Journal of Inclusive Methodology and Technology in Learning and Teaching
ISSN 2785-5104
Anno 6 n. 3 (2026)

EDIZIONI UNIVERSITARIE ROMANE
editoria scientifica dal 1952

Between Cinema and Live Action Role-Play: Designing Transitions to Evoke Historical Memory

Andrea Capone [1,*] and Mario Giampaolo [1]

[1] University of Siena, Italy; andrea.capone@unisi.it; mario.giampaolo@unisi.it
* Correspondence: andrea.capone@unisi.it

Abstract: Live action role-play (LARP) is increasingly used in education as edu-larp. This study examines how cinema and Media Education from a transmedia perspective, engagement as a sociomaterial phenomenon, and the relationship between play and reflexivity interact in *Oltre il Ponte*, an upper-secondary school project on the memory of the 1944 Nazi-Fascist massacres. The project was designed as a loop: students learned film language, watched films on the Resistance, took part in a LARP campus (n = 70), produced a short film and a documentary, and returned to the cinema to present them publicly. Data from questionnaires, focus groups, participant observation and written reflections were examined through inductive thematic analysis. Engagement emerged as relational and situated: spaces, material conditions and reciprocity sustained involvement for some participants and hindered it for others. The relationship between immersion and learning was not linear, and meaning developed through subsequent occasions for reflection, as students moved from spectators to participants, authors and spect-authors. The findings point to three design implications: attending to spaces and material conditions, calibrating adult guidance and student initiative, and designing the transitions of an educational ecosystem in which experience can be discussed, narrated and returned to the public sphere.

Keywords: Educational LARP; Cinema education; Sociomateriality; Engagement; Historical memory

Copyright: © 2026 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

1. Introduction

Among immersive methods, live action role-play (LARP) asks participants to physically embody a character within a shared fiction (Francia, 2023) and is now used in educational and training contexts under the name edu-larp (Maragliano, 2020). The literature on edu-larp suggests a close relationship between three thematic strands: cinema and Media Education from a transmedia perspective, engagement as a sociomaterial phenomenon, and the relationship between play and reflexivity (Maragliano, 2020; Bowman & Baird, 2022; Bowman et al., 2025).

1.1. Media Education from a Transmedia Perspective

Media Education holds together the critical understanding of media and media production (Buckingham, 2003); in Italian scholarship it is closely tied to citizenship education and historical research, recognising media as sites where memory is constructed and citizenship exercised (Bricchetto et al., 2012; Rivoltella, 2019).

EDIZIONI UNIVERSITARIE ROMANE
editoria scientifica dal 1952

Cinema is a privileged terrain for it, since it can be watched, analysed and produced: those who move from the theatre to the film set and back to the theatre take on the dual position of the *spettautore* (spect-author), both consumer and producer (Pasta, 2021). Jenkins (2006) describes transmedia storytelling as a narrative distributed across multiple platforms; here, transmediality designates the process by which moving between environments and languages changes relationships with the past. Every medium takes up and reinterprets the forms and contents of other media (Bolter & Grusin, 1999), and cultural memory is constituted through this circulation (Erll, 2011).

1.2. Engagement as a Sociomaterial Phenomenon

Sociomaterial approaches regard the social and the material as constitutively entangled: bodies, spaces, objects and rules take part in the production of learning (Fenwick et al., 2011). The learning setting is thus located in intra-actions, and the divisions between games, technologies, environments, objects and bodies "are in the mind of the beholder" (Fabbri, 2023, p. 111). The educational context becomes an open ecosystem that is never neutral (Banchetti, 2025). Engagement is understood here as a relational and situated process that emerges, changes or breaks down within these configurations (Gourlay, 2017; Ardron, 2023); the enactive perspective adds that cognition takes shape in the interaction between body and environment (Varela et al., 1991). To read the role of places, the study adopts the category of played spaces (Picone, 2025): contexts in which play produces space through bodies, rules, objects, narratives and a temporality of its own. LARPs appear here as laboratories of imagined territoriality, in which each setting defines boundaries, powers and resources (Ceresa, 2020). Bilancini (2026) distinguishes between playing in a space, which remains a backdrop, and playing a space, reorganised into new arrangements of bodies, rules and relationships; in non-urban contexts, moreover, the environment acts as an active texture of the experience (Ceresa, 2026).

