

Editorial

Transformative Play Initiative Seminar 2025: Games, Conflict, and Education

Welcome to Issue 19 of the *International Journal of Role-Playing*. While publication took some time from the 1st (2008) and the 2nd (2011) issue of the IJRP, since 2011, the journal has published on average one issue every 1-2 years. The fact that Issue 19 is the third published in 2026 alone serves as a concrete example of how the field of role-playing game studies is currently in the middle of a significant expansion.

In June 2025, The Transformative Play Initiative (TPI) at Uppsala University's Department of Game Design hosted a two-day seminar on Games, Conflict, and Education in Visby, Sweden. Here, we will present information originally disseminated in the Call for Papers, discuss the peer review process, and present the articles in this issue.

The event was co-organized with members of Uppsala's Political Science and Peace & Conflict Studies departments, and was partially funded by the Erasmus+ ROCKET project, a Cooperation Partnership between Göttingen, Uppsala, and Groningen University in the ENLIGHT network on the use of conflict transformation through role-playing in critical virtual exchange for diversity, equity, and inclusion in EU universities. Members of each of these organizations contributed to providing feedback on the programming committee.

The event was coordinated alongside the Department of Game Design's annual Gotland Game Conference (GGC), in which students present their games to the public and are evaluated by a panel of jury members. This year, some conference presenters and attendees also served in a jury capacity at GGC. The seminar also received generous financial and practical support from the Uppsala Forum on Democracy, Peace and Justice, and from Region Gotland. We are very grateful for the support from all these parties, and it is safe to say that we could not have run the seminar in the way we did without their generosity and contributions.

During the seminar, educators, researchers, and design practitioners were invited to present work related to conflicts within games, their associated communities, and/or game-based learning environments. While conflict in games has historically been associated with violence and using force to achieve your goals both in mainstream digital (Schott 2016) and analog games (Torner 2015; Albom 2021), the TPI seminar invited participants to come up with novel approaches with which to approach the issue, and imagine how conflict in games can be used to facilitate conflict transformation (Lederach 2014), support peaceful resolutions, and promote greater diversity, equity, and inclusion. Participants were therefore encouraged to submit work on games that contain elements of practicing prosocial skills, and ways to cultivate positive peace (Galtung 1969) and support processes of justice. Presenters were also given the option to submit an academic article for consideration in this special issue, under the condition that they would engage in an open peer review process with other authors in advance of the conference.

At the end of the editorial feedback and peer-review processes, the 9 conference papers published in this issue remained. Our contributors represent a wide range in terms of stage of academic career, from undergraduates to senior lecturers, representing 10 different nationalities, 3 continents, and 9 different academic institutions. We believe that the accepted

papers represent different contemporary trends within role-playing game studies, showcasing how the field is expanding and developing in width, depth, and degrees of interdisciplinarity. Accordingly, we will organize the rest of this editorial according to the panel themes within which these articles were presented at the seminar.

Games, Privilege, and Marginalization

The ways in which privilege and marginalization manifest and are addressed in, by, and in relation to role-playing games is a subject that has received increased attention in the discourse in the last few years. Examples include inclusion, e.g., of people from marginalized racial and ethnic backgrounds (see e.g., George 2014; Kemper 2018 for popular sources) and representation of such groups within game contents (see e.g., Long 2015; Mendez Hodes 2019a, 2019b; Burton, Trammell, and Jones 2024 for academic sources). Researchers have published similar work about other forms of marginalization, e.g., connected to representation of gender (Stang 2021) and disability (Henry 2025).

Similarly, work is increasing regarding the effects of role-playing games on neurodiverse participants such as autistic players, including in leisure play (Atherton et al. 2024), larp camps (Fein 2015), social skills education (Helbig 2019; Katō 2019; Visuri 2024), and therapeutic settings (Connell, Kilmer, and Kilmer 2020; Davis and Johns 2020). Such outcomes indicate the importance of establishing inclusive role-playing spaces for participants on the autism spectrum.

In this issue, Kevin Rebecchi's (2026) "*Asteria and Neurodiversity in Role-Playing Games: Inclusion or Tokenism? Examining Community Conflicts Over Autism Representation*" explores how players perceive representations of autism in fantasy settings. By analyzing the discussion that followed the introduction of the autistic character Asteria in *Dungeons & Dragons*, Rebecchi shows how competing and conflicting interests can add substantial levels of complexity around processes to integrate neurodiversity in games.

