Reading the world with Lego Serious Play

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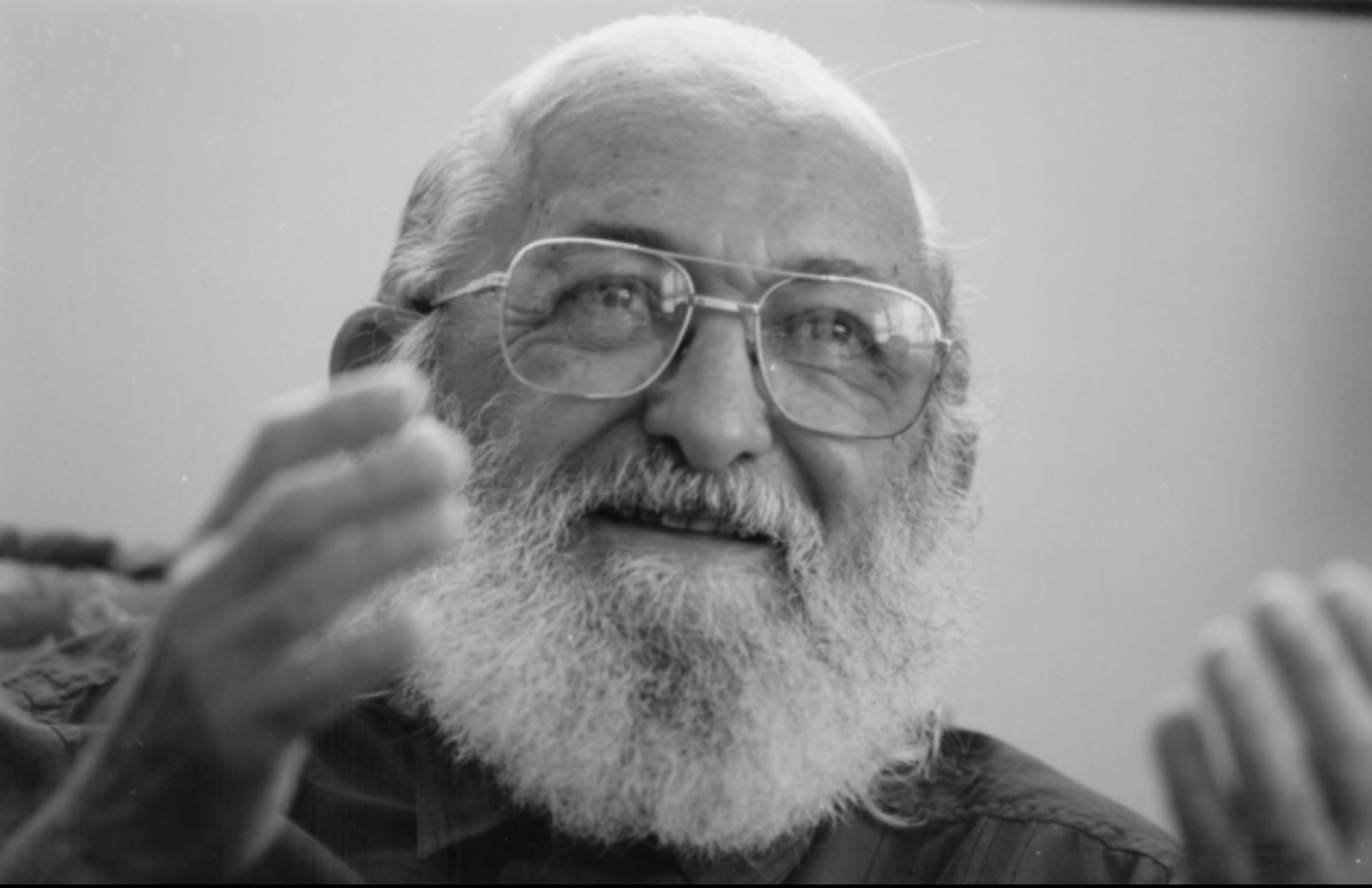
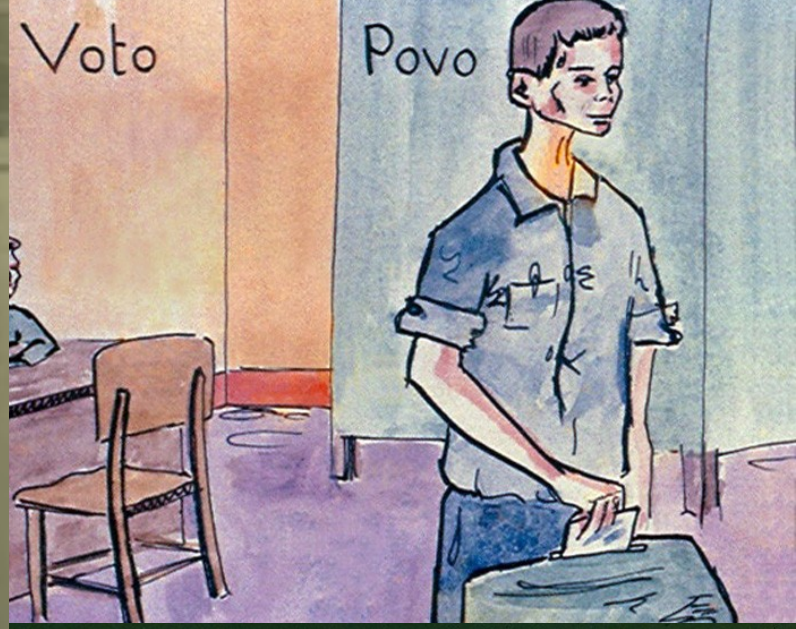