1.3. Play and Reflexivity

Play establishes a space and time set apart from ordinary life (Huizinga, 1938/1949) and offers a key for understanding cinema itself, born "as play", as both a medium and a formative experience (Farné, 2015). LARP adds to play the embodiment of characters within a shared and rule-governed fiction. Research on transformative role-playing stresses that immersive experiences foster personal change when accompanied by structured moments of reflection (Bowman & Baird, 2022; Bowman et al., 2025): experience turns into learning when it is revisited and named (Schön, 1983; Fedeli et al., 2014; Trinchero, 2025). For Mezirow (1991), a situation that the available meaning schemes cannot explain, the disorienting dilemma, can trigger a revision of perspectives through the critical reflection that follows; developed for adults, the theory has been extended to other educational contexts (Taylor & Cranton, 2012). Fabbri and Melacarne (2023) offer a sociomaterial reading of it: meanings arise jointly from material conditions and from individual and social processes of symbolisation, and reflexivity takes the form of social action.

1.4. Aim and Research Questions

EDIZIONI UNIVERSITARIE ROMANE
editoria scientifica dal 1952

This contribution analyses *Oltre il Ponte* [Beyond the Bridge], a transmedia project on the memory of the 1944 Nazi-Fascist massacres designed as a loop: students learn film language, watch films on the Resistance, take part in a LARP, shoot a short film and a documentary, and finally return to the cinema to present them to the public. The interest of the case lies in the transitions between these phases. Two questions guide the analysis:

1. How does engagement emerge, change or break down within the social, material, narrative and media configurations of the project?
2. How do transitions between these configurations change the meaning attributed to the experience and students' position towards the past?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. The Case

Oltre il Ponte ran from November 2024 to December 2025 and involved about 1,200 students from four upper-secondary schools in the provinces of Novara and Turin, across five phases (Table 1). The Cine-LARP Campus took place in May 2025 at the Villaggio delle Stelle in Lusernetta (Turin), an isolated settlement of mountain huts in the woods, with 70 students aged 16 to 19: two days of live action role-play, for more than twenty continuous hours, and two days of filming (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Students, teachers and educators at the Villaggio delle Stelle, Lusernetta (Turin), during the Cine-LARP Campus (May 2025) (Photo by the authors).

Table 1. Project phases and participants.

Phase	Period	Participants
Audiovisual language literacy	Nov. 2024 – Jan. 2025	Up to 100 students
Film-club screenings (4 films on the Resistance)	Dec. 2024 and Feb. 2025	About 1,200 students
Cine-LARP Campus	May 2025	70 students

Short film and documentary	May – Sept. 2025	70 students (20 actors in the short film)
Public screening (VIP cinema, Novara)	Dec. 2025	About 250 people

The game was set in Montelupo, an imaginary village inspired by the villages of the Monte Sole area, and involved partisans, German forces, Fascist militias, commoners and bourgeois townsfolk. A macro-plot with fixed events, including the round-up and the final execution of the partisans, was combined with open personal plots. The partisans camped in tents in the woods, while the Nazis requisitioned a house in the village as their headquarters. After the execution, an audio track of about six minutes declared that Montelupo "never existed except in our shared imagination" and reconstructed the Monte Sole and Marzabotto massacre (29 September – 5 October 1944), with about 770 civilian victims, and closed with Calamandrei's epigraph *Lo avrai camerata Kesselring* [You shall have it, comrade Kesselring]. The short film, made under the guidance of a professional director, involved 20 students as actors and others in technical roles; its plot transposes the dilemmas of choice and friendship into the present.

