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Variables and variable naming in introductory programming education

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Stellingen

Behorende bij het proefschrift

Variables and Variable Naming in Introductory Programming Education

1. The effect of a name that is (unintentionally) wrong increases the difficulty of code comprehension and the time that one spends on debugging and understanding. (this dissertation)
2. Finding the “perfect” name follows Goldilocks' principle; a good name is exactly “just right” for its context, including the program, domain, language, and programmer. In general, ‘rubbish in == rubbish out’. (this dissertation)
3. When teaching naming practices one is to include feedback on why a name might be badly chosen. (this dissertation)
4. Naming practices are systematically undervalued and underestimated within programming courses. Naming practices deserve careful and explicit attention. (this dissertation)
5. A programming language is a human language more than it is a computer language: created by humans to communicate with humans and computers. Hence, programming languages are about formalizing and communicating ideas, much like any natural language.
6. Being a good educator requires being aware of –and appropriately aligning– your teaching philosophy, pedagogy and didactics, including your assumptions on how students learn.
7. Technological advancement is meaningless unless the humans that it is ‘made for’ are taken into account. This includes involving these humans in the design process. To put it simply, the “whats” and “hows” are irrelevant if the “whys” and “for whom” are not properly answered.
8. Numbered in-text references (like IEEE standard) in academic papers lack context and hinder scientific discourse.
9. To listen to someone is one of the most beautiful things one can do for another.
10. Art, music, dance, poetry, stories, and other forms of expression are essential for the wellbeing of a society. When it is made, it will be seen, heard, and felt.
11. The product of a PhD is the person, not their work.
12. The PhD with prior work experience has a different experience than those joining directly from a masters education, having learned more realistic and healthier boundaries between the self and the work and other internal and external expectations.

Vivian van der Werf

Leiden, dinsdag 2 september 2025