Not Only Play: Experiences of Playing a Professor Character at *College of Wizardry* with a Professional Background in Teaching

Abstract: This article investigates how participants that have played professor characters in the sandbox-style Nordic Larp *College of Wizardry* reflected on planning and conducting play-pretend lessons compared to their experiences of teaching in professional environments. Using the concepts of spillover, bleed, compensation, role conflict, and contrast, this article focuses on how such experiences can contain reversals of playful and serious motivational states. Data was obtained by interviewing nine participants from various countries: areas of subject expertise; amounts of teaching and larping experience; and levels of education (primary, secondary, tertiary, and vocational). Qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2002) was used to evaluate the guideline-structured interviews via a category system developed from a theoretical framework, combining the research findings of Fenstermacher et al. (2009), Apter (2008), Banner (1985), Biddle (1983 and 1979), Staines (1980) and Kando and Summers (1971). The results of this investigation show that all interviewees drew on their professional teaching experiences for planning and conducting play-pretend lessons at *College of Wizardry.* Despite the fictionality of the setting, interviewees identified several parallels, such as approaches to teaching and an awareness for student/player needs. Playing a professor at *College of Wizardry* with a professional background in teaching provided an opportunity to explore and experiment, due to the absence of expectations present in professional settings. Educators larping their role enjoyed more liberty, yet also encountered familiar real-world stress factors.

Keywords: Larp, education, teachers, *College of Wizardry*, wizard, lessons, live action role-playing games, spillover, bleed, compensation, spillover

Juliane Homann
info.julianehomann@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

What happens when educators engage in a similar role beyond their professional work context: when they play a professor and give fictional lessons at a larp? In childhood, pretending to be a team of firefighters putting out a fire, pretending to be a doctor examining the heart rate of a patient, or pretending to be a vendor selling groceries seemed the most natural and carefree thing to do. Playing work-related activities adhered to our interests, skills, and role models. In doing so, we not only imitated how we observed adults performing these activities, but also allowed ourselves to pursue what sparked our curiosity, helping us familiarize ourselves not only with the norms of society, but also to understand how roles are related to and dependent on each other (Biddle 1979, 58 and Brown 2010). Yet we grow up, forget, and even devalue the power of play; we erroneously come to believe that play is a waste of time or a distraction from work best restricted to childhood (Brown 2010, 6-7 and 60; Stenros and Montola 2010, 25). In education, our output- and competition-oriented systems leave little room for practice, process, and passion. But what if we could temporarily escape these expectations and restrictions, and impose a playful change of perspective on a professional everyday role by adapting it for a larp?

Connections between work and leisure have sparked researchers' interests for a long time. Banner insists that "[w]e need to know much more about what work and leisure *mean* to people, and, also, *why* they do them. [...] What do they get out of their work and leisure activities?" (1985, 17; emphasis in original).

These meanings and connections have frequently been discussed with reference to *spillover* and *compensation*. Spillover describes a situation in which qualities or habits exercised at work

are transferred to and exercised in leisure (or vice versa), whereas compensation describes the engagement in a leisure activity to balance an unsatisfactory amount (or complete lack of) opportunities to engage in desired activities or to use meaningful skills at work (Kando and Summers 1971, 315-317; Staines 1980, 111 and Banner 1985, 15). The analysis of these concepts remains a relevant field of interdisciplinary inquiry – also within larp studies, where the concept of spillover is similar to the concept of *bleed*, describing the transfer of thoughts, emotions, relationships and physical state from a player to a character or vice versa (Bowman 2015).

Previous studies have used spillover and compensation to analyze connections between educators' work and leisure activities. Hecht and Boies, for instance, examined spillover in faculty members at a Canadian university, showing that participation in leisure activities is beneficial both for employees and their employers (2009, 424). Sorcinelli and Near provide insight into coherences between spillover, compensation, and an overall life/job satisfaction of university lecturers, tracing a reciprocal relation between their leisure and work activities unrelated to gender (1989, 75-76). In the primary and secondary education sector, Delle Fave and Massimini discovered that teachers mostly had optimal experiences while engaging in active, complex and demanding activities such as work (i.e. teaching), creative activities, and reading, which—as opposed to passive leisure activities—supported a development of competences and personal growth (2003, 338).

At the intersection of formal education and leisure activities, edu-larps attempt to fuse the casual setting and creative energy of leisure with the innovative pedagogical aims of a formal setting, thereby aiming to harness the interactive and immersive nature of larps as opposed to traditional ways of teaching and learning (Bowman 2014, 114). Various researchers in this field have highlighted that edu-larps have been effectively used in different subjects within primary, secondary and tertiary levels (c.f. Vanek and Peterson 2016, Kilgour et al. 2015, Kurz and Balzer 2015, Bowman 2014, Mochoki 2014 and 2013, McDonald and Kreizenbeck 2012, Robinson 2011, Hyltoft and Holm 2009, Harder 2007, Henriksen 2006). Researchers have also shown that using edu-larp as a method for teaching and learning provides a safe environment for exploring and practicing involvement in complex or controversial socio-political and cultural themes requiring teamwork, active participation, empathy, and divergent thinking.

