INTERVIEW

Seymour Papert is the author of "The Children's Machine." The book predicts schools won't always exist because computers will teach children instead. Alex and Owen, fifth graders from the Sippican School in Marion, are really into computers. They interviewed Papert at his office at MIT.

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Alex (left) and Owen (center) get a lesson in Lego/Logo (a computer program that turns Lego blocks into a moving machine), from Seymour Papert, who heads MIT's Learning and Epistemology Research Group.

Q: Will computers take over for teachers?

A: Computers will change the way everybody learns. I think there's still room for good teachers. Teachers will become more like counselors and coaches.. . .

Q: Some adults are afraid of computers but kids love them. Why?

A: I don't know the answer to that but I think it's the most important question in the world. Children feel that computers are their thing. As children grow up, they'll be doing everything in a different way. Unless people learn to think differently, the planet isn't going to last very long. The fact that children take to computers well is one of the most hopeful things in the world.

Q: Will the computer mouse change?

A: Oh yes. I don't think that in 10 years, computers will look anything like they do today. If you think back in the past.. . . when I first programmed a computer it filled a room bigger than a barn. There was no keyboard. We punched holes in little pieces of cardboard.

Q: Why are computers called computers?

A: . . . In English, the word computer comes from the fact that when people first made computers, they thought they would compute numbers. They thought of it as a gadget for doing calculations of numbers. The name has stuck although nowadays using computers to calculate numbers is such a tiny part of the use of computers.. . . Maybe that's one reason people are afraid of computers — because they're afraid of math and they still think of the computer as doing math.

Q: Will computers take over people's jobs?

A: Some jobs ought to be taken over by computers. Some jobs are very boring and people shouldn't have to do boring work.. . . We have to see losing jobs not as a disaster but as a good thing.. . . Computers have taken away a lot of jobs but they have also created a lot of jobs.. . .