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Assignment 2: Critiques

1. "The Gears of My Childhood"

One aspect of the gears experience that Seymour Papert does not discuss is how he learned about the gears. He describes how before he was even two he was already interested in learning about car parts, and how "many years later," he was engaged in learning about gears. Papert shows how this then became a model for how he looked at mathematics. In this preface, Papert describes his relationship with the object, but he does not explain how he formed such a relationship with the object, nor why it was deeply engaging to him. Mysteriously absent, in particular, is his relationship with the individual who taught him about the car parts. Although no one specifically directed him to love car parts, I'm assuming that someone first showed him the car parts, expressed enthusiasm when teaching him about them, and was knowledgeable enough to answer questions about the parts and satisfy curiosity about how they work together. This person was probably someone with whom he had a close relationship, such as his father, which enhanced his affection or love for this transitional object. Perhaps the interaction with his father, at age two, in learning about the car, or later, when learning about the gears, helped him more deeply engage with the model. This model was already situated in an affective context.

2. "Hard Fun" by Seymour Papert

I agree with Papert's notion that it is important to find activities that will allow students the ability to find pleasure in the challenging—the "hard fun." Papert tries to address those teachers who criticize him, and show them the problem of conflating "learning [self-control and discipline] with learning to write. He only briefly touches upon why these people and schools are opposed to his ideas. His detractors are embedded in a philosophy that the primary purpose of school is to create order and discipline, not to deeply engage learners in where they individually feel passion. Thus, Papert wouldn't just need to change some of the activities going on in these traditional classrooms; he would have to alter an entire set of attitudes and beliefs behind school and learning. He would need to see school not as an institution that teaches social control, discipline, and self-control first and foremost, but as one that encourages children to find and develop "hard fun" that connects to their individual and cultural needs.

3. Edutainment? No Thanks. I Prefer Playful Learning.

I like Mitchel Resnick's contention that language is important in how we think. He switches from using the buzzword "Edutainment" to a more active phrase "playful learning." The word "Edutainment," he contends, is an amalgam of two services (Education and Entertainment) that you expect someone to provide, and, I suppose, those providing them hope you are willing to pay for. I wonder, then, if that is the source of the creation of "Edutainment." It sounds like something we should pay for, because it is a mixture of two things we would normally spend a hefty portion of our income on. Play and learning, however, are seen as the "free" by-product of shelling out large sums of money on various services, products, and toys. The word "play" carries connotations of something being simple, unchallenging, and even at odds with the learning process. Thus, as Resnick writes, "teachers and administrators" resist playful learning, "seeing them as just 'play.'" While I am enthusiastic about playful learning, I wonder if it is the best term to describe deeply engaging learning. Perhaps through defining and measuring how and why we become deeply engaged in learning or what it is about the activities that they "connect deeply with [our] interests and passions, we can come up with a new language for describing such learning."