

CHAPTER 4

Theory and Practice in Facilitating Transformative Role-playing Games

Sarah Lynne Bowman ❖ Angie Bandhosingh ❖ Simon Brind
Elektra Diakolambrianou ❖ Kjell Hedgard Hugaas ❖ Felipe García-Soriano
Alessandro Giovannucci ❖ Josephine Rydberg ❖ and Josefin Westborg

4.1 Introduction

As we discussed briefly in previous chapters, facilitation is a special role within the overall category of organizers. While this chapter will cover suggestions for specific implementation situations, we recommend reading all the sections, as much of the advice is applicable in other contexts.

Facilitation can take many forms in role-playing games. A *storyteller* helps mediate the rules of the game and the narrative of the world. Storytellers may engage heavily, ranging from high control, representing the entire world and all characters within it, to a low control hands-off approach, with availability only for narrative or rules clarifications. As we will discuss later, many terms for this role exist, but we use *storyteller* to emphasize narrative responsibilities compared to other forms of facilitation.

A *non-player character* (NPC) is a character who serves a certain function in the game and thus has somewhat limited agency (Stenros 2013), e.g., a moderator in a debate or a zombie enemy. Alternatively, a *supporting character* tends to be more developed and aims to support player-characters (PCs) in their experience (Fido-Fairfax 2024).

Other types of facilitation include *high responsibility player-characters* who are full players, but are expected to run events or facilitate play for others. *In-game safety team members* play characters within the fiction able to provide emotional support or guide players off-game as needed for psychological safety reasons (Bowman et al. 2017; Atwater and Rowland 2018).

Finally, but most importantly in transformative role-playing games, the *workshop* and/or *debrief leader* facilitates the framing of the game. A workshop leader may run pre-game warm-ups, trust-building exercises, character creation exercises, and other activities, whereas a debrief leader helps players process their experience after play through guided structured, semi-structured, or structured discussions. In tabletop, a Session 0 often serves some or all of these purposes. Finally, *off-game safety team*

members assist players who are upset or overwhelmed (Brown 2017; Berthold 2024), whether engaging in crisis management or trying to help strategize narrative, social, or personal strategies to help the player re-engage in the activity.

Role-playing games can be run in many locations. Each location has its own specifics regarding facilitation requirements and opportunities. As examples, a tabletop role-playing game can occur at a home, a community center, or a therapist's office. Some larps occur on-site in a realistic location, e.g., a castle, a field, a campsite, or a boardroom. Other larps are played in more neutral locations, requiring players to imagine the location, e.g., a hotel conference room becoming a spaceship, or a classroom becoming a mountaintop. Some larps and freeform games are played in abstract, neutral spaces enhanced by lights and sound, such as black box theatres. Urban larps are often played in multiple locations across a city (Pettersson 2025). Online games often require special software and internet connection to play.

Therefore, a thorough understanding of the affordances (Gibson 2014; Lampo 2015) offered by different types of environments is necessary when considering facilitation strategies. Some practices that work in a physical room may be more challenging to arrange in video conferencing software, for example organic role-playing scenes in which several people are talking at once. Others might be easier, for example, passing private notes to the facilitator through direct messages without the other players noticing.

The length, location, player count, and requirements of the narrative design also have an impact on how many facilitators are needed, if any. The context also matters; educational and therapeutic contexts often need more intensive on- and off-game facilitation than leisure ones, i.e., have a higher *ratio* of facilitators to players.

Thus, any given game will differ in terms of facilitation needed, as well as the required facilitation skills, e.g., whether storytelling skills are adequate, or a facilitator also needs pedagogical training. If a facilitator lacks the requisite training, additional facilitators may need to be recruited, e.g., a paraprofessional in mental health as extra support for an emotionally heavy game; a mental health professional responsible for handling the processing around therapeutic goals while the storyteller runs the narrative; or a school class' regular teacher.

This chapter will expand upon these aspects in more detail, with a strong emphasis on styles of facilitation helpful for transformative role-playing games.

a) Types of facilitation

Facilitation norms differ between play cultures, but also have different considerations depending on the format.

For traditional tabletop RPGs, the facilitator is a strong and even critical presence in the game, responsible for running the story, everything within the world, and rules adjudications. In such situations, the facilitator is both helper and adversary, especially

if they are running combat scenes for player-characters to fight against NPCs. In indie role-playing games, this role may still be intact, such as in *Powered by the Apocalypse* games like *Apocalypse World* (Baker and Baker 2010), but be instructed to focus on ways to emphasize the story over rules, or help the players co-create interesting narrative moments rather than winning or losing an interaction (Boss, Vaghi, and Morningstar 2012). Other games such as *Dream Askew* (Alder 2014) are *GM-less*, meaning that narrative power is distributed among the players and they are, essentially, co-facilitating for each other (Stein 2021; Bisogno 2022). However, one person who knows the rules may act as an unofficial facilitator in onboarding players to the game. Additionally, research has shown that expert players at the table help onboard new players, as can viewing materials about the game online ahead of time (Giordano 2022).

Larps vary widely in terms of numbers of players, spaces in which they are played, and number of facilitators needed (if any). In many traditional larps, the facilitator plays a similar role as in tabletop, but is not the primary point of interaction; the other player-characters are the focus of play. On the other hand, if a facilitator is playing an NPC who holds important plot information, is an adversary to be defeated, or represents a specific quest, the game is incentivizing players to interact with that person in some way, with or without each other. In other larps, the facilitator is there mainly to provide direction or hints on how to proceed, or not visible at all, so it depends strongly on the game.

Nordic and American freeform games vary in terms of structure and interaction with the facilitator. Some are run in real-time, meaning the whole larp is one long scene. The facilitator may offer suggestions or come in as an NPC, but is not playing a strong role in directing play. In other freeform games, the facilitator is exceptionally active, starting and cutting scenes in a direct manner, as well as interrupting play for certain meta-techniques, to fast forward or backward scenes, ask players to replay the same scene, etc (Stark 2014a, 2014b; Torner 2019).

You should strongly consider the necessity of facilitator intervention in the play experience. If you write a facilitator-heavy game but have limited organizing staff, you may not be able to run it for the group size you originally envisioned. Similarly, if your transformative goals require facilitator intervention, they will need to be present during play, e.g., to practice specific therapeutic techniques under direction. For more information about ratios between organizers and players, see Chapter 2.

b) Narrative-related roles

i) Game master, referee, or storyteller

The term *game master* (GM) is fairly ubiquitous, referring to someone who has “mastered” the game. However, from our perspective, this term has cultural and gendered implications that render it inappropriate for use in the 21st century. Other terms -- like referee or storyteller -- are increasingly used to describe an individual or a

team of individuals who facilitate the diegetic action of the game, interpret rules where appropriate, and sometimes direct action by guiding players or NPCs. We have also seen terms like dungeon master, steward, janitor, caretaker, consultants, and story lead used, so the term may vary depending on your play culture. In this textbook, we will use the term storyteller to indicate this type of facilitator's direct impact on the narrative.

Whilst at a tabletop game, the storyteller sits on one side of the table, in larps, some storytellers sit in the organizer room, or a special location where they can direct narrative operations, others may be in the play area either diegetically or not. For example in some UK larps, referees wear high visibility clothes so they can be easily spotted and identified by players.

How an individual understands the position of storyteller and takes action accordingly derives largely from the design of the game and the norms of the play culture. In some larps, it is a matter of active *direction*, in which the storyteller makes specific events happen at designated times (Westerling and Hultman 2019). In other cases, the storytelling function is more a matter of supervising the game, intervening only when players stray too far from the intentions of the game or for logistical reasons.

ii) Non-player characters (NPC)

A *non-player character* (NPC) is a common feature of tabletop role-playing games where the gamemaster plays all of the characters not under the direct control of the players. For larps, NPCs are useful as plot devices, as functionaries of the game whose agency is curtailed by the organizers. They can be used to make a specific event happen at a specific time or in a predetermined way, or as “short term” characters who may only be present for a part of the larp. Some NPCs have no backstory, whereas others have stories that are highly complex. They may become long-standing fixtures of a game world, entering play when needed or playing consistently, such as an NPC monarch in a political game.

NPCs are a design feature which exists at the service of the larp, and whose existence and experience is secondary to those of the player characters. Notably, this notion has been challenged by scholars critical of this treatment of NPCs (Stenros 2013), especially as recipients of violent action (Torner 2015) or embodiments of the monstrous (Mitchell 2013, 2016). As Jaakko Stenros (2017) explains, “Non-player characters, even when inhabited by players, are less than human. They are props and toys for the player characters to do as they please.” That being said, the responsibilities of NPCs vary greatly from organization to organization.

iii) Supporting characters

Fido-Fairfax (2024) makes the distinction that a game can benefit from the presence of an upgraded NPC, perhaps ones with more complex personalities and agendas than many of such characters have. These characters are still embedded on behalf of the storytellers, but they have a bit more freedom. Where NPCs mostly serve the story,

supporting characters serve the player experience, e.g., bringing out the internal struggles in the player-characters (PCs), or drawing them deeper into the story: not for the story's sake, but for the characters'. Their interactions with the player-characters are paramount to their personal agendas.

Supporting characters are often used as a litmus paper for how the game is going and what aspects need to be tweaked during runtime. Those roles could be taken by players returning for the second time, for example, or whose character has died. Sometimes supporting characters are directed to involve participants who have ended up on the sidelines.

Note that the term supporting character is quite new in the discourse. Many communities still use NPC as the more common term.

iv) High responsibility player-characters

In some instances, the game needs something to happen and the organizers can make this action the responsibility of a player-character. For example, at the start of *Gothic* (Brind et al. 2023), Lord Byron's player is told, "Begin the larp by counting slowly from thirteen to one hundred and then lead the hunt in a game of Hide and Seek ..."

Other examples could be:

- "Make sure everyone goes to dinner at 8."
- "Make sure the enemy is allowed in the camp for the negotiation."
- "Your character must turn up for the wedding to the princess."

In some cases, these responsibilities also focus on what the player should avoid doing. For example:

- "Teach your magic class in a way that creates opportunities for further play, but never solve problems for the students" (see e.g., Koljonen 2016b).

These roles are sometimes known as *instructed* or *directed player-characters*. Other than these instructions, these characters have complete agency freedom. Note that in larger games, an entire group may bear these responsibilities rather than one character.

In some cases, you might want to brief the players to make sure something happens, rather than expect the characters to do the work here, especially if your plot hinges on it.

v) In-game safety team members

It can be very useful to have one or more safety members in play (Bowman et al. 2017). That way they are able to observe, to check-in on characters without necessarily breaking immersion, and can act as a litmus test for the larp. An example of this was The Chaplain at *The Quota* (2018). The role was played by one of the primary organising crew and he spent the larp in character and inside the detention centre living with the detainees. He played the role of The Chaplain, who was there to provide

spiritual support to the characters. He had an off-game function as the primary point of contact for players who had a problem. They could ask to speak to the Chaplain in private and they could close the door and go off-game. His primary function was to look after those players who were isolated, or who needed to speak to a safety team member. The in-game safety team members can bring someone to the off-game safety room when required.

Keep in mind that including such characters can have drawbacks. For example, if an NPC has been playing a role connected to a plot or otherwise bad experience that a participant is undergoing, then they may be reluctant to seek off-game help from that person. Such situations can blur the distinction between in-game and off-game in a way that may get in the way of providing the best support.

To return to the previous example, while the Chaplain in *The Quota* was being kind and sympathetic, by the nature of his role and of the larp setting, he was frustratingly unable to help with any in-game problems that the characters. Such instances can cause bleed-out, in which players may feel less trusting of the safety person due to in-game factors, and therefore less willing to approach them.

As a result of such critiques, some researcher-practitioners have developed a framework for ethical in-game safety team members based, in part, on professional counselling guidelines (Atwater and Rowland 2018).

c) Framing-related roles

Some facilitators are responsible for the framing, rather than the run-time game facilitation.

i) Workshop facilitator

Workshop facilitators are responsible for running one or more specific workshops, e.g., warm-ups, character creation, safety, etc. They may or may not be facilitators in other areas of the game. We will explore this role in more depth later in this chapter.

ii) Debrief facilitator

Debrief facilitators manage the debriefing of the game, which may be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured (see Chapter 2 of *TRGD* and this book). The facilitator may guide the process or be an integral part within it. See the section on debriefing later in this chapter for more information.

iii) Safety team member

Finally, having an off-game safety team member who understands the game can help with facilitation. Often, players come to the safety team not because they are in emotional crisis per se, but because they are overwhelmed by the content or unsure what direction to go with their character. What they need most is for an understanding person to listen, or even a quiet place to sit for a moment and regroup. They may also

want advice. If the safety team member has no knowledge of the game content, they might struggle with this type of task, in which case, asking another organizer for advice may be most appropriate. Either way, the primary goal in these situations is to help the player reengage with their character and the game rather than to spend prolonged periods of time processing emotional reactions.

If the player is in crisis, then your Internal Procedures document becomes important (see Chapter 5). Play may not be possible for them after that point. Your safety team members should work to develop their skillset to be able to discern the difference between crisis states versus relatively minor experiences of overwhelm or frustration.

d) Types of facilitation responsibilities

Academic study of runtime narrative facilitation has been emerging in the literature. In his study of tabletop RPG facilitators, Steven Dashiell (2022) applies Pierre Bourdieu's (1980) concept of *habitus* to refer to the ways in which storytellers will adopt specific habits of behavior and dispositions relevant to the social context from which they arise. Such habits are often influenced by norms within their overarching culture, play subculture, and/or ideas within the role-playing game discourses with which they are familiar (see Chapter 6 of *TRGD*).

However, while advice to storytellers is sometimes directly provided by experts, e.g., at conventions and conferences (Mandall 2013; Chatterjee et al. 2017; Johns et al. 2022), Dashiell explains that such habits are often learned implicitly, stating, "Habitus does not need to be explicitly taught through other actors, but it is most assuredly 'caught' implicitly via the socialization process" (2022, 5). Usually, such learning happens by watching others who have run the game, whether for the players directly, e.g., one's older sister running a *Shadowrun* (1989) campaign, or indirectly, e.g., watching facilitation on an Actual Play show such as *Critical Role* (Geek & Sundry, 2015-2018; Critical Role Productions, 2018-).

Dashiell (2022) identifies certain responsibilities of traditional tabletop facilitators, which we paraphrase as:

- **Supervisor:** Orchestrating the game, including providing direction, indicating the appropriateness of certain actions, and guiding players in the right direction;
- **Time manager:** Managing time based on emergent play in order to make the game convenient and enjoyable for players;
- **Conflict resolver:** Acting as a referee who has the final say when issues arise during gameplay, whether through the rules or own fiat (Dashiell 2022, 6-7).

Dashiell (2022) further describes several types of styles representing how the facilitator views their responsibility in the game and fiction:

- **Collaborator:** Taking control and guiding player-characters through the story through various means as a collaborative supervisor, avoiding forcing player-characters through one's personal fantasy (citing Fine 1983, 80);
- **Storyteller / Narrator:** Exerting agency over the story in a limited fashion, constrained by the narrative, players, and game rules;
- **Divinity:** Managing, bestowing, and limiting the affordances of the players and their subsequent agency to act in-game (Dashiell 2022, 7-9).

Similarly, work by William J. White, Nicholas LaLone, and Nicolas Mizer (2022) analyzes the ways in which facilitators in traditional tabletop RPGs are described in various fan discourse sites over time, identifying the following types:

- **Fan:** Facilitating moments of “playing to find out” by listening to the players, rather than following one's own plan;
- **Challenger:** Driving player-characters actions toward conflict or fateful choices;
- **Grown-up:** Setting scenes, refereeing, and developing the ongoing narrative fairly and engagingly;
- **Demiurge:** Preparing and presenting an elaborate world and scenario for player-characters to explore, including adversaries and challenges (White, LaLone, and Mizer (2022, 52-54).

However, facilitation may look very different depending on the game style. For example, in GM-less tabletop RPGs such as *Dream Askew* (Alder 2014), responsibility for these roles is distributed amongst the players (Stein 2021; Bisogno 2022). The players enact both their player-character, parts of the world, e.g., the Society Intact or Psychic Maelstrom, as well as key NPCs they invent within them. However, GM-less games still require at least one person to familiarize themselves with the rules, even if that person does not wield the same amount of authority as present in traditional games.

Furthermore, some games have little-to-no storytelling from facilitators, such as in larps where player-character action makes up the totality of the events that occur in an unmediated fashion. From a transformative game perspective, such games would still require off-game facilitators for safety and framing purposes.

In short, make sure to carefully consider how you view your role as a facilitator. We recommend aligning this view with the needs of your population and the specific game, then clearly communicating to your players aspects of their style that are relevant to their relative degree of agency.

4.2 Facilitation as a skill

Regardless of style, role-playing game facilitation is a skill that requires practice over time to develop. Some facilitators may begin the process having learned existing complementary skills, for example in theatre, pedagogy, therapeutic training, camp

counseling. Others may be new to leading groups completely. Regardless of previous training, facilitators should expect a learning curve when working with emergent narratives and spontaneous role-playing. For example, facilitators in *Dungeons & Dragons* (Gygax and Arneson 1974) have to develop the capacity to navigate the rules, the story, the actions of each player-character, and the subsequent responses by non player-characters in their heads at the same time. Adding teaching moments or therapeutic strategies on top of such tasks might cause cognitive overload for facilitators. To address these challenges, in some cases, additional facilitators are brought in with specific responsibilities, e.g., in a therapeutic tabletop role-playing game, sometimes one person handles the fiction, while the other handles the emotional processing.

Facilitation in transformative role-play links design intention to lived experience. The facilitator's role is to convert a written scenario, game concept, or co-created shared world into a supportive, purposeful arc that begins with clear framing, flows through responsive play, and lands in reflection that participants can use. This craft rests on three pillars:

1. **Ludic competence:** Ability to understand how systems and playstyles behave at the table or in the field;
2. **Interpersonal sensitivity:** Ability to read energy, tone, and boundaries; and
3. **Contextual awareness:** Ability to adapt and respond to what this group in this place needs right now.

