



ADDRESSING MEDIA LITERACY THROUGH THE LENSES OF IMMERSIVE ROLE-PLAYING

Gamify+: Enhancing Organizational Capacity through Hybrid Gaming



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In a time when we are bombarded with information from different media sources every day, the significance of Media Literacy cannot be emphasised enough. Through Media Literacy, individuals gain the necessary skills to critically analyse, evaluate, and understand media messages, which helps them navigate the complex world of information dissemination. However, traditional methods of teaching Media Literacy often fall short in engaging learners and fostering a deep understanding of its nuances. Here in this booklet, we want to introduce how Live Action Role-Playing (larp) and its digital counterpart, Live Action Online Games (laog), can represent a powerful and forward-thinking resource that holds immense potential in addressing the challenges of Media Literacy.

Larp is a form of interactive storytelling where participants assume the roles of characters within a predetermined narrative, immersing themselves in fictional worlds and scenarios. While traditionally associated with fantasy and adventure themes, larp can be adapted to explore contemporary issues. Through the lens of larp, participants embark on a journey of exploration, engaging with diverse perspectives and challenging their preconceived notions.

Similarly, laog brings the immersive experience of role-playing into the digital realm, offering a dynamic alternative to traditional larp settings. In a laog, participants interact with each other and the narrative through online platforms, combining elements of storytelling, gameplay, and social interaction. While lacking the physical presence and sensory immersion of traditional larp, laog compensates with accessibility, scalability, and the integration of multimedia elements.

One of the most powerful aspects of larp and laog in the context of Media Literacy is their ability to foster empathy by allowing participants to inhabit roles different from their own. In assuming the perspectives of journalists, editors, consumers, or even fictional characters caught in the web of media manipulation, players gain a deeper understanding of the motivations, biases, and challenges faced by each role. By experiencing these diverse viewpoints firsthand, individuals develop empathy towards others and recognise the complexities inherent in media production and consumption.

Moreover, larp and laog encourage players to step out of their comfort zones and engage with unfamiliar ideas and viewpoints. Through interactive role-play and improvisation, people are challenged to think on their feet, critically evaluate information, and make real-time decisions. This active engagement pushes individuals beyond passive consumption of media towards a more discerning and analytical approach. In the safe and supportive environment of a larp session or the digital realm of a laog, players can feel empowered to question assumptions, challenge narratives, and explore alternative perspectives, thus honing their critical thinking skills.

Incorporating larp and laog into Media Literacy education offers dynamic and immersive approaches that resonate with learners of all ages and backgrounds. However, in order to achieve this kind of results, larp must include some specific features, which allow this medium to express its educational potential. Some elements need to be evaluated and reflected upon before starting the design process:

- **Who is going to play the game, i.e. what is the game's target?** Designing a game for children, teenagers or adults requires different approaches, that need to consider the attention span, the need for “pure” fun, the seriousness of the topic, etc.;
- **What is the theme of the larp and what do you want to achieve through it?** What are the values we intend to promote or to spark reflection upon? Having clear in mind what is the theme and the aim of the larp can help focus the design process on what is essential. Including values - through ethical choices, for example - can also help to work on deeper levels of the player, promoting a process of evaluation and/or empathy towards a specific character or situation present in the game. Details and techniques involved need to be a consequence of these reflections;
- **What kind of experience do you want the players to have?** Deciding if the experience has to be completely immersive, partially immersive, more intimate, based on many interactions or on a few deeper ones is necessary to identify the right kind of larp you want to design for your purpose.

These are only some of the evaluations needed to design a fully functional larp, but they can be considered a first core to work upon and familiarise with the medium.

A crucial element in larp is *immersion*, i.e. the generation of a feeling in the players of “truly” being living the experience the character is living. Depending on the type of larp, this feeling can be more easily or hardly inspired: in a large production with scenographies, long play-time, a specific location and costumes it’s easier; in a *chamber larp* (a larp that can be played in a smaller area, in a shorter time and with less players and less to non costumes and scenography), a designer has to rely on other techniques to get closer to the same result. One example of the tools at disposal are meta-techniques, that allow the player to stray from the perceived reality and delve into the reality lived by their character.

While tackling the major subject of Media Literacy, though, a laog (which we could also describe as an online version of a *chamber larp*) has the opportunity to use the selected platform to play on - a forum, a voice chat, a video call etc. - to boost immersion (if the laog is designed to be set on the same platform it takes place on) and at the same time help develop some of the hard skills related to the specific platform used.

Another crucial aspect to consider is *safety*. In larp settings, ensuring the physical and emotional well-being of participants is paramount. Incorporating measures such as physical safety checks, establishing guidelines for emotional safety, and fostering a culture of consent can create a supportive environment where participants feel secure in exploring challenging themes and engaging in immersive role-playing experiences.

Moreover, diversity and inclusion should be promoted to enrich the larp experience for all participants. Creating inclusive narratives and characters that reflect a diverse range of identities and experiences fosters an environment where everyone feels valued and respected.

Additionally, providing facilitators with proper training on conflict resolution, de-escalation techniques, and recognising signs of distress equips them to effectively manage challenging situations and support participants in need.

Another element that helps develop an educational process through larp is an *on-boarding workshop*, which prepares the players for what their characters will be facing and can help to set the mood or the focus of the experience.

