# Edu-Larp as Revision of Subject-Matter Knowledge

**Popular Abstract** - The paper presents theoretical foundations of the author's approach to the design of edu-larps.. It is deliberately steering away from cross-disciplinary teaching, artistic education or soft skills training in order to advocate larps tailored to single school subjects, focused on integration and consolidation of curricular knowledge. Putting larp in the context of applied drama, or Drama in Education, the text argues that well-designed edu-larp is likely to be accepted by the average teacher, not just by dedicated and trained drama educators. The concept of print-and-play "larp for dummies" downplays the importance of preparation, acting and immersion, while emphasising the game-like structure of goals and conflicts: gameplay set to work alongside role-play. Therefore, the ideas and tools borrowed from video games and board games design can be useful in the creation of edu-role plays, breeding a form which might be called 'gamified drama'. The recommended function for edu-larps is final revision of a large textbook unit, an idea discussed on the example of high-school history classes. The suggested model for classrom larp is a negotiation game between conflicted but cooperating factions, divided into three stages: a) preparation of all factions separately; b) informal meeting of all factions shortly before the official talks; c) official negotiation session which is supposed to bring forward all major (textbook-based!) issues for public debate. The paper ends with a section on troubleshooting, i.e. an overview of risk factors frequently pointed in the discussion of game-based learning, with ideas of how to eliminate or minimise the risks through careful design. Referenced sources come from the fields of edu-larp, edu-drama, game-based learning, and general educational theory.

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## INTRODUCTION

This passage from *Dorothy Heathcote: Drama as a Learning Medium* could be a motto for my edu-larp endeavours:

"for too long we have been concentrating on training drama specialists, a process that has widened the gap between what these specially trained persons do with groups of children and what ordinary teachers do. The time has come to show all teachers - ordinary day-in and day-out classroom teachers - how they can use drama at times to achieve something that cannot be attained as effectively in any other way"
(Wagner, 1976, p. 15).

Written initially for the *Role Playing in Games* seminar in Tampere (10-11 Apr 2012), the paper was framed as a report on edu-larp research project carried out on high-school history classes, piloted in 2010 and launched in 2012-2013 by Games Research Association of Poland and Nowa Era publishing house. In this revised version, the report part has been removed (to be completed when the project is over), and the focus switched to the theoretical foundations of my approach to edu-larp design. Referenced sources come from the fields of edu-larp, edu-drama, game-based learning, and general educational theory.
My ideas go against the dominant trends in academic and professional literature on edu-larping (and broadly understood edu-drama), as I am deliberately steering away from cross-

disciplinary teaching, artistic education and soft skills training. My primary interest are edu-larps tailored to single school subjects, focused on revision, integration and consolidation of specific subject-matter knowledge from a textbook unit. In order to make larp manageable for average teachers and students, I came up with the idea of gamistic "larp for dummies": strongly orientated on task completion, while downplaying the importance of preparation, acting and immersion.
The paper contains four sections:

(1) Context: Larp as Drama In Education,
(2)Theory: How edu-larp works for learning objectives,
(3) Design: A model of edu-larp for content revision,
(4)Troubleshooting: Elimination of risk factors.

## 1. CONTEXT: LARP AS DRAMA IN EDUCATION

Paving the way for edu-larp to mass implementation in Polish schools, I have taken two strategic moves in order to position larp among the most desirable methods of teaching social sciences and humanities. First, demonstrate larp is a form of educational drama. Second, show it can beat the systemic obstacles blocking the progress of drama in schools.

### 1.1: Larp is *just like* drama education

To begin with, I would like to situate larp in the context of D.I.E., Drama in Education, which has a long and glorious tradition in Polish educational studies. It has been researched and promoted for over forty years, mostly based on the theories and practices developed in the UK. *Development Through Drama* (1967) by Brian Way, translated into Polish in 1990, is probably the most cited source in the works of our D.I.E. proponents. It was Way, Heathcote, Bolton and other English Drama Educators who put strong emphasis on Process Drama (as separated from product-oriented theatre), in which:

> (1) The emphasis is placed on participants experiencing personal growth through an exploration of their understanding of the issues within dramatic experience
> (2) The generated topics are explored through improvisation
> (3) Student and teacher share equal places in the development, analysis and production of the drama
> (4) The drama is normally not performed for an audience (Weltsek-Medina 2008)

The terms 'process' or 'applied' drama have a broader meaning than D.I.E. In *Interactive and Improvisational Drama: Varieties of Applied Theatre & Performance* (Blatner & Wiener 2007) educational applications occupy only one of its five sections (beside psychotherapy, community building, empowerment, and life expansion&entertainment). However, if we narrow the focus to education itself, these names can be used interchangeably: "process drama. Often called drama in education or 'living through' drama or 'experiential drama' or applied drama" (Bowell & Heap, 2013, Kindle Locations 124-125). My preferred term is 'edu-drama'.

Larp was unheard of in this context until the development of academic game studies in the early 2000s. Probably the first Polish author to change this was Jerzy Szeja, a literature scholar, game researcher and experienced high-school teacher, who wrote in *Polonistyka* 7/2000[2] that the use of tabletop and live action role plays can lead to similar educational outcomes as the use of drama techniques. Later, he reinforced his view in *Gry fabularne - nowe zjawisko kultury współczesnej* ("Role Playing Games: New Phenomenon in Contemporary Culture") published in 2004, the first ever doctoral dissertation in Poland on role playing games.

My argument goes one step further. I do not say edu-larp is *similar* to edu-drama, I say it should be seen as *a kind of* edu-drama. It exhibits all features prescribed by Dorothy Heathcote for the basic model of her D.I.E. called "Drama used to explore people":

> 1. It works through social collaboration
> 2. It will always involve exploration in immediate 'now' time where participants engage with events in the first person; I do. That's the drama element.
> 3. It must involve participants considering one of the three levels of social politics. The psychology of individuals to drive the action, or the anthropological drives of the community, or the social politics of how power operates. These three form the

> lubrication and friction which makes the work have meaning for participants beyond the ordinary and mundane.
> 4. It will always require some modification of behaviour so that the fiction isn't mixed up with the usual way people behave. . . .
> 5. The event must have focus, usually through productive tension, which has to be injected deliberately. In the early stages this is usually provided by the teacher . . .
> At this level the teacher has to do the play "wrights" job - as maker collaborating with the nature of the material. (Heathcote, 2002, p. 2)

Larps also meet the definition presented in *Planning Process Drama:*

> performance to an external audience is absent but presentation to the internal audience is essential. . . . this is a whole-group drama process, essentially improvised in nature, in which attitude is of greater concern than character. . . . lived at life-rate and operates from a discovery-at-this-moment basis rather than being memory-based. . . . participants in process drama will not normally be involved with learning and presenting lines from a *pre-written* dramatic text – a play – but will be 'writing' their own play as the narrative and tensions of their drama unfold in time and space and through action, reaction and interaction. (Bowell & Heap, 2013, Kindle Locations 246-255)

More specifically, I see larp as a twin sister of the "improvised scene" technique, as defined by Dziedzic and Kozłowska in *Drama na lekcjach historii* (1998). All elements they mention are typically found in larps: pre-designed characters, loosely sketched environment, pre-assigned problem(s), and their creative solving through role playing (p. 38-41). Structurally, "improv scenes" and larps are the same phenomenon. As for specific features found in individual scenarios, differences still can be noticed, e.g. larps generally have more rigid structure, more elaborate role descriptions, more specific tasks, formal rules of conduct and game mechanics. But "generally" is the operative word here: larps *tend* to be more firmly structured and rules-heavy than typical edu-drama improvs, but it is not always the case, especially if we take freeform/jeepform into account. The same choice of "less/more control" (i.e. "less/more structure") is faced by the designers of all dramatic improvisations. Hence, I will restate my point: in spite of different statistical *tendencies* in design patterns, edu-larps and "improvised scenes" share the same basic structure.

Of course, I am not unaware of the radically different backgrounds of the two forms, one originating from the highbrow artsy theatre education, the other from the popular entertainment which (initially) had no artistic or didactic ambitions. However, in the case of edu-larp its educational aims come before the entertaining function. As Hyltoft (2010) puts it, edu-larp demands that

> organizers of the activity have a plan for acquisition of knowledge or skills or correction of certain behaviours in the target group through the medium of the larp . . . while larps organized among peers may have educational aspects, they cannot be see as educational larps so long as other factors supersede the educational aspects (p. 44).

