

Beyond rote learning -
memorization as a bodily
activity: *Re-viewing
memorization with a practice-
based approach*

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Agenda

- Background and context
- Aims of this study
- Practice-based theory
- Methodology
- Findings
- Implications
- References

Background and context

- Chinese learners (Biggs, 1996; Watkins & Biggs 1996).
- Passive learners (Jiang and Smith, 2009; Zhao and Bourne, 2011)
- Rote learning (Biggs, 1996; Volet et al. 1996)
- “Lacks” or “deficits” (Clark and Gieve, 2006, p. 55)
- “Less adequate in a Western setting” (Jones, 2005, p. 340).
- Problematic group (Tan, 2011)
- Reduced other (Grimshaw, 2007)



Image from iDevelop Teacher Training

Background and context

A reappraisal (Jiang & Smith, 2009; McMahon, 2011; Ryan, 2010)

- Traditional way of learning in CHC countries (Kember, 1996; McMahon, 2011)
- A central component of the Chinese education system and widely used (Jiang & Smith, 2009)
- Unique to a ‘Chinese culture of learning’ (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996)
- Can lead to “deep learning” (McMahon 2011).
- A purposeful learning strategy (Biggs, 1991; Hu, 2002; Jiang & Smith, 2009)
- Learning styles are more subtle, complex than they appear (Xu, 2019)

Aims of this study

- By adopting a practice-based approach, this study focuses on
 - What practices Chinese students use in memorizing and how these activities support their learning?
 - What are the doings, sayings and relatings (Schatzki, 2019; Kemmis et al. 2014) in memorizing practice?

Why practice theory?

- There is no unified theory of practices (Schatzki, 1996, 2019)
- Common themes identified (Keevers, Treleavan, Sykes and Darcy, 2012)
 - Go beyond dualism and emphasize the relational character of practice
 - Emphasize on *knowing and doing*
 - *Knowing-in-practice* is viewed as situated, mediated, provisional, contested and pragmatic activity (Gheradi 2006)
 - Focus on the importance of the materiality of the social world

Methodology

- A practice-based approach (Nicolini, 2013)
 - entails a practical package of theories
 - removes the distinction between theory and method
- Ethnographic methods
 - interviews, participant observation and focus groups; the collection of artifacts, documents, and photographs, field notes and reflections (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006)
- Data collection: 18 months, three sessions
- Six participant students: studying different majors: Accounting, Finance and International Business

Findings

1. Memorizing: reading- thinking-writing-repeating-remembering
2. Reflecting: writing - highlighting – circling – ordering - reading
3. Summarizing: linking - repetitive writing - reflecting
4. Repetitive practice: testing by teachers
5. Translating: a tool overcoming the "hurdle of language" to memorize

Findings 1 - Memorizing

- The meaning manifest itself after one reads one hundred times” (“书读百遍，其义自见”)
- Chinese equivalent for “memorize” means “to recite the book from memory”(Yang & Dai, 2011)
- Children are taught to how to use memorization to learn
- Memorizing the key articles in Chinese literature
- Tested constantly in every day’s morning
- Reading- thinking-writing-repeating-remembering

Findings 1 – Memorizing

- *“She used repetitive handwriting with a pen and paper while softly speaking phrases over and over to help her concentrate her thoughts while she memorized accounting concepts. Her body was intense and concentrated on the whole process, and it seems that she was immersed in her world without noticing anything around her. Her actions and the affordance of materials such as pens, papers and desks were all used together with her thinking processes as she practiced memorizing” (Observation notes 13052014).*

Findings 2 Reflecting

- A way of structuring their thinking and writing (Sykes and Dean, 2012)
- Clarifying their understanding to judgments on what makes sense and what to do and when (Schatzki, 1996)
- Reflecting and memorizing not merely cognitive processes
- Bodily positioning, writing, highlighting, circling, reading, and ordering
- *"Learning without thinking is a vain effort. Thinking without learning is a dangerous effort"* (Analects, 2: 15, trans. 2000)

Findings 2 – Reflecting

“She concentrated very hard by bending down her head closely to the desk. Ting wrote down the key words from lecture notes and highlighted them with different colors, and she also circled them again and again to show her emphasis on the key words. She read the lecture slides and ordered them with 1, 2, 3... in her way after her reflection of the concepts” (Observation notes, 12082015).

“I read the lecture slides, but I also tried to find my way of understanding how they are related to each other, and then I reorder them and highlight with different colors to memorize them” (Ting, Int, 12082015, p. 3).