Such skills are not easy to learn or to teach, but as with most skills requiring mastery. Instead of the old adage “practice makes perfect,” we believe that “practice makes competent.” Regardless of your level of skill or the complexity of the tasks required, be patient with yourself as you develop these capacities. Just like in role-playing itself, you may need to play the role of a competent facilitator for a while in these situations while your skillset develops.

The remainder of this section will mention a few skills we recommend developing as a facilitator.

a) Being a good host

At minimum, facilitators should aim to be a good host, ensuring that players have their basic needs met and attempting to help them feel safe enough to lower their vigilance and take chances. Facilitation is a job that involves paying attention to even the smallest details. A good host asks participants how they are feeling and adopts a positive and proactive attitude. They are friendly without being intrusive.

Ultimately, they must be able to read the room. They must know how to adapt their tone of voice, body language, and posture to the situation and the participants. Furthermore, they should present as relaxed and confident a demeanor as possible, even if they are anxious internally. Humans tend to unconsciously *attune* to one

another, meaning they will immediately sync up with you as their guide (Siegel 2007; Gottman 2011); they can sense if their leader is unsure of their capabilities, which may cause them to feel anxious as well (Pettersson 2024). In other cases, such as mandatory settings, they may resist attunement, and read your anxiety as weakness, becoming disruptive to test boundaries. Similarly, try to be as organized as possible when they arrive. If you are distracted, they will likely distract themselves as well, or feel increasingly awkward.

On the other hand, a good facilitator has strategies for reestablishing attunement and attention to the task at hand, which we will explore in later sections. Such practices may be verbal, like using an elevated calm or excited voice to focus the activity, or nonverbal, such as eye contact, purposeful movements, and a relaxed body posture. Reassuring the players that the only way to fail is not to engage at all can be effective, even if, in reality, your scenario may fail in a number of ways if players go rogue. The important part is helping them feel safe enough to engage.

We will discuss attunement and synchrony in more detail in Chapter 6.

b) Facilitation and power

Recent research emphasizes how facilitators -- and to some degree, other players -- can help meet deeper psychological needs of players provided they provide: compelling versus un compelling game worlds; character engagement vs. disengagement, supporting vs. restricting player agency, fair vs. unfair adjudication, and social cohesion vs. conflict (McLaren, Oades, and Derry 2026).

Accordingly, it is critical to accept the fact that facilitators are in a position of power over participants. Being a good host means not abusing that power, e.g., by enforcing non-consensual scenes on players, taking control of their character, railroading them into certain plot trajectories. In other words, avoid situations in which you are using your power to remove their agency without clear negotiation. For example, if playing a horror game in which players know at some point their character may get “taken over” by the facilitator, the loss of agency might be experienced as exciting. In other situations, that outcome without transparency might feel violating (Bowman 2013; Torner 2013; Dashiell 2022; Femia 2025). Similarly, forcing player-characters to follow a pre-established story with a fixed outcome may be considered *railroading* and overly limiting in some play cultures, whereas in others, perhaps *fate play* is more normative, with fixed moments that are known beforehand by the players (Fatland 2000, 2014).

Whatever the norms of the group, responsible facilitators understand they usually are in a higher power position than their players during the game itself. In some cases, the social dynamics are very different off-game and the facilitator does not perceive themselves to be the high-power person, e.g., running a larp for one’s boss, being from a historically marginalized background. However, during the game, players must trust the facilitator to guide them through a process that may feel scary or anxiety-inducing. This dynamic is especially strong in long-running campaigns in which players invest in

one character over several sessions, or emotionally intense scenarios in which players are expected to engage vulnerably.

Power is not inherently bad and is part of most, if not all, social interactions in some way. When we think about power, we usually think of abuse, for example exerting *power over* others in inappropriate or harmful ways (Hunjan and Keophilavong 2010). Neglect can also be an issue related to power, i.e., if someone has the power to meet someone's needs but makes themselves unavailable. Favoritism is another common issue with regard to power: the perception that some people are receiving benefits the others are not. Unwanted flirting or sexual advances can also lead to a climate of abuse. All of these situations can happen in role-playing game facilitation, whether in-game or off-game, and sometimes can be brushed off due to the process being “just a game,” in the same way players may engage in in-game bullying and feel protected by the alibi of the game. Such dynamics can lead to social conflict, toxicity, and even irreparable schisms within the gaming group (Bowman 2013).

Notably, power over can be a pleasurable and mutually consensual activity, e.g., in the *Dungeons & Dragons* OSR community, which often features high-risk in-game scenarios that are commonly lethal to characters and strong storyteller control. However, such dynamics should be negotiated and calibrated as needed throughout the process. If a group decides to play in a *hardcore* style (Bowman 2017), then such negotiations may be more implicit and explicitly negotiated, but the risk is higher. Without a sufficient perception of psychological safety, such play might negatively impact the participants, which as we have discussed before is necessary to establish and maintain in transformative play (see Chapter 5 *TRGD*).

We recommend facilitators practice other types of power in addition to consensual power over. *Power with* involves acting together with participants to create a satisfying outcome (Follett 1940; Pansardi and Bindi 2021), e.g., offering suggestions of what characters might do in a scenario, reminding them of information they had before to solve a mystery, creating scenes that help them practice skills in self-advocacy. *Power to* involves a high-power person acting on behalf of a lower-power person (Pansardi and Bindi 2021). For example, a mental health professional facilitator might use a safety mechanic like the X-Card (Stavropoulos 2013) to remove content that they know another player is uncomfortable enacting, especially if that person may find it socially risky to self-advocate. On the other hand, in some cases, such self-advocacy may be a stated goal, in which case the facilitator may use their power to create narrative situations in which that skill can be practiced. In this case, the facilitator is using *power-to* to create conditions for *power within* to emerge in the player: an experience of personal empowerment (see e.g., Cazeneuve 2021). Power-to can also be important in off-game situations, e.g., advocating for specific members of the group to people in positions of influence, using institutional connections to get a location in which players will feel more comfortable. Similarly, the development of power within (Hunjan and Keophilavong 2010) can transfer off-game given the right conditions and integration practices.

Power in gaming communities is especially complex when considering intersectional identities. A transgendered woman of color running a game might not feel like her authority carries as much weight as a White cis-man's might, especially if consistently challenged by players, e.g., through game-splaining or rules lawyering, in which players attempt to assert their superiority based on their knowledge of the game (Dashiell 2017, 2020; Hilman, Hirst, Flanagan, and Leonard 2025; Tremblay 2025). Ultimately, it is critically important that facilitators reflect on their power and how their actions might be perceived by their players, as well as ways in which they could use support from players to bolster their authority in service of empowerment for everyone involved. For more on power, see Chapter 6 of *TRGD* and Hammer, Beltrán, Walton, and Turkington (2018).

c) Driving the narrative

Facilitator-heavy games often require storytellers to drive the narrative through various tactics, including creating story arcs, signposting for players what actions to take next, providing or enacting NPCs to enhance the experience. Many techniques can be used for this purpose. As mentioned before, some games follow a fixed story in which little or nothing will change (*railroad*), some have specific predefined moments (*fateplay*; Fatland 2000, 2013), and others that involve a series of events that are only triggered if the participants set them in motion. There are also countless middle grounds, such as multiple endings or more or less elaborate narrative branches in which the players' agency is not entirely free but not entirely controlled either. Whatever the style, the storyteller should be transparent with players about what sort of experience to expect, ideally when they sign up (Koljonen 2016a).

d) Negotiating rules

Depending on the game, facilitators may also need to help players negotiate the rules, for example, what is possible in this storyworld or the game mechanics involved. Often, rules in larps are used to reproduce situations that would not be possible or desirable to perform in practice, e.g., *representational mechanics*. In the case of tabletop role-playing games, through narration, it is possible to describe situations that defy, for example, the laws of physics. For example, *Mage: the Ascension* (Wieck et al. 1993) has complex representational mechanics not only for ways that mages can counter the rules of "consensus reality," e.g., using telekinesis to fly or creating fireballs with one's mind, but also for the mechanisms behind such feats, e.g., how powerful one's magical potency is, how reality reacts to such visible breaches, etc. Similarly, larps may feature suitable rules or meta-techniques. The latter should be explained in the preparatory materials and, where possible, tested in pre-event workshops.

Notably, some games with representational mechanics do not require a facilitator to negotiate rules, e.g., wizard school larps such as *College of Wizardry* (2014-) that rely on consent-based play in which players decide how a spell affects their character. Other games focus on a What You See Is What You Get (WYSIWYG) aesthetic, such

as many games in the Nordic larp and adjacent traditions, which requires players to physically perform the actions of their characters without representational mechanics (Wieslander 2004). In such situations, the facilitator does not need to negotiate rules during runtime, but likely will still need to workshop these techniques before the game. An example is running a workshop for players to learn how to engage in physical combat more safely or with less force.

e) Maintaining engagement

A core responsibility is maintaining engagement. Role-playing can be mentally and emotionally taxing, so providing conditions for keeping players focused is important. An example is having clear briefings. If players know who their characters are and what they want, they will find it easier to get into the game. Also, it is important for facilitators to pace the game, alternating intense moments with breaks, because continuous tension can burn out players' energy. The engagement can sometimes be stronger when rooted in the emotional involvement and related to the event's core themes, although sometimes moments of intense catharsis can happen when both player and character are exhausted, e.g., *bleed-out* (Montola 2010; Leonard and Thurman 2018; Hugaas 2019).

f) Pivoting and responding to emergence

As role-playing is spontaneous co-creation, sometimes, storytellers need to pivot and respond to emergent play in particular ways; it is impossible to predict reliably how players will react in any given design. A common phrase among facilitators in role-playing game communities is, "No plot survives contact with the players." For example, emergent play may create a *domino effect* (Bowman 2018) in which a piece of fiction introduced by the players or an unforeseen action taken by the players can derail the intended direction for the story (Torner 2018). On the other hand, games that are heavily plotted with limited chances for players to contribute can sometimes lead to conflicts between facilitators and players (Bowman 2013).

Therefore, facilitators should assess the needs of the scenario in terms of the degree of structure and its tolerance for emergent play. Some educational scenarios, for example, may need to remain highly structured in order to ensure learning objectives are achieved or all players are exposed to certain learning content. Responding to emergence is part of the beauty but also the challenge of role-playing: a skill that facilitators will likely need to practice throughout their life.

g) Establishing and maintaining psychological safety

Finally, facilitators should develop the ability to establish and maintain an adequate perception of safety, including feelings of inclusion. While this task is not always easy, it is required for players to continue to engage in a satisfying way. Recent research has demonstrated a correlation between good facilitation, psychological safety, group

cohesion, and creativity (Lasley and Ruiz Ezquerro 2026), with clarity and support indicated as important components. Alternatively, another study analyzes accounts of “nightmare” facilitation horror stories, e.g., featuring non-consensual play dynamics (Femia 2026).

A basic strategy for establishing safety is discussing safety during the pre-game workshop or Session 0, e.g., presenting players with the *Consent in Gaming* checklist (Reynolds and Germain 2019). Some examples include reminders that RPGs can sometimes be surprisingly intense; the introduction and modeling of safety mechanics; instructions for what to do if a player is feeling overwhelmed; and assurances that players can opt-out at any time. Some games also feature trust-building exercises before the game, but be aware that practices that might engender trust for some players might lead others to become more vigilant, e.g., workshops with hugging or prolonged eye contact. Certain practices may also be difficult for participants to perform, e.g., due to aspects of neurodiversity. For example, some players might enjoy a warm-up exercise in which their characters are expected to walk around and mingle with other characters, whereas for others, such a loose structure might provoke anxiety. Therefore, facilitators should carefully consider the needs of their target group and recognize that sometimes conflicting needs may be present within the same group (Stavropoulos 2022).

Safety is also important to maintain or reestablish if a rupture has occurred. Players may experience an emotional activation that makes engagement suddenly difficult (Brown 2014); experience off-game offense at a comment made or at a stereotypical character portrayal (Kemper, Saitta, and Koljonen 2020; Leonard, Janjetovic, and Usman 2021); or simply be tired, hungry, or otherwise overwhelmed. Under such conditions, one’s perception of safety may become diminished. Safety mechanics can help in this situation, as can calibration, e.g., players discussing how play might be adjusted.

Sometimes, these situations can be addressed quickly in the moment and safety can be reestablished, whereas other times, more lengthy interventions are needed. Facilitators should consider strategies ahead of time to adapt to changing situations and create conditions for players to be able to engage again, e.g., breaking the game to host impromptu small or large group calibration sessions (see e.g., at *Immerton*, Brown et al. 2018). Assigning support responsibilities to another facilitator who is not responsible for the game fiction is often a helpful strategy.

Ultimately, while safety is challenging, even discussing safety or letting players know care is available may help players perceive themselves to be safer (Pedersen 2015). However, these resources must remain available throughout play; it is not enough to simply call the game a “safer space,” and players may feel betrayed if care was not provided when promised. Therefore, the maintenance of safety throughout the process is an important component of facilitation, one that is not often discussed in traditional advice to organizers, but is becoming more prevalent (see e.g., Spencer 2025, 2026).

Related to this topic, facilitators should set expectations about what they will and will not provide in terms of support during play and communicate these boundaries clearly, as we will explore in more depth in the section below on interactions with players.

We will discuss psychological safety in more depth in Chapter 5.

h) Steering play toward transformative impacts

When considering larps as a transformational container (Baird and Bowman 2022), another important aspect of facilitation is helping guide play toward the intended goals, e.g., the development of specific prosocial skills. In this case, make sure the organizers are all on the same page. Transformative role-playing is a specific style that focuses on catalyzing processes of change in the participants. While leisure games can also be transformative, many facilitators from leisure games are not accustomed to, for example, considering learning objectives throughout their implementation practices.

When it comes to organising a transformative larp, the organizer's communication skills are crucial at every stage of the process. Even before the game begins, it is important to establish a relationship based on clarity and transparency (Torner 2013): participants need to know exactly what the objectives of the experience are, what sensitive issues will be addressed, what safety rules will be applied, and how the logistics will work (Koljonen 2016a). This does not just mean providing information, but doing so in accessible and inclusive language, avoiding overly technical jargon or references that may create distance. Listening is also very important at this initial stage: gathering any doubts, fears or needs that players may have, and showing willingness and openness. Trust can arise from a reassuring, professional and attentive tone that communicates that everyone will be welcomed and supported.

During the larp, communication takes on a different, more subtle, and calibrated character. The organizer or facilitator must be able to read the playing field: observe verbal and non-verbal cues, picking up on tensions, energy, and the needs of the group. When they intervene, they should consider doing so with restraint, but with the necessary readiness to re-establish boundaries or safety if something requires it. This is where active empathy comes into play: recognising participants' emotions and validating them without judgement, offering immediate and constructive feedback that can help keep the experience fluid and engaging. At the same time, the facilitator must maintain a position of narrative neutrality: their voice does not judge or take sides, but helps to clearly distinguish what belongs to the game world from what concerns the safety framework.

After the larp has ended, it is time for the delicate debriefing and follow-up. Here, the priority is to provide a space for deep listening, where participants can speak without feeling interrupted or belittled. The organizer must acknowledge and normalise the emotions that have emerged, making it clear that any reaction is legitimate. The closing should be positive and focused on synthesis, helping to

transform the experience into learning and awareness, and linking what has been experienced to the objectives of the larp. It is equally important to maintain continuity, offering channels of contact even after the event for those who wish to further process what they have experienced.

In all these stages, we find certain cross-cutting communication skills that make all the difference:

- **Active listening**, consisting of paraphrasing, asking clarifying questions and showing signs of presence;
- **Conscious management of silence**, which allows space to be given without the rush to fill it;
- **Empathy**, which comes across as much through words as through tone of voice, posture and gaze;
- **The use of inclusive language** that respects differences and is careful not to reproduce stereotypes;
- **The ability to mirror and guide**, i.e. the sensitivity to tune in to the group and then steer it in the desired direction; and
- **Clarity and the ability to set boundaries** without ambiguity, and being ready to intervene firmly if someone oversteps them.

All of these strategies also require good communication skills.

i) Inclusive facilitation

Role-playing communities have developed specific techniques that facilitators can use in order to promote engagement or enhance the narrative in an inclusive manner. For example, players have different learning preferences. As Olivia Fischer (2022) explains, you may wish to send information you will cover in the workshop in advance, such as in videos or written text so players can study it ahead of time at their own pace. She recommends using simple language and presenting your material in an organized manner, as well as allowing them to practice key mechanics multiple times in the workshop rather than just once. Fischer (2022) also recommends using the same safety mechanics from game to game whenever possible to make them more accessible rather than inventing new ones for each game.

Furthermore, some players may feel less able to engage than others, e.g., due to differences in social status (Algayres 2019a), social anxiety (Algayres 2019b) shyness, or previous experiences of marginalization, such as internalized oppression (see e.g., Kemper 2018). While facilitators cannot solve the social dynamics of underlying privilege and marginalization in broader society, they can utilize specific practices that aim for greater inclusion. For example, the *monologuing* meta-technique allows for players to express briefly their character's inner thoughts in a scene (Boss and Holter 2013); the characters cannot hear these thoughts, but the players and facilitators can,

which can help them *steer play* (Montola, Stenros, and Saitta 2015) in dramatically interesting directions after the monologue completes. A facilitator may pause the scene and use this technique to provide alibi for quieter players to express themselves, or empower the players to use it themselves, e.g., in more hands-off facilitation scenarios.

4.3 Facilitation in applied contexts

In this section, we will introduce general considerations for facilitation in different applied contexts, specifically in therapeutic, educational, organizational, and community-focused interventions. We expand with more concrete advice for educational, therapeutic, and train-the-trainer role-playing later in this chapter.

a) Therapeutic facilitation

Therapeutic facilitation involves mental health professionals or paraprofessionals running role-playing games as part of a more extensive therapeutic process. Professionals in this case might be psychotherapists, counselors, coaches, psychodramatists, social workers, etc. Paraprofessionals might be psychologists or crisis managers without clinical training. Alternatively, they could be RPG facilitators who are not mental health practitioners but are working toward mental health goals. In the latter cases, they should likely work in concert with a trained mental health professional, otherwise the practice is more accurately described as transformative leisure.

