

# Consent Using Analog Role-Playing in the Classroom: Strategies for Safe and Engaging Learning Experiences

**Abstract:** This article explores the critical integration of analog role-playing games (RPGs) in educational settings, focusing on the intricate dynamics of consent and power, and culminates with a proposal based on risk management to deal with these dynamics. It highlights the significant focus on consent culture within RPG communities and the specific challenges this presents for educators employing RPGs as instructional tools. The study introduces a theoretical framework that adapts Goffman's frame analysis—person, player, and character—to the educational context to analyze power relationships and interactions among participants. It details a structured five-stage process for implementing RPGs in classrooms, designed to optimize educational outcomes while effectively managing consent issues. Additionally, the article discusses necessary context analysis for educators to facilitate practical application of risk management strategies in four steps, integrating established role-playing consent tools and scenarios to proactively address potential consent-related challenges. This comprehensive framework aims to empower educators to navigate the complexities of consent and power within RPGs, ensuring a safe and engaging learning environment for all participants.

**Keywords:** consent, analog role-playing games, best practices, risk management, educational innovation, game design, Spain

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The perception of what consent is has changed according to society. One of the many examples of this transformation is the Spanish law about sexual consent approved in 2022, that changed the concept of consent from the “no means no” to the controversial “only yes is yes”; but also how the media and part of the population reacted to it.

Gaming in general, and RPGs more specifically, have been dealing with similar issues. The Japanese Journal of Analog Role-playing Game Studies editors (2020) summarized some of these concerns with the next questions:

How to create a safe environment or culture for play? How to deal with missing stairs in play communities? How do I encourage difficult topics in play without triggering players, who may have encountered and suffered through the situation-to-be-played outside the sphere of play? How to allow players to calibrate such situations? How to support players who went beyond their emotional comfort level? How to enable a space for dealing with extreme play situations? (2020, 1e)

The word “safe” appears as a recurring word, including the creation of “safe spaces” especially for females, LGBTQ+ community and diverse cultures and ethnicities in opposition to the white-male-heteronormic dominance that dealt to certain behaviors (Williams et. al, 2018, 236-239). The specific process that entails role-playing implies “Concerns about psychological safety have thus led to the creation of tools and mechanisms to create safer spaces inside certain role-playing communities” (Bowman and Lieberoth 2018, 251).

RPG published books increasingly include tools and techniques for safety and consent. By writing the word “consent” in the published-books search of DnDBeyond, that contains all the published books of Wizards of the Coast of the Fifth Edition of Dungeons and Dragons, 35 results appear. Only 3 of them are related to the application tools or techniques of consent: a reference of deal with how player feels vs. how character feels, limits and consent in *Icwind Dale: Rime of the Frostmaiden* (Perkins et al, 2020), Social Contract as a technique included into the section “Dungeon Master’s Tools” in *Tasha’s Cauldron of Everything* (Crawford et al, 2020), and player-to-player limits of consent in the section “Habits of Horror Heroes” for character creation in *Van Richten’s Guide to Ravenloft* (Schneider et al, 2020). Other sections can be found in which safety tools appear. For example

the last book includes a section named “preparing horror” that includes some of them to be applied by the Dungeon Master. Considering Dungeons & Dragons the most representative TTRPGs in terms of age and success, it’s an indicator on how much work still needs to be done, and how these tools tend to appear more often in terror/horror books, two of three in this search, when any other theme could benefit from these tools.

The learning environment also generates specific questions when analog RPGs are part of the teaching process: How do students react when something is mandatory? Is there a limit to let them opt out? How effective are rpg tools and mechanisms of consent when applied into the classroom? Can a “culture of safety” that reinforces “the protective framework of the magic circle” (Bowman and Lieberoth, 2018, 255) be generated with students, even when they play without the presence of the teacher? Do these tools interfere with the acquisition or development of skills? And, basically, what can a teacher do to preserve consent when RPGs are part of the class? For the sake of simplicity, this article will use the words teacher and student as their most general usage, including educators, facilitators, trainers, participants, etc.

This article takes a broad approach to analog role-playing game activities (RPGAs) in educational settings, addressing various forms—from educational larps and tabletop RPGs to more improvised role-play scenarios. We propose a general framework based on risk management techniques, designed to be adaptable across different types of RPGAs in classrooms. Recognizing that a comprehensive definition of consent would warrant its own in-depth treatment, we focus here on a practical approach, drawing on Consent in Gaming (Reynolds and Germain, 2019) to guide educators in creating a safer, more responsive environment. The article begins with an analysis of framing structures within RPGAs and the power dynamics they generate in classroom settings. From there, we outline a phased process to address consent-related risks, encompassing the planning, contextual analysis, and implementation of a simplified risk management method tailored to fit the unique needs of each role-playing activity.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Sociologically, “power has to do with the capacity or ability to shape people’s actions” (Williams et al, 2018, 233). As a structure, a learning environment entails a teacher-student relationship similar to the relationship Game Master/referee-player. In fact, there is a tendency in researchers that prioritize giving the function of Game Master to the teachers, with arguments like “The authority of the game master educator cannot be denied but it is also essential in creating a collaborative gaming environment and guiding collective creativity” (Lasley 2022, 79) or “A teacher acting as a gamemaster already has the requisite skills to help students process what they are learning and give them appropriate feedback.” (Youakim 2019, 15). The power of the teacher can be exerted in different ways, from grading the students to assuming the responsibility of their safety, both physical and emotional.