This is Paulo Freire (1921-1997), a Brazilian educator who made adult education a means to transform reality.

He did so in a context where illiterate people (40% of the Brazilian population, mostly in rural areas) could not vote.



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He devised a literacy method based on participatory research, visual codification, generative words, and dialogue.

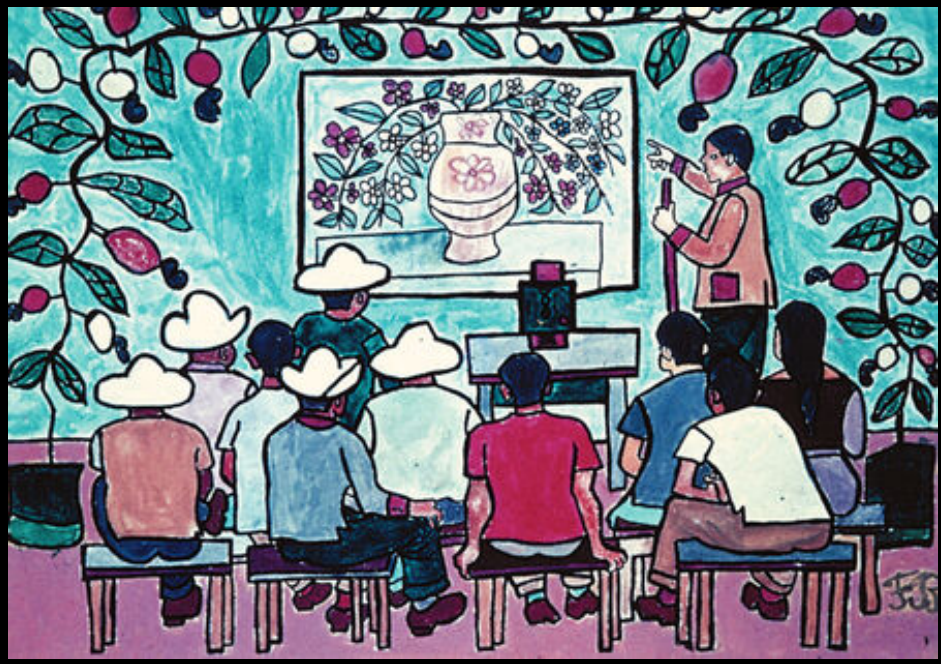
"Basically, the pictures of concrete situations enable the people to reflect on their former interpretation of the world before going on to read the word."

Paulo Freire (1983, p.11)

Generative image to support questioning the cultural relevance of a vase

Rereading knowledge codified in the world. Knowledge is not just codified into words.