Furthermore, therapeutic facilitation involves a client relationship with the practitioner, usually one that is contractually bound. In practical terms, this relationship means high expectations of emotional care over a prolonged period of time, which could be a certain fixed number of sessions or continuous sessions without a set end date.

Such emotional care is not always possible during the game itself, especially if facilitation requires other cognitive resources such as storytelling and rules adjudication. For this reason, the responsibilities of the game facilitator are sometimes separate from therapeutic processing. For example, a game facilitator might run a session focused on social skill development or building friendships, then a mental health professional processes with the group or 1:1 with individual clients in a separate session. That person can then give feedback to the game facilitator on how to proceed in the next session.

Alternatively, two mental health professionals may run a game together; one can then focus on telling an engaging story based on themes relevant to the therapeutic goals and responding to character actions, while the other is tracking the skills practiced by the clients or their emotional responses to the experience. The latter professional might interrupt play, for example to process the emotional content at the table. Unlike in leisure spaces, such interruptions are often considered acceptable rather than frustrating for players, as they all understand they are engaging in a therapeutic process first and foremost.

Important to this process is a shared understanding of therapeutic goals and themes explored between client and facilitator. Facilitators need to be made aware of any potential sensitivities or behavioral tendencies of the client and be skilled enough to work with or around these aspects during play. When playing with sensitive content, facilitators need to be able to modulate intensity or completely back away from certain content if the client is showing signs of overwhelm, activation, or trigger. While sometimes, the client may be able to navigate these states in play in a productive and even transformative way, crossing the line of “too much” can also mean a potentially dysregulating or humiliating experience for the client. For example, while role-play can be a form of *exposure therapy*, e.g., to help a client work through their fear of being outside through outdoor-related play (Cohen 2023), or arachnophobia by including spider-related content, clients must consent to this process and the facilitator must be able to adjust in real-time to the client’s needs. Therapeutic facilitation requires a high level of attunement and empathy for others.

Similarly, facilitators may want to avoid certain content completely if it might cause the client to feel overly exposed based on their past experiences or psychological difficulties. It might be tempting for a facilitator to introduce metaphorical content related to the client’s challenges, such as a surprise encounter with giant spiders, but doing so without transparency and consent might result in a loss of trust, or a breakdown in the process completely.

Some key concepts relevant to facilitation skills in therapeutic interventions are:

- **Therapeutic climate:** The container fostered by the facilitator should follow basic principles in e.g., person-centred therapy, such as empathy, unconditional positive regard for clients, and authenticity rather than manipulation or duplicity.
- **Communication skills:** As mentioned earlier, facilitators should cultivate the ability to communicate in a way that puts clients at ease, e.g., techniques such as the use of “I-statements” to focus on one’s own feelings and thoughts rather than judging the actions or assuming intentions from others (Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management 2000). Such techniques are sometimes called *nonverbal communication* (NVC; Rosenberg 2015).
- **Active and reflective listening:** *Active listening* involves making clear to the other person that one is fully engaged and responsive to their actions, e.g., eye contact, nodding, making affirmative sounds with one’s voice. *Reflective listening* involves asking follow-up questions that *mirror* what the person has said and prompt further reflection, e.g., “I heard you say you felt anxious during that scene. Could you tell us more about what prompted your anxiety?” Note that some of these techniques, such as eye contact, might cause specific clients discomfort, so adjust according to the needs of your clientele.

- **Counseling skills:** Other skills specific to the counseling profession are also important here, including reflection of feelings, focusing, summarizing, cultural competences, nonverbal communication, self-monitoring, etc.
- **Group processes and dynamics:** Understanding how to work within a group is also important, as groups have their own growth trajectory and dynamics. See Chapter 3 of *TRGD* for more information.
- **Specific techniques according to modality or approach:** Mental health professionals are often trained in a particular modality, such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) or Internal Family Systems (IFS), which has specific techniques associated with it. These techniques can be employed, e.g., during the game, such as running players through a script to practice communicating about their feelings, or after the game, e.g., in 1:1 sessions, practicing what they would have said to the person if they could try again. Techniques can also be embedded in the game content itself in a more symbolic or narrative way (see e.g., Bartenstein 2022).

Note that many of these skills can be useful for any facilitator to learn regardless of context and are not only accessible through therapeutic training.

For more on considerations regarding running therapeutic role-playing games, see Chapter 2 and later sections in this chapter.

b) Educational facilitation

When facilitating educational games, facilitation starts before the event itself: you need to provide players with enough information beforehand and give them time to prepare, especially if subject matter will be revisited during the game (Mochocki 2013). Equally important is workshops before the game starts to discuss rules and safety mechanics, even if the information has been shared previously. During the runtime, facilitators have a demanding role: keeping the group engaged, monitoring safety needs, but also gently steering the game towards the learning objectives if necessary. At times, you may need to improvise and adapt to the group, so it is highly recommended that you are strongly familiar with the game and educational materials. Educational facilitation in role-play contexts focuses on designing learning environments that align clear pedagogical outcomes with engaging, experiential structures. Therefore, the debrief should focus on consolidating the knowledge and connecting the in-game experience with the educational goal(s).

The primary challenge in these settings often stems from institutional constraints rather than from learners themselves. Schools and educational programs are bound by expectations of curricular alignment, assessment, and measurable progress. Within such frameworks, play can easily be dismissed as a distraction or an unproductive deviation from instruction. For this reason, the facilitator must learn how to translate the role-play experience into the language of education (Westborg 2026b). When proposing an activity to educational authorities or colleagues, it is essential to specify

what learners will gain at four levels: the content knowledge addressed; the practices and behaviors rehearsed; the overarching skills developed through play; and the values embedded in the design. This framing brings transparency to the process and situates play not as an alternative to learning, but as a legitimate method to achieve it.

Within the classroom or other learning environments, scale becomes a practical concern. As discussed in Chapter 2, role-play, especially tabletop or small group freeform scenarios, can require a high facilitator-to-student ratio. To maintain engagement without overextending resources, it is advisable to plan for distributed facilitation, either amongst your colleagues or the players themselves. Selected participants can be assigned supporting roles, functioning as peer storytellers or co-facilitators. This strategy not only sustains the dynamics of play but also converts facilitation itself into a learning opportunity, reinforcing agency, leadership, and collaborative responsibility.

Another crucial dimension of educational role-play is evaluation of the process. Assessing whether learning has occurred requires more than grading participation. Facilitators can embed incremental challenges within the scenario to trace progression in cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. Succeeding in situations of increased difficulty, complex collaboration, or ethical dilemmas can serve as markers of growth.

Observation and systematic recording of interactions can provide further evidence of development, although keep in mind that taking such notes may inhibit players if sufficient trust is not built first. With observation, the facilitator's attention to decision-making, communication patterns, and problem-solving behaviors becomes the form of formative assessment. Furthermore, the debrief must explicitly connect the experience to curricular content, guiding students to articulate what they learned and how it applies to other contexts. Reflection through discussion allows learners to co-construct meaning rather than being told what the lesson was. Post-game journaling can also be effective, especially for learners who feel less comfortable speaking in group settings.

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, time management remains a recurrent limitation. Workshopping, play, and debriefing must all fit within predefined sessions. While it may be tempting to shorten reflection to accommodate the game play, doing so undermines learning transfer. The most effective designs treat workshopping and debriefing as part of the pedagogical arc, not as appendices to it.

Age and developmental stages also shape facilitation choices. With children aged 6-12, absorption into fiction and imagination is often easier than for adults, yet self-regulation and sustained attention are still developing. Younger people also tend to struggle to maintain immersion into a character. Turn-taking systems can help maintain inclusion and support social growth.

As learners approach adolescence, engagement often depends on agency: the sense that their choices matter. One strategy is to provide role-playing experiences at this stage that allow for decision-making that visibly alters the narrative, reinforcing

autonomy and accountability. Identity exploration is also central: adolescents are still developing their sense of self (Erikson 1968) and frequently experiment with aspects of self in characters. Respecting and validating these explorations can be crucial for psychological safety and trust. At the same time, facilitators should anticipate exploratory or transgressive behaviors around taboo topics such as sexuality, violence, and power. Clear boundaries, established safety tools, and cultural sensitivity can help negotiate these moments, ideally without shaming or censoring curiosity. Alternatively, you may want to establish boundaries before the game around sensitive topics if they are not appropriate in the setting, e.g., through an X-card (Stavropoulos 2013) or a line (Edwards 2003).

Working with young adults and more mature people can be both easier and more complex. When participants approach the activity with openness, learning tends to unfold naturally through collective reflection. However, disengagement is common in formal settings where participation feels imposed or is indeed mandatory. In such cases, offering alternative roles outside the main action can help preserve inclusion in the group activity. For example, you could assign reluctant players with observer roles and provide them with ethnographic observation sheets, allowing them to analyze group dynamics, keeping them connected to the learning process without forcing a sense of performance. Often, these observers later choose to join the play once they feel psychologically safe. You may also offer them alternative educational assignments away from the play if their presence will be too disruptive.

Educational role-play succeeds when its structure makes learning visible and participatory at every level: in content, in behaviors practiced, in skills demonstrated, and in values explored. The facilitator's role is to weave these layers together into a coherent cycle of experience and reflection.

i) Teaching skills and facilitation

Teachers are usually fairly skilled at facilitation. Some struggle more depending on their teaching style. If a teacher is used to having students' main focus on them, it is harder to let go of control. Status can also become an obstacle; if a teacher is accustomed to running a strictly hierarchical classroom, then it can be complicated all of a sudden to step down and even out the level of power. Here, it is important to show how alibi such as shifting power roles can help with learning.

Teachers can often be in a storyteller position themselves, attempting to run games on their own. However, some teachers feel they lack the skillset or confidence and may bring in a third party to run the game. In these situations, we recommend that the teachers still participate and do not stay on the sidelines, as observation by the teacher can make the student feel self-conscious and judged. To help ease teachers with the change in hierarchy, it also can be helpful to ask them to play an NPC that is somewhat high status, but focused on a specific task, ostensibly diverting their attention from the students. Another way for teachers to be able to use their facilitation skills is to let them play the other extreme -- someone who needs help and cannot solve anything -- and then have the participants solve the problem for them.

For additional considerations regarding educational role-playing game facilitation, see Chapter 2 and later sections in this chapter.

c) Organizational facilitation

Sometimes, the intervention is focused less on individual goals and more on group dynamics, as is the case when facilitating for specific organizations, e.g., corporations, governmental offices, or other workplaces. When role-play is introduced in organizational contexts, the most decisive factor is not necessarily the sophistication of the design, but rather the atmosphere created around it. Many participants attend these sessions not by choice but by institutional mandate, carrying a certain resistance, skepticism, or fatigue from conventional training. The term *team building exercise* might have a bad connotation of forced awkward activities with colleagues. This reality makes the facilitator's first task psychological rather than logistical: to build trust and transform a mandatory activity into a meaningful experience. The key lies in creating a situation that feels safe enough to experiment, yet substantial enough to matter.

Two cases developed by one of the authors of this chapter, Felipe García-Soriano, serve as examples of how role-playing can be structured to generate meaningful learning within organizational environments. In some cases, small groups of 4-8 participants are reframed as a collective unit -- a "team of adventurers" -- who must navigate a fictional environment that symbolically reflects their organizational reality. By embedding real tensions such as communication failures, gaps in empathy, or leadership dilemmas into narrative quests, participants engage with issues they recognize without the defensive posture that a direct critique might trigger in corporate environments. Fictional distance functions as a protective layer that enables authenticity. Within the game world, hierarchy loosens, and participants can express more genuine behaviors that reveal how coordination and trust can actually occur in their daily work.

In other contexts, the environment of play is intentionally designed to feel more realistic and immediate, e.g., by confronting teams with crisis situations, uncertainty, or limited resources. Instead of offering safety through metaphor, these interventions use structured stress to expose habitual responses under pressure. The goal is not to replicate the workplace literally, but to simulate the systemic dynamics between its units, e.g., fragmented communication, competing goals, and/or the tension between individual autonomy and collective responsibility. These high-pressure scenarios surface behavioral patterns that usually remain invisible in ordinary meetings, such as hesitation, dominance, withdrawal, or improvisation; these moments then become shared material for reflection after the game.

In both approaches, the reflective phase determines the depth of learning. Debrief facilitators guide the group through a process of reconstructing meaning together rather than evaluating their performance. The conversation focuses on what was experienced, such as moments of clarity, disconnection, or alignment. Specific questions help participants articulate their insights in their own words, such as

“When did we act as a team?” or “What made us hesitate?” The objective is to convert emotional experience into understanding, which is in turn transformed into collective awareness. Without the reflection process, play remains more like entertainment. On the other hand, without play, reflection often lacks the emotional resonance and relatability that anchors learning.

Several practical recommendations have emerged from these experiences. First, avoid replicating the workplace too closely. Excess realism tends to provoke anxiety or strategic behavior rather than experimentation. Similar to classroom dynamics, replicating existing hierarchies might inhibit lower power participants in the organization. In some cases, you may wish to group people who are not involved in the same direct organizational structure to further loosen these dynamics.

Second, do not model overacting and theatricality, as these tendencies might dilute the focus on interaction and systems thinking. Third, maintain clarity about purpose: participants must know that their performance is not being tested, but rather you are inviting them to explore. Finally, as with all other forms of transformative play, never skip the debriefing phase, even under time pressure. The value of experiential learning depends on reflection after the experience that connects symbolic events to clear takeaways and concrete practices moving forward.

When facilitated with care, organizational role-play can become a rehearsal for complexity. It allows participants to experience coordination, decision-making, and ethical tension as lived processes rather than abstract competencies. The temporary world of play thus becomes a mirror: one that reflects how an organization learns, adapts, and sustains itself when the rules are uncertain and the outcome is still unfolding.

For examples of role-playing games designed or adapted for organizational purposes such as leadership, see Branc (2018); Lasley (2020); Mercer, Harris, and Swab (2021); Jensen (2021); Hartyándi and van Bilsen (2024); and van Bilsen and van Barlingen (2025).

d) Community-focused facilitation

Community-based facilitation also focuses on interactions within a group, with the emphasis on creating shared meaning and long-term engagement among diverse stakeholders. While issues with logistics can occur, the main challenge is relational. Community projects often begin in contexts marked by distance, distrust, or uneven commitment among participants. Some attend out of personal interest, others because their institution requires a presence, and others still to defend or promote an ideological position. In such circumstances, the first goal is not immediate collaboration but the construction of a minimal sense of common purpose. Without a clear shared objective, even the most creative participatory method collapses into parallel monologues.

The facilitator's task is to create a temporary space where participants can imagine themselves as part of a collective project. Establishing this shared purpose requires two foundations: clarity and inclusion. Clarity ensures that everyone understands the goal to be pursued together, while inclusion ensures that every participant, regardless of background or agenda, can see themselves reflected in the process. Inclusive mechanisms can help reduce the distance between sectors that rarely collaborate on equal terms, such as civil society groups, public administrations, and private actors. Examples include open framing sessions, co-designed characters, or flexible participation rules.

When designing role-play experiences for community building purposes, we recommend considering diversity not as a problem to solve but as material to work with. Participants may include older adults who view play as childish, highly politicized individuals who attempt to steer the activity toward their agenda, and representatives of institutions more concerned with image than participation. Rather than confronting these differences directly, effective facilitation transforms them into a creative tension within the fictional frame. The game experience can then become a rehearsal for collaboration under disagreement.

One approach that has proven effective for García-Soriano is to use speculative or dystopian future scenarios that require collective decision-making. Placing participants in an imagined community facing a shared threat encourages them to act together in the game world before they are asked to collaborate in reality. Examples include a resource crisis, environmental collapse, or social fragmentation. Once trust and community bonds begin to emerge within the fiction, the roles can gradually blend with real stakeholder identities. At this stage, participants are often invited to co-design representative characters that symbolize sectors of their community rather than specific individuals. Through these roles, they can articulate shared interests and tensions from a position of creative distance. The process culminates in a collective task, such as developing a joint project or proposal for an issue they all recognize as relevant, but still within the safety of a fictional setting.

This approach avoids direct confrontation while still allowing structural conflicts and power asymmetries to surface. It also transforms abstract ideals into lived decisions, such as sustainability, inclusion, and participation. Through their characters, participants negotiate, make compromises, and recognize their mutual dependencies through play, often with greater honesty than they would in formal dialogue off-game.

When running community-based games, do not expect immediate consensus. The aim is not agreement but contact. We recommend not attempting to eliminate conflict, and instead structuring it so that it becomes productive. Avoid treating dissent as failure, and instead view it as evidence that participants are invested enough to care. The facilitator must hold the tension between openness and direction, allowing co-creation without losing sight of the collective goal.

Ultimately, role-play for community building works best when it positions fiction as a neutral ground for collaboration. Role-playing games allow people who normally meet through institutional roles or opposing worldviews to act together, take risks, and imagine possibilities beyond the limits of their current realities. In that shared imaginative space, commitment begins to shift from symbolic participation to genuine co-ownership of the community they are building.

For more on co-creating with participants, see Chapter 2 and 3.

e) Knowing when to outsource or refer

In some cases, you may not have the competencies needed to process an experience with a student or client. For example, if you are a trained tabletop facilitator and have only basic crisis management training, you will likely not be able to help a client process complex trauma for extended periods of time. It also might be unethical for you to try without sufficient training as a mental health professional. In this case, you might work closely with a client's existing therapist to make sure your work is a proper adjunctive treatment. Similarly, as another example, if you are hired to run an educational larp on concepts in physics, you may have the subject matter knowledge to address these topics in a basic manner through play, but may not be able to explain complex concepts to students with any measure of specificity or accuracy.

