

Title of Case Study

Creating Resilient & Confident Researchers with Lego® SeriousPlay®

Staff Lead

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School/Department

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n/a

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Name of course

Problem-solving with Lego® SeriousPlay®

Please briefly describe the activity undertaken for the case study

This three-hour multi-disciplinary workshop aimed to help first-year postgraduate researchers develop and apply skills and mind-sets in creative problem-solving. The purpose of the session was to offer time and space for PGRs to identify and explore ways to overcome obstacles encountered during doctoral research in order to gain confidence and develop resilience.

How was the activity implemented?

This workshop employed a combination of Lego® SeriousPlay® (LSP), peer coaching and collaborative creative thinking. During the workshop, participants were introduced to the LSP method, which involves a facilitator asking questions or proposing challenges. Participants then build their response to the questions/challenges using Lego®. Subsequently, participants share and explain their model to their peers, in pairs and small groups and then reflect on the insights and learning they gained from the experience. The process is repeated, and participants' models are expanded through each iteration of questions asked throughout the workshop.

To further enhance the LSP method, this workshop also included a session on asking effective coaching questions using the GROW model. This helped participants during the sharing process to ask non-judgemental questions to help identify individual blocks and realistic directions for resolving problems. This was immediately followed by a collaborative brainstorming session, where ideas for problem-solving were generated for each participant. The workshop culminated with the development of individual plans for taking ideas and actions forward following the workshop.

To prepare participants for model building, they were given three warm-up activities, a technical challenge, an exercise in using metaphors to build concise models, and a challenge in using storytelling to explain their models to others. After the warm-up, the following schedule of activities and challenges/questions were addressed (each for a duration of approximately 20 minutes):

- Build a model of your immediate goals as a researcher
- Share/Reflect
- Build a model of what's happening right now
 - what does your current everyday situation look like?
- Share/Reflect
- Build a model of any problems or obstacles stopping you from achieving your goals
- Share/Reflect
- Peer interviews: Tell me what you have already done about the problem/obstacle?
- Collaborative brainstorm: What ideas and directions could _____ try?
- Group- and self-reflection
- Action planning: What will you do now? When?

Has this activity improved programme provision and student experience, if so how?

The workshop offered a supportive and non-judgemental 'safe space' to explore the commonly shared problems faced by postgraduate researchers. It aimed to contribute to enhancing PGR wellbeing through offering opportunities to socialise, recognise the challenges and ambiguities that surface during doctoral research and exercise self-reliance through collaborative problem-solving and creative thinking.

Did you experience any challenges in implementation, if so how did you overcome these?

The challenge of working with Lego is the time and 'permission' needed to allow participants to shift their thinking and dexterity towards participating in playful learning. Some participants have not 'played' with Lego for some time, so a warm-up session where there was a technical build, such as building a tower, was beneficial in helping participants build and explain their own models. Taking time to explain how to use metaphors in building models also helped alleviate the expectation that a model must look literal. This ensured that participants didn't get carried away with building overly precise models.

Which Liverpool University Hallmarks and Attributes does this case study relate to (tick all boxes that apply)

Research-connected Teaching	
Active Learning	X
Authentic Assessment	
Confidence	X
Digital Fluency	
Global Citizenship	

How does this case study relate to the Hallmarks and Attributes you have selected?

Active Learning

The Lego® SeriousPlay® method is inherently interactive, collaborative and reflective. Participants gained insights into the challenges of the research environment through building physical models, participating in peer-coaching, self-reflection and action planning. Participants actively collaborated in creative thinking to generate and explore multiple options towards resolving problems and used their insights and peer feedback to develop their own realistic plans to put into action following the workshop.

Confidence

Participants developed confidence by using creative problem-solving skills to address their current problems. By assisting their peers via coaching and collaborative creative thinking, they additionally developed a sense of confidence in knowing that they can turn their skills and mindsets to any future barriers and obstacles, which hopefully permits them to become resilient researchers. Using the LSP method and having fruitful discussions via peer coaching, helped participants find directions towards solving their own problems and encouraged creative thinking, openness, curiosity and a tolerance for ambiguity.

How could this case study be transferred to other disciplines?

This case study is applicable across all disciplines, professional services and HE management.

If someone else were to implement the activity within your case study what advice would you give them?

1. The Lego® SeriousPlay® kits have pieces that help participants use metaphors (such as ladders and pillars). However, the kits are somewhat pricey. If you are looking for alternative ways to use the method, try building your own kit (see below).
2. Don't get too concerned with the 'type' of Lego® you plan to use in your session. Instead, focus on crafting clear questions and challenges to build, which will contribute to your learning aims and objectives.
3. Less is more. It might be tempting to use/buy every Lego® brick available, but people tend to be more creative with constraints. Start with a small amount of Lego® first and then add more with each question. This will help keep participants engaged and allow for the models to grow larger.
4. The time allocated for sharing models and reflecting also shouldn't be hurried.
5. A cabaret style layout or at least one large table surrounded by chairs is easier to facilitate in comparison to lecture theatre.
6. Use a felt or thick tablecloth to ensure the Lego® doesn't fall onto the floor. Or even better, work on a carpeted floor.
7. Be prepared and have the Lego® portioned out for each participant.
8. Ask your participants to keep it tidy during the session and have a clear plan of how you want them to clear up after the session.
9. To capture the value of the session, encourage participants to photograph their models.

Making a Kit

The [SeriousPlay® Lego® Shop](#) offers the officially branded sets. For those just starting out, the Starter Kit offers a generous range of Lego, including plenty pieces for metaphors. Combining a few Starter Kits with [Classic Sets](#) would permit ample materials for a session of 10-15 participants. The Window Exploration kit includes 100 bags of identical bricks, which is great for small introductory sessions with large groups or to expand the pieces of the Starter Kit.

Recommended Reading and Resources:

Blaire, Sean & Rillo, Marko, 'Serious Work: How to Facilitate Meetings & Workshops Using the Lego® SeriousPlay® Method' (2015).

[Open-source Introduction to Lego® SeriousPlay®](#), accessed September 2018.

Kristiansend, Per and Rasmussen, Robert, 'Building Better Business Using the Lego® SeriousPlay® Method' (Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley, 2014).



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