Fine (1983, 183-186) applied Goffman’s frame analysis to roleplaying games generating three laminations that coexisted during the experience of the game: person, player and character. Mackay (2001, 56) included two more, raconteur and addresser, that are really interesting for a performance/artistic approach. This article will focus only on the three previously mentioned and we recommend the article “Playing with Leadership: A Multiple Case Study of Leadership Development Larps” (Hartyándi and van Bilsen 2024, 150-151) especially for the part in which the authors apply a “layer analysis” using the case study methodology in four larps. One of the cases is the larp named *7Samurai*, in which 3-7 players enact peasants who must “save their village both from rebel bandits and a greedy emperor” with the purpose of training human resource to understand how to use this larp to “choose one of the candidates for the proposed job” (152).

On the social layer, individuals might want to participate in this AC larp to get hired or to get familiar with the larpified AC process as an HR recruiter. On the game layer there is an undefined but existing win-state, so players might be competing with each other to be the “winner” in the eye of the assessors, thus getting hired. On the diegetic layer, the characters are Japanese peasants who must cooperate against external threats. (153)

From the perspective of the structures of power that appear in each layer in a classroom, it’s interesting to check each lamination or layer to prevent problems related with consent:

- **Lamination person:** The roles applied in terms of teacher-student or the different dynamic of power between students, like social leaders or even bullying. It’s also quite interesting when students belong to the same company and they have a relationship of power with bosses and employees studying together.

- **Lamination player:** Roles defined by the type of participant that enacts the experience: player or GM in classic RPGs; total symmetry for GMless games; Player, Storyteller or NPC Player for LARPs based on Mind's Eye Theatre, etc. It can also be understood in terms of who is better with the rules of the game.
- **Lamination character:** Or the experience as it would be lived in the fictional world, with the character or characters that each participant controls, and the relationship of power that can be found in it: a character is socially or socially stronger than another one.

Understanding the different laminations, the structures of power, and how they permeate is very important for the teachers, especially when they need to prevent and react to consent-related issues that can appear during the class. As Williams et al indicate:

In each lamination, individuals enact different role-identities as they define reality in terms of the relevant frame. The idea that these frames overlap as laminations demonstrates the complexity of role-play. Not only must “real world” friends be careful how they treat their “fantasy world” enemies, but a player who plays an adventure for a second time may need to ignore what they know is coming for the sake of their character or other party members” (2018, 231).

The relationship of power can create interesting contradictions within laminations. A person who is more powerful in one lamination can be completely powerless in another one, creating three possible comparisons of laminations:

- **Person vs. player:** A teacher, who has more power within the frame of person, can participate as a player in a game in which a student is a gamemaster, inverting the relationship of power within that lamination. This can create power conflicts during the game if the teacher exerts the power he or she has in person to deny a student's decision that would go against another student's consent.
- **Person vs. character laminations:** In the *7Samurai* larp, one of the options include the teacher, using the term facilitator in the text, to be “a delivery servant” while students enact peasant pretending to be samurais (Hartyándi and van Bilsen 2024, 153-154). Would students roleplay rudely with the servant knowing that the teacher is going to evaluate them?
- **Player vs. character laminations:** A participant that controls the mechanics of the game, as explained part of the player lamination, can optimize the gaming experience in ways that wouldn't represent the real level of power of his/her character compared with other characters.

All in all, from the perspective of consent, teachers should be aware of these dynamics to prevent and properly respond to situations that can arise in the class. The next section initiates a proposal for teachers to implement risk management techniques as a method that can be initially perceived as overwhelming and that generates a lot of paperwork. Mochocki warns about it indicating that “the teaching profession in Poland has relatively low social and financial status, with little appeal for energetic and innovative individuals” where passionate teachers “do not get discouraged by the “minor inconvenience” such as low salaries and ever-increasing paperwork” (2013, 58). We understand that this asseveration not only applies to Poland, so we suggest readers to apply one of the main principles of Project Management that is tailoring, which implies “the deliberate adaptation of the project management approach, governance, and processes to make them more suitable for the given environment and the work at hand.” (Project Management Institute, 2021, 130). To do that, readers can apply it, modify it even removing parts when they apply it or simply use the proposal as an inspiration to question the things as they are written.

Paperwork is a controversial word, and this proposal is based on risk management techniques that can create a lot of it. One of the principles of the Agile Manifesto, key framework currently for many projects, is: “Working software over comprehensive documentation.” This framework has been adapted to all types of projects, not only software, and could be adapted to this article as “working educational safe RPGs over comprehensive documentation”. Similar to this approach, Losilla indicates that, related to larps in general and not specifically to the classroom, “the methods used in risk management (risk matrices being the primary example) help us very little here: they have been designed to leave a paper trail which can be used as evidence. They are too bureaucratic” (2024). On the other side of the spectrum, Sinking Ship Creations uses Risk Management “to reduce harm by identifying hazards that cause harm, assessing the risk they pose to participants, using controls to reduce that risk, and finally by communicating that risk to players so that they can make a risk-aware consent decision” (Hart 2024a), even sharing their already tailored Standard Risk Assessment “for the sake of transpar-

ency” (Hart 2024c).

