

WHAT A STORY THAT COULD HAVE BEEN

Story-making and telling

By **Sergio Hernandez Ledward** and **Martijn Nas**

Sergio: It was my second time at the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® (LSP) global community meeting in Billund when I presented the results of my LSP workshop about the lack of urban forestry in my hometown in México. A smiling self-confident facilitator wearing orange glasses approached me and shouted “Hi, you are a fellow Scout right!” It’s a pity you can’t see my surprised face at that moment in time, as I am sure it showed. Who the hell is this guy... and how does he know that, was there a picture of a campfire? WHAT DID I DO OR SAY IN MY PRESENTATION???

From that day we had more than just amazing conversations. We facilitated together in Turkey, the Netherlands and Germany, Colombia and Malaysia and we have planned trips for Finland, Kenya and more this year, we even started writing. We are having fun, but above all we became friends.

And now we start the other story

We could continue and share with you experiences of our workshops, but we decided to share more insight than our stories alone, because stories are super-powerful tools for us humans. Some studies state that they played a huge role in brain development some 200,000 years ago. Imagine our ancestors around an ancient fire, fighting the cold and wild animals, cooking their meals, and creating myths to give meaning to their lives and telling life lessons to stay alive. These moments made them bond together and create communities. When humans invented stories, they started speaking not just about the tangible world with all its perils but also about the intangible one where dreams and meanings reside. From that moment on we haven’t stopped sharing stories, every human culture has used them to convey its learnings, values, and wisdom to the next generation.

The Language of a story

When we, Sergio and Marti-

jn, go back to what we’re good at, NLP communication differentiates two levels: surface structure and deep structure. Surface structure refers to our words, gestures, voice tonalities; in short what we say and how we say it. While the deep structure is the unseen part of communication referring to meanings, values, and intentions. We can observe it as an iceberg with the visible part being the surface structure and the hidden part that floats in the sea is the deep structure, full of meanings. When seeing communication this way, NLP invites us to use two different language movements. Downwards (from surface to deep structure) therefore being very specific, avoiding generalisations, omissions, and distortions. Upwards, speaking in a deliberate and vague manner so every listener is free to assign their own meaning to the phrases used.

The benefits of this kind of communication have been researched lately. This century has seen a huge boom in neurosciences and now we know

that good, told stories generate - both on the storyteller and the audience - dopamine, oxytocin and endorphins, a beautiful biochemical cocktail for our brains. Dopamine increases focus, motivation, and memory, it is the hormone of curiosity and learning. Oxytocin creates trust, human bonds, and relaxation; your brain generates it through empathy and vulnerability. Endorphins are released when we laugh, and it takes us to a state of creative relaxed focus. It is not a mystery that stories are much more powerful than tools such as PowerPoint. Stories ensure deeper learning, and we can even say that a species we are not 'Homo Sapiens' but 'Homo Sapiens Narratio': the humans that seek wisdom in stories.

Familiarising with story-making and telling

Story-making is embedded in LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® and we practise it all around the world. It typically starts by introducing the following three stages:

- Familiarising with constructing
- Familiarising with giving meanings and metaphors
- Building a story, yourself

And with those skills we move on to using the techniques of the LSP Method. Though let's be careful because just pointing to a model and explaining its features is not - per se - story-making. As Per Kristiansen and Robert Rasmussen say in their book 'Building a Better Business using the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® Method': Contrary to the classic use of the LEGO brick to build models of the tangible world, the brick in LSP is used to build stories about the intangible



Martijn and Sergio

world. The focus is not on the bricks; it is on the story they create.

As facilitators we know we use LSP to make the intangible concrete, as every question posed will create depth and new insights. NLP helps us to deepen that even more. It is through your line of questioning, that when a team is using the LEGO® bricks to imagine, explore, test, and decide, they can extract the 'deeper' lessons. Lessons from the past, lessons to better understand the present.

The story we are building!

Back to the beginning. Our aim through the LSP community is to create a better world by the stories, lessons, and shared visions for the future. Sitting around our campfire, the experience table with LEGO® bricks, and challenging our brain through 'hard fun'.

As always in our articles, we want to finish by leaving you with some questions and invite you to build models ... and

sharing your reflections and models with us.

- How do you use stories as an LSP facilitator?
- Where is LSP moving you toward?

We are sure you will find quite interesting answers, as we have had since our meeting in Billund. Happy story-playing!

*Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP) is a discipline that explores how people create and communicate models of reality (our inner AT1s), how we create shared understandings (invisible AT2s) and how to play meaningfully with the bricks that make up those models to improve our chances of success.

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