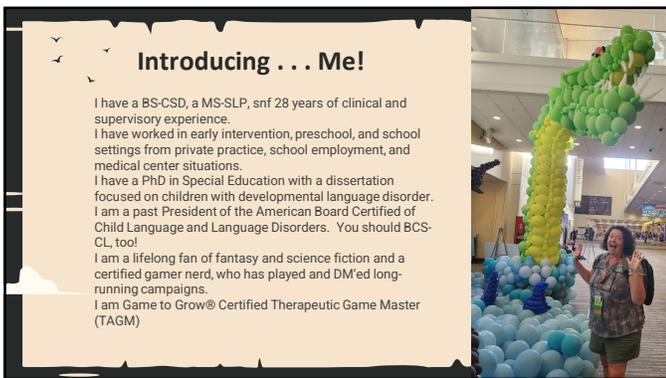
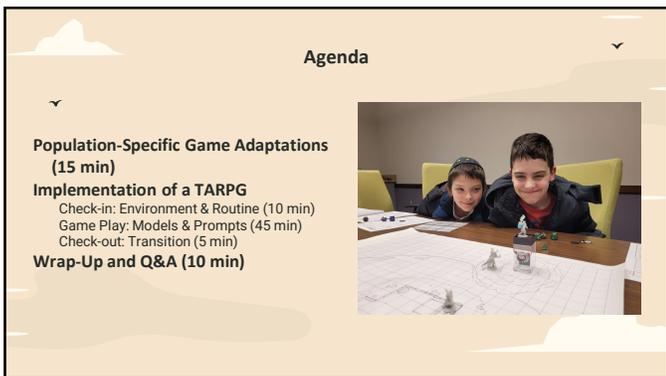




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Learning Objectives

Participants will . . .

1. match game accommodations to specific populations of clients.
2. explain therapeutic elements of applied role-playing games.
3. describe the potential for therapeutically applied role-playing games within their own practice.



4

What is a TARPG?

TARPGs can be characterized as a gaming system laid on top of group therapy sessions (Kilmer, Davis, & Kilmer, 2023).

- ASHA (2016) defines therapeutic use to “establish a new skill or ability or remediate an impaired skill or ability”
- May be conducted across settings and populations

Within specific therapeutic use, role-playing games have been used to help the social skills of children and adolescents with autism (Kōhei, 2019).

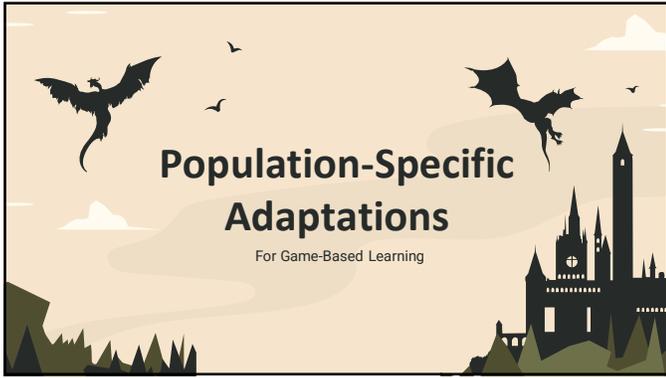
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So . . . You are a GM!

A Game Master is the person who . . .

Facilitates Play	Supports Therapeutic Goals	Guides the Story
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures everyone understands the rules • Manages turn-taking and pacing • Balances structure with player creativity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Models language, social skills, and emotional regulation • Scaffolds communication and problem-solving • Reframes moments to highlight growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describes the world, characters, and events • Sets up challenges, scenes, and narrative choices • Keeps the story moving while adapting to player decisions

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Game Features to Support Individuals with DLD

- Supports vocabulary learning in a natural context
 - Game Masters present planned information, called *boxed text*, which may include specific target words
- Incorporate explicit interaction
 - The structure of a TARPg session is easily modified to include brief mini-lessons in relevant grammar features
- Visual supports
 - Game Masters offer an array of visual supports,
 - RPGs specifically contain miniature character representations to maps of the world around them and graphic organizers that include action choices based on character skills, equipment, and knowledge



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Game Features to Support Autism Spectrum Disorder

- Predictable routines
 - Game Masters should create a welcoming routine that clearly marks the game space both physically and mentally
 - Turn-taking supports can be built into the game space with turn-trackers, written or picture sequences, etc.
- Allows flexible practice with real peers
 - Game Masters provide a real-life experience with explicit stated rules for collaboration and cooperation as groups work together to succeed
- Explicit social modeling
 - Game play provides natural in-kind feedback peer-to-peer. This can be expanded by including a typically-developing game player



