FORGETTING AS A FRIEND OF LEARNING:
IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING AND SELF-REGULATED LEARNING
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ABSTRACT:

It is natural to think that learning is a matter of building up skills or knowledge in one’s memory and that forgetting is a matter of losing some of what was built up. From that perspective, learning is a good thing and forgetting is a bad thing. The relationship between learning and forgetting is not, however, so simple, and in certain important respects is quite the opposite: Conditions that produce forgetting often enable additional learning, for example, and learning or recalling some things can contribute to forgetting other things. In this talk I attempt to characterize the interdependencies of learning, remembering, and forgetting that define the unique functional architecture of how humans learn and remember, or fail to learn and remember. I focus in particular on why forgetting enables, rather than undoes, learning; and why the interplay of forgetting, remembering, and learning is adaptive and yet poorly understood by the user.

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