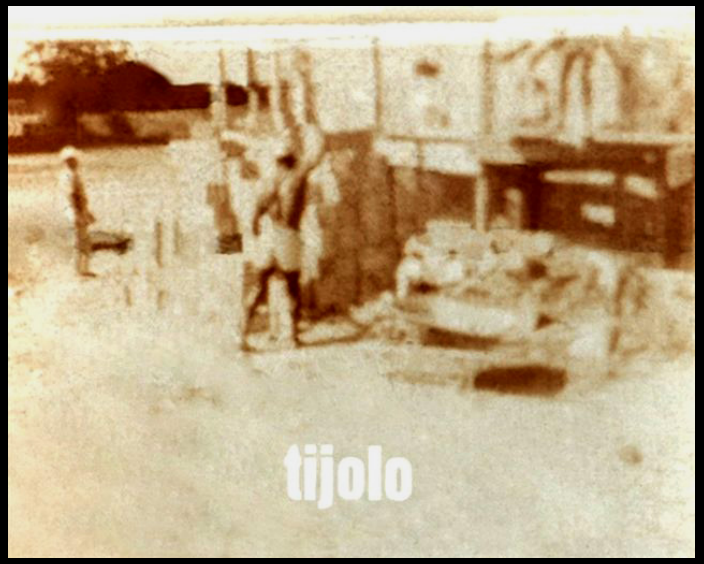
Generative image to support questioning the cultural relevance of dialogue

