

Development and implementation of high-throughput phenotyping tools for microalgae

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Certificate of Original Authorship

I Harvey Bates, declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Science (Climate Change Cluster, C3) at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis. This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

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Contribution of Authors

Each chapter of this thesis was overseen by Prof Peter Ralph, Dr. Milán Szabó and Dr. Alonso Zavaleta. This includes the formulation of concepts, experiments and reviews/editing of text.

Thesis Format

This thesis is compiled with published, submitted and in preparation manuscripts. An introductory chapter is used to explain concepts and review the current state of literature on the explored topics. Chapters two to four are experimental chapters where instrumentation is developed, tested and novel experiments are carried out. The thesis synthesis is used to explore the broad reach that this research applies to and present concepts that may help to drive future microalgal physiological research.

Nomenclature

Acronyms

ETR_{II}	Absolute electron transport rate of photosystem II
PAR_{II}	Photo absorption rate of photosystem II
PI_{abs}	Performance index (absorption)
R	Correlation coefficient
V_j	Relative variable fluorescence at the J-step
Z	Z-score
3D	Three dimensional
pmf	Proton motive force
A	Ampere
ADC	Analog-to-digital converter
ADP	Adenosine diphosphate
AL	Actinic light
ATP	Adenosine triphosphate
C	Capacitor or capacitance
CEF	Cyclic electron flow
DAQ	Data acquisition device
DC	Direct current
DC-DC	Direct current to direct current

Fd	Ferredoxin
FRR	Fast repetition rate
ID	Inner diameter
IDE	Integrated development environment
IV	Intravenous
LC	Light induction curve
LED	Light emitting diode
LEF	Linear electron flow
LHC	Light harvesting complex
LiPo	Lithium-ion polymer
MC-PAM	Multicolour pulse amplitude modulated fluorometer
NADP ⁺	Nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide phosphate reduced
NADPH	Nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide phosphate hydrogen
ND	Neutral density
OD	Optical density or outer diameter
OD ₈₇₅	Optical density determined at 875 nm
OEC	Oxygen evolving complex
P _{max}	Maximum photosynthetic rate as determined by a PI-Curve
PAM	Pulse Amplitude Modulation
PAR	Photosynthetically active radiation (400 - 700 nm)
PBR	Photobioreactor
PC	Plastocyanin or personal computer
PCB	Printed circuit board

PGI	Plotting graphical interface
Pi	Inorganic Phosphate
PI-Curve	Photosynthesis-irradiance curve
PLA	Polylactic acid
PQ	Plastoquinone
PQ Pool	Plastoquinone pool
PSI	Photosystem I
PSII	Photosystem II
PWM	Pulse width modulation
Q_A	Quinone A
Q_B	Quinone B
qE	Energy dependent quenching
R	Resistance
RB	Red blue
RCII	Reaction center of photosystem II
rETR	Relative electron transport rate
RGB	Red green blue
RPi	Raspberry pi computer
SMD	Surface mount device
SQL	Structural query language
T	Transistor
V	Volt or voltage
VDE	Violaxanthin de-epoxidase

VNC	Virtual network computing
Glossary	
$\Delta\Psi$	Electrical potential
ΔpH	Change in pH (proton gradient)
ϕ_{PSII}	Effective quantum yield of photosystem II
ϕ_{PSIIQ_A}	Quantum efficiency at the J-step (Q_A only)
σ_λ	Wavelength-dependent functional cross section of photosystem II
1O_2	Singlet oxygen
F_i	Fluorescence intensity at the I-step
F_j	Fluorescence intensity at the J-step
F_m	Maximum fluorescence intensity (equivalent to the P-step)
F'_m	Maximum fluorescence intensity under actinic illumination
F_o	Minimum fluorescence intensity (equivalent to the O-step)
F_t	Fluorescence intensity immediately before saturation pulse under actinic illumination or the fluorescence intensity at some time-point
F_v	Variable fluorescence
F_v/F_m	Quantum efficiency of PSII if all reaction centres are open (ϕ_{P_o} or ϕ_{p_o} or $Y(II)_{MAX}$)
FN_{1s}	Normalised fluorescence intensity at one second
FN_t	Normalised fluorescence intensity at a point in time
I_1 -level	Maximum fluorescence intensity with an oxidised PQ pool
k	Doubling time of microalgal cells in solution

M_0	Closure rate of PSII	
$O - I_1$ rise	Chlorophyll <i>a</i> fluorescence rise	
V_t	Relative variable fluorescence	
$Y(II)$	Effective quantum yield of photosystem II	
Bilins	Phycobilisomes	
CO ₂	Carbon dioxide	
FNR	ferredoxin-NADP ⁺ oxidoreductase	
JIP-test	Technique for analysing OJIP transients	
O ₂	Dioxygen	
OJIP	Chlorophyll <i>a</i> fluorescence technique (fast rise)	
P680	Pigment center of photosystem II	
P680 ⁺	Excited state of the pigment center of photosystem II	
P700	Pigment center of photosystem I	
PQH ₂	Plastoquinol	
Constants		
ETR_{Factor}	Incident PAR absorbed by photosynthetic antenna and the distribution of energy between PSII and PSI	0.42
L	Avogadro constant	$6.02214076 \times 10^{23} \text{ mol}^{-1}$

