

Re-Imagine Learning: High-Level reflections from an Ecosystem



LEGO Foundation and Ashoka Globalizer Ecosystem Day,
17, June 2016

The LEGO Foundation's view on quality learning

A child's inherent ability to play is paramount in the early years and is the catalyst for learning competencies that prepares the child for learning throughout a lifetime.



From when they are born, children need to learn and grow in environments that support their holistic development, well-being, and natural curiosities to learn through engaging and meaningful interactions with caring adults. Research indicates that one important way this is naturally developed is through quality play experiences that spark children's curiosity for deeper learning.

It is within the caregiver-child relationship that children explore the world around them, learning what they are capable of doing, and beginning to form ideas about themselves and others. This is also when young children make meaning of the world around them. We need to ensure that caregivers create safe, stimulating environments and experiences that inspire children.

When children transition to the formal educational system, it is important to continue to provide opportunities to further develop holistic skills that may influence competence later in life. Quality learning that is not only focused on curriculum but also mirrors later educational experiences.

How children learn is as important as what they learn, and children should be co-creators of their learning experiences with teachers who build on what children know and extend their competencies through scaffolding. Learning environments should be intellectually stimulating and promote social interactions among students.

Quality learning happens best when teachers receive training on pedagogical practices rooted in child development along with approaches to learning that are adaptable to individual differences. New knowledge about how children learn should be provided to all teachers with time to apply a playful mindset that allows the teacher to be curious and build a culture of inquiry and exploration around them.

Alongside teachers, parents and community members are important partners within educational systems to support their child's ongoing learning journey. The LEGO Foundation believes that it is equally important for societies and governments to discuss key recommendations for excellence when it comes to stimulating quality learning. We are dedicated to building evidence and advocacy efforts that continue to highlight the importance of quality learning through play.



The Re-Imagine Learning: High Level Reflections from an Ecosystem

Report by Mirjam Schöning, Vice President, LEGO Foundation
and David Gauntlett, Professor of Creativity and Design, University of Westminster



The Re-Imagine Learning Globalizer Summit, organized in partnership between the LEGO Foundation and Ashoka, took place at the LEGO London Hub, on 17–19 June 2016. The first of these three days was the Ecosystem Day, which brought together 60 participants from business, philanthropy, INGOs and academia, among them colleagues from the LEGO Group, representatives from the H&M Foundation, Ikea Foundation, SOS Children's Villages, BabyCenter and the Global Partnership for Education, to meet and exchange ideas with the social entrepreneurs.

The Globalizer process began at the end of last year, with the selection of 16 social entrepreneurs whose models were ripest for scale from among the pool of entrepreneurs identified earlier through the Re-Imagine Learning Challenge and an additional selection process. Over the last six months, the selected social entrepreneurs have been through an intensive process to develop and refine their scaling strategies, with consulting advice on a weekly basis from Ashoka's pro-bono support partners such as McKinsey. The Summit was the culmination of this process.



Summing up key Ecosystem Day learnings



The power of a flourishing ecosystem

If the people, organisations and institutions in our ecosystem can recognise each other, see their interconnectedness, and work together to bring about a world of learning through play, that will be so much more successful than hundreds of isolated struggles. We need to identify what we have in common to achieve long-term goals, and to bring about stronger, richer ecosystems where we know how to leverage each other.



The mindset challenge

The slow progress of the movement towards learning through play internationally is not because we lack ideas or evidence. It is because mindsets are so hard to change. When people experience the power of learning through play, and can see the change in children's lives, it takes on so much more meaning – so we need to create more opportunities for people – including decision-makers – to really experience the difference that learning through play can make.



Scaling by building together

There are many initiatives which we want to see scaled, from the inspiring work of the social entrepreneurs, to the global movements for change which involve Ashoka, the LEGO Foundation, and others. We can grow all these things together if we recognise the shared need to do so. Social entrepreneurs are vital as innovators and catalysts, but the responsibility for change goes deeper and wider.



An ecosystem pulling together

Just as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes the support of the ecosystem to scale innovations. As Gregory Dees has put it, we need to 'accept scale as a shared responsibility' – recognising that 'the challenge of social entrepreneurs achieving widespread and lasting impact is not just their challenge, it belongs to all of us and the solution requires action on many fronts by many players'.

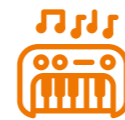


In our introduction to the day, we noted that an ecosystem of people, organisations and institutions which are concerned with education and learning already exists – but may not be especially 'self aware'. As in a natural ecosystem, there can be many different actors going about their business, unconcerned with what anyone else is doing – but, again just like in a natural ecosystem, they can still have huge impacts on each other, whether their knowledge, relationships and intentions are switched on or not.

The idea of bringing together representatives of the learning through play ecosystem was to spark recognition and connections, so that those in the ecosystem can work better together to achieve the goal that we all seek – transforming learning into a playful, creative and empowering experience for children.



