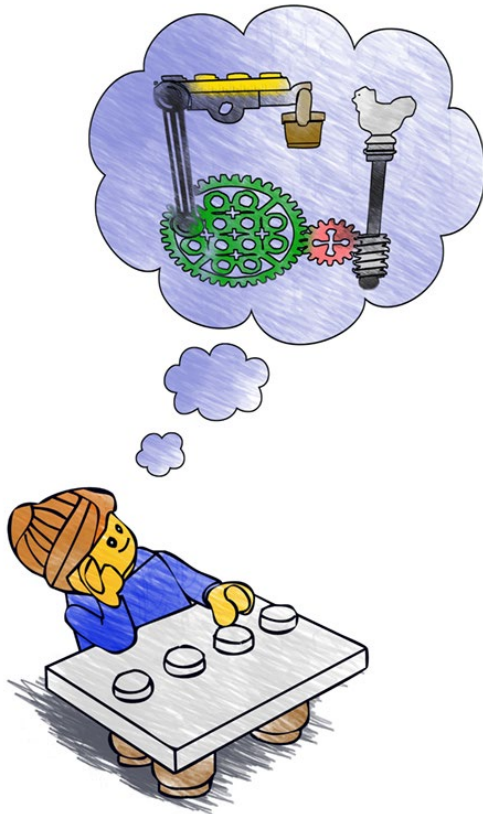


Reversing the creative process

By Sven Franic

Whether you build as a hobby or aspire to be a toy designer one day, your creative process is likely to be a lot different now than when you were a child.

I won't go into creative process theories since the process varies so much among individuals that it is almost impossible to categorise into steps.



There are several distinct approaches to building. If you ask a LEGO® designer how they start a project, each will give you a different story. Some designers go straight for the bricks and start stacking, sometimes cheating the system's limitations by using cutting tools and glue in the initial stages. Some fire up digital bricks, and others hit the drawing board, create sophisticated colour maps and browse the internet in an attempt to better visualise their idea.

The goal here is always to create something according to your idea. This means elements have to adapt to your vision and you have to find the best part or technique to accomplish it.

What a lot of us did as kids, in a time without Bricklink and so many parts at our disposal or advanced knowledge of elements, was to try to find what could be done with the pieces we had. If the shape didn't quite match what we imagined, we just blamed the limitations of the bricks. We didn't seek other solutions or try to obtain different elements.



While observing how children build at our conventions, I noticed colour coordination is not a priority. They only have about three or four colours of 2x4 bricks at their disposal and yet you don't see a single child giving up just because they are missing a piece that would work better for their project. In fact, I think children would be less creative if they had a wide inventory of categorised bricks within reach. The overwhelming choice and order would become a challenge.

As adults, we lose this carefree flow of creativity. This is because the final idea is already formed in your head and you need your art medium to adapt to your idea in the best way possible. When the medium can't cope with the shapes or colours you imagined, you get into a diagnostic process and try a different approach.

Emptying a box of random elements in front of you to create a substantial build would now be a demanding task, while the kid sitting beside you would likely thrive in this environment, browsing and discovering in a random pile, drawing inspiration from the pieces themselves.



Overriding your creativity



A couple of AFOL building competitions are designed around the idea of reversing the creative process by taking a piece, usually a very obscure one, and trying to find the best alternative uses for it. In other words, shaping the idea around the pieces instead of the traditional approach where your elements cater to your predefined vision. Some of the most imaginative creations come out of these competitions, which tend to override your natural formation of ideas, throwing you back into the pilot's seat of a child, only with more experience and knowledge.

The skill level of different builders surprisingly varies in this environment compared to how they normally build. This type of re-imagining on the spot is a skill TLG likes to test in potential designer recruits and can probably be applied to other aspects of life, outside the brick.

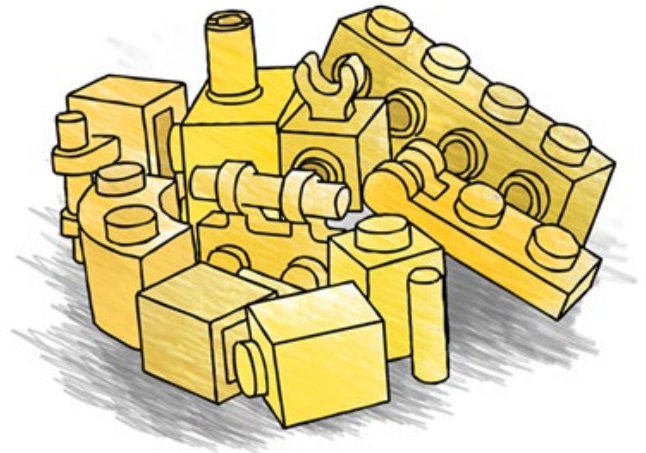
Sorting and storing bricks

The way you sort and store bricks will ultimately affect your creative process. AFOL builders tend to have organically growing collections of pieces which sometimes get in the way of maintaining acceptable living conditions. I find sorting bricks a meditative process, but from what I have heard most people

aren't so enthusiastic when it comes to placing each piece in its corresponding bin.

The debate on how to store LEGO® bricks is never-ending, and very personal. Even if you finally acknowledge that you could have perhaps done it better, you are unlikely to admit it if it would mean having to re-invent the whole system and break established habits.

Sorting pieces by colour looks visually more attractive, but it takes longer to find pieces because your brain distinguishes colours more efficiently than shapes. This means you will more easily find a yellow brick with clips in a box of bricks with clips than you would in a box of yellow bricks.



What you won't find in a box of bricks with clips, though, is inspiration. In order to make use of your 'child brain' imagination, you sometimes need a pile of random bricks. You can't be inspired by categorically sorted pieces because by the time you open the storage container, you already know what you are looking for.

Even the most advanced sorting system can benefit from a box of miscellaneous elements when you experience builder's block or want to get some nice part usage (NPU) into your builds.

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