Building a playful community of practice:

Brick by brick

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Play-based learning is a common concept in early-years education, but is little-studied in adult contexts, including the traditional workplace setting. Even less documented is how play can contribute to teaching and learning in Higher Education. Yet play can be a useful mechanism for inculcating creativity, reflection, and collaboration. We often think of play as being ‘the opposite of work,’ or a pastime for children. But play also provides an unconventional learning environment where we can encourage students to explore alternatives, experiment, make mistakes, and reflect back on their learning.

There are many ways in which play can be incorporated into Higher Education, but here we would like to focus on different approaches to using Lego. The small ubiquitous construction toys are aptly suited to playful instruction and facilitation for a number of reasons. Affordable and colourful, they are immediately recognisable to most people, and there is a low barrier to understanding their use. While some bricks have an obvious function (doors, wheels, and flowers for example) others may become whatever we need them to.

Given the growing popularity of Lego throughout the university, establishing a community of best practice seemed like the next step. Using an informal setting we are aiming to promote discussions about incorporating Lego into teaching and learning activities, meeting facilitation, and process improvement. We ran our first Lego Café in April, complete with cakes and a collection of bricks and figures for attendees to experiment with.

# Learn More

The Lego Cafés will take place in LRC1 on the second Tuesday of the month during trimester one 2018/19 and you are all warmly invited. In trimester two we hope to bring the Lego Café to either Craiglockhart or Merchiston so that all colleagues can have the chance to be involved.

If you would like to be added to our Lego interest group email list, send an email request to [ISServiceDesk@napier.ac.uk](mailto:ISServiceDesk@napier.ac.uk) with the words “Please add me to the [lego@napier.ac.uk](mailto:lego@napier.ac.uk) distribution list.”

Read more about Lego, play, and creativity here;

* [Lego and Games for STEM Education](https://blogs.napier.ac.uk/claire-garden/), a blog by Claire Garden
* [Introduction to Lego Serious Play Open-Source: Basic Principles and Philosophy](http://davidgauntlett.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/LEGO_SERIOUS_PLAY_OpenSource_14mb.pdf)
* [Play Matters](https://pmt-eu.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo-explore/fulldisplay?docid=ALMA-44NAP_ALMA5152392540002111&context=L&vid=44NAP_ALMA_VU1&search_scope=everything&tab=default_tab&lang=en_US)
* [Serious Work: How to Facilitate Meetings and Workshops using the Lego Serious Play Method](https://pmt-eu.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo-explore/fulldisplay?docid=ALMA-44NAP_ALMA2164561370002111&context=L&vid=44NAP_ALMA_VU1&search_scope=everything&tab=default_tab&lang=en_US)
* [The Place of Play: Toys and Digital Cultures](https://pmt-eu.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo-explore/fulldisplay?docid=TN_oapen341443&context=PC&vid=44NAP_ALMA_VU1&search_scope=everything&tab=default_tab&lang=en_US)
* [The Secret World of Lego](https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand/index.php/prog/0A396C17)
* And of course, [The Lego Movie](https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand/index.php/prog/07792057)

# How I Use Lego: Claire

I adapted the Lego Serious Play method for large class sizes and shorter timeframes in HE. The method hinges on building an object and sharing the story around it – using metaphor to explore complex ideas. I’m using it with a biology class to help students link key cell biology concepts as revision. The Teaching Fellows funded evaluation of this, most students responded positively to questions around social interaction, creativity and understanding cell biology, recommending the tutorial to others: ‘It was a nice and friendlier approach to biology and made the visualization of biological functions and processes easier’. I’ve also used the approach to explore student perceptions of good and bad teachers, what a scientist is, and staff perceptions of a supportive workplace. I’d be interested in exploring the idea of learning communities next.

# How I Use Lego: Laura

I use Lego in a small activity that allows students to make mistakes in a safe environment. Drawing on the work of Buckley (2015) this is a playful way to assist students in redirecting their focus away from the mechanisms of referencing towards the practice of referencing. When students encounter referencing they have a tendency to focus on the mechanisms of citation at the expense of the academic method behind the practice of referencing. All academic work is constructed using the ideas of previous scholars, and Lego is an excellent way to demonstrate this is a low-risk way.

Buckley, C. (2015). Conceptualising plagiarism: Using Lego to construct students’ understanding of authorship and citation. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *20*(3), 352–358. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2015.1016418

# How I Use Lego: Steve

Playing with Lego might seem like a world away from enhancing how somewhere like a University works, but, in the right situation it can really help. One recent example is with a workshop to help think about what the role of the personal development tutor is. Making a Lego model to describe the PDT relationship helped bring some insight, as the modellers had to think differently about what was going on to make their model. It also supported each modeller in explaining their understanding to the rest of the team. I find that modelling using Lego is one way of (literally and figuratively) thinking objectively about situations. Using something like Lego also seems to move the conversation into a more creative space and also feels tangible, which I hope supports people to take more immediate action.