

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE and TUTORING SYSTEMS

Computational and Cognitive
Approaches to the
Communication of Knowledge

Etienne Wenger

Foreword by
JOHN SEELY BROWN
and JAMES GREENO

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BY

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A mes parents
Alfred et Liliane Wenger

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Foreword

It is always a pleasure to introduce a fine book by a young author. Etienne Wenger's *Artificial Intelligence and Tutoring Systems* is the fruit of an ambitious effort that has succeeded remarkably well. In this book, Wenger has taken on the task of reviewing the state of the art and science of intelligent tutoring systems. The result is a work that provides a new level of conceptual coherence and analytic structure to ITS research, thereby helping to define the field as a legitimate, and potentially very important, scientific and technological domain.

Let's consider Wenger's accomplishments in turn. To start with, he has given us an insightful review of AI-based instructional systems. His treatment will be valuable as an introductory text, for it provides informative descriptions of each system as a whole and useful comparisons of significant features. In doing so, he has also conveyed a sense of the

intellectual history of the field, for he shows how specific features of tutoring programs resulted from theoretical and practical attempts to address system deficiencies. As an example, Wenger's excellent discussions of mental models show how they emerged as a response to system failures to handle certain kinds of communication tasks. Wenger also gives an exceptionally penetrating discussion of diagnostic systems, showing the respective advantages and disadvantages of top-down (model-driven) and bottom-up (data-driven) methods of student modeling.

But this book is no mere catalog of programs and techniques. Most significantly from our point of view, he has also laid out a provocative framework for analyzing and comparing intelligent tutoring systems. This framework addresses fundamental scientific issues concerning the nature of knowledge, learning, and communication, which are at the heart of ITS design. It is relative to this framework that Wenger's discussions reveal how research on intelligent tutoring systems contributes not only to the fields of artificial intelligence and education, but also to basic scientific problems in linguistics, psychology, and philosophy.

Wenger's framework for understanding intelligent tutoring systems centers on the notion of communicable knowledge. In this view, the primary function of a tutoring system is as a vehicle of communication. In developing this notion, Wenger makes very productive use of an epistemological assumption, developed by Philip Kitcher, that knowledge is warranted belief. Wenger takes a warrant for a belief to be the set of experiential or conceptual episodes provided by the system that give rise to the belief and justify it for a particular person. The key notion is that knowledge can only be communicated—and therefore learned—through the mediation of warrants that connect with the individual's present understanding. It therefore becomes crucial that system designers pay close attention to the various kinds of warrants for belief (e.g., causal, functional, teleological) and to the various ways that these justifications become manifest, ranging from sequences of experiences to verbal explanations. Wenger's framework unifies a number of issues surrounding knowledge communication in ITS, including the problem of explanations—a topic frequently alluded to but all too often finessed in expert systems research.

One emerges from this book with an altered vision of intelligent tutoring systems in which informed presentational schemes—presentational schemes based on knowledge about the warranting conditions for new beliefs—play a newly important role. Wenger's epistemological view and theoretical framework together expand the universe of intelligent tutoring systems, building conceptual links between systems that demonstrate their processes of reasoning explicitly, that enable students to reflect on their own reasoning, and that provide rich environments for exploratory learning. Thus, tutoring programs that have emphasized methods as diverse as interaction with computational experts, coaching, and free

exploration are interpretable within a single, coherent conceptual framework.

But we believe that there is more to Wenger's accomplishment than its manifest contribution to ITS theory. The rapid pace of technological and social change and the growth of information have created pressing new educational needs. It is no longer appropriate to think of education as transpiring solely in school or between the ages of six and eighteen. Instead, it is imperative that people acquire the cognitive and interactional skills necessary for self-directed, life-long learning. We believe that this agenda requires an examination of fundamental assumptions about knowledge and learning, a fresh look at alternatives to the didacticism that currently dominates our educational system, and the development of new kinds of educational resources. The expanded view of the requirements of successful knowledge communication implicit in Wenger's framework begins to address several of the issues that will be important to this reformulation of educational means and ends. Wenger's work has obvious implications for the development not only of instructional systems per se, but also of information systems more generally. But the implications of this work extend even beyond that. We believe that a better understanding of the nature of knowledge and its warrants will result in increased attention to the social and physical contexts in which learning takes place, as these often determine the situational characteristics that bring about growth in knowledge. Wenger's analytic framework and his focus on learning as a process of communication will contribute significantly to inquiry into the various ways that individuals come to know, either articulately or tacitly, in a range of everyday situations, including free exploration, apprenticeship, collaboration, and reflection.