Yet while several studies have been conducted by educators who themselves engage in larp and/or edu-larp, their own experiences of play-pretend teaching in a larp context have not previously been a subject of inquiry. Therefore, this investigation seeks to begin bridging this gap by providing an insight into how professor players at *College of Wizardry* with a professional background in teaching reflected on planning and conducting play-pretend lessons, concerning connections between work and leisure, elements of teaching, and role theory. The following description sketches a brief overview of the larp chosen as the focal point of this investigation.

College of Wizardry — created in 2014 by Dziobak Larp Studios and run by Company P since 2019 — is an international sandbox-style Nordic Larp. Players can be cast either as student or staff members attending a magical college, engaging in house competitions, stirring up and resolving teenage drama, and unravelling dark, mysterious plots (Dziobak Larp Studios 2016). On average, 135 players attend the larp, of which approximately 115-120 are cast as student characters and 13-18 as staff members, including professors (Šumar 2016). In-game (i.e. fictional) lessons represent a main element of the game:

Each day at Czocha has six lesson "blocks" during daytime. The Professors each have their own speciality, and the three years have different classes. Classes are taught to Juniors, Sophomores and Seniors respectively, and most lessons will be taught to classes consisting of 5-20 students at a time. (Dziobak Larp Studios 2016, 8)[1]

The design document also contains a guide on "playing a professor," describing responsibilities and possibilities connected with this role, stating:
How you teach is very much up to you, but the key words are:

• Make it interactive (let the students participate—either by casting spells, working in groups, exercises, etc)

• Make it interesting (make the students make choices—ethical choices, status choices, relations choices)

• Make it usable outside class (teach them things they can use to create more play outside the classroom)

• Make it playable (create a way for good students to be able to excel and bad students to be able to fail)

• Make it special (in Invocation, summon creatures. In Mind Magic, practice mind spells). (Dziobak 2016, 25)

Another responsibility of professor players is to give and take house points on a scale of 1-5, which count towards the house cup awarded at the end of the game. Yet while professor players have many opportunities to create play, the game design draws attention to how play with student characters should be regulated, "The students are supposed to learn something about life too, right? So don't solve problems for them—create problems for them instead. Don't be a hero. Be a teacher" (Dziobak 2016)!

Thus, on the one hand, professor players are expected to be aware of how their in-game authority may influence and interfere with student players' plots. On the other hand, this creates an alibi for professor players, protecting them from a need to shepherd students or entertain players all the time. For while this makes the role of professor players similar to game masters (responsible for generating play, passing on information etc.), they are not NPCs (non-player-characters), but players that can pursue their own plots outside of lessons. As some interviewees' experiences will show, this ability is where both liberties and challenges arise.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN

While a professional background in teaching is not required for playing a professor character at *College of Wizardry*, this investigation sought to interview those who had one. As a hypothesis,

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1   Whether players receive Junior, Sophomore, or Senior student characters is determined by their preference, not by their off-game (i.e. real) age, academic background, or level of larping experience (Dziobak Larp Studios 2016, 7).

it was assumed that planning and conducting lessons for *College of Wizardry* might enable new ways of learning about teaching, in that educators might identify and make use of similarities and differences in the work and leisure contexts of their role. Expert interviews were chosen as a qualitative method to conduct this investigation, since expert knowledge foregrounds the practical relevance of the interviewees' experiences (Bogner, Littig, and Menz 2014, 13-14), where the term "expert" acknowledges a certain degree of professionality concerning the topic of investigation (Bogner, Littig, and Menz 12). Experts structure and influence a field of action for others and themselves through the meaning and relevance they identify in their experiences (Bogner, Littig, and Menz 13). Nine participants (five males, four females) from six different countries and across all levels of education (primary, secondary, tertiary, and vocational) were interviewed, having different areas of subject expertise and amounts of teaching and larping experience. Two interviewees played a professor at *College of Wizardry* more than once. Due to the small sample size, this investigation is not representative.

Interviews were structured around a guideline containing questions about professional teaching experiences and approaches; aspects that contributed to the decision of playing a professor at *College of Wizardry*; aspects they identified as relevant for planning their play-pretend lessons; decisions made during the larp; and any similarities and differences that they might identify concerning teaching in a professional versus a larp environment. Interviews lasted for 45 minutes on average.

Qualitative content analysis was used to analyze the interviews, representing "a method of successive, controlled steps of ordering and filtering transcripted material via a system of rules and categories" (Mayring 2002, 114-115). This was done by developing a system of deductive categories as outlined below, where spillover and compensation were used as overarching categories, since many parallels emerged regarding these work-leisure connections.

Figure 1: Category system for qualitative content analysis
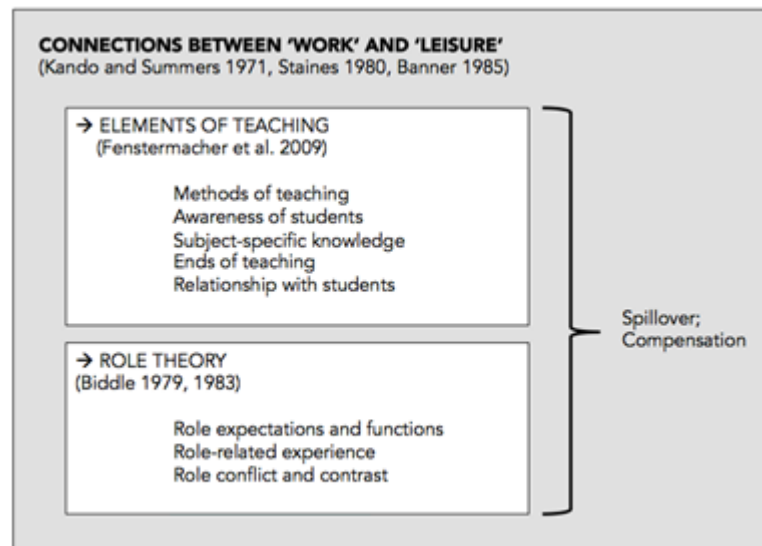
3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As seen previously, this investigation centers on ideas of work and leisure, which require a critical examination.

