

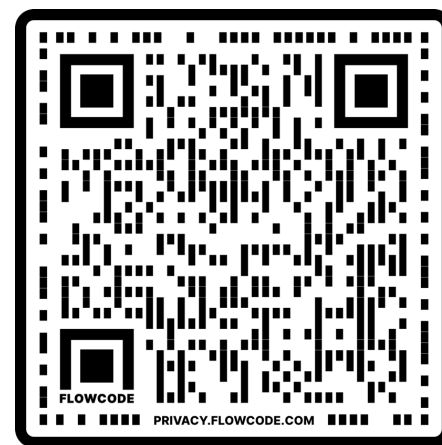
Using Lego Bricks to help First Year Undergraduate Students cope with Loneliness

Dr. Bianca Fox
SRHE Conference 2019

Introduction

Scholars believe that Lego is a “tool for thinking” (Gauntlett, 2007) with a great potential to link theory to practice, bridging the gap between thinking and doing in education (Cavaliero, 2015). This study explores ways of using Lego as a student engagement tool and shows evidence of the Lego play efficacy in helping first year students build relationships and feel less lonely in their first year at university.

I started using Lego in teaching in 2016 and led numerous Lego workshops since. Use your phone's camera to scan the code below to watch a short video from 2016 when I first started using Lego in teaching.



Aim

The study reported discusses the results of a mixed-method longitudinal research project that examines experiences of loneliness in young people and how transitions can increase the risk of loneliness, with the aim of finding viable solutions for early prevention and coping mechanisms. The aim of the Lego workshops was to:

- Familiarize students with their course and get them thinking about what they want to achieve by the end of their first year of study.
- Encourage students build meaningful relationships with their colleagues and test whether these relationships are maintained over time.

Method

Data for this project was collected in two stages: an online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. A number of 835 first year undergraduate students responded to the online questionnaire and 60 semi-structured interviews were conducted between September 2016-September 2019. Students were interviewed after each Lego workshop every year. Same students were interviewed again in their second and third year of study.

What do students think?

- *'I live away from home for university and I was feeling really lonely during my first year until we had the first Lego workshop. I made so many friends that day and we kept in touch ever since' (Third year student).*
- *'I think it is a great idea to use Lego at University because it is quite visual and helps you see what you are doing right and how is theory going to help you' (Second year student).*



(First year students building news stories with Lego bricks in September 2019. Photo: Dr. Bianca Fox)



(Students using Lego bricks to explain different types of journalistic formats. February 2016. photo: Dr. Bianca Fox)

Results

Loneliness is considered a common feeling (Tan, Pamuk, Donder, 2013: 606) that all people experience at some point in their lives. First year undergraduate students frequently report feeling lonely in their first year at university.

The transition to university life is normally associated with feelings of anxiety and loneliness; 95% of the students that took part in this research reported feeling often lonely in their first year of study.

Using Lego play creates a unique atmosphere in the class and enables everyone to participate. 85% of students reported that the relationships that started during their first Lego workshop were maintained until their final year at university and beyond.

The Lego models built in class were a basis for debate, problem solving or decision-making in other lectures. For example, in one of the Lego workshops students were asked to build a news story using Lego bricks or to explain the characteristics of a journalistic format.



(Students trying to write a news story using Lego bricks September 2018. Photo: Dr. Bianca Fox)

However, Lego workshops can easily get out of hand if not guided by very clear objectives, tasks and deadlines for each task.

Conclusion

Lego play has a great potential to bring students working together to achieve a common goal. Students get to know each other in the process and build meaningful social relationships that help them cope with being away from family and friends in their first year of study. Using Lego play and involving students in Lego workshops and competitions encourages students to interact with each other and discuss challenging theoretical concepts and media theories. Further exploratory studies are required to fully understand the positive implications of using Lego play in HE.



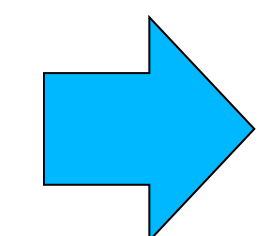
(Students working together in the newsroom, September 2019. Photo: Dr. Bianca Fox)

References

1. Cavaliero, T. (2015). 'Creative blocs': action research study on the implementation of Lego as a tool for reflective practice with social care practitioners. Journal of Further and Higher Education.
2. Gauntlett, D. (2007). Creative Explorations: New Approaches to Identities and Audiences. U.K.: Routledge.
3. Tan, C., Pamuk, M., Donder, A. (2013). Loneliness and Mobile Phone. Procedia-Social and behavioural Sciences 103, 606-611, available online at www.sciencedirect.com

Have any comments or suggestions?

For feedback



Email Dr. Bianca Fox