Knowing when to outsource certain parts of the transformative process or refer participants to a professional with the relevant skillset can be important. Similarly, we recommend clearly communicating your limitations with your group regarding what support you can and cannot offer.

4.4 Facilitation phases and guidelines

a) Workshops

Workshop facilitators are responsible for running the preparatory workshops, which can have many purposes. The term workshop can be used to refer to a singular exercise, or the sum total of all workshops before a game (Hernø 2025). Workshop facilitators may also be responsible for designing these activities ahead of time. If the game is intended to be published, they are usually the ones taking notes for iteration that should be incorporated in the next run of the game and/or the published instructions.

We recommend that workshops be made mandatory to take part in the game, as they help onboard the players and sometimes are crucial for character development, relationships, and group cohesion. Indeed, Fischer (2022) describes workshops as critical to learning in edu-larps, identifying four categories of *prerequisites* that might be necessary for successful play. As in education, when a certain course is a prerequisite to take a more advanced one, we can consider workshops to contain prerequisite learning for playing the game. We have generalized Fischer's (2022) categories as:

- **Emotional prerequisites:** Workshops that help your players start the larp in a good emotional space, e.g., feeling safe and brave.
- **Game flow prerequisites:** Techniques, mechanics, and other tools to help players manage their way through your game, e.g., calibration tools, techniques to help them *steer* toward optimal play (see e.g., Montola, Stenros, and Saitta 2015; Pohjola 2015);
- **Portrayal prerequisites:** Workshops that help players bring your world and the characters within it to life, e.g., to portray their own character well or support others in their portrayal;
- **Kick-off prerequisites:** Exercises that help players get into character (Fischer 2022).

For example, if players miss a workshop, they may not know how to use a key mechanic or may misunderstand a safety technique when used in play. Similarly, if you have multiple workshop facilitators, we recommend training them on the script ahead of time to help ensure instructions are given similarly in each group.

Mo Holkar (2015) describes several workshop activities according to their purposes. This section is largely based on his framework.

i) Briefing and group formation exercises

Chronologically speaking, the first exercises in the block should focus on the player experience, e.g., off-game information *briefings* and group formation exercises. The functional categories for player-focused workshops include:

- **Location tour:** Showing players the site, making sure they know where to find key places, such as the organizer and safety rooms. The tour can happen whenever works best in your schedule, but we recommend before or after the intensive workshop activities.
- **Introduction:** Welcoming players, giving brief information about the game, and introducing them to one another.
- **Transformative goals:** Explicitly stating them aloud in language appropriately adjusted for the target group. Workshops bring participants in direct or indirect contact with your transformative goals, which helps shape the intentionality of the game. Embed them in your script and make them transparent so everyone is on the same page on what they should emphasize during play.
- **Workshop-related information:** Providing an agenda for the workshops, including practicalities, the structure, and the purpose of the activities.
- **Setting community norms:** Establishing “how we do things here” in terms of acceptable, encouraged, and discouraged interactions. It can be done as a group or established by the organizers. If you are low on time, we recommend establishing these norms for them.

- **Warmups:** Energizing the players in low-stakes ways, encouraging them to lower their vigilance and become more present in the moment.
- **Group:** If relevant, helping the players become accustomed to physical contact and build trust with other players.

Importantly, not everyone experiences greater trust from workshops, especially ones that focus on vulnerable sharing, intimacy, or touch. While touching exercises such as hugging workshops or holding hands can sometimes help players feel more trusting and relaxed, for other players, such exercises can provoke intense anxiety, alarm, fear of germs, or even trauma triggers from upsetting past experiences. Therefore, if your larp encourages or requires touch or other forms of intimacy, you should tell the players ahead of signup so they can set expectations accordingly (Koljonen 2016a). Similarly, if touch is not a strong feature of the play experience, having a touch-based physicality workshop may not be necessary and may even work against your goals. Depending on the context, it also may not be appropriate, e.g., in certain professional, therapeutic, or educational contexts.

If physical touch would benefit your goals, a useful strategy is letting the group decide the level of comfort with physical touch. You can ask them to close their eyes, then announce the baseline of touch, with progressively more intimate types, e.g., shaking hands, squeezing arms, hugging, cuddling, kissing, etc. Players can raise their hands for the level with which they are comfortable. If one person does not raise their hand for a specific type of touch, stop, then ask them all to lower their hands. Then, ask them to open their eyes and announce the last level of agreement as the baseline for the game. Remind them they can still calibrate.

On the other hand, if you were to ask those questions with eyes open, players might feel peer pressured to raise their hand and self-conscious when lowering it, worried about exclusion. We emphasize this example to demonstrate how important skillful negotiation is in helping establish trust in the group, especially in the initial activities of the game.

ii) Mechanics, meta techniques, and safety exercises

Holkar (2015) divides mechanics or meta-technique focused workshops into multiple distinct workshop activities, which is highly recommended. We recommend dividing these workshops under the following:

- **Game mechanics:** The rules and/or system of the game, techniques, and meta-techniques not connected to safety should have their own sections. You may also wish to workshop social conventions important to the group. If relevant, you also may add a section instructing players on how to play upon sensitive topics responsibly or avoid them altogether, e.g., violence, racism, etc.
- **Safety:** Safety should be its own workshop and ideally focused on embodied practice of any techniques rather than briefings only. If you have a Code of Conduct, you should mention the basics here.

You should think carefully about when to introduce safety information. If you run this workshop too early in a long workshop, it may be harder for players to remember the information. Some larps choose to run safety workshops close to the end of the workshop block for this reason, e.g., after any character-related activities. However, if your previous workshops run late, make sure you have plenty of time to run the safety workshop, even if you have to cut time from other exercises. In our view, safety should never appear to be an afterthought to your staff of your players.

iii) Character and relation exercises

In Holkar's (2015) model, exercises intended to focus on the characters come next in the workshop, as they help players slowly transition into the headspace of their character. The sequence of them depends strongly on the design of the larps, but some general categories include:

- **Character creation:** Players may create the entire character in this workshop, or flesh out their pre-written character in more detail through activities. If specific rules are connected to these characters, those can be explored here. Similarly, this workshop can help players prepare for actions their players will take during play. When possible, we recommend allowing players the opportunity to think and respond as their character to ease them into the game, e.g., through the Hot Seat exercise, when their character answers questions from "the universe," provided by you or their co-players.
- **Character relations:** These workshops help players build relations with others, rehearse these relations through acting specific dynamics out, and/or help them fill out backstory scenes.

iv) Calibration exercises

After relations are established, we recommend calibration exercises, which can include:

- **Game-focused calibration:** This form of calibration helps players build a mutual understanding of the game world, learning what is possible, impossible, and encouraged, as well as other key information.

For example, if your wizard larps focuses on going to class, finding a date for the ball, and other typical youth-related activities, but will not focus on acquiring dark magic or summoning evil spirits, you should strongly communicate that. Otherwise, players will likely take the game in many unanticipated directions through emergent play, which can disrupt the coherence of the experience (Bowman 2017; Torner 2018) and sometimes even lead to safety issues. Do not assume your players know how to play your game in the way you imagine it; each participant arrives with their own assumptions, projections, and past experiences that inform their actions and what they imagine the game to be.

- **Relationship-focused calibration:** This form of calibration allows time for co-players to discuss physical and emotional boundaries, request desired play, indicate undesirable play, and/or enact preparatory scenes (Holkar 2021). This type of calibration can happen between two players, e.g., discussing how a married couple handles conflict; or in small groups, e.g., discussing how a dysfunctional family dynamic should play out during the game.

Preparatory scenes can be highly helpful to give players a sense of their character dynamics before the larp through embodied play, for example in backstory scenes.

In some cases, each character will have several different relations, but you will not have time for them to calibrate for each one. Choose the most important relations, e.g., prioritizing romantic or sexual partners, family members, best friends, or enemies.

v) En-roling exercises

En-roling refers to a process of slowly getting into the character and immersing into the fiction. It can happen immediately in some cases, or be slow and methodical, e.g., spending time putting on costuming and makeup while listening to one's character's custom playlist the participant curated. Either way, we recommend having a method to guide players into the experience, such as:

- **Take-off:** Easing the players into game, e.g., through a group meditation or ritual. (Holkar 2015).

Keep in mind that even with en-roling, the first moments and even hours of a role-playing game can feel awkward, especially if the players are expected to engage in immediate social interactions. You may wish to also have strategies to help them en-role after the game starts, such as embodying or involving an NPC who can help bring them into the narrative.

vi) Additional considerations when running workshops

While all of these activities might be aspirational and, indeed, a facilitator might receive a script with many of them, they may need to decide on the fly what is most critical to run. For example, if the script calls for 10 minutes of embodied practice of a mechanic and time is running out, the facilitator needs to make a decision about how crucial that embodied practice will be to prepare players for the game. In this case, a quick demo of the mechanic with a volunteer in front of the group might suffice.

Furthermore, sometimes facilitators go “off-book” when giving workshops. This tendency can take many forms: abandoning parts of the script; not reading the exact carefully-chosen words, or worse saying incorrect instructions; giving extensive information about a concept; adding new activities that were not previously included; and forgetting to workshop key mechanics. This tendency is especially common when the facilitator did not write the script or they were not properly onboarded onto why all the sections are important. In some cases, hacking the script might be necessary,

but ideally your workshop design is well-aligned with the needs of your game, in which case facilitators should strongly resist this urge.

Along these lines, we recommend that one person who is strongly familiar with the script run the workshop with all players in the same room if possible, potentially with helpers to answer questions from smaller groups. That way, all players receive the same information. For example, you can use a microphone if your group is big.

In short, your workshop facilitators not only have the job of onboarding players to the game, but also setting the tone for the whole event. We recommend making sure your facilitators are skilled at communication, time management, and other front-facing people skills. They should practice the script, or at the very least have you demonstrate it or read it aloud beforehand so they feel more confident delivering it themselves. Remember some people learn better aurally and visually, so watching you demo it can be helpful.

Finally, when running educational games, the workshop helps build the alibi (Montola 2010; Deterding 2018), which can be especially important in mandatory situations with strongly established social hierarchies. Workshops can create a bit of healthy group pressure when encouraging new people to play. For example, if your game uses costumes and some participants are hesitant to choose one, let them wait a bit; when others start trying on the costume in the workshop, they may end up wanting to use them after all.

b) Run-time

As mentioned above, during runtime, your game may have one or many facilitators depending on the structure of the game, the needs of the narrative, the rules, etc. As an absolute minimum, your game should have a designated facilitator that is responsible for player safety during the game: an organizer whose sole task is to make sure that the game runs in a way that maintains and strengthens the designed safety measures. This facilitator should be somewhat independent of the rest of the game runners, and have the power to override and overrule any and all parts of the game design if it is deemed necessary in order to keep the players and the organizers safe. In larger games, this responsibility is shared by a safety team consisting of more than one safety person, usually with one or more coordinators (Brown 2017). This practice allows the team to also take care of each other's need for safety. Also, having a team from diverse backgrounds can help players find someone they can most trust, especially with sensitive issues related to that background.

If the location allows for it, there should also be a designated physical space for safety. This space should be separate from other organizer spaces and be under the direct care of the safety person or team. In this space, harsh or intense sensory impressions should be kept to a minimum, meaning that it should be fairly quiet, warm, softly lit, and comfortable. Creating a warm and inviting atmosphere can be crucial for supporting players who need to process and decompress.

If your game has a high level of complexity, either in relation to plot, character relations, world knowledge, or similar, it can also be wise to have facilitators that support players in navigating their play and help them figure out what their characters can do within the game. Such facilitation can also help solve misunderstandings and make sure to promote play that supports the larger vision and story arcs of the game.

Run-time facilitation in educational settings often can be more chaotic than in ordinary classrooms. This process requires a great deal of trust on the part of the facilitator to let go of control and flow with what the players do. Even if you have a fairly fixed notion of what the game should be, sometimes it can be good to remain open to letting the students change the direction of the game, as long as your learning objectives are still attainable. To enhance focus on the targeted learning, you can use meta-techniques and reflective pauses. Depending on the number and the age of your players and the type of the game you are implementing, if possible, have at least one in-game and one off-game facilitator; a controlled environment or location; and attention to both physical and emotional safety.

c) Debrief and integration

Whether debriefs should be mandatory or voluntary at leisure games is an ongoing conversation within and between different larp scenes and traditions. We advise that you consider how your game might affect the players on an emotional and psychological level, and make your decision accordingly. The default for our model is mandatory debriefing, but players can opt-out or pass if they do not feel like sharing at that moment or need to remove themselves from the activity. Depending on your context, you may not be able to allow them to leave the room, so find other ways to allow them to opt-out (see Chapter 2).

The debrief and integration practices should be designed specifically and intentionally for the game you are running. You should carefully consider these elements as parts that support the overall design vision. You might have experienced something that worked really well at a game you attended, but that does not mean that it will work at your game. We would argue that at least part of the reason why some players dislike debriefs is because they have experienced some that were more afterthoughts than well-considered components that support the whole game experience. They may also have experienced debriefs that were far too long, badly facilitated, or where players engaged with each other directly in an accusatory manner, which negatively impacted their view of the practice in general.

When running a debrief, the facilitator should make sure everyone receives the same information, either by handing out questions or having one singular voice asking the questions, e.g., on a microphone. If running a structured debrief, the facilitator should make clear the guidelines for engagement and enforce them if necessary. Some recommendations include:

- Everyone has **roughly the same amount of time to talk**, e.g., 3-5 minutes. You do not need to be exact about this guideline, but rather feel into the needs of the group at a given moment, avoiding letting some players monopolize the time;
- **No cross-talk** between group members, as the debrief is not a conversation;
- **No accusatory language** toward other players or **attributing their characters' actions to them** personally;
- **Focus on their own experience**, rather than describing the experiences of others;
- **Focus on sharing in a serious manner** rather than telling a humorous story; and
- **Cut to the emotional chase of the story**, trying to avoid telling too many extra details.

In large groups, one recommended way to run the debrief is to assign or ask for a volunteer for a player who will serve as group leader to each smaller group who is responsible for keeping time, including during their own sharing. The main debrief facilitator will read each question aloud in turn. The group leaders can raise their hand and let the main facilitator know when the group is done, then encourage the group to converse quietly until the next question is announced. Alternatively, you can hand them a script to run for the group themselves, in which case the script should have clear instructions and facilitators should check to make sure they understand all information. Reminders of time should be gentle rather than abrupt, as sometimes people will be sharing vulnerable things.

In terms of group size, consider smaller groups if you have several questions to cover, e.g., emotional, intellectual, and educational debrief questions (see Chapter 2 of *TRGD* and this book). Groups of 3-4 are usually best; adding more people can make players feel more inhibited, and they will have less time to share. On the other hand, if your emphasis is on learning objectives, e.g., in a classroom environment, it might be more helpful if everyone hears the same content. You can vary up the group size in the debrief, having smaller groups to process more personal things, then bringing a larger group together to discuss, e.g., educational takeaways.

Finally, your debrief does not necessarily need to be exceptionally long. Targeted, incisive questions that guide players to the intended topics are much better than long, unfocused debriefs. If needed, you can then encourage them to continue processing after the structured debrief e.g., with assigned debrief buddies. You may also choose to make yourself or someone on your team available for processing after the debrief, but make clear any boundaries on your time or channels of communication.

In transformative play, you should also consider facilitating some integration practices or at least providing players with examples moving forward (see Chapter 2 for examples). Integration practices also make time for additional optional debriefing and

reflection opportunities that do not require your direct intervention. See Chapter 2 for examples of concrete integration practices you can provide for players. Finally, sharing insights like, “It’s normal after a game to have strong feelings, no feelings at all, or a different interpretation of the game events than your co-players,” and providing popular sources can help tremendously for players experiencing bleed (Bowman 2015), or post-larp blues/depression (Nilsen 2015; Bowman and Torner 2014).

4.5 Facilitation recommendations for specific settings and/or populations

In this section, we will provide brief recommendations for facilitation strategies when working with specific settings or populations. Keep in mind that each of these categories could make up an entire book itself, and sometimes do, e.g., in therapeutic manuals (Shanun 2013; Connell 2023; Kilmer et al. 2023; Hand 2023).

a) Transformative leisure

In the next sections, we will explore facilitation considerations in specific transformative leisure settings in which transformative interventions can be run with the right preparation and contacts. In Chapter 2, we mentioned recommendations for working with stakeholders that can help you gain access to specific populations. These sections will help you run these interventions once your foot is in the proverbial door.

i) Festivals, conventions, and game jams

Facilitating a game at a festival, convention, or game jam means operating in a context different from that of a dedicated one-shot event that you have planned yourself (see e.g., Lukka 2022). Here, time is more limited, participants are more diverse, and some of them are more likely to be experiencing larp for the first time. As in other settings, the facilitator’s task begins with a welcome: it is necessary to immediately create a warm and inclusive atmosphere that puts everyone at ease. A smile, a simple introduction, and perhaps a little icebreaker can help to ease tensions. Immediately afterwards, it is essential to contextualise the experience clearly and quickly, explaining what kind of game is about to take place, what its themes are, how long it will last, and what the limits are. There is no time for long workshops, so the information must be concise and understandable to everyone. Similarly, it is important to introduce safety tools in a simple way, reminding everyone that the game is always voluntary and that anyone can stop at any time, i.e., The Door is Always Open.

During runtime, the facilitator becomes the point of reference that holds the group together. In a chaotic or distracting environment, such as a conference room with several tabletop RPG sessions running at the same time, your voice and presence must help players maintain concentration. Time management is crucial: you need to know how to set the pace, signal moments of transition, and guide the players towards the conclusion without rushing but without going over time. All this takes place while

maintaining a constant balance between immersion and logistics, because especially in festival spaces without privacy and a closed door, there is often noise, people passing by, and other distractions. You may even have to field questions from curious onlookers unfamiliar with role-playing. It is the facilitator who “holds the circle,” protecting the group experience.