This priority shift brings edu-larp closer to applied drama – to the point in which the difference in origins loses all significance. Different evolutionary trees have led to the same product.

Experienced Nordic larpers are probably now wondering why I am taking such pains to prove the obvious. If, for example, Tuovinen (2003, p. 8-10) or Henriksen (2003, p. 111) talk about larp, tabletop rpg, and broadly-understood educational role plays in a single breath, my insistence on "larp = form of applied drama" seems like reinventing the wheel. I have two answers to that:

(1) It is not so obvious in Polish schools where larp is practically unknown, and this paper is informed by my work and its challenges in my home country. If teachers see larp as a form of edu-drama, it will change their perception from 'a novelty with unknown educational merits' to 'a new development among well-known and highly effective teaching methods'.

(2) More importantly, this strong contextualisation is not the end, but a means to pave the way for further argument. There would be little sense in proving larp to be *just as good* as D.I.E.. I claim it is *even better* in certain aspects.

[1] Professional / academic magazine for students of Polish Studies and teachers of Polish.

**1.2: Larp is *even better***

If edu-larp is nearly identical (in its formal features, dynamics of participation, and didactic intent) to improvised educational drama, it is natural to assume (as Szeja did) that they should have the same teaching efficiency and educational outcomes. However, in my opinion, carefully designed larps should easily overcome two systemic obstacles which halted the development of D.I.E. in Polish schooling.

As I have already said, the use of edu-drama in Poland has been thoroughly researched and enthusiastically advocated. One can find drama-focused teacher's guides to all levels, from kindergarten[3] to higher education[4], as well as general studies on the psychological, social, and cognitive aspects of drama. For example, a three-year school experiment (1998-2001) coordinated by prof. Jerzy Trzebiński resulted in stalwart support for D.I.E. As he concludes in final report, students in drama groups outperformed control groups in six areas:

1. Positive emotions and sense of security
2. Cognitive curiosity
3. Cooperativity and friendly attitude towards schoolmates
4. Independence
5. Critical approach to oneself and to school, but combined with positive attitude to school duties
6. After-school activities extending the topics discussed on Polish classes

(Trzebiński 42; translation mine[5])

Still, there is one fundamental problem: despite huge methodological support, D.I.E. is not being implemented on a larger scale. All research and incentives are totally ignored by the majority of teachers, and I fear nothing is likely to change in this respect. If I may reach for anecdotal evidence: I often ask my students at Kazimierz Wielki University about their high-school experiences with edu-drama, and usually not a single person in class reports they have participated in one. Very few have ever heard of such teaching methods. I can attribute this to two reasons.

**1.2.1 Applied theatre demands too much from the teacher**

Browsing a guide for prospective drama pedagogues, one can come across passages like that:

> . . . It requires broad knowledge of the topic, extending far beyond historical knowledge [this passage comes from a book addressed to history teachers - MM]. And most of all, great imagination and resourcefulness.
> . . . specific organisational and managerial skills as well as the ability to keep the group under control.
> . . . thorough preparation, specific acting/dramatic skills, good organisation, pedagogical intuition, openness towards students, and emotional involvement
> . . . The drama teacher spends lots of time and effort on the preparation of educational means.
> . . . should introduce in class photo- and video cameras and computers (Dziedzic & Kozłowska, 1998, p. 63-66; translation mine)

Faced with such a formidable list of expectations, the average school teacher steers away from any involvement in drama pedagogy. And by "average" I mean the great majority, unfortunately.

**carefully designed larps should easily overcome two systemic obstacles which halted the development of D.I.E. in Polish schooling**

Chronically underpaid and tied up with red tape as it is, the teaching profession in Poland has relatively low social and financial status[6], with little appeal for energetic and innovative individuals. The popular conviction is that school jobs are taken only by those who are unable to find better employment. Obviously, this unfair exaggeration fails to account for the dedicated educators who are motivated by genuine passion for teaching, and do not get discouraged by the "minor inconvenience" such as low salaries and ever-increasing paperwork. But still, in public schools the passionate ones are severely outnumbered by routinists, and are more likely to be found in non-formal education centers (museums, for instance).

[2] Królica M., 2006, *Drama i happening w edukacji przedszkolnej.*

[3] Lewandowska-Kidoń T., 2001, *Drama w kształceniu pedagogicznym.*

[4] The Polish text of the report is available online at http://www.assitej.pl/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/RAPORT-Trzebinski.pdf

**1.2.2 Applied theatre does not teach subject-matter knowledge**

This problem discourages even those who are willing to introduce edu-innovations in formal teaching: the great potential of drama education advertised by its proponents does not translate well into the learning outcomes prescribed for school subjects. Even though the general trend in education is to shift focus from encyclopedic knowledge to practical skills, this is more pretend rhetoric than fact. Despite huge reforms of the educational system in recent years, subject-matter knowledge still severely outweighs skills in Polish formal learning assessment. Nor is cooperation with non-formal education as strongly encouraged as, for instance, in Finland[7]. On the one hand, teachers would unanimously agree that empathy, creativity, problem solving, teamwork, effective communication, critical thinking or artistic expression are desirable skills. On the other hand, no teacher of History, Geography, Maths, etc. is willing to spend too much lesson time on general personality/soft skills development at the expense of the subject matter, because it is subject-matter knowledge that the students need to pass standardised tests and final exams. By no means specific to Poland, this concern is raised even in countries with a well-established tradition of D.I.E (see e.g. Harder, 2007, p. 234). As Blatner (2007) reports, "arts and drama classes are being squeezed out in order to 'teach to the tests' imposed by national standards programs" on a global scale (Kindle Locations 1871-1872).

**Metaphorically speaking, where applied drama stumbled and fell, larp may spread wings and fly.**

Now it is time to restate the main point in my argument. Not only does larp have the same advantages as improvised D.I.E. (see above), but it is also capable of avoiding its both main drawbacks.

**1. IT'S EASY TO USE.** Compared to the high bar set by edu-drama theorists, **larp seems to be very teacher-friendly.** Of course, I do not mean writing their own larps, which would be a time-consuming and fairly difficult enterprise. But what if the teacher could download and print ready-made educational scenarios with character sheets and all supporting materials – very much like packaged murder mystery games for dinner parties? Then time and effort spent on the preparation and moderation of classroom activity could be even less than with traditional lessons. This asset could make even the laziest teacher (mildly) interested.

**2. IT TEACHES WHAT YOU NEED.** Efficient transfer of subject-matter knowledge is more problematic, as even larp educators think "the method is awful for delivering hard knowledge" (Henriksen, 2003, p. 114). However, I believe I have found a way to achieve that in the area of social studies and humanities: **larps based strictly on core content from school textbooks, run as final revision of a large book unit**. If these prove to be educationally efficient, this could be a major incentive for teachers, making edu-larp eligible for implementation on a mass scale in Polish schools. Metaphorically speaking, where applied drama stumbled and fell, larp may spread wings and fly.

Would it be possible to design a 'drama for dummies' without reaching for larps? Perhaps. In her 'mantle of the expert' approach, Dorothy Heathcote switched focus from acting to doing tasks (Bolton, 1997, p. 387), which was a step in this direction. But it did not eliminate insistence on performance, immersion and emotion, or strong endorsement for teacher-in-role (Heathcote, 2010, p. 12). Much as I agree all this is beneficial, I want to target the largest group, including very reluctant individuals (students and teachers alike). If they do not feel like roleplaying, they could still play a larp scenario as a game, with teacher out-of-game as organiser/facilitator. Drama scenarios, by contrast, do not have sufficient game-like goal structure to replace role-play with gameplay. They could – but this is not how drama designers usually work.

[5] According to September 2012 research conducted by Warsaw-based SWPS (college of social psychology) and educational publisher Operon, only 40% of teachers would call their profession 'prestigious', and only 16% feel it is respected in society. 91% think their work is underestimated by society. Lack of social respect comes first when they point to the disadvantages of their profession. (Operon 2012)

[6] See Finnish Ministry of Education, *Education and Research 2003-2008 Development Plan*, p. 16.