Wenger's book is a particularly timely contribution. It could not have been written as recently as five years ago, since a critical mass of information about intelligent tutoring systems sufficient for this kind of conceptual analysis had not yet developed. Nor could it have been written five years from now, for by then there will be too much material to review in the thorough manner employed here. *Artificial Intelligence and Tutoring Systems*, therefore, stands as a unique document revealing a young field's accomplishments and, more importantly, its promise at an important threshold of development.

John Seely Brown, Xerox Palo Alto Research Center
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This book was not a planned project; it could not have been. It grew out of research I was doing as a graduate student at the University of California at Irvine, and surreptitiously became "the book." In the process of making room for this new entity and bringing the project to completion, many people had to go out of their way: it is my great pleasure to thank them all here and to give explicit recognition to some of them.

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Etienne Wenger

Contents

Part I A first glance: introducing the field

Chapter 1 Knowledge communication systems	3
1.1 Implicit versus explicit encoding of knowledge	4
Educational software engineering: encoding of decisions	
Artificial intelligence: explicit encoding of knowledge	
1.2 Knowledge communication	6
1.3 Practical and theoretical implications	7
Toward a cognitively oriented form of software engineering	
Toward a communication-oriented epistemology	
1.4 An interdisciplinary enterprise.....	9
Summary and conclusion	11
Bibliographical notes	11

Chapter 2 Basic issues	13
2.1 Domain knowledge: the object of communication	14
The functions of the expert module	
Aspects of communicability	
2.2 Student model: the recipient of communication	16
The student model: information	
The student model: representation	
The diagnostic process: accounting for data	
2.3 Pedagogical knowledge: the skill of communication	19
2.4 Interface: the form of communication	21
Summary and conclusion	23
Bibliographical notes	23

Part II A panorama: people, ideas, and systems

Chapter 3 Tutorial dialogues: from semantic nets to mental models	29
3.1 SCHOLAR: launching a new paradigm	30
A system to conduct tutorial dialogues	
3.2 Natural reasoning and tutorial dialogues	35
3.2.1 Natural reasoning: plausible inferences	35
Techniques supported by simple extensions to SCHOLAR	
More complex inference techniques	
3.2.2 An inquiry into the nature of tutorial dialogues	37
3.3 WHY: the Socratic method	39
Toward a computational model of Socratic tutorial strategies	
A system implementing the Socratic method	
3.4 From local strategies to multiple mental models	41
3.4.1 Considering global goals	42
3.4.2 Domain knowledge: multiple viewpoints	44
The functional perspective: a second viewpoint on physical processes	
Additional open issues in domain-specific knowledge	
3.4.3 From multiple viewpoints to multiple mental models ...	45
Learning about physical processes viewed as model tuning	
Componential views of mental models	

Summary and conclusion	48
Bibliographical notes	49
Chapter 4 SOPHIE: from quantitative to qualitative simulation	51
4.1 Simulation: dialogues and learning environments	52
4.1.1 The METEOROLOGY tutor: question answering	52
4.1.2 A reactive learning environment for troubleshooting ...	55
4.2 Natural-language interface: semantic grammars	55
Efficiency and habitability: semantic parsing	
A robust interface	
4.3 SOPHIE-I: simulation-based inferences	59
SOPHIE's instructional tasks	
The value of quantitative simulations	
4.4 SOPHIE-II: an articulate expert	62
SOPHIE-I and II in actual use	
4.5 SOPHIE-III: humanlike reasoning	64
4.5.1 Paradigmatic systems: the BLOCKS tutor.....	65
4.5.2 Toward humanlike reasoning in electronics	67
Further problems with SOPHIE-III	
4.6 Mental models: qualitative reasoning.....	70
Function from structure: envisioning	
Principled construction of causal models: robustness	
and learning	
Prescriptive and descriptive theories	
Qualitative physics	
Summary and conclusion	76
Bibliographical notes	77
Chapter 5 Interactive simulations: communicating mental models	79
5.1 STEAMER: simulation and abstraction	80
5.1.1 Manipulable simulation of a steam plant	80
5.1.2 Tutorial capabilities: the use of abstractions	82
Explanations of procedures: abstract objects	
Structure of components: abstract functionality	
5.1.3 Inspectable simulations: conceptual fidelity.....	83
5.1.4 From graphic abstractions to qualitative processes	86
5.2 QUEST: progressions of qualitative models	88
5.2.1 Mental models: a developmental approach	89
Differences between models	
Understanding and learning	