3.1 Types of Work and Leisure

According to Gershuny (2000, 5), there are four distinct uses to which we devote our time: paid work, unpaid work, sleep, and leisure. He reminds us that:

> [o]ur work is more than just what we do in our jobs; it is also what we do without pay, in our households, for our families, and for the members of the wider community. And what we do for other people's livings is that we use *our* non-work time, to consume the products of *their* work. (Gershuny 2000; emphasis in original)

In other words, it is necessary to expand our understanding of work to include activities outside the job setting: activities characterized by their inherent need of having to be done (Banner 1985, 14). This statement mirrors Jones, Koulu, and Torner's argument that participation at a larp involves a lot of volunteering, which may not always be considered or be immediately visible as work (2016, 126). Conceptions of work and leisure, then, are subject to context and vary according to the people performing these activities:

> What is work one day may be leisure another. . . . [W]e cannot assume any given *form* will be defined as one or another consistently, even by the same author. The extent to which these definitions are situational or trans-situational must be an empirical question rather than a theoretical one. (Banner 1985, 14; my emphasis)

It is thus necessary for investigations of "work" and "leisure" to remain open for and include multiple perspectives of what these forms consist of, since they should:

> not [be seen] as a dichotomy, but, rather, as two pure types at opposite ends of a continuum. . . . Treating work and leisure as points on a continuum may help correct what appears in most of the literature to have been the forcing of a distinction that might not be nearly so clear and meaningful to most people. (Banner 1985, 14)

Thus, this investigation treated work and leisure as dynamic and subjective concepts, asking interviewees how they experienced planning and conducting play-pretend lessons at *College of Wizardry* in this regard (see section 4 for a visual overview of this spectrum).

Stebbins' concept of serious leisure offers another way of approaching and understanding different types of leisure activities. Casual leisure, for instance, is characterized by immediately intrinsically rewarding activities (2014, 4). The most complex forms of leisure however—serious leisure and devotee work—allow for little to no differentiation between work and leisure, describing a systematic endeavour to pursue fulfilling activities high in achievement and appeal as an outlet for skills, knowledge and experience (Stebbins 2014). Between casual leisure and serious leisure, project-based leisure is an intermediate type, involving a considerable degree of organization and skills, but is not intended or considered to be serious leisure or work (Stebbins 2014). These distinctions are important to consider, since people

reflect differently on their experiences even if they share a similar background and scenario — as is the case with the interviewees of this investigation.

Jones, Koulu, and Torner's (2016) choice to focus on larps as a form of (less visible) work can add to this understanding by offering an insight into the significant amount of planning, coordinating, and conducting that is involved in providing play (126, 132), thereby pointing out that this type of labour creates value (125). The authors specifically refer to how the design of *College of Wizardry* "requires the player to draw on additional skills beyond role-playing, such as putting together a lesson plan. . . and . . . [holding] extensive meetings outside of game or prepar[ing] lessons and materials, which in turn help coordinate plotlines in game" (130-132),

Considering the tasks associated with the role of a professor (see section 1), Jones, Koulu, and Torner (2016) argue:

> Preparing and teaching lessons would be an example of second-order labour. . . . Second-order labor serves the game experience at the cognitive and aesthetic levels, but would otherwise be remunerated outside of the larp context. . . . Indeed, it might be considered one of the key design features of *College of Wizardry* that nearly all player-characters are engaged in second-order labor such as studying or teaching, during the game. (128-129, emphasis in original)

3.2   Spillover and Compensation

According to Staines (1980), spillover and compensation describe "two general and competing approaches to the relationship between work and nonwork" (112).

Spillover describes a situation in which a trait, habit, skill, or activity that is developed and/or exercised in a work context is transferred into a leisure context or vice versa (Kando and Summers 1971, 315-317; Staines 1980, 111 and Banner 1985, 15). For this investigation, reflections on having exhibited similar or identical traits, approaches, and tasks in both larp and professional contexts were treated as indicators for spillover in professor players with a professional background in teaching.

Compensation, by contrast, occurs when a person lacks or identifies few opportunities to exercise traits, habits, skills, or types of activity in their work context that they consider meaningful, thus seeking to make up for this in leisure (Kando and Summers 1971, 314-317 and Staines 1980, 111). In the current study, indicators for compensation were treated as experiences identified by the interviewees in which they felt they could not exhibit creativity and/or autonomy within their professional teaching context to a degree of satisfaction. However, it should be noted that spillover and compensation may occur at different times within the same individual performing the same activity (Kando and Summers 1971, 319; Banner 1985, 17), and that "the same leisure activity may be compensatory in *different ways* to *different individuals* depending on their work experience" (Kando and Summers 1971, 319; my emphasis).

