

BREAKTHROUGH LEARNING

LEGO SERIOUS PLAY and the adult learner

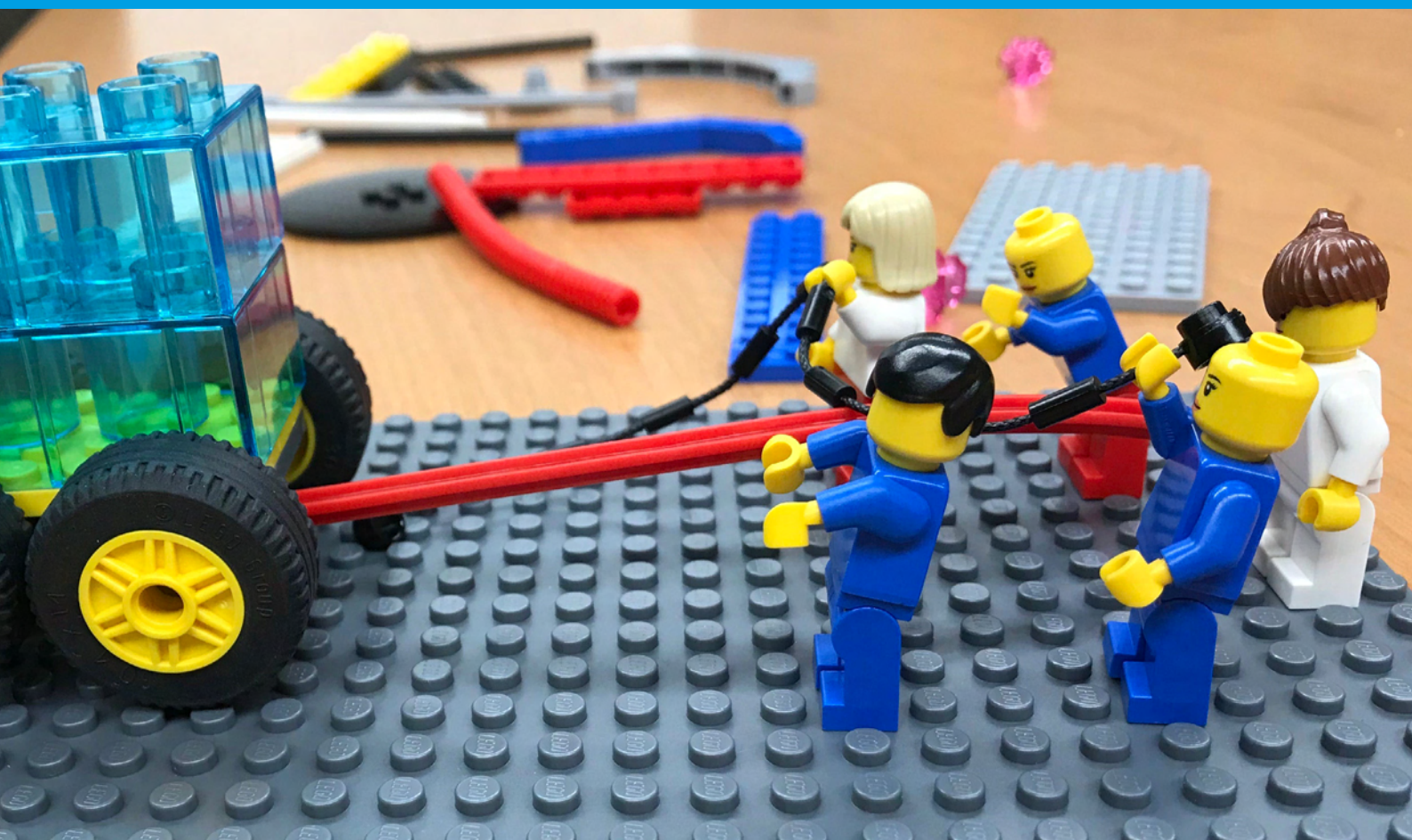
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IN THEORY:

