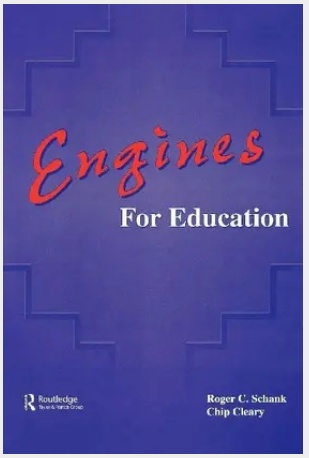
Schank / Cleary

Engines for Education



Most six-year-olds can't wait to go to school on that first day in September. It's a sign of coming of age. They get to go to school like the big kids. For an alarmingly large number of these children, however, boredom, anxiety, and fear of learning quickly set in. This happens because societies build schools that achieve much less than they promise, are frustrating for students, and generally fail to help children become adults who can think for themselves. The development of flexible, inquiring minds has rarely been the primary consideration in the design of educational systems. Making students into proper members of society has usually been of much greater concern than developing students who are creative thinkers. Today's schools are organized around yesterday's ideas, needs, and resources. The purpose of this volume is to raise consciousness about the changes needed in the educational system. It is concerned with what is wrong with the educational system and how to improve it. It presents a pragmatic view of what education could be through the use of computer technology -- technology permitting us to pursue the radical notion that children must be allowed to guide their own education because interested learners learn more. Children can and will become voracious learners if they are in charge of their own education. This does not mean letting them play video games all day, but it does mean allowing them to pursue the intellectual goals that interest them, rather than being force-fed knowledge according to someone else's schedule. The school system must face the responsibility of creating learning environments that are so much fun that children cannot wait to get up in the morning and go to school. This volume describes the progress being made at The Institute for the Learning Sciences using computers to provide motivating environments for learning -- environments that enable students to explore new worlds, and learn things by doing them. This technology will allow society to support what is one of the most important parts of a good educational system: the cultivation of individual initiative in students. This text documents the authors' work from the cognitive psychology which underlies it on through to guided tours of a number of the software learning environments they've developed. The CD ROM version of Engines for Education illustrates the types of innovative education software being developed at the Institute for the Learning Sciences at Northwestern University. In addition to providing tours of seven different ILS programs, the CD ROM itself provides an example of a new form of hypermedia system developed at ILS. Containing the complete text of the book with full-text search, the CD ROM enables readers to move fluidly between pages as they would with a traditional book; it also engages the reader through question-answer interactions with the system. Hardware Requirements: Macintosh (not a Macintosh Power PC) with 16M of RAM (13M of free RAM) and a CD ROM Drive. Software Requirements: System 7 (or later version) and Quicktime.

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