COMBINING WORDS INTO IMAGES

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BACKGROUND

The most common way of learning, especially in student classrooms, is writing notes. However, although practical during lectures, writing might not be as effective as some other learning strategies. Drawing to-be-learned information has consistently shown benefits in memory. Although, these memory benefits have mostly been studied for single words. Remembering single items tells us very little about how effective drawing might be in an educational context where students must form new associations between concepts and/or prior knowledge. In fact, forming associations between concepts and events is a natural part of storing information, whether it is remembering the name of a new person or the time and location of meeting.

AIM

The current study aimed to understand how effective drawing might be for remembering these associations. Because simply drawing words separately might not be the most effective when trying to remember multiple items and their associations, I tried to determine whether combining the different words into a single image might be more useful. For example, combining the words 'bus' and 'librarian' could be done by creating an image of a 'library bus' full of librarians. This strategy is called 'unitization' and on its own provides substantial benefits for remembering associated words. However, maybe drawing these combined images might bring even further memory improvements.

METHODS

Participants were randomly divided into two groups – one group was drawing the words and the other (control) group was imagining the words. They were then shown 32 unrelated word-pairs and where asked to create an image of the two words together (unitization condition) or separately (non-unitization condition). Afterwards, participants were shown one word of each of the word pairs that they were shown and were asked to remember the second word from the word-pair.

RESULTS

The results showed that the words that were combined together were more easily remembered compared to the words that were not combined. Surprisingly, there was no substantial memory difference between drawing and imagining the words. This suggested that to remember multiple words and their associations, the most effective might simply be to create interactive images and there is no difference whether these images will be drawn or imagined.

FUTURE

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