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Towards an Understanding of the Way Chemistry Students Relate to Teaching Software, Using Stereochemistry as the Vehicle

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand, 2002
ABSTRACT

The aim of the project was to identify features crucial for the effective software-based learning of chemistry. The project involved four connected studies using two methods: one developed for evaluation of student-software interaction (videotaping and stimulated recall interviewing); the other, phenomenography for investigating student conceptions related to their understanding of stereochemistry, a concept addressed by the developed tutorial.

The main insights fall into two categories: the development of chemistry educational software and teaching and learning of chemistry specifically the concepts of stereochemistry.

The original stereochemistry tutorial employed multiple representations, free navigation and model progression. Students' ideas were used to modify the tutorial. This resulted in the learning tasks covering the properties of enantiomers, using the animation and guided discovery.

The use of computers in chemistry has two advantages over the traditional educational tools. Using 3D interactive ball and stick models helped students to visualise molecules and animation assisted to visualise aspects (properties), which are impossible to observe under laboratory conditions.

Learning chemistry is strongly influenced by the way chemistry is taught. Students experienced chemistry in two worlds separated from one another - the world of body of chemistry knowledge and the world of real substances (dream world-real world concept). This insight contributes to an understanding of how learning chemistry takes place.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the contribution of my supervisors Dr Tony Wright, Assoc. Prof Janet Davies and Assoc. Prof. Paul Buckley to the development of this project and to my own development.

I wish to thank Dr Tony Wright who initiated the project. His enthusiasm in chemistry education and particularly the software learning and teaching is an example of how the vision can become a reality; much software-based chemistry is offered to the first year undergraduates at Massey University thanks to Tony. In addition, I appreciate Tony’s contribution in the development of the method suitable to exploring software-based learning and to all the comments aimed to improve the thesis.

I am thankful to Assoc. Prof Janet Davies who raised many educational issues. Janet’s contribution in the development of my own educational-based understanding of the research was enormous (ethics, sampling, phenomenography etc.). Thank you Janet for the encouragement you gave me at the different stages of the project, and when I needed it the most.

I am especially grateful to Assoc. Prof. Paul Buckley who started to become involved in chemistry education at the same time as I did (and maybe because of me). Thank you Paul for your involvement in this project by heart, for your thoughts and the cheerful encouragement. Thank you for sharing the excitement that arose from the readings of the interview transcripts and sharing your wisdom with me. Thank you for reading the draft chapters of the thesis. Thank you for being a friend.

I wish to thank for kindness to all IFS people and particularly the members of Chemistry Department; for the support and trust I felt during my employment as a GA. Thanks to the Graduate Research Fund Committee who supported me in attending the international conferences and to the MU DRC that showed understanding for my position and delay in writing.

Also, I am grateful to all who were involved in the proof reading, particularly to Mrs Evelyn Camplin in the first and to Ms Betty Livingston in the emended version of the thesis; and to all who gave me technical and any other help on an almost daily basis. Most of all, I wish to thank all the participants who contributed in the four studies, without them this project would not be possible.
Finally, as an appreciation of the time that was taken away from them many times over the years of completing this thesis and as a small token of my love for them, I dedicate this thesis to my children Tin and Ivica.
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