

# SCHOOLING BELIEFS



THE HETERO-DIRECTED AND CONVENTIONAL  
EDUCATION THAT STILL LIVES WITHIN YOU

**ALEX BRETAS**



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The hetero-directed and conventional education that  
still lives within you



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Thank you!

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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Alex Bretas** is a writer, speaker and a Self-Directed Learning Architect. He is a co-author of the book *Core Skills: 10 Essential Skills for a changing world* and partner of the Learning Sprint program, a self-directed learning method for companies. After completing an independent research on adult learning and publishing two books in 2015 and 2016, Alex has founded several projects to support autonomous learning – among them, the Masters of Learning program (MoL), the largest self-directed learning community in Brazil. Along the way, he worked with different organizations and spoke at various events, including TEDx.

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# INTRODUCTION

The way we see the world and behave have been shaped over time by powerful influences: family, media, church, market, life, politics, groups of friends and even our habits.

What about school? Have you ever wondered how this institution has been shaping our living in the world, our perception of ourselves and others and how we see life and the universe?

It is clear that the influences of schooling on our thinking, feeling and acting are mixed and combined with all other kinds of inputs. It would be impossible to draw a line separating the beliefs coming from school and the ones acquired somewhere else.

Still, school has the power to create a set of ideas that are supposed to be shared by all mankind (which is something that we may never be able to understand fully) AND, in addition to that, it can set the tone for which kind of narratives are “allowed” to be spread, and which are doomed to be forgotten.

The beliefs you will read next may be understood as the “hidden curriculum” in schools. That is what is being taught, implicitly, while the teaching happens. They are signals that we pick up through the environment, the context, the culture and the way of doing things.

These are the "chronic thoughts"<sup>1</sup> that are constantly crossing our minds, most of the time unconsciously.

When I refer to "school", I don't mean the school building itself, nor am I generalizing to all the schools around the world. What I mean is society's schooling process<sup>2</sup>, not simply understood as the increasing number of children becoming students, but as a process of "colonization" of our bodies and minds, from a certain ideological point of view.

Since the 19th century, this process, in the way it is imposed on us, has been one of the main domestication tools used by the western culture. No wonder Foucault compared the structure of schools with prisons.

Would it be possible to break free?

I invite us to risk a resounding "yes". When we start being aware of our learning process, we can deliberately and intentionally change our behaviour. Freedom turns into autonomy and, thus, breaking this loop becomes more possible and real, one day at a time.

By reading the set of beliefs gathered here, it is likely that you will remember even more patterns introduced

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<sup>1</sup> I learned this from Monica Lan, who learned from Abraham via Esther Hicks.

<sup>2</sup> The term was introduced by Ivan Illich in his work *Deschooling Society*.

to you during your schooling process. Maybe you will hear the voice of an old teacher, a strict principal or even your father – all shaped by the same system.

If that happens, I invite you to send them to me by clicking [here](#). In time, I want to update this book and your contribution can be important. If your suggestions appear in future editions, you will be credited as a collaborator.

I wish this book provides some useful reflections in our search for free, self-directed and community-based learning. May each one of us discover the world more deeply, beyond the chronic thoughts inherited throughout the schooling process.

**P.S:** I am not against schools. I understand that they are a very important social and cultural equipment, especially in a country like Brazil (where I am from). I believe, though, that we must think critically about what kind of education we want for the future. There are thousands of schools and educational philosophies working for new ways to look at the world, much different from the ones you will read here. Change is possible, even from within the school.







**LEARN=  
BEING TAUGHT.**



**MY PARENTS WERE  
RESPONSIBLE FOR  
MY **LEARNING****

**PROCESS,**

**ALONGSIDE MY**   
**TEACHERS AND MY**

**TUTORS. NOW IT IS**

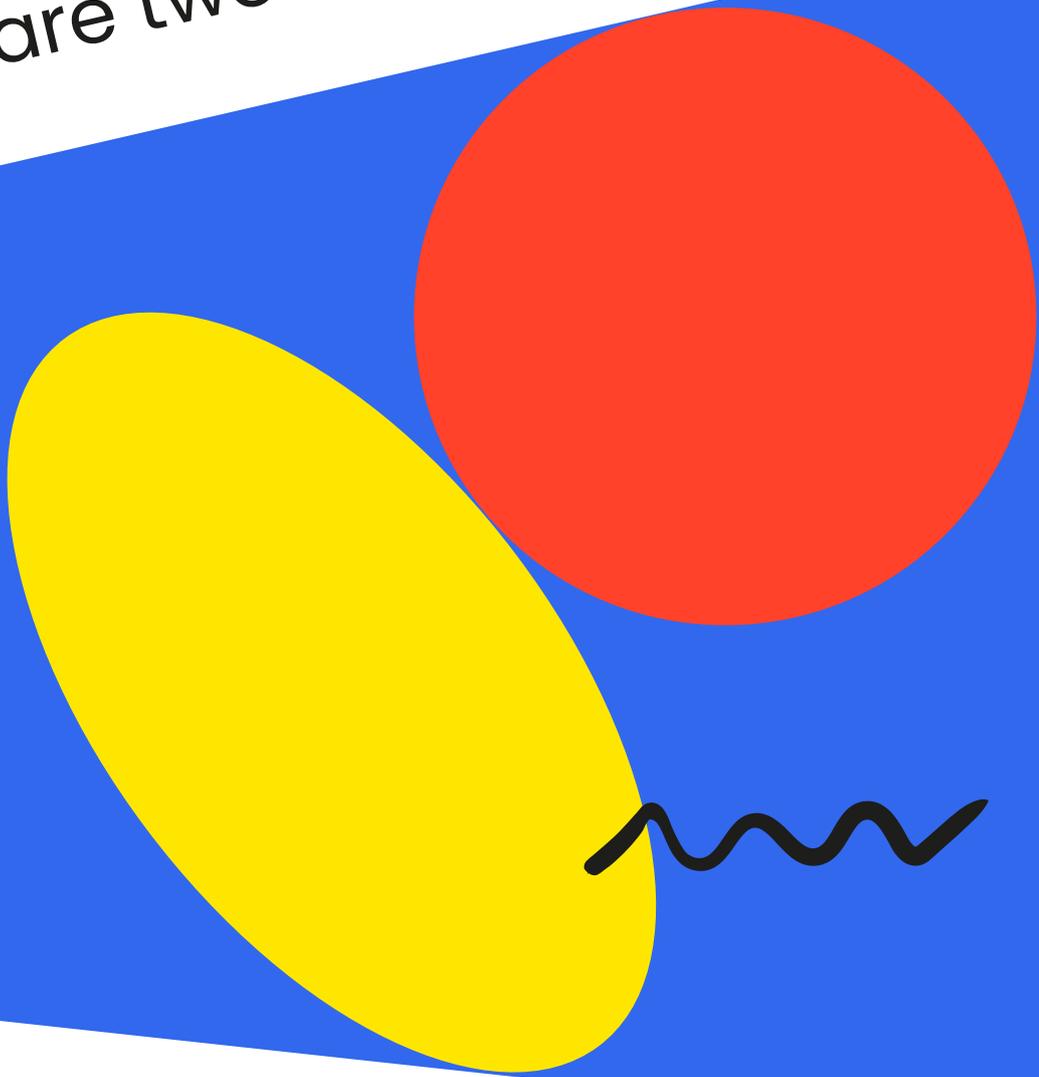
**MY BOSS AND THE**

**HR DEPARTMENT**

**AT THE COMPANY**

**I WORK FOR.**

Learning and having fun  
are two separate activities.

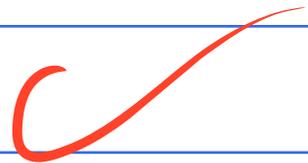


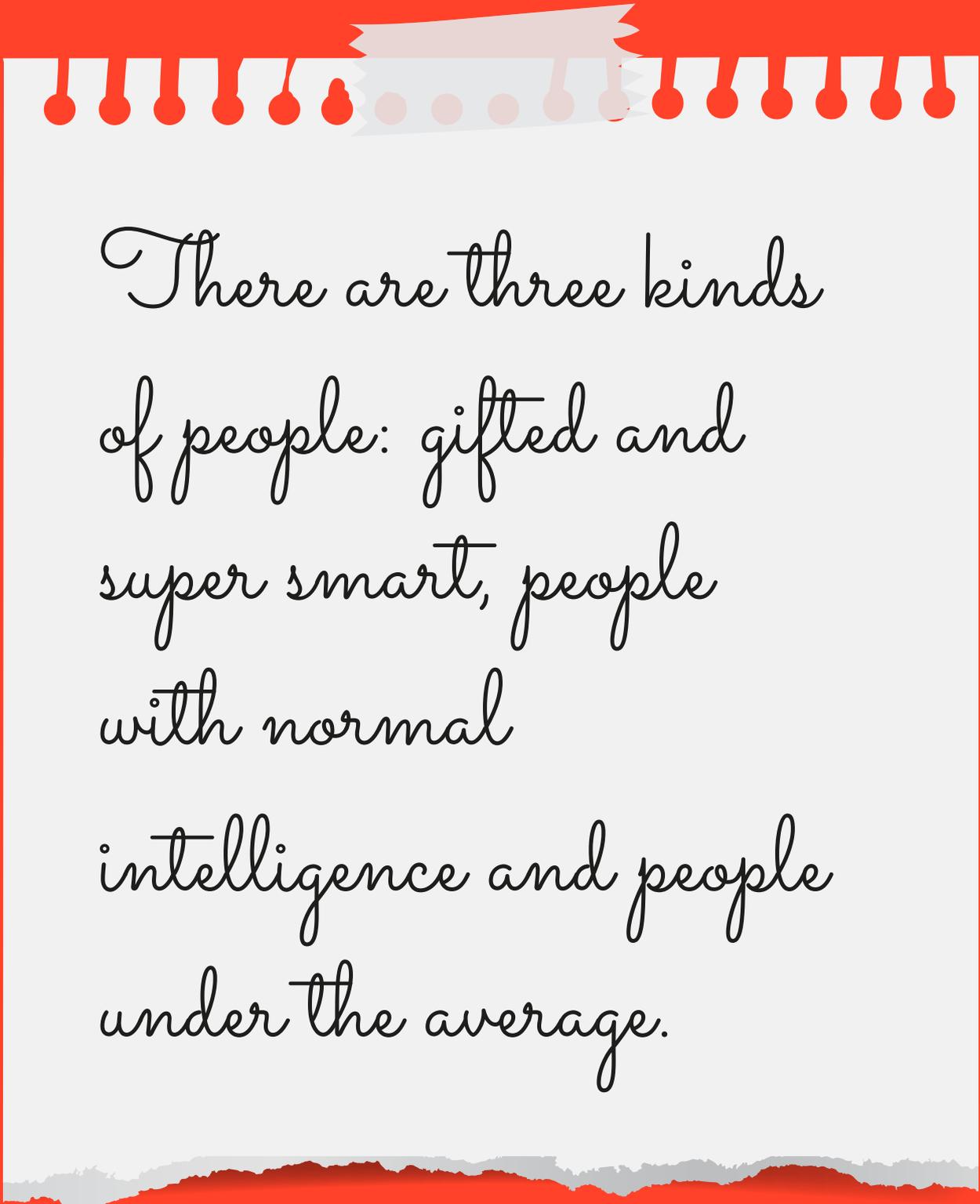
One happens in the  
classroom, and the other in  
the break between classes.