Thus, the facilitator must embody several qualities: the ability to summarise; to explain the setting and rules in a short time; and modulate energy and intensity of the group. Being a facilitator at a festival ultimately means embodying three roles at once: the hospitality of a host, the precision of an organizer, and the presence of a playmate. Also, keep in mind that your players may be experiencing overstimulation and insufficient sleep or nutrition, as is unfortunately common in such spaces. Keep these factors in mind when considering the emotional and physical safety needs of your participants.

Finally, if running a game jam, your role is not to facilitate a pre-designed game experience, but rather the process of designing a game itself. Ultimately, the goal of such an exercise should be to get participants excited by the process of co-creation. A measure of success should not be for participants to have a high-quality or fully completed game prototype, but for them to gain confidence in their design work. Similarly to convention games, many people at game jams are designing for the first time. Even if well-intentioned, excessive critique or unrealistic expectations can cause participants to leave feeling deflated and insecure about their capabilities. Thus, we recommend viewing your role as a well-informed cheerleader rather than drill sergeant.

ii) Work with children and youth

To facilitate games for children and youth as informal learning is often quite different from running them at a convention or festival, as the main purpose often is not to “have fun,” but to promote educational and group development. Role-playing games becomes a teaching method and a tool to stimulate transferable skills of cooperation and active citizenship. To do this, the facilitator must first define a clear structure: explain to the young audience that the game is an active learning experience that will put them in situations to experiment with new perspectives. For this reason, it is important to introduce safety structures and boundaries built on trust and cooperation.

Running a game in this context is a very delicate task. During the game, the facilitator must act with care and educational sensitivity, reading group dynamics and avoiding discomfort or exclusion. Your task is to accompany young people in experiencing the game and its benefits, which involves maintaining a balance between playful aspects and educational goals.

As with other groups, the debriefing phase is crucial in youth work. This is where the game truly transforms into learning. Finally, continuity is essential in these cases. Larp should not be an isolated event, but part of a journey. It can introduce a theme that can be also explored in other languages to ensure the cohesion of the group that will continue to work together. For this reason, the facilitator must ensure a bridge is made between the gaming experience and the overall educational project.

iii) Larp camps

Larp camps can be excellent places for players to develop both socioemotional and practical physical skills. These camps range in length, e.g., 1 week, 2 months, or several sessions throughout the year. They sometimes focus on physical boffer combat, but may also emphasize other activities like scavenger hunts and quests, as well as ecological education or the development of survival skills in the wilderness.

Facilitators at larp camps may or may not have any background in role-playing. They are often teenagers or young adults who have participated in the camp when they were younger. Facilitator to player ratio is important to consider in larp camps, especially if physical activities require supervision, e.g., to avoid injury or getting lost in the woods.

Interestingly, the skills learned facilitating larp camps can be transferred to professional skillsets, especially with the burgeoning professionalization of tabletop role-playing game facilitation. For example, professional facilitator Brennan Lee Mulligan started out at the Wayfinder larp camp (The Wayfinder Experience 2017). Recently, Mulligan sold out Madison Square Garden running *Dungeons & Dragons* (Gygax and Arneson 1974; Weaver 2025), and replaced Matt Mercer in 2025 as facilitator for *Critical Role* (Geek & Sundry, 2015-2018; Critical Role Productions, 2018-; Brennan Lee Mulligan 2025).

For examples, see e.g., Fein (2015), Schwartz (2018), Faros (2018), Hoge (2013), Callina, Colbert, and Gray (2018), the latter being a mixture of both leisure transformational and therapeutic role-playing.

iv) Activism and politics

Facilitation for activism and political aims is also delicate. Here, the game is not only used to tell a story, but also becomes a space for critical reflection on power, social conflicts, collective rights, and responsibilities (Johansson et al. 2026). Therefore, the role of the facilitator is not only to guide participants in their immersion into the narrative, but also to maintain a perception of safety so that people can explore complex dynamics without feeling exposed or manipulated. Political games often move on uneven ground that combines reality and history with fantasy. For example, in a larp, the players often have the freedom of movement and rewriting of narratives, so how can we ever reconcile this practice with the accuracy of historical facts? From this perspective, role-playing games are better understood as platforms for exploring heritage, rather than history in the strict sense (Mochocki 2012, 2021).

Before starting, players need to know that they are entering an experience that deals with political or social issues, which may stir up strong emotions and stimulate personal reflection. It is also important to contextualise the experience: anchor the fiction in dynamics that resonate with reality so that participants understand the value of playing with historical facts or political themes.

In a political larp, emotions can become intense, e.g., anger, frustration, enthusiasm, or feelings of powerlessness. The facilitator's task is not to suppress them, but to ensure that they are expressed constructively, without degenerating into out-of-game conflicts related to players' beliefs or of antagonistic experiences within the game leading to unmanaged bleed-out that feels negative (Bowman 2013).

After a political or historical larp, participants need to digest what they have experienced. It is useful to give players some historical context and facts, as a bridge between fiction and reality. Facilitating a larp on activism and politics ultimately means creating a space that feels safe enough to simulate real conflicts, offering participants tools to question the status quo, discuss, and imagine possibilities for a future. For more on conflict in games, see Chapters 5 and 6 of *TRGD*.

v) Spiritual direction, guidance, and companionship

RPGs can be facilitated in order to assist with *spiritual direction*, e.g., exploring one's life purpose (Cohen 2023). If facilitators have a particular spiritual orientation or follow a specific religion, they should be aware of their participants' views on these topics. Integration of content specific to those beliefs might be normative to a group who already follows that religion's principles or believes its dogma, but might alienate the players, e.g., if they sense the game is being used to promote a specific faith or branch of a religion. As Menachem Cohen (2023), a self-proclaimed "punk rock rabbi" who uses tabletop role-playing games when working with LGBTQIA+ and/or unhoused youth, explains:

I am here to walk alongside people of all faiths or no faith as they ask the big questions of life: "Who am I? Why am I here? How do I manifest who I am? Is there a God and, if so, how do I relate to it? How do I know right and wrong?" (Cohen 2023, 56)

Ideally, the game is a space for players to learn more about their identities; their life's purpose; their moral and ethical character; and/or their spiritual beliefs in an open, exploratory way. Furthermore, facilitation for spiritual direction requires a deceptively simple skillset; as Cohen explains, "Spiritual directors do not have to be experts in anything but being present." They should empty themselves of an agenda, "ready to be what the seeker needs at that moment" (Cohen 2023, 57). In this case, the skill of deep presence is a method for witnessing and honoring the journey of another person without feeling the need to intervene. When players end up at a crossroads, whether off-game or through their characters' story, the spiritual guide's role is not to tell them which direction to take, but rather to illuminate the various paths available to them. For this reason, Cohen (2023) explains that the term spiritual direction is sometimes better understood as guidance or companionship.

The goal of such work is empowering others to deeply explore themselves, their choices, and their path in life, cultivating greater agency to have influence over their own trajectory based on a stronger sense of purpose. Importantly, not everyone believes they have a purpose in life, nor that they need one. If you encounter this belief in spiritual direction sessions, perhaps help the client instead find a greater sense of self-understanding, meaning in life, or alignment between their values and actions.

For more on exploring spirituality through play, see Chapter 6 of *TRGD* and Chapter 2 of this book.

vi) Prisons or rehabilitation centers

Facilitators working with individuals who are incarcerated or mandated to attend rehabilitation centers have special concerns. They should make sure to have clearance from any stakeholders within the administration of the facility, ideally with full transparency about the content of the game and actions that the characters might take as part of the fiction (see Chapter 2 for more details). They should avoid placing their participants in a position where they may behave out of accordance with the rules of the institution, e.g., enacting violence, even in a humorous or playful manner, or using banned items such as pencils or dice. You might also consider the type of content you wish to play. For example, if someone is recovering from addiction, perhaps you should avoid surprising them with plots that have to do with mind control, intoxication, or similar psychological states, unless you agree with the participant and the administration to work with this content as part of the transformative process.

Though challenging to implement, games run in these contexts have the potential to be profoundly meaningful, providing feelings of hope, agency, and connection. They can provide participants with opportunities to develop morally and ethically, including skills of critical thinking and decision making. If players struggle with developing a positive self-image due to past actions, role-playing games can help them transform their identities as well as their connections with others within the group and outside of it.

b) Therapeutic

When considering best practices for therapeutic facilitation, considering the purpose of the activity becomes important.

i) Personal development

Some clients may be looking for personal development in some way outside of the context of acute symptoms. Perhaps they want to explore meaning in their lives, improve their relationship dynamics with others, or increase their feelings of self-confidence. While these topics might be challenging for clients, the risk is lower than in other forms of therapeutic processing, and therefore likely may require less extensive framing.

For example, a facilitator might create a weekend workshop with a personal development group that is bookended by one 1:1 session each for onboarding and debriefing. The client-clinician relationship for such an intervention is in place and additional care is provided, but the relative length of the therapeutic process is shorter. That being said, such sessions can dig up trauma and other repressed content that might be challenging to process for the facilitator, the client, and the group alike. You should have a backup plan if such situations become acute, such as the opportunity for additional 1:1 sessions or referral to a specialist. Even if your intention was to have a less intensive therapeutic process, the psyche can reveal surprising contents at a moment's notice that must be meaningfully and skillfully addressed.

ii) Social skills

Other clients primarily seek therapy for help in improving their relationships and communication with other people. Therapeutic games are often run as a method to practice prosocial skills, e.g., turn-taking, emotion regulation, communication, teamwork, and/or building friendships. Importantly, the therapeutic goals of such interventions must be developed with clients; the intervention should not be treated as a space to “fix” someone who is socially “broken,” but rather to help someone get their needs for connection with others met in healthy, mutually fulfilling ways.

Again, while such skills can be challenging and strong feelings emerge, the therapeutic container is less focused on extensive processing. For example, facilitators might provide short check-ins and debriefs with the emphasis being on play itself, sometimes with short processing breaks during play and sometimes not.

However, such sessions are not without the potential for emotional activation, overwhelm, or trigger. For example, if a client has intense social anxiety or has experienced bullying due to their communication patterns, strong emotions can rise to the surface. Again, knowing when to add additional support in the framing can help, as can knowing when to refer the client to someone else, ideally a mental health professional with whom they already have a therapeutic relationship.

iii) Therapeutic processing

Finally, some clients are seeking help with deeper therapeutic processing, e.g., working with trauma, grief, or acute mental health challenges such as depression, then the framing should be more robust. Group selection is especially important, as interactions with certain group members might intensify symptoms or enable unhealthy coping behaviors. In some cases having facilitators step in as other player-characters in the group might be advantageous, giving you more control over the social dynamics. More extensive 1:1 or group processing between sessions is likely necessary and should be built into the process from the start.

In some cases, group therapy and/or role-playing games may be high risk or contraindicated, in which case you should avoid including the client in the intervention altogether either temporarily or permanently. See Chapter 2 of *TRGD* for risks related to lack of training on the part of the facilitator, delusional tendencies, incompatibility of group members, confidentiality, and privacy.

c) Educational

In this section, we will expand upon considerations when implementing for educational purposes.

i) Informal, nonformal, and formal learning

As briefly mentioned in Chapter 2, *informal learning* can occur in any type of game you facilitate; it is spontaneous learning that happens naturally even in everyday life (Baird 2022; Westborg 2023). For example, a game played over several days in the mountains may lead to players naturally picking up camping skills. However, in our model, transformative leisure games are still designed and implemented with explicit transformative goals in mind. In such games, your framing structure might be a bit looser. For example, if a facilitator would like to explore what people have learned in informal learning, they can offer a less formal debrief check-in circle at the end of the game and have a conversation with the players.

Non-formal learning, on the other hand, can be found in different structures, for example museums, youth centers, extracurricular activities, organizational learning, and development programs. Examples include an edu-larp that aims to equip youth workers with skills to help them prevent burnout or an extracurricular language class that uses *D&D* (Gygax and Arneson 1974) as a tool to practise new vocabulary. These games can be one-shot experiences or a series that unfolds over time.

In longer formats, e.g., a weekly *D&D* campaign in a language center, players meet regularly with the same facilitator. Here, the role of the facilitator is quite different: rules and safety are discussed in the beginning, possibly in a dedicated Session 0, and then re-addressed whenever necessary. The facilitator needs to have the skills to create a warm, fun, safe, and consistent environment that inspires players to return to the group again and again. As this is a recurring event, the facilitator will inevitably become the person of reference, much like a teacher in a classroom. You will need to be ready to deal with the dynamics of the group and remain observant. Flexibility is also necessary, as absences might occur or people might drop out suddenly. Similar to therapeutic role-playing, you might need to have milestones in mind or even scheduled, where longer reflection sessions with the group will occur, e.g., breaks between sessions.

In non-formal learning, participants often have signed-up voluntarily, meaning they have an interest and are open to the experience (Baird 2022; Westborg 2023). The voluntary nature of such exercises is helpful for the facilitator, as the goal is harnessing the existing energy and aiming it in the right direction rather than creating the energy from scratch.

Formal learning occurs in structured environments following a pre-planned curriculum that leads to official qualifications, certifications, and/or degrees (Geneuss 2021; Baird 2022; Cullinan and Genova 2023; Westborg 2023). As a result, facilitating a game in such an environment requires some extra steps. If the facilitator is the main

educator of the group, things are a bit simpler: you already know the students and are the person of reference, so the trust does not need to be built from scratch. You are aware of the schedule, the curriculum, and the learning objectives, so you can pre-plan the activity beforehand. You are likely familiar with the logistics that need to be taken into account, e.g., who to talk to for approval, available space, available time, and consent / assent forms.

You can build upon or temporarily alter pre-existing rules and boundaries that exist by establishing specific rules and safety mechanics for the specific game. Alternatively, you can build the safety mechanics you plan to use in the game into the general rules of the classroom, e.g., using Pause when needing to ask for clarification; using the X-Card to request a discussion topic be removed if possible (Stavropoulos 2014), or using the Lookdown mechanic with a hand over one's eyes if they need to leave the room and do not want to draw attention to themselves (Koljonen 2016c, developed with Trine Lise Lindahl).

In formal education, remember to take into account time restrictions, e.g., mandatory breaks that might interrupt the flow of the game; possible distractions and interruptions, e.g., other students entering the game area; and unpredicted absences. We recommend building some flexibility regarding the number of players and facilitators your scenario requires, especially if you plan to run it for different groups. Adjustments on the fly might require quick thinking, like assigning some students high responsibility player-character status to help keep the structure intact, as described previously.

If you are an external collaborator coming into an educational institution to facilitate a game, the requirements are a bit more complicated. You need to figure out many of the things that other educators already know, such as schedules and the content covered already. In this case, as discussed in Chapter 2, we highly recommend directly collaborating with educators embedded in the institution and actively involving them in the implementation process. They can provide insight not only regarding logistics, but also typical behaviours and dynamics in the classroom.

Ideally, the educator can either receive a character like everyone else or an NPC. Having an idle observer in a power position over the students can break the immersion, cause stress to the players, and even derail the game completely. If they mainly want to observe, give them a light, or *thin*, character. In this case, a thin character does not have a complex backstory or personality, but rather focuses on a specific in-game activity such as time keeping or handling one small part of the structure. As discussed above, they could also play an authority in-game; the educator is already the authority figure in the class, so you can use that to benefit the game (see also Drama in Education, e.g., Heathcote 2010; Mochocki 2013). On the other hand, be aware that if the teacher holds too much authority in the game, it might inhibit the players from being active or taking risks due to the power differential. Worst case scenario, the educator can be involved without having an in-game role, e.g., being responsible for addressing safety concerns.

Crucially, the educator may be responsible for running additional debriefs or connecting the game content to other curricular materials in future class sessions. Make sure to give them clear instructions for how to help the students process the material, such as a debrief script. Assume they may not be able to debrief at all and plan accordingly, making sure the students have enough time to process immediately afterward.

In formal learning, participation is usually partially or entirely mandatory. For this reason, as a facilitator, emphasize activities that help the participants feel safe and steer them toward intended game play. Often, they have no prior experience and will not know how to play this scenario without guidance. A player who is unsure what to do or feels uncomfortable may drop out-of-character, which can encourage others to break character. This issue can be handled in different ways; if the player mostly feels insecure and unsure, you can reply in-game while role-playing your character quite heavily to help pull them back into game through interimmersion (Pohjola 2024). If they feel unsafe, then it is better to pull them aside and talk to them off-game, even if doing so disrupts the role-play. Have some back-up instructions ready to keep the other players engaged in case such situations occur.

For examples of educational larp implementation practices from the STARS method in Germany, see Geneuss (2021, 2022). If you want to begin facilitating RPGs for educational purposes, *Roll for Learning: 51 Micro Tabletop Role-Playing Games to Use in the Classroom* (Zamboni, Farber, and Merchant 2024) is an excellent anthology specifically designed to play in learning environments for different potential age groups.

ii) Primary and secondary schools

Younger children often find it harder to focus, but easier to play. In general, when working with this target group, you can let the students be the experts while the teachers and other adults are the ones needing help. As with other forms of educational play, for younger children, we strongly suggest having an option to opt-out even if mandatory. If not, they might disrupt the game for the others due as their self-regulation skills are still developing. As examples, you could offer them an alternative assignment such as drawing in the corner or playing another game by themselves. In some situations, you may be able to have them join another class, but you should develop a good working relationship with the other teacher in these instances.

Also, clearly establish a way to be able to talk to students off-game. You can use this technique for giving relevant information about the game, such as asking if they want to participate in a certain pre-planned scene, or to communicate with students who are behaving disruptively.

However, if the group has a lot of energy, participants might take anything you throw at them and run with it, meaning you end up running out of things to do with them. It can be good to have extra activities planned and try to aim the players towards playing with each other instead of coming to you to get quests or tasks. Examples of additional tasks include:

- **Tasks involving active movement**, e.g., collecting a certain number of items and bringing them back;
- **Intellectual tasks**, e.g., solving puzzles; or
- **Socially-focused role-playing tasks**, e.g., making a friend from another in-game group or finding out about the latest gossip.

iii) Higher education

Higher educational environments have specific constraints to consider in facilitation. Unlike with children, older students and inexperienced players often struggle initially to be playful, which can be helped sometimes with a stronger alibi. Since class time is even more scarce than primary and secondary school settings, activities should be closely connected to the learning objectives of the course, especially if testing will later occur on the material.