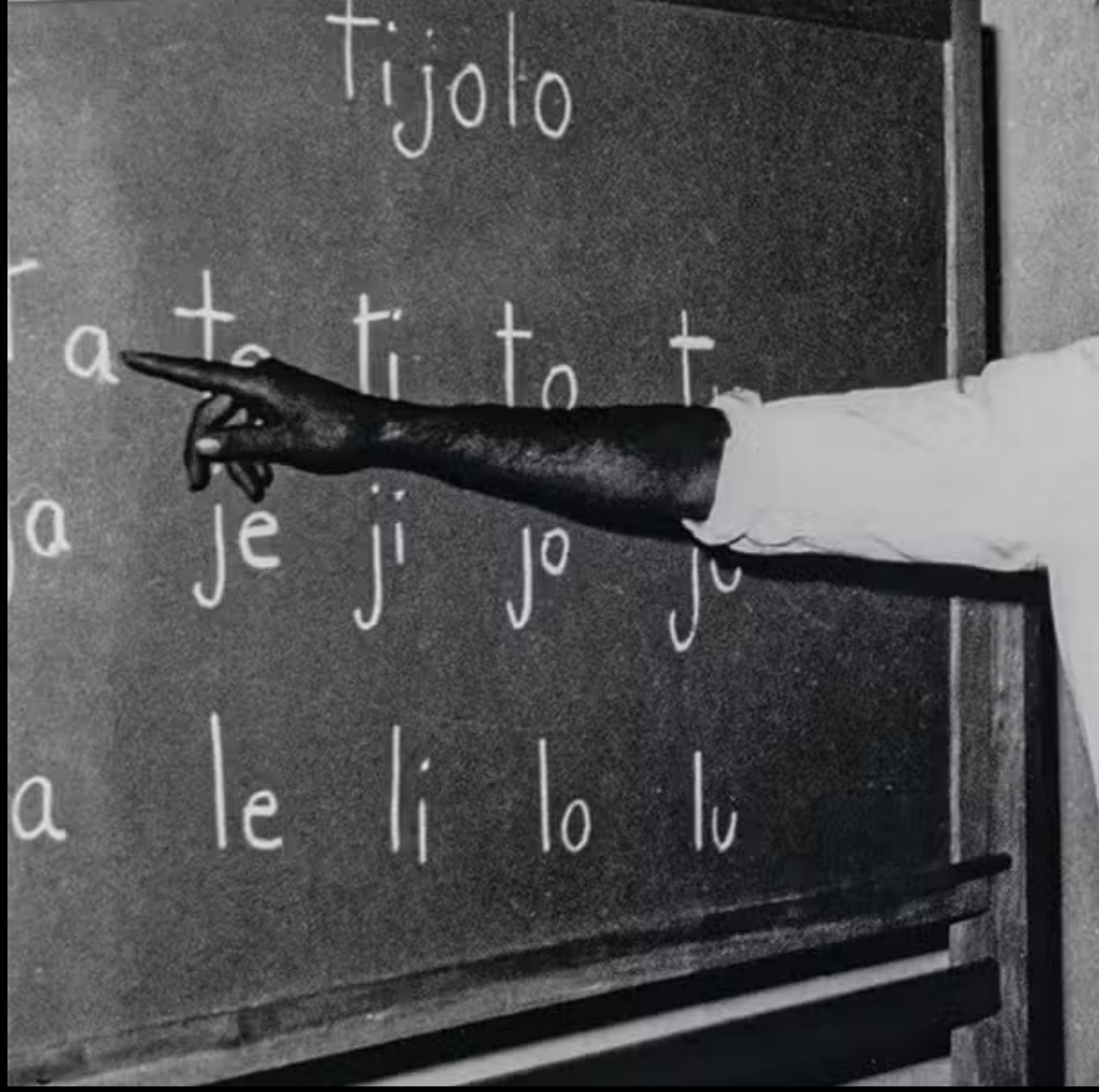


Rereading knowledge codified in the word. Words advance knowledge of the world.

"Reading the world precedes reading the word."

Paulo Freire (1983, p.5)





After presenting the image of a situation in which the word makes sense, the word was broken down into syllables, and these were altered with the remaining vowels.

Through this method, 300 rural workers in Angicos town learned how