If I have a  
bad performance,  
I deserve to be punished.



If I have a good one,  
it is only my obligation, so  
there's nothing to be  
celebrated.

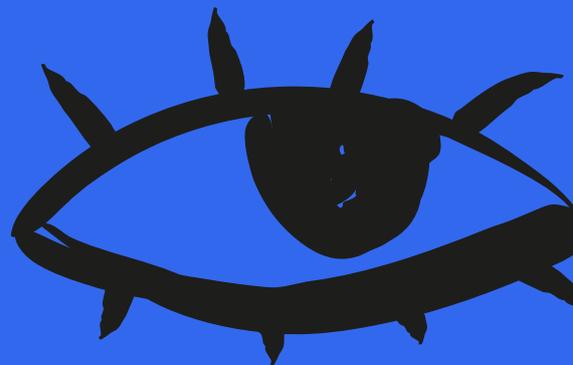
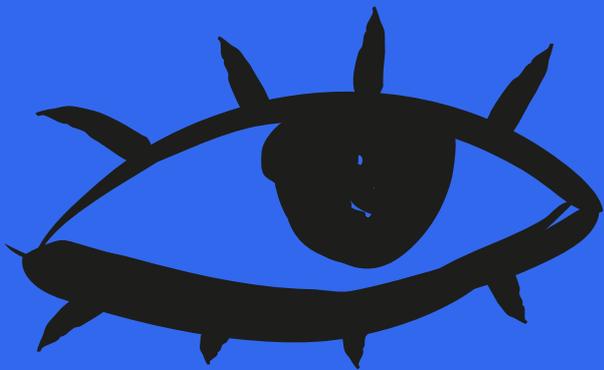




There are three kinds  
of people: gifted and  
super smart, people  
with normal  
intelligence and people  
under the average.

**IT IS OK TO MAKE FUN  
OF THOSE WHO ARE  
UNDER THE AVERAGE.**

*And it is also  
ok to make fun  
of geniuses.*





**THERE IS ONLY**

**ONE KIND OF**

**INTELLIGENCE:**

**THE ONE THAT CAN BE**

**MEASURED BY IQ**

**AND TEST GRADES.**



**CREATIVITY AND  
AUTHENTICITY ARE  
GIFTS POSSESSED  
ONLY BY A FEW.**



**IF I DON'T HAVE THEM,  
I'D BETTER NOT  
EVEN TRY.**

Some people belong to the human sciences box.

Others, to the  
math and logical  
thinking box.



True geniuses  
are great in  
numbers and  
logical thinking.



(And never in  
music or sports).

I am never  
going to be  
able to

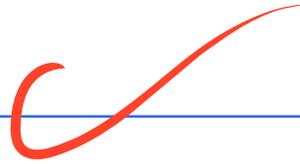


**HAVING DISCIPLINE  
MEANS BEING  
OBEDIENT.**



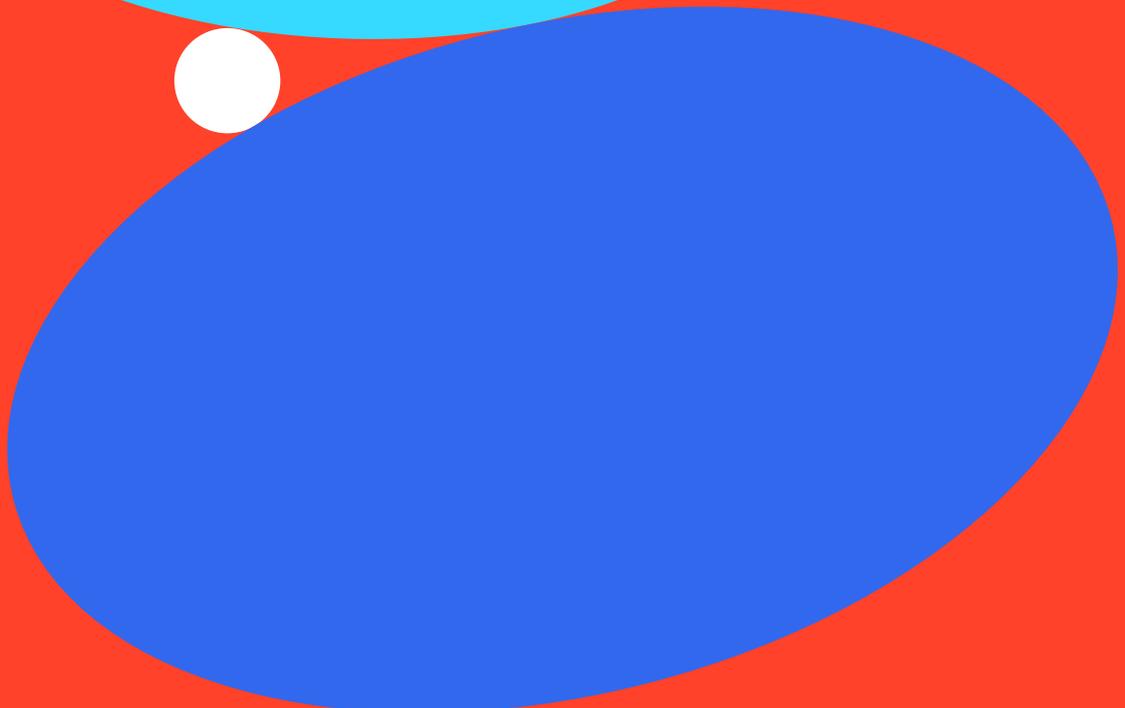
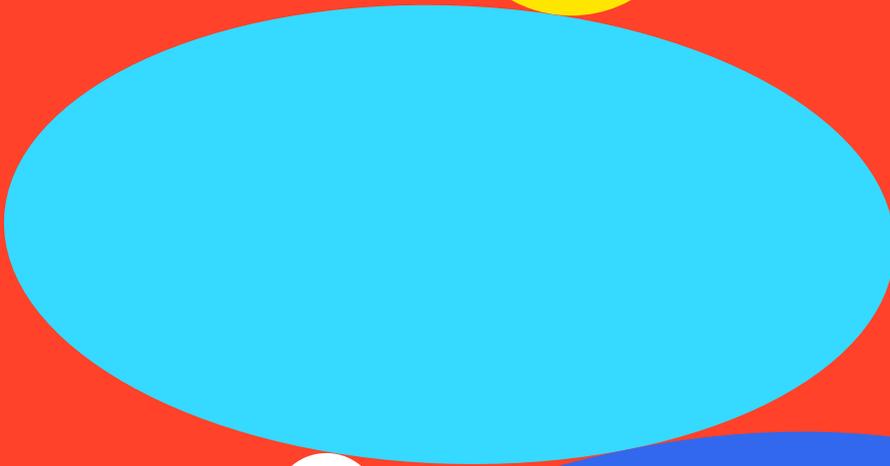
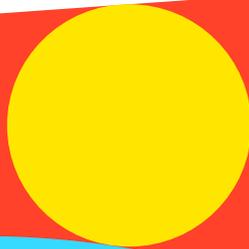
If my grades  
are high,

my parents will  
love me.





Rest and leisure are only allowed if they have a positive impact on my productivity.

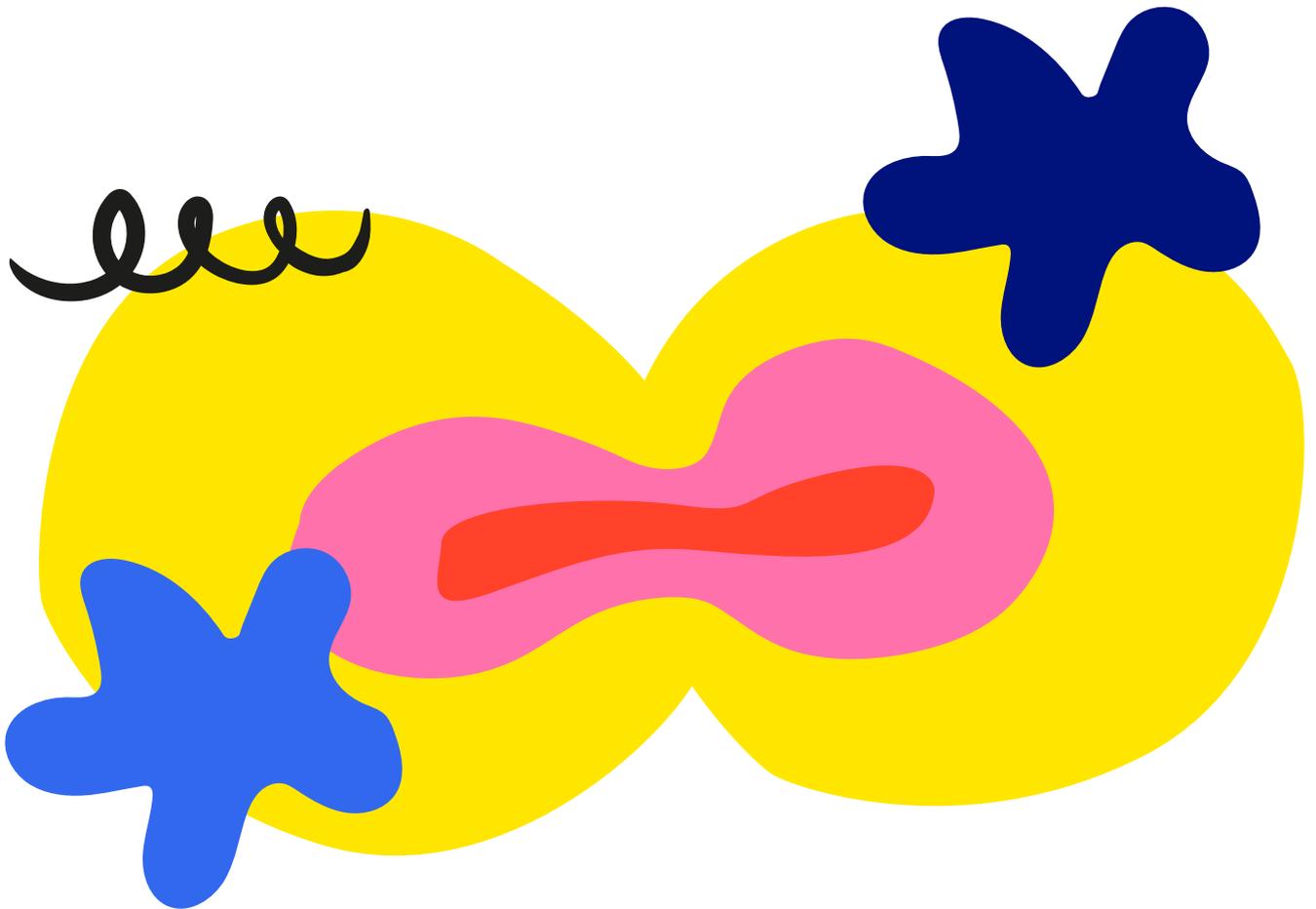


**NOTHING GOOD  
CAN EVER  
COME OUT OF  
IDLENESS AND  
BOREDOM, SO  
THEY MUST  
ALWAYS BE  
FILLED WITH  
SOMETHING. \***



Learning is  
100% a mental  
process and  
0% emotional.