On the other hand, these players are likely able to engage with complex content. Therefore, scenarios exploring such content from multiple dimensions is more possible than with younger age groups. As an example, *Reacting to the Past* games can be found in over 350 college and university classrooms across the US (Bledsoe and Richardson 2022), as well as high school classrooms around the world (Reacting Consortium n.d.).

Additionally, while perspective taking and empathy can be powerful learning tools, be aware that in some situations, students might object to feeling forced to empathize with certain roles, e.g., participating in debates about emancipation during the Civil War (Belkin 2022). Furthermore, while such scenarios can help students understand the complexity of political situations in particular historical or fictional situations, they might also make room for stereotypical, culturally appropriative, or otherwise problematic behavior (Leonard, Janjetovic, and Usman 2021). Some students might object completely to the practice of role-playing marginalizations the student does not share (see e.g., Raja 2020). Such outcomes can make diverse participants feel less safe in the classroom, which can interrupt the learning process or even lead to them no longer returning. If you are hired by the institution, you may even face disciplinary actions and negative media coverage in such cases.

If you choose to include sensitive content, since you likely will have limited class time, make sure you make plenty of space to process properly and have sufficient debrief facilitation available. In general, remember that large classes with a lower ratio of facilitators to players are inherently riskier in terms of safety, but the scale of impact might make such risk acceptable depending on the type of game. We recommend making such sessions optional and offer alternative assignments, e.g., reading a book that provides a first-person account on the topic.

While not emerging from the leisure tradition of RPGs, we recommend reading more about *Reacting to the Past* games as one of the most successful examples of widespread implementation of educational role-playing (see e.g., Carnes 2011, 2018; Watson and Hagood 2018; Hoke and Risk 2026), including their game design handbook (Proctor 2011).

d) Train the trainer

Finally, a great way to spread transformative play is to train other facilitators as your primary target group, sometimes called *train-the-trainer* interventions. In many ways, portions of this textbook can be understood as train-the-trainer guidelines.

When teaching educators how to facilitate a role-playing game, you usually have a strong starting point. Experienced educators are used to managing groups and running activities. They likely know how to ask good questions to help students reflect. However, less experienced educators may still be developing their skillset, so adjust your training accordingly. Additionally, teachers are often overworked and role-playing games can require extra effort than more traditional classroom activities. We recommend providing them a strong argument for why the effort is worth it (see e.g., Richardson, Bledsoe, and Manning 2023).

Role-playing games tend to redistribute power from the educator to the players to greater or lesser degrees (Westborg 2026a). Some educators find this process of power redistribution difficult. You can alleviate some of this anxiety by teaching strategies to create a strong alibi for the game itself that makes clear the distinction between in-game and off-game roles. Similarly, by making a clear transition from in-game to off-game, educators may find it easier to act in different ways from their established classroom persona.

Importantly, emphasize to teachers that they should maintain the focus on letting the participants explore on their own. Encourage them to release expectations about how the scenario “should” go. Emphasize to them that ideally, their scenario is not about getting the “right” answer, but rather about experiencing the content together in a low-stakes environment. Furthermore, if success is possible in the scenario, encourage them to reassure their students that they are able to take risks, will not face consequences for failure; and that failure can be a great learning opportunity as well. If they need to test student performance for a grade, advise them to use a different activity. For an example of training using American freeform with arts educators, see Cox (2015; 106).

Role-playing is also an excellent way to practice therapeutic skills. Future therapists and coaches often have demo sessions in which they engage with a mock client. Adding gaming elements can make such exercises more engaging, and can also work to build facilitation skills with therapeutic RPGs. Examples include trainings developed by RPG Therapeutics (n.d.), the Bodhana Group (TBG n.d.), and Geek Therapeutics (n.d.), and Game to Grow (STAR Institute 2025).

4.6 Facilitation logistics

As discussed in Chapters 1 and 3, an important part of planning any game is considering the logistics of your facilitators. Some games like *Dungeons & Dragons* (Gygax and Arneson 1974) are facilitator-driven, meaning they require a strong, active facilitator for most, if not all scenes. Other games have hands-off facilitation, e.g., in a slice-of-life larp attempting to maintain a 360 degree illusion without interference or negotiation from organizers.

Remember that adding a facilitator to the equation adds an element of power imbalance. Consider whether or not your game's goals require hands-on facilitation. Do your goals involve training specific skills only the facilitator knows? Or will allowing the players to role-play freely just as easily meet your goals, for example in practicing social cohesion?

Another important dimension is the concept of *plot*, which extends beyond narrative to become a sort of currency in many RPG traditions. In this case, plot refers to narrative elements generated by the design team to engage players, such as secret lore, clues to mysteries, special quests, insider knowledge about the game world, etc. Facilitators often hold plot, and therefore interacting with them can mean gaining an advantage or favor that other players do not have. Similarly, in many RPG traditions, the facilitator resolves conflicts, usually through some sort of mechanics or their own fiat.

Even in games where interactions with facilitators do not affect the story in any way, the perception of the facilitator as the person who holds the secrets, the power, and/or the status is often present in the minds of players and can dramatically affect game dynamics. For this reason, consider having strong guardrails around yourself if running a game alone, or around your co-facilitators in terms of actions they should and should not take when improvising with players. If they serve a specific function, remind them to stick to that function unless approved by the organizing team to stray.

The following subsection will ask some key questions you should consider when creating your implementation plan (see Chapter 1).

a) Interaction with facilitators

- **Will facilitators interact with the players throughout the game, e.g., run-time storytelling?**

Sometimes the facilitators are characters in the game (*diegetic*) who play a role in order to support the players. On other occasions they may be semi-diegetic: in costume, but merely functionaries who will occasionally step in to perform an action or to offer guidance. In other situations, they may be non-diegetic: present but should be ignored by characters and only spoken to by players.

- **How will players interact with the facilitators during the game?**

During the game your players may want or need to interact with the facilitators. This interaction could involve coming to an off-game / organizer room to ask a question, or there could be diegetic or non-diegetic storytellers in play. You need to plan for and explain how, where, and for what purposes players can approach facilitators.

- **How will facilitators provide support during play?**

For example, will they be available to answer questions? Is their primary role to adjudicate in-game conflicts? Some larger larps have in-game referees whose job it is to ensure fair play, particularly in character vs. character conflicts (CvC, sometimes called PvP), and/or to explain complex rules around magic and rituals. They tend to stay in the background as semi-diegetic or non-diegetic figures, wandering around the play area, or requestable by players for specific events.

Alternatively, will they not be physically present, or in a completely different room and hands-off? This choice is very much a matter of personal preference. Some organizers like to have characters and to be present in the fiction, sometimes even taking an active role. Others prefer to remain in an off-game space, ready to step in and perform whatever functions are needed. However, the presence or absence of a facilitator can dramatically affect interpersonal dynamics, so consider this choice carefully. You might consider giving players instructions for how to interact with facilitators during play if you want to discourage imbalanced power dynamics.

If not immediately present, will they be available via text or phone? For larger games, or for events that run for longer periods of time, having contact details for organizers can be useful. Usually, contact is reserved for emergencies, but is sometimes also available for queries that are urgent enough to affect play. Assuming there is mobile phone coverage, a good practice is to offer a cell phone number for a facilitator to be contacted if they are not immediately available.

Related to this point: How can players locate/contact safety team members? You should have a safety team person available and on call during game hours. Sometimes they may be eating, in the bathroom, or helping another player. Giving a cell phone number or a walkie talkie means they can be contacted in a hurry if needed. Also it can seem trivial but remember: once you give a contact number to the players, remember to check it often. Communicate with your players if you will be unavailable during certain hours, e.g., sleeping times. We discuss safety teams in more depth in Chapter 5.

b) Interaction with the game's environment, narrative, and challenges

In some cases, facilitation is not direct communication with players, but rather creating opportunities for them to engage with elements of the game world during run-time or even between sessions. Sometimes, these interactions need to be overseen by a facilitator in order to ensure the game proceeds as planned. Some guiding questions:

- **How will the players interact with the game world and/or environment?**

For a game that has locations, props, and scenography, you need to consider the interfaces between players and the physical storyworld. For a game that has plot, you need to consider the interface between player and fiction, which sometimes occurs through direct storytelling, but other times is seeded throughout the game, e.g., through clues. Remember that your players may interpret clues coming from the facilitator even if not intended. While this may seem harmless, unfortunately such misunderstandings can derail the entire game. You may wish to make clear what is and is not an actual plot or clue, e.g., with a meta technique or visual signal. Alternatively, you can explain in workshops if certain facilitators carry no key plots, instructing the players to treat them like any other character.

- **Are they expected to solve puzzles or plots?**

Some games are built around puzzles or dilemmas. As a part of the design, you need to think about to what extent will players need to “solve” the game? If this activity is a part of the design, how much of the play time will players be spending on it and how will this time spent affect your transformative goals?

Puzzles are subjective. Something that you consider to be difficult as a designer could end up being trivial to one of your players. Conversely the puzzle box you put into play that you are expecting to be opened in ten minutes could be abandoned as impossible and still closed in Act 3, which can stall the plot. Similarly, important plot information sometimes fails to get into play. It is forgotten, communicated to a character who is disinterested, or worse, hoarded by a character as currency or tucked away for future use. In some cases, the facilitator will need to enter the game and move the plot along if it stalls. In other cases, a puzzle or plot may end up being a distraction from other forms of interactions, so use these tools wisely.

Remember also that plot is often viewed as a form of currency. If you include a puzzle or plot that only a few people can interact with, others may feel excluded. Similarly, a one-person puzzle game that takes hours to play will likely take that player away from interaction with others for a significant amount of time. These situations can be especially problematic if the other players cannot move the story forward until a few people have finished the puzzle. Consider whether or not such a plot is necessary for your game.

- **Are players expected to hoard and/or deliver information for the game to run smoothly?**

In some cases, hoarding plot may be desirable. For example, in a game about knowledge and power, you should expect players to hoard information and trade secrets. Therefore if you want any plot points to be common knowledge, then you will need a method for broadcasting them. Some games have a rule that says, “If you are told a secret, you should pass it on to at least two other characters.” These techniques

are fun, but they also tend to be forgotten in play. Furthermore, if you as a facilitator tell characters not to tell anyone a secret, do not assume the players will then spread that information; they may think they are betraying your design by telling anyone. *Spilling secrets* is actually a player skill that can sometimes feel counterintuitive. (See Chapter 6 for more information on player skills).

Thus, a careful explanation to players if they should be either sharing or hoarding secrets is important. If sharing secrets, it is also worth having an NPC or a character whose job it is to assimilate and communicate knowledge. If the game is stalling, you may wish to come in as a facilitator and spread secrets yourself to activate a specific plot. If you absolutely need some piece of information to get into the game, consider multiple routes by which it can get into play: at least two, ideally more.

- **Should the players interact with the scenography or leave it alone?**

This point may seem strange, but considering the amount of player agency role-playing can offer, giving explicit instructions regarding how to interact with the environment can be important.

Some scenography is just aesthetic and should remain in the background, but other times it is fundamental to the game and should not be touched, or should remain secret until a specific time.

For example, you may have a key to unlocking a certain plot such as: “If the players search the undergrowth beneath the strange monolith they will find the runes that they need to open the gate.” If you want your players to make those sorts of searches, tell them in the game documents and the briefings, or spread this information as a facilitator during the game. As another example, if you do not want them wasting time spending hours searching the woods for more items because they have all been found, also tell them. We recommend giving players some broad direction about where to spend their energy.

- **Are special clues buried somewhere? If so, how will you tell players how/where to find these?**

Treasure hunt types of puzzles can be very interesting, but having some clues, mechanism, or guidance will reduce the amount of time players waste on a thankless task and give you some control about when they find the important information. For example, having players call the in-game Ministry and come away with a promise that an NPC with a metal detector is on the way to help search is likely more interesting for them than them digging in the sand on a beach for three hours.

- **Are these clues critical to the plot or to having a good experience? If so, consider if they are needed for your transformative goals.**

As we have mentioned before, this is the fundamental question about complex plots, riddles, plots, and puzzles when it comes to transformative games: in what ways are they *core* to the design? In some cases they can be central, for example, as a way for

players to put things they have learned to the test. If students in a math class need to practice solving equations, then creating puzzles based on equations to achieve success in the game makes sense.

However, if these elements are not at the heart of the transformative element of your design, you should consider whether they would be better used in a game that was intended solely for leisure. The right question to ask while designing is: what is the function of this component in the game? Is the component a game engine that will lead to something else that is not another piece of the narrative? Will this process spark reflection or incentivize players to come together and share emotions and ideas? If not, you may want to save the component for a less intentional design.

4.7 Technological considerations

Running transformative role-playing games through online technologies can be an accessible alternative to in-person play. For example, players who are geographically isolated, financially constrained, or have limited mobility may prefer to role-play through Zoom or Discord. Suffice it to say, you will need to familiarize yourself with these technologies if you plan to facilitate using them to avoid awkwardness, confusion, and frustration. Alternatively, the more seamless you can make the experience for players, the less they will notice the technological medium.

Each technology has affordances and drawbacks. For example, breakout rooms in Zoom have the advantage of creating instant privacy for scenes, but make it difficult for other people -- including you -- to monitor what is happening, join the discussion, overhear the conversation, or approach a character to briefly whisper in their ear, which are often far smoother when playing in the physical world. Of course, tech issues also can make play difficult, e.g., if someone's video or audio is not working, or if they are experiencing service interruptions, e.g., an internet or power outage. Finally, while accessible in some ways, running games with these technologies players may face other accessibility challenges. Some of these challenges can be addressed, such as turning on autocaptioning in Zoom for people with difficulties with auditory processing (for examples, see e.g., Marsh and Dixon).

We share some brief considerations here for the use of virtual reality (VR) for larp. However, for a more thorough investigation of advanced technology and larp, see our Erasmus+ EDGE Tech Toolkit (Suominen 2025).

a) Facilitating with advanced technology

With any advanced technology, it is more likely than not that unforeseen technical problems will occur. Without fail, these problems will take time to solve. Make sure to test all your equipment before a game session and build time buffers into your schedule for any tech-related hiccups.

b) Facilitation through advanced technology

Immersive and social VR affords players the opportunity to experience embodied and spatially situated play. In a VR larp, the player uses their own body to play the character, much as in an analog larp. VR larp is a different feeling to puppeting a version of your character as a 3D representation on a 2D screen, like players do in most graphical role-playing games played on a computer. VR larp is also different from using your own face on a 2D screen in a Zoom larp. Therefore, it is important to factor in extra time to make sure that all players in VR become familiar with the medium. We recommend having a separate session to familiarize players with speaking and moving in VR space. Take time to learn and agree upon how to compensate for what gets lost in translation in terms of touch and eye contact, e.g., with vocal assurance and body language. For more information about VR larp design and implementation, see Lipsyc (2024a, 2024b), Rydberg (2024), and Green (2026).

4.8 Core competencies for role-playing facilitation

This final section looks toward the future of role-play facilitation. In this section, Garcia integrates direct facilitation experience in Erasmus+ Youth Exchanges and Training Courses for youth workers, including non-formal education, experiential learning cycles, structured reflection, and intercultural group facilitation. Garcia then synthesizes core academic literature that treat facilitation as a professional practice in simulation and game-based learning contexts (INACSL Standards Committee 2016; SALTO-YOUTH 2018; de Wijse-van Heeswijk 2021; van Laere, Lindblom, and de Wijse-van Heeswijk 2021).

This synthesis further integrates insights from the Erasmus+ European Training Strategy (ETS; n.d.) and the LifeComp framework for Personal, Social, and Learning to Lean Key Competence (European Commission 2025). Both frameworks define competence as the integration of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that can be observed and developed over time.

Applying this logic to role-playing games suggests a path for facilitators to grow from intuitive practice toward deliberate, evidence-based design, which is needed not only for quality design work, but also to help our field gain recognition and to study its impacts. What follows is not a formal model, but a reflection emerging from European educational work that imagines what competent facilitation might look like in the coming years.

Facilitation can be viewed as a full learning cycle composed of four core areas. The first, *framing and intent*, defines why the experience exists and how participants are invited into it. Clear framing aligns the game's purpose, tone, and structure with learning goals while ensuring that people can safely choose how to engage.

Second is *play orchestration*, which covers the small, ongoing actions that make play flow, for example balancing pressure vs. rest, spotlight on players vs. silence, and rules vs. improvisation.

The third, *safety and calibration*, aims for participants to retain agency and perceive the community as emotional support, e.g., consent tools, visible boundaries, and options to pause or exit without stigma.

Finally, *reflection and transfer* turn play into learning by guiding participants from what happened to what changed and how that change applies beyond the game.

Across all areas, two transversal dimensions enrich this vision. *Intercultural competence* supports facilitators in adapting tone, language, and norms across different cultural contexts. *Recognition of learning* ensures that experiences are documented in a way that can be validated in education or training systems without interrupting the flow of play.

Together, these perspectives point toward a future where facilitation is recognized as a professional field grounded in observable practice and shared ethical standards. This model is not meant to prescribe specific rules, but rather to invite facilitators to see themselves as learners too, who are continuously refining how they create safer and more meaningful transformative experiences through play.

4.9 Conclusion

Facilitation can have strong implications on the experience of the players. On a basic level, facilitators tend to be responsible for the smooth run-time, including timing, pacing, and other logistical matters. If a facilitator fails to establish and maintain a perception of safety, players may feel exposed or even betrayed (see e.g., Spencer 2025, 2026). Power struggles may emerge, especially if the players' perceive their expected agency within the scenario is reduced due to heavy-handedness from the facilitator (Bowman 2013), or if the facilitator is not authoritative enough, e.g., in rules disputes that threaten to derail a game (Dashiell 2017; Hilman, Hirst, Flanagan, and Leonard 2025; Tremblay 2025). Facilitators may introduce content that players find objectionable, stereotypical, triggering, or otherwise problematic. Alternatively, they may fail to address the situation adequately if other players introduce such content or transgress boundaries in ways that cause harm. Failure to address such challenges may cause ruptures in the community or the activity itself to break down. Our next chapter will discuss such challenges with regard to psychological safety.