In this article we try to reduce and adapt this paperwork but we don’t eliminate it for several reasons: it’s useful to create distance and thinking about it for people without experience, it helps to visualize things and prioritize actions (like which risks you are going to deal with first) and keeping track of it can improve next experiences when analyzing previous ones. Additionally, some teachers can consider generating paperwork to defend their projects both as proposals and inspections.

### 3. APPLICATION OF ANALOG RPGS IN THE CLASSROOM IN FIVE PHASES

Mackay explained the connection of ritual and role-playing games as performing arts (2001, 112). Bowman elaborated on this when she stated that “Role-playing, when understood as ritual, contains these same defining elements. Role-playing as a practice tends to be more free-form and improvisational than a traditional stage play, but still follows the same principles of liminality.” (2010, 49). Being at the same time actor and spectator is another of the common grounds between rituals and playing RPGs (Hoover et al, 2018, 214). However, the most iconic element shared is the process of immersion. Huizinga stated that one of the things games do is creating a “temporary world” that he mentions as “magic” and that implies a “temporary abolition of the ordinary world” (1980, 10-12), and roleplaying embraces this process better than any other gaming experiences.

The transition to this “magic world” is one of the key elements at designing these activities. In larping, many pre and post debriefing is used for that, but tabletop role-playing games usually have their own ritualistic elements that can occur, not only during the session as Hoover et al mention (2018, 217). Torrebejano Osorio (2024, 127) indicates the three Van Gennep’s stages of the ritual (separation or isolation from the community, transition or liminality and (re) incorporation to the community) associating liminality to change, not only social but also communal, what anthropologically implies that is a temporal disorder that enables a new paradigm.

The same concept can be applied to the activities in class. There is a process in which students separate from real life, live the experience of the activity, and then they make a transition to real life after acquiring skills or knowledge they can apply. Therefore, using analog roleplay as activity would entail a magic world (rpg) inside another magic world (class activity).

Considering all of the above, we propose a structure based on five phases. They can be understood as 5 phases with 2 of them subdivided into 2 of them: 1st part of the separation from the real world (as activity in class), 2nd part of the separation of real world (as rpg, while in the liminality of the activity), total liminality, 1st part of the reincorporation to the real world (as rpg, while still in the liminality of the activity) and 2nd part of the reincorporation to the real world (as activity):

1. **Previous instructions.** Ideally, it’s the stage to explain to the students what it wants to be achieved with the roleplay activity. The dominant frame in this stage is person.
2. **Beginning the activity.** In this moment rules are explained and limits are created. It’s usually the transition to the next two frames, although the dominant is still the player. We like to name it “crossing the threshold.”
3. **Playing.** The three frameworks coexist in an uneven way. Depending on the type of experience, by design or how the players behave, one of them will be the dominant. The ordinary world and magic world coexist.
4. **Ending the activity.** Once the game is over, it’s time to keep the energy that came from the magic world and make a transition until only the person lamination exists. At the beginning, the energies of the magic world can impregnate the reflection, so the important thing here is focusing on the feelings as soon as the roleplay has finished and the stories created in them.
5. **Final debrief.** Decontaminated from the magic world, students can be more rational at confronting the experience. Reflective/solo work can be useful too, sometimes before sharing with the other participants conclusions about what happened.

This temporal division makes it easier for the teacher to detect when risks related to lack of consent would arise, as well as when to include measures to prevent or mitigate them.

### 4. CONTEXT ANALYSIS OF ROLE-PLAY IN THE CLASSROOM

Understanding the broader context and main characteristics of a role-playing activity is essential to tailoring an effective teaching experience. As Hammer et al. (2018, p. 286) assert, “Creating the right circumstances for game-



based learning involves designing the learning experience as carefully as the games.” Just as general labor risk assessments provide a foundational framework that must be adapted to specific tasks and roles, this article offers a flexible approach for implementing role-playing activities in the classroom, which educators can adjust to meet their unique needs and context. When planning for a specific game or activity, educators should apply this framework to address the distinct requirements of each role-playing experience. Tailoring, therefore, is essential, as it enables flexibility in mitigating risks specific to each activity, ensuring that safety and consent practices align with the structure and objectives of diverse RPGAs. This proposal includes analyzing several elements: the teacher’s involvement, the number of participants, student-to-teacher ratio, purpose of the role-play, degree of mandatory participation, importance of grading, student profiles, teacher experience, the topic being taught, time constraints, game characteristics, and special considerations.

The first question to be asked is how much the teacher will participate in the activity which is related to how much power can be exerted to control the class to react to problems of consent and preserve safety, sometimes at the cost of the engagement of the students.