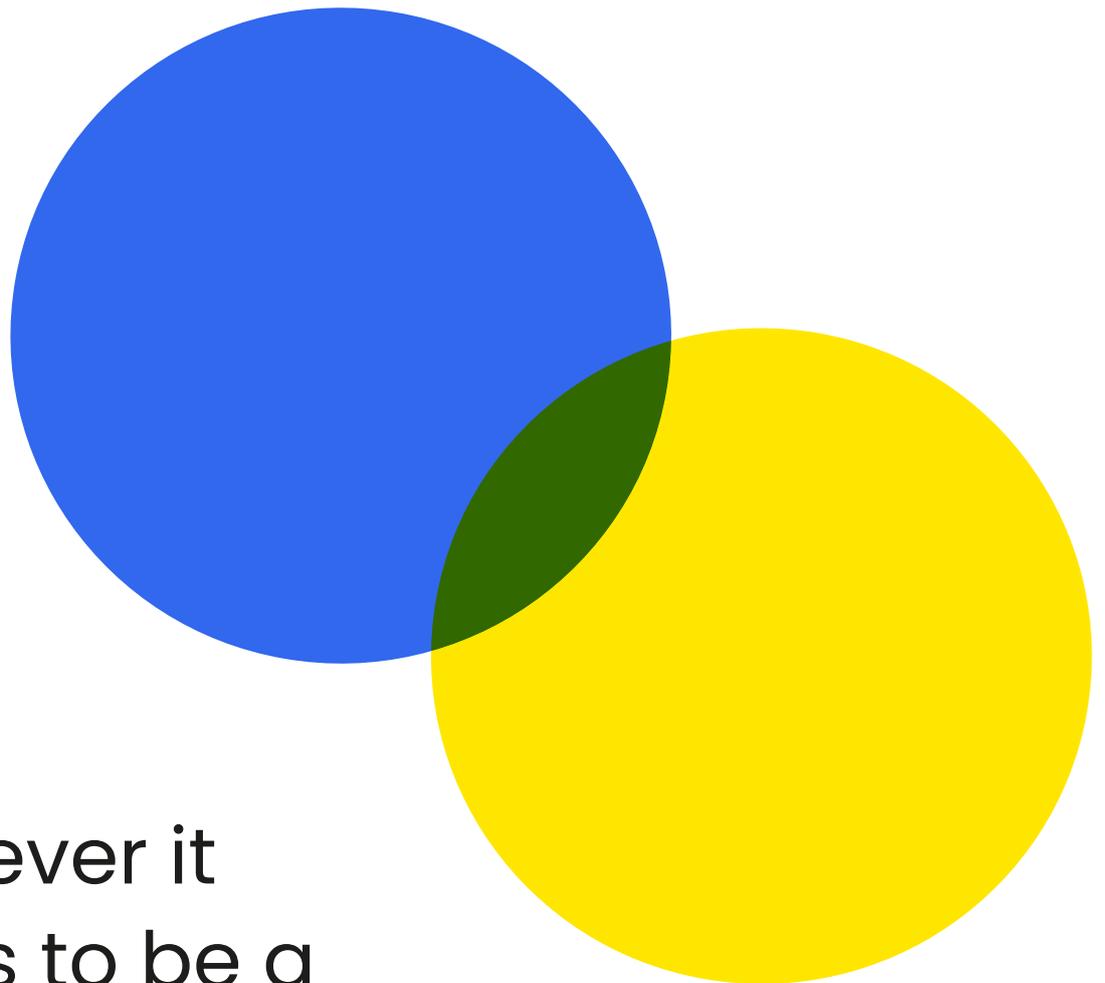
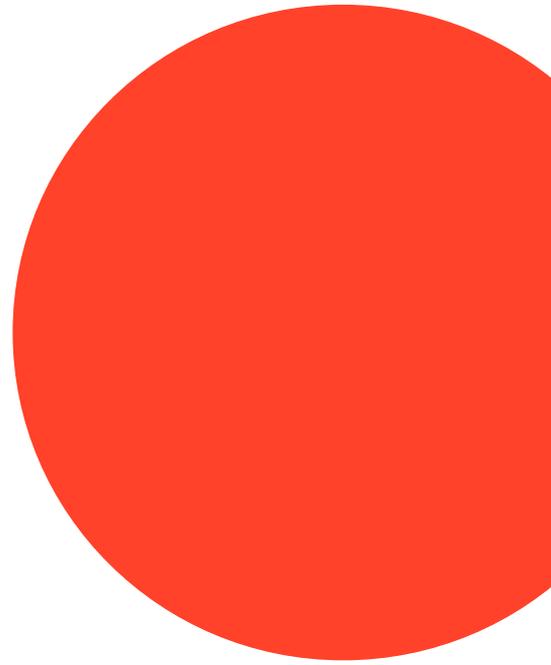
**I AM MADE OUT OF  
CELLS, ATOMS AND  
MOLECULES**



**(NOT DREAMS,  
RELATIONSHIPS AND  
NARRATIVES).**

People with different  
ages and academic  
performances are **not**  
supposed to work  
together.

Only adults can  
transmit the  
necessary  
knowledge to  
become a “good  
adult”



(whatever it  
means to be a  
good adult).

**AN OLD**



**DOG**

**CAN NEVER**

**LEARN**

**A NEW**



**TRICK.**





**CHILDREN  
WOULD BE  
LOST**

**IF ADULTS  
DIDN'T TELL  
THEM EXACTLY  
WHAT TO DO.**

**IT IS**

**✘ FORBIDDEN ✘**

**TO HELP**

**OTHERS AND**

**SHARE YOUR**

**KNOWLEDGE ↙**

**WITH THEM.**

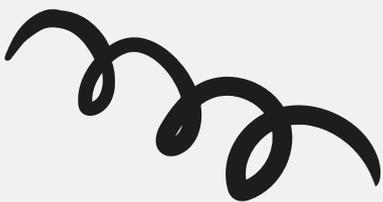
If I want to make  
something new, I need my  
teacher's blessing, the  
coordinator's blessing and  
the principal's blessing  
(therefore, it is not even  
worth trying).



**WHATEVER I WANT  
TO DO, FIRST, I  
NEED TO ASK IF I AM  
ALLOWED TO DO IT.**



I'd rather not  
have answers to my  
questions than  
bring them to the  
public eye.

