Takashiro Akitsu: Environmental Science: Society, Nature, and Technology

Ken Jones¹

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Bibliography
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It would be an unusual public presentation that would not be based on anything other than Powerpoint®, pointer and speaker, but few individuals have elected to compile their approach into a book format. This Japanese author is the exception, collating his expertise on environmental sciences into one very compact volume. This does make a refreshing change from the more usual format of carefully selecting data into chapter format; but does it make it easier to teach?

Somewhat loosely, basic chemistry is divided into two parts. Part 1 covers the social sciences (environmental economics or policy) plus technology (chemical engineering or green chemistry), whilst Part 2 includes the natural sciences (various fields of environment), and chemistry. It is then further subdivided into twenty-five chapters, each ending with a series of questions under the heading of “Active Learning by Students”; in other words, what have you learned from this chapter? This approach of making chemistry the primary link between social sciences and life sciences is novel, but the linkage is not sufficiently well developed from which to comment on its relevance.

50 years ago blackboard and chalk was the common interface of learning, slowly superseded by slides and projectors, but now that most data are produced directly from instruments or other computer-based devices the evolution to e-learning is now complete.

What cannot be judged from reviewing this book is how effective the ‘old’ compares to the ‘new’. Are the questions raised (Active Learning) sufficiently searching to challenge the student? Are the contents of the Powerpoint® presentations sufficiently broad? How well researched is the content? Is there a linked continuity between subject matter?

It cannot be argued that this style of presentation is here to stay, but as always what matters more is the lecturer’s personality, knowledge, enthusiasm and charisma in the subject matter. If these are present then the method and style of presentation becomes almost secondary. The content is clearly directed towards other academics rather than a broader readership, perhaps seeking better processes in presentation and content. Most aspects of the generalised subject of environmental sciences are covered, allowing any individual adopting the proposed format to add, subtract or emphasise whatever element they wish to express—and it assumed others will find it a useful framework for their lecture notes.

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✉ Ken Jones
chromatographia@springer.com

¹ Knutsford, UK