to read and write in only 40 contact-hours. The elections prospects changed dramatically.

Freire was persecuted, imprisoned, exiled, and his books were banned in many places, including Arizona.

We launched Design & Oppression Network to read Paulo Freire's books and reread the world (Van Amstel et al., 2021).

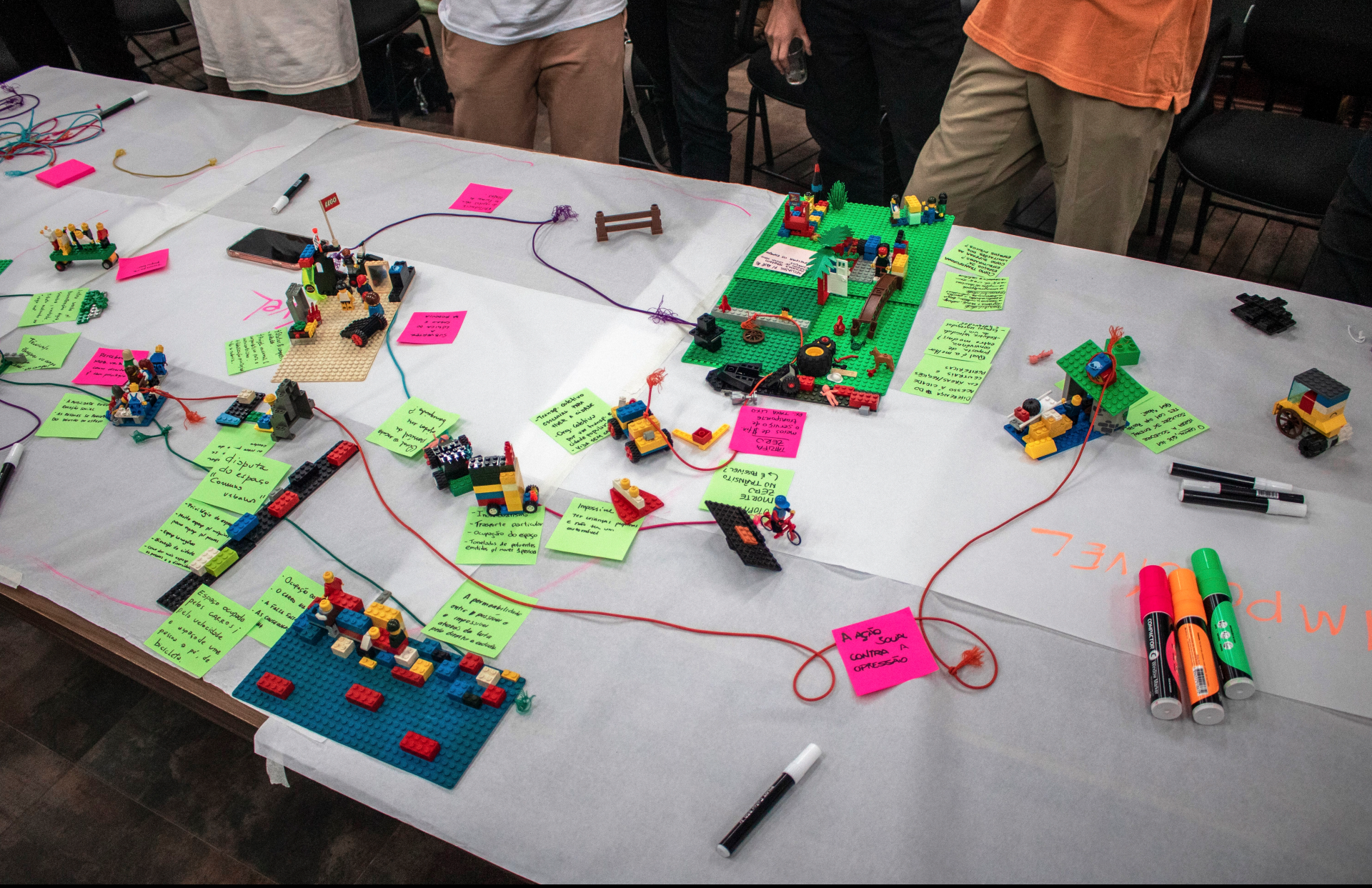
We experimented with many ways of reading and rewriting the designed world.

