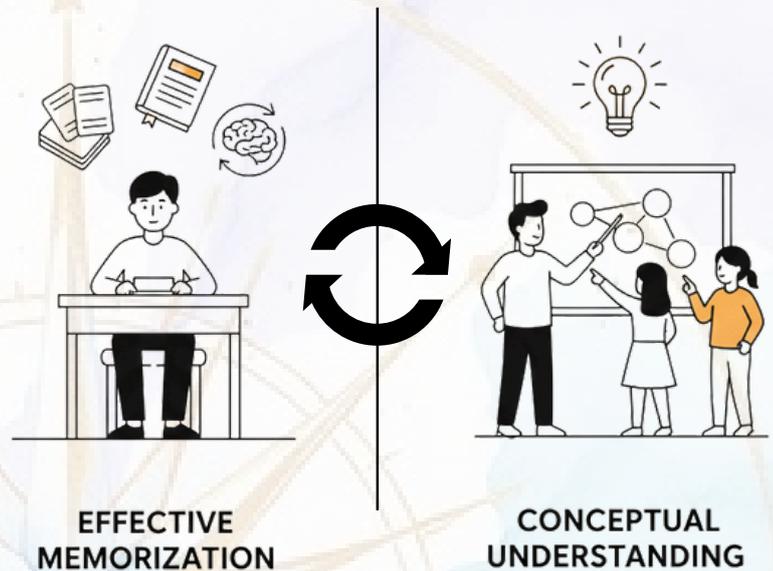


# The Learning Compass - Vol 1 - Issue 7

Let's  
Explore  
This  
Together



We've demonised the wrong thing. And it's costing our students dearly.

India's education discourse has become trapped in a false binary: memorisation bad, understanding good. NEP 2020 declares war on "rote learning", while NCF 2023 celebrates "smriti" (memory). Educators are left confused, and students are caught in the crossfire of contradictory policies that treat memorisation and rote learning as synonyms when they're fundamentally different.

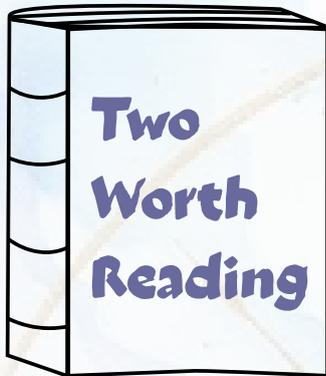
Here's what we've lost: the distinction between mindless repetition and purposeful memory work. Traditional Indian pedagogy, from Gurukula systems to oral traditions, understood something that we've forgotten, memorisation isn't the enemy of understanding; it's often the foundation for it. You cannot think deeply about what you cannot remember. You cannot make connections between concepts you haven't internalised.

The problem was never that students memorised multiplication tables, Sanskrit shlokas, or historical dates, the problem was what we have tested them for. We tested recall instead of application. We rewarded regurgitation over reasoning. We confused the tool with the outcome.

But instead of fixing our pedagogy and assessment, we threw out memory entirely. Now we have students who can't recall basic facts, struggle with mental math, and lack the foundational knowledge needed for higher-order thinking. We've created a generation that googles everything but understands nothing deeply, because understanding requires something to build on—and that something lives in memory.

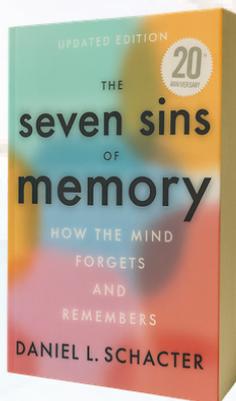
The question isn't whether to use memory in learning. It's how to honour India's powerful tradition of treating memorisation as a first-rate citizen in pedagogy while ensuring what's memorised becomes a springboard for thinking, not a ceiling.

The reader is further urged to **carefully study the argument** constructed by our Chief Education Officer, Anand Krishnaswamy, in favour of better understanding memory and memorisation.