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Game Features to Support Individuals with Cognitive Impairment

- Repetition and rehearsal
 - Games are created by talk between the Game Master and players, allowing nearly unlimited opportunities to use targeted skills
 - Natural language opportunities readily facilitate multiple exemplars focused on broad grammatical target principles or operations
- Target grammar use in real communication
 - Games create natural opportunities for group discourse, with communication an essential component of success in the game
- Curriculum-referenced
 - Games with embedded narratives directly apply to standard curriculum requirements, such as answering relevant questions, retelling, and inferring perspectives and motivations



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Engagement & Motivation Benefits of (TARP) Games Across Populations

- Players actively engage in a motivating context
 - The context of a game with props, like miniatures, maps, and illustrations, creates an engaging environment
- Targets multiple language features to support generalized language growth
 - The language within TARP play is rich in targets across semantics, syntax, and pragmatic components of language
- Manipulate context of presentation to create frequent opportunities, using salient models in mature communication forms, with target skills and difficulty levels
 - GMs facilitate player interaction, allowing models, feedback, and elicitation of target structures that occur naturally within play



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Implementing a TARPG
(Therapeutically Applied Role-Playing Game)



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Intervention Process

Intervention Session Schedule	Description
Check-in	Two related questions that foreshadow elements of the gaming session while providing opportunities for players to use target vocabulary or structures.
Mini-Lesson	A few minutes are spent explicitly teaching the communication skill the group members will be practicing within this session. This is not extensive; just enough to make the terminology and expectations familiar.
Narrative Retell	Players retell the last session's adventure, so we all remember where we are starting our game today.
Encounter(s)	Think of these as the "scenes" of the show, where students play cooperatively to build the story. Language targets continue to be elicited naturally.
Narrative Summary	Players summarize the most important elements of the session's play, allowing another opportunity to build narrative structure.
Check-out	Each player provides a praise for another, states a challenge of the session, and predicts what will happen in the next session.

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Check-in



Check-in Questions

- Set the question form to target language objectives (vocabulary, grammar, etc.)
- The follow-up question asks the same question from the perspective of the character.
- Learning science: Activating prior knowledge, increasing engagement, explicitly separating self from other (ASD), guided practice
- Game reason: Each question attempted gets the player a "hero point" that offers benefit during play
- You can start the check-in question segment with a mini-lesson for explicit teaching moments!

Narrative Retell

- Over a 10-12 session adventure, gradually release components of a narrative retell, using visual supports
 - Initially, the GM models the desired narrative, placing visuals as they go.
 - After 2-3 sessions, the GM passes out the visual supports to the players and cuing each component of the story.
 - By the halfway point, cuing is reduced to only those players with attentional challenges.
 - By the final session, the players should be able to retell a complete narrative (with or without visual support and prompting, depending on the age and developmental level)
- Be strategic when assigning story components. Use these to target individual goals.

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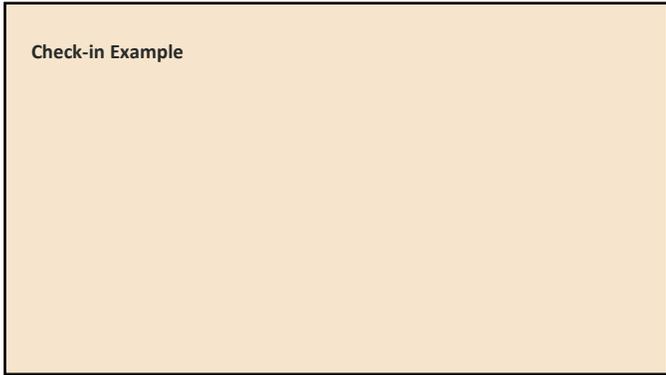
Entering the Game Space

Build community and engagement by creating a ritual to begin game play.

This is a predictable marker for shifting perspectives from player to character

Have some examples, but let the group decide!

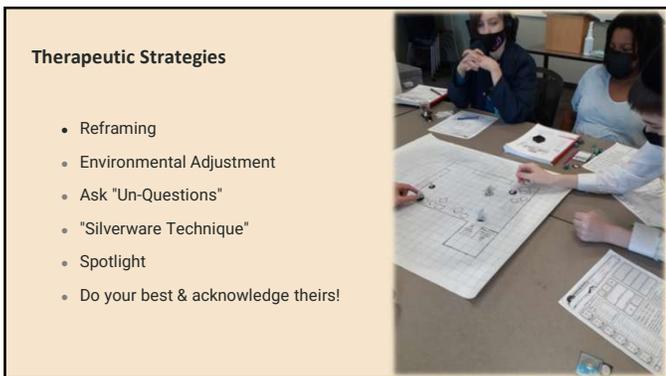
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Specific Therapeutic Strategies

Language

- Models
- Scaffolding
- Recasting
- Expanding
- Visual Supports

Social Skills

- Think-Alouds
- Name What You See
- Explicit Turn-Taking
- Conflict Resolution
 - Clear Expectations
 - Characters
 - Modeling
 - The "Bigger Bad"

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Game Play Example

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Check-Out

Spotlight

Give a compliment to another player who made the game more fun or took an epic heroic action.

