# *CosTechPlay*: Towards a Teaching Concept that brings Cosplay to Schools

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## Keywords

cosplay, making, costume creation, education, teaching, talent promotion

## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Cosplay is a trend that originated in Japan and is also becoming increasingly popular in Austria. The word cosplay is a combination of the words "costume" and "play". Cosplayers slip into different characters known from media worlds - such as movies, TV series, comics, mangas or games. Cosplay costumes are often elaborately designed and as true to the original as possible, typically with a large do-it-yourself component. They are worn and presented at special events (conventions, fairs or fan meetings) and many cosplayers also share their costumes and insights into the creation process online, e.g. via social media. In this way, cosplay is not only a creative form of expression, but also a diverse and vibrant community which can be characterised by openness, tolerance, diversity and inclusion. (see e.g. Yang 2022, Akademie der Kulturellen Bildung 2019, Birnbaum 2019)

Cosplay is not exclusively a phenomenon of gaming culture but bears increasingly relevance for it. On the one hand, characters from video games are often portrayed by cosplayers, and on the other, more and more gaming events provide cosplayers a stage to promote the cosplay community.

The current state of research explores the skills that are necessary and also promoted in the course of active participation in the cosplay scene (see e.g. Bender and Peppler 2018; Lome 2016; Matsuura and Okabe 2015). Cosplay can be a very complex and creative hobby that develops practical skills such as sewing, crafting, painting, stage

make-up and photography. Social skills can also be promoted through community interaction and the hobby requires problem-solving, time and money management skills. In addition, cosplay can contribute to body positivity and the exploration of one's own identity. (see e.g. Lome 2016, Hirsh 2021, Seregina and Weijo 2017, Joice 2022)

There is also initial research on the integration of cosplay-based activities in the educational sector, e.g. Valiant (2020) highlights the potentials of cosplay in storytelling for listening learning; Szwed and Walker (2017) explore cosplay in the context of English Language Learning in the classroom; Dyer (2021) highlights the possibility of students exploring their identity through a cosplay-based curriculum, emphasizing that forms of popular culture like fan art and cosplay remain underexplored both as art and as teaching methodologies. While these research results are very promising, cosplay activities in school education in Austria (and beyond) are still limited to a few pilot projects.

The research project *CosTechPlay* (ongoing from September 2023 until August 2025) aims to fill this gap by developing an innovative, interdisciplinary cosplay-based teaching concept that combines technical and textile work, making and upcycling, and explores the potentials to develop students' skills in the areas of creativity, technology, problem solving, communication and self-expression. Career guidance activities will focus on identifying and nurturing talent in the professional field of production technologies. A gender sensitive and inclusive approach aims to contribute to body positivity and breaking gender stereotypes.

The teaching concept is being developed from the three project partners, in close collaboration with five partner schools in Austria. The schools cover a wide age range from 8 to 18 years. All methods will be tested and iteratively developed in the schools, supported by experienced cosplayers who will also act as role models throughout the project.

To achieve the project objectives, the following project phases are planned:

**Phase 1:** The first phase analyses the current state of research on the topic through a literature review. The focus is on best practice examples and research on the interplay between cosplay and the development of skills and talents in an educational context.

A qualitative study explores expectations, needs and challenges related to cosplay activities in the classroom. Focus groups are conducted with a total of 10-15 teachers from the partner schools involved in the project and their students (around 120 students in total). In addition, in-depth expert interviews are carried out with four professional cosplayers to explore the skills and abilities required and promoted in the context of cosplay, and to gather feedback and implementation ideas for the specific activities in the schools. To enrich the data, short interviews are conducted with ten other cosplayers. The results are analysed using a qualitative content analysis technique according to Mayring (2019).

**Phase 2:** Based on the previous research and the empirical study, the *CosTechPlay* teaching methods (*CosTechPlay* workshops) and the concept of the *CosTechPlay* Makerspace are developed. The latter is a special facility in the partner schools where students can work independently on their cosplays. Before the hands-on phase, the

implementation plan will be discussed again with the participating teachers in focus groups and adapted if necessary.

**Phase 3:** In a hands-on phase, the *CosTechPlay* workshops are implemented in the partner schools and the *CosTechPlay* makerspaces are set up. During the implementation of the workshops, project staff and role models (cosplay experts) will be present in the schools as workshop leaders. The finished cosplay costumes and props will be presented at a final small cosplay convention in the schools. The hands-on phase also includes visits to the carpentry workshop of a project partner. At the end of this phase there will be an evaluation of the implementation of the teaching concept, including the points of view of the students, teachers and parents.

**Phase 4:** The teaching concept and the *CosTechPlay* Makerspaces will be revised based on the results of the implementation and evaluation, including feedback from all participants, and made available on the project website (https://www.costechplay.at) together with lesson plans and other teaching materials under a Creative Commons licence.



**Figure 1:** Project logo and header design of the project website

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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