2.2. Data Collection and Analysis

This qualitative case study focuses on the 70 campus participants. Data include an anonymous pre-campus questionnaire; a post-campus open-ended questionnaire (45 returned); two focus groups held at the end of the game with 14 and 11 randomly selected students, joined on request by four classmates; participant observation by the researcher, educators and accompanying teachers; 12 video interviews at the campus and about ten in September 2025; and written reflections from 15 students and 2 teachers collected a few weeks later, the latter treated as observational data. The inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) used ChatGPT (GPT-5; OpenAI, 2026) to identify recurrences in pseudonymised materials, cross-checked against the researcher's reading. Quotations indicate their source: FG1 and FG2 for the focus groups, Q for the questionnaires, FU for students' written reflections and D for teachers' reflections. Quotations have been translated from Italian by the authors.

2.3. Ethical Considerations

Participation was subject to informed consent under Regulation (EU) 2016/679, signed by parents for minors. The study was not submitted to an ethics committee. Participants' names, including their battle names, were replaced by codes.

3. Results

3.1. Materiality and Space

Cold, hunger, lack of sleep, darkness and guard shifts were the conditions through which the partisans camping in the woods questioned life in 1944:

> "In the morning we were there awake, cold to the bone, trying to light a fire that wouldn't light […]: you wondered how people had managed to live for so long in those conditions." (FG1)

Some conditions arose from the game itself: the absence of the character in charge of supplies left the partisans without food for a long time. A female student links the night in the open to her grandparents' stories of hiding in the woods after the Russian campaign: "as if I were really in 1944" (FU3). Space also shaped behaviour (Figure 2): a worker always tried "to pass as far away as possible from the Nazi-Fascists" (FU6).



Figure 2. Members of the Fascist militia and German forces patrolling the woods around Montelupo during the LARP (Photo by the authors).

3.2. A Relational Engagement

Involvement appears tied to reciprocity: immersion was triggered by "someone who was really in character and spoke to me as if I too were really in character" (FG2). The reverse also holds: those who did not play broke the "magic circle", with "a chain reaction that ruins the experience and makes several people lose the will" (FU10). The partisans, isolated and interdependent, describe a rapid cohesion ("it felt like we had known each other forever", FG1), fuelled by missions to the village experienced with "anxiety and fear" and by the "joy of seeing one's comrades return" (FU8). The commoners' group, made up partly of students "a bit forced to take part" (FG1), struggled instead to form.

3.3. Agency and Moral Reflection

Open plots confronted participants with failed plans and incomplete information:

> "I had already planned everything […] but seeing it go up in smoke right at the start, having to change my plans […] really made me change perspective." (FG1)

Dilemmas of obedience, betrayal and violence culminated in the final execution (Figure 3) and in the audio track that linked it to Monte Sole. A student who played a Blackshirt recounts:

> "At that moment I was happy. But then, when I saw all the partisans, citizens like us Italians, […] I felt a bit disoriented, also by the voice in the background." (FG1)



Figure 3. The final execution of the partisans in the village square, the event that closed the LARP and was followed by the audio track on the Monte Sole massacre (Photo: A. Rizzo).

Those who played commoners describe power experienced from below: "sometimes I felt invisible, other times a target" (FU15). Some students kept moral limits even within the fiction, refusing to simulate violence against the girls (FG2); others reflected on the distance between self and role, concluding that "what you do is not always who you are" (FG2). In the questionnaires, numerous answers connect the experience to ongoing wars and to the value of democracy: "to have what we have now, we fought before" (Q14).

3.4. Variability and Low Engagement

Strong variability also emerges: 32 of 45 respondents recall at least one moment "inside" the story, about ten none. For some, the experience remains a game ("you don't take it seriously", FG2); disengagement is linked to participation perceived as compulsory, the lack of seriousness of some peers and discomfort with the accommodation, the same materiality that made 1944 credible for others.

3.5. From Participation to Authorship

With audiovisual production (Figures 4–7), students moved from participants to authors, selecting what they had lived and turning it into narrative. A student who had been a partisan in the LARP found himself playing, in the short film, a Fascist forced to shoot his childhood friend:

"Something inside me rebelled, but I couldn't stop: my task was to complete the mission." (FU1)



Figure 4. A scene from the short film: a Blackshirt forced to shoot his childhood friend, the role discussed in Section 3.5 (Photo: G. Giannini).



Figure 5. A scene from the short film: partisans captured in the woods by Fascist and German soldiers (Photo: G. Giannini).

