ForeWord Reviews

EDUCATION

Teaching Minds: How Cognitive Science Can Save Our Schools
Roger Schank
Teachers College Press
978-080775266-5
(November 2011)

"Schools are an ancient artifact that can't last much longer," concludes Roger Schank in his proposal of an alternative to *buildings* and the subject-based curriculum that defines schools. Instead, he envisions online courses designed around a story-centered curriculum (SCC) replacing traditional schools. As the managing director of the nonprofit Engines for Education, Schank is working to make his vision a reality. *Teaching Minds: How Cognitive Science Can Save Our Schools* presents his solution to the education crisis and promotes the author's enterprise.

Schank believes online courses should be the mainstay of education from pre-school onward. Properly designed, they emphasize the practical knowledge and abilities that a person needs "to function in the world they inhabit" and to get a job. He rejects many "truths" held by today's educators and politicians, insisting that students are forced to learn too much math and science and receive this instruction in stifling, repressive, and confining ways. Rejecting the notion that all students should attend college, the author believes society is better served when the focus is on improving the conceptual, analytical, and social processes of the individual rather than on acquiring factual knowledge. He believes the best way to achieve this goal is by having learners under the direction of a mentor interact in a virtual world, meet a reality-based situation (as in a SCC), and create a product. Educated in such a system, individuals will think about how and why they do what they do.

Schank is most convincing when he talks about how people learn and what can and should be taught. He uses stories to reveal that all learning results from experience. He also employs rhetorical questions, making much of his book an extended Socratic dialogue. The author is least effective when he defines intelligence by showing what it is not, focusing on Tea Party advocates.

In addition to his work with Engines for Education, Roger Schank is the CEO of Socratic Arts. He has worked in the fields of cognitive science, education, and computer science at a number of prestigious universities and has written more than twenty-five books on various

aspects of learning. Educators and parents may not enjoy reading Schank's attacks on concepts they hold dear, but they should consider what he has to say for the sake of their children.

Geraldine A. Richards