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Abstract

It has been shown earlier that while some high school students (younger on the average) do not differentiate between memorization and understanding, others (older on the average) do so (Marton, Watkins and Tang, Learning and Instruction 7, 21-48, 1997). Those who do differentiate impose a sequential ordering on the two: When you learn you memorize first and understand subsequently or When you learn you understand first and memorize later. This sequential ordering is expressed both through the students account of their theory of learning and their account of their own study practices. In the current study a group of 20 students of an elite University in mainland China were interviewed about learning, memorization and understanding in the context of their studies upon entering the University and 1.5 years later. It was found that while on the first occasion the predominant mode of talking about memorization and understanding was by discussing them in terms of either of the two above ways of sequentially ordering them. On the second occasion the most frequent way of talking about memorization and understanding was in terms of two simultaneous events, simply two different

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aspects of the very same learning process. The students spoke about using both repetition and variation in their study practice at the same time. Unlike when you read the same presentation of something several times in the same way and thus repeat the same thing again and again, when you read different presentations of the same thing or when you read the same presentation in different ways, something is repeated and something is varied. To the extent that repetition enhances remembering and variation enhances understanding ? as the students seem to believe ? they will likely remember that which is repeated and understand that which is varied. And when the two are intertwined they will remember what they understand. (HRK / Abstract übernommen), Marton, Ference, E-Mail: Ference.Marton@ped.gu.se