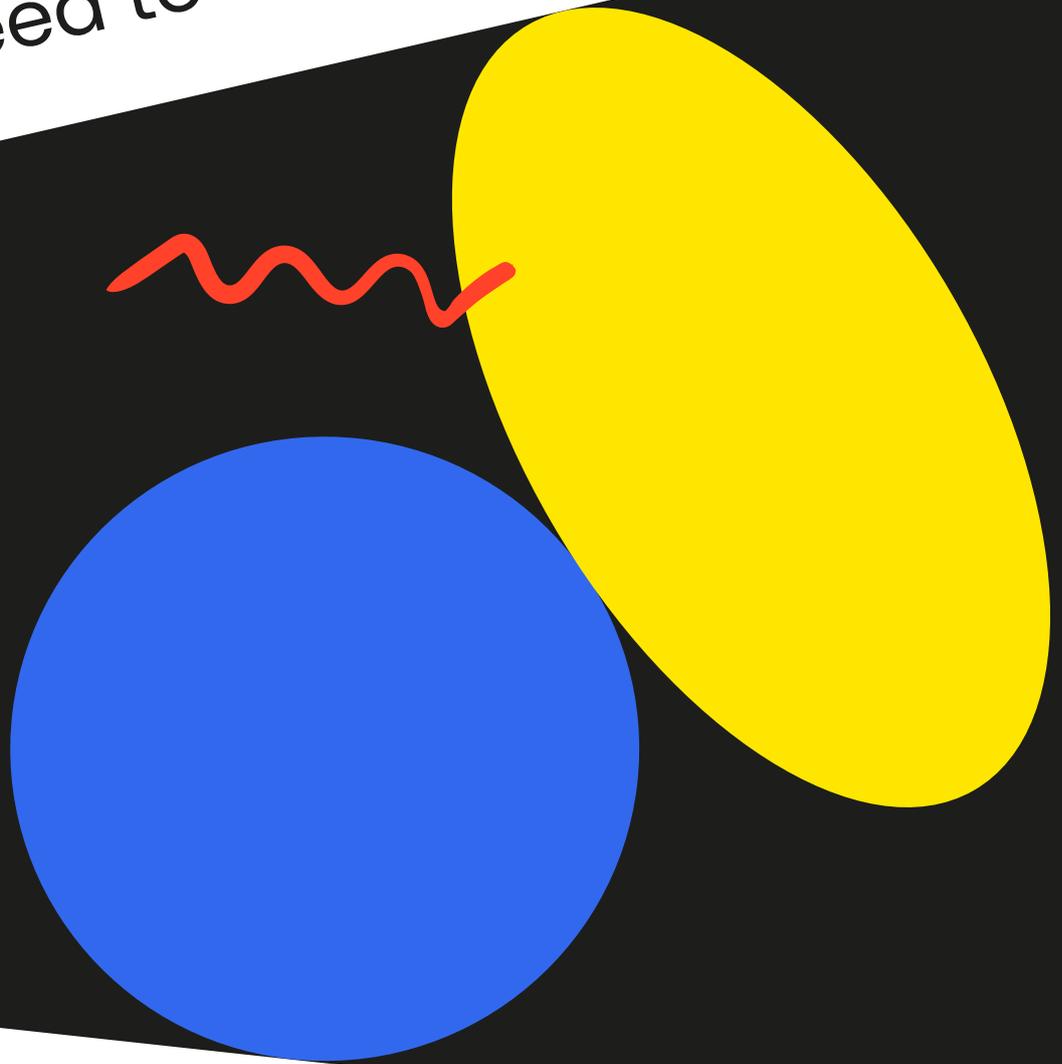


**THE KNOWLEDGES  
THAT INTEREST ME OR  
THE EXPERIENCES  
THAT AFFECT ME**

**ARE NOT IMPORTANT!**

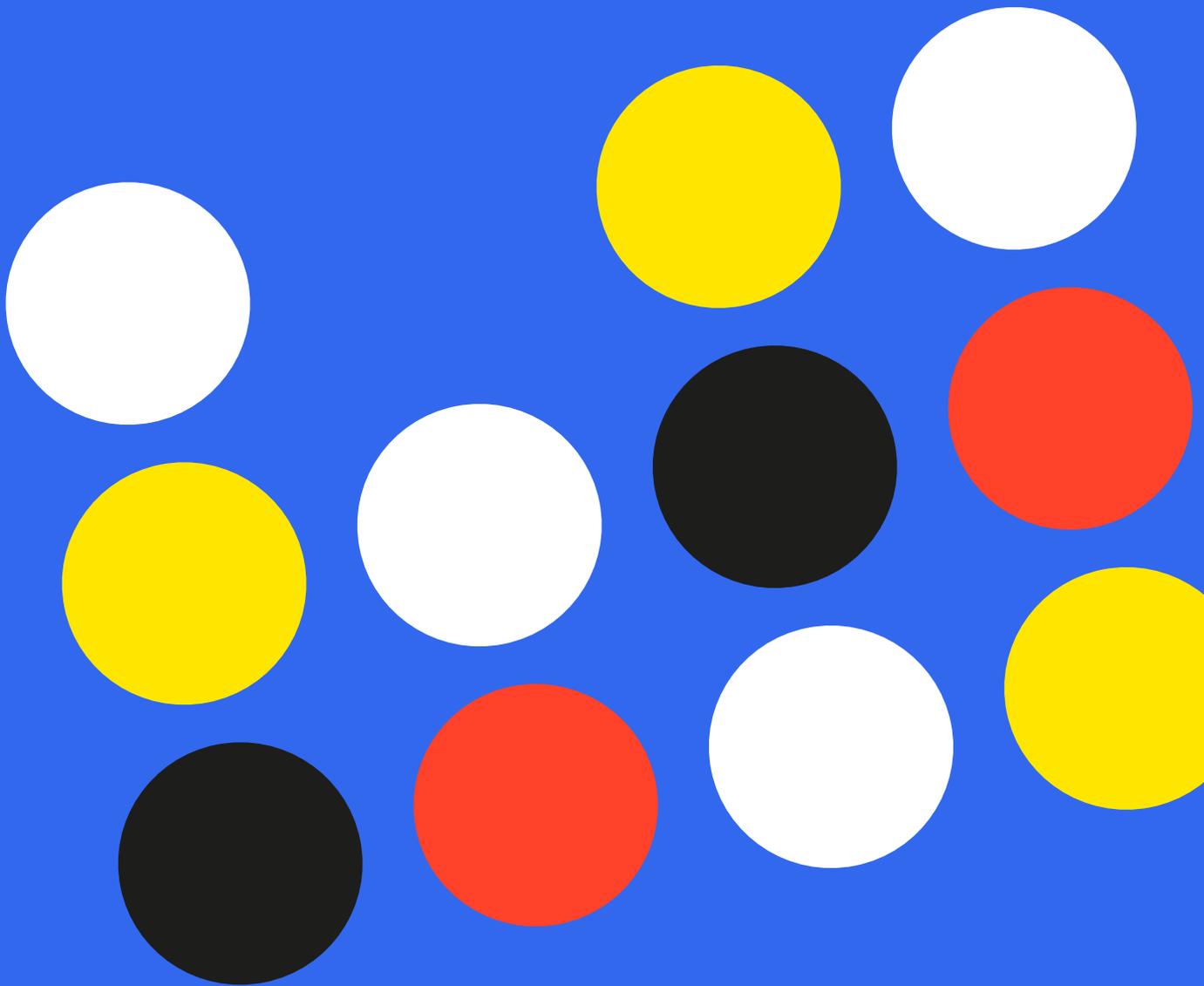
**WHAT MATTERS IS  
THE COMPULSORY  
CURRICULUM.**

I need to focus on my gaps



instead of my talents and interests in order to grow.

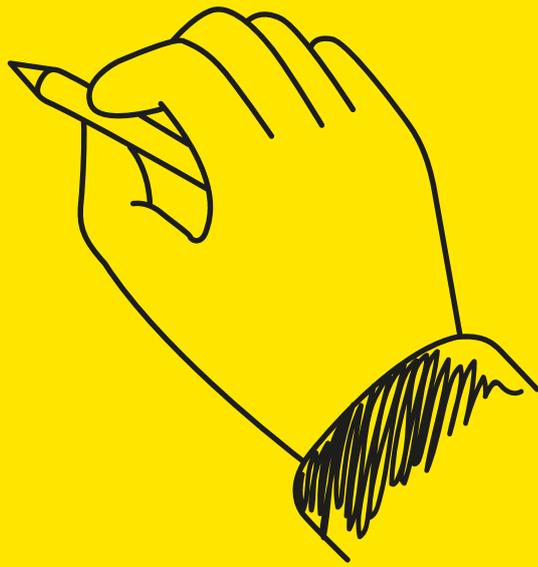
In order to succeed, I  
need to memorize all the  
information about all the  
subjects in the curriculum



(language, math, history,  
biology, etc).

if I pass  
the test, then  
I know.

**THE TEST GRADES PROVE THAT I AM WORTHY.**



**THE ONLY WAY TO  
LEARN SOMETHING**

*is by taking a course  
or attending classes.*



Time outside school  
or not invested in  
focused studying is  
wasted.

**PLAYING, IMAGINING,  
HAVING LONG  
CONVERSATIONS OR  
TRAVELING WITH  
STUDENTS PUTS THE  
IMPORTANT CONTENT  
BEHIND SCHEDULE.**



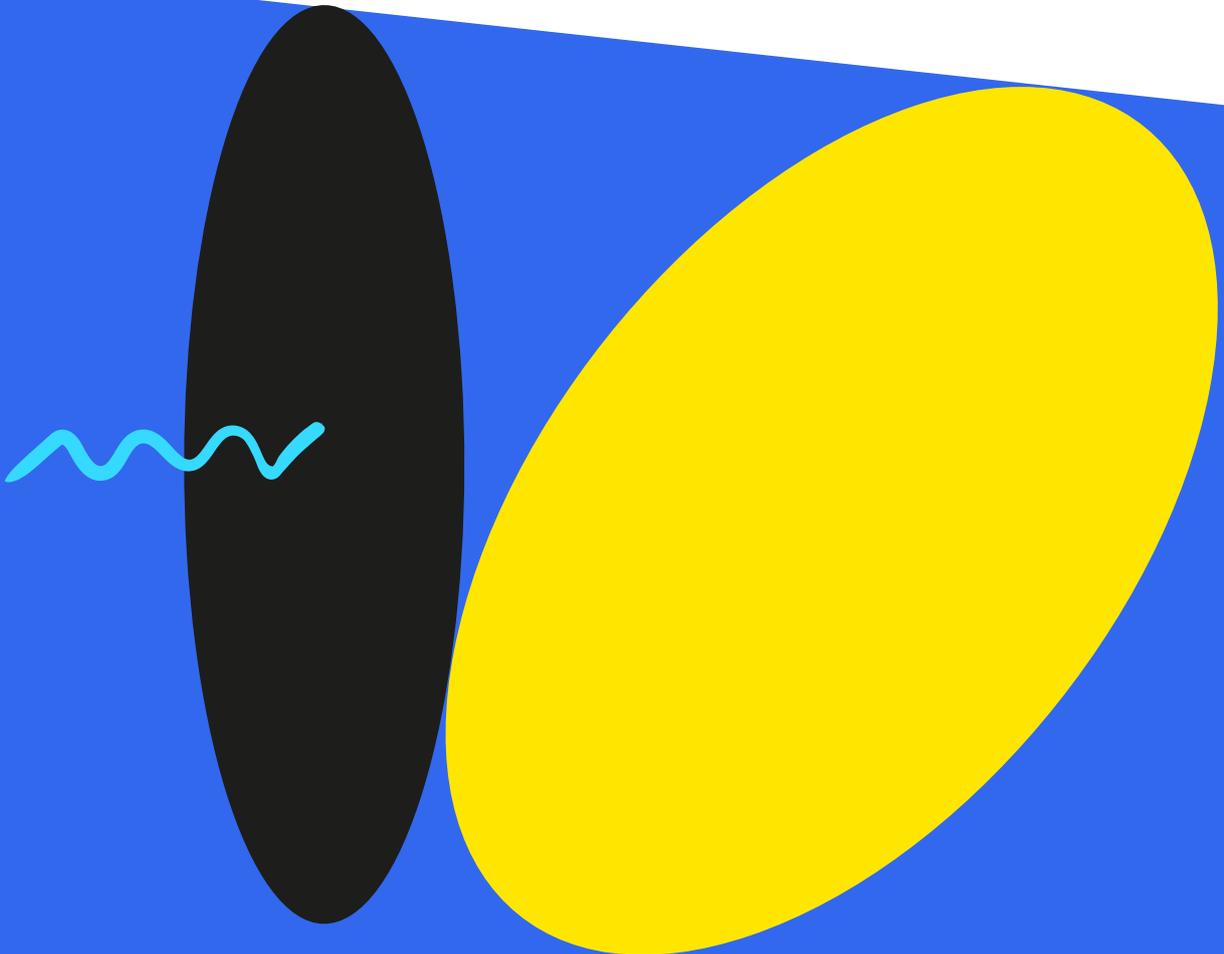
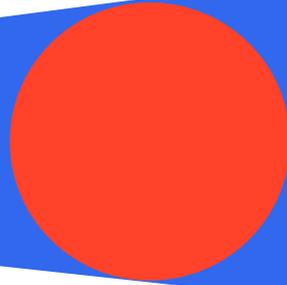
I must separate  
my personal life  
from my studies

(and then, my  
personal life from  
my professional life).



Teachers are not supposed to  
be friends with their students,

or else they might become  
permissive.



**IT IS UP TO  
THE MASTER  
TO SAY WHEN  
THE PUPIL IS  
READY.**

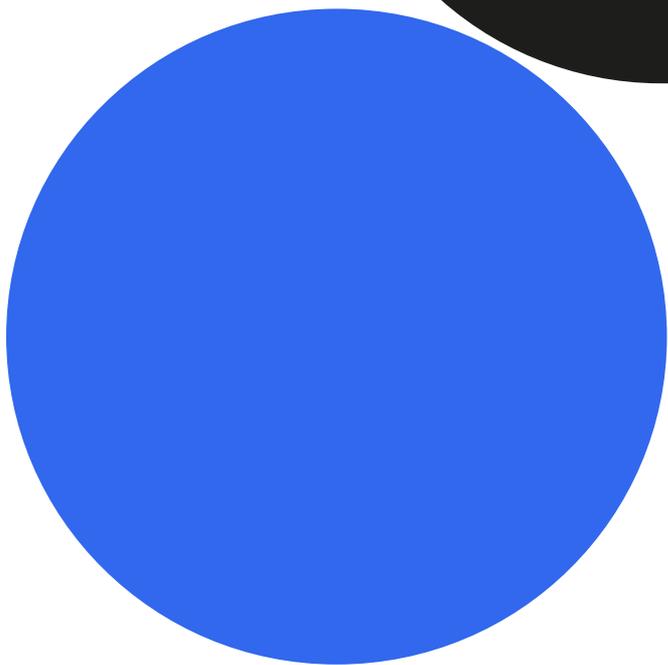
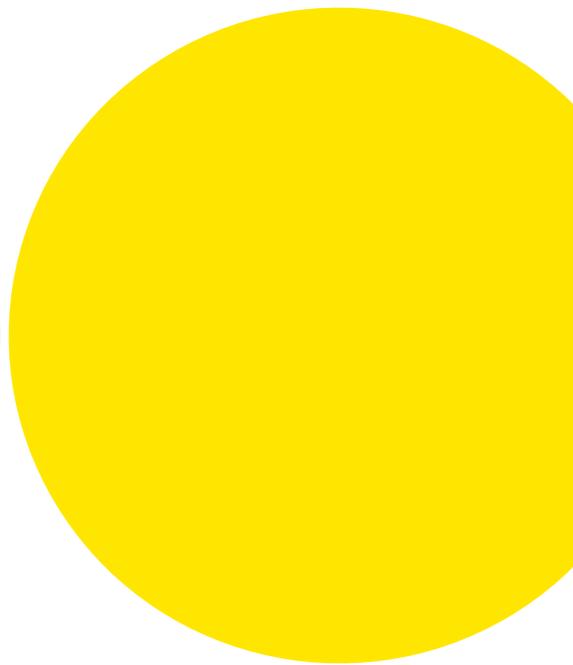
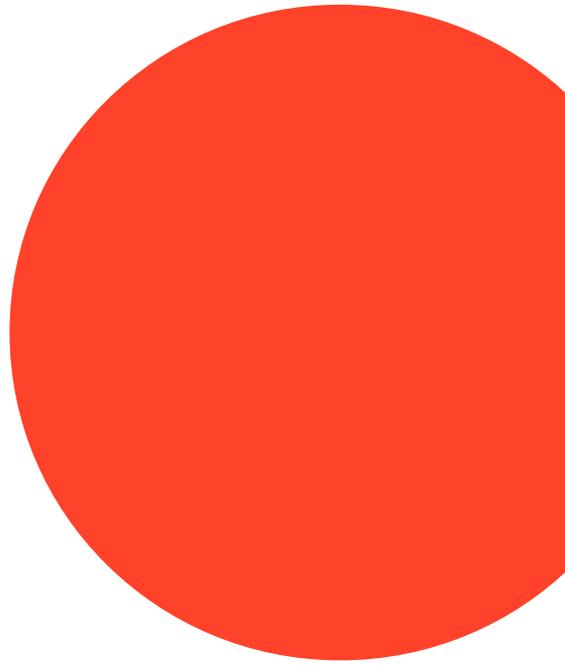


**IT IS  
FORBIDDEN  
TO MAKE ANY  
PROGRESS  
WITHOUT HIS/HER  
AUTHORIZATION.**

Learning  
equals  
studying.

