

SEDA Spring Conference 2024



Session Title: The serious role of play in educational development

Session Type: Lightening talk (10 mins)

Main presenter(s): Dr Aybige Yilmaz and Aga M Buckley, Kingston University (both presenters)

Co presenter(s): N/A

Session Summary: This Lightning Talk confronts the performative rhetoric of HE teaching and learning practice, proposing 'play' as not only another pedagogic strategy but an essential disposition that needs to be nurtured for a more sustainable and compassionate experience of working in academia. The presenters, based on their experience of working as educational developers, lecturers and course leaders, will discuss the challenges to adopting such a position and offer strategies utilised in their contexts of academic development.

Session Outline: Building on the growing body of literature that focuses on the importance of play in Higher Education (HE), the lightning talk focuses specifically on how play can improve the experience of being and working as an academic. Striving for academia to be a more sustainable and compassionate place, nurturing creative and original thought calls for taking play more seriously: a necessary balance against metrics and performance indicators of the neoliberal rhetoric.

Considering play in its broadest sense combines elements of exploration, discovery, experimentation, creation, and reflection that support and foster academic creativity through dialogue and collaboration. Seen this way, play offers an array of increasingly popular and valid pedagogical approaches which in their own right, provide an alternative avenue for HE teaching and learning spaces. However, how play is seen and understood often fails to realise its potential. In classroom spaces, being playful can be interpreted as gamifying to increase student motivation rather than using creativity and fun to facilitate effective active learning. In academic development sessions, play hardly manages to go beyond the 'fun, ice-breaker activity'. Play competes against the 'real' teaching, frequently dictated by data, institutional agendas and priorities, confirming internalised beliefs on what is (or is not) expected of HE educators.

The lightning talk discusses the challenges of taking play seriously, based on the presenters' varied experiences working as educational developers, lecturers, and course leaders. Introducing examples of teaching strategies utilised in contexts of academic development and student learning serves as an invitation to get silly and find joy in play as a powerful pedagogy for both students and educators.

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