A traditional approach to teaching and learning in higher education has become less enticing as the emerging generations desire a more applied and integrative experience (Gilbert, Whyte, LeMaster, Dykes, Barron, 2017). In response, specifically in the context of adult learning, a key approach that is proving to be effective is the LEGO(R) Serious Play(R) (LSP) method. Dialogical Education, as outlined by Vella (2008), articulates ten principles that speak to engaged learning. Among those ten, there are five significant principles that compliment the premise and purpose of the use of LSP. These principles include the following:

- Respect and value the life experiences of each individual and foster an opportunity for co-creation of learning.
- Learning is an active process and most effective when mind and emotions are considered together.
- Learning is most effective when ideas, feelings, and actions are all utilized and working together.
- When individuals feel safe they are able to work through challenges that will help lead to transformative learning.
- Utilizing open-ended ques-



tions foster deeper thinking, new ideas, and show relevance to their context .

Vella (2008) articulates that when these principles are utilized in the classroom the learning dynamic shifts in such a way that the students become more engaged, take ownership for their learning and the instructor becomes more of a guide to their learning process.

The LEGO(R) Serious Play(R) method and the principles of 100%/100% engage learning and co-creation, complement principles outlined above and become a platform to integrate LSP into the classroom and course curriculum. The combination of Dialogical Education

and LSP is a groundbreaking enterprise in adult learning and contributes to what Adam Kahane (2021) describes as a breakthrough moment in which significant obstacles are removed leaving room for personal and group transformation.

IN PRACTICE:

To provide illustration of how we integrate theory with practice below are two distinct examples of the use of Dialogical Education and LSP into course instruction and curriculum.

Example 1: Through the use of the LEGO Serious Play methodology, a theoretical understanding of the complex topic of organizational

systems is cemented within the students. A four-step process of teaching the concept uses adult learning principles alongside constructionist theory, allowing for deeper learning to occur as ideas are built external of oneself (Papert & Harel, 1991; Vella, 2008).

Step 1: First, the theory of organizational systems is introduced through reading, videos, and lecture.

Step 2: In the following week, the class time (4-5 hours) is designed to engage in LSP to build out a system. Tip: We use a topic that all students can relate to for this activity. In this case, we build the system of a graduate student.

Step 3: Following the system build and playing with the model, the process and reflection phase begins. Student's minds are churning as they express how watching the system ebb, flow, and break during emergence gives perspective on the effect that one change can have on an entire system. Students share thoughts and experiences aloud and continue personal reflection throughout the week.

Step 4: In the final step, students write a Systems Research Paper which covers systems theory, systems thinking, and the effects this can have on organizational change. Prior to introducing LSP, student papers were far from impressive and lacked substance. Incorporating LSP brought higher levels of understanding and critical thought around the concept.

Example 2: The LSP method can also be utilized to draw out overall learnings and provide an opportunity for learners to reflect on their own growth and ideas. This allows for what Vella (2008) describes as implementation- an opportunity to act on the content, and Integration- the opportunity to take away their new learning and contextualize it for themselves. This can be done in the following way:

Step 1: Provide prompt in which the learner builds a model of what they have learned as



BUILDING A SYSTEM

a result of the course

Step 2: Provide a prompt in which the learner builds a model and articulates personal competencies they desire to build and refine as a result of what they have learned. Attach the model to the first model.

Step 3: The entire group of learners place their models into a landscape in which they can see collectively the competencies and personal learnings

Step 4: Play with landscape to identify most important competencies and themes

Step 5: Provide a prompt of one key learning and word to describe their overall sentiment/action item as result of their participation in the course

Utilizing LSP at the end of the course has produced a deeper, more focused articulation of learning. An added benefit of this process, the facilitator/professor can take note of whether the course learning objectives were met, key themes that stood out, and ways to modify for future courses.

In the Future:

We are just beginning to experiment with opportunities for using LSP in the classroom to educate the adult learner. Thinking in 3D has become a wonderful way to help students define topics for research papers, outline publication sequences, and process stress levels. We encourage everyone to consider all the opportunities LSP can afford you as you seek to facilitate breakthrough learning.

References

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