## 2. THEORY: HOW EDU-LARP WORKS FOR LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Against the dominant trend in research on edu-larping, I am deliberately putting the "soft" education (creativity, social skills, personality nurturing) aside. As I have said, my project is strictly limited to the potential of larp in teaching the "hard" subject-matter knowledge. I wholeheartedly agree (as suggested by some preliminary research by Paweł Janiszewski, 2012, M.A. student of mine) that larp is inefficient in *delivering new content*, but I strongly believe it to be an excellent way to *review and broaden prior knowledge*. While it is often highlighted that role plays can integrate knowledge and skills from across disciplines, this is another thing I want to steer away from. My intention is to encourage school teachers to use larps in their subject classes, so the "across-disciplines" approach would be counterproductive. As stated above, the best application of larp in schools seems to be the final review of a large unit of subject material, the aim being to integrate, consolidate, expand, and internalize content which has been covered on a number of classes.

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The obvious reason for choosing Social Sciences and Humanities is the inherently social nature of larping. Much as I admire efforts to use larps in teaching math and sciences (e.g. the *Star Seekers* program by Seekers Unlimited, 2012), I do not think it is effective for math or science classes in the long run, because social interactions can be too distracting and time-consuming at the expense of subject matter. In social sciences, just the opposite is true: social play can incorporate coursebook content directly, making it "embedded in the game's functioning mechanics in such a way that the game's success is conditional to understanding its content" (Villalta et al., 2011, p. 2043). It therefore comes as no surprise that role plays are strongly recommended by today's education experts:

> "Social science teaching needs to be revitalized towards helping the learner acquire knowledge and skills in an interactive environment. The teaching of social sciences must adopt methods that promote creativity, aesthetics, and critical perspectives, and enable children to draw relationships between past and present, to understand changes taking place in society. Problem solving, dramatization and role play are some hither-to under explored strategies that could be employed."
> (National Council of Educational Research and Training [India] viii).

Generally, "a role play is always a simulation" (Crookall, Oxford & Saunders, 1987, p. 155), and a role played event is "a constitution of a social system . . . , which from a constructivist perspective would consist of simulations of selected aspects of mundane reality" (Henriksen, 2010, p. 241). Making players act as people involved in collaborative problem-solving in a specific place in the world - be it a present-day, historical, or fictional one - larps are (effectively) simulations of socio-cultural environments. This is universally acknowledged by edu-larp researchers (Utne, 2005, p. 24; Larsson, 2004, p. 244; Henriksen, 2004, p. 121). Hence, it may be useful to consult general literature on educational simulations, even if it does not address larp specifically. Actually, the node of intersecting theories relevant to edu-larp is far more complicated: it includes (and is not limited to!) drama education, simulation gaming / system modelling, game-based learning, experiential learning, experience design, instructional design, and the constructivist paradigm in educational theory. They all meet on one platform: the design of interactive learning environments.

In other words, edu-larp is simultaneously a (1) game, (2) drama/role play, (3) simulation, and (4) designed learning environment. What does it tell us about its educational potentials? Simulation "is considered to result in improved performance, greater retention, and better understanding of complexity" (Crookall, Oxford & Saunders, 1987, p. 150), and helps "understand the complexities and intricacies of systems that we impact in myriad of ways" (Galarneau, 2005, p. 4). Games "seem useful for learning processual knowledge, such as application, integration and such (Henriksen, 2010, p. 258), making "connections between elements of

knowledge or knowledge and application" (p. 241). It is "the immediacy of games" that "inspires motivation, stimulates active involvement . . . and encourages the development of 'adult' behaviour" (Bowman, 2010, p. 86). Talking specifically about edu-larping, co-founder and former co-principal of Osterskov Efterskole mentions its four main advantages: "distraction from everyday life, motivational strength, heightened activity level of the students and student empowerment" (Hyltoft, 2010, p. 56). Additionally, he reports that larp seems to work especially well with underperforming and/or disadvantaged students (Hyltoft, 2012, p. 22-23). As a psychological side-effect, "Being allowed power over his own decisions within the story makes the student feel that he is taken seriously by the educational system (Hyltoft, 2010, p. 55).

Good as they are to start with, these general assumptions should be followed with more detailed analysis. In all game-based learning environments, educational efficiency is dependent on three major factors: (1) subject-matter must be embedded in gameplay, (2) learners must be willing (or skillfully encouraged) to participate, (3) in-game participation must be supported with out-of-game reflective processes.

**1. Subject matter embedded in gameplay**

"In constructivism", says Lainema (2009), "the learning of the content must be embedded in the use of that content. . . . *revisiting the same material*, at different times, in rearranged contexts, for different purposes, and from *different conceptual perspectives*, is essential for . . . advanced knowledge acquisition." (p. 58) This is exactly what happens at edu-larps conducted as final revision, in which edu-content is not limited to a single lesson but activates major points of a large subject-matter unit (textbook unit).

I would also like to refer to the Continuum of Knowledge Acquisition Model (Jonassen, McAleese & Duffy, 1993), which divides the acquisition process into three levels – introductory (novice), advanced, and expert. It is suggested that constructivist paradigm does not work well at the introductory stage. Hence, with my positioning of edu-larp at the end of a book unit, introductory learning is covered by regular teacher-controlled lessons. Larp as the final revision marks the step into the advanced level, where constructivist learning should work best.

For instance, the nation's history of a given century was discussed on six meetings, covering: 1) wars and international politics; 2) internal social and political issues; 3) intellectual, philosophical, and religious movements; 4) economy and technology; 5) microhistory: the everyday life; 6) culture and arts. All this constitutes a complete thematic unit in the student's history book. A concluding larp, set near the end of the period to enable players to relate to all significant events, can do much more than just revise the content of six lessons. In line with *A Practical Guide to Teaching History in the Secondary School*, I see "Role play as consolidator of knowledge" (Guscott, 2007, p. 40-41).

Obviously, some of this assumed "prior knowledge" will already be forgotten (or worse: never actually learned) by individual students; it would be naive to think they have mastered the entire book unit. To make up for this, right before the game students should be given printed handouts summarising all major things they need to know (in this case, the "need to know" applies to larp characters and school learners

**Very much like in the MIT's multiplayer classroom game *Revolution***

simultaneously). Then they face a full-fledged (ca. 80 minutes) larp on two consecutive lesson units (in Poland lesson periods last 45 minutes). Fragmented and disconnected before, now the knowledge becomes integrated in a cohesive multifaceted simulation in the style of Process Drama: "in ways that make the subject matter more relevant, alive, and unforgettable" (Weltsek-Medina, 2007, Kindle Locations 2032-2033). Entering the interactive environment in which all aspects of the simulated reality are intertwined, students can activate all relevant knowledge they have, and expand it with information from the handouts.

The design of in-game factions and conflicts exposes links between the big politics, social groups, and individual (public and private) interests, putting students against the big picture of

[7] A comprehensive description of *Revolution* and other projects created under the MIT-Microsoft *Games-To-Teach* programme are available at http://www.educationarcade.org/gtt/.

the period / culture / society with all bits and pieces moving into positions. Very much like in the MIT's multiplayer classroom game *Revolution*[2], "A central assumption underlying the game is the interplay between personal and local concerns (making a living, marrying off your children, preparing for a party) and the kinds of national and very public concerns" (Squire & Jenkins, 2003, p. 17). This is a model of a historical reality, and "Models, like myths and metaphors, help us to make sense of our world (Ryder, 2012). As Balzer (2011) says, "learning on a model offers such didactical potential because the participants are being integrated into the physical, factual, scenic arrangement as agents; they are allowed to actively take part in the simulation's creation" (p. 35). And if the game is set in:

- a real-world country from your Civics, Political Science or Foreign Culture classes
- a real-world historical period from your History classes
- the setting of a novel / drama from your Literature classes

then entering this game activates your entire knowledge of the given world, essentially making the subject matter part of gameplay.

