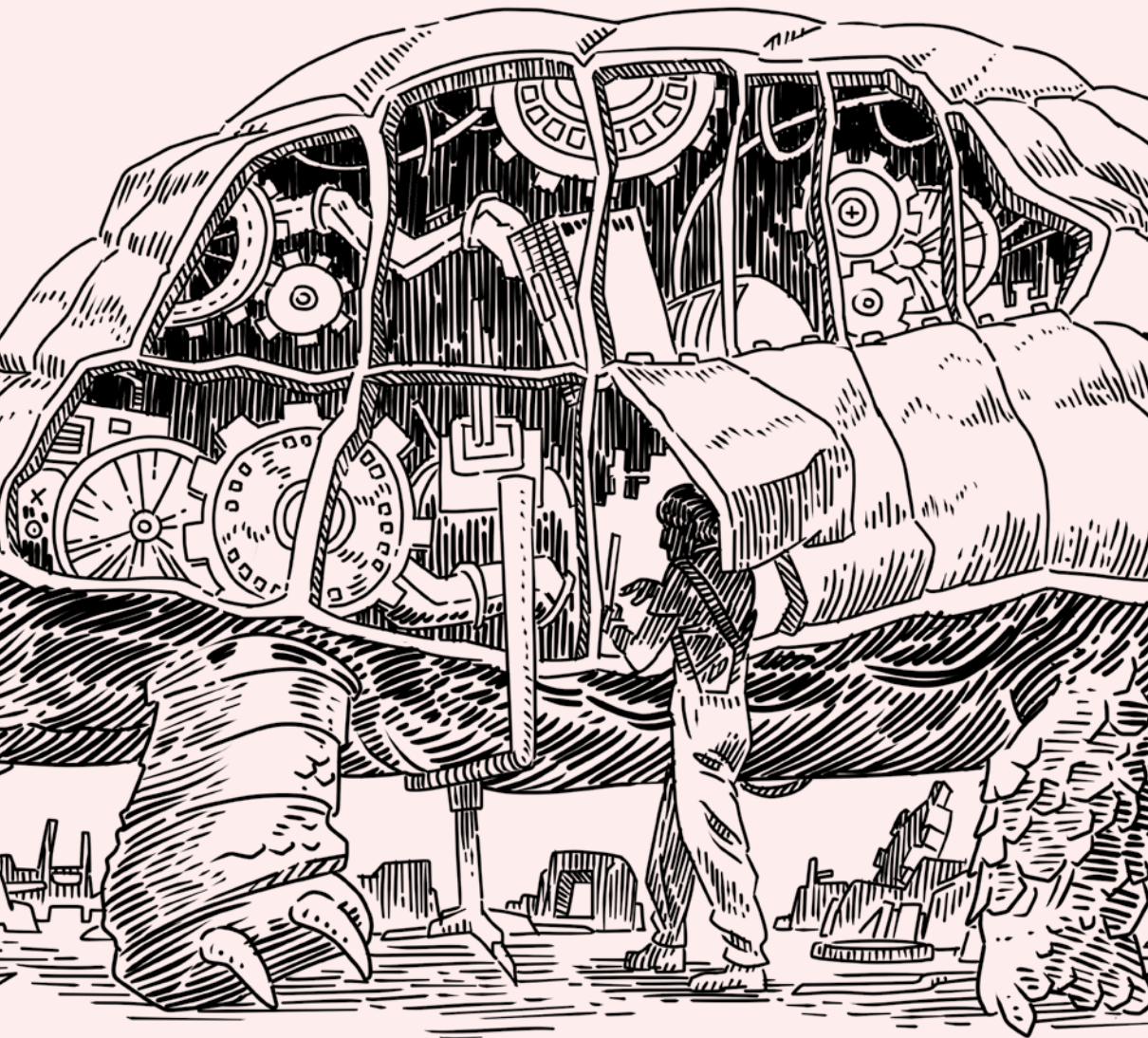


— — — — —
To echo the African proverb, “if you want to go fast, go alone; but if you want to go far, go together.” Translation: teamwork makes the dream work. Give learners time to exchange, co-create, and learn *together*. When learners design their objectives together, foresee change together, and decide the direction they want to do in together, they are the full owners of their learning.



SIX

Authentic assessment



— instead of measuring learning through multiple choice tests, measure worthwhile, significant, and meaningful accomplishments. Give learners an authentic setting to perform skills, act in role plays, or solve real-world problems. Authentic assessments prepare learners for reality outside the classroom (or “Zoom room”). Place a hold on traditional learning analytics and make space for more qualitative feedback.



