

Foreword

In a 1996 interview, the American actress Natalie Portman said, "I don't love studying. I hate studying. I like learning. Learning is beautiful." These words soon became one of the most famous quotations to circulate on the Internet. Their fame, however, is not solely due to the fact that they were spoken by a pop culture icon. The simplistic dichotomy set up by Portman resonates with all those people who identify formal education with the drudgery of studying, but, in time and with some luck, might come to realise that learning transcends their experiences at school. The fact that a teenager uttered the above words makes this point even more vital. At the time of the interview, Portman was still a 14-year-old actress whose main claim to fame was her debut in *Léon: The Professional*. However, over the years she has starred in many successful movies, notable amongst which is *Black Swan*. This is the story of a ballerina who is fully committed to her art and, after winning the lead role in Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*, feels compelled to study so hard that she starts to lose grip on her sanity. The story is somewhat germane to a discussion concerning the dichotomy between learning and studying due to the fact that when learning ceases to be perceived as "beautiful", it impairs our ability to enjoy it and jeopardises our capacity to profit from it.

Studying has many negative connotations due to the bleak experiences that some people go through in formal education. In many parts of the world, education is increasingly assessment-driven and students are expected to amass a store of knowledge that they might not consider relevant or interesting because it is both far-removed from the world they live in and also is taught with no consideration for their personal identities. Hence, they grow up to associate studying with humdrum work that is mainly conducted for examination purposes. However, studying should not be perceived in such a way, especially since it can lead students to develop a deeper understanding of and an enhanced ability to do something of value. Studying is beautiful because it conflates disparate elements into one vast tapestry of knowledge, skills and competences; it enriches the life of every single person who engages in it. For students to embrace this idea, much depends on how they go about studying.

This book encourages young people to develop a positive attitude towards studying. It helps students to discover how they learn best so that studying

will no longer strike them as dreary. By means of the characters of Machu, Picchu, and Inka, the book highlights two opposite attitudes towards studying. Machu hates studying and is not successful at school. Consequently, he does not consider himself clever and seems to have given up on doing well at school. His attitude towards studying and his poor opinion of his abilities makes him resist studying. On the other hand, Picchu loves studying and is convinced of its benefits. He is also well informed about how to make studying enjoyable. Picchu's knowledge is useful for Inka, who wants to find out which study method is best suited for her.

By means of the superbly illustrated Machu, Picchu and Inka, this book makes students consider different ways in which they could study, some of them perhaps more consonant with who they are as individuals. The various techniques outlined in the book have the potential to make studying more effective. They enable students to approach studying from different angles and choose the most appropriate methods depending on how they think they learn best. Moreover, the book contains many tips that are meant to help students overcome common obstacles when studying. In this way, students build a repertoire of techniques and approaches that they can depend on in order to make the study process smoother and more enjoyable. Most importantly, the guidelines provided in the book are geared towards boosting students' confidence, so much so that someone like Machu can undergo a transformation in what he believes about studying and himself as a student.

The emphasis that the book places on the student's individual journey in becoming more positive about studying and more competent at it indicates that it puts a premium on autonomous learning. This is of fundamental importance considering that one of the most significant effects on learning is when students become their own teachers. This book enables young people to grasp how to study more effectively as individuals so that they may magnify the power of learning.

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