It may thus not always be distinguishable for the researcher whether an interviewee transfers a trait, skill or habit to leisure despite already making use of a certain amount of opportunities to engage in them during work (Kando and Summers 1971, 313-314). Hence, connections between work and leisure should be understood as a complex set of possibilities, depending on a person's wishes, needs, and values, such that work and leisure may have different forms and meanings where spillover emerges as a *form* of work affecting a *form* of

leisure and compensation describes how a *meaning* of work affects a *meaning* of leisure (Kando and Summers 1971, 316-319).

3.3 Bleed

A sensation known to larpers as a state that strongly connects player and character in terms of in-game and off-game experiences is referred to as *bleed* (Bowman 2014; 2015). Bowman observes:

> Participants often engage in role-playing in order to step inside the shoes of another person in a fictional reality that they consider "consequence-free." However, role-players sometimes experience moments where their real life feelings, thoughts, relationships, and physical states spill over into their characters and vice versa. (2015)

Thus, bleed may represent a kind of spillover in which a transfer of cognitive and emotional impressions occurs across layers of interactions and experiences. Yet while spillover and bleed share a common outlook, they differ in their focus of transferred items: while bleed focuses on emotions, thoughts, relationships and physical states (Bowman 2015), spillover is concerned with habits, skills and interests (Kando and Summers 1971, 315-317; Staines 1980, 111 and Banner 1985, 15). Furthermore, while bleed corresponds with contents crossing over between fictional and non-fictional frames, spillover only concerns non-fictional situations, i.e. daily life. Both concepts form relevant points of analysis for this investigation.
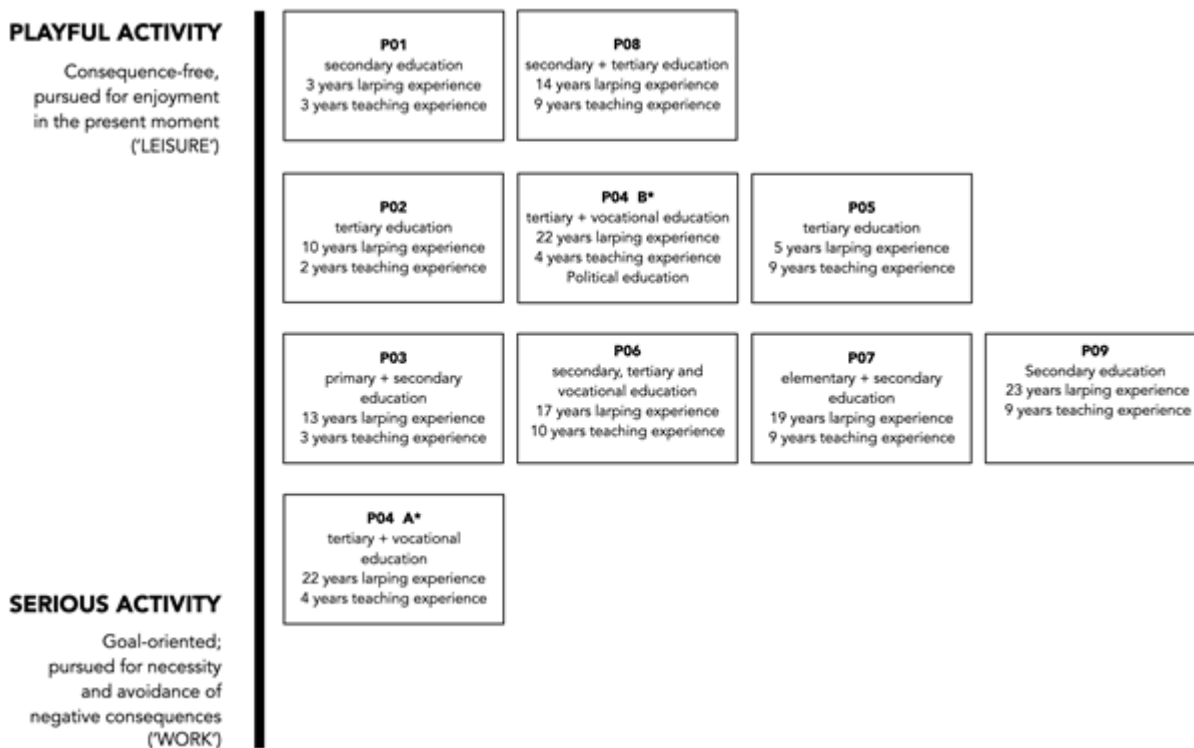
3.4 Motivational States and Reversal Theory

Besides the aspect of meaning discussed in section 3.2, motivation represents another important element to consider while analyzing similarities and differences in experiences. According to Apter (2008), motivation varies not only between people and situations, but also within a person: how we experience something can change from one moment to the next, or change between different times and circumstances in which we perform an activity. As such, Apter noticed that we never stay in one motivational state for long, but rather switch (or reverse) between two opposing states, since we cannot both be playful and serious at the same time, for instance. Apter identified four pairs of motivational states representing contrasting desires: serious vs. playful, conformism vs. rebellion, mastery vs. sympathy, and self-oriented vs. other-oriented. He cautions, however, that these should be neither thought of as personality traits nor as unusual or unstable levels of psychological fluctuation. Instead, reversal occurs naturally, either due to situational change via an external, mostly unexpected influence or encounter with a person, object, or event; due to frustration about wanting to get into a particular motivation, but not being able to do so; or in satiation when remaining in one motivational state before boredom or exhaustion ensues (Apter 2008). For this investigation, reversals between serious and playful motivations were considered particularly interesting in combination with the aforementioned theories.