SEVEN

Ecocentrism

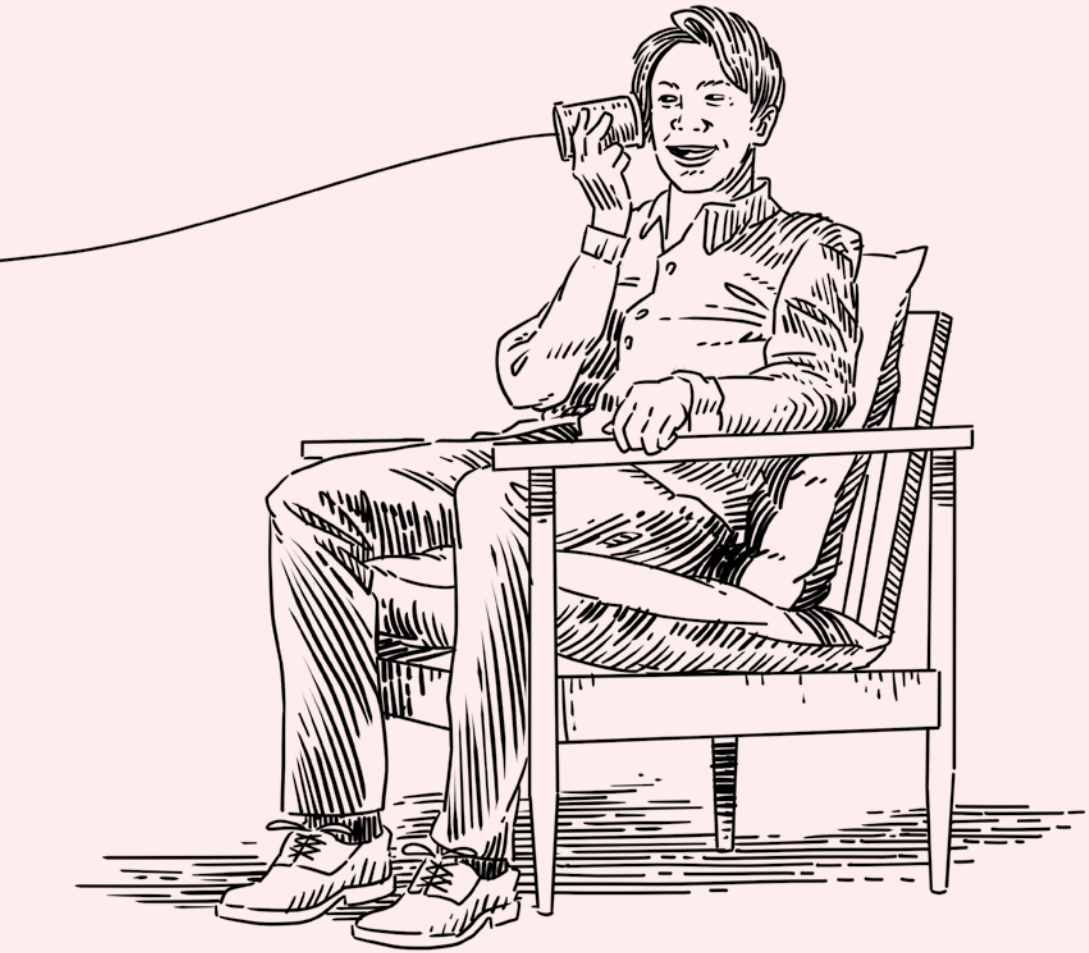


— T he outdoors heals. Mother Nature reacts, recovers, and regenerates all on her own. Being in nature has profound impacts on our mental, physical, and spiritual selves. So why not take learning outside? Educational gardens, trail walks, and team-building on rafts all demonstrate ways in which nature sets the scene for slower learning. Immerse learners in the natural environment to replicate nature's harmonious coexistence between humans.