**I AM ONLY ABLE  
TO COMMIT  
WHEN THERE IS  
SOMEBODY  
TELLING ME  
WHAT AND  
WHEN TO DO  
THINGS. **

There is something  
wrong with the  
students, who are  
uninterested by  
nature,



and then with the  
employees, who  
are intrinsically  
disengaged.

**I WILL ONLY LEARN FOR  
REAL WHEN I HAVE READ A  
LOT AND HAVE MASTERED  
ALL THE THEORIES.**



The faster

I read and consume

content, the better

(quantity is more  $\begin{matrix} + \\ + \\ + \end{matrix}$

important than quality).





**THEORY.**



**PRACTICE  
CAN ONLY  
COME AFTER**



It is not safe to talk  
about what I am  
learning before I have  
mastered the subject  
as a whole. \*



**THERE IS A  
“RIGHT” WAY  
AND A  
“WRONG” WAY  
OF THINKING  
AND DOING  
THINGS.**

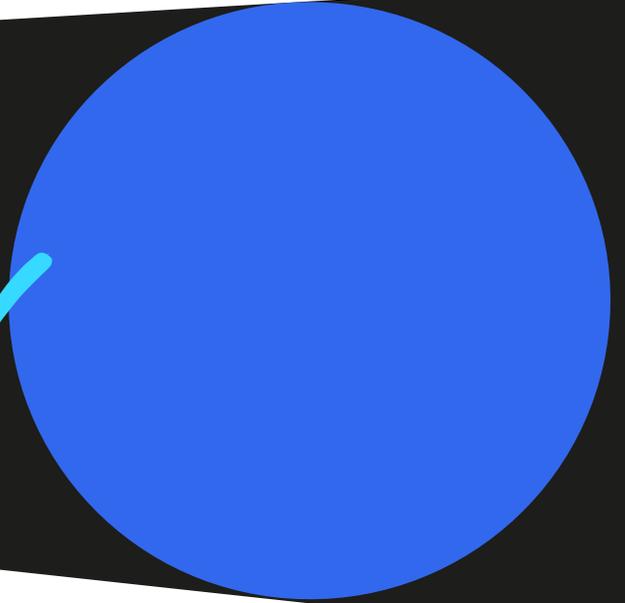


There is only  
one truth and  
only one path,

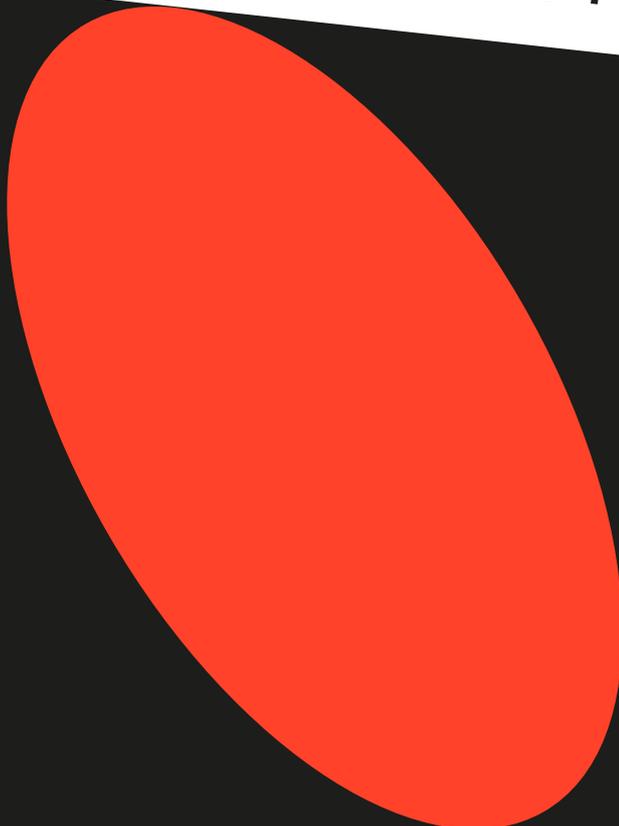


which are  
revealed by  
books and  
masters.

I am not able to understand  
unless someone explains it to me.



I am not able to do it unless  
someone tells me how.



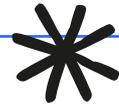
**REALITY IS  
WHAT IT IS,  
REGARDLESS  
OF WHO IS  
OBSERVING IT  
OR THE CONTEXT  
AROUND THE  
OBSERVER.**

Life and  
the world can  
be predicted  
and controlled.

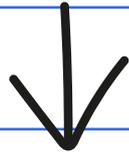


**DESCRIPTIONS OF  
THE WORLD ARE  
EQUIVALENT TO THE  
WORLD ITSELF.**



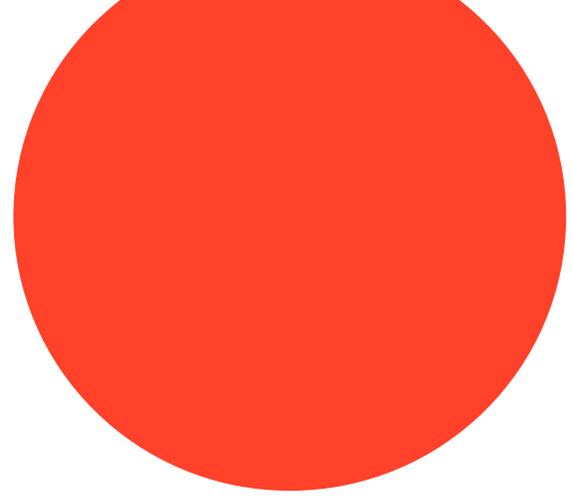
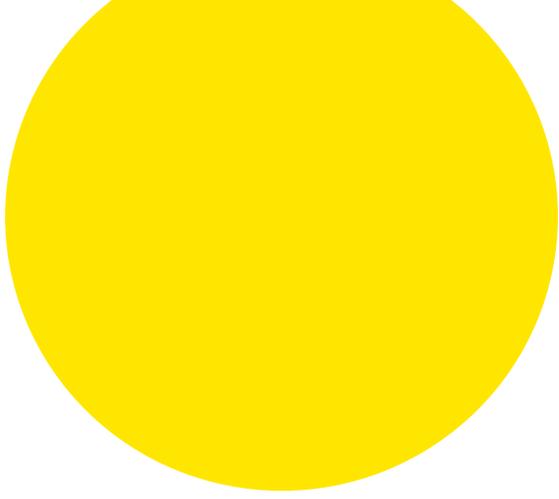


The future is a place  
where we are heading to,

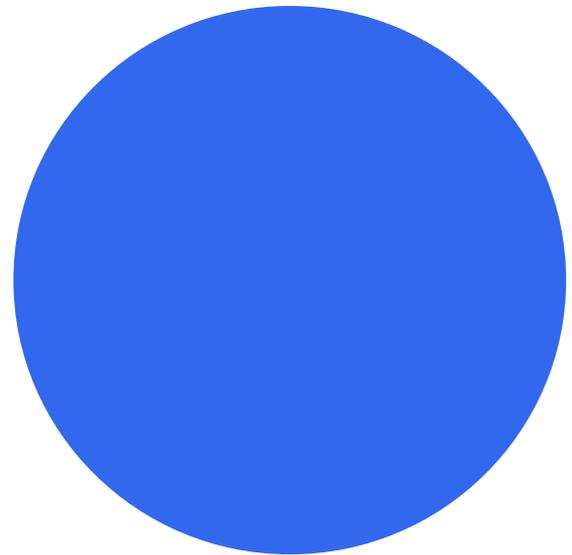
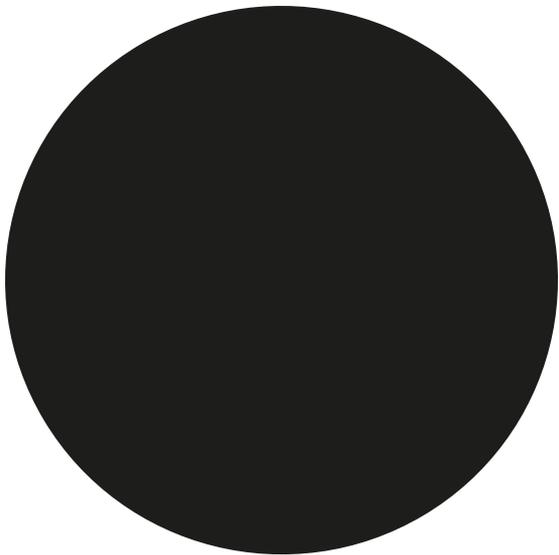


and not a place  
we are creating.

Learning about the  
outside world is  
more important than  
understanding my  
inner world.



Questioning is  
important,



as long as I  
don't go too far  
or question the  
"owners" of the  
knowledge.

