



Facilitating co-creation experience in the classroom with Lego Serious Play

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ABSTRACT

Lego Serious Play was founded within the Lego Corporation in the mid-90s as a response to an unusual problem why a company that sold creativity by the kilo was struggling for market share, profit and new thinking. Built from the ground up as a make-or-break proposition, the LSP process is an industry strength business solution designed to create conducive conditions for problem recognition, knowledge creation, and shared understanding. Based on these condition, and the 2010 open source licence of the protocol, this paper outlines the Lego Serious Play process, the history and origin of the method, and the seven principles underpinning its operation. The paper then outlines the adaptation of the LSP method from industry to academy, to showcase how to bring the technique into the classroom. Educators can use the step by step guide to construct a classroom activity that draws on Lego Serious Play to further promote key graduate outcomes of communication, creativity and shared understanding.

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CHINESE ABSTRACT

Lego Serious Play 是乐高公司 (Lego Corporation) 于 90 年代中期在内部创设的, 用以应对不寻常问题 - 以千克为单位出售创意的公司为何力争市场份额, 利润和新思路。作为白手起家孤注一掷创立的事业, LSP 流程是具有行业优势的商业解决方案, 旨在为问题识别, 知识创造和共享理解创设有益的条件。基于这些条件以及 2010 年该方案的公开资源许可, 本论文概述了 Lego Serious Play 流程, 该方法的历史及起源, 以及支撑其运作的七大原理。而且, 该论文概述了 LSP 方法从行业到学术界的改写适应, 以展示如何将该技艺引入课堂。教育工作者可使用循序渐进的指南来构建课堂活动, 这些活动凭借 Lego Serious Play 进一步提高交流, 创造性和共享理解的关键毕业成果。

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1. Introduction

Co-creation is a foundational element of the contemporary marketing domain. You can not so much as cite a cat without needing to cross-reference Vargo and Lusch (2004) and the myriad of co-creation concepts that followed in its wake. For the marketing educator, bringing practical co-creation exercises to the classroom is an opportunity to apply theory to praxis. This paper introduces the use of the Lego Serious Play facilitation technique as

a means to teach co-creation through experiential learning and to produce co-created experiences connected to the coursework materials. Lego Serious Play was created in 1996 by the Lego Corporation in response to their financial and creative slump. Based on a combination of management theory, applied use of flow state, and structured play, the LSP platform has been a mainstay of Lego operations, open sourced and shared with the world in 2010, and applied across a range of industry settings. The paper outlines the LSP process, case examples of use scenarios from Canada and Australia, and an indicative session plan to facilitate in-class co-creation experience. The paper explores the delivery of a Lego Serious Play classroom workshop, class case studies, and a few bricks and pieces. It demonstrates how the “Three Permissions” of play, ownership, and use enable co-creation conditions, and it provides

Abbreviations: LSP, Lego® Serious Play™ the formal title of the serious play protocol open sourced by the Lego Corporation in 2010 <https://www.lego.com/en-us/seriousplay>.

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suggestions for mapping LSP to learning outcomes, graduate attributes, and assessment tasks.

2. Lego Serious Play: creativity and play

2.1. Co-creation

When Vargo and Lusch (2004) badge engineered coproduction out of a pure services context and into the co-creation for services dominant logic, it gave life to the beautiful paradox of co-created meaning in the context of what marketers meant by “Co-creation.” Bereft a permanently agreed upon co-creation definition, each marketer finds their preference, and thus for this paper, the Ballantyne and Varey (2008) approach to co-creation as a stand-alone concept from co-production will be used. This allows for co-production through known resources and capabilities to pair with co-creation of distinct value as the service-dominant logic approach to inform adapting Lego Serious Play into marketing. Co-creation is also central to the application of many aspects of the Serious Play process – not least of which is the requirement of the participant to respond by building a Lego model when faced with a task, challenge or question. Using Lego as a temporary medium quickly generates conditions of co-creation as models are only capable of existing through deliberate human intervention (Said et al., 2001), and require the individual to explain any attached meaning during the LSP process (Hyvönen, 2014). At the conclusion of each exercise, as models are reduced to component pieces, no residual meaning resides within the bricks, with the consequence that value-in-ownership is absent the model, and until used to build and explain, the bricks hold no inherent value (Ballantyne and Varey, 2006). Further, as the process is communal, with the conversations between participants, unexpected for co-creation and SDL, the value can arise in exchange of ideas, and in the use of the model. Even where participants keep the LSP bricks for themselves (ownership), the models that are made (use) provide the canvas for explanation (exchange) with no meaning being held or stored by pieces.