When we consider Heckner's critique of video games in history education, we can truly appreciate the didactic potentials of larp:

> "When I taught a history class on the origins of Nazism, I frequently found that those – often very smart and articulate – students whose interests were informed by the materiality-obsessed heroic narratives of video gaming and The History Channel had trouble mustering up enthusiasm for learning about the cultural and social environment from which the crimes of Nazism originated. . . . it would seem that 'authentic' World War II games in their current state are not only not teaching us anything helpful, but they distract from what is really to learn from these events in Germany . . ." (Heckner, 2012, p. 191-192)

It seems that the social and cultural dimensions of larp make it a far better tool for teaching these aspects of history than computer games. As Heyward (2010) says, "emotions associated with the social interactions that occur in learning activities are fundamental in securing the long-term retention of the actual concepts being studied (p. 198). I guess the best approach to game-based learning is to mix role-played activities with video- and card/board-gaming, maximising the potentials of all platforms.

In my edu-larps, all in-game goals and gameplay actions are rooted in the personal and social dimensions of a real-world culture as depicted in the coursebook. This is how we achieve "embedding the content to be learned into the core mechanics of the game itself, thereby ensuring that the mere participation in the game provides the participant with exposure to the content" (Henriksen, 2010, p. 258). The adopted character comes with a more or less specified worldview and all kinds of backgrounds: race, gender, family, education, profession, religion etc. Unless the character suffers from amnesia or other mental disorders, one needs to position the character and his/her in-game situation within the broad cultural (social, political, economic, technological etc.) context of the game world. Even if the role card does not specify these, they are always implied as indispensable parts of human experience, so players should have at least some vague ideas of how an individual would relate to the environment represented in the game.

The personal perspective, or the clash of two personal perspectives (the character-role and the person-player), is a powerful vehicle to be used by educators. As Hyltoft (2010) says, edu-larp can put a student:

> in a narrative situation, where the character of the student has an internal motivation for acquiring a skill, which the student himself could never be persuaded to have. So if the edu-larp manages to engage the student . . . , new priorities and goals can be transferred from the character to that student . . . It can be very hard to explain to a whole class of students with different

[8] Whenever I talk about the dichotomy of intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation, I cannot shake off the doubt planted in me by Steven Reiss (2000), who claims that the concept was invented by idealistic researchers and backed up with questionable experiments. Reiss says: "our educational system cannot deal with the idea that there is someone who cannot enjoy learning and never will. Educators are making a mistake when they think all children were born with more or less equal potential to enjoy learning" (as quoted in Grabmeier, 2000). Delving into the depths of the psychological debate is beyond my field of expertise (and the scope of this paper), so I will drop this thread here – still, it is worth a closer look.

> interests and agendas, why some piece of abstract learning is relevant to them. It is much easier to create a character to whom it is relevant. As an example, most 15 year olds have no use for nuclear theory, but secret agents in the later part of World War 2 will memorize it gleefully. (p. 49)

Thus, student's mind is processing the knowledge of the game world in continuous interaction with its issues and challenges in which he or she gets involved at cognitive, affective and behavioural level (see e.g. Kot, 2012, p. 122). All levels contribute to the illusion of personal involvement in the simulated situation, merging the real mental / emotional / physical experience with the fictional diegesis built on syllabus-based knowledge.

I must admit the design of such larps is a heavy task. Not only do we have to design proper social dynamics and story arcs, but also make sure we have implemented all major learning objectives prescribed for this book unit. More of that in the Design section. But this is the job of the larpwright, not the teacher's. The teacher needs to see the burden taken off her back.

**2. Onboarding, or participatorial incentives**

On the one hand, even with perfectly embedded content, an edu-game will be useless if learners do not play it. As Whitton (2010) observes, especially adult learners "may perceive games in the context of learning as frivolous or a waste of time" (p. 37). On the other hand, in classroom context learners can be simply ordered to play. On the… third?... hand, mandatory participation may lead to unplayful gaming (Makedon, 1984, p. 49), ruining all educational effects which were reliant on *playfulness*.

As with all prolonged user experiences, designers need to provide participants with incentives first to *willingly* enter the experience ("The Onboarding Challenge", as termed by Zichermann & Cunningham, 2011, p. 62-63), and then to stay active until the experience is over. With reference to Schein (1962), Henriksen (2010) says "the initial unwillingness to learn" is frequent in *any* learning context, based on the learner's assumption that his/her existing knowledge and behaviour patterns are sufficient, so there is no need to learn anything new (p. 235). (This is clearly the case with teaching history, as most students do not find historical knowledge useful beyond school.) The very fact that learners are offered *a game to play* is not enough; "it is an oversimplification to assume that any game is motivational simply because it is a game (Whitton, 2010, p. 39). "Putting on costumes and acting out decisions with big consequences gives life to what could have been a boring history lesson", says Linder, Swedish full-time larp educator (as cited in Jansen, 2012, p. 32), but even her group sometimes "has participants who more or less refuse to play, deliberately stay off character or otherwise ruins the game" (Jansen, 2012, p. 33).

The natural solution to the engagement problem seems to be "make the game entertaining!" However, not all edu-theorists support this claim. This is how Kapp (2012) concludes Sitzmann's (2011) metaanalysis of instructional efficiency of computer games:

**This seems to be of extreme importance in edu-larps simulating a foreign culture or historical period**

> "Simulation games don't have to be entertaining to be educational. The research indicated that trainees learned the same amount of information in simulation games whether the games were ranked high in entertainment value or low in entertainment value. There does not appear to be a correlation between the entertainment value of a simulation game and its educational merit." (Kapp, 2012, Kindle Locations 2439-2441)

Whitton (2010) says "I believe fun can be a component of an engaging experience, but not an essential one" (p. 44). Also Henriksen (2010) consistently downplays the value of entertainment in non-digital edu-role plays: "process is not motivated by entertaining the participant, but rather by utilising a goal-orientated incentive towards mastering the situation, rather than feeling insufficient to it. Such motivation combines intrinsic and extrinsic participational incentives" (p. 249). I must say I am not convinced by this rhetoric. Much as I agree with Henriksen and Kapp on other things, I take an issue with this one.

[9] Described by Łukasz Wrona and myself in "DEMOcracy Project: Larp in Civic Education", to be published in the proceedings of 2nd Larp Conference (Wrocław, Poland, 11-13.01.2013)

First of all, their views might inspire teachers to see non-entertainment as a valuable feature of edu-games, which I would find regrettable. As Hyltoft (2010) says: "Whilst it is not a prerequisite for an edu-larp that it is perceived as fun by the participants . . . , there are no significant signs in the games mentioned that entertainment value is inhibiting the learning gains of the students" (p. 44). Anyway, I would argue that Henriksen's 'goal-orientated incentive' is just another kind of entertainment. "The role play . . . does help us creating bubbles of intrinsic motivation by being able to actualise its problems to the participant, admits Henriksen (2010, p. 249). The motivational factors he suggests *in place of* entertainment are "fruitful frustration, irritation, narrative desire, social roles and frames, etc." (p. 232) , and most notably, "Papert's (1998) concept of hard fun, utilising fruitful frustration as a driving incentive" (233). Essentially, this boils down to the not-so-new idea of intrinsic motivation based on a sense of purpose, autonomy, and mastery, recently elaborated on in the very popular book *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us* by Dan Pink (2009)[3] (and in the context of edu-drama, 'fruitful frustration' is reminiscent of 'productive tension' recommended by Dorothy Heathcote [2010]). I could subscribe to all points made by Henriksen, but I will not put them in *opposition* to entertainment. If the human drive for hard fun and mastery is rewarded with satisfaction (i.e. pleasure) – it *is* entertaining. In Lazzaro's (2004) four keys to emotions in game, Hard Fun is put on equal terms with entertainments such as Easy Fun, Altered States, and The People Factor. Therefore, what Henriksen (2010) sees as "entertaining" vs. "non-entertaining", I would change to "immediately entertaining (easy fun)" vs. "first frustrating, then entertaining (hard fun)".