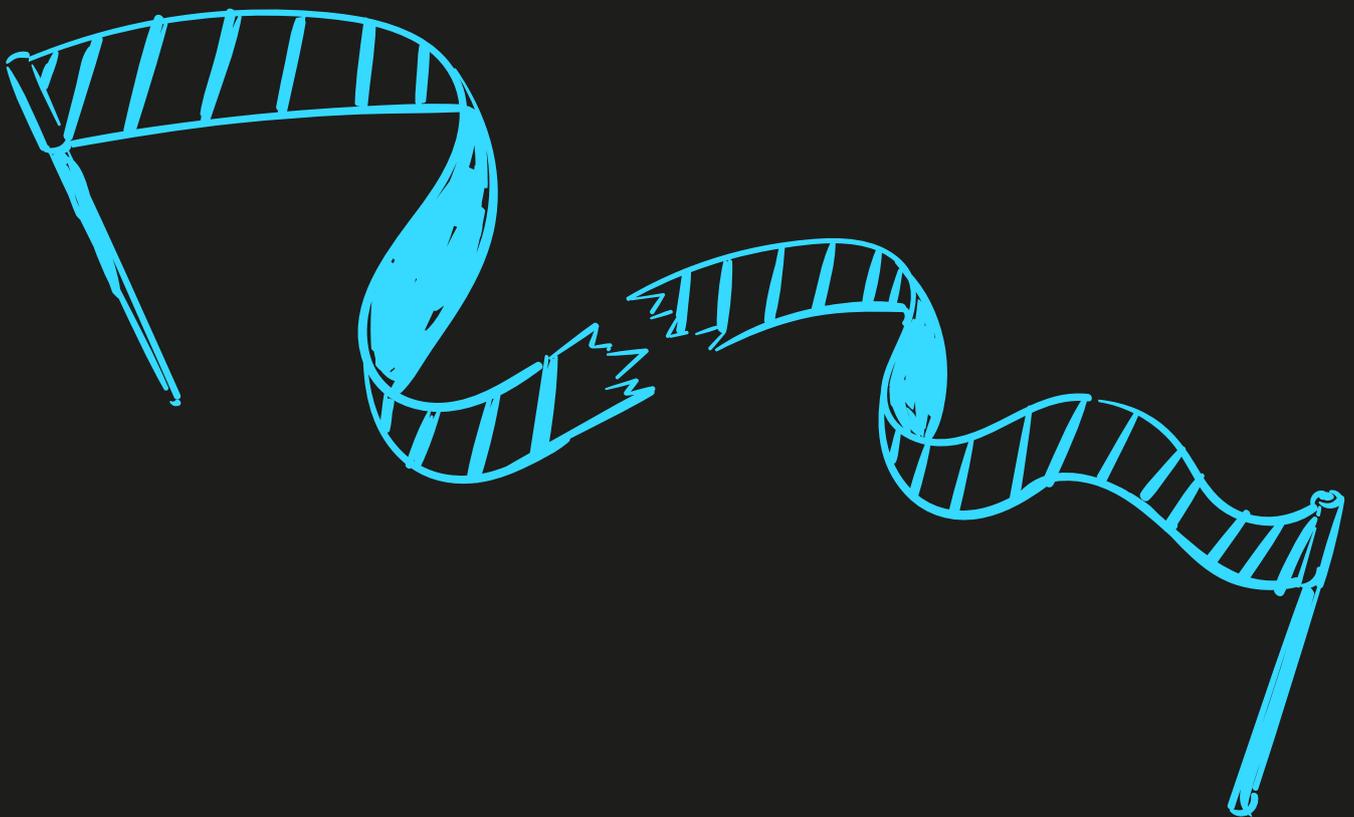
**IN THE BEST CASE,  
HIERARCHY MUST  
BE RESPECTED.**

**IN THE WORST,  
IT MUST BE OBEYED.**

Getting the  
expected result is always  
more important

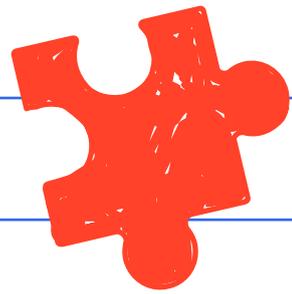
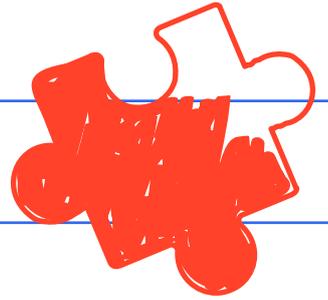
than learning through the  
process.\*

**THE PROGRESSION  
OF HUMAN  
KNOWLEDGE IS AN  
ORDERED LINE,  
WITH BEGINNING,  
MIDDLE AND END.**

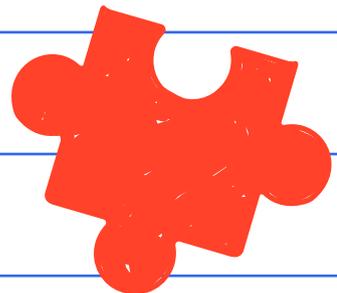
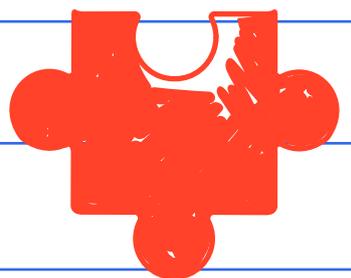




The human knowledge base is divided into boxes named by "school subjects" or "disciplines".



It is better to study one at a time in order not to get confused.



**SCIENTIFIC**



**KNOWLEDGE**

**IS**

**NEUTRAL**

**AND**

**ALWAYS**

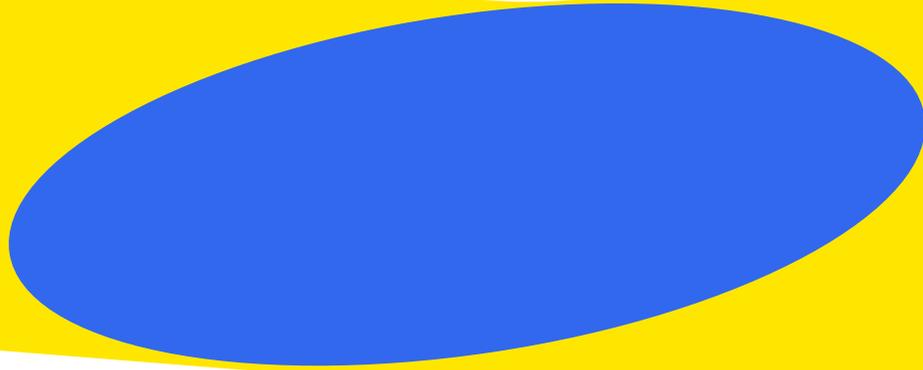
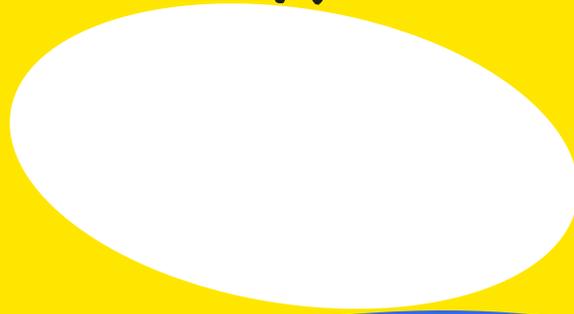


**TRUTHFUL.**

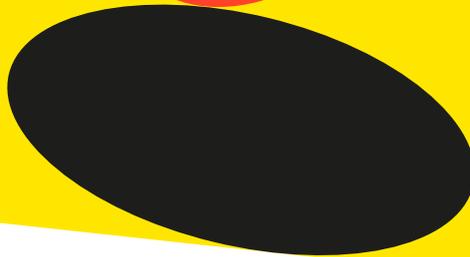
**THE HISTORICALLY  
ESTABLISHED  
KNOWLEDGE,  
EVENTS AND  
PERSONALITIES ARE  
THE ONLY ONES**



**WORTHY OF  
STUDYING.**

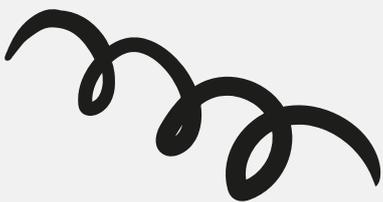


There are cultures which  
are "more developed"  
than others.



As if a culture could be  
measured with a ruler.

The "more developed"  
culture (western) is  
supposed to save the  
"less developed" ones.

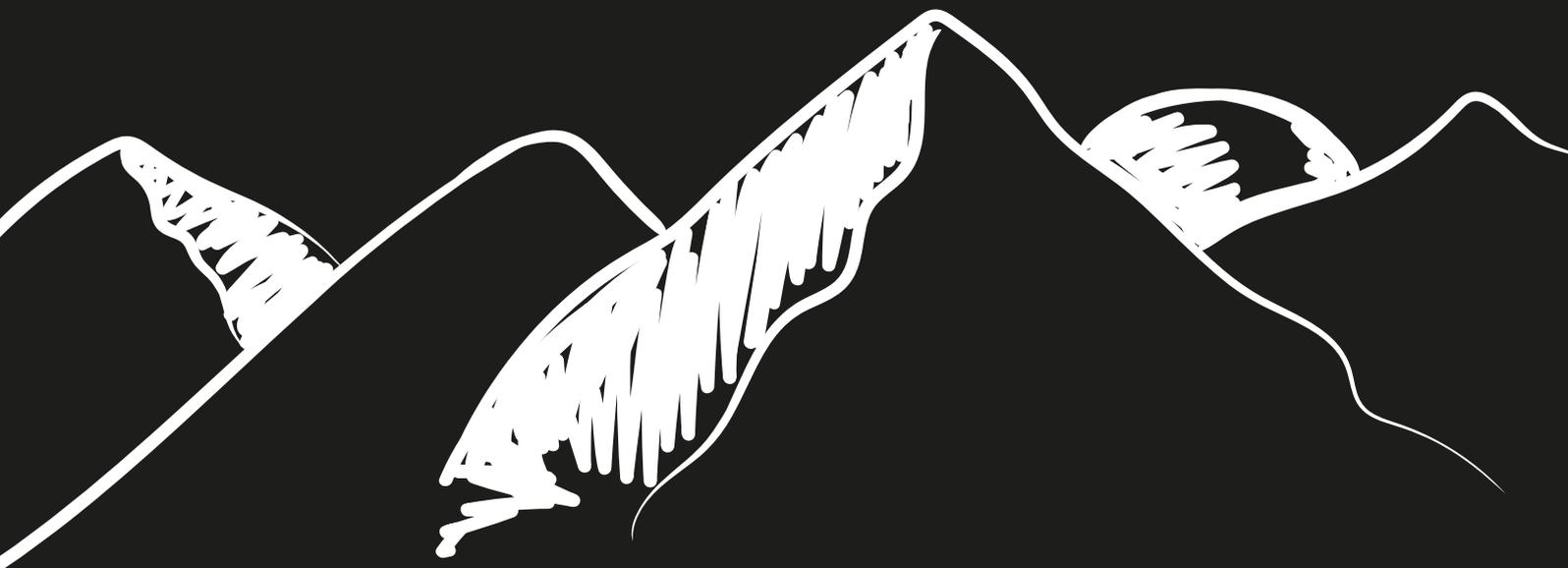




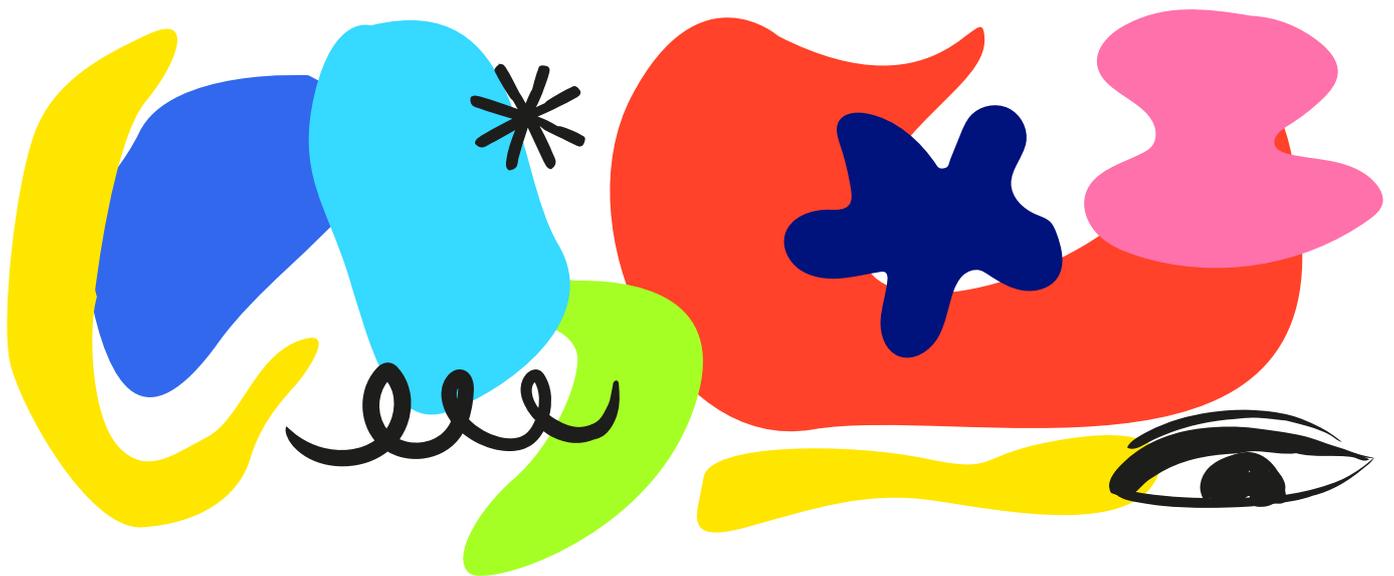
# **SOME PEOPLE'S KNOWLEDGE IS MORE VALUABLE THAN OTHERS.**

(And the most valuable of all is white, western, written, rational, scientific, sexist, heteronormative, individualistic, anthropocentric and maintainer of inequalities).

