MAS.714J Fall 2009

Final Project Proposal

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In *Mindstuff*, Michael Eisenberg argues that "... the room, and not the computer screen, is the most tasteful and productive grain size of design for educational technology." This statement has resonated with me more than any other in the class so far for a number of reasons. First, he is refering to a way of thinking about educational technology that is intricately linked to the ideas of Papert's constructionism. Second, these constructionist theories mesh well with my own experience as a learner, and I see a progression in my own interests in building from the virtual scale to the object scale to an architectural scale. Third, while many have worked on creating "transitional objects" that are not just virtual but tangible, I am not aware of projects that explicitly link constructionism with the truly immersive potential of architecture - not even in the work of Eisenberg himself whose statement seems to suggest this to me. Plenty of constructionist projects provide kits for building things with which to fill rooms; I would like to explore the idea of a constructionist kit for building the room itself.

Conveniently, moving in this direction will allow me to build off an existing project I began last spring. The main idea was to design and build a temporary outdoor classroom that could be built, rebuilt, designed, and redesigned by the students who use it. A history of this project is here: http://classroom.mit.edu/about/history/. For my final project, I want to reinterpret and redesign this project using the new tools and contexts I've learned in this class.

When I began this project, I knew nothing about Papert's constructionism; I was working from my own intuition and experience alone. I would like now to analyze and adjust my design from a constructionist viewpoint. Specifically, I will consider the major topics of this class (i.e. constructionism, new media literacy, diversity and pluralism, tangible learning, communities of learners, reflection, etc) and elaborate on a portion of my existing work or design a new architectural-scale activity/object that addresses each area. How well do constructionist theories mesh with the construction of architecture? What elements of technology are appropriate to include at this scales?

The product will consist of a written analysis of the project, illustrated diagrams of new architectural toolkit components, and plans for activities that could be implemented in workshops in the short term to further test these ideas. Recognizing that architectural experimentation can quickly become expensive, I will try to propose activities that can be done on a variety of budgets and with variable numbers of people collaborating perhaps both in person or remotely.

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