4. DISCUSSION

On average, the interviewees had 6.5 years of professional teaching experience and 14 years of larping experience. The interviewees showed great variation in how they reflected on their experiences of play-pretend teaching in a larp context, as illustrated in the diagram below.

Indicators for spillover surfaced most often in interviewees' reflections on similar methods of teaching, awareness of students'/players' needs, and relationship with students, whereas indicators for compensation surfaced mostly in experiences of role conflict and contrast. As mentioned before, whether an activity is experienced as closer to "work" or "leisure" is strongly subjective and would be difficult to place within a black/white dichotomy, such that interviewees' experiences have been placed on a spectrum of whether they experienced playing a professor-character with a professional background in education as a more playful or a more serious activity. Please note that the following results and diagram are not representative. They show suggestions of how to represent and interpret the reflections of 9 people, where each experience is highly subjective and unique (Stenros and Montola 2010, 10), and should be considered as a snapshot in time rather than a generalization. They also include the possibility of erroneous interpretations from an outside perspective. Thus, the diagram represents an attempt at locating the interviewees' experiences in approximate relation to each other on the spectrum discussed in section 3.1 and the motivational states discussed in section 4.4.

PLAYFUL ACTIVITY

Consequence-free, pursued for enjoyment in the present moment ('LEISURE')

P01
secondary education
3 years larping experience
3 years teaching experience

P08
secondary + tertiary education
14 years larping experience
9 years teaching experience

P02
tertiary education
10 years larping experience
2 years teaching experience

P04 B*
tertiary + vocational education
22 years larping experience
4 years teaching experience
Political education

P05
tertiary education
5 years larping experience
9 years teaching experience

P03
primary + secondary education
13 years larping experience
3 years teaching experience

P06
secondary, tertiary and vocational education
17 years larping experience
10 years teaching experience

P07
elementary + secondary education
19 years larping experience
9 years teaching experience

P09
Secondary education
23 years larping experience
9 years teaching experience

P04 A*
tertiary + vocational education
22 years larping experience
4 years teaching experience

SERIOUS ACTIVITY

Goal-oriented; pursued for necessity and avoidance of negative consequences ('WORK')

Figure 2: Estimated locations of interviewees' experiences of playing a professor character at College of Wizardry.

Playing a professor at *College of Wizardry* with a professional background in teaching was mainly experienced as a mixture of playful and serious activity. Two experiences (P01, P08) were located purely within leisure, though it is not possible to deduce that their experiences solely consist of casual leisure; while these experiences appear to have been mainly positive and fulfilling, the interviewees did perform complex tasks as highlighted by Jones, Koulu, and Torner (2016). Seven experiences (P02, P04 B, P05, P03, P06, P07 and P09) point towards project-based leisure, in that they were not identified as purely recreational, characterized by

a high degree of organization and commitment, but also not experienced as work (Stebbins 2014, 4).

On the one hand, these interviewees considered it to be an investment of time and effort in preparing and conducting the lessons that they feel should not be overlooked. On the other hand, they emphasized their overall experience of enjoyment and the aim to play their role in a different context for fun. This may represent a type of devotee work in compliance with Jones, Koulu, and Torner's (2016) findings that peoples' time and resources are needed to enable a larp in the first place. Some interviewees reported using edu-larp in their professional teaching and reflected that this might have make them doubly aware of their actions and their role. Interviewees P03, P06, and P07 especially highlighted the similarity of their role with an NPC, describing how they performed tasks usually characteristic of game masters— responsibility for generating play, passing on information, etc.—while simultaneously being player characters. Similarly, P03, P06, P07, and P08 stressed how providing play for student players was always at the forefront of their attention, thereby sometimes neglecting play for themselves—an ambivalent experience of paying to do work in one's freetime by adopting a responsibility to ensure a good experience for others (Jones, Koulu, and Torner 2016, 130). One interviewee had two profoundly different experiences,[1] of which one was described as having "felt a lot like working" (P04 A), whereas the other was "fun"; "more like leisure" (P04 B; see also section 4.4). Another interviewee that had also played a professor twice mentioned no profound differences in experiences. No pattern was discernible between the amount of experience in teaching and larping and the way in which playing a professor was identified as being more playful or more serious. This might be due to different personalities and the different backgrounds and frameworks of how education is organized at different levels in various countries.