How to achieve that in the game? Crookall, Oxford & Saunders (1987) claim: "The major problem faced by participants, especially initially, is to reduce uncertainty, so that they can select appropriate strategies and behave accordingly in the particular situation (p. 167). This seems to be of extreme importance in edu-larps simulating a foreign culture or historical period which the learners are only vaguely familiar with. Printed and spoken introductions are helpful, as "The imaginative power of the dramatic pre-text is that it can provide infinite imagined roles and places for exploration, even within the physical context of a classroom (Cameron, Carroll & Wotzko, 2011, p. 4). But if players have little experience with drama activities, it may not work at all. It is not enough to provide them with character & setting descriptions, and push into play with an unspecific goal of "immerse in this role and interact with others". I strongly believe inexperienced larpers must be given explicit, actionable tasks ('goal-orientated incentives', see Henriksen above), otherwise they are likely to feel lost in the game.

In my high-school research project I assign at least three specific tasks to each character. Some are based on collection ("collect 1000 gold pieces"), some on interpersonal relations ("protect your cousin from harm" / "your enemy is illegally building an army – do not let him get away with it"), some are factional ("talk people into an alliance with France"), etc. In the DEMOcracy Project, a civic education programme with larps reenacting 17th century parliamentary traditions in junior high schools[4], I went one step further. Not only did I prescribe clear descriptive "do this / don't let them do that" tasks, but also assigned numerical values. For example, "3 pts. if you get elected for parliament, and +1 if they won't tie your hands with binding instructions; 1 pt if that bastard Woodmaster, your irritating neighbour, **is not elected;** 1 pt for each elected MP who will call for punishment for Zebrzydowski", etc. This worked successfully both as a strong incentive for competitive-cooperative gameplay and as guidelines reducing the players' uncertainty mentioned by Crookall et al. (1987).

Finally, in problem-based social simulations motivation for participation and emotional involvement tends to emerge organically. With players engaged in negotiations between three competing factions, the larps meet all requirements set by Szewkis et al. (2011) for successful classroom collaboration: *common goal, positive interdependence between peers, coordination and communication between peers, individual accountability, awareness of peers work, and joint rewards* (p. 3-4). This is how **cooperation** within each faction is likely to work –

[10] See my text "Less Larp in Edu-Larp Design" in the 2013 Knutepunkt book.

Mark Schick (2008) says players are most likely to "break frame" due "to the emotionally charged nature of the topic" (p.2), but I had no reports of such cases. Distant history does not seem to have strong emotional resonance with youngsters.

and result in motivational **synergy** when combined with the effect of **competition** between factions:

> The actual intergroup rivalry comes from participants importing into the simulation all those taken-for-granted behavioural dispositions, attitudinal orientations, and the like which would lead to intergroup rivalry in *any* circumstance, whether or not it is termed a simulation. . . . it is hardly a simulation, but the real thing – except that participants have made certain pre-simulation agreements, which bound the simulation activity of rivalry and mark it off as somehow relevant only to the purposes of the simulation . . . (Crookall, Oxford & Saunders, 1987, p. 165)

Villalta et al. (2011) insist that "Collaboration must be embedded in the game's functioning mechanics, so that its success is conditional to having worked collaboratively" (p. 2045). One consequence of this: unmotivated students who would like to sit by without entering gameplay will not be left alone. If the in-game conflicted parties need to recruit supporters, then uninvolved players will be actively encouraged by peers to join in. "The desire to being able to master a situation is not limited to a cognitive desire for situational adaptation [von Glaserfeld, 1995], but is also likely to be fuelled by social incentives" (Henriksen, 2010, s. 249), so even if initial motivators fail, peer pressure may do the job.

**3. Reflective processes**

Larpers and educators are increasingly aware of the importance of non-game reflective activities linked to the play experience. Addressing Sitzmann's metaanalysis on computer games, Kapp (2012) states clearly that "Simulation games embedded in a program of instruction are better tools for learning than stand-alone simulation games (Kindle Locations 2449-2453). In the context of larp, emphasis on debriefings is now commonplace in the Knutepunkt book papers, and yet more support comes from Schein's unfreeze-move-refreeze model (1962) as discussed by Henriksen (2010), who recommends caution "in order to ensure a proper completion of the process. A binding part for the three stages is the need for reflective process" (p. 235). Karalevich (2012) puts it simply: "a game won't have a lot of educational effects if the organizers don't facilitate a discussion, a debriefing and a detailed reflection of the game after it has ended" (p. 42).

But "after the game has ended" is not the only time to position reflection. Henriksen (2010) says reflectional processes in edu-games can be placed in four ways: pre-reflection (briefing and preparatory activities), post-reflection (debriefing and further discussion/reflections), break-away reflection (when the game stops for a moment), and reflection-in-action, which means to "embed reflective process into the task at hand, allowing an ongoing adaptation and development to a context or a problem" (p. 251).

(1) Edu-larps in my research project are **backed with extensive pre-reflection**, as they are the final revision of a large coursebook unit: the content has been discussed for several hours in total, and the larp itself is explicitly framed as a revision activity which precedes tests.

(2) **Post-reflection is at a disadvantage**: with very little time for post-larp debriefing, the responsibility for further reflective processes falls on the teacher. Some will make use of the opportunity, some will not (to see how huge difference it makes, see the two cases discussed by Aarebrot and Nielsen, 2012, p. 28). There is no way we can guarantee that, but we can greatly increase the chances if we provide teachers with ready-made lesson plans to be used after the larp. A successful example of this approach is the package of teacher's materials prepared by the Educational Simulations company for *Real Lives* computer game (see Downloads at educationalsimulations.com). I have not tried that in my projects yet, but this is definitely the direction I want to go[10].

(3) **Reflection-in-action**, or "embedding reflective phases into the game mechanics [e.g.] by using shared perspectives and goals, allowing group-based participation, thereby opening room for discussion and shared reflection within the game" (Henriksen, 2010, p. 151) **is omnipresent**: the core gameplay is all about group-based analysing, debating, plotting and negotiating focused on edu-content issues.

(4) **Break-away reflection is not planned, but can emerge** when need arises. The need can be teacher- or learner-determined. By learner, when s/he breaks out of character to ask the teacher or GM

about historical details or game rules and boundaries[6] (Example: a player in-character convinced a soldier to murder her rival, and out-of-character came for instructions on how to arrange it.). By teacher, when the teacher / GM intervenes in order to correct a potentially harmful distortion of factual knowledge or misinterpretation of game rules by the players. (Example: once players impersonating the queen and her advisors were planning to put a traitor to an ad hoc trial and send to prison. I felt the need to step in and explain that the legal system leaves no power to the queen (or even the king) to make this happen without due process of law.)

## 3. DESIGN: A MODEL OF EDU-LARP FOR CONTENT REVISION

The model I devised for the research project is a negotiation game between three political factions, conflicted by partially incompatible goals but to some extent dependent on each other. Negotiation is essential for two reasons: first, it creates space for in-game reflective thinking (see above: reflection-in-action); second, it makes players constantly process the desired edu-content in their minds (see above: subject-matter embedded in gameplay). As Echeverria et. al (2011) claim, learning objectives can be met when "By directly mapping these objectives onto the mechanics, the student is forced to fulfill them in order to successfully complete the game." (p. 1129) If we assume that negotiation and persuasion are core mechanics (= actions players take to influence other agents and events in the game world) of my larps, then the "direct mapping" of curricular content is obvious. All major issues they negotiate/argue about belong to subject-matter knowledge, as in-game problems, characters, and social groups have been implemented from the history textbook.

According to "the elemental tetrad" by Jesse Schell (2008), each game comprises mechanics, story, aesthetics, and technology (p. 41-42).

*Technology* was limited to pen-and-paper: printed handouts and nametags, handwritten notes (if players wanted to write contracts or letters), and huge wall maps of the historical period.

*Aesthetics,* understood by Schell as "how your game looks, sounds, smells, tastes, and feels" (p. 42), was deliberately neglected. There is no doubt that props, costumes, room décor, music theme etc. would enhance the experience, but were 'sacrificed' for the sake of the print-and-play principle of minimum effort. Moreover, "since the goal of the drama in education is to think and learn, highly polished or rehearsed elements, the right costume, and so forth are only distractions" (Weltsek-Medina, 2007, Kindle Locations 2064-2065). The only aesthetic element to spice up everyday classroom setting was acting performance and in-role dialogue. However, framework devised for educational games at Carnegie Mellon University has a different view of aesthetics: "the subjective experience of the player", which includes "sensation, fantasy, narrative, challenge, fellowship, discovery, expression, and submission" (Aleven, Myers, Easterday & Ogan, 2010, p. 71). This will be discussed below beside Malone and Lepper (1987).

