

SAW Seminar: History of Science, History of Text

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Orality, writing and the learning of chemistry.

Abstract: Public lectures and experimental demonstrations, one of the more widespread forms of teaching and popularization of experimental science in the 18th and 19th centuries, constitute a privileged space for the study of interactions between orality and writing. In this article we analyze the lecturing style used by Louis Jacques Thénard (1777-1857) in the chemistry courses he taught at the Collège de France in the early 19th century through the notes taken by some of his listeners who, following an old and extended tradition, produced rich and detailed notebooks wherein they reconstructed the contents of the lessons. The writing practices associated with these student notebooks and the way this activity interacted with other writing, reading, observation and manipulative practices related to studying experimental sciences such as chemistry are also discussed.