- **Absence:** The lowest participation of the teacher would be absence, letting the students do the activity by themselves. It does not mean that students won’t report the experience later or participate in debates or debriefings, but during the activity the teacher won’t be present.
- **Surveillance:** The next level would be surveillance. The teacher stays with the students but lets them do the activity on their own. Certain interaction is possible, especially to preserve consent and clarify things. Mochicki proposes this formula for teachers who “do not feel like roleplaying, they could still play a larp scenario as a game, with teacher out-of-game as organiser/facilitator” (2013, 59).
- **Equal:** Teachers can also be participants equal in role to all students or many of them. This can be the case for one student being the Game Master and the other students and the teacher players, or by using any game without GM. By sharing equality in the player lamination, it’s easier for students to transit to the magic world, and it also gives the chance to respond to any issue related with consent.
- **Inferior:** Teachers can be participants inferior in role to all the students. By using games like Vincent and Meguey Baker’s *The Last Adventure* (2022), the teacher can be the only player whilst students are the game masters.
- **Game Master or referee:** Finally, teachers can act as Game Master or referee. That’s the level that includes more control on the class, making it easier to preserve consent, but it also can intimidate students at giving the teacher power on the two first laminations at the same time. That’s the main proposal of Youakim in his honor capstone project because he considers that “Teacher and gamemaster are parallel roles; they both enable students/players to achieve by being guides” (2019, 15).

The second element to be considered is the number of participants and the ratio of students per teacher. Preparing a roleplay for a group of 120 students, a ratio that can be found in University classes in Spain, can drive the teacher to divide the group into subgroups, limit the type of roleplay that can be made or even deny him/her the possibility of gamemastering. Larps allow a higher number of participants than ttrpg, and that’s one of the reasons why “The first officially documented application of larp methodology in educational processes was dated 1916–1918” (Harviainen et al. 2018, 101), long before the term larp was coined as it’s nowadays understood. Preserving the consent in huge groups can be also challenging, and will constrain the design to make it achievable. For tabletop, Lasley recommends 4-6 players per session, with multiple groups if some students are prepared to DM and assume that role (2022, 83-84) whereas Youakim proposes as another solution “Asking students to meet outside of class” (2019, 22).

The purpose of role-play as an activity is another key element, and derives to certain questions and assumptions. Was it prepared for a complementary acquisition of skills, like usually happens with soft skills in other trainings? Is it going to be used as the main tool for the acquisition of key skills, like understanding a new concept? Or does it only pretend to entertain or relax the group, as a funny transition between hard work activities?

The next consideration is about the location of the activity within the mandatory vs. optional axis. It’s a very controversial topic with authors like Heeter et al who defend that “When games become mandatory, they are less motivating and less engaging – qualities on which many educational games depend” (in Hammer et al 2018, 286). Even in non-mandatory exercises, there is a tendency to persuade students with incentives (Mochocki 2013, 64), which could be considered a violation of the principle of *Consent in gaming*: “It’s not up for debate” (Reynolds and Germain, 2019, 4). That’s an ethical concern that must be addressed with care, especially with

children, as Geneuss explained in the article about the STARS technique project they developed in Munich (2021, 122). This concept is written like an axis because there are several points in between. One activity can include complementary assignments for those who decide not to engage into it, for example, or the lack of participation could impact one assessment criteria, which leads to the next item.

Is it going to be a graded activity? Sometimes, the teacher doesn't have the chance to choose. Role playing activities can be the only way to grade the students, with the most obvious case of roleplaying games as the topic of the lesson, as it could be for training teachers and educators who need to participate in one of them to really understand the process for further use. On the other hand, the role-playing activity can be part of a course or training that has no evaluation but attendance control, or not even that because no certification is obtained. Nevertheless, if the teacher can decide to grade the activity, the decisions to be made entail not only in terms of designing how he/she is going to do it or the weight of that activity within all the other assessment criteria of the course, but also if another option is available for the students to acquire the skills and being graded if they decide not to participate.

The next thing would be understanding the student, starting with two elements that are so related that it's better to explain them together: their age and educational level. One of the reasons why there are more studies about role-playing games for children and teenagers than for adults is that "Role-play is a natural part of human development. This includes both pretend play by children and identity experimentation by adolescents." (Hammer et al, 2018, 287). Nonetheless, Bowman explained that "when role-playing takes place in so-called 'serious games,' popular and academic publications often celebrate its benefits" (2010, 81). Maturity of students is complicated to be seized, whereas age is an easily quantifiable indicator, so that is a good starting point to prevent and adapt consent tools and techniques. Educational level works in the same way, not as a determinant but as an indicator of maturity, exposure to different training techniques and understanding of abstract concepts. However, the difference between the educational level of the teacher and students can also influence the perception of power. Other specificities related to students can be included in this point or in the last one: special situations.

The teacher must also ask a few questions about him/herself and other teachers, starting with the expertise they have in these types of activities. Mochocki highlights how larps don't demand as much from the teachers as applied theater (2013, 59) and he proposes print-and-play larps with "no costumes, props, room decoration or rehearsals" (73) as a way to fight laziness of students and teachers. When Cox mentions that "In Teaching Gramsci and Arendt at Wizard School (2016) Evan Torner uses his experience larping as a teacher of ethics at the New World Magischola college of magic to reflect on the invisible neo-liberal concepts that govern us and resist rebellion, particularly in a higher education setting" (2021) and he also clarifies that he's not only one of the editors of *Analog Game Studies* (and we could add that editor of this journal), but also that "Torner's preparation, play, and reflection in this piece share connection with his experiences as a scholar, gamer, teacher, and fan of music" (Cox 2021). Besides Cox talks about Torner's experience as a player, it creates a good point at one side of the spectrum of combining that expertise versus new teachers without experience in roleplay.

