

Building the "Ideal Classroom" with Personal Construct Psychology and Lego®

Prompt Sheet



June 2014

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Background

This technique has been developed as part of my Doctoral thesis, due for submission in June 2015. I have found it to be an engaging, fun and creative way of eliciting pupils’ views of their life in school.

Acknowledgements

This technique has been created with the kind support and guidance of Colette Soan, Sue Morris, Helen Newbery, Rachna Rawal (University of Birmingham), Jane Williams (Dudley Educational Psychology Service), Heather Moran (Coventry CAMHS) and Walsall Educational Psychology Service.

Equipment

- Lego® Build To Express Kit 45110 (available from Lego® Education for approx £40).
- Lego® minifigure accessories are available cheaply from online auction sites. I included:
 - 1) Domestic animals.
 - 2) Food.
 - 3) School equipment (Harry Potter Hogwarts Classroom Kit 4721 is good, with the removal of the Harry Potter minifigure and mirror).
 - 4) Laptops.
 - 5) Kitchen equipment.
 - 6) Plastic Box for storage of all this Lego! This type is good as it has a removable tray. Online auction sites and high street stationary shops sell them.



- Plain white A4 Paper.
- Plain white A3 Paper (optional).
- Lined paper and black pen for making notes.
- Smart phone / tablet / camera to photograph the models (the name of the young person is not in the photograph).

Instructions

Throughout the task, the child builds the model and you write the labels. This ensures the young person focuses on the building of his/her model and that the labels are recorded accurately.

Part 1: Building the “Ideal Classroom”

Ask the young person to think about the kind of classroom they would like to have (I tend to use the term “dream classroom”). This is not a real classroom, but one they can dream of and use their imagination to create. Explain that a Lego® brick can represent anything they like and that there are no right or wrong ways of doing this activity.

As the young person makes their model and places items onto the base board, ask them questions such as “what’s that?”, “what’s happening here?” and “why is that important?” Write down their answers onto the plain white A4 paper, perhaps using the paper as a map of the model.

When the young person is happy with their model, photograph it and:

- a) If you have the facility to print off straight away, do so and stick the photo onto a sheet of plain white A3 paper and annotate together....or....
- b) If you need to print the photo off later then go through your notes with the young person, double checking you have understood their labels and explain you will be printing it off and annotating it later.

The Questions

You will now ask the young person 9 questions (adapted from Williams et al, 2007 and Kangas, 2010) and record their answers onto lined paper.

1. What are the most important things in this classroom?
2. What is your favourite thing in this classroom?
3. If you were to walk into this classroom, how would you feel?
4. If this classroom has rules, what would they be?
5. What are the students doing?
6. Tell me three things about the students.
7. What are the adults doing?
8. Tell me three things about the adults.
9. What happens at break time for the students of this classroom?

Part 2: Building the “Non-Ideal Classroom”

Ask the young person to think about the kind of classroom they would NOT like to have (I tend to use the term “worst classroom”). This is not a real classroom, but one they can use their imagination to create. Explain that a Lego® brick can represent anything they like and that there are no right or wrong ways of doing this activity.

As the young person makes their model and places items onto the base board, ask them questions such as “what’s that?”, “what’s happening here?” and “why is that in your worst classroom?” Write down their answers onto the plain white A4 paper, perhaps using the paper as a map of the model.

When the young person is happy with their model, photograph it and:

- c) If you have the facility to print off straight away, do so and stick the photo onto the plain white A3 paper and annotate together....or....
- d) If you need to print the photo off later then go through your notes with the young person, double checking you have understood their labels and explain you will be printing it off and annotating it later.

The Questions

You will now ask the young person 9 questions (adapted from Williams et al, 2007 and Kangas, 2010) and record their answers onto lined paper.

1. What are the most important things in this “worst classroom”?
2. What is the worst thing in this classroom?
3. If you were to walk into this classroom, how would you feel?
4. If this “worst classroom” has rules, what would they be?
5. What are the students doing?
6. Tell me three things about the students.
7. What are the adults doing?
8. Tell me three things about the adults.
9. What happens at break time for the students of this classroom?

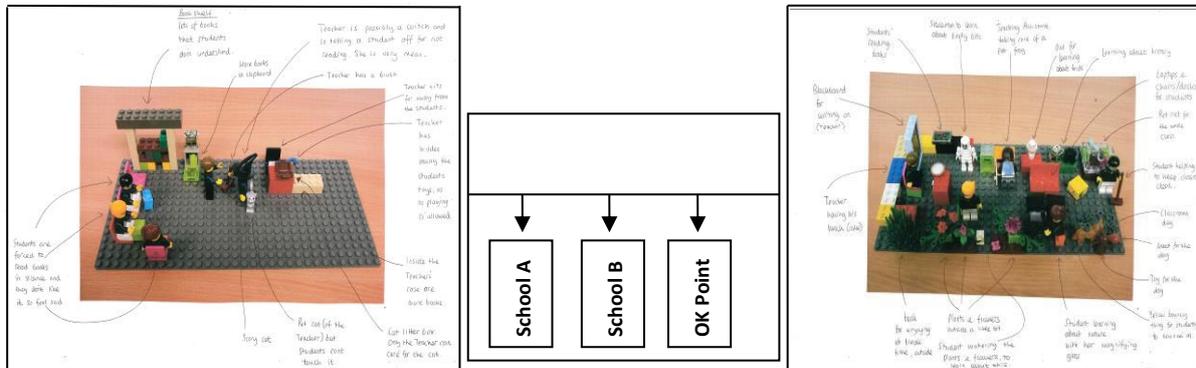
Part 3: Discussion

The final step is ensuring you have understood what the young person has expressed through this work. Clarify what you feel they have said in terms of what they feel they would not like in their classroom. Discuss who can view the photographs and if possible, give them a copy of the photographs to take away.

Part 4: Optional

Mapping Development and Progression towards the “Ideal Classroom”

This technique can be expanded on by applying Heather Moran’s rating technique. Place the two drawings on the table with the “Non-Ideal classroom” to the left and the “Ideal Classroom” to the right. Place a piece of A4 plain white paper in between them, landscape orientation, with a line across the middle, as shown below.



Current and previous schools (or subjects) can be plotted onto the line, along with an “OK point”. Ask the young person if there is anything that can be done to move towards the “OK point” and what the differences are between those plotted on the line.

Sample Report

This is how I have presented a young person’s views of their “Ideal Classroom” in a recent report:

“The students are doing group work”.

“I would feel happy in this classroom as it’s not noisy”.

“You can see the trees outside”.

“There are cupboards to keep my stuff in so it doesn’t get lost”.

“The teacher is calm and helpful and is looking for naughty children”.

“There is a naughty seat for children who are naughty”. “It’s important to be told off if you do something wrong”.

“The students can have extra time with their teacher to do their work if they need to”.

“If you are over excited after playtime you can chill first then learn”.

“We can bring in small stuff from home to show our friends”.

Get in Touch

Feel free to contact me for more information or with questions and comments at:

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