In their article "Masculinity at the Table: Untangling the Male Preserve in Indie and Mainstream Gaming," Irene Hilman, Alula Hirst, Scooter Flanagan, and Diana Leonard (2026) address how the increasing popularity of tabletop role-playing games and resulting shifts in the demographic makeup of the player base has led to a stronger questioning of historically *male preserve* (Dashiell 2020) related values and practices in mainstream games. In their work, the authors hypothesize that indie games can function as spaces that provide a more diverse and inclusive alternative to the male preserve, and that players can develop a stronger sense of real-world agency through playing in these spaces. The presented analysis of qualitative interviews in the study also suggests that players are building resistance to the dominant culture of the male preserve through play.

Conflict, Resistance, and Resilience

Bridging the gap between digital and analog RPGs, Minyue Wu's (2026) article "From Digital to Analog: *Disco Elysium's* Conflict Transformation Mechanisms for Educational Larps" explores how the agency created by the narrative and mechanical elements from the critically acclaimed video game *Disco Elysium* (ZA/UM, 2019) compares to agency provided to players of live-action role-playing games (larps). Wu argues that while *Disco Elysium's* design can provide players with opportunities to thoughtfully navigate relationships, enhance their contextual analysis competence, and invite critical self-reflection, the structures of a digital

game can not provide the same level of agency as larps. However, the author suggests that applying digital role-playing mechanisms in educational analog contexts may be similarly beneficial.

Taking a similar step in a different direction in the article “Transformative Play for Building Resilience to Misinformation,” Lars Konzack and Chris Coward (2026) examine how the educational escape room *The Euphorigen Investigation* (Cho et al. 2023) helped players build resilience against misinformation. Their paper explores how one can foster critical reflection and emotional engagement through immersive, narrative-driven gameplay, shifting perspectives, enhancing the critical media engagement skills of the participants and supporting the development of more inclusive and adaptive ways of knowing.

Politics, Heritage, and Games

Moving on to digital games that simulate real-world sports, Guus van Tilborg and Peter Groote’s (2026) article “Press Start for Heritage: Representing University Sports Rivalries in *EA Sports College Football 25*” focuses on how the best-selling sports video game *College Football 25* leveraged participatory fan culture, team rivalries, interactivity, and real-world heritage in order to achieve its success. The article explores how the game manages to effectively preserve and promote digital heritage and strengthen real-world place attachment (Tuan 1977) by creating a strong and immersive connection to the players’ existing and lived heritage experience.

Game Aesthetics and Conflict

An additional example of the strong interdisciplinarity of our field can be found in Tom Blancarte’s (2026) article, “Aesthetic Conflict in the Musical Role-Playing Game *Runic Soundscapes*.” In this article, Blancarte presents his game *Runic Soundspaces*, explores the ludological aspects of improvised music, and analyses the aesthetic conflicts (Yu 2022) that come up in play. The article further suggests how designers of more traditional role-playing games could incorporate aesthetic conflict in their designs.

Play and the Human Condition

In the theory article, “Bleed as Intrapersonal Conflict: Understanding Bleed Management and Resilience as Parts of a Homeostasis Recovery Process,” Kjell Hedgard Hugaas (2026) connects the concept of *homeostasis* (Cannon 1932) from biology and psychology to the role-playing game studies-specific concept of *bleed* (Boss 2007; Montola 2010; Lankoski and Järvelä 2012; Bowman 2013; Leonard and Thurman 2018; Hugaas 2024). The article explores how the different parts of the homeostatic model have counterparts in role-playing bleed theory, making an argument for how bleed management skills and integration practices can be explained, as well as how this process relates to personal transformation.

Educational RPGs and Participation

Olivia Fisher’s (2026) article “Let’s Do It Together! Why Participatory Design and Co-Creation are Promising Approaches for Designing an Edu-larp” examines the benefits that contemporary participatory design practices (e.g., Bratteteig and Wagner 2016) can offer edu-larp designers. The article presents examples of design processes with participatory elements, exploring student empowerment, social transformation, and design quality.

Focusing on participation in a broader sense, Karin Johansson and Mafalda Morganti's (2026) article "Larp with Erasmus: A Quantitative Study of Live Action Roleplay Projects Funded by EUs Erasmus+ Program Between 2014-2022," presents a quantitative analysis of 111 larp related projects that have received monetary funding from the EU Erasmus' program between 2014-2022. The article shows how the EU has provided substantial funding to larp related projects in 22 different member states, offering insights to larp organisations and larp researchers into how and which larp projects are financed through the EU funding system.

In conclusion, this issue of the *IJRP* showcases how role-playing game studies is a highly varied and substantially interdisciplinary field that seems to be perpetually expanding into novel areas. We strongly feel that it is in this open-minded culture of genuine curious exploration that we find the core strength of our field. As editors, we are deeply grateful for being given the opportunity to connect with the high quality work of the authors of this issue, and we trust you will find many aspects that can challenge, inform, and inspire your own work.

-- Kjell Hedgard Hugaas, Sarah Lynne Bowman, and Josefin Westborg
June 6, 2026

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