The contrast becomes for him a key to understanding those who had to suppress their pain "because there was no room for feelings" (FU1). For others, production was the encounter with a new language, acting (FU2, FU14). Reflections written weeks later link the experience to a knowledge that "books will never be able

to explain" (FU15), while the public screening exposed students' representations to the scrutiny of the community.

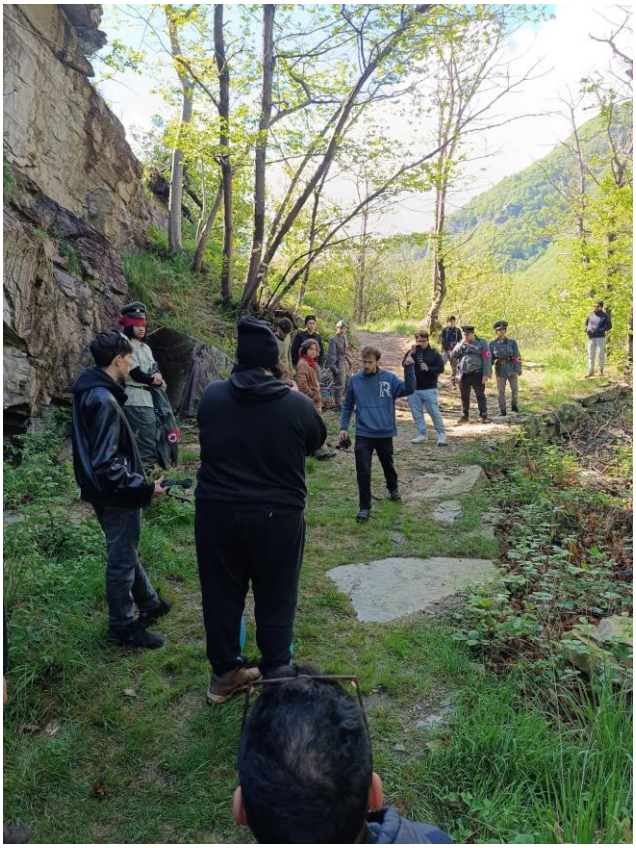


Figure 6. On the set of the short film: students rehearsing a scene under the guidance of the professional director (Photo by the authors).



Figure 7. A scene from the short film: a captured partisan held by a Blackshirt (Photo: G. Giannini)).

4. Discussion

4.1. Sociomaterial Engagement and Played Spaces

The results describe an engagement that takes shape in the entanglement of bodies, environments, objects, rules and relationships (Fenwick et al., 2011; Gourlay, 2017). The partisans' hunger, born from a gap in the network of game relationships, shows how tents, woods, missing food and companions acted as actors of the experience. The same configuration that sustained the involvement of some hindered it for others: engagement cannot be attributed to the device alone or to the individual student (Ardron, 2023). In Picone's (2025) terms, the Villaggio delle Stelle became a played space: the distribution of woods, village, headquarters and square translated the power relations of the narrative into space, while Montelupo worked as an imagined territory over a real landscape (Ceresa, 2020), until the audio track relocated it on the map of Monte Sole. Play also made interdependence tangible by establishing shared rules, goals and times (Bilancini, 2026): the partisans' rapid cohesion and the chain effect of interrupted plots are two opposite expressions of it. The combination of a fixed macro-plot and open plots left students room for initiative that produced both agency and gaps in play: the balance between adult guidance and student initiative is a design variable. In this space the body operated as an instrument of historical knowledge (Varela et al., 1991): cold and hunger remained present to awareness and became objects of reflection.

4.2. From Intensity of Experience to Meaning-Making

The relationship between immersion, engagement and learning is not linear: intense immersion produced articulate moral reflection in some cases, and an experience lived as a game in others. Immersion itself appears shared and fragile, sustained by reciprocity and by adherence to the "magic circle" (Huizinga, 1938/1949). The Blackshirt's disorientation, which arose when the audio track

linked the scene to the Monte Sole massacre, seems to take on the character of a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 1991). The data leave open the question of an actual revision of perspectives, but show that its elaboration depends on subsequent occasions for reflection. This meaning appears to be generated jointly by the material conditions of the scene, the square, the execution and the recorded voice, and by the collective elaboration that followed (Fabbri & Melacarne, 2023). A teacher recounts stepping out of character during the execution: "I took a step back and, from a ruthless spectator, I was moved" (D1).