The selection of contents for a curriculum is neutral and represent reality well.



**TO BE ACKNOWLEDGED,  
I MUST REPRODUCE THE  
WAYS OF THINKING OF  
MY TEACHER AND FROM  
THE TEXTBOOK -**



**AND, THEN, FROM MY  
BOSS AND THE MARKET.**

The school principal  
– and then the CEO  
– is someone  
inaccessible and  
scary from whom I  
should keep a  
distance.



WE ARE **NOT** SUPPOSED  
TO TALK ABOUT

**P** **O** *L* **I** **T** *i* **C** **S**

AT SCHOOL.



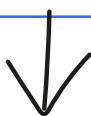
The teacher  
must always be  
in control and  
his authority  
must never be  
contested.



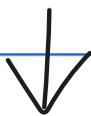
**STACKING  
PRESTIGIOUS  
DIPLOMAS IS THE  
ONLY WAY TO BE  
SUCCESSFUL IN LIFE.**



My professional future is



defined by



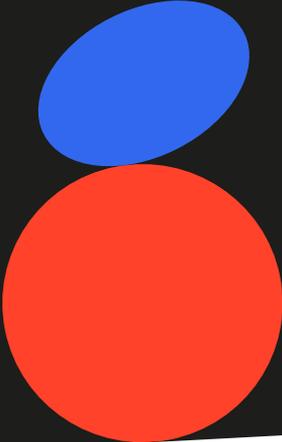
the university which  
I choose to attend.



**LEARNING MEANS**

**“CONSUMING” CONTENT  
AND “ACCUMULATING”  
KNOWLEDGE.**

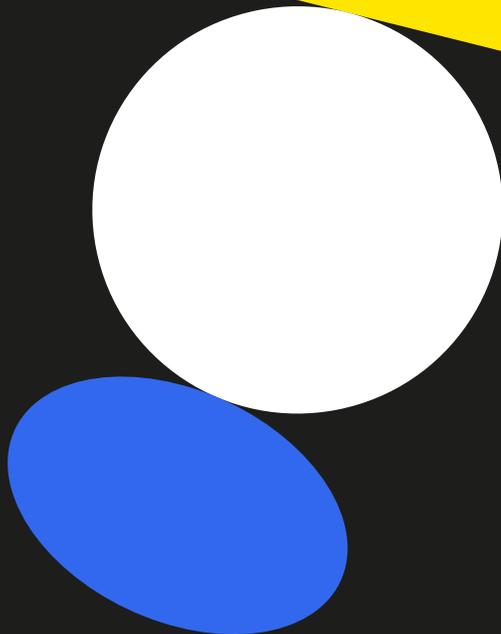




If I study hard, I will  
"master" the subject



and I will have  
nothing left to learn.



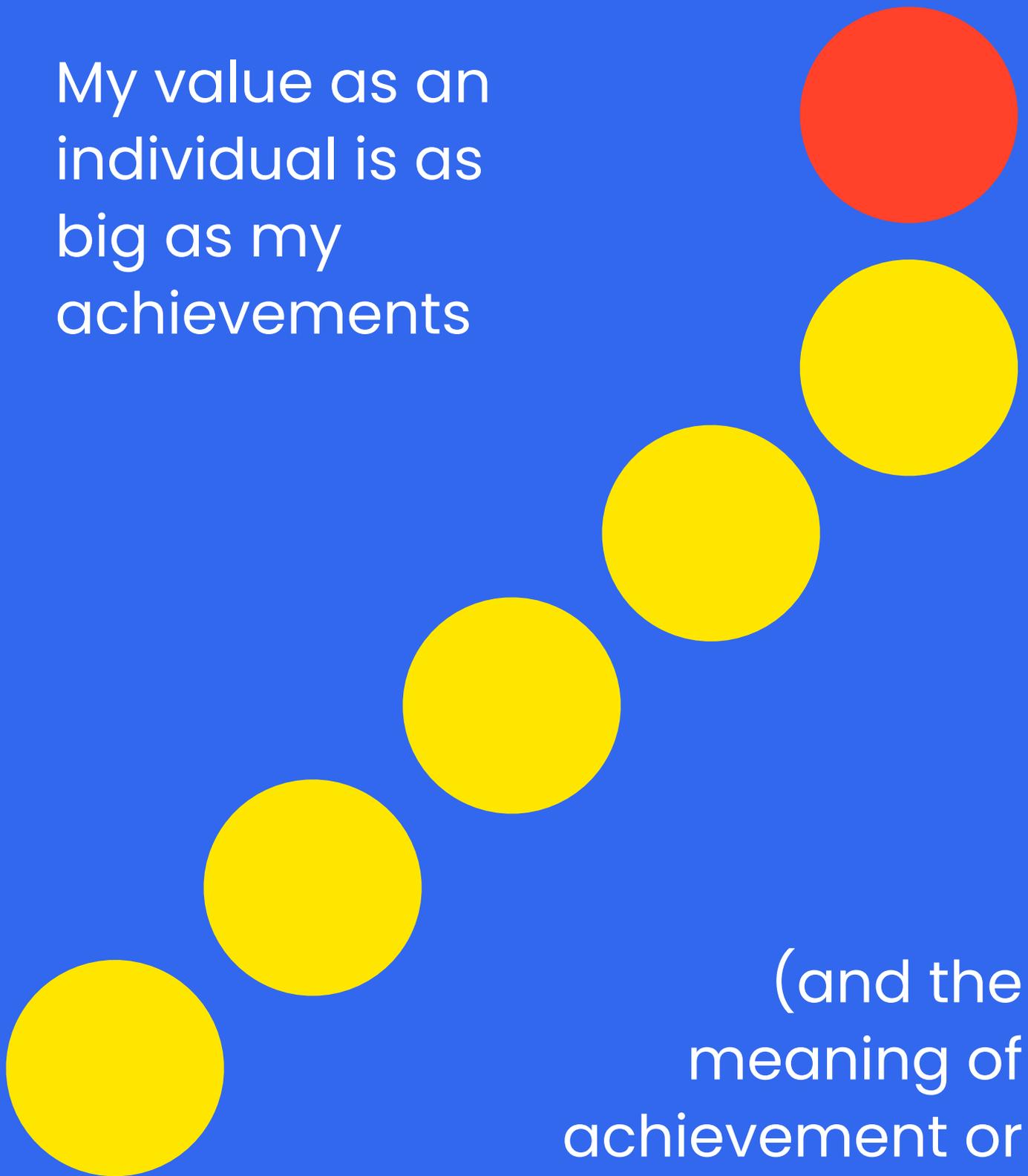
If everyone could have  
access to school, then  
everyone would have  
the same opportunity to  
be successful in life.

**INDIVIDUAL  
EFFORT IS THE  
GREATEST FACTOR  
TO SUCCEED.**

*privileges  
barely count.*



My value as an individual is as big as my achievements



(and the meaning of achievement or failure is not up to me to decide).

# To be successful in life



means taking  
good grades,  
following  
previously  
designed paths  
and keep doing  
what is expected  
from me.



The background is a vibrant yellow, decorated with several black, stylized eyes of various orientations and sizes. Some eyes have long, spiky eyelashes. Interspersed among the eyes are black starburst or asterisk-like shapes. A large, white, vertical rectangular box is centered on the page, containing the text in a bold, red, sans-serif font.

**THE  
WORLD IS  
A CRUEL  
PLACE,  
SO I'D  
BETTER  
LEARN  
HOW TO  
COMPETE.**

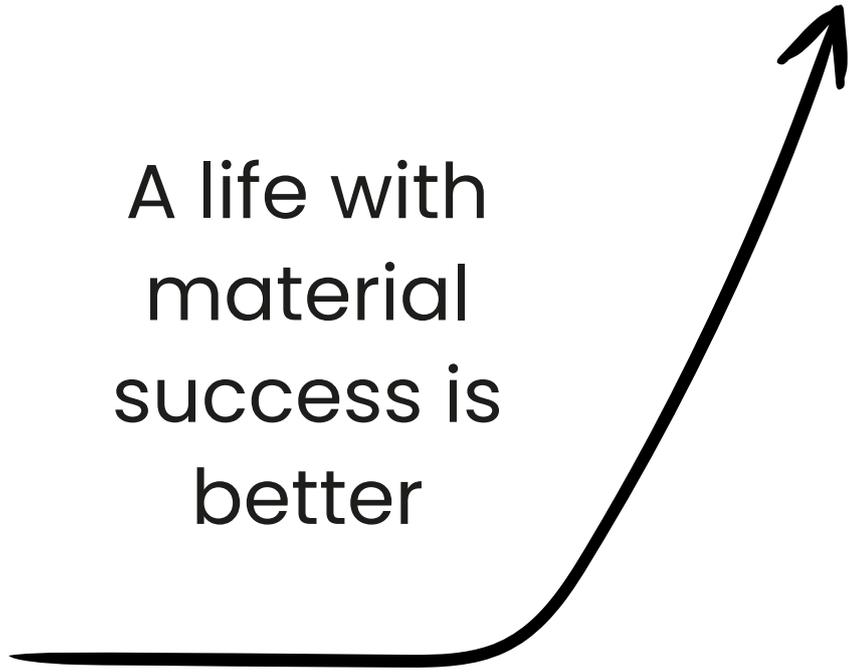


**I MUST ADAPT TO  
THE SYSTEM AND  
NOT QUESTION IT.**



**IF I FAIL, IT IS  
NEVER THE  
SYSTEM'S FAULT,  
BUT MY OWN.**

A life with  
material  
success is  
better



than a  
meaningful and  
purposeful life.



DRUGS  
ARE FOR

**D** **e** *L* *i* **N** **q** *u* **e** **T** *s*

RITALIN IS NOT.

**THERE IS SOMEONE  
WHO KNOWS EXACTLY  
WHEN I SHOULD DO  
THINGS AND WHERE I  
AM SUPPOSED TO BE,**



**AND THIS PERSON  
IS NOT ME.**

I know less

than my teachers

in any given matter.

