

Chapter 5

Ludic Approaches to Teaching and Learning: Facilitating the Emotional Self at Work in Higher Education

Catherine Hayes

University of Sunderland, UK

ABSTRACT

Ludic approaches to the everyday tasks faced in higher education have become a receptacle for individuality, creativity, and the acknowledgement of the value of individual thought processes. Thoughts, meanings, and emotions are not just an embedded part of or neatly contained within people; rather they exist as connectors within and between human individualities as part of wider collective aims, values, and experience. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an insight into how ludic approaches to learning and teaching have the capacity to facilitate the emotional self at work in the context of higher education. An insight into the use of the Lego Serious Play method is used in illustrating how gamification can impact upon processes of critical introspection and reflexivity.

THE NOTION OF ‘LUDIC APPROACHES’ AND ‘SERIOUS PLAY’

When childhood dies, its corpses are called adults and they enter society, one of the politer names of hell. That is why we dread children, even if we love them, they show us the state of our decay. ~Brian Aldiss (1925-2017)

For the purposes of this chapter, ‘ludic’ is defined as the capacity to play or integrate games into everyday interaction and dialogue. Delineating this from the conceptual foundation of ‘serious play’ is important in terms of the relative purpose both can serve in the context of Higher Education (HE). Whereas serious play combines ideas from constructionism, which has been widely critiqued in relation to the seminal work of Piaget (Sutton-Smith, 1966) and its subsequent progressive development (Harel and Papert’s

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-3519-6.ch005

Complex Adaptive System Theory (1991) which was evaluated by Holland (1996) in terms of application to management and organisational infrastructure, ludic approaches are far less formal, and within them, a creative, lateral approach to thinking about complex issues is encouraged as a mechanism of ‘thinking outside the box.’ The author’s own pedagogical contributions to the literature have applied the concept of ‘serious play’ to learning and teaching in postgraduate level nursing (a contextually and situationally specific environment in United Kingdom (UK) HE). Within this research, the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® (LSP®) method was chosen for its specific capacity to engage students in activity that can lead to deeper reflection and collective constructive dialogue (Hayes, 2015). Albeit a contextually different setting, the pedagogical research of Dann (2018) echoes this work, in which he outlines the concept of knowledge co-creation with students.

OPERATIONALLY DEFINING ‘PLAY’

In common with other contexts of ‘adult play’, LSP® method can be operationally defined as ‘play’ for the purposes of this study since it involves the imaginary, it is limited in time and space and is structured by rules (James, 2015). Children are progressively educated out of being creative and away from using play to constructively ‘think’ laterally as they are gradually both collectively and individually shaped and guided away from playfulness to the characteristic format of taught disciplinary signature pedagogies (Robinson and Aronica, 2015). These metaphorical silos of learning often have a negative impact on the potential for emotional freedom, free thinking, and consequently, the emotional self (Resnick and Robinson 2017).

In contrast to traditional approaches adopted to engage students in critical self-reflection, particularly in nursing and allied health disciplines, the LSP method has become a recognized means of capturing individualism and the acknowledgment of the value of individual thought processes. It is at this stage that whilst we can acknowledge the emotional self as something intrinsically private that it ought also to be acknowledged that thoughts meanings and emotions are rarely, if ever, just held within people, rather they exist between human individualities as part of wider collective aims, values, and experiences at community or societal levels (Kristiansen and Rasmussen, 2014; Schulz and Geithner, 2014). Kestly’s (2014) insight into the interpersonal neurology of play, specifically examined the subcortical motivational systems in the brain. Her findings revealed that playing with blocks powerfully influences the decision making processes and fundamental behaviors that are regulated in higher brain regions. She also highlighted the notion of ‘thinking with your fingers’, where the physical processes of creation facilitate reflection, which is such an integral part of the profession/vocation of any practicing healthcare professional, for example.

Within that definitive interrelationship between psychology and neuroscience, cognitive processes such as learning and memory are strongly influenced by the way the human body is used to interact with the world (Claxton, 2015). The term *emergence* is the hallmark of connection with right mode processing of the brain, which attends to what is happening ‘in the present moment/here and now’ within the emerging flow of new experience (Schore, 2018). When added to the already active left mode, this is actually the zone of creativity, which is of direct significance to the LSP method. In turn, planning the right mode in the lead is pivotal in allowing what has not yet been thought to emerge via the hands and gives natural integration of the brain for something never before imagined (Corballis, 2017). The process of play is thus temporal and uniquely specific to that particular moment in time in which it occurs. It also

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