2.2. Lego Serious Play

Lego Serious Play is a process by which participants use small amounts of Lego pieces to create visual 3D models of ideas, concepts, and thoughts, which they explain to fellow participants. Serious play is a protocol where the method of play (fun, enjoyment, risk-taking) is coupled with task-specific activity (learning outcomes, strategy, ‘serious’ topics). By combining these two approaches, Serious Play enables participants to create an environment in which the benefits of the play state can assist in the surfacing of ideas, thoughts, and knowledge that would otherwise have been inaccessible in conventional conditions (Blair and Rillo, 2016). The process uses time bounded activity, with a balance of challenge and skill set to evoke the flow state, and engage the constructionism hand-mind connectivity through the use of Lego pieces (Kurkovsky, 2015; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Constructionism draws on a management theory background where the process of “thinking with the hands” results in different ideas, thoughts and process being drawn out from a participant than occurs in a non-constructionism environment (Middleton, 2015).

Lego Serious Play is a facilitation technique that uses a combination of personal focus through Lego model creation, the creation of meaning through story-telling and structured sequences of active listening, engagement, and story-making. As a commercially orientated business process, it has evolved to apply structured play to enhance creativity, communication, and innovation. By building visual metaphors in Lego, and explaining the meanings of the model, LSP supports deeper insights into problems and unlocks

more creative solutions through storytelling, meaning-making, and experimentation (<https://www.lego.com/en-us/seriousplay>). It was developed within the Lego Corporation as a facilitation toolkit to level the playing field within meetings, and to augment both knowledge discovery from participants, and creativity in solutions flowing from the meetings (Victor et al., 2002). This method was retained in-house from 1996 to 2010, at which point Lego® Serious Play™ was released as an open source methodology, adapted for use in a wide range of business contexts from strategic reviews through to team building, and beyond into business process modeling (Kristiansen and Rasmussen, 2014).

2.2.1. Serious play in academia

For the reader, there are certain key elements to consider. Lego Serious Play began as a problem-solving mechanism for the Lego Corporation and was solely dependent on practical outcomes for its survival. From the author’s experience, this facet of the process is important to establish in the outset, before any well-meaning question of “Do you see an application of this for business?” attempts to derail the process. This is an industry technique forged from real-world application and one that survived the trial-by-fire process of getting Lego out of a financial crisis and into profit. The evolutionary process Lego undertook with LSP, particularly with regards to “If it does not work, the process is over” attitude outlined by Kristiansen and Rasmussen (2014), turned LSP into an industrial strength facilitated method to be adapted into academic contexts. While it may not translate easily (or at all) to complex structural equations; partial least squared analysis or correlations, enough success has been invoked through the process to warrant legitimacy at the industrial scale.

Similarly, although this process may be new to the reader, and relatively unexplored in the marketing literature, it was initiated in 1996, patented in 2001, and open sourced in 2010. The LSP method has weathered economic downturns, post-9/11 America, the Global Financial Crisis, the rise of the internet, and a host of other conditions that are ill-suited to the survival of a faddish management technique with technicolor toy sets. That marketing is once again late to the party is indicative of a problem in our house, and not reflective of the viability or survivability of the technique. Finally, the decision by Lego in 2010 to go into open source was described by Kristiansen and Rasmussen (2014) as taking the third path between the decision of “Gear up or Give up,” where instead the platform chose to “Grow up.” A conscious decision by Lego was, and remains, to use the open source approach to expand LSP’s value to the community through public development (Nerantzi et al., 2015). Contributions based on the LSP core tenets are expected to adhere to the principles of open source – public availability of shared knowledge, new developments, and to reinvest contributions back to the community to forward the advancement of LSP as an ongoing activity. The necessity of giving back to our community may run contrary to the desires of publication houses for exclusivity, and we need to adhere to the rule of the open source community in the development, delivery, and use of this LSP process (Hyvönen, 2014). As the methods and techniques presented here owe their pedigree to the open source community, and the willingness of Lego to share, so too will any derivation on these themes in the reader’s practice.

2.2.2. Serious play and service dominant logic in the classroom

Similarly, the principles of service-dominant logic have survived similar market conditions and trial by peer review across the decade and a half following that Vargo and Lusch (2004) paper. The approach of moving from the value of objects as inherent in possession, to the requirement of participant interaction to create value through use opens the opportunity for temporary applications of reusable objects to create significant meaning and affect

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