

Comment on: "Controlling Lego from Squeak"

No matter how experienced a programmer happens to be, her most joyful moments will always arise when a communication with a peripheral is established after implementing the supporting code. Needless to say, the matter becomes much more gratifying when the remote party is not a conventional device but an actual robot. Any parent who has read with a child the book "Squeak – Learn Programming with Robots" by Stéphane Ducasse, can surely imagine what I'm talking about.

Robots and objects are relatives. Both react to specific messages that they can understand. Both represent abstractions that can gain greater meanings when provided with intention-revealing metaphors. Both are intended to base their behavior on well defined sets of rules.

Squeak Etoys have taken advantage of this analogy from the very beginning. Using viewers and tiled scripts any morph can be controlled to perform robot-like commands. Rich education experiments can be devised using this kind of simulations. However, it might be questioned that an excessively preponderant use of virtual playgrounds in detriment of physical games could restrict the development of a human brain. In fact, as new electronic devices replace their mechanical ancestors every day, the knowledge accumulated by the humankind along thousands of years about mechanics is being erased from our daily experience.

The pedagogical value of this talk could not be clearer. Lego robots are perfect allies of Squeak because they combine both experiences the mechanical and the electronic one. Thus, the possibility to establish a communication between the two worlds establishes the bases for learning the best lessons from each of them.

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