4.1 Spillover

Indicators for spillover identified via qualitative content analysis were divided into two subgroups: a spillover of skills, traits, and interests from a professional teaching context to a play-pretend teaching context, and a spillover of activities and approaches concerning how lessons were planned and conducted. All interviewees' reflections showed indicators for both subgroups. Most commonly, interviewees expressed their motivation for playing a professor at *College of Wizardry* via their interest in experimenting with their role in a different context. All interviewees confirmed having profited from their skills and interests of their professional background in teaching to execute the role of a professor at the larp. The following illustrates an indication of spillover from a professionally taught subject to a fictional subject:

> I chose to teach Runic Magic. I have a background as a teacher in crafts and I thought that my experiences in crafts could give something extra to the students. I also used materials I had at work—at my real work—to prepare props that I brought to the larp. (P03)

Some interviewees stressed that a good relationship between their professor character and their student characters was as important to them on an in-game level as it was to them on an off-game level. Two of these reported that their ends (i.e. aims) of play-pretend teaching mirrored the values of their professional teaching. Conscious use of voice and body language

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1   Hence, two different boxes were placed in the diagram: P04 A and P04 B.

also represented an item of transfer. Depending on the professor character that the interviewees chose to play, some of the interviewees identified parallels in approaches to and conceptions of teaching and learning, such as the belief in students'/pupils' ability to excel. Interviewees generally drew on several professionally acquired skills, such as spontaneity and flexibility, praising students, acknowledging their contributions, estimating group energy level, setting goals for the lesson, and encouraging students to actively participate. Two interviewees reflected on having relapsed into habits they exhibit in a professional teaching context.

Regarding spillover of activities and approaches for planning and conducting play-pretend lessons, all interviewees reported having used some methods of teaching that they also use in a similar form in their professional teaching context:

> I used the same method with the kind of homework that I gave and I used the same way of sequencing the lessons into smaller blocks, some of the same ways of working with topics and the same kinds of exercises, so, yes, I think there was a number of parallels (P08).

It is interesting to consider here that some interviewees reported using role-play as a method of teaching professionally. Lastly, several parallels emerged in how interviewees adapted their role to the play-pretend context, such as their unchanged understanding of their responsibility to be there as guides and supporters, both in-game and off-game, both at the larp and in their professional teaching context—especially during times of struggle.

4.2 Bleed

In accordance with Bowman (2015), some interviewees experienced bleed between their professor characters and themselves as professional educators and/or vice versa. These pertained to a general positive feeling as expressed by two interviewees, both in a professional and a play-pretend teaching context. Bleed as a negative emotional spillover from character to player was identified by one interviewee in terms of a dominant feeling of stress. Another indicator of bleed emerged in efforts to keep their own habits and perspectives as a professional educator out of their larp character. Another interviewee reported how the in-game feelings of their professor character affected them strongly on an off-game level:

> You do become the character, or I do. And one of the things was actually a negative experience that my character was very confused that the students didn't like me. And I remember that feeling a lot. And I'm actually not used to it, I'm usually seen as a pretty likable teacher, so not being liked actually was really one of the strongest emotions that I had to deal with during that larp. (P09)

It can thus be said that Bowman's observation of players experiencing different degrees of bleed (2015) can be supported in the light of these results—also concerning an interviewee with an opposite approach to the above, who reported relinquishing immersion into character while larping.

4.3 Compensation

Indicators for compensation were found in most interviewees, mainly in aims of using College of Wiz-

ardry as an outlet for autonomy and experimenting:

> I guess I wanted to test my creativity skills as well, because as a classroom teacher in my country, my curriculum and syllabus are pretty much fixed. I have a textbook to teach from, but at *College of Wizardry*, you don't really have a fixed syllabus, so you can pretty much decide what you want to teach. And I wanted to test my skills to see how creative and how interesting I can make my lessons. (P01)

Some interviewees emphasized enjoying the opportunity to relax and distance oneself from the usual demands they face in this role in a professional context. The opportunity to play a strict or unpopular professor was also experienced as a way to blow off steam by consensually treating student characters on an in-game level in a way that they would not find appropriate on an off-game level or in a professional setting. In addition, two interviewees emphasized that student players at *College of Wizardry* voluntarily and actively participated in their lessons, which was experienced as a welcome contrast to a lower level of student motivation and participation in professional teaching settings, e.g. as a result of mandatory attendance. Larping their role in a non-professional context reminded the educators of the intrinsic joy that they associated with teaching and learning interactions. They were free to let a lesson take its course, even if that resulted in an unforeseen change of initial plans and how the lesson ends. One interviewee remembered agreeing with students that an exercise may seem pointless, which would not be desirable in a professional context. A critical approach towards the traditional education system was also considered an indicator for compensation.

Particularly strong connections surfaced when examining interviewees' recollections of compensation regarding role conflict and contrast.[2] Interviewees expressed an attempt to redress an imbalance between work and leisure in terms of innovative ideas struggling against strongholds of tradition and limited opportunities for creativity and autonomy. All interviewees emphasized a role contrast in terms of class dynamics and an overarching end of teaching: whereas a professional teaching context intends to produce measurable learning outcomes, at *College of Wizardry*:

> The main purpose of the class is not to teach the student anything. It's to give them some situations or some reflections that they could use in their play outside the class. . . . as a teacher you are more focused on gameplay than actually educating. (P05)

Three interviewees experienced a direct link between having more space for improvisation and less responsibility towards students in terms of actual learning achievements. One interviewee emphasized how play-pretend teaching allowed them to focus on student players' interests and provide them with opportunities to express themselves, while another interviewee identified how *College of Wizardry* reminded them of their wish to meet with fellow educators more regularly. Contrast also showed in how interruptions of play-pretend lessons were not perceived as negative, since they provided additional chances for gameplay and allowed a professor player to step back and observe how student players let their characters react.