5.2.2 A learning environment for zero-order qualitative models	94
The system in practice: evaluation and comments	
Progressions of models and knowledge communication	
Summary and conclusion	97
Bibliographical notes	99
Chapter 6 Existing CAI traditions: other early contributions ..	101
6.1 Early attempts to tailor problem-solving experiences.....	102
6.1.1 EXCHECK: understanding natural proof procedures	102
Natural proof procedures: a learning environment with informed feedback	
6.1.2 A probabilistic model for judgmental knowledge	105
Numerical representation of expertise	
Learning by adapting probabilistic values	
6.1.3 BIP: curriculum information networks	108
BIP-I: layered curriculum organization	
BIP-II: pedagogically organized information	
Problem-solving guidance: limited diagnostic information	
6.2 Pedagogical experiments: teaching expertise	111
6.2.1 Self-improving tutors: tuning strategies empirically.....	112
The QUADRATIC tutor	
Self-improvement by experimentation	
Empirical versus analytical learning	
6.2.2 Concept teaching: a formal analytical approach	117
Teaching and learning models	
The value of formal experiments	
Summary and conclusion	120
Bibliographical notes	121
Chapter 7 Learning environments: coaching ongoing activities	123
7.1 LOGO: knowledge communication as learning	124
LOGO: programming as a discovery tool	
Knowledge communication as a learning process	
7.2 WEST: relevance and memorability of interventions	126
7.2.1 Tutoring with issues and examples	127
The role of WEST's expert	
7.2.2 Pedagogical principles for coaching.....	132
WEST in actual use: an encouraging success	

7.3 The design of learning environments	133
Toward a theory of pedagogical simplification	
7.4 WUSOR: toward learner-oriented models of expertise	135
7.4.1 WUSOR-I: an expert-based coach	136
7.4.2 Overlays: a rule-based paradigm for student modeling .	137
The overlay architecture	
Limitations of the overlay paradigm	
7.4.3 The overlay theory in WUSOR-II.....	140
7.4.4 WUSOR-III: the genetic graph	140
The topology of the graph: a source of pedagogical information	
Representing problem-solving expertise for teaching	
7.5 Architectures organized around curricula	144
7.5.1 The bite-sized architecture.....	145
7.5.2 Curriculum organization and steering testing	146
Summary and conclusion	149
Bibliographical notes	151
 Chapter 8 Bugs in procedural skills: the ‘buggy repair step’ story	 153
8.1 BUGGY: an enumerative theory of bugs	154
8.1.1 A modular representation of subskills	154
Limitations of enumerative theories of bugs	
8.1.2 The nature of bugs in procedural skills	157
8.2 DEBUGGY: a diagnostic system	159
8.2.1 Off-line diagnosis: heuristic search strategies	159
8.2.2 Coercions: a model-driven analysis of noisy data.....	160
Coercions and bugs	
8.2.3 IDEBUGGY: an on-line version.....	162
Problem generation	
Managing the space of hypotheses	
8.2.4 Diagnostic tests and the notion of subskill	164
Primitive subskills: a formal definition	
8.3 REPAIR theory: a generative theory of bugs	165
8.3.1 Representation of procedural skills	166
8.3.2 Mechanisms for the generation of bugs	167
Generative principles for repairs and impasses	
Filtering principles for impasses and repairs	

8.3.3 Explanatory power and observational coverage	170
8.4 STEP theory: a learning model of bug generation	171
8.4.1 Planning nets: teleological reasoning	172
8.4.2 The nature of learning in procedural skills	175
The teaching sequence: supporting inductive learning	
Induction from examples: a source of mislearning	
8.4.3 SIERRA: a model of the generation of core procedures .	177
The learning model	
Sources of impasses	
8.4.4 Coverage and validation: competitive argumentation ...	179
Competitive argumentation: the role of assumptions	
Methodological considerations	
Summary and conclusion	182
Bibliographical notes	183
 Chapter 9 More on student modeling: toward domain-	
independent mechanisms	185
9.1 PSM/ACE: interactive diagnosis	186
Following explanations of the student's reasoning	
Domain knowledge and understanding of explanations	
9.2 LMS: inferential diagnosis with rules and mal-rules	190
9.2.1 Representing procedural skills with production systems	190
9.2.2 Containing the combinatorics of the modeling task	191
9.2.3 Automated test generation	193
9.3 PIXIE: generating mal-rules	194
9.3.1 Diagnosis by reconstruction	194
Toward remedial dialogues	
9.3.2 Student interviews: toward a generative theory of bugs	197
Misgeneralization as a generative principle	
The attitude of the learner: a controversy	
9.4 UMFE: a generic modeling subsystem	198
The propagation of diagnostic information	
A prototype: limitations and possibilities	
Summary and conclusion	201
Bibliographical notes	202

