Incorporating Play-Based Learning Using LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®

Haley Q. Traini, Oregon State University
Ehi-Kowochio B. Ogwiji, Oregon State University

108 Strand Agriculture Hall
Oregon State University
Corvallis, OR 97331
Haley.Traini@oregonstate.edu
Ehi.Ogwiji@oregonstate.edu

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Introduction/Need for Innovation or Idea

As leadership education faculty at Oregon State University, it is important to offer dynamic, engaging, and meaningful learning experiences for our students that bolster student outcomes, spark student motivation, and align with university missions (Konopka et al., 2015). Crafting dynamic learning environments requires educators to utilize multiple and varied teaching strategies that lead to deeper levels of understanding (Bloom, 1956). Play-based learning, a dynamic form of active learning, has the potential to catalyze creativity and innovation (James & Nerantzi, 2019), kindle joy and motivation among students, and create opportunities to bridge theoretical knowledge with practical applications (Barnett, 2007), simultaneously enriching the learning experience (Sicart, 2014) and fostering student well-being (James & Nerantzi, 2019). A distinctive play-based learning approach is LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® (LSP or the LSP Method), initially crafted for workplace contexts. LSP serves as a method to unveil challenges, overcome barriers, identify opportunities, and comprehend systems using LEGO bricks (Fearne, 2020). The essence lies not solely in the LEGOs themselves but in their role as tools for modeling, fostering creation, reflection, and subsequent discussion. Upon our discovery of the LSP Method in 2023, we actively integrated it into leadership education courses to provide students with an effective means of engaging with complex and sometimes elusive leadership concepts and practices.

How it Works

The LSP Method can be as straightforward or intricate as needed. Before facilitating it, ensure you acquire a variety of LEGOs in sufficient quantity to accommodate different group sizes, allowing for the selection of bricks that best suit various building challenges. Below are the fundamental steps for implementing the LSP Method. **Step 1:** Place a pile of LEGOs in front of individuals or a group. A skilled facilitator presents a question or prompt to initiate a "build challenge." **Step 2:** Participants quietly and independently construct their response to the question or prompt using LEGOs, employing metaphor and storytelling. The crucial aspect is giving tangible form to intangible ideas, concepts, or experiences. The focus is on creating something descriptive of a phenomenon, not building prototypes or models. **Step 3**: Individuals take turns sharing their models that address the initial question or prompt. No one is skipped, as the models are visible to everyone. Share-outs can be serious or lighthearted, involving group discussions, follow-up questions, and further processing. **Step 4:** Groups collectively process and engage in enriched conversations due to model sharing. The LSP Method typically includes multiple rounds of diverse build challenges and verbal sharing. The initial challenge can be an individual, pair, or small group activity, potentially involving iterations, revisions of models, or combining individual models to construct a more complex system.

Results to Date

During the 2023 academic year, we purchased several new and used LEGO sets and proceeded to utilize the LSP Methods in a variety of contexts and courses, each for a different purpose. The table below captures three ways we used the LSP Method in leadership contexts.

Table 1

LSP Applications in Leadership Contexts at Oregon State University

Context	Prompt	Photo
Students in an undergraduate introductory leadership course worked in small groups to explore a leadership theory (e.g., Servant, Adaptive, Situational). After completing a short in-class reading, they were asked to pull out one key idea from the reading to share with the class.	Build a model that captures the key insight you gleaned from the reading. Share with the class under the docucam. Then, pose a question for the class offering a critique or question about the theory by stating, "I wonder…"	
Seniors in a capstone leadership course for the Leadership Minor were asked to describe their leader identity and leadership journey thus far.	Build a model that captures your personal leadership journey and your current leadership identity.	
Professionals in the agriculture, natural resources, and forestry sectors who sit on a leadership academy advisory board convened for a yearly board meeting to discuss the current and future state of the Leadership Academy. This prompt served as the opening activity.	Select one prompt: 1. Create a model that captures why it was important for you to show up today. 2. Create a model that captures why student leadership development matters to you.	

Future Plans/Advice to Others

Whether the goal is to enhance understanding of complex biological structures in undergraduate biochemistry classrooms (Agrawal & Austin, 2023) or nurture the STEM interests of children (Williams, 2015), LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® fits a wide range of learners. Since discovering this tool for teaching, we have used it in every class, at least once per term. We intend to utilize this in research as well, as a data collection tool as well as facilitating challenging conversation through our Extension activities. We also plan to take the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® training to become certified facilitators. However, if certification is not of interest, the LSP book (Fearne, 2020) is a great resource for learning about the method. We recommend the LSP methods for instructors who are hoping to build in engaging moments into their instruction, regardless of the subject or topic.

Costs/Resources Needed

Our current collection, though far from complete, has incurred a cost of approximately $150. One essential kit that we still want amounts to $755. While Legos may be pricey, the investment is worthwhile. You can find sets on the official LEGO website. Additionally, we utilize a few yards of repurposed green felt fabric as a mat to prevent Legos from sliding, aiding in keeping them together.

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