References

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>Algayres, Muriel. 2019a. "The Impact of Social Capital on Larp Safety." <i>Nordiclarp.org</i>, October 29. Link here.</p> <p>Algayres, Muriel. 2019b. "Not Good Enough: On Larp and Systemic Anxiety." Nordic Larp Talks. YouTube, February 11.</p> | <p>Arenas, Daniel Luccas, Anna Viduani, and Renata Brasil Araujo. 2022. "Therapeutic Use of Role-Playing Game (RPG) in Mental Health: A Scoping Review." <i>Simulation & Gaming</i> (March 2022).</p> |
|--|---|

- Atwater, Brodie, and Alexis Rowland. 2018. "Developing a Framework of Larp Counseling." *International Journal of Role-Playing* 9: 16–23.
- Baird, Josephine. 2022. "Learning About Ourselves: Communicating, Connecting and Contemplating Trans Experience through Play." *Gamevironments* 17: 355–402.
- Baird, Josephine, and Sarah Lynne Bowman. 2022. "The Transformative Potential of Immersive Experiences Within Role-playing Communities." *Revista de Estudos Universitário* 48: 1–48.
- Ball, Graham. 2022. "A Phenomenological Inquiry into the Therapeutic Aspects of Tabletop Roleplaying Games." Ph.D. diss, UWE Bristol, October 6.
- Bartenstein, Lennart. 2022. "Larp in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy: Making Larp a Standard Method." Nordiclarp.org, April 22.
- Bartenstein, Lennart. 2024. "Live Action Role Playing (Larp) in Cognitive Behavioral Psychotherapy: A Case Study." *International Journal of Role-Playing* 15 (June): 92–126. [Link here](#).
- Belkin, Douglas. 2022. "College Professors Drop Slavery Role-Playing Lesson Over Concerns It Upsets Students." *The Wall Street Journal*, May 13.
- Berthold, Anita. 2024. "All Quiet on the Safety Front: About the Invisibility of Safety Work." Nordiclarp.org, May 13.
- Bisogno, Ben. 2022. "No Gods, No Masters: An Overview of Unfacilitated 'GMless' Design Frameworks." *Japanese Journal of Analog Role-Playing Game Studies* 3: 70e–81e.
- Bledsoe, Robert S., and Deborah S. Richardson. 2022. "Impact of Reacting to the Past and Effect of Role on Student Attributes and Academic Outcomes." *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* 33, no. 3: 361–373.
- Boss, Emily Care, Ivan Vaghi, and Jason Morningstar. 2012. "Beyond the Game Master: The Rise of Peer Empowered Tabletop Roleplay." In *States of Play: Nordic Larp Around the World*, edited by Juhana Pettersson, 163–169. Helsinki, Finland: Pohjoismaisen roolipelaamisen seura.
- Boss, Emily Care, and Matthijs Holter. 2013. "Play with Intent." Black and Green Games, October 22.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1980. *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford University Press.
- Bowman, Sarah Lynne. 2013. "Social Conflict in Role-playing Communities: An Exploratory Qualitative Study." *International Journal of Role-Playing* 4: 4–25. [Link here](#).
- Bowman, Sarah Lynne. 2015. "Bleed: The Spillover Between Player and Character." Nordiclarp.org, March 2.
- Bowman, Sarah Lynne. 2017. "A Matter of Trust: Larp and Consent Culture." Nordiclarp.org, February 3. [Link here](#).
- Bowman, Sarah Lynne. 2018. "The Larp Domino Effect." In *Shuffling the Deck: The Knutpunkt 2018 Color Printed Companion*, edited by Annika Waern and Johannes Axner, 161–170. Pittsburgh, PA: Carnegie Mellon University: ETC Press.
- Bowman, Sarah Lynne, and Evan Torner. 2014. "Post-Larp Depression." *Analog Game Studies* 1, no. 1.
- Bowman, Sarah Lynne, Maury Brown, Brodie Atwater, and Alex Rowland. 2017. "Larp Counselors: An Additional Safety Net." Nordiclarp.org, August 7.
- Branc, Blaž, et al. 2018. In *Imagine this: The Transformative Power of Edu-Larp in Corporate Training and Assessment*, edited by Michał Mochocki. Rollespilsakademiet.
- Brennan Lee Mulligan. N.d. "Critical Role." Brennanleemulligan.com
- Brind, Simon, et al. 2023. *Gothic*. Avalon Larp Studio.
- Brown, Maury. 2014. "Pulling the Trigger on Player Agency: How Psychological Intrusion in Larps Affects Game Play." In *The Wyrd Con Companion Book 2014*, edited by Sarah Lynne Bowman, 96–111. Los Angeles, CA: Wyrd Con.
- Brown, Maury. 2017. "Safety Coordinators for Communities: Why, What, and How." Nordiclarp.org, April 17.
- Brown, Maury, Sarah Lynne Bowman, Quinn D, Kat Jones and Orli Nativ. 2018. "Immerton: A Society of Women." In *Shuffling the Deck: The Knutpunkt 2018 Color Printed Companion*, edited by Annika Waern and Johannes Axner, 41–52. ETC Press.

- Carnes, Mark C. 2011. "Setting Students' Minds on Fire." *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Last modified March 6.
- Carnes, Mark C. 2018. *Minds on Fire: How Role-Immersion Games Transform College*. Harvard University Press
- Cazeneuve, Axiel. 2021. "Larp as Magical Practice: Finding the Power-From-Within." Nordiclarp.org, Aug. 13.
- Charrette, Robert, Hume, Paul, Dowd, Tom, Babcock III, L. Ross, Lewis, Sam, Wylie, Dave, Mulvihill, Mike. 1989. *Shadowrun*. [Tabletop role-playing game]. FASA, Fantasy Productions, Catalyst Game Labs.
- Chatterjee, Bradford, Danielle Harper, Erik Mona, Liz Spain, Cat Tobin, and Ivan Van Norman. 2017. "PAX Unplugged 2017 - The Art of the Table: GMing Beyond the Basics." Dubl Day. YouTube, November 18. [Link here](#).
- Connell, Megan. 2023. *Tabletop Role-Playing Therapy: A Guide for the Clinician Game Master*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Callina, Krysten, Evan Colbert, and Peter Gray. 2018. "The Educational Micro-Larp." Paper presented at the *Role-playing and Simulation in Education Conference*, Boston, MA, 2018. Living Games Conference. YouTube, August 17.
- Cox, Jason. 2015. "Educational Communities, Arts-Based Inquiry, & Role-Playing: An American Freeform Exploration with Professional & Pre-Service Art Educators." Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University. [Link here](#).
- Cox, Jason. 2016. "Arts-Based Inquiry with Art Educators through American Freeform." *International Journal of Role-Playing* 6: 27-31.
- Critical Role Productions. (2018-). *Critical Role*. Critical Role Productions.
- Cullinan, Maryanne. 2024. "Surveying the Perspectives of Middle and High School Educators Who Use Role-Playing Games as Pedagogy." *International Journal of Role-Playing* 15 (June): 127-41. [Link here](#).
- Cullinan, Maryanne, and Jennifer Genova. 2023. "Gaming the Systems: A Component Analysis Framework for the Classroom Use of RPGs." *International Journal of Role-Playing* 13: 7-17.
- Dashiell, Steven. 2017. "Rules Lawyering as Symbolic and Linguistic Capital." *Analog Game Studies* 5, no. 3.
- Dashiell, Steven L. 2020. "Hooligans at the Table: The Concept of Male Preserves in Tabletop Role-playing Games." *International Journal of Role-Playing* 10: 26-39.
- Dashiell, Steven. 2022. "DM Habitus: The Social Dispositions of Game Mastering in Dungeons & Dragons." *JARPS: Japanese Journal of Analog Role-Playing Game Studies* 3: 3-13.
- Deterding, Sebastian. 2018. "Alibis for Adult Play: A Goffmanian Account of Escaping Embarrassment in Adult Play." *Games and Culture* 13, no. 3: 260-279.
- Devorak, Mary. 2022. "Using RPGs with Family Systems." TAGGS: Therapeutic and Applied Geek and Gaming Summit, April 14.
- de Wijse-van Heeswijk, Marieke. 2021. "Ethics and the Simulation Facilitator: Taking your Professional Role Seriously." *Simulation & Gaming* 52, no. 3: 312-332.
- Edwards, Ron. 2003. *Sex and Sorcery*. Adept Press.
- Efterskolen EPOS. 2014. "Epos' værdigrundlag [Eng. Values]." Efterskolen-epos.dk, December.
- European Commission. N.d. "LifeComp: The European Framework for the Personal, Social and Learning to Learn Key Competence." The Joint Research Centre: EU Science Hub.
- European Training Strategy. N.d. "Levels of Impact of the European Training Strategy." European Training Strategy.
- Erikson, Erik H. 1968. *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc.
- Faros, Lux. 2018. "Immersive Narratives, Personas, and Multi-intelligence Scaffolding." Living Games Conference. YouTube, August 17.
- Fatland, Eirik. 2000. "The Play of Fates (or: How to Make Rail-roading Legal)." Amor Fati.
- Fatland, Eirik. 2013. "The Play of Fate - Preface to the Italian Edition." The Larprawright.
- Fein, Elizabeth. 2015. "Making Meaningful Worlds: Role-Playing Subcultures and the Autism Spectrum." *Culture Medicine and Psychiatry* 39, no. 2 (March).

- Femia, Giuseppe. 2025. "Uninformed Consent in TTRPGs: Communicating Expectations to Avoid Nightmare Game Master Horror Stories." *International Journal of Role-Playing* 16 (September): 34-45. [Link here](#).
- Fido-Fairfax, Karolina. 2024. "Strings and Rails: NPCs vs. supporting characters." In *Liminal Encounters: Evolving Discourse in Nordic and Nordic Inspired Larp*, edited by Kaisa Kangas, Jonne Arjoranta, and Ruska Kevätkoski. Helsinki, Finland: Ropecon ry.
- Fischer, Olivia. 2022. "The Lion, the Witch and the Workshop - Olivia Fischer." Nordic Larp Talks. YouTube, September 11.
- Follett, Mary Parker, 1940. *Dynamic Administration: The Collected Papers of Mary Parker Follett*, edited by H. C. Metcalf and L. Urwick. New York: Harper & Brothers.
- Geek & Sundry. (2015–18). *Critical Role*. Geek & Sundry.
- Geek Therapeutics. N.d. "Get All Of The Tools And Skills Necessary To Create Your Own Therapeutic Roleplay Sessions!" [Therapeuticgamemaster.com](#).
- Geneuss, Katrin. 2021. "The Use of the Role-playing Technique STARS in Formal Didactic Contexts." *International Journal of Role-Playing* 11: 114-131.
- Geneuss, Katrin. 2022. "To Play or Not to Play: Edu-Larp in Curricular Settings – Katrin Geneuss." Transformative Play Initiative. YouTube, April 8.
- Gibson, James J. 2014. *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. 1st Edition. Psychology Press.
- Giordano, Michael J. 2022. "Legitimate Peripheral Participation by Novices in a Dungeons and Dragons Community." *Simulation & Gaming* 53 (5): 446–469.
- Gottman, John M. 2011. *The Science of Trust: Emotional Attunement for Couples*. WW Norton & Company, 2011.
- Green, Sophie. 2026. "Crying Alone for the Invisible Audience: VR Roleplay Design and Traditions." In *Seasons of Larp*, edited by Anna Erlandsson, Martine Svanevik, Mo Holkar, and Simon Brind. Knutpunkt.
- Hammer, Jessica, Whitney Beltrán, Jonathan Walton, and Moyra Turkington. 2018. "Power and Control in Role-playing Games." In *Role-Playing Game Studies: Transmedia Foundations*, edited by José P. Zagal and Sebastian Deterding, 448-467. New York: Routledge.
- Hand, Daniel. 2023. *Role-Playing Games in Psychotherapy: A Practitioner's Guide*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hartyándi, Mátyás, and Gijs van Bilsen. 2024. "Playing With Leadership: A Multiple Case Study of Leadership Development Larps." *International Journal of Role-Playing* 15 (June): 142-77.
- Hazlett, Naomi, Lloyd Smith, Erica Murray, and Andrea Duncan. 2024. "Exploring Tabletop Role-Playing Games as Meaningful Occupations: A Qualitative Exploratory Study." *Occupational Therapy In Health Care* (September): 1–18. doi:10.1080/07380577.2024.2403784
- Heathcote, Dorothy. 2010. "Productive Tension. A Keystone in 'Mantle of the Expert' Style of Teaching." *The Journal for Drama in Education* 26, no. 1, 2010: 8-23.
- Henrich, Sören, and Rachel Worthington. 2021. "Let Your Clients Fight Dragons: A Rapid Evidence Assessment Regarding the Therapeutic Utility of 'Dungeons & Dragons'." *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health* 18, no. 3: 1-19. [Link here](#).
- Henriksen, Thomas Duus. 2004. "On the Transmutation of Educational Role-play: A Critical Reframing to the Role-play in Order to Meet the Educational Demands." In *Beyond Role and Play: Tools, Toys, and Theory for Harnessing the Imagination*, edited by Markus Montola and Jaakko Stenros, 107-130. Helsinki, Finland: Ropecon ry.
- Henriksen, Thomas Duus. 2006. "Games and Creativity Learning." In *Role, Play, Art: Collected Experiences of Role-Playing*, edited by Thorbiörn Fritzon and Tobias Wrigstad, 3-16. Stockholm: Föreningen Knutpunkt.
- Henriksen, Thomas Duus. 2008. "Extending Experiences of Learning Games: Or Why Learning Games Should Be Neither Fun, Educational Nor Realistic." In *Extending Experiences: Structure, Analysis and Design of Computer Game Player Experience*, edited by Olli Leino, Hanna Wirman, and Amyris Fernandez. Rovaniemi, Finland: Lapland University Press. 140-162.

- Hernø, Nór. 2025. "WEB: Workshop - Exercise - Briefing." Nordiclarp.org, February 7.
- Hilman, Irene, Alula Hirst, Scooter Flanagan, and Diana J. Leonard. 2025. "Masculinity at the Table: Indie TTRPGs as Refuge From the Male Preserve in Mainstream TTRPGs." Paper presented at *Transformative Play Initiative Seminar 2025: Games, Conflict, and Education*, June 12, 2025, Uppsala University, Visby, Sweden.
- Hoge, Mark. 2013. "Experiential Learning for Youth Through Larp and RPGs." In *The Wyrd Con Companion Book 2013*, edited by Sarah Lynne Bowman and Aaron Vanek, 38-41. Los Angeles, CA: Wyrd Con.
- Hoke, Rachel, and James Risk. 2026. "Rewriting the Rules: Game-Based Learning for Affective and Cognitive Student Engagement in an Undergraduate History Course." *International Journal of Role-Playing* 17 (March): 22-41. [Link here](#).
- Holkar, Mo. 2015. "Workshop Practice: A Functional Workshop Structure Method." In *The Knudepunkt 2015 Companion Book*, edited by Charles Bo Nielsen, 150-155. Copenhagen, Denmark: Rollespils Akademiet.
- Holkar, Mo. 2021. "Larping Before the Larp: The Magic of Preparatory Scenes." In *Book of Magic: Vibrant Fragments of Larp Practices*, edited by Kari Kvittingen Djukastein, Marcus Irgens, Nadja Lipsyc, and Lars Kristian Løvang Sunde. Oslo, Norway: Knutepunkt, 2021.
- Hollander, Aaron T. 2021. "Blessed Are the Legend-Makers: Experimentation as Edification in *Dungeons & Dragons*." *Political Theology* (Feb 26): 1-16.
- Hugaas, Kjell Hedgard. 2019. "Investigating Types of Bleed in Larp: Emotional, Procedural, and Memetic." Nordiclarp.org, January 25.
- Hunjan, Raji, and Soumountha Keophilavong. 2010. *Power and Making Change Happen*. Carnegie UK Trust.
- Hyltoft, Malik. 2008. "The Role-players' School: Østerskov Efterskole." In *Playground Worlds: Creating and Evaluating Experiences of Role-playing Games*, edited by Markus Montola and Jaakko Stenros, 232-47. Jyväskylä, Finland: Ropecon ry.
- Hyltoft, Malik. 2010. "Four Reasons Why Edu-Larp Works." In *LARP: Einblieke*, edited by Karsten Dombrowski, 43-57. Braunschweig, Germany: Zauberfeder Ltd.
- Hyltoft, Malik. 2012. "Full-Time Edu-larpers: Experiences from Østerskov." In *Playing the Learning Game: A Practical Introduction to Educational Roleplaying*, edited by Martin Eckhoff Andresen, 20-23. Oslo, Norway: Fantasisforbundet.
- INACSL Standards Committee. 2016. "INACSL standards of best practice: SimulationSM facilitation." *Clinical Simulation in Nursing* 12, supplement: S16-S20.
- Ihalainen, Tia Carolina, and Freja Gyldenstrøm. "How Do You Value Creative Work? Perspectives on Collaborating (Respectfully and Productively) with Creatives – and Why It's Still Worth It in the AI-Era." In *Seasons of Larp*, edited by Anna Erlandsson, Martine Svanevik, Mo Holkar, and Simon Brind. Knutpunkt.
- Jensen, Maria Kolseth. 2021. "Larp in Leadership Development at the Royal Norwegian Naval Academy (RNNA)." In *Book of Magic: Vibrant Fragments of Larp Practices*, edited by Kari Kvittingen Djukastein, Marcus Irgens, Nadja Lipsyc, and Lars Kristian Løvang Sunde. Oslo, Norway: Knutepunkt.
- Johansson, Karin, Johanna Koljonen, Jaakko Stenros, PerOla Öberg, and Sarah Lynne Bowman. 2026. "Playing a Role in Democracy: Political Live Action Role-playing Games, Activism, and Deliberation." In *Education and Analog Role-Playing Games: Theory and Pedagogy*, edited by Susan Haarman. CRC Press.
- Johns, Adam, Jared Kilmer, Cheryl Paberzs, and Heather Whittal. 2022. "Roll for Healing: Therapeutic Game Master Round Table." *TAGGS: Therapeutic and Applied Geek and Gaming Summit*, June 3.
- Kemper, Jonaya. 2018. "The Good, the Bad & the Internalized: Searching for Self Liberation in Conscience." Nordic Larp Talks. YouTube, March 20.
- Kemper, Jonaya, Eleanor Saitta, and Johanna Koljonen. 2020. "Steering for Survival." In *What Do We Do When We Play?*, edited by Eleanor Saitta, Johanna Koljonen, Jukka Särkijärvi, Anne Serup Grove, Pauliina Männistö, and Mia Makkonen. Helsinki: Solmukohta.