Findings 3 - Summarizing

- Summarizing and memorizing complex and overlapping
- Summarizing to reconceptualize the theories or concepts and reorganize them
- 3 steps:
 - categorizes the concepts into key points
 - reinterprets the key concepts
 - remember and use the key concepts and methods
- Summarizing: categorizing – interpreting - remembering

Findings 3 - Summarizing

“ I like summarizing. If the concepts are cluttered, I memorize them better. If there are many concepts and there are no key points, it can be confusing. . . I try to work out my way of understanding the concepts first, then work out the solutions to the tutorial questions, after that, I then summarize the methods for certain types of questions” (Su, Int, 09052015, p. 4).

Finding 4 Repetitive practice: testing by teachers

- Timed and tested students' memorizing
- Knowing and learning occurred in the fluid performance (Reich & Hager, 2014).
 - *“I am good at remembering stuff quickly... My teacher normally tests us randomly in reciting some articles from the textbook in the required time limit almost in every class” (Ting, Int, 28032014, p.5).*
- Intensive emotional experience (Dahlin and Watkins, 2000).



Findings 5 – Translating: overcoming the "hurdle of language"

- Chinese language, culture and pedagogy shaped their thinking and their linguistic practices (Sawir, 2005).
- Students may still think in their mother language
- Becomes an essential study practice
- Translating and memorizing are overlapping

Findings 5 – Translating: switching between languages

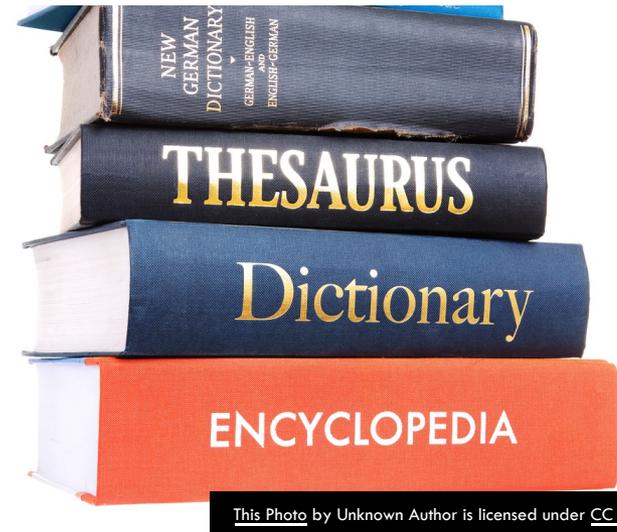
- Chuchu said, “I think in Chinese, but I memorize the concepts in English” (Chuchu, Int, 04042014, p. 2).
- *“I can only understand the surface meaning of the words if I ask questions of local students. The way of communicating is different from the Chinese way . . . For example, the order might be different, the English order is 12345, Chinese order might be 15324. So it makes understanding harder, sometimes I have to memorize the English order and words and then I do not have to translate them again when using the concepts” (Su, Int, 20082014, p. 7).*

Findings 5 – Translating: switching between languages

Dear Diary,
For today, ~~我~~ 一节 ACY 211 的 computer lab 让我加深了对 statement of manufactured 的理解和记忆。同时巩固了上学期 ACY 200 的知识和 computer skills。
第三次 Law 101 的 computer lab 教会我们如何使用 Austlii 去查询案例以及法律条文，另外，Simone taught us that the differences between AGLC & Harvard referencing, and also the way of using footnotes. It is interesting. Above all, I found that I can tell the pronunciation of Simone today Haha 哈哈 That's good. Keep trying! I will be there!
ACY 211 Tutorial 是最后一节课 for today. We learned and practiced the knowledges about costs in general business operation, so that we can figure out the answer.
Actually, there are all, only but we

- Switch between two languages in writing
- “if I do not know the English words, I use Chinese . . . and then I change to English again . . .” (Ting, Int, 2003/2014, p. 3).

Findings 5 Translating - IT mediated translating tools



Findings 5 Translating - IT mediated translating tools

- Google translation, You Dao (translation software)
- Material arrangements participating in and shaping practices of translating
- A transition in between memorization
 - a new word - translating - memorizing the new vocabulary

Implications

- Adding to the body of literature
- “Zoom in” and “zoom out”, memorizing becomes visible.
- Cognitive and bodily involvement
- Bundles of practices of the bodily doings and sayings, materially mediated (Schatzki, 2019)
- Allowing the simplicity and complexity to coexist (Law and Mol 2004)
- Sociocultural and educational embedded memorizing
- Contesting Plato’s ideas of resemblance
- Deleuze’s concept of repetition (Deleuze, 1994)
 - Not just repeating identity
 - A process where new meanings are generated

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Thank you



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