Challenge

Identify something in the game that challenged your character and how they handled it.

Prediction

Predict what might happen next time (and how you know).

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Measuring Language Growth in Therapeutically Applied Role-Playing Games

- Small scale pretest-posttest cluster randomized design (pilot study)
- Repeated measures t-tests for each variable and combined variables representing the targeted narrative language and a control of expository language (SPSS).
- Bootstrapping based on 1000 resamples was used to enhance the reliability of the statistical results (Konietzschke & Pauly, 2014)

Variables and Relationships

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Players

Age	Gender	Diagnoses	TILLS Standard Score
11 years, 11 months	Female	ADHD, ASD, SLD, Anxiety Disorder, Language Impairment	74
10 years, 11 months	Male	ADHD	92
12 years, 10 months	Male	ASD	96
11 years, 3 months	Male	ADHD, Speech Impairment	57
12 years, 3 months	Male	ASD	82
10 years, 8 months	Male	ASD, ADHD	40
13 years, 2 months	Male	ASD, Speech Impairment (dismissed)	81
10 years, 1 month	Male	ASD, ADHD	42
14 years, 0 months	Other	ASD, Speech Impairment (dismissed)	91

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Did they improve?

Measurement	Pre-intervention Mean (Standard Deviation)	Post-intervention Mean (Standard Deviation)	p Value
MLU	8.22 (4.72)	10.79 (4.17)	0.036*
Subordination Index	1.20 (0.60)	1.45 (0.29)	0.101
MISL microstructure	7.67 (3.81)	15.22 (3.46)	0.0005*
MISL macrostructure	4.78 (3.42)	11.11 (4.54)	0.0006*
Expository Scoring Scheme	15.89 (2.25)	20 (3.22)	0.162
Mazes	7.39 (4.40)	8.87 (3.19)	0.232
CELF-5 PP	116.11 (11.50)	129.56 (18.15)	0.002*
TOMTB	12.56 (1.33)	13.89 (1.27)	<0.0001*
TOMI-2	70.11 (13.01)	74.84 (15.99)	0.17

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Again, in English, please?

Implications

- TARPGs have potential to meet social communication challenges associated with various medical diagnoses.
 - Group treatment may increase access to intervention without additional load on treating clinician.
- The U.S. Dept. of HHS (2021) identified a need for behavioral interventions in schools that promote academic achievement of students with ASD.
 - TARPGs may meet this need because students also demonstrated improved language use.
- This may meet a similar need for children with Developmental Language Disorder.

Limitations

- Expository structure (a control feature) also demonstrated some improvement
 - Planning and playing as a group allows practice with procedural organization.
 - While not the goal of the intervention, if replicable, this outcome may increase effectiveness for academic skills. For more information on expository discourse, please see Lundine and McCauley (2016).
- Small self-selected sample
- No control group
 - Power concerns addressed with bootstrapping procedures
 - Planned continuation with randomized participation vs. BAU

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Challenges to Implementation

- Thinking 80% accuracy in 30 minutes twice weekly
 - Staffing and preparation needs
 - Preparation time
- Convincing your administration and/or community you are not crazy
 - Ensuring consistent data collection
- Providing good models while keeping it a game
- Managing diverse skill levels in one group
- Balancing narrative flow with therapeutic goals

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Take-aways

- Game features and modifications can be applied to support individuals with DLD (such as *boxed text* with specific vocabulary and rich visual supports), ASD (such as clear collaboration rules and opportunities for supported peer interaction, predictable routines and explicit turn-taking), and CI (such as natural opportunities for repetition and rehearsal within a curriculum-referenced activity) to build language and social communication skills.
- Therapeutically Applied Role-Playing Games make use of the facilitative nature of a Game Master and strategies such as *reframing*, *unquestions*, *think-alouds*, as well as traditional *models*, *recasts*, and *expansions* to target communication within motivating contexts.
- Existing evidence suggests that TARPGs can address social communication and language goals simultaneously to create significant improvements in narrative language, mean length of utterance, and theory of mind.

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Wrap-Up

Your Questions

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