- Kilmer, Elizabeth D., Adam D. Davis, Jared N. Kilmer, and Adam R. Johns. 2023. *Therapeutically Applied Role-Playing Games: The Game to Grow Method*. Routledge.
- Kilmer, Elizabeth, Jennifer Rubin, Michael Scanlon, and Jared Kilmer. 2024. "Therapeutically Applied RPGs to Support Adolescent Social Connection and Growth During the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health* 19, no. 2: 210–231.
- Koljonen, Johanna. 2016a. "Basics of Opt-in, Opt-Out Design Pt 3: What They Need to Know at Signup." Participation Safety in Larp, July 5.
- Koljonen, Johanna. 2016b. "Creating Play in the Magical Classroom: Part 1." Nordiclarp.org, May 13.
- Koljonen, Johanna. 2016c. "Toolkit: The 'See No Evil' or Lookdown." Participation Safety in Larp, September 18.
- Lampo, Marjukka. 2015. "Ecological Approach to the Performance of Larping." *International Journal of Role-Playing* 5 (January): 35–46.
- Larsson, Elge. 2003. "Larp as a Way to Enlightenment." In *As Larp Grows Up*, edited by Morten Gade, Line Thorup, and Mikkel Sander, 126–131. Denmark: Projektgruppen KP03.
- Lasley, Joe. 2020. "An Examination of Gaming Environments in Dungeons and Dragons Groups." PhD diss., University of San Diego Digital USD.
- Lasley, Joe, and Antonio Ruiz Ezquerro. 2026. "Guiding the Game: A Model for How Facilitation, Psychological Safety, Cohesion, and Creativity Are Interrelated in Dungeons & Dragons Groups." *International Journal of Role-Playing* 17 (March): 64–84. [Link here](#).
- Lehto, Kerttu. 2024. "Nordic Larp As a Method in Mental Health Care and Substance Abuse Work: Case SÄRÖT." *International Journal of Role-Playing* 15 (June): 74–91. [Link here](#).
- Leonard, Diana J., Jovo Janjetovic, and Maximilian Usman. 2021. "Playing to Experience Marginalization: Benefits and Drawbacks of 'Dark Tourism' in Larp." *International Journal of Role-Playing* 11: 25–47.
- Leonard, Diana J., and Tessa Thurman. 2018. "Bleed-out on the Brain: The Neuroscience of Character-to-Player." *International Journal of Role-Playing* 9: 9–15.
- Lipsyc, Nadja. 2024a. "Comments on VR, Larp, Technology, Creation." In *Liminal Encounters: Evolving Discourse in Nordic and Nordic Inspired Larp*, edited by Kaisa Kangas, Jonne Arjoranta, and Ruska Kevätkoski. Helsinki, Finland: Ropecon ry.
- Lipsyc, Nadja. 2024b. "Immersive Aesthetics: VR, Larp, and Art -- Nadja Lipsyc." Transformative Play Initiative. YouTube, August 28.
- Losilla, Sergio. 2024. "Rules, Trust, and Care: the Nordic Larper's Risk Management Toolkit." In *Liminal Encounters: Evolving Discourse in Nordic and Nordic Inspired Larp*, edited by Kaisa Kangas, Jonne Arjoranta, and Ruska Kevätkoski. Helsinki, Finland: Ropecon ry.
- Lukka, Lauri. 2022. "Designing Intensity: A Case Study of an Extraordinary 24h Scenario Session." Transformative Play Initiative. YouTube, January 26.
- Mandall, Ben, Amber Eagar, Eric Mona, Jess Hartley, Ross Cowman, Jeff Fasenfest. 2013. "PAX 2013 - The Art of the Table: GMing Beyond the Basics Panel." Mmoreporternetwork. YouTube, September 12. [Link here](#).
- Marsh, Erin, and Hazel Dixon. 2021. "Accessibility in Online Larp." Nordiclarp.org, March 17.
- McLaren, Patrick J., Lindsay G. Oades, and Ben Deery. 2026. "How Do Dungeon Masters and Players Contribute to the Needs Satisfaction (or Frustration) in Dungeons & Dragons 5th Edition?" *International Journal of Role-Playing* 17 (March): 42–63. [Link here](#).
- Mercer, Ian S., John N. Harris, and R. Gabrielle Swab. 2021. "To the Top: A Role Playing Exercise Highlighting Leadership, Influence Tactics, Decision Making, Conflict Resolution and Communication." *Journal of Organizational Behavior Education* 14: 71–94.
- Mitchell, Laura. 2013. "Beauty or the Beast? The Role of 'Monsters' in Larps." In *Crossing Theoretical Borders*, edited by Karete Jacobsen Meland and Katrine Øverlie Svela, 37–45. Norway: Fantasisforbundet.

- Mitchell, Laura. 2016. "Volunteers as Monstrous Workers: 'Monsters' in UK Live-Action Roleplay Game Organizations." *Culture and Organization* 25, no. 3: 233–48.
- Mochocki, Michał. 2012. "Reliving Sarmatia: National Heritage Revived in the Polish Larp Scene." In *States of Play: Nordic Larp Around the World*, edited by Juhana Pettersson. 54–61. Helsinki, Finland: Pohjoismaisen roolipelaamisen seura.
- Mochocki, Michał. 2013. "Edu-Larp as Revision of Subject-Matter Knowledge." *The International Journal of Role-Playing* 4: 55–75.
- Mochocki, Michał. 2013. "Less Larp in Edu-Larp Design." In *Crossing Habitual Borders: The Official Book for Knutepunkt 2013*, edited by Katrine Øverlie Svela and Karete Jacobsen Meland, 101–111. Oslo, Norway: Fantasiforbundet.
- Mochocki, Michał. 2021. *Role-play as a Heritage Practice, Historical Larp, Tabletop RPG and Reenactment*. Routledge.
- Montola, Markus. 2010. "The Positive Negative Experience in Extreme Role-playing." In *Proceedings of DiGRA Nordic 2010: Experiencing Games: Games, Play, and Players*. Stockholm, Sweden, August 16.
- Montola, Markus, Jaakko Stenros, and Eleanor Saitta. 2015. "The Art of Steering: Bringing the Player and the Character Back Together." Nordiclarp.org, March 29.
- Nilsen, Elin. 2015. "A Beginner's Guide to Handling the Knudeblues." Nordiclarp.org, February 17.
- Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management and The Ohio Department of Education. 2000. *Let's Resolve Conflicts Together: Elementary School Classroom Activities*. Conflict Management Week, May 1–7, 2000. Retrieved from ERIC.
- Otani, Victor Henrique Oyamada, et al. 2024. "Framework Proposal for Role-playing Games as Mental Health Intervention: The Critical Skills Methodology." *Frontiers in Psychiatry*. [Link here](#).
- Pansardi, Pamela, and Marianna Bindi. 2021. "The New Concepts of Power? Power-over, Power-to and Power-With." *Journal of Political Power* 14, no. 1: 51–71.
- Pedersen, Troels Ken. 2015. "Your Larp's Only As Safe As Its Safety Culture." Leaving Mundania, August 4.
- Pettersson, Juhana. 2024. "Designing the Designer." In *Liminal Encounters: Evolving Discourse in Nordic and Nordic Inspired Larp*, edited by Kaisa Kangas, Jonne Arjoranta, and Ruska Kevätkoski. Helsinki, Finland: Ropecon ry.
- Pettersson, Juhana. 2025. "Production Models of Nordic Larp." In *Anatomy of Larp Thoughts: A Breathing Corpus*, edited by Nadja Lipsyc et al. Knutepunkt Conference 2025. Fantasiforbundet.
- Pohjola, Mike. 2015. "Steering for Immersion in Five Nordic Larps: A New Understanding of Eläytymisen." In *The Knutepunkt 2015 Companion Book*, edited by Charles Bo Nielsen, 94–105. Copenhagen, Denmark: Rollespilsakademiet.
- Proctor, Nicolas W. 2011. *Reacting to the Past Game Designer's Handbook*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.
- Raja, Sara. 2020. "UNC Professor Accused of Ignoring Students of Color's Concerns Over Role-playing Class." *The Daily Tar Heel*.
- Reynolds, Sean K., and Shanna Germain. 2019. *Consent in Gaming*. Seattle, WA: Monte Cook Games.
- Richardson, Deborah South, Robert S. Bledsoe, and Kailea Manning. 2023. "Pushing Active Learning to the Extreme: Is It Worth It?." *College Teaching* 71, no. 1: 9–17.
- RPG Therapeutics LLC. N.d. "Role-Playing Game Professional Training and Workshops by RPG.LLC: The Global Leader Highest Standards in Comprehensive Holistic Role-Playing Game Professional Training." Rpg.llc.
- Rosenberg, Marshall. 2015. *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*. 3rd Ed. Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press.
- Rydberg, Josephine. 2024. "Mud in the Machine: Making the Most of Your Next VR Larp -- Josephine Rydberg." Transformative Play Initiative. YouTube, August 21.

- SALTO-YOUTH. 2018. A Competence Model for Youth Workers to Work Internationally. SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centre. [Link here](#).
- Schwartz, Ben Books. 2018. "The Wayfinder Experience - Ben Books Schwartz." Nordic Larp Talks. YouTube, March 20.
- Shanun, Almog. 2013. *TTRI: Therapeutic Table Role-Play Intervention: Role Play In Group Therapy*. Scholar's Press.
- Siegel, Daniel J. 2007. *The Mindful Brain: Reflection and Attunement in the Cultivation of Well-being*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Sinking Ship Creations. 2020. "Risk Management." Sinking Ship Creations. [Link here](#).
- Spencer, Albert R. 2025. "Beyond Consent: Care Ethics in Horror Role-Playing Games." *International Journal Role-playing Game* 16: 57-65.
- Spencer, Albert R. 2026. "Transforming Crisis into Growth: Neurodivergence, Bleed, and Care Ethics in RPGs." In *Education and Analog Role-Playing Games: Theory and Pedagogy*, edited by Susan Haarman. CRC Press.
- Stark, Lizzie. 2014a. *Pocket Guide to American Freeform*. Lizzie Stark.
- Stark, Lizzie. 2014b. "Three Ways to Organize a One-Shot Larp." Leaving Mundania, May 11.
- STAR Institute. 2025. "Game to Grow Training Series." Sensoryhealth.org.
- Stavropoulos, John. 2013. "X-Card: Safety Tools for Simulations and Role-Playing Games." Google Docs.
- Stavropoulos, John. 2022. "Innovating for Growth: Designing a Culture of Safety in Games - John Stavropoulos." Transformative Play Initiative. YouTube, February 15.
- Stenros, Jaakko. 2013. "Between Game Facilitation and Performance: Interactive Actors and Non-Player Characters in Larps." *International Journal of Role-Playing*, no: 4, 78-95.
- Stenros, Jaakko. 2017. "Keynote: Nordic Larp, NPCs, and the Future." Jaakko Stenros: Researcher, Player, Writer, February 27.
- Suominen, Taisto. 2025. "Erasmus+ EDGE Tech Toolkit." Erasmus EDGE.
- TBG: Therapy Blended Gaming - The Bodhana Group. N.d. "Bodhanaversity." Thebodhanagroup.org.
- Turner, Evan. 2013. "Transparency and Safety in Role-playing Games." In *The Wyrd Con Companion Book 2013*, edited by Sarah Lynne Bowman and Aaron Vanek, 14-17. Los Angeles, CA: Wyrd Con, 2013.
- Turner, Evan. 2015. "Bodies and Time in Tabletop Role-Playing Game Combat Systems." In *The Wyrd Companion Book 2015*, edited by Sarah Lynne Bowman, 160-171. Los Angeles, CA: Wyrd Con.
- Turner, Evan. 2018. "Emergence, Iteration, and Reincorporation in Larp." In *Shuffling the Deck: The Knutpunkt 2018 Companion*, edited by Annika Waern and Johannes Axner, 171-179. ETC Press.
- Turner, Evan. 2019. "How to Run a Freeform Larp." In *Larp Design: Creating Role-play Experiences*, edited by Johanna Koljonen, Jaakko Stenros, Anne Serup Grove, Aina D. Skjønsvell and Elin Nilsen, 350-354. Copenhagen, Denmark: Landsforeningen Bifrost.
- Tremblay, Julie. 2025. "Assigning Expert Authority to the Dominant Player in Role-Playing Games." *International Journal of Role-Playing* 16 (September): 46-56. [Link here](#).
- van Bilsen, Gijs, and van Barlingen, Anne. 2025. "Learning from Bleed." In *Anatomy of Larp Thoughts: A Breathing Corpus*. Knutepunkt Conference 2025. Fantasiforbundet.
- van Laere, Joeri, Jessica Lindblom, and Marieke de Wijse-van Heeswijk. 2021. "Complexifying Facilitation by Immersing in Lived Experiences of on-the-fly Facilitation." *Simulation & Gaming* 52, no. 3: 346-363.
- Watson, C. Edward, and Thomas Chase Hagood, eds. 2018. *Playing to Learn with Reacting to the Past: Research on High Impact, Active Learning Practices*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wayfinder Experience, The. 2017. "Life Lessons with Brennan Lee Mulligan" Oct. 31, 2025. [Link here](#).
- Weaver, Shaye. 2025. "Brennan Lee Mulligan is leading D&D's NYC Rise With a Sold-out Show at MSG." Time Out New York, January 10. [Link here](#).

- Wieck, Stewart, et al. 1993. *Mage: The Ascension*. 1st Ed. White Wolf Publishing.
- Wieslander, Eliot. 2004. "Rules of Engagement." In *Beyond Role and Play: Tools, Toys, and Theory for Harnessing the Imagination*, edited by Markus Montola and Jaakko Stenros, 181-190. Helsinki, Finland: Ropecon ry.
- Westborg, Josefin. 2023. "The Educational Role-Playing Game Design Matrix: Mapping Design Components onto Types of Education." *International Journal of Role-playing* 13: 18-30. [Link here](#).
- Westborg, Josefin. 2026a. "Edu-larp: The Promise and Pitfalls of the Method." In *Education and Analog Role-Playing Games: Theory and Pedagogy*, edited by Susan Haarman. CRC Press.
- Westborg, Josefin. 2026b. "How Is Learning in Edu-Larp As a Method Described and Seen by Practitioners?" *International Journal of Role-Playing* 18 (April):120-38. [Link here](#).
- Westerling, Anna, and Anders Hultman. 2019. "Using Runtime Directors." In *Larp Design: Creating Role-play Experiences*, edited by Johanna Koljonen, Jaakko Stenros, Anne Serup Grove, Aina D. Skjønfsjell and Elin Nilsen, 342-346. Copenhagen, Denmark: Landsforeningen Bifrost.
- White, William J., Nicolas LaLone, Nicholas Mizer. 2022. "At the Head of the Table: The TRPG GM as Dramatistic Agent." *Japanese Journal of Analog Role-Playing Game Studies* 3: 46-58.
- Winardy, Gary Collins Brata, and Eva Septiana. 2023. "Role, Play, and Games: Comparison between Role-Playing Games and Role-Play in Education." *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 8, no. 1: 100527. [Link here](#).
- Wright, Jennifer Cole, Daniel E. Weissglass, and Vanessa Casey. 2020. "Imaginative Role-Playing as a Medium for Moral Development: Dungeons & Dragons Provides Moral Training." *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 60, no. 1: 99-129.
- Yuliawati, Livia, Putri Ayu Puspita Wardhani, and Joo Hou Ng. 2024. "A Scoping Review of Tabletop Role-Playing Game (TTRPG) as Psychological Intervention: Potential Benefits and Future Directions." *Psychology Research and Behavior Management* 17 (August): 2885-2903. doi:10.2147/PRBM.S466664.
- Zamboni, Camilla, Matthew Farber, and William Merchant. 2024 "Roll for Learning: 51 Micro Tabletop Role-Playing Games to Use in the Classroom" *Open Textbooks & Reviews*. 10.
- Zayas, Luis H., and Bradford H. Lewis. 1986. "Fantasy Role-Playing for Mutual Aid in Children's Groups: A Case Illustration." *Social Work with Groups* 9, no. 1: 53-66.

Ludography

- Alder, Avery. 2014. *Dream Askew*. Buried Without Ceremony.
- Baker, D. Vincent, and Baker, Meguey. 2010, 2016. *Apocalypse World*. 1st. Edition. [Tabletop role-playing game]. Lumpley Games.
- Brind, Simon, Charlie Ashby, H. Dabill, Martine Svanevik, and R. Williams. 2018. *The Quota*. [Live action role-playing game]. Avalon Larp Studio and Broken Dreams Larp. UK.
- Brind, Simon, et al. 2023. *Gothic*. [Live action role-playing game]. Avalon Larp Studio. Denmark.
- Davis, Adam, Adam Johns, Virginia Spielmann, Gavin Cheng, and Maja Nordrum. 2021. *Critical Core*. [Tabletop role-playing game]. Game to Grow.
- Gygax, Gary, and Dave Arneson. 1974. *Dungeons & Dragons*. [Tabletop role-playing game]. TSR, Inc.