The specific topic of the formation or training is quite relevant too. The expectations at including analog roleplaying into a course of mathematics for teenagers is quite different than the ones into a workshop of new teaching methodologies. Mochocki for example defends that larp is more effective in social science and humanities than in math and science classes (2013, 60). It's also important to understand in which way the topic of the specific course is related to the whole training. For example, in the Universidad de Sevilla the subject Game Design and Ludonarrative is a mandatory subject for the students of Audiovisual Communication.

The next items are related to time: the length of the formation and in which moment the activity will be executed within the formation. Longer courses give time to the teacher to understand the social dynamics in the classroom, and as a result to create the proper mood and work on the creation of "safe space". And as it happens with the topic, these elements can be contextualized within the whole formation, because students don't behave in the same way if they just met than if they've been together for several years. Continuing with the same example of the subject of Game Design and Ludonarrative, it's taught as two classes a week for a whole semester of the fourth and last course of the degree.

Of course, another element to be deeply analyzed is the game itself, and the first question to be asked about it is: how much can it be modified? That's especially relevant because we can find during the analysis of the risks that to preserve consent we need to make modifications of the game. What's the level of agency of the game? The more control students have, the less control the teacher has to prevent problems of consent, but emergent narratives to "play to find out what happens" allow an exploratory mindset far from the designer/facilitator auteur mindset (Cox 2021).

Finally there are the special situations, or everything the teacher considers in the analysis that it's not covered in the previous items. They can be things as specific as teaching in prison for condemned students, whose

lack of attendance could be derived from a punishment, or as common as the presence of students with special learning necessities. The importance of these specificities can be better understood with the example of Sinking Ship Creators when they learned about “race and accessibility to people with physical disabilities” that “When white organizers without disabilities do talk about these topics, we often fail to include actionable plans, or worse, explain why we won’t address the problem.” (Hart 2024d).

## 5. METHOD TO DEAL WITH CONSENT BASED ON RISK MANAGEMENT

Project management has been frequently applied to teaching, and risk management specifically is being applied to larps (for further readings, we recommend the articles of Hart and Losilla that can be found in bibliography). The method we propose adapts risk management methods to treat the lack of consent as a risk. One of the tendencies in risk management is working with risk as threats and opportunities (Project Management Institute 2019, 7-8), because by modifying some situations the outcome can be even more positive than the original situation was. Besides this mindset can be also applied to the subject of this article, especially when with bleed as we are going to mention in the final part, we opt to not include it to simplify the process that can be already overwhelming for teachers with the lack of training in this topic.

Depending on the author, the Risk Management cycle can be divided in 7 (Project Management Institute 2019, 27-40), 5 (58-60), or even reduced to only 3 steps as Sergio Losilla applies them to larps (2024). The method we propose is based on:

1. Identify risks,
2. Analyze risks,
3. Respond to risks, and
4. Monitor risks.

### 5.1 Identify risks

This step basically consists of listing the possible risks that can happen. The best way of doing it is by combining research with deduction. We are going to include two or three examples to illustrate each part, including a suggestion of how to write the risk in the list.

Research will imply navigating into three types of sources: topic related literature, previous experiences and consulting experts. Many risks of consent are so obvious that could easily appear in all the sources, and that’s also an indicator of how probable is that this risk appears, which will be an important item for the next stage. E.g., the basic lack of consent that is students not willing to participate in the activity even when it has already started; mentioned by Mochocki (2013, 64 and 71) among many others, previously experienced by the teacher and it’s something that can be easily deduced.

Topic related literature can be consulted in general (by searching consent and roleplay) or specific ways (consent applied to the classroom or consent in the specific activity). For example:

- When reading the book *Consent in Gaming* (general approach), the quote “There may not be a reason why they’re not consenting. They may not be able to explain why something bothers them. It just bothers them. That’s okay. Even if they can’t put it into words, it’s valid that something creeps them out, makes them feel unsafe, or scares them. It’s okay for people to listen to their feelings” (Reynolds and Germain, 3) leads the teacher to write in the list “a student wants but cannot explain why he/she doesn’t give consent”.
- In Geneuss’ article of specific use of role-playing practices in schools, she indicates that “stepping out of the game without inhibiting the other participants’ game had to be trained, not only explained. Despite the high amount of time needed, it helped students to remain in character and to feel safe and in command during the game” (2021, 123). The risk could be added into the list as “not giving enough time of training to feel safe and in command”.

Previous experiences could include events lived by the teacher also as student, or participant in similar activities, but also the ones known by other professionals. That’s why it’s so important to keep track of them as it’s explained in the last stage, monitor risks, and create documents that can be consulted.

In project management, risk registers of previous projects are usually accessible not only for the person who created them, but also to other project managers. They are repositories that can include information as “the

person responsible for managing the risk, probability, impact, risk score, planned risk responses, and other information used to get a high-level understanding of individual risks" (Project Management Institute, 2021, 185). Of course, these data should be written in a way they respect privacy and preserve ethics.

The already mentioned Sinking Ship Creator's Standard Risk Assessment (Hart 2024c) is a good example of the importance of creating a document that can be consulted, not only for the basic purpose of creating and executing a possible Risk Management Plan, but also to reflect about what has been already done and letting others to access it and learn from it. In the teaching environment, risk registers can be implemented informally, as personal or teams of teachers prepare and share them, or formally, as part of the teacher's department, general from the institution or a risk management department.

