Grant Hosford and Jan von Meppen, two participants in the LEGO Foundation and Ashoka Re-imagine Learning Challenge [1], met in Pasadena, California this month to collaborate on tools that improve learning through gaming. The meeting exemplifies a rapidly growing focus on engaging students through entertaining and immersive learning.

Hosford co-created Code Spark, a platform for children to learn to code through fun, interactive games. Its flagship game, “The Foos,” features animated creatures and games that teach 6–8 year old computing and life skills such as creative problem solving. The goal is to create a comprehensive STEM teaching program in a way that positively engages young students.

Similarly, Jan von Meppen of LudInc fosters fun learning through interactive media. The Germany-based company is responsible for creating the educational film series, “Professor S.” In the series, the title character and his research assistant are trapped in time and space. The viewers—third and fourth grade students—complete course work that informs the progression of the characters of “Professor S” in their adventures. The “educational entertainment” program is gaining much traction, and was nominated for the prestigious European Innovative Games Award.

Hosford and von Meppen initially met in a conference call between fellow Challenge participants. They connected well, Hosford says, because they both shared the same beliefs in making STEM education an engaging experience for young children. They continued to talk, and finally met in person at the LEGO Idea Conference in Denmark. The conference was “more interactive than other conferences,” von Meppen observed. “We worked through real life challenges that people in education and gaming deal with.” Through the conference’s interactive workshops involving “playful co-creation,” they discovered that they had plenty of common ground.
"We’re both trying to solve a lot of the same problems. Our products are not competitive. If anything, they’re complementary," commented Hosford.

Hosford and Von Meppen plan to integrate The Foos and Professor S. into one storyline. Their idea is to have an intersection between the characters Professor S., his fellow time travelers, and The Foos. Since Code Spark’s program does not utilize words, there is no language barrier; the program, therefore, can be easily featured in curricula in LudInc’s native Germany or in any country around the world. Meanwhile, LudInc seeks to translate its “Professor S.” series into English, so that more students around the world can access its lessons. The two companies also plan to create homework assignments to accompany these in-class programs, thereby bringing the interactive studies outside the classroom. They aim to combine these two games because they find that both their missions positively align and their combined resources and allow them to tackle challenges in technological advancement. While “Professor S.” and “The Foos” foster different educational skills in children, both encourage immersion with technology at a young age and immersive learning through play.

Members of the Re-Imagine Learning network, like Hosford and Von Meppen, are challenging the conventions of learning. We’ll keep you posted with new developments in the playful learning movement and other exciting collaborations from the network!

Education reform [3]

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[1] https://www.changemakers.com/play2learn