I was particularly drawn to experimenting with Lego. I already used this material for codesigning with users.

With Lego, codesigners can read/write the world as a system.

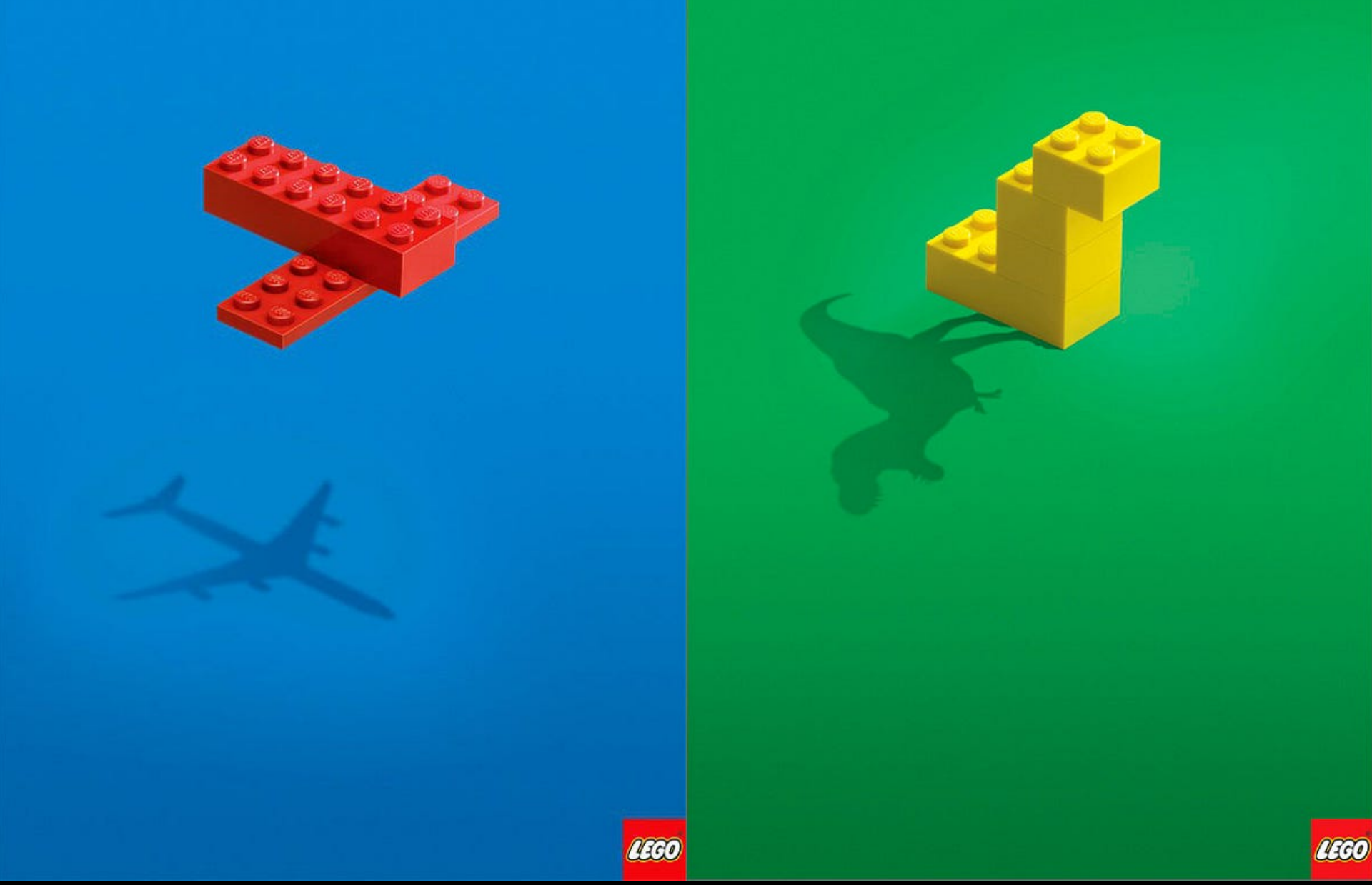
Lego is a microcosm of the modern world: mass-produced objects that can be combined and recombined into many designs.