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2   Role contrast does not always ensue in role conflict. If the contrast was not experienced as a source of off-game concern or a challenge that could not be resolved, a statement was categorized as role contrast. If, however, the contrast did present the interviewee with these stressors, the statement was categorized as role conflict.

Concerning indicators for role conflict, three interviewees reported that despite being aware of the need to award and deduct points for student characters' performance, they did not enjoy this part of their role. They also voiced critical thoughts towards grading work in a professional teaching context in general, thus finding their personal priority at odds with their role's duty, both in professional and larp contexts:

> I didn't like it very much in my game experience, giving points. . . . It was an engine for the whole game and also for the motivation of the students, so I wouldn't say that the organizers should skip this engine, but it would be better to tell the students beforehand that the giving of points is a very unfair thing, and that there's a lot of frustration included. (P04)

Some interviewees experienced difficulties in keeping their high self-expectations from their professional context in check, as this example shows:

> The greatest challenge was not being overly professional. You know, the sort of mindset that you get when you teach, that you have to deliver good classes, and you have to be a good teacher, and even when there's no formal evaluation you sort of expect it to happen. (P02)

The chance of misunderstanding the purpose of lessons at *College of Wizardry* for producing real learning outcomes was also highlighted. For two interviewees, the concept of bleed may apply as a form of role conflict, in that they remembered being simultaneously affected by off-game guilt and in-game enjoyment while bullying student players in-game despite having mutual off-game consent.

4.4 Motivational States

While this article cannot offer a thorough discussion of motivational psychology, Apter's reversal theory of motivational states can provide further insight into the interviewees' experiences. He identifies serious vs. playful, conformism vs. rebellion, mastery vs. sympathy, and self-oriented vs. other-oriented motivational states, which are never static labels but constantly fluctuating (2008). For the purposes of this investigation, particular attention was given to identifying a fluctuation ("reversal") of serious vs. playful states in key phrases of the interviewees. These should not be read as generalizations, but as examples or snapshots in time of the interviewees' motivational states when they reflected on the larp as shown in Figure 2.

P01's motivation can be described as dominantly playful at the time, including an indication that a reversal has taken place from a serious state:

> I definitely enjoyed myself, even if planning the lessons was a bit stressful in the beginning, when I wasn't sure what to do with my lessons, but in total I enjoyed myself thoroughly at the larp. So I would say it's all leisure. It's no work at all. (P01)

P02's reflection points towards a reversal which may have taken place more than once from the serious to the playful state and vice versa. Mastery and self-orientation may also be considered active, given the interviewee's reference to skill development:

I think purely within leisure. I didn't think that the preparation for the larp as a professor was very different from the preparation for any other larp. Maybe it required slightly different things, but either way I could sort of write all my larp experience as not purely leisure, and I guess it would be true to some extent, because it does help you train lots of so-called soft skills. But I think I approached it as leisure, and what I took from it is of course mine, and I can reflect upon it, but I didn't treat it at as work, at any point. (P02)

P03 also shows indication of reversals from serious and playful motivations, closely connected to other-orientation:

I saw myself as an NPC: first and foremost, I did not do this for my own experience, but for someone else. Which I thought was very similar to the work I do as teacher in real life. I did it for fun, but I definitely viewed it, at least partially, as work, and not leisure. (P03)

P04 discussed two profoundly different experiences of playing a professor. Their first experience traces stress to dominantly serious experiences, connected to a conformist motivation and other-orientation:

I would say my first role as a teacher was at the Midterm Madness. And the Midterm Madness were about exams. And this setting was a lot of work, and really out-time work. Because it was a lot of giving grades to the students, and like I said before, I don't like giving grades to students in general, neither in the game nor out of game. So this was a lot of stress I was under, a lot of pressure. This felt a lot like working. (P04)

By contrast, P04's second experience can be described as a clear reversal from serious to playful, since this larp included fewer stressors than they associate with their workplace. Also, an indicator for a rebellious motivation surfaces in their critical questioning of the importance of giving points:

The second time, when I was teacher for Curses, was more like leisure. This was fun. This was not about giving grades, and like I said, the points were not very important to me. I got the students very well with my narrative and this was fun. This is also what I'm doing in other role-plays when I play a character. I also played the teacher in my mother tongue, so it was easier to perform in a more subtle way. (P04)

While P05's account does not allow for many details on motivation, it points to a reversal from a dominantly serious state in their professional context to a dominantly playful state at the larp, calling it "somewhere between. And it was definitely a leisure experience as a professor in real life" (P05).