This is a key point to insist on tailoring the experience. Many teachers will opt to directly not doing it to reduce the paperwork and workload. Our personal recommendation is do it progressively: start with a personal risk register and, if you find it helpful, offer it to other teachers and then you will decide if you continue the process.

- Reviewing personal documents, the teacher includes the risk "bleed in: student uses one activity to continue a pre-detected bully behavior against another student".
- Checking reports of partners, the teacher writes in the list "bleed out: a student had a conflict in character with another student that continued as a personal conflict".

Consulting experts can be formal or informal, and an expert can be someone who had similar experiences but also people with the knowledge of specific elements related with the group.

- The International Office sends a report indicating that students from one country understand an expression as offensive, and the teacher writes in the list "student uses a word that is perceived as offensive to other cultures".
- Interacting through LinkedIn with a renown teacher who included larps in his/her classes appears the risk "stereotypical imitation of another accent offends a student".
- In a conversation with an experienced VTT Gamemaster, he/she shares how improvising the search and sharing reference pictures, one image made a player uncomfortable. The teacher turned it into the risk "reference media discomforts student".

Deduction would imply thinking in advance situations that could appear, and didn't appear in the research. A personal tip is to write the risks in present tense, that will help you to think almost as if you are there. It's important to have a methodology to do it, and this proposal uses the division in five phases included in the second chapter of this article considering that thinking linearly in the experience will facilitate the detection specially for inexperienced teachers:

- **Previous instructions:** In this part, a version of one of the most common risk can arise: "student's misconception of the activity makes him/her not wanting to participate in it", but also "student doesn't want to behave silly in front of the other ones" what could be derived from the lack of a safe environment.
- **Beginning the activity:** Continuing with another version of the opt out risk, "student changes his/her mind at the last moment and decides not to do the activity", which can be a big deal for the other members if the activity was for a specific number of players or even if other students prepared some work that implied interaction with that student.
- **Playing:** This stage should be analyzed more carefully than the other ones, because it has more nuances specific for every activity. And again, for the sake of tailoring, we recommend decomposing it in sub-steps specific from every activity. Typical elements like bleed (Bowman and Lieberoth, 2018, 249), unwanted sexual interactions between players or, besides the possible effect, reluctance of treating themes like "sexism, racism, and religious extremism in-character" on players because "they may become more inclusive towards others in their daily life, enhancing overall social cohesion" (Bowman, 2010) can appear in this point if they didn't do it earlier at the research. Some risks that could appear here are "the content of the activity will traumatize students" and "student doesn't feel comfortable being the center of attention."
- **Ending the activity:** "Student doesn't want to share publicly about the experience" is a common risk that appears here as it is "student expresses violently his/her feelings."



- **Final debrief:** As a continuation of the previous ones “student declines to share privately the concerns he/she has about the activity” and “student doesn’t indicate all of his/her concerns,” especially in graded activities, could be included here.

Finally, when the list is made, it should be contained in the number of items and writing style to make it appropriate to work with, depending on what the teacher needs. Too many items can be as unproductive as too few, with the possibilities of removing and merging risks. For example, depending on the activity, “student refuses to share about the experience” can be enough useful for some of them, whereas for others it would be better to divide them between “public share” and “private share” with the teacher.

## 5.2 Analyze risks

The general purpose of this stage is understanding the risks to prioritize them first and facilitate the next step: responding to each risk. Besides other characteristics can be included, like urgency or proximity (Project Management Institute. 2019, 139), this basic analysis will rely on the estimation of only two: probability (or likelihood) and impact (138).

Probability responds to how often the risk can appear, whereas impact to how severe repercussions will be if it appears. Even though the estimation can be linked to quantitative or qualitative elements (59) and each characteristic divided in five degrees, for the sake of simplicity we divided it in three degrees with a short explanation of each one of them (see Table 1).

**Table 1:** Explanation of Low, Medium and High applied to Probability and Impact.

	Low	Medium	High
Probability	If it happens it would clearly surprise the teacher.	It will happen in some activities.	It will happen at least once per activity.
Impact	It won’t barely affect the student.	It will affect the student, but not in a meaningful way.	It will affect the student in a meaningful way.

These definitions are quite subjective, although nonetheless human behavior in Project Management is treated understanding this subjectivity and directly attached to the concept of complexity (Project Management Institute 2021, 51).

After assigning a level of probability and impact to each identified risk, the next step is to prioritize them. The Probability and Impact Matrix (Table 2) is a practical tool that allows educators to organize and assess risks visually by placing probability levels in the columns and impact levels in the rows, with the intersection determining each risk’s overall priority level. While Losilla (2024) suggests that such matrices may have limitations in the flexible structure of larps, we find they can still provide essential support in classroom role-playing settings, particularly for educators unfamiliar with formal risk management. This matrix serves several key functions:

1. **Visual Framework:** For educators new to risk management, the matrix provides a structured, visual method for ranking risks, helping to reduce overwhelm and establish a clear order for addressing potential issues.
2. **Guidance on Risk Mitigation:** By identifying high-priority risks, the matrix enables teachers to target specific risks, either by reducing their probability, their impact, or both.
3. **Structured Response:** The matrix allows educators to work systematically, beginning with high-priority risks and progressing to lower ones. This aligns with Mochocki’s (2013) point on limited time for educators, as they can address critical risks first and determine a stopping point that suits their needs, allowing them control over the process.
4. **Post-Activity Evaluation:** After the activity, teachers can use the matrix to compare their initial risk assessments with actual outcomes, supporting reflection and adjustment for future sessions. This iterative process improves educators’ ability to assess and manage risks effectively over time.

