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Assignment 2: Critiques

1. Gears of My Childhood by Seymour Papert

In this article, Gears of My Childhood, the author said that the assimilation of something to previous collection and affective components are very important to the learning process using his early experiences about gears.

Because it is a very short article, the author did not describe enough the reason why he thought like above, but we can easily concede that if someone has a model and can assimilate new things to the previous model, or someone has affection with the new things, it will be easier to understand them. However, it is controvertible that it is the only or the most effective way to learn new things.

Assimilation could be one method to understand new theory or principle, but it is not the only method to learn new things. At least, the author could learn the motion of gears without any former model related with gears. Although many children did not use gears and differentials to learn the equations in two variables, they also could learn the equations, and some of them could be engaged into the equations and even become mathematicians. Of course, when people face new concept and principles, it will be much helpful to assimilate them to the previous models to decrease the fears and understand them initially. However, when the knowledge becomes more complicated, or the knowledge needs sequential development, the assimilation might become rather an obstacle. For examples, the author easily learnt the equations in two variables by assimilating them into the gears and the differentials. However, if he kept understanding the equations by gears and differentials, could he understand the complex equations such as x^n or $\log x$? Sooner or later, he would have had to give up to assimilate the equations into gears and to try to understand the equations newly.

It is also in the case of affection. Although it is true that the affection which is drawn from the previous models will help children to feel friendly to the new knowledge, but could it be kept after they find that the new knowledge is much different from the previous models?

Although the assimilation could help people to feel comfortable to the new knowledge at first, I think the new knowledge could be firmly set when it is based on its original structure at the last.

2. Edutainment? No Thanks. I Prefer Playful Learning by Mitchel Resnick

These days, it is easy to find educational toys which are intended to encourage children to learn something. In this article, however, the author said "I don't like edutainment." It doesn't mean that he prefers strict boring education to fun learning, but he prefers playful learning to edutainment, learning and then getting award by fun. What is the difference between playful learning and edutainment? By the author's distinction, in the view of edutainment, children should learn something (by education) but, because learning process is very boring, education should be coated by entertainment. On the other hand, in the view of playful learning, playing itself could be the process of learning, not decoration or award.

In my opinion, there is nothing which is totally helpless to learning. While doing something, even if it is not a kind of education, there are always some kinds of new experiences and new problems to solve no matter how trivial they are, and by getting the experiences and solving the problems, people learn something. It means that we can learn something not only by education but also by playing. The matter is not whether people can learn or not, but how much people can learn from the things. In this manner, there are two points to raise the fruits: how much knowledge can be offered by the experience and how much knowledge can be searched by and absorbed into the people.

Of course, when the knowledge offered is same, we can search and absorb much more things from what we are engaged than what we are not. When people are engaged in something, they would think about that all day delightedly, search more relevant information actively, try to understand whole things about that by themselves, and manipulate or remodel that in many ways. In this point of view, I think what the author wanted to say by the words “playful learning” was the “engaged learning.” For examples, Alexandra was deeply engaged in making her marble machine. The difference between the edutation and playful learning might be rephrased as the follow. In edutation, children could be engaged in the reward of the learning, but not the learning itself. In this case, although children could work hard to get the reward, we cannot expect them to search and manipulate actively beyond the given problems. In playful learning, children could be engaged in the learning itself, and the effects of engaged learning is written above.

It is true that the playful learning has some limitation. For examples, it is highly dependent on the players’ tastes and abilities. However, thinking about the active and creative effects of engagement, educators should accept the concept of playful learning.

3. Hard Fun by Seymour Papert

It is common sense that when the works or tasks are too much difficult, most people feel desperate and do not want to do them. However, how about easy works? In this article, Hard Fun, the author said that adequate difficulty is necessary for fun, and named it as “hard fun.”

Many people including designers and educators often think that easier is better for children to have interests, and so they have tried make things much easier. But the author and I do not agree to them. In the previous assignment, I have written that the response of myself such as improvement could be one of the most important factors of engagement. People feel fun and delight when they face problems, challenge, try to overcome, and finally defeat the problems, seeing how much they are improving. In this manner, too easy works cannot encourage the improvement because they do not require it.

We can find a good example when watching babies. For babies, it is very hard to control their own body. At first, they cannot flip themselves. But they try hard to flip their own bodies again and again willingly and delightedly, although nobody tell them to do so. Once they success the goal, they really enjoy to practice of flipping and to see how they are improved from day to day until they can flip themselves freely and easily. However, we can find that, once it becomes easy, they do not enjoy the motion itself anymore – it becomes just a tool for other goals. And then babies start to enjoy overcoming new problems such as creeping.

However, could it be “hard fun” when something is assigned by other people such as teachers with a time limitation because the situation is not easy nor overwhelming? Could writing about difficult topics or doing what I really hate be hard fun? I don’t think all the difficulties could cause the “hard fun.” There are several kinds of difficulties, and among them, in my opinion, the difficulty which can be overcome by repeated practice or try might be the best kind of hardness for “hard fun,” because I think the “hard fun” is caused from the delight of improvement through the tries and overcome which come finally after the endeavors.