



By Robert Rasmussen

LEGO SERIOUS PLAY is a unique thinking, communication and problem solving technique. It is a facilitated process with multiple applications within strategy development, organizational learning, product development and innovation, change management.

LSP draws upon extensive research from the fields of business, psychology, learning, organizational development and education. LSP distinguishes itself as a:

- Remarkably **efficient** tool. Comments from participants include:
 - “We accomplished more in two days than we had previously done over the course of several months of long tedious meetings.”By having participants make use of multiple intelligences—visual-spatial intelligence, linguistic intelligence, and bodily-kinesthetic intelligence¹—teams discover what they didn’t know they knew in a very direct manner.
- Method for **developing fresh insights** into tough issues. Comments from participants include:
 - “The ideas and creativity just start to flow. LSP brings out the best each team member has to offer.”
 - “New ideas emerged from unexpected sources.”
 - “The session helped our imaginations take off.”

LSP is built on the theory of Constructionism² from Seymour Papert at MIT and his idea of concrete thinking--thinking with and through concrete objects. Constructionism proposes we gain knowledge when we construct something external to ourselves. Research has shown that the use of objects as part of an inquiry process can make hidden thought more discussable.³ Constructing internal mental maps becomes easier when you build external models that can be examined, shared, and discussed. This is consistent with psychology and art therapy that uses drawing, collage, and sculpture to create analogues of internal mental maps.⁴

In building 3-dimensional models with LEGO bricks, participants literally think with their hands. One of the roles of the hand is to shape how we think. If we move our hands or make gestures to help us think, we can assume that using LEGO materials to construct physical representations of ideas, concepts, and models of strategy might generate new content.”⁵ And it’s no wonder that the hand is such a powerful avenue for learning. The link between the hand and the brain is well-researched.⁶ 80% of brain cells are connected to the hands. In a mapping of the brain that shows proportions of it dedicated to controlling different parts of the body, a disproportionately large part of the brain is dedicated to controlling the hand.

Much of the new insights from participants are a result of bringing the unconscious to the conscious. Learning encompasses both conscious and unconscious processes. We make unconscious associations between various events. In addition, we have different ways of organizing memory that work in concert, including spatial organization (memory in relation to three-dimensional space), temporal organization (memory organized by

chronology), and semantic organization (universal concepts independent of space and time, e.g., mathematical rules). For each type of memory, there is an explicit type of memory that we can consciously talk about and an implicit part that we cannot talk about directly because it functions unconsciously. Just as we know unconsciously, we remember unconsciously.⁷

- The results are **deep and sustainable**. Comments from participants include:
 - “LSP has changed the way we work”
 - “LSP provides a tool to have fierce conversations, interrogate reality, provoke learning, tackle potentially tough issues, and enrich relationships.”

LSP integrates social, cognitive, and emotional dimensions into group exercises.

Research shows that people are changed significantly and irreversibly when movement, thought, and feeling fuse together during the active, long-term pursuit of personal goals. Learning is much deeper and the experience becomes memorable, almost “hard-wired.”

LEGO bricks convey both strong cognitive as well as emotionally-charged information.⁸ Emotions play a particularly strong role in learning--they are useful in alerting us to important environmental changes, to appropriate responses, and to anchor important events in our long-term memory.⁹

- A way of productively **addressing tough conflicts** in organizations. Comments from participants include:
 - “LSP enabled discussion of sensitive issues without it becoming personal”
 - “In normal circumstances, a conflict or approach might lead to arguments or shouting. This changes the way we interact.”
 - “Safe to talk about the difficult and sensitive issues which otherwise all too often are left untouched.”
 - “LSP enables rich dialogue respecting the views and values of each team member.”

Most people aren't willing to be open and honest with conflict. LSP focuses attention on the model, not on the creator of the model. By doing so, the learning environment remains safe, even in the face of emotionally-charged issues. The decision to address emotions brought to the surface during an LSP session remains with the creator of the model.

¹ Oliver, D. and Roos, J. (2003) Constructing Organizational Identity, *Imagination Lab Working Paper 2003-10*, Lausanne, Switzerland.

² Harel, L. and Papert, S. (1991) *Constructionism*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation

³ Edwards, (1986) *Drawing on the Artist Within* NY: Fireside Books; Barry, D. (1994) Making the Invisible Visible, Using Analogically-Based Methods to Surface Conscious Organizational Processes, *Organizational Development Journal*, 12(4), 37-47.

⁴ Edwards, (1986) *Drawing on the Artist Within* NY: Fireside Books; Case, C. and Dalley, T. (1992) *The Handbook of Art Therapy*, Routledge

⁵ Roos, J., Victor, B., and Statler, M. (2003) Playing Seriously With Strategy, *Imagination Lab Working Paper 2003-2a*, Lausanne, Switzerland.

⁶ Wilson, F. (1998) *The Hand: How Its Use Shapes the Brain, Language, and Human Culture*, New York, NY: Pantheon Books.

⁷ Caine, R. and Caine, G., (1994) *Brain-Based Learning*.

⁸ Said, R., Roos, J., and Statler, M. (2002) Lego Speaks, *Imagination Lab Working Paper 2002-7*, Lausanne, Switzerland.

⁹ Scherer, K. and Tran V. (2001) Effects of emotion on the process of organizational learning, *Handbook of Organizational Learning*, 369-392. New York: Oxford University Press.