Mental representation and computer use

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Learning is a modification of the learner's behavior due to experience. However, from a cognitive psychology perspective, learning implies the acquisition of new knowledge or the restructuring of the knowledge already in the mind of the learner. When a person learns to use a computer, she/he acquires a mental model of the system that is using, its structure and functioning. Two important empirical questions that have been asked are how this mental model is acquired and how its acquisition could be facilitated. The line of research that we are pursuing explores the usefulness of several techniques for faciliting the acquisition of good mental models of a computer system by novice subjects. One important aspect of this research is the use of indirect methods for eliciting the mental representation of the learner.