P06's account does not appear to have a dominantly serious or a playful motivation at the time. However, an indicator for mastery appears in playing the role as a kind of personal research:

It was partially work, because as an academic I am also a role-playing scholar, so I also

study larp as an object of inquiry. (P06)

Somewhat similar, P07's reflection indicates a balance of playful and serious motivation, combined with an other-oriented motivation:

> I wasn't there to work, but I realized the responsibility of the professor role. Both because I am a teacher, and because I had been playing this once before. I consider a professor player as kind of an NPC function, in that your first priority is not to have fun, but I think your first priority as a professor is to create play for students. And then to have fun. So I suppose in between. I consider that fun as well, playmaking, but it's complicated. (P07)

P08 also shows a playful dominant motivation, along with self-orientation in the motive of attending the larp: "For me definitely 100% leisure. I mean, I think that role-playing can be used in teaching, and in a sense that it can definitely be used wise[ly], but that played 0% role in me deciding to go, and that was definitely a great time." (P08)

Lastly, P09 also reflects what might be a balance of serious and playful motivation, including an indicator for self-orientation in the awareness that an activity can also be pursued for it's own enjoyment: "It was hard work, I can tell you that, I mean it was not a holiday, but it was still something I did for me. And it's also something that I got a lot of good energy out of: mental energy, just physically owed." (P09)

Apter's reversal theory can provide an additional insight into how larping one's professional role never simply just remains in a playful state of motivation: many interviewees experienced a role conflict at some point during their experiences. Yet while these contrasted highly in some regards, they also uncovered similarities in terms of teaching and learning interactions, whether real or fictional, that might have become less visible in professional contexts:

> One of the things that people really forget about when they're taught for teachers is that we're not just specialists within our languages and within our subjects, we're also classroom managers and leaders. . . . It feels like a huge untapped thing with the role-playing and the learning. I think we're only just getting started. (P09)

Thus, although the findings of this investigation reject the hypothesis that professor players with a professional background learn something new by larping their role and conducting play-pretend lessons, interviewees mostly agreed that it this experience reminded them of important aspects within a professional teaching profession (such as establishing and maintaining a positive relationship with their students/pupils), and that it can be used as a space for generating and testing new ideas for teaching.

5. CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

While it is not possible to generalize from a sample size of 9 interviewees and the experiences were as unique as the interviewees themselves, the results of this investigation confirm Banner's observation that individuals can show both spillover and compensation via the same leisure activity, depending on different circumstances (1985, 17), and that reversals between playful and serious motivational states occur (Apter 2008). Playing a professor character with a professional background in teaching required an adaptation of professional perspectives and

habits; although a professional teaching background was mostly experienced as an advantage, it also provided challenges that required individual solutions. To answer the research question on how educators reflected on planning and conducting play-pretend lessons at *College of Wizardry* concerning connections between work and leisure, it was found that all interviewees' reflections showed indicators for spillover of traits, skills, and activities, but also bleed of thoughts, emotions, and relationships (Bowman 2015). Most interviewees highlighted differences in terms of (welcome) role contrasts and conflict. Although the interviewees only pretended to teach in a magical environment, adapting their role for a larp context inspired them to critically reflect about the tasks, approaches, and aims of their role in a professional compared to a fictional setting, what might be considered items of good practice in both environments, and how the portrayal of the role is influenced by the framework within which it is played. As such, the interviewees made conscious decisions to create new approaches to a familiar role:

> I removed myself from the normal surroundings, the normal parameters of teaching, and tried new things, tried new parameters, new priorities. . . . I think it is a great learning experience when you take parts of the equation and change it to something completely different. (P07)

Indicators for compensation occurred in terms of wishes for more autonomy and creativity, for which the fictional setting provided an outlet. In these cases, play-pretend teaching was experienced as a refreshing change from the expectations that educators are usually expected to shoulder, such as the need to be accountable towards their institution, their students'/pupils' learning outcomes, parents, external monitors, evaluators, and accreditors. While this should not be misunderstood as devaluating professional standards in education, it invites questions about how a more risk-free environment of play-pretend teaching at *College of Wizardry* could, for instance, be useful for teachers in training to practice and experiment with their ideas.

To conclude, it can be said that playing a professor at *College of Wizardry* with a professional background in education is more than simply imitating one's everyday role. It can represent a deliberate way to explore opportunities, challenge, and reinvent approaches to teaching with varying degrees of similarity and difference to one's personal professional standards. Rather than dismissing play as childish, unimportant or irrelevant, the interviewees have re-interpreted and explored their professional role outside of their work context and have experienced this as a valuable experience to reflect on and perhaps to question, mock, value, and/or share their insights and experiences of this role. After all, what does one consider to be "good" or "bad" teaching? What kind of an educator does one (not) want to be? What does one consider important for teaching? Pretending to teach can point out (un-)desirable, changeable, and interdependent aspects associated with the role and the setting of teaching—experiences that can serve as important starting points for educational systems and global societies that increasingly depend on fostering empathy, changing perspectives, and collaboration to function well and to critically reflect on themselves. Although experiences of a larp are difficult to generalize due to their highly subjective nature (Stenros and Montola 2010, 10), this investigation represented an attempt to collect, analyze and contextualize some of these experiences to begin gaining an understanding of the meanings and motivations that may be attached to teaching when core elements of this activity and the role of an educator transcend the borders of their traditional context. Thus, while we may struggle to let go of

the efficiency-oriented attitude in becoming adults, it allows us to rediscover meanings and motivations that we associate with the activities that we perform.

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Juliane Homann holds a Master's degree in education, a Bachelor's degree in Cultural Studies and a certificate in play pedagogy. She discovered larping in 2015 and teaches since 2018, experimenting with gamification to provide students with new and interactive ways to access subject material. Her interests include academic and creative writing, student and educator support, counseling, self-efficacy, peer-tutoring, approaches to constructive feedback, multilingualism, game design and emotional safety, international collaborations and supporting LGBTQ+ visibility and inclusivity.