Chapter 10 Bug reconstruction: beyond libraries of bugs	205
10.1 Extending past knowledge with general operators	206
10.2 Syntactic manipulations on production systems	207
Syntactic manipulations: practical and theoretical limitations	
10.3 ACM: machine learning techniques for diagnosis	210
Machine learning techniques for diagnosis	
10.3.1 ACM's modeling process	212
Path hypotheses: diagnostic and psychological heuristics	
Inferring production rules: learning from examples	
10.4 Primitive operators versus bugs	218
Bug reconstruction: low granularity of primitives	
Defining the right primitives	
Summary and conclusion	220
Bibliographical notes	222
 Chapter 11 Problem solving and design: diagnostic plan analysis	 223
11.1 The FLOW tutor: structured memory organization	224
Teaching strategies expressed in terms of schemata	
Tutors built on top of active structural networks	
11.2 SPADE: toward a tutor based on a theory of design	227
11.2.1 Ideas for a theory of design	227
A linguistic view of the design process	
Diagnostic concerns: parsing protocols with PATN	
11.2.2 SPADE-0: a plan-based editor	230
An experimental didactic system	
11.3 The MACSYMA ADVISOR: plans and beliefs	232
The dependency graph: a plan annotated with assumptions	
Inferring misconceptions and interactive diagnosis	
11.4 MENO: debugging and tutoring	236
11.4.1 MENO-II: error-oriented program analysis	236
11.4.2 The knowledge of novice programmers	237
Toward a generative theory of bugs for looping plans	
BRIDGE: from natural language to programming	

11.4.3 PROUST: intention-based diagnosis	244
The importance of intentions	
PROUST's knowledge base and interpretation process	
PROUST used in real settings	
11.4.4 MENO-TUTOR: strategies for tutorial discourses.....	252
The discourse management network: articulate tutorial strategies	
The performance of MENO-TUTOR as an exploration tool	
Summary and conclusion	256
Bibliographical notes	257
 Chapter 12 GUIDON: the epistemology of an expert system ...	261
12.1 GUIDON: a tutor on top of MYCIN.....	262
12.1.1 Tutorial context: the case method.....	263
12.1.2 Modularity: domain and pedagogical expertise	265
Additional layers of domain knowledge	
The tutorial module: a distinct expert system	
12.1.3 GUIDON and MYCIN: rule-based representations ...	268
MYCIN's rules as domain expertise for tutoring	
12.2 NEOMYCIN: reconfiguring the expert knowledge	271
12.2.1 NEOMYCIN: a model of diagnostic thinking	272
Explicit control mechanisms: articulating the reasoning strategy	
Knowledge organization: articulating the epistemological structure	
12.2.2 The significance of NEOMYCIN's reconfiguration....	276
12.3 GUIDON2: tutoring systems for classification tasks	278
12.3.1 HERACLES: a heuristic classification system	278
12.3.2 Diagnosing heuristic classification.....	279
IMAGE: interpretations for tutoring purposes	
ODYSSEUS: knowledge acquisition and student modeling as a learning task	
12.3.3 Teaching heuristic classification	283
Summary and conclusion	286
Bibliographical notes	287

Chapter 13	ACTP: a marriage with cognitive psychology	289
13.1	Cognitive theories and pedagogy	290
	The underlying cognitive model: a brief overview	
	An investigation of tutoring strategies	
13.2	Tutoring systems based on theoretical principles	292
	Problem solving as a tutorial context	
	Ideal and buggy models: goal-restricted production systems	
	Tutorial interventions: immediate feedback	
	Interface: dealing with working memory limitations	
13.3	Field evaluation of ACTP's tutors	299
13.4	Skill acquisition and expertise	302
	Summary and conclusion	304
	Bibliographical notes	306

Part III A synopsis: the state of the art

Chapter 14	The computer	311
14.1	Representational mappings: epistemic fidelity	312
	Two facets of knowledge representation: internal and external	
	Epistemic fidelity of representational mappings	
14.2	Internal representation: the power of process models	314
	Process models and pedagogical activities	
14.3	External representation: the power of interfaces	316
	Functions of external representations	
14.4	Process model and interface: reification	317
	Reification and notation	
14.5	Representational commitments	321
	Bibliographical notes	322
Chapter 15	The domain	325
15.1	Communicability in epistemic terms	326
	Scope of expertise: completeness	
	Relevance: articulation and compilation of expertise	
15.2	Compiled knowledge	328

