

Wishmakers

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Keywords

role-playing games, queer youth and inclusion, consent education, educational games

Format of work

Wishmakers is a tabletop role-playing game [TTRPG] in the format of a storytelling card game. Average playtime is 60 minutes for 3-4 players. Playtime can be customised between 25 and 75 minutes to suit different contexts.

DESCRIPTION OF WORK

Wishmakers is set in a fantastical village that facilitates collaboration and reflection. Players play as a group of teenagers from the same village who take responsibility for helping their community as they come of age.

It is a challenging year for the village. From summer to spring, players encounter unexpected scenarios that require creative solutions. As their collective journey ends, they are tasked with making a wish. Given all they have learned about themselves and each other, what wish will they make?

Wishmakers follows a simple gameplay design. Every player has a character card containing personality, motivations, and their relationships with the village and each

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other. Once they have assumed their characters, players draw a story card and read the prompts out loud. The submission is an in-development version of *Wishmakers*, which contains 44 high-quality printed cards (75x120 mm), a rulebook, and a two-piece tuck box to carry the game. The game does not require additional materials to play.

RESEARCH STATEMENT

Wishmakers encourages active learning via social and collaborative worldbuilding. Players take on individual character identities but, to progress, they must engage and develop their critical and creative thinking skills alongside each other.

Background: *Wishmakers* is designed to be an educational tool that can be integrated into Australian school classrooms and programs. Designed by a queer team, the game facilitates inclusion, belonging, and connectedness. This is important in two learning perspectives.

First, for students, active learning is offered as collaboratively making “purposeful discussion and reflection in order to attain co-constructed mutual understanding” (Chang-Tik 2022, 4). Active learning can promote higher-level cognitive skills and enjoyment of activities, yet queer students often don’t feel they belong. *Wishmakers* seeks to generate conditions in which young people can find new ways to talk about gender, sexuality and relationships, or not, since it is up to the players what they share with each other in story-based situations that require them to assess and explore mutual trust and its complications.

Second, for teachers, there is a lack in teaching tools for teachers to confidently facilitate conversations around gender and sexuality. In Australia schools, consent education is severely under-resourced to meaningfully address topics beyond sexual health messaging (‘use protection or face the consequences’) and are almost always heteronormative. Instead of fear-based messaging, our pedagogical approach to game design focuses on building, and teaching how to build, great relationships. We discuss gender and sexuality as “key forms of difference, power and privilege” and how they “intersect with other forms of difference such as race, faith, disability, citizenship” (Hoyle and McGeeney 2020, 98). As many school environments tend to reproduce gender norms that limit student expression and growth, the aim of this research is to investigate whether a game-based active learning approach can open new opportunities for teachers to meet or expand students’ understanding of relationships and consent.

Contribution to field/industry: *Wishmakers* expands the resources currently available to teachers wanting to support their students’ abilities to navigate conversations around gender and sexuality. It is unique in many dimensions, including:

- its focus on intersectionality, both in gameplay and design and development, which is queer-led,
- its focus on perception, both self-perception and how one is perceived by others,
- its invitation to students to collaborate around coming of age as a community project not just an individual journey,
- its incorporation of initial findings from student playtests and teacher feedback, and
- a novel understanding of game-based learning and its implementation in Australian secondary schools wishing to expand pedagogical diversity

Significance: As conceived, *Wishmakers* will be downloadable in a free print-and-play format alongside guidelines for teachers and facilitators wanting to use or adapt the

game for educational purposes. Physical copies of the game will be available on a print-to-order basis with all profits enabling further development of games for inclusion.



Figure 1: *Wishmakers* prototype public playtesting at PAX Australia 2024



Figure 2: *Wishmakers* prototype carriage box, rulebook, and story deck

EXHIBITION

We will provide two copies for the exhibition, one to display and one for attendees to play. Unlike many roleplaying games, *Wishmakers* does not require a Game Master. It can be played by 3 to 4 people. We will be available to facilitate the game at DiGRA Australia. Players can also pick up the game rulebook and play right away using the Quick Start instructions on the back of the rulebook.

BIO

Dr Premeet Sidhu (she/her) is a games and learning researcher on Gadigal land. Her favourite RPGs are Dungeons & Dragons and Final Fantasy.

Logan Timmins (he/him) is a queer and trans game designer, TTRPG mentor, and friend to Dusky Moorhens. He lives on Wurundjeri Country.

Dr Xavier Ho (he/him) is a queer, furry, and first-generation Taiwanese migrant, game designer and researcher living on Bunurong Country at Monash University. He loves hot chocolate, musical theatre, and games that tell stories with heart.

Dr Vic Rawlings (she/her) is a researcher, educator, and advocate for inclusive schools from the University of Sydney (Gadigal land). She loves cats (including those called 'Mouse') and telling stories with friends.

Professor Lee Wallace (she/her) is an expert in gender and sexual studies at the University of Sydney where she directs the Sydney Social Sciences and Humanities Advanced Research Centre [SSSHARC].

Sydney Queer Games for Learning and Education [SQUIGGLE] is a funded collaboration between queer theorists, educationalists, and game designers interested in developing play-based educational resources that facilitate conversations about gender inclusivity and belonging.

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