



Legotherapy: The Use of Building Toys in Play Therapy with children and Young People

René Schubert *

***Correspondence to:** René Schubert,

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Received: 21 October 2025

Published: 01 November 2025

Summary

This article explores the use of Lego building toys as a therapeutic and educational tool in play therapy with children and young people. Based on an analysis of Lego's origins and evolution, the text discusses how it is incorporated into the clinical setting to foster children's motor, emotional, and social development. It also reports on the benefits of Lego therapy for children with emotional difficulties and conditions such as autism spectrum disorder, as well as its applications in the corporate context for developing communication and teamwork skills.

Keywords: *Legotherapy; Play Therapy; Education; Psychology.*

Introduction

Play is a fundamental activity in childhood, as it allows for the development of imagination, creativity, and motor and emotional skills. Among the many toys that offer these possibilities, Lego stands out for its versatility and creative potential, allowing children to experience a universe of constructions and possibilities. Through Lego pieces, it is possible to explore scenarios, create characters, and develop narratives, thus promoting a child's integral development. This article discusses how Lego, beyond being a toy, becomes a valuable therapeutic tool in play therapy, aiding both psychological assessment and the development of children's social and emotional skills.

1. History of Lego Toys

Lego was created in Denmark by carpenter Ole Kirk Christiansen in 1934, under the name "Leg Godt," which means "play well" in Danish. In Latin, the name refers to the expression "I join - I unite," highlighting the concept of unity and construction. Unlike other ready-made toys, Lego was designed to be a play system, with interconnecting pieces that offer endless combinations. This system allows for manual construction by fitting together, without the need for glue or adhesives, developing children's imagination, creativity, motor coordination, logical reasoning, and depth perception.

In the late 1990s, Lego established itself as one of the most popular toys in the world, and both children and adults use it in a variety of recreational and educational activities.

2. Lego in Play Therapy and Psychodiagnosis

Since beginning my clinical practice in 2001, I have observed children's fascination with Lego. By exploring the pieces, children experience the process of construction and deconstruction, learning about organization and resilience. Playing with Lego, in addition to aiding emotional expression, allows children to create characters, establish connections between them, and name emotions and beliefs, making it a rich therapeutic tool (Schubert, 2022). Through Lego, children reveal how they connect, communicate, and interact, demonstrating their skills and challenges in a playful and accessible way.

3. Lego-Based Therapy

Lego-based therapy was introduced by neuropsychologist Daniel Legoff, who in 2004 published the first study on the use of Lego in therapy with children. In his "Club Lego" model, Legoff brought children together in groups to achieve common goals using Lego. This practice is widely used with children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, promoting the development of social skills, self-esteem, and communication. Legoff demonstrated that children's natural interest in Lego facilitates motivation for therapeutic engagement and interaction with both the therapist and peers.

In countries such as Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Latin America, studies indicate the effectiveness of Lego therapy in contexts ranging from school to hospital environments (Legoff, 2019).

4. Lego as a Therapeutic and Educational Tool

Research and clinical practices by various health and education professionals reinforce the benefits of playing with Lego, especially for the development of language, cognition, socialization, and motor skills. According to Fonseca (2023), Lego also fosters skills such as concentration, discipline, and the ability to cope with frustration. Connor Ward (2018), on his YouTube channel, describes Lego as a system with rules, where everything must be built with patience and organization, which contributes to the development of resilience in children.

In Brazil, educational psychologist Karina Fonseca uses Lego in therapy for children with various conditions, including autism spectrum disorders and ADHD, to stimulate communication and socio-emotional skills. As Fonseca (2023) explains, "The Lego Therapy approach is based on the idea that children can communicate and express their feelings through manipulating bricks, a form of expression that is often less intimidating than verbal expression."

In this sense, some notes from my work presented in Brazil at a psychology conference: “There is something about Lego that always attracted children more than other toys, perhaps the colors, the shapes, the possibility of organization, segmentation, systematization – and then, through linking, connection and exchange, move on to something more therapeutic: building scenes, creating characters, relating characters, naming emotions and beliefs.” (Schubert, 2022)

5. Lego in the Corporate World - Lego Serious Play

Lego also developed Lego Serious Play, a method applied in the corporate world to facilitate communication and teamwork. Developed in Denmark, Lego Serious Play is used in over 100 countries, being applied in workshops on design thinking, innovation, problem-solving, team training, and situation simulation. Through this methodology, Lego bricks are used to create three-dimensional models that facilitate the development of strategies and the sharing of ideas in a visual and interactive way.

Final Considerations

The use of Lego as a therapeutic resource in play therapy has proven to be a powerful, multifaceted, and effective tool for promoting the emotional, cognitive, and social development of children and young people. Since the beginning of my clinical practice in 2001, I have adopted Lego as a central resource in my practice, serving a large number of children and young people with this modality. The results observed over the years have been largely positive, including:

- Establishing a therapeutic bond: Lego facilitates the creation of a safe and trusting bond between therapist and client, essential for the effectiveness of therapy;
- Naming and expressing emotions: by creating scenarios and characters, children can express their emotions and difficulties in a more natural and playful way;
- Recognition of difficulties and perception of different contexts: playing with Lego allows children to observe their own limitations and how to deal with them in different contexts;
- Motivation from challenges: the flexibility and infinite possibilities of building with Lego awaken the motivation to overcome challenges and persist in activities;
- Development of attention, memory and abstraction: assembling and imagining new constructions requires attention, memory and the ability to abstract and create;
- Stimulation of fine motor skills and figure and ground perception: handling Lego pieces contributes to motor development and understanding of spatial relationships;

- Storytelling and expanding vocabulary and cultural references: playing with Lego provides opportunities for creating stories, promoting verbal expression, the construction of narratives and the expansion of cultural references.

As I wrote in 2023: "I consider Lego to be a fantastic playful representation of adult human reality. A powerful ally in helping children make the transition from the world and imagination of childhood to the world and reality of adulthood—or in understanding and expressing them."

Therefore, the Lego building toy stands out as a robust playful-therapeutic instrument that, while entertaining and engaging, offers an infinite number of therapeutic possibilities for the integral development of children and young people, providing a more peaceful, enlightening, joyful and creative transition from the world of childhood to adult reality.

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