The Lego Serious Play method enables the Lego block system to represent abstract systems of any kind, not just physical.



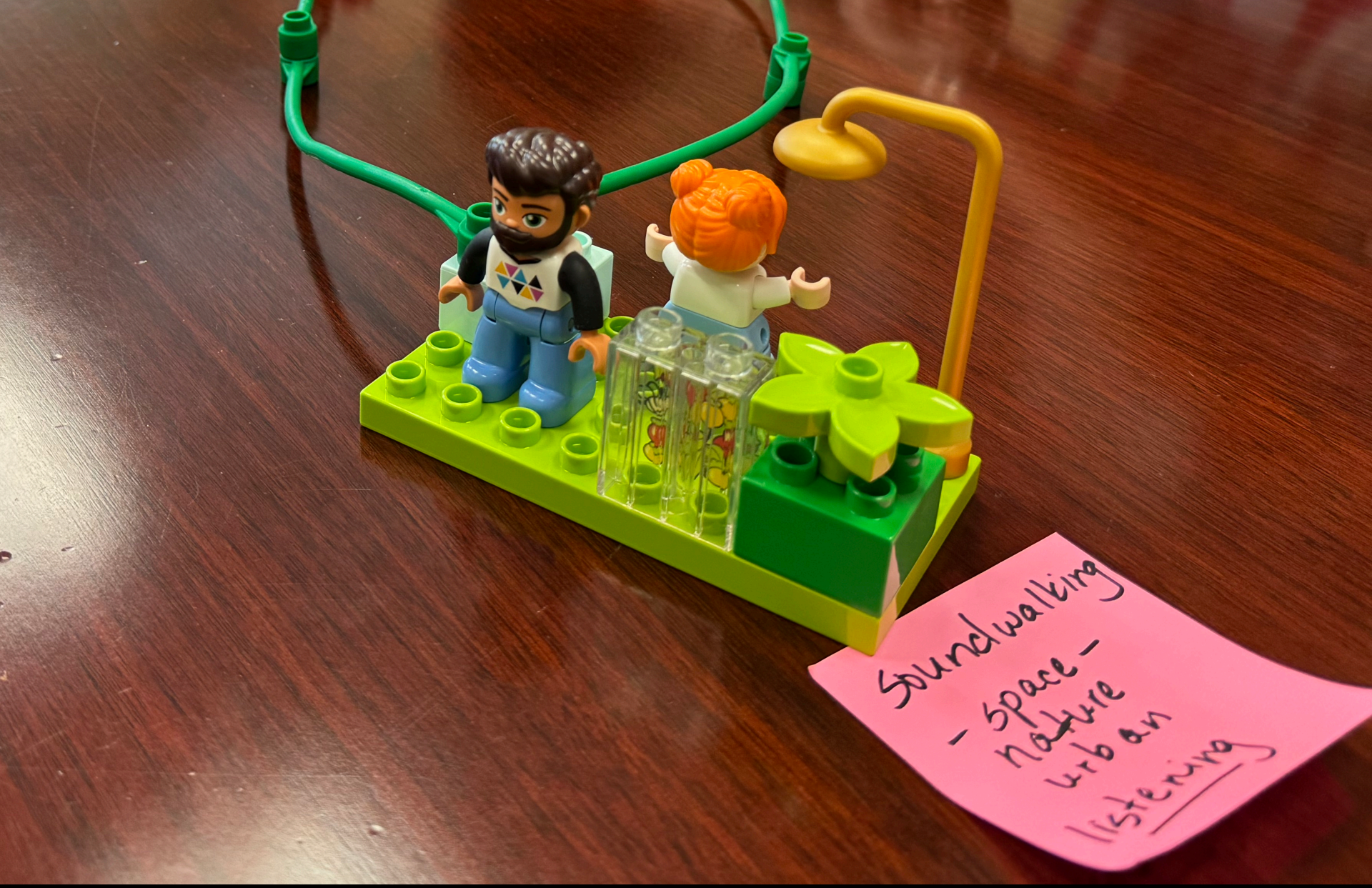
The mobility system of a city (Aliança para Mobilidade Popular).