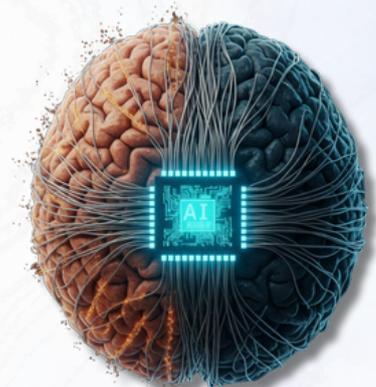
### 1. The Seven Sins of Memory

Daniel Schacter shows that memory “failures” are not flaws but natural features of how the brain works. For teachers, the key value lies in understanding why students forget, distort, or misremember—and how instruction can counter these tendencies. The sins (transience, absent-mindedness, blocking, misattribution, suggestibility, bias, and persistence) reveal the need for spaced repetition, attention-rich learning environments, retrieval practice, clear cues, and emotionally safe classrooms. For teachers, the book reinforces that effective learning requires designing experiences that align with how memory truly operates, not how we wish it would.



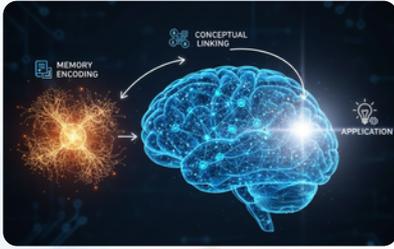
### 2. Perspective to Consider: Barbara Oakley's "The Memory Paradox"

Neuroscientist Barbara Oakley's latest research reveals why our obsession with offloading knowledge to AI and digital tools is literally shrinking our brains' capacity for learning. Her study links the recent decline in IQ scores to educational practices that downplay memorisation, showing how underuse of memory systems undermines reasoning and mental flexibility. The simple truth: when we don't exercise our declarative and procedural memory, we lose the cognitive infrastructure needed for deep thinking. Knowledge isn't outdated—it's the foundation intelligence is built on.



# Three to Try

## Try This Tomorrow: The "Remember-Connect-Apply" Protocol



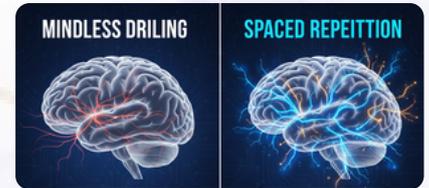
When teaching new content, explicitly move students through three phases: First, help them commit key information to memory (using spaced repetition and retrieval practice). Second, ask them to connect it to prior knowledge or across concepts. Third, have them apply it to novel situations. Make all three phases visible—don't skip straight to application.

## Question to Ask



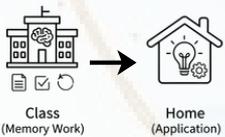
"What foundational knowledge do my students need in long-term memory to think deeply about this topic?" If you can't identify the essential facts, patterns, or vocabulary they need to recall automatically, your assessments of 'understanding' might be measuring superficial performance rather than genuine mastery.

## Tool/Resource: Spaced Repetition Systems

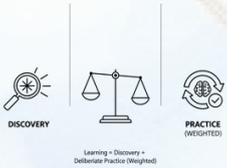


Explore evidence-based memory tools like Anki or Quizlet that use cognitive science principles (spaced repetition, active recall) to help students build robust long-term memory. The goal isn't mindless drilling—it's building the knowledge base that makes higher-order thinking possible.

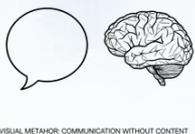
## On My Radar



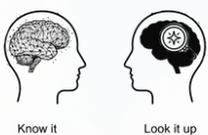
1. What if homework isn't the problem, but rather that we assign work that requires understanding students don't yet have? Memory work should happen in class where teachers can guide it; application could happen at home once foundations are solid



2. Are we romanticising "discovery learning" because we're uncomfortable with the hard work of deliberate practice? Sometimes learning genuinely requires repetition, struggle, and time—not constant novelty and entertainment



3. The obsession with "21st-century skills" might be creating students who can collaborate and communicate but have nothing substantive to collaborate about or communicate – skills are empty without knowledge.



4. Why do we celebrate when students "look it up" rather than "know it" when cognitive science clearly shows that thinking requires readily accessible knowledge in long-term memory?

**What's one piece of foundational knowledge you think every student in your subject should have in long-term memory? Hit reply and share—let's reclaim the conversation about memory in learning.**

**Elevating Education to Excellence for Impact,**

*H. Anand*

Chief Education Officer