*Mechanics* did not include rule-based tests or numerical statistics. In fact, gameplay featured no actions beyond immediate human-human interaction, in line with Villalta's et al. (2011) claim: "The user's interaction with the game must be simple and intuitive and not add unnecessary complexity" (p. 2042). Story was set in a formal meeting between factions, focused on problem-solving through negotiation, persuasion, bribery, blackmail, intrigue, and information management. Physical violence in this context was highly unlikely, as goals of all factions could only be achieved in a non-violent manner. Thus, no combat mechanics was needed. In case of player-induced violence, the larpmaster would resolve it arbitrarily. In other words, the 'mechanics' of player action consisted in speech, acting performance, writing/signing documents, and resource management (money/information).

*Story* was composed of four elements: historical background known from prior history classes and summarised on printed handouts; pre-defined personal stories and conflicts on individual role sheets; emergent narrative created by players; and a basic frame dividing the game into three scenes or phases:

a) Preparations of all factions separately, in which they discuss strategy for the upcoming meeting and learn about the goals and personalities of their group members.

b) Unofficial meeting of all factions, where everyone is struggling to further their agendas

before the official decisions are taken. This is always the central part of gameplay, where all factions mix, break down into pairs and small groups, get involved in scheming, arguing, bribing, signing contracts, recruiting support etc.
c) Official negotiations at a table, usually moderated by the host (host in the game world, e.g. the queen if the larp is set in the royal chambers), and preferably leading to voting, agreement, or another kind of conflict resolution.
On average, phase a) lasts 15-20 minutes, b) 45-50 minutes, c) about 20 minutes, but the exact moment of switching phases is at larpmaster's discretion. This is "a flexible structure that enables the teacher, who is the game moderator and guides the flow of actions, to adjust the game to the actual participation of the students in the classroom" (Villalta et al., 2011, p. 2044).

In the detailed design of story and characters, I used the framework of Larp Experience Design (Konzack 2007), which I find simple and precise enough to be used by school teachers who would like to become larpwrights. In the "tactical group frame", I focused on *social narratives* arising from tensions between the rich and the poor; more privileged and less privileged; traditionalists and progressivists; and I designed each of three factions as an *interpretation community* unified by a political *motivation principle* (17th-c. scenario: royalists vs. French faction vs. Austrian faction; 18th-c. scenario: royalists vs. patriotic faction vs. hetmans faction). Still, I made sure factions were not monolithic, as "within the group identities . . . there lies enormous scope for individual differences, levels of participation and opinions" (Bowell & Heap, 2013, Kindle Location 843). As an equivalent of Konzack's *secret communities with hidden agendas*, I created several roles of "moles" working secretly for an opposite faction. In the "operational character frame", I equipped each character with *ways to influence the larp; motivations;* and *psychology,* and some of them with *moral dilemmas* and *secrets*. The "strategic world frame", including *cosmology and worldview(s); philosophies, religions, ideologies*, as well as *cultures and subcultures*, was taken directly from the history textbook, and integrated in the design of both factions and characters.

Activation of and reflection on this curricular content was the primary educational objective. Aleven, Myers, Easterday & Ogan (2010) put forward three questions to be answered here:

> 1.***(Prior knowledge)*** What knowledge or skills do student/players need to have before starting the game?
> 2.***(Learning and retention)*** What knowledge or skills can student/players reasonably be expected to learn from the game?
> 3.***(Potential transfer)*** What knowledge and skills might they learn that go beyond what they actually encountered in the game? (p. 70)

In this project, required prior knowledge encompassed the entire book unit (history of Poland in 17th or 18th century). Students were given handouts summarising major events and persons they should know of. Expected learning/retention included expansion, integration and consolidation of prior knowledge, plus a deeper understanding of the social and political realities of the period. Potentially transferable knowledge and skills concerned politics, small group dynamics, and soft skills such as negotiation, teamwork, and effective communication (though I don't think a single game is enough to produce an observable increase – this should be a repeated experience).

Echeverria et al. (2011) propose a set of guidelines for classroom games, based on revised Bloom's taxonomy, which distinguishes four types of knowledge: factual, conceptual, procedural, and meta-cognitive. Focusing on the needs of test-based formal high-school education, I am primarily interested in the first two:

Factual: an explicit fact must appear as content in the game . . .

Conceptual: a specific concept must emerge explicitly from interaction with the game, through its mechanics. (p. 1129)

In my larps, explicit facts appeared both on character sheets and historical timeline handouts. Game mechanics was limited to general rules of collaboration in upholding the game fiction: in-/out-of-character communication, limitations on physical contact, task orientation, and gamemaster's authority. Since human interactions (mostly conversation) can be considered mechanics-based, the curricular concepts (political factions, ideological/personal conflicts, geo-political situation, etc.) did emerge through mechanics.

Additionally, all six Bloom's cognitive processes seem to take place in edu-larps. This is how Echeverria et al. (2011) translate these into game design:

> ➔Remember: repetitive tasks with auxiliary rewards, keeping the student constantly confronted with the knowledge that must be remembered, keeping him/her engaged with the rewards.
> ➔Understand: free exploration of interactions between objects that provide clear feedback, allowing the student to observe how a given process or concept works.
> ➔Apply: direct action over objects with a specific goal, allowing the student to directly apply the specific knowledge.
> ➔Analyze: problem-solving tasks and puzzles that involve integrating and selecting different elements.
> ➔Evaluate: activities that allow the player to modify and correct existing objects, processes or simulations, check how something works and modify it if necessary to improve it.
> ➔Create: activities that enable the player to build new artifacts, design new processes and test them experimentally. (p. 1129)

Written with reference to video games, phrases like 'action over objects' or 'modify objects' may be unclear in the context of larp. As defined by Schell (2008), objects are "Characters, props, tokens, scoreboards, anything that can be seen or manipulated in your game" (p. 136). Physical objects found in the classroom and used in-game as their diegetic equivalents constitute one category: desks, chairs, stationery etc. (The presence of mobile phones, blackboard, video projector, school rucksacks etc. was ignored.) But their meaning in the game frame is negligible; hardly ever could they be used to make a significant difference in the game. The central 'elements' that contain the 'game state', being agents as well as objects of actions, are player characters. Plus, the 17th-century game has virtual money as a resource, which can be transferred by means of written notes. Given that, my edu-larps can be positioned within Bloom/Echeverría's framework as follows:

*Remember:* larp does not have 'repetitive tasks' in the sense of math or grammar drills; however, the condition of 'constantly confronted with the knowledge' is met by the ongoing discussion of major content-based problems (social, political, economic, military issues of the period) to which all characters are related through in-game tasks.

*Understand:* players watch social and interpersonal interactions (attempts at persuasion, intimidation, etc.), including curricular knowledge of historical events, social groups, and conflicts used to gain advantage or put someone at disadvantage in the emerging narrative; their immediate or delayed results (successes and failures) constitute clear feedback.

*Apply:* players initiate above-mentioned actions themselves (and get feedback).

*Analyse:* individually and collectively, players reflect on the situation and devise action plans (especially in the first phase of the game, when factions start in separate locations to make plans).

*Evaluate:* as long as the other player is in the game, unsuccessful attempts at persuasion/negotiation can be modified and repeated; experience generalised from several interactions can inform further action.

*Create:* the simple technology of pen-and-paper makes it possible to create artifacts not envisioned by the larpwright, e.g. false documents compromising a political opponent as a traitor. It was not suggested in game materials or introduction, but it nevertheless happened in two of my high-school games.

**character design should give players the illusion of influence on national / regional issues, but no more than illusion**

Finally, I would like to address the "sensation, fantasy, narrative, challenge, fellowship, discovery, expression, and submission" (p. 71) counted by Aleven, Myers, Easterday & Ogan (2010) as aesthetics. I am more inclined to see them as motivations. A well-known taxonomy of player/student motivations comes from Malone and Lepper (1987), who identify four individual (challenge, curiosity, control, fantasy), and three interpersonal (cooperation, competition, recognition) motivations (p. 248-249), all of which larps can facilitate. My personal favourite of the competing typologies is Nick Yee's (2007) **advancement**, mechanics, **competition** (grouped under Achievement); **socialising**, *relationship*, **teamwork** (Social); **discovery**, **role-playing**,

customisation, and *escapism* (Immersion) (p. 5); names in **bold** here indicate motivations I find strongly present in larps, in *italics* optional presence.