What is most important, though, is a thorough reflection on the experiences made during the larp: this is usually achieved through a guided debriefing, to be held by the facilitator after the game has ended, and that, at least in the context of educational larp, is as important as the whole game experience. These sessions provide an opportunity for participants to process their emotions, discuss insights, and address any concerns that may have arisen during gameplay, ensuring that everyone feels heard and supported.

Key points for effective debriefing include:

- **Creating a safe space:** Establishing a non-judgmental environment where participants feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings;
- **Asking reflective questions:** Posing open-ended questions that encourage participants to reflect on their experiences and consider the impact of their actions within the game;
- **Identifying learning moments:** Highlighting key moments from the larp that sparked discussion or prompted participants to think critically about media literacy concepts;
- **Addressing emotional responses:** Acknowledging and validating participants' emotional responses to the game, providing support where needed, and offering strategies for processing difficult feelings.
- **Encouraging perspective-taking:** Encouraging participants to consider different perspectives and viewpoints presented in the game, fosters empathy and understanding.

By integrating larp and laog into Media Literacy education, we open up new avenues for experiential learning. These role-playing approaches not only captivate participants but also build crucial skills in an impactful way. The combination of narrative immersion and reflective debriefing ensures that the lessons learned extend far beyond the game itself, transforming Media Literacy education into a dynamic and experiential process that actively engages learners in critical thinking and self-reflection.

Embracing the potential of larp and laog can thus foster the creation of not just informed consumers of media but active participants in the ongoing conversation about information, its dissemination, and its impact on society.

Workshop Outline:

Designing Media Literacy Scenarios with Larp and Laog

Objectives:

1. Introduce participants to the basic elements of Live Action Role-Playing (larp) and Live Action Online Games (laog);
2. Explore the potential of larp and laog in addressing Media Literacy;
3. Guide participants through designing a larp or laog scenario focused on Media Literacy;

Duration: from a minimum of 6 hours (may vary)

Materials (may vary):

- Whiteboard/Flipchart with markers;
- Paper and pens;
- Support materials and handouts of different **chamber larps**:
<https://chaosleague.org/first-they-came/> First They Came
<https://alexandria.dk/en/data?scenarie=3732> Robin's Friends
<https://alexandria.dk/en/data?scenarie=7920> The Tribunal
- Selection of design documents from different **laogs**:
<https://alexandria.dk/en/data?scenarie=17825> Uninvited
<https://alexandria.dk/en/data?scenarie=12543> Queer and Together at the End of the World
<https://alexandria.dk/en/data?scenarie=17826> Calling Down
<https://alexandria.dk/en/data?scenarie=12528> Imaginary Problems

Workshop structure:

1. Introduction - if not done as a separate workshop (30 minutes):

- Welcome participants and introduce the workshop concept: trying out a larp/laog experience and designing an original scenario to promote Media Literacy.
- Presentation on the basics of larp and laog:
 - Definition and key characteristics.
 - Differences and similarities between larp and laog.

2. Introduction to larp and/or laog (180 minutes)

- Select one chamber larp or laog scenario for the participants to play, dividing them in more smaller groups if the scenario requires it;
- Facilitate the onboarding workshop of the scenario, giving the chance to participants to ask all the questions they have;
- Run the larp/laog experience;
- Debrief the larp/laog experience;

3. Reverse-Engineering on Key Elements for Larp and Laog Design (30 minutes)

- Prepare and introduce to the group a selection of design documents from different laogs and/or chamber larps, trying to ensure as much variety as possible among the chosen examples;
- Divide the participants into small groups and ask them to select one or two design documents they would like to analyse further;

- Ask the groups to look at the documents and identify their main elements, specifically focusing on:
 - Theme and Objectives;
 - Context and Narrative;
 - Relation between characters and interaction between players;
 - Mechanics/Techniques used and their purpose;
 - Transmedial elements (specifically for laogs);
 - Debriefing and purpose of the debriefing;

- Ask the groups to present the findings of their analyses to the other participants;

4. Scenario Design Workshop (90 minutes)

- Divide participants into small groups (4-5 people).
- Following the blueprint of the key elements identified in the previous phase, have them design an original larp/laog scenario focusing on:
 - Define the Target Audience: Discuss the specific needs and characteristics of the target audience (children, teenagers, adults).
 - Choose a Theme and Objective: Decide on a Media Literacy topic (e.g., misinformation, media bias, ethical journalism).
 - Outline the Narrative: Create a basic storyline and character roles.
 - Plan Immersive Elements: Identify techniques to create immersion (physical setting, online platforms, props, etc.).
 - Incorporate Safety and Inclusivity: Discuss strategies for ensuring a safe and inclusive experience.
 - Design the Debriefing Session: Plan questions and activities for post-scenario reflection.

5. Group Presentations and Feedback (30 minutes)

- Each group presents their scenario to the other participants
- Facilitators and participants provide constructive feedback.
- Facilitators summarise key takeaways.
- Participants share their reflections and potential applications in their own work.
- Share information on additional resources and support for implementing larp and laog in education.

Important! This is a flexible outline. Feel free to adjust it based on your audience, the chosen games and the desired level of detail for the re-imagined scenarios.

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