EIGHT

Conversation



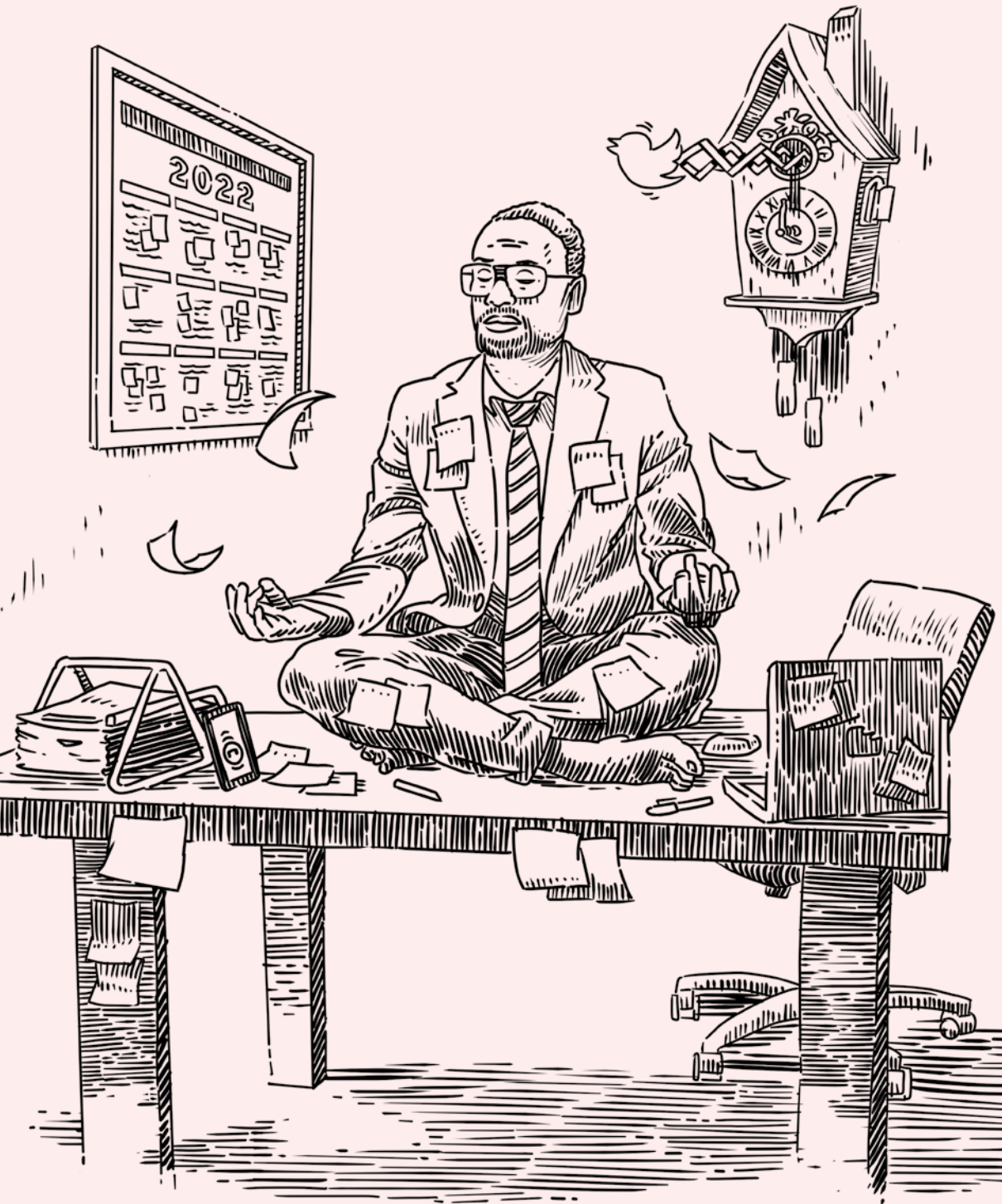
Words hold the potential to change minds, trigger innovation, and focus on one thing at a time. A conversation requires monotasking. Foster active listening through 100 questions to break the ice and dig deeper. Allow ideas and emotions to flow in a safe environment. Unlock ideas that are not only out of the box, but on its edge, its corner, and under its barcode. Giving space for simple human-to-human interaction boosts empathy and mutual understanding.

NINE

Movement

— dance, walk, run, flex, and stretch. Getting the blood
D flowing around the body and releasing endorphins
— only improves our physical and mental health. Cu-
rate movement moments during the learning cycle to release
fresh ideas, create new connections, and get out of your chair.
Movement also boosts retention rates and helps metabolize new
concepts, so what are you waiting for? Put on some background
music, stand up, and move about.





TEN

Meditation

Are you mindful? Or is your mind full? We live in an age of hyper-distraction where our attention spans have reduced to less than a goldfish's. Guided meditations for 1, 2, or 10 minutes are all it takes to clear your thoughts and focus back on what matters. Support learners to take three deep breaths, follow a mindfulness talk, or engage in a guided meditation as a break in the learning journey.



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