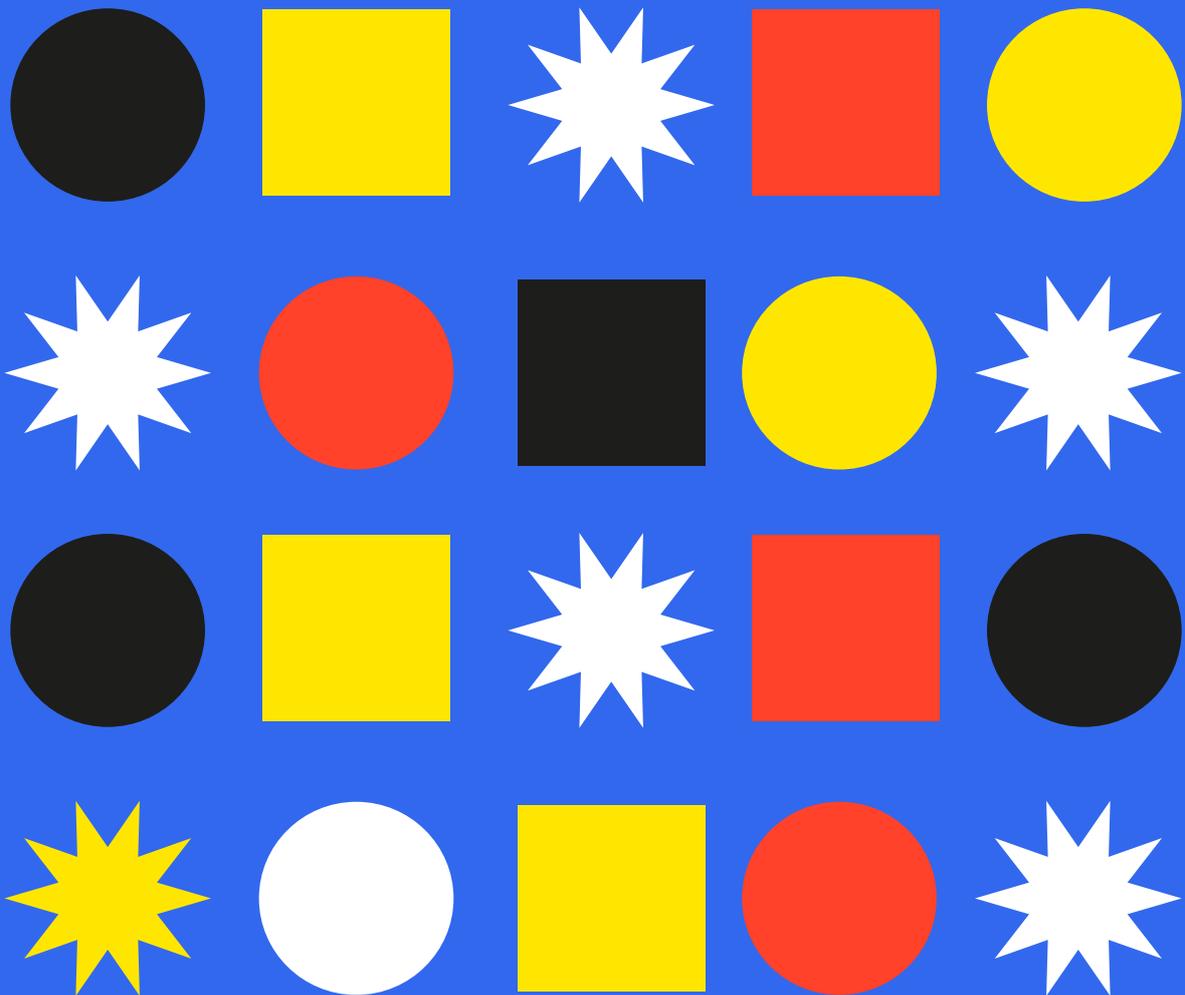


**I MIGHT BE PUNISHED**



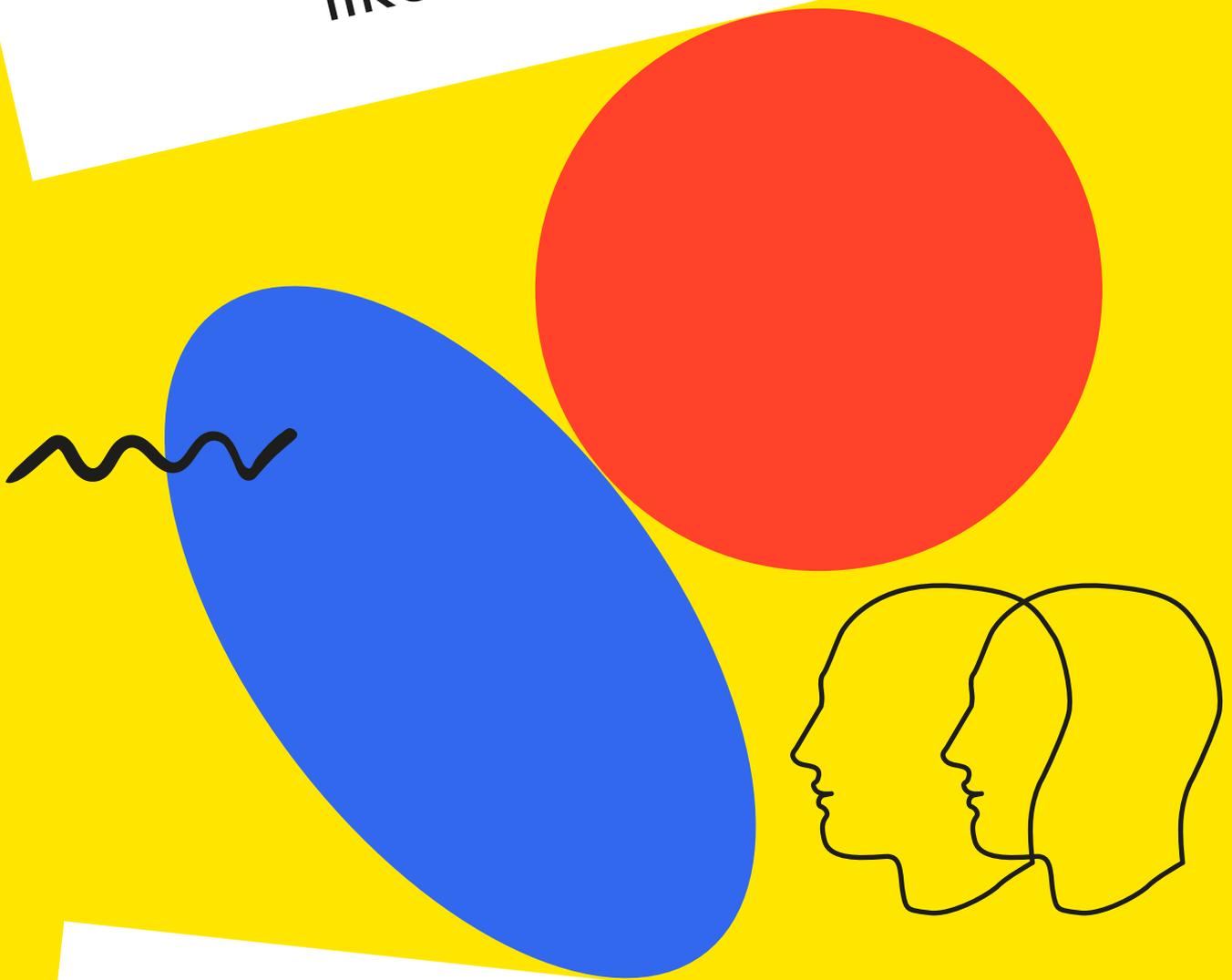
**IF I LAUGH.**

I must accept a  
number of rules,  
routines and rituals



that I do ~~not~~ have the  
power to change.

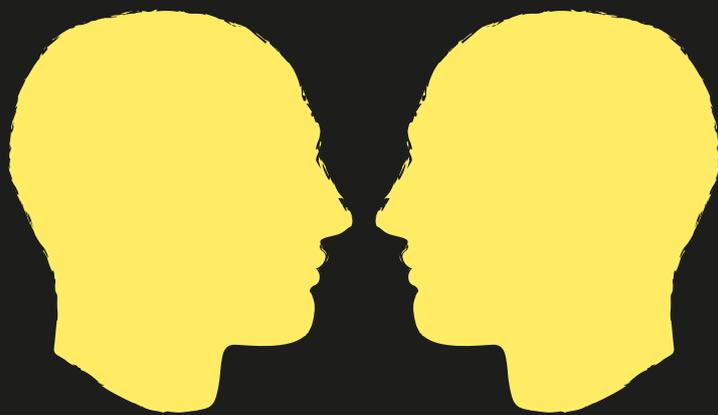
I must make an effort to look like other people.



I don't deserve to be included if I am truly myself.



I must compare  
myself to others  
to acknowledge  
my value.



**I DO AS I AM TOLD  
BECAUSE I DON'T  
REALLY KNOW WHAT IS  
BEST FOR ME.**



**IF I AM JUDGED OR  
RIDICULED BY  
OTHERS, IT IS  
ALWAYS ABOUT ME  
AND MY WORTH.  
IT HAS NOTHING  
TO DO WITH THE  
OTHERS WHO JUDGE  
OR RIDICULE ME.  
I AM THE ONE TO  
BLAME, NOT THEM.**



Expelling a  
student from the  
class or from the  
school is a way to  
solve problems.



**LEARNING  
MEANS TO  
REPRODUCE  
WHAT  
ALREADY  
EXISTS**



**INSTEAD OF  
CREATING  
SOMETHING  
NEW.**

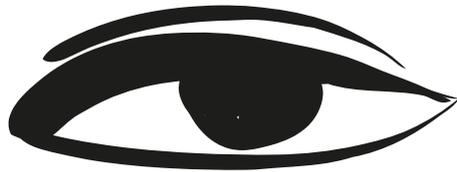


**TAKING  
RISKS OR  
TRYING  
SOMETHING  
NEW**

**IS JUST FOR  
THOSE WHO  
HAVEN'T YET**

**“STRAIGHTENED”**

**IN LIFE.**



I am afraid  
to be  
punished,  
rejected or  
despised  
whenever I  
need to  
express my  
emotions.



**LONGING TO BE HEARD OR SEEN**



**IS A SIGN OF WEAKNESS.**





**PUNISHMENT**

**AND SHAME**



**ARE THE BEST**

**REMEDIES**



**TO DEAL WITH**

**MISTAKES.**



Depression  
and anxiety  
are just part  
of the  
landscape.

**I AM NOT ALLOWED  
TO FEEL ANGER OR  
INDIGNATION.**



A hand holding a spiral-bound notepad with a handwritten message. The notepad is white with a yellow spiral binding on the left side. The background is bright yellow with a large red circle in the upper right and a large blue circle in the lower left. The text on the notepad is written in a black, cursive font.

I will never  
be good  
enough.



So, how was it for you to read all that?

Realizing these beliefs in your life might hurt or bother a little. Or maybe you want to preserve some of them and keep following their lead. That is totally fine as long as it is a conscious process.

It is a lifetime's work to reframe so many chronic thoughts. But this doesn't need to be a lonely process. Share this book with your friends, family, co-workers, networks and communities. If you think it is a good idea, send it also to the school where you have studied and to the school where your children study.

If you need support or want to talk, my email is [alex@alexbretas.com](mailto:alex@alexbretas.com).

We are in this together.