Bedwell et al. (2012) uses some of these terms not to describe the experiential player's perspective but game components or 'attributes': action language, assessment, **conflict/challenge, control**, environment, **game fiction**, **human interaction**, *immersion*, and rules/**goals** (p. 9). Of these, action language doesn't apply, environment ("representation of the physical surroundings", p. 13) is of little importance, and assessment is limited to non-quantifiable ongoing interpersonal feedback plus debriefing. Larp operates primarily via 1) **human interaction** centered on 2) **goals** and 3) **conflict/challenge** within the frame of 4) largely **control**lable 5) **game fiction**, with the powerful but non-obligatory addition of 6) *immersion*.

## 4. TROUBLESHOOTING: ELIMINATION OF RISK FACTORS

I have also paid attention to the potential dangers or shortcomings of educational larping and historical games, pointed out by various researchers (referenced below). If we are aware of the risk factors, we can eliminate most of them at the stage of scenario design.

**Problem 1: Varied exposure to educational content**
**Solution: Guided whole-group discussion in the last phase**
Henriksen (2004) notices that in larp "the trajectories become physically separated, thereby limiting the participant's choice of situations. He can no longer take part in all the enacted situations of the game" (p. 123) , therefore might not be exposed to significant parts of educational content (p. 120-123). To minimize the risk, the game was divided into three phases, the last one being:
*c) official negotiations at a table, usually moderated by the host (host in the game world, e.g. the queen if the larp is set in the royal chambers), and preferably leading to voting, agreement, or another kind of conflict resolution.*
In this arrangement, the last phase will bring forward all major issues that larp designers want students to discuss, and make sure everyone is able to hear.

**Problem 2: Counter-historical effects of gameplay memory**
**Solution: Illusion of influence, debriefing**
Concerns about the potential "counter-historical effects" (Campbell, 2008, p. 197) of historical simulations are not to be ignored. Not only can history be misrepresented in the game itself, but also distorted by player-generated actions. On the other hand, we do not need (and do not want) to design games so strictly bound by historical detail that they would not allow for any change in the game world. As Jeremiah McCall (2011) says,

> a simulation cannot actually be a dynamic working model of the past and at the same time reproduce every historical event and detail in ways that match historical conventions. . . . a black box that returns an exact match to historical events each time is not a working model; it is a static representation of what happened. (p. 26-27)

Game with no possibility for human input could hardly be a game at all.

A way to balance historical fidelity and the room for creative input is putting the player in the shoes of nonentities, as is frequently done in computer historical simulations: "in *Medal of Honor*, for example, the player's role was made generic so that his or her actions, while having local effects, did not globally affect the outcome of history" (Fullerton, 2008, p. 234). But this will not work in my projects. In high school history classes, larpers are supposed to be processing political, legal, religious, social, domestic and economic issues - not battlefield tactics - so they have to be able to influence these spheres on a national level. Or, to be more specific, they have to *feel* they can do it, which does not have to be true.

My solution to this: character design should give players the illusion of influence on national / regional issues, but no more than illusion. In the terms of *Patterns in Game Design* by Björk and Holopainen (2004), it would be called *Perceived Chance to Succeed* : "players must feel that they can influence the outcome of the game . . . do not actually have to have a chance to succeed . . . the important part is that they believe that they have" (p. 203). As lobbyists, government advisors, respected aristocrats, members of parliaments, military officials, renowned scholars, opposition leaders etc., they should be situated close to seats of power, but never as real decision-makers. Their

meetings behind the scenes may strive to change the course of history (e.g. incite a rebellion or influence the outcome of a forthcoming international summit), but only through pressure on kings, parliaments or ministers who are unavailable in gameplay.

For example, if our game is about the outcome of World War II, the scenario could simulate a (fictional) meeting of military and intelligence officers, diplomats, businessmen, and other interested parties from various countries right before the Yalta Conference, its aim being to put forward and discuss all major issues that have to be decided. Player characters are sent here to gather intelligence, promote their interests, try to form or reinforce alliances - and report everything back to their superiors. The players have the freedom to use their own judgments and to come up with their own solutions, but the point is that none of them is in a position to make binding decisions in the name of "their" governments. Even if their meeting brings completely a-historical conclusions, this should not distort their knowledge of Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin in Yalta - because the teacher makes it clear that the roleplayed meeting never really happened, and the Yalta Conference was a different event that took place "later".

To maximise the educational effect, the teacher should summarise the Yaltan event in an immediate post-larp debriefing. For one thing, it gives players a sense of completion; after all, the entire game was about "how to influence the Yalta decisions". More importantly, this can make the learner develop an emotional relationship with the historical event, as the character perspective and the emotions roused in competitive gameplay take some time to wear off. I think (yes, this is an unverified hypothesis) that if the players are still feeling the impact of the game experience, they will – at this moment – really care about the outcome of the Yalta summit, and attach emotional value ("We won! / We lost!") to it. To facilitate that, I would recommend using the "Character futures" debriefing trick (Andresen, 2012, p. 110): players are asked to describe where their characters are, what they do, and how they would feel some time in the future.

**Problem 3: Confusion of fictional and factual characters**
**Solution: Name-coding**
Stacy Roth, a living history first person interpreter, divides characters into factual, "who once actually existed" (57), and fictional, or "fictional composite, a representative based on selected biographical, cultural, occupational, and other characteristics", which "can be desirable - and more flexible - if the goal is to highlight typical occupations or subcultures rather than specific people" (57-58). She also mentions the semifictional type: "real people for whom documentation is scanty" (58). I do not think any school larper could ever come close to the "factual" standard set by living history interpreters, so even if I use well-known and documented figures such as monarchs or war leaders, I will modestly call them "semifictional . . . for whom documentation is scanty", for scanty is the player's knowledge of these documents.

Given that, some of my historical larps include only fictional characters, some use both fictional and semifictional ones. I have not yet gathered enough data to tell whether one of these approaches is better from the educational or experiential perspective (logistics-wise, semifictional ones are more problematic, as they have specified gender – we may end up with 10 male characters in a class with only 3 male students). Still, I want to avoid potential confusion of the once-living with never-existing persons in the players' memory. Therefore, I established a clear rule for character names: if a specific name is given on the role card, this role is based on a real (factual) biography - and if the character is non-historical, the player enters larp under his/her real name (slightly altered to add a foreign flavour, when needed).

**Problem 4: Shyness or unwillingness to act**
**Solution: Attitudinal roles, task orientation**
Another problem sometimes encountered in classroom role plays is the learners' unwillingness to get involved in role playing. Already mentioned in 2. Onboarding, or participatiorial incentives, it is by no means limited to the opening of the game. There may be students who are willing to participate in problem-solving – but not in the artistic/emotional performance of the character's personality. Especially older children (teenagers) may find role plays "too simple and childish" (Tuovinen, 2003, p. 12), as "the process of

becoming another character is harder for grown-ups" (Linder, as cited in Jansen, 2012, p. 34). American context is no different; see Bowman (2010, p. 102). In the UK, Whitton (2010) mentions the diverse attitude of college students to game-based learning, including "a feeling that games are *frivolous* and inappropriate for education" (p. 40). In Poland, Siek-Piskozub (1995), professor in applied linguistics and an avid proponent of *ludic strategy* (her term) in language teaching, writes that not just role plays but virtually all fun activities may have this problem with teenage and adult learners (p. 51, 55). To that I do not have a perfect solution. Nevertheless, I think that my model of edu-larping – with intentional castration of its artistic side to emphasise content-based task completion – will at least decrease the risks.