15.3	Conceptual articulation: contents	330
15.3.1	Articulation by justifications: toward first principles .	330
15.3.2	Articulation by integration	333
15.3.3	Conceptual contents: concluding remarks.....	334
15.4	Epistemological articulation: organization	335
15.4.1	Articulation by decomposition	335
	The curriculum view: learnable units	
	The diagnostic view: perceptual units	
15.4.2	Articulation by configuration	338
15.4.3	Epistemological organization: concluding remarks ...	339
15.5	The paradox of articulation	340
15.6	Articulation versus compilation	341
Chapter 16	The student	345
16.1	Scope of expertise	346
16.2	Incorrect knowledge	347
16.2.1	Different types of theories of bugs	347
	Enumerative theories of bugs	
	Reconstructive theories of bugs	
	Generative theories of bugs	
16.2.2	Trade-offs between types of theories of bugs	350
16.2.3	Bugs and misconceptions: compilation and articulation	352
	Compiled knowledge: mislearning and forgetting	
	Articulate knowledge: misconceptions	
16.3	Viewpoints	355
16.3.1	What are viewpoints?	355
	Situation-specific viewpoints: individual solutions	
	Domain-specific viewpoints: individual conceptualizations	
	Background viewpoints: individual worldviews	
	Composite viewpoints	
16.3.2	Viewpoints in knowledge communication systems ...	359
	Theories of viewpoints	
16.4	Knowledge states	361
16.4.1	Knowledge states: structural and genetic constraints .	362
16.4.2	Representing variations: classification versus emergence	363

16.4.3 Theories of knowledge states: knowledge communication	364
Chapter 17 Diagnosis	367
Organization of the chapter	
17.1 Behavioral diagnosis	371
17.1.1 Noninferential evaluation	372
17.1.2 Inference of unobservable behavior	373
Reconstructive interpretation of dynamically constructed solutions	
Inferred behavior as data for epistemic diagnosis: solution processes	
17.2 Epistemic diagnosis	376
17.2.1 Direct assignment of credit and blame	376
Model tracing	
Reconstruction	
Issues	
Hybrid approaches	
17.2.2 Structural consistency	381
17.2.3 Longitudinal consistency	382
17.3 Noise: sources and solutions	383
17.3.1 Noise in the data: variations in behavior over time ..	384
Solutions of a "behavioral" character: scalar weights	
Solutions of an "epistemic" character: genetic organization	
Solutions of an "individual" character: modeling inconsistencies	
17.3.2 Noise in the diagnostic process: ambiguities	386
17.3.3 Noise in the model of communicable knowledge	387
17.4 Sources of evidence: diagnostic data	388
17.4.1 Diagnostic observation	388
Granularity of information: reification in reverse	
The price of additional diagnostic data	
17.4.2 Overt diagnostic actions	390
Active diagnosis	
Interactive diagnosis	
17.5 Aspects of diagnostic expertise	393

Chapter 18 Didactics	395
18.1 Didactic operations: plans of action	396
18.2 Pedagogical contexts	398
Opportunistic contexts	
Plan-based contexts	
Mixed strategies: embedded contexts	
18.3 Decision base: constraints and resources	400
18.3.1 Didactic base	401
18.3.2 Domain base	403
Sequencing information	
Content of interventions	
18.3.3 Diagnostic base	405
Tailored interventions	
Tailored sequences	
The student model: constraints and resources	
18.4 Target levels of didactic operations	408
18.4.1 The behavioral target level	408
18.4.2 The epistemic target level.....	410
18.4.3 The individual target level	411
Metacognition: reflexive models	
18.5 Aspects of didactic expertise.....	413
Diagnosis and didactics in knowledge communication systems	
Bibliographical notes	415
Chapter 19 Knowledge communication	417
19.1 The components of knowledge communication.....	418
19.1.1 The presentation level	418
19.1.2 The communication level	420
19.1.3 The communication model	420
19.2 Knowledge presentation.....	423
19.3 Knowledge communication.....	425
Chapter 20 Epilogue	427
20.1 Direct outcome: useful systems	428
20.2 Indirect outcome: articulation of expertise.....	428

20.3 Related research: motivation and validation	430
20.4 Research topic: knowledge and communication	430
Bibliography	433
Figure Credits	461
Author Index	463
Subject Index	467