**Table 2:** Probability and Impact Matrix.

		Probability		
		Medium	High	
Impact	High	Medium risk	High risk	Critical risk
	Medium	Low risk	Medium risk	High risk
	Low	Trivial risk	Low risk	Medium risk

*Critical risks* not only should be the first ones to be addressed, but also are good indicators for canceling the activity unless they are properly dealt with. *High risks* are very important too, and *medium risks* usually draw the line of really important to manage. *Low risks* matter too, and they shouldn't be completely ignored especially if the impact is still medium, but sometimes they are left behind because of urgent issues. The term of *trivial risk* is less and less used and many people treat them as low risks.

Here are some examples with risks already detected, understanding that especially the probability will vary depending on the course. That's why it's so important the context analysis:

- **The student doesn't want to participate:** High probability + Medium impact = High risk.
- **The student wants to tell the teacher why he/she doesn't want to participate but doesn't know how:** Low probability + Medium impact = Low risk.
- **The student uses the activity to bully another student:** Low probability + High impact = Medium risk.
- **The student doesn't feel comfortable being the center of attention:** High probability + Low impact = Medium risk.
- **The content of the activity traumatizes students:** High probability + High impact = Critical risk.
- **The student declines to share his/her concerns about the activity in the individual report:** Low probability + Low impact = Trivial risk.

### 5.3 Respond to risks

Starting with the critical risks, it's time to decide what to do with each one of them. Depending on the author, you can find different categories as a response to the risk. For example, Hart (2024a) indicates six categories of control risks at larps that are used in Sinking Ship Creations: elimination, design, equipment, training, regulation and information (2024?). Our proposal includes the next five ones:

- **Escalate** the risk. It implies raising it to some higher in the hierarchy than the teacher, which is a common response in the educational environment for extreme behaviors, including harassment, sending the student to the head of department or director.
- **Avoid** the risk. A common answer to critical risks that could lead to cancellation of the activity, as Losilla (2024) as a possibility for some larps.
- **Transfer** the risk. Every time some else needs to deal with the risk it would be considered to transfer it. When students do the activity without the presence of the teacher, the risk has been transferred to them.
- **Mitigate** the risk. Actions that reduce probability or impact developed or controlled by the teacher. As the most common and developed way to respond to consent risks, it will be expanded later in this chapter.
- **Accept** the risk. Basically, doing nothing. That decision can be made because there is no solution, the consequences of applying them are even worse or by prioritizing other risks there's no time to deal with that one (Project Management Institute. 2019, 36). One principle that Losilla (2024) indicates for larps that can be easily adapted to the classroom is "Do not hesitate to make participation compulsory, if absence would lead to risks that you cannot accept."

Once the choice is made, specific measures or tools can be applied. These measures can modify risks, especially but not only, in the case of mitigation, or generate new risks related or not with consent. And there is

always a chance to combine some of them. As an example of a specific consent risk that can be addressed in any of these ways, we are going to deal with the first one that appeared in the stage Identify Risk: students that don't want to participate.

- **Escalate** the risk, by taking it to a superior, who would decide if opt out is an available option for students and the consequences for them.
- **Avoid** the risk, by canceling the activity or letting students opt out.
- **Transfer** the risk, if the student presents a signed authorization of a qualified person (legal tutor, parent or even medical report).
- **Mitigate** the risk. Mochocki proposes 3 things that are clearly mitigations of this risk: create incentives "to willing enter the experience" (2013, 64), "if the in-game conflicted parties need to recruit supporters, then uninvolved players will be actively encouraged by peers to join in" (2013, 66) and tailor the design to the students by diminishing the importance of immersion, generating easy-to-relate characters and emphasizing task completion (2013, 71-72). Another option would be discouraging students to opt out by making them do another activity that is not as attractive as the game, like writing an essay. All of these things reduce the probability.
- **Accept** the risk. That would be the case of not giving the chance to opt out. That's usually the most common decision for courses and workshops whose main focus is the roleplay activity, e.g., Creating a course of how to use the larp *7Samurai* to train HR specialists to detect natural leaders among candidates for a job (Hartýándi and van Bilsen 2024, 154) could entail that playing the larp is mandatory to all the participants.

In the case of mitigation, actions and techniques can be found in different sources: academic, para-academic, designers' or players' publications, learners' experiences, podcasts, encounters, etc. Teachers can also adapt similar experiences from topics like general gamification or other interactive activities. The Probability and Impact Matrix further supports this process by helping educators determine whether to address each risk by reducing its impact, its probability, or both, thereby providing a strategic approach to mitigation. At the same time, it enhances understanding of how a risk diminishes in priority as its impact or probability decreases.