"The effectiveness of role play withing a simulation depends on the degree of congruence between the individual and the role s/he is asked to play. For example, a reluctant teenage boy asked to play the role of a grandmother might find this relatively difficult and unappealing" (Crookall, Oxford & Saunders, 1987, p. 159). Edu-larp designer therefore should remember that putting less emphasis on acting and character immersion reduces the risk of severe incongruence between the role and the individual. This is not to say teachers should actively *discourage* students from deeper immersion/performance; what I am saying is that shy students should feel free to "choose a greater role distance . . . by the assumption of an attitudinal role", as defined by Carrol and Cameron (2005), which "requires only the agreement of the player to take on an attitude of a character in the drama for it to operate" (p. 11). That is what Dorothy Heathcote did in her 'mantle of the expert' approach to drama, when she was struggling with uncooperative youngsters: "conscious that she must get these lads *doing* something, in fact *anything but acting*, she let the *tasks* dictate the meaning of the experience." (Bolton, 1997, p. 387) This idea has become central to my design approach: with role play and immersion optional, task-orientation should be the core.

Serious students who need some time to get in character may have difficulties in short and funny ("babyish") role plays, but a 90-minute socio-cultural simulation gives them proper room for involvement. Moreover, self-conscious students who feel bad at acting and are ashamed of emotion displays are at odds with all kinds of drama activities. Fortunately for them, if the larp is focused on the achievement of personal and collective tasks through political negotiations, the very nature of the environment reduces the importance of emotional and artistic expression. It is possible to participate - and do well in the game! - without heavy gesturing, raising your voice or changing speech patterns. The fact that other edu-drama projects take the same approach gives me reassurance that this is the right course. E.g. the team behind the Finnish scientific edu-larp *Rescue Mission 20X0* realised that "this might sound terrible: we are having a role playing game and we're just chopping off the role playing aspect" (Meriläinen, 2011, 7:58). The same concern had been raised years before about Heathcote's drama: "Mantle of the Expert's reliance on *actual* behaviours seems, in this respect, to disqualify it as dramatic" (Bolton, 1997, p. 409). Surprising as it may seem, the reduction of the role-play element is rational from the educational point of view.

**As long as educational content is properly embedded in core gameplay, game-based logic does not seem to be an impediment to learning.**

**Problem 5: Performance anxiety**
**Solution: Explicit tasks**

Sometimes linked to lack of confidence in role playing, sometimes not, stress created by performing before an audience or by being put to a skill test is a significant risk factor. Participants may "be cramped by the fear of making such an error, which may actually increase the chances of an error being made" (Crookall, Oxford & Saunders, 1987, p. 152). This is the most frequent problem I have encountered in the final "official negotiations" phase of my larps. Phase a) "strategy-building in separate factions" has almost always been successful; phase b) "unofficial negotiation" has not failed me even once; but phase c) "official negotiations" frequently suffers from performance anxiety. It is weird to see how the very same people, who were superactive in small-group arguing just a while ago, suddenly turn speechless when they are given floor as solo speakers at the negotiation table. This is definitely a weakness in my edu-larp concept. On the other hand, I do not want to remove the all-group official

[12] See my paper "Reliving Sarmatia" in *States of Play*.

talks, as they are deliberately put there to address problem 1: Varied exposure to edu-content (see above). My plan to tackle the challenge is to insert final-phase actions into the explicit tasks, e.g. "be the first to speak at the official meeting", or even better, "you get 3 points if you are the first to speak at the official meeting". This tactics proved its efficiency in the first and second phase – we shall see how it works when tailored specifically for phase three.

**Synergy of gameplay and role-play might be a powerful motivator – and if players refuse to role-play, then gameplay should single-handedly keep the larp running and educationally efficient.**

**Problem 6: General laziness of teachers and students**
**Solution: Print-and-play**
With eyes set on the prospective mass usage, I want to "sell" to teachers a fairly simple scenario model, requiring minimum effort from teachers and students alike. On the teacher's side, the task is to print and distribute ready-made role sheets, and then moderate the larp (not necessarily in character). No costumes, props, room decoration or rehearsals are required. It should be possible to play the larp in the classroom and school corridors, without changing clothes, putting on make-up, or any other preparations apart from reading game materials. This is not a new idea: print-and-play sources for drama teachers are already available online (e.g. dramanotebook.com). However, they are targeted primarily at drama educators, and offer short dramatic activities. My idea is a full 90-minute class for teachers who do not have to be drama practitioners.

**Problem 7: Game-based logic**
**Solution: No mechanics beyond social interaction**
As "a major cause of problems with game-based learning", Harviainen, Lainema & Saarinen (2012) discuss the "default to a game-based logic, instead of using the simulation/game as an opportunity to learn real-life practices and skills" (p. 2). In other words, people concentrate so much on winning the game that they lose sight of the educational functions. The problem of real-life skills is not at stake in historical edu-larping, as its learning objective is to *understand how a system/process works* (or worked in the past), not to build practical skills for future use. Still, the possible harm related to strong emphasis on game-based logic made me consider the rationale behind my focus on task-orientation at the expense of world- and character-immersion.

I have observed such cases during the pilot study: guys apparently not immersed in characters or gameworld (judging by frequent out-of-character remarks and no attempts at historical stylisation) could nevertheless be deeply engaged in task-completion and in the conflicts between game parties. A high-standing aristocrat could yell to the queen "Hey, Queenie! Come over here, we need to talk", which was a total disaster in terms of world- and character-immersion, but did not seem to spoil the game experience at all. In terms of GNS model, theirs was the gamist approach, non-immersive as it is (unless you see this case as immersion in the classroom activity). Nevertheless, although gamistic in nature, their involvement still resulted in thorough consideration and discussion of pre-designed historical issues, as there was no other way of progressing in the game. As long as educational content is properly embedded in core gameplay, game-based logic does not seem to be an impediment to learning.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In advocating edu-larps for use in Polish schools, my firm intention is to start with 'larp for dummies', putting no pressure on character immersion, actor/director skills, teacher-in-role or soft skill practice, focusing only on its efficiency in revising subject-matter knowledge. Why eliminate so many potential educational benefits? It's not that I find low quality to be better than high quality - it's because I find low quality larp better (as for now) than no larp at all. I am convinced this is the choice we are facing with thousands of prospective targets in Poland: unless larps are user-friendly to the utmost, they will only be used by a small minority.

Actually, I am an enthusiast of synergic cross-disciplinary teaching, totally on the side of immersion, art larps, creativity, soft skill development, etc. I have promoted (and had experienced myself) the transformative power of role playing in identity formation[12]. I would love to see larps as "tools for personality

[13] See my text *Less Larp in Edu-Larp Design* in the 2013 Knutepunkt book.

development" (Wingird, 2000) that "ask some essential questions . . . for pedagogical work" (Thestrup, 2007, p. 225), or "produce an even greater sense of catharsis than the plays and epic poems of Aristotle's times" (Bowman, 2010, p. 74), or even used as "agents for social change" (Marken, 2007). However, I believe these values have to be introduced in the second stage. First, we have to get with the least demanding print-and-play games to as many teachers as possible to lay foundations on which we can build. Then, it will be possible to encourage upgrades from low quality to high quality larping. I strongly believe the two-step approach is the only rational choice if we hope to smuggle larp into mainstream teaching.

Design-wise, if performance and immersion have been sidelined, it was necessary to focus on gamistic goal structures. Perhaps, in the design of goals/tasks the best choice would be to implement models from video games, as "Digital games and non-theatrical drama forms share similar strategies when applied to non-entertainment settings" (Cameron, Carroll & Wotzko, 2011, p. 1). Synergy of gameplay and role-play might be a powerful motivator – and if players refuse to role-play, then gameplay should single-handedly keep the larp running and educationally efficient. My recent interest in gamification of education inspired me to think of this type of larp as 'gamified drama'.

At the moment (March 2013), the research project on the efficiency of larp in teaching high-school history is nearing its end, with over 20 games run in 18 schools. Additionally, I wrote larp scenarios for the educational DEMOcracy Project (Mochocki, 2013), reaching 1100+ middle-schoolers in 64 larps. In all cases, I employed the same design model: problem-solving negotiations between political factions; divided into stages of preparation – unofficial talks – official debate; set in a specific historical moment; based on task achievement (in DEMOcracy, each task had a numerical value), with role-playing and immersion encouraged but not required. With an overwhelmingly positive feedback from both teachers and students, I find this model to be worth further development.

In future research, I am going to focus on two aspects I have not yet explored enough: 1) the application of design ideas from digital games and gamification, 2) the addition of post-larp lesson plans for teachers[13].

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