4.3. Designing Transitions

Transitions distributed reflexivity along the pathway: the film-club screenings brought the films into discussion, the LARP translated these issues into bodily and relational experience, audiovisual production required students to select and narrate what they had lived, and the public screening brought these narratives into relation with the community. At each transition, the language, the sociomaterial configuration and the students' position change, as they progressively become spectators, participants and authors (Buckingham, 2003; Jenkins, 2006). In terms of remediation (Bolter & Grusin, 1999), what is elaborated in one phase is translated into the next, and the memory of 1944 is reconstructed through these reconfigurations (Erll, 2011). The pathway closes with a return to the cinema: the students who had initially watched the films on the Resistance in the theatre returned to present the short film and the documentary, closing the loop as *spettautori* (Pasta, 2021). Filming in the streets of Novara and in the local history museum brought memory back to the territory, and the public screening returned it to the school and the city, turning the theatre into a space of shared knowledge (Picone, 2025).

5. Conclusions

The case of *Oltre il Ponte* shows an engagement that takes shape in the sociomaterial configurations set up by the project, and a passage from involvement to meaning-making that occurs in the transitions between them. Three implications follow for immersive methodologies in memory education: attending to spaces and to material and organisational conditions, which can sustain or hinder participation; calibrating the balance between adult guidance and student initiative; and designing the transitions of an educational ecosystem in which what is seen can be discussed and lived, what is lived narrated, and what is narrated returned to the public sphere. In these transitions reflexivity takes shape as social action (Fabbri & Melacarne, 2023), and the meaning of what was lived is validated in peer discussion, filming and public screening. The study concerns a single case. The researcher was at once game designer, observer, facilitator of one focus group, in which historical clarifications were provided, and sole analyst: a position that raises the question of the epistemic responsibility of those who design the situations they then observe (Ceresa, 2026) and calls for recognising the researcher as part of the observed configuration (Fabbri & Melacarne, 2023). The data are mainly self-reported, the anonymous initial questionnaire does not allow individual comparisons, and the final questionnaires cover 45 of 70 participants. Future studies could involve multiple analysts, paired instruments and the analysis of audiovisual products. With these caveats, designing engagement means setting up the sociomaterial conditions within

which involvement can become understanding, cultural production and participation in a shared memory.

References

Ardron, K. J. (2023). *Student engagement with learning: A sociomaterial conceptualisation* [Doctoral dissertation, Lancaster University]. https://research.lancaster-university.uk/en/publications/student-engagement-with-learning-a-sociomaterial-conceptualisatio

Banchetti, C. (2025). Sociomaterialità ed ecosistemi formativi. Uno studio di caso [Sociomateriality and educational ecosystems: A case study]. In L. Fabbri, C. Melacarne, & P. Malavasi (Eds.), *Ricerca, servizi, politiche territoriali pedagogiche. Trasformative, innovative, emancipative* (pp. 14–20). Pensa MultiMedia.

Bilancini, E. (2026). Il giocare generativo. Spazi, comunità e prosocialità tra geografia ludica e game science [Generative play: Spaces, community and prosociality between ludic geography and game science]. *Rivista Geografica Italiana, 133*(3), 268–272. https://doi.org/10.3280/rgioa3-2026oa23564

Bolter, J. D., & Grusin, R. (1999). *Remediation: Understanding new media*. MIT Press.

Bowman, S. L., & Baird, J. (2022). The transformative potential of immersive experiences within role-playing communities. *Revista de Estudos Universitários, 48*, e022013. https://doi.org/10.22484/2177-5788.2022v48id5028

Bowman, S. L., Diakolambrianou, E., & Brind, S. (Eds.). (2025). *Transformative role-playing game design*. Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. https://doi.org/10.33063/23xd2197

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Bricchetto, E., Fiore, F., & Rivoltella, P. C. (Eds.). (2012). *Media, storia e cittadinanza* [Media, history and citizenship]. La Scuola.