As an example, the book *Educuar Jugando: un reto para el siglo XXI* (translation: *Educate Playing: a Challenge for the XXI Century*; Blasco et al. 2019) includes a wide variety of contributions, from the para-academic "Utilizando juegos de mesa en la universidad. El caso de *Timeline* historia de la comunicación" (translation: "Using Board Games in the University: *Timeline* history of communication's case"; Gonzalo 2019) written by an academic author, to the teacher-designer section "Jugando a rol con científicos" (translation: "Playing RPGs with Scientifics", Sanz González 2019a) that starts with the general use of games to the creation of his published game book *Científicos: El juego de rol* (translation, *Scientifics: The Role-Playing Game*, Sanz González 2019b). In the same way, the already mentioned free publication RPG-oriented *Consent in Gaming* (Reynolds and Germain 2019) includes many tools, and you can find there a collection of links of additional resources where we recommend "The TTRPG Safety Toolkit" where you can find one of our favorite ones: Ron Edwards' lines and veils (Shaw and Bryant-Monk 2021). The Nordic Larp Wiki also includes in "concepts" and "tools" sections specific situations and already tested tools quite useful to use with this method.

We propose to use the context analysis and then checking the different phases to locate the actions for the mitigation. Several actions could affect the same risks, reducing more and more the impact and/or the probability, and the same action can have effect on several risks. We include here a few examples of actions and their consequences in each phase:

- **Previous instructions.** In the case of tabletop roleplaying games, this is a good point to introduce Lines and Veils and similar tools. This technique consists of elaborate and shared with the participants lines or "content won't show up in the game at all" and veils while content that "might be in the game but not spotlighted or described in great detail" (Shaw and Bryant-Monk 2021, 1) are veils. For some groups, it can generate a new risk of people mocking the person, and that's why it's so important preserving anonymity of the contributions by making the teacher generate the list after receiving the contributions, possibly including more lines and veils.
- **Beginning the activity.** The use of workshops for larps is something mentioned by many authors. When Losilla talks about the rules of consent he strongly recommends "practising them explicitly in a workshop before runtime, particularly in case of subtle diegetic mechanics, which may be easily missed" (2024).

- **Playing the activity.** And again, this stage is the key one. Some general principles are applied, like active listening to detect and react to issues as they appear, reducing the impact, which is also applied as a Game Master technique from many non-academic authors (Sesenra 2022, 14). Other actions could be using the X-Card so “the GM (or whoever is acting when the X-Card is activated) should either revise the current content to avoid the problem content or skip ahead so that the problem content is no longer present” Reynolds and Germain 2019, 6), including mandatory off-game after care after pre-designed abusive scenes (Losilla 2024).
- **Ending the activity.** Aftercare, also known as debrief or checking in, creates a space that “might involve mostly retelling favorite bits and planning for the future, both in and out of character. An intense game probably requires something more structured” (Reynolds and Germain 2019, 8). With this action, you can reduce the severity of the damage, therefore decreasing the impact.
- **Final debrief.** “Write an individual report” is an action itself that allows students to mention issues that they experienced during the activity and that they don’t feel comfortable discussing in public. This action reduces the impact by expressing the concern and feeling listened to by the teacher.

It is also quite useful to re-check how the risk has changed after applying the modifications. If you take a critical risk and you modify it by reducing the probability to low, it becomes a medium risk.

#### 5.4 Monitor risks

This final step implies “reevaluate the status of previously identified risks; to identify emergent, secondary, and residual risks; and to determine the effectiveness of the risk management processes” (Project Management Institute. 2019, 39).

As it was indicated in the Identify risks step, previous experiences will help further experiences. It can also enhance quantitative approaches to further analysis. One key element here is to process data in a safe and ethical way, especially for students. Institutions can have their own logs as reports to tutors or shared documents with other teachers, and some countries and public organizations publish their own guides (see e.g., Agencia Española de Protección de Datos 2018).

If a teacher decides to create his/her own log, it should be written coding terms and skipping names to respect students’ privacy, even if the initial purpose is for personal use.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Future research could benefit from developing tailored consent frameworks for specific types of role-playing activities within educational settings, building upon the general approach proposed in this article. For instance, as Bowman (2018) has noted, educational larps often foster immersive and complex interactions that require unique risk management strategies to address player agency and emotional engagement. In contrast, tabletop RPGs might benefit from frameworks focused on structured consent tools, such as those outlined in *Consent in Gaming* by Reynolds and Germain (2019), which emphasizes setting boundaries and managing sensitive themes within moderated scenarios. Developing such specific models would enable even more precise applications of consent and safety practices, ensuring that each role-playing genre within educational contexts has a well-suited, research-backed framework to effectively support both educators and participants.

Role-playing activities applied in the classroom make teachers deal with many concerns related to consent. The triple framework that these activities generate create a complex dynamic of power that not only creates tricky interactions but also makes it harder to detect consent issues. It’s important that teachers have their own method to deal with these situations, and the tools that have been created by the rpg community can be quite useful, properly understood and adapted. This article proposes a method based on risk management techniques that starts by dividing the activity in 5 phases, continues analyzing its context and finishes with a 4 steps process of dealing with the risks derived from lack of consent: identify, analyze, respond to and monitor them. This is not *the* method, but *a* method to be adapted by the teacher.



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