

# Editorial

## Special Issue: Role-Playing and Simulation in Education

Welcome to Issue 6 of the *International Journal of Role-Playing*.

This issue focuses on one of the more important topics in the field of role-play studies: educational role-playing, or edu-larp. Edu-larp is closely aligned with other forms of experiential learning, including simulation, drama in education, psychodrama, improvisation, game-based learning, etc. (Mochocki 2014; Bowman, 2014; Bowman and Standiford, 2015). Indeed, learning through role-taking and playing scenarios is an instinctive part of the human experience, as evidence by our proclivity toward pretend play (Bowman 2010). Although not all play is productive (Stenros, 2015), using games and role-playing as a means of instruction holds a tremendous amount of potential to increase engagement and motivation.

Along these lines, interest in educational role-playing has increased dramatically in the last several decades, from practitioners to researchers (cf. *Simulation & Gaming*; Henriksen, 2004, 2006, 2008; Andresen, 2012; Bowman, 2014; Simkins 2015). Edu-larp, which evolved from leisure role-playing as a form of experiential learning, is expanding rapidly as a supplemental teaching method in classrooms and other learning spaces. Edu-larp is even the primary teaching method at the Danish boarding school Østerskov Efterskole, which is celebrating its tenth successful year of operation in 2016. Due to this increased interest in the method, several official conferences have emerged to discuss the practical and academic aspects of edu-larp, including the Role-playing in Games Seminar (2012) in Finland, the Living Games Conference (2014) in New York, the Edu-larp Sweden Conference (2014) in Gothenburg, the Edu-larp CPH conference (2015) in Denmark, and the Edularp Conference (2016) in Finland. This classroom (2015), as she is an accomplished researcher and practitioner who straddles both the simulation and larp worlds (Standiford 2014). Standiford teaches clinical and psychiatric nursing at the St. David's School of Nursing at Texas State University, which offers students an elaborate simulation lab, complete with a mock hospital, clinic rooms, and sim dolls. Texas State had consulted with both edu-larp specialist Aaron Vanek and myself for assistance with integrating larp techniques into their simulations in

the last few years. I have also volunteered for them as both a simulated patient and doctor for several semesters. Therefore, this location served as an excellent space to hold the conference, which took place on May 19, 2016, with much support from the faculty and staff of the School of Nursing.

The results of this event were twenty-two exceptional presentations on the theoretical and practical applications of experiential learning from a variety of perspectives: Simulation and Health Care; Humanities; Natural and Political Sciences; Sociology, Psychology, and Therapy; Business and Other Professional Applications; and Youth Outreach. These presentations are all available in their entirety on the Role-playing in Simulation in Education Hub (2016) hosted on the Living Games website, including videos of each talk and their accompanying Powerpoint presentations. In conjunction with the conference, we invited participants to submit short papers on their topics, which underwent peer review. Thus, this sixth issue of the *International Journal of Role-playing* features a selection of nine papers resulting from this work, co-edited by Evan Torner and me.

As the conference was hosted by a department specializing in simulation, we invited J. Tuomas Harviainen to deliver a keynote bridging the gap between simulation and larp entitled "Physical Presence in Simulation: A Scratch at the Surface of Complexity." His accompanying paper provides a meta-review of the existing literature on presence, simulation, and larp, discussing the importance of careful attention to the components of physicality, briefings, and debriefings in the successful deployment of these interventions.

In a similar vein, in "Enhancing Healthcare Simulations and Beyond: Immersion Theory and Practice," Standiford and I reviewed the literature around the contested topic of immersion. We synthesized this information into six major categories similar to those developed by Gordon Calleja (2011): immersion into activity, game, environment, narrative, character, and community. Standiford and I then applied these categories to health care simulations, analyzing how effectively existing exercises engage students on each of these levels and identifying areas for improvement.

Transitioning to the more expansive category of the Humanities, this issue offers four excellent papers on the application of edu-larp. In "Arts-Based Inquiry with Art Educators through American Freeform," Jason Cox offers a summary of his dissertation project, which involved developing and deploying original freeform scenarios as training tools in higher education pedagogy. Evan Torner's "Teaching German Literature through Larp: A Proposition" also explores edu-larp in the higher education classroom, but takes a different approach. In this paper, Torner explains how he incentivized college students to develop freeform scenarios by adapting classic German literature texts.

Similarly, others presenters focused upon the use of larp, simulation, and improvisational techniques as a way to stimulate student interest in learning. Josh T. Jordan's "Simulation and Character Ownership in Secondary Dramatic Literature Education" discusses utilizing larp and simulation techniques to help high school students more deeply connect with characters in classical theatre texts. While Jordan's work emphasizes scripted materials, Graham MacLean's "One Way to Create Educational Games" explores the use of improvisational theatre methods in the classroom as an innovative way to build upon the existing skills students possess through the use of spontaneous creativity.

In contrast, the last three papers focus on more scientific content within edu-larps, as well as the application of social science theories. Brodie Atwater's "We Need to Talk: A Literature Review of Debrief" presents an overview of the concept of debriefing in various contexts, including simulation, clinical psychology, and larp. This work untangles the various definitions of the term, working to clarify the importance of properly deployed debriefing in each of these fields, with an emphasis on the unique purpose behind the larp debrief.

With an eye more toward practice, Mikael Hellström's, "Playing Political Science: Leveraging Game Design in the Post-Secondary Classroom" explains how the author applied gamification and game-based learning strategies garnered from role-playing theory to the higher education political science classroom. Finally, Gabriel de los Angeles' "Scaffolding Role Playing: An Analysis of Role-playing Interactions with Non Role-players of All Ages" describes the application of educational psychology and larp theory to edu-larps designed for indigenous children to increase engagement with science and the arts. These exercises work to provide an experiential method of connecting ecological knowledge with indigenous tradition and inter-generational community building.

One of our major goals for the conference was to make the various theories and practices around edu-larp accessible to the larger community. We also hoped to bridge the gap between edu-larp and other sibling practices in order to share insights between related fields. We hope that these papers and the accompanying video documentation of the presentations will help inspire others to begin or advance their own work in this growing, fascinating field of pedagogy.

Sarah Lynne Bowman  
Austin Community College

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