LIST OF FIGURES

1.1	Theoretical Model of Phenotype Expression	3
1.2	Phenotyping Process in Microalgal Research	6
1.3	Antenna Energy Transfer	9
1.4	Phycobilisome Structure	10
1.5	Diagram of Linear Electron Flow	11
1.6	ATP Synthase Activity	12
1.7	Energy Dissipation Pathways	14
1.8	Chlorophyll Fluorescence Techniques	15
2.1	Diagram of <i>Open-JIP</i> Algae and Plant Versions	27
2.2	Circuit and PCB Diagrams of Open-JIP	28
2.3	Comparison between Open-JIP (Algae) and commercial device measurements	31
2.4	Effect of light intensity on O-J rise and heat stress comparison	32
2.5	Open-JIP (Plant) OJIP transients of different species	33
3.1	Photograph and 3D render of <i>The Phenobottle</i>	40
3.2	High and Low Microalgal Concentration OJIP Transient	44
3.3	Software and Hardware Work-flow	46
3.4	Optical Density Calibration and Results	48
3.5	Time-series Fluorescence Parameters	49
3.6	Heatmap of OJIP Fluorescence Parameters	50

4.1	Multi-spectral Phenobottle Arrangement	58
4.2	Cross-Section of PSII Absorption	61
4.3	OD ₈₇₅ Calculation Before and After ETR Adjustment	62
4.4	Photosynthetic Parameters over a Daily Cycle	63
4.5	Optimisation and Calculation of Real-Time ETR_{II}	64

ABSTRACT

Microalgae are promising candidates for numerous biotechnological applications which may help to create sustainable industries of the future. These include the production of sustainable bio-fuels, bio-degradable plastics and food sources for aquaculture. Due to the scale of microalgal biodiversity there is a clear need for tools to assess microalgal phenotypes in an automated manner. However, currently available tools, such as incubators, are either not suitable for reproducible experiments, due to heterogeneous light exposures and lack of physiological measurements or are too expensive for a high-throughput assessment of genotypes, such as commercial photobioreactors. Therefore, this thesis aims to develop a platform upon which robust, open-source sensors and instruments can be created to propel microalgal research into the high-throughput realm.

This thesis presents a low-cost, open-source, multi-wavelength fast polyphasic rise (OJIP) chlorophyll *a* fluorometer (named *Open-JIP*). This device can assess the fine tuning of photosynthesis in microalgae in a non-invasive and rapid manner. The device is compared to commercial instrumentation to demonstrate its ability to resolve the polyphasic rise of chlorophyll *a* fluorescence and its usefulness as an indicator of stress in microalgae.

The developed fluorometer is then integrated into a 3D printed photobioreactor known as the *Phenobottle*. This instrument can assess photosynthesis in a real-time manner and gives the user the controls to automate environmental variables such as bubbling intensity, light quality/quantity and mixing of microalgal solutions. The devices reproducibility is assessed and a simple guide to its functions are presented.

Using these new devices, a novel probe of photosynthetic electron transport in the microalga *Chlorella vulgaris* is formulated (known as FN_{1s}). This measure-

ment allows for a real-time and non-invasive assessment of photosynthetic electron transport, in terms of the electron turnover rate of the electron transport chain in microalgae at a previously undocumented time resolution. Thus, changes in electron transport can now be observed in a matter of minutes rather than previous methods that took upwards of an hour, and no longer requires complex and expensive instrumentation. This may prove useful for researchers looking to optimise microalgal productivity by maximising photosynthetic productivity.

In the final chapter, the presented phenotyping platform is discussed for its potential applications in other areas of microalgal and terrestrial plant research. Additionally, a novel perspective on conducting microalgal physiological research is presented, which may fast-track biotechnological industries of the future.

CONTENTS

1. <i>Introduction</i>	1
1.1 An Introduction to Microalgae	1
1.2 Microalgae Explored in this Thesis	2
1.3 Phenotyping Microalgae	2
1.3.1 Phenotyping Theory	2
1.3.2 Cultivation and Phenotyping of Microalgae	4
1.3.3 High-throughput Phenotyping	5
1.4 Low-Cost and Open-Source Instrumentation	7
1.5 Key Concepts	7
1.5.1 Photosynthesis in Microalgae	7
1.5.2 Chlorophyll <i>a</i> fluorescence	13
1.6 Challenges to be Addressed	18
2. <i>A guide to Open-JIP, a low-cost open-source chlorophyll fluorometer</i>	23
2.1 Introduction	23
2.2 Materials and Methods	25
2.2.1 Setup and Construction	25
2.2.2 Benchmark Tests	28
2.2.3 Biological Material	29
2.2.4 Experimental Design	29

2.2.5	Data Analysis	30
2.3	Results	30
2.4	Discussion	33
3.	<i>Phenobottle: An Open-source photobioreactor for novel physiological studies</i>	36
3.1	Introduction	36
3.2	Materials and Methods	38
3.2.1	Phenobottle Hardware Design	38
3.2.2	Custom Electronics	40
3.2.3	Measurement of Optical Density	40
3.2.4	Measurement of Temperature	42
3.2.5	Architecture for Chlorophyll <i>a</i> Fluorescence Analysis	42
3.2.6	Chlorophyll <i>a</i> Fluorescence Analysis	43
3.2.7	Phenobottle Software	45
3.2.8	Biological Material	45
3.2.9	Benchmark Test	45
3.2.10	Data Analysis	47
3.3	Results	47
3.4	Discussion	51
4.	<i>Near-real time measurements of photosynthetic electron transport</i>	55
4.1	Introduction	55
4.2	Materials and Methods	57
4.2.1	Microalgal Species	57
4.2.2	Photobioreactor and Light Arrangement	57
4.2.3	Automated Measurements	57

4.2.4	External Manual Measurements	58
4.2.5	Rapid Electron Transport Rate Assessment	59
4.2.6	Experimental Design	60
4.3	Results	60
4.4	Discussion	66
5.	<i>Synthesis</i>	69
5.1	Summary of Thesis	69
5.2	A Perspective on the Future of Microalgal Physiological Research . .	71
5.3	Concluding Remarks	73