Buckingham, D. (2003). *Media education: Literacy, learning and contemporary culture*. Polity Press.

Ceresa, G. C. (2020). Edu-larp e didattica della geografia: Tra spazio fantastico e spazio reale [Edu-larp and geography teaching: Between fantastic and real space]. In A. Maragliano (Ed.), *Edu-larp. Game design per giochi di ruolo educativi* (pp. 208–220). FrancoAngeli.

Ceresa, G. C. (2026). Giocare lo spazio. Spazialità ludiche oltre l'urbano [Playing space: Ludic spatialities beyond the urban]. *Rivista Geografica Italiana, 133*(3), 278–284. https://doi.org/10.3280/rgioa3-2026oa23564

Erll, A. (2011). *Memory in culture* (S. B. Young, Trans.). Palgrave Macmillan.

Fabbri, L. (2023). Gli artefatti sociomateriali come paradigmi educativi [Sociomaterial artefacts as educational paradigms]. In J. Magrini & M. Parente (Eds.), *Educazione zerosei: Sistema integrato e poli per l'infanzia. Riflessioni e confronti a partire dall'esperienza formativa toscana* (pp. 108–115). Istituto degli Innocenti.

Fabbri, L., & Melacarne, C. (2023). Una epistemologia post-umanista della riflessività? [A post-humanist epistemology of reflexivity?]. *Educational Reflective Practices*, (1). https://doi.org/10.3280/erp1-2023oa16224

Farné, R. (2015). Il cinema come gioco [Cinema as play]. In D. Felini (Ed.), *Educare al cinema. Le origini* (pp. 27–49). Guerini.

Fedeli, M., Frontani, L., & Mengato, L. (Eds.). (2014). *Experiential learning: Metodi, tecniche e strumenti per il debriefing* [Experiential learning: Methods, techniques and tools for debriefing]. FrancoAngeli.

Fenwick, T., Edwards, R., & Sawchuk, P. (2011). *Emerging approaches to educational research: Tracing the socio-material*. Routledge.

Francia, U. (2023). *LARP: Giochi di ruolo dal vivo. Creare esperienze immersive con il live action role-play* [LARP: Live action role-playing games. Creating immersive experiences with live action role-play]. Audino.

Gourlay, L. (2017). Student engagement, 'learnification' and the sociomaterial: Critical perspectives on higher education policy. *Higher Education Policy, 30*(1), 23–34. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41307-016-0037-1

Huizinga, J. (1949). *Homo ludens: A study of the play-element in culture*. Routledge & Kegan Paul. (Original work published 1938)

Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York University Press.

Maragliano, A. (Ed.). (2020). *Edu-larp. Game design per giochi di ruolo educativi* [Edu-larp: Game design for educational role-playing games]. FrancoAngeli.

Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. Jossey-Bass.

OpenAI. (2026). *ChatGPT* (GPT-5) [Large language model]. https://chat.openai.com

Pasta, S. (2021). Partecipazione onlife: Promuovere l'attivismo degli "spettautori" nel social web [Onlife participation: Promoting the activism of "spect-authors" on the social web]. In S. Pasta & M. Santerini (Eds.), *Nemmeno con un click. Ragazze e odio online* (pp. 81–93). FrancoAngeli.

Picone, M. (2025). *Spazi giocati. Per una geografia ludica* [Played spaces: Towards a ludic geography]. Guerini e Associati.

Rivoltella, P. C. (2019). *Media education. Idea, metodo, ricerca* [Media education: Idea, method, research]. Scholé.

Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. Basic Books.

Taylor, E. W., & Cranton, P. (Eds.). (2012). *The handbook of transformative learning: Theory, research, and practice*. Jossey-Bass.

Trinchero, R. (2025). *Mind games: Il ciclo di apprendimento esperienziale come strategia didattica e di potenziamento cognitivo* [Mind games: The experiential learning cycle as a teaching and cognitive enhancement strategy]. FrancoAngeli.

Varela, F. J., Thompson, E., & Rosch, E. (1991). *The embodied mind: Cognitive science and human experience*. MIT Press.