The outreach system of UF’s College of the Arts.



Lego Serious Play relies on physical metaphors (Roos and Victor, 2018). A handful of building blocks can represent any object.

Lego Serious Play is particularly powerful when we don’t have obvious words to name our world.

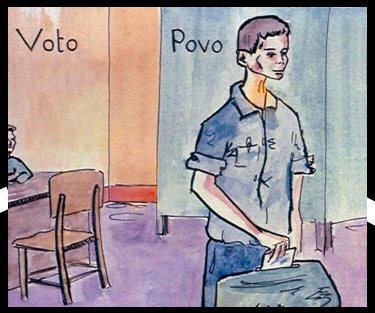


After the world is named with the metaphorical model, words are extracted from it and written down on sticky notes.

"To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new naming."

Paulo Freire (1970, p. 88)

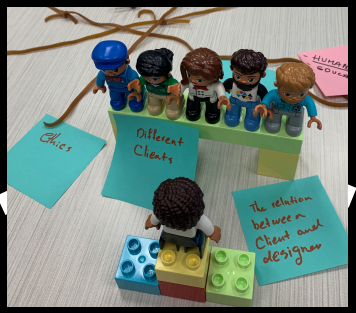
Paulo Freire Method



TEXT

CONTEXT

Expansive Design



DESIGN

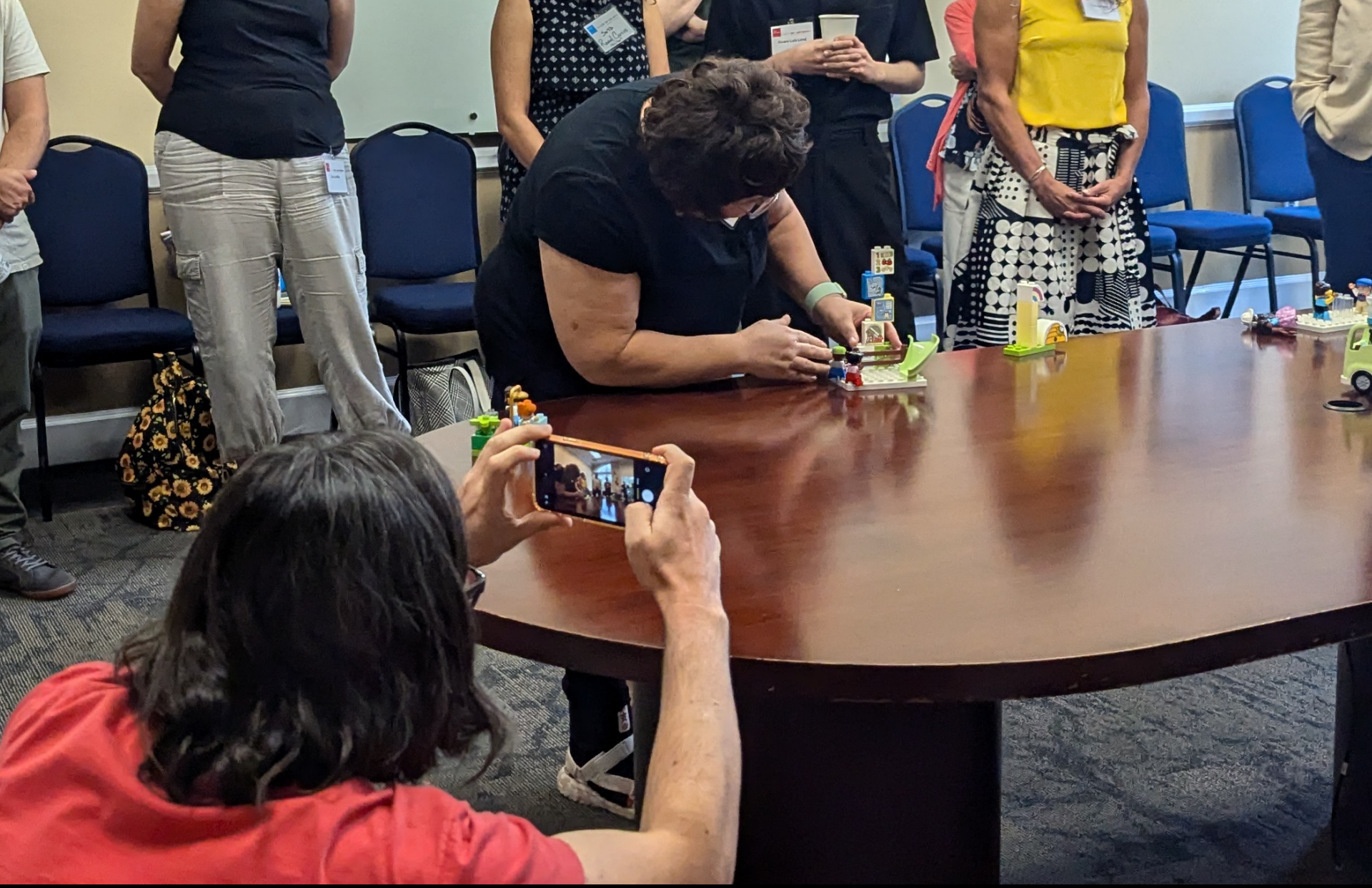
CODESIGN

Generative images can expand Lego Serious Play.

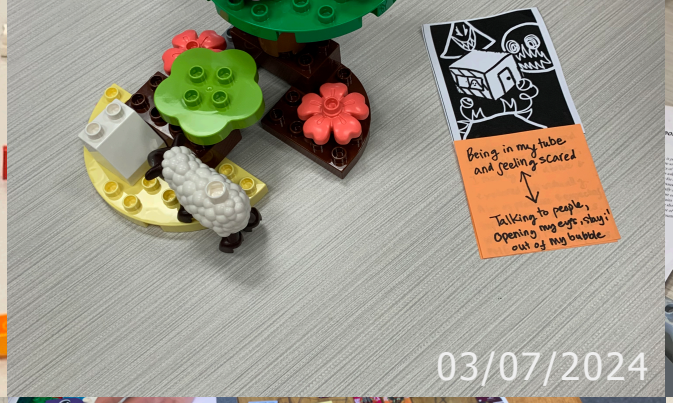
The pretext of play enables expressing sensitive issues that would otherwise go unaddressed.

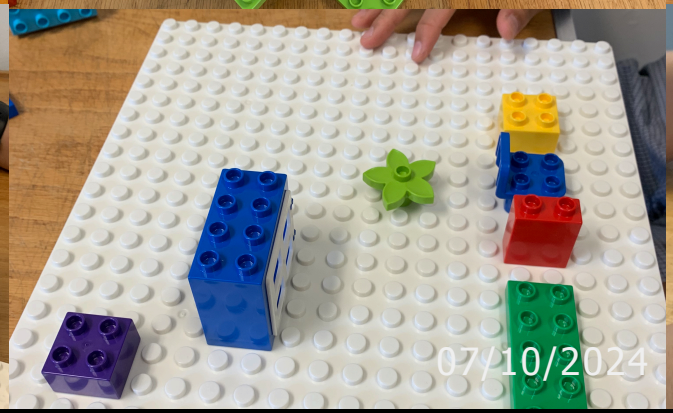
In initial stages of a project, it is easier and quicker to codesign with Lego than with other materials.

After many experiments, I discovered that Duplo is more accessible to those who do not have much building experience.



Recording the model presentation on the author’s smartphone lets that person watch and reflect further after the workshop.





Rereading the world and remaking the metaphorical model over time supports the slow emergence of breakthrough concepts.

Lego Serious Play models are generative objects: objects that generate other objects in a dialogical making activity.

Teachers who combine critical pedagogy with Lego Serious Play can literally avoid being "another brick on the wall."

Pink Floyd (1979)

References

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Thank you!

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