Stimulating inputs



In a fascinating panel on Future Trends in Play and Learning, Valerie Hannon, of The Innovation Unit, argued that we need to shift focus from a knowledge-based economy to a 'wisdom based society'. She presented definitions of the learning ecosystem which proposed that it 'enhances teaching and learning uncoupled from traditional educational institutions', and represents 'an interdependent system of individual and institutional providers that support human learning across the full lifecycle'.

She showed a diagram with a matrix of formal and informal learning on one axis, and established and new providers on the other.

Although the quadrant identified as a 'new paradigm' seems to be the most exciting – at the intersection of informal learning and new providers – Hannon emphasised, in keeping with the ecosystem day approach, that all actors in the system had a significant role to play.

Hannon also captured imaginations with this insight from the US-based organisation, LRNG: 'Across our cities and online, there is an unprecedented abundance of learning opportunities. What young people need is access, inspiration and guidance — something no one institution alone can provide'.



	Formal Learning	Informal Learning
Existing Providers	improving	supplementing
New Entrants Entrepreneurs Partnerships	reinventing	new paradigm

Paul Lindley, CEO and founder of Ella's Kitchen, put on his Elvis mask and argued that we now live in a VUCA world – 'Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous' – which means that we need new thinking and new approaches to solutions. The shift means that our education system must promote empathy, teamwork, communication and collaboration, and it highlights the importance of entrepreneurs, risk takers and outliers to spark changed thinking. People's trust in both institutions and individuals has diminished, but we are willing to accept the collective view of the informed 'crowd' – as on TripAdvisor or Mumsnet. In these changed times, Lindley argued, we should 'grow down' to rediscover the viewpoint of our inner toddler – inquisitive, playful and brave.

Julia Goldin, Executive Vice President and Chief Marketing Officer of the LEGO Group placed a particular emphasis on the significance of the maker movement, which has led a major shift towards recognition of experimentation and tinkering, and do-it-yourself creativity. She noted the success of the coding platform Scratch, the key to which is the 4 P's of creative learning highlighted by Mitch Resnick at the LEGO Idea Conference: Projects, Peers, Passion and Play. It was observed that these 4 P's also served as a guide to the success of all the initiatives in the Globalizer.



'Children are not the future, they are the now. We always say that the principles of play are actually the principles of design thinking. It starts with acts of the heart, the head, the hands, and hope'

– Kiran bir Sethi, Design for Change

Insightful outcomes

Of course, every one of the 16 social entrepreneurs participating in the Globalizer can tell an amazing story of how they overcame multiple barriers to convert their ideas into action and 're-imagine' learning on a large scale. To highlight the incredible range of ideas and innovation in that group, we enjoyed three short talks from Oliver Percovich of Skateistan, Karima Grant of ImagiNation Afrika, and Kiran bir Sethi of Design for Change. In each case – as so many times before – we were moved and delighted by their passionate stories of bringing equity, inspiration, opportunity and hope to diverse communities.



'We were able to support girls to show how amazing they could be at skateboarding because nobody had made rules forbidding it. They were 'just playing', and nobody ever takes play seriously enough. These skateboarding girls then go and talk in the Afghan parliament, they go to UN conferences in Sweden, in Germany, and around the world. These are street working kids from the streets of Kabul, girls who had no opportunities, getting to represent Afghan youth around the world through the bridge that the skateboard created.'

– Oliver Percovitch, Skateistan

The short presentations were really stimulating, but the greater part of the day was spent in an interactive, playful, creative exercise – building the barriers to learning through play, and then working out how to overcome them, using a version of the LEGO Serious Play process.

In the first half, some striking representations of the barriers emerged. For instance, Aleta Margolis of the Center for Inspired Teaching showed a LEGO plate covered with minifig heads, and another covered with just bodies. She explained: 'This is how the school system currently perceives children. We just engage the heads of children and disregard the rest of their bodies. We ask them to sit still when learning, but there is a reason why they have bodies and we should strive to engage the whole child'.

The highest circulation paper, written and printed by young people and dated

The Global Times

London, United Kingdom

Friday, June 17th 2010

REACTION OF KIDS:

HISTORICAL MUSEUM
OF SCHOOLS JUST
INAUGURATED

WHAAT?!

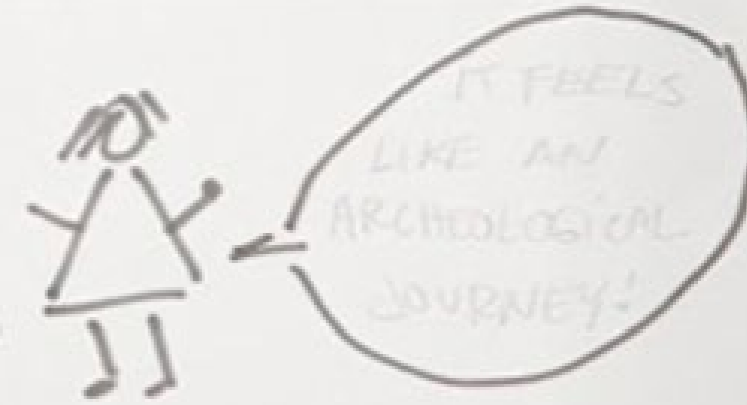
RELIQS IN EXHIBIT:

-STANDARDIZED TESTS



-PICTURES OF OLD STYLE
CLASSROOMS

-AN OLD DICTIONARY
WITH THE WORD 'FAILURE'



INTERACTIVE SHOW EXPLAINS
HOW IT ALL CHANGED:
IT ALL STARTED WITH AN
ELEPHANT IN THE LEGO HUB

Many of the barriers were about the need to change mindsets, and the difficulties in doing so. Part of the explanation was seen to be that adults cannot picture a viable alternative, and have not experienced one. They merely think of how school was for them, and assume that it is kind of inevitable, and should be reproduced.

Vishal Talreja of Dream a Dream offered a moving story from India which illustrates the inertia in the system, and the power of the mindset as a barrier. The story began with a baby elephant, which was chained to a tree and could only move within a narrow radius. As the elephant grew up, it became stronger and stronger, and the chain became weaker over time. But the elephant spent the rest of his life within the same circle, unaware that he had gained enough strength to break free from the chain.

By the end of the day, participants had developed visions of a world beyond today's barriers, imagining the situation in 2050 where learning through play is widely embraced as necessary and essential.

In this world, play-based learning would be enshrined in law as a human right. Some visions saw schools being closed altogether, replaced by systems where children and adult learners are given the tools to explore whatever they want to learn about, in a collaborative, collective, community-based context. People could use every place as a site of learning. Other visions retained the school as at least part of the learning mix, but with children encouraged to be positively disruptive and empowered learners, setting their own learning agendas and making their own discoveries through play and experimentation.

Find out more about the movement for learning through play at our joint website:

www.changemakers.com/play2learn

and visit the LEGO Foundation at www.legofoundation.com

Write and illustrate a 'Breaking news' story that a big barrier has been overcome. Explain how particular actions, taken in 2010, have led to overcoming the barrier, including learning through play.

Participants

Name	Organization	Name	Organization
Caroline Arnold	Aga Khan Foundation	Afzal Habib	Kidogo
Nathalia Mesa	aieoTU	Vineet Bawtra	Omidyar Network
Ross Hall	Ashoka	Tina Hyder	Open Society Foundation
Paula Recart	Ashoka	Tom Gilliford	RSA
Caroline Guyot	Ashoka	Oliver Percovich	Skateistan
Tim Scheu	Ashoka	Sofia Garcia Garcia	SOS Children's Villages
Maria Zapata	Ashoka	Sharath Jeevan	STIR Education
Daphne Metland	Babycenter	Gaby Arenas	TAAP Foundation
Shelley Kuipers	Better Ventures	Valerie Hannon	The Innovation Unit
Lewis Temple	BRAC UK	Mirjam Schöning	The LEGO Foundation
Abha Thorat Shah	British Asian Trust	Zelda Yanovich	The LEGO Foundation
Brandee Butler	C&A Foundation	Hanne Rasmussen	The LEGO Foundation
Aleta Margolis	Center for Inspired Teaching	Per Havgaard	The LEGO Foundation
Robin Horn	Children's Investment Fund Foundation	Fiona Smith	The LEGO Foundation
Montserrat del Pozo	Colegio Montserrat	Diego Adame	The LEGO Foundation
Monika Horch	Colegio Montserrat	Frederikke	The LEGO Foundation
Kiran Bir Sethi	Design For Change	Janet Kroes	The LEGO Group
Vishal Talreja	Dream a Dream	Julia Goldin	The LEGO Group
Paul Lindley	Ella's Kitchen	David Pallash	The LEGO Group
Adam Lancaster	Financial Times	Anna Bacarese-Hamilton	The LEGO Group
Gib Bulloch	Formerly ADP	Olivia Lankester	The LEGO Group
David Rothschild	Fossil Foundation	Carrie Fade	The LEGO Group
Luis Guggenberger	Fundacion Telefonica	Michael Kehlet	The LEGO Group
Raul Mendoza	Germinalia	Cecilia Weckstrom	The LEGO Group
Celina de Sola	Glasswing International	Liz Sklaroff	The LEGO Group
Karen Mundy	Global Partnership for Education	Lars Silberbauer	The LEGO Group
Obum Ekeke	Google	Bali Padda	The LEGO Group
Luisa Book	H&M Foundation	Tarun Varma	University of Oxford
Umesh Malhotra	Hippocampus Learning Centers	David Gauntlett	University of Westminster
Jeffrey Defries	icould	Kabir Vajpeyi	Vinyas Society/BaLA
Patrick Obonyo	Ikea Foundation	Beau Crowder	Vitol Foundation
Karima Grant	ImagiNation Afrika	Thorsten Kiefer	WASH United
Mike McGilliard	Imagination Foundation		

