

Title:

Brick by Brick: Using LEGO® Serious Play® to Teach ‘Change Leadership’
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Abstract

Teaching students to be positive change agents involves the recognition of human factors at the individual and group level. This workshop intersects a 4-stage change model with creative andragogy, as exemplified by an adaption of the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® methodology.

While often associated with, and widely used for, the development of strategic thinking to facilitate change, LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® is increasingly being used in higher education to engage learners and faculty in hands-on approaches to learning, promoting outcomes of communication and shared understanding. Join us to build, share, and reflect on the many uses of this approach in higher education.

Key words: leadership education, change models, Lego® Serious Play®

Introduction

This experiential workshop adapts *Lego® Serious Play®* (LSP) as a model of group communication to teach concepts regarding leading through change. *Lego® Serious Play®* (LSP) is an innovative, play-based facilitated methodology, using brick building and metaphoric storytelling to deal with complex problems or to enhance understanding of concepts and others perspectives (Kristiansen & Rasmussen, 2014). Over the last decade and with adaptations, LSP has entered higher education classrooms across the globe (James & Nerantzi, 2018). Participants will learn about a specific model of change (The ELIMAR model) as they use their hands to “think and create” engaging both brain hemispheres simultaneously (Turesky & Peabody, 2018). Participants will experience connections between thinking (cognition), sharing (speaking),

listening (hearing for understanding), feeling (emotional), doing (experiential), and retaining information (memory). Workshop participants will gain knowledge of the integrative theoretical basis for both the change model and for LSP including underpinnings of constructionism, constructivism, and the psychological sense of community. Applicable for both undergraduate and graduate level teaching, please come build “think with your fingers” as we construct and deconstruct concepts around positive change processes, though metaphoric Lego® bricks and mini-figures.

Theoretical foundations

We argue, that change efforts are inherently emotional processes that require leaders to react with a sensitivity and awareness of the impact change has on the ‘psychological sense of community’. While the literature in organizational change often refers to emotions as interfering with change, our ELIMAR change model, embeds emotions as critical and foundational to successful change. Theoretically grounded in McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) psychological sense of community (PSOC) theory and Scott and Jaffee’s (1989) change curve model, this model acknowledges emotion as both the tension and motivation that pulls and pushes throughout the change process, impacting the way we think, feel, and behave.

In the organizational behavior and leadership literature there is evidence to move toward a general acceptance of affective influences on decision making and the importance of emotional intelligence (Lerner, Li, Valdesolo & Kassam, 2015). Emotions are felt both individually and collectively, and as educators we believe our students need to understand the primary role of emotions during any change process. In this workshop we use LSP as the medium to illustrate how we experientially engage our students to understand how individuals and groups move through four non-linear phases in response to changes (disruption, resistance, evolvment and

repurposing) experiencing the duality of both positive and negative emotions. Theoretical underpinnings of the LSP methodology are constructivist in nature as the learner is guided in a process of making meaning of their experiences at both the individual and social level (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007). This means that we learn not only from our own thinking processes, but also by accessing and intersecting with the learning of others, aligning nicely with the shared group learning of LSP. Another theoretical lens informing LSP is constructionism, aptly named by Seymour Papert, who argued that learning happens especially well when people are engaged in constructing something external to themselves (Kristiansen & Rasmussen, 2014). Papert postulated when we “think through our fingers,” different modes of thought, creativity, and imagination are engaged, and when tangible objects are involved, abstract ideas become more concrete, visual, and therefore more understandable (Papert & Harel, 1991). In other words, better learning comes when the teacher creates environments to instruct, and gives learners opportunities to construct.

Teaching implications

LSP suggests several teaching implications for management and leadership educators and their students. First, LSP involves emotional and social competencies, specifically the ability to listen, share stories, and engage in collaborative group interaction. The very nature of the LSP process elicits creative modes of expression and the importance of diverse learning styles. Each student interprets the building prompt slightly different, highlighting that individual past experiences play an important role in our perceptions. LSP enhances creative thinking, a prized competency in many business settings (Statler, Heracleous & Jacobs, 2011) and facilitates collaborative ideation (West, Hoff, & Carlsson, 2016).

Learning objectives

The learning objectives associated with the Lego® Serious Play® (LSP) workshop are: a) develop a greater awareness of the importance leaders and managers possess in acknowledging emotional sensitivity during change events; b) become familiar with a 4-stage change model that embeds emotional sensitivity through the change process leading to positive change; and c) experience an adaptive version of LSP used in higher education classrooms and the specific associated skills (framing questions skills and pacing) that enhance the student experience.

Exercise Overview

We will briefly introduce our change model, the ELIMAR model, so that workshop participants are familiar with the content that will be used for the experiential exercise. We will also briefly explain the 4 step LSP adapted process, (question, build, share, reflect), the difference between LSP brick kits versus typical Legos®, the importance of warm-up builds, pacing and timing, group size, framing questions, and facilitation vs. teaching. Next we will engage in the experiential section of the workshop, beginning with a skill building exercise to help participants become comfortable with the bricks and the metaphoric representation process. We plan to highlight key andragogical steps throughout the experiential exercise. Moving from individual builds to a shared group build, individuals will then create a “mega-story” which keeps the core essence of the individual builds within a collective and mutually agreed upon group story. Next we will debrief the overall session, sharing what we feel is most important and common pitfalls to avoid. Lastly, we will share our experiences with LSP in a variety of classroom contexts, including the many positive experiences and the occasional tension experienced by a small number of students.

Session Description and Plan: 90 Minute Workshop Outline

Introductions and significance of Workshop: Objectives	5 minutes
Lecturette: Overview of the ELIMAR change model LSP theoretical foundation and use in higher education	15 minutes
Experiential activity: Lego Serious Play adaptation <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Introduce the first skill building exercise● Next, a metaphoric build● Next an individual build● Finally a group shared build	45 minutes
Debrief and discussion About the 4-stage ELIMAR model About experiential use of object mediated communication About adaptability and transferability	20 minutes
Resource sharing and conclusion	5 minutes

Application to conference theme

Our workshop session specifically deals with the concepts of organizational change. We present the concepts of a model through a creative and experiential approach easily adaptable to a variety of course content and learning objectives.

Unique contribution to OBTC

Part of this workshop has been presented with our faculty to process the complexity of our own college-level change efforts. This workshop is different because the focus is how we use this approach with students as an andragogical practice. We can also share content from a recent peer reviewed publication about our use of LSP in higher education with graduate students studying leadership and organizational studies. This workshop is not under review elsewhere.

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