

"How I Design Games for Health, Peace, Inclusion, and Compassion"
Karen (Kat) Schrier
Marist University, New York
International Disability Rights Affirmation Conference 2025
Thursday, November 6

[2025/11/06 14:59] Carolyn Carillon: Hello everyone.

Today's presentation is being transcribed so those without audio or who require text only can participate in real time.

A little explanation about this service.

Voice-to-text transcriptionists provide a translation of the key ideas discussed, NOT a word for word transcription.

Voice-to-text services provide an in-the-moment snapshot of ideas and concepts, so that those who are unable to hear or to understand the audio program are able to participate in real-time.

You will see the transcription in local chat.

Transcription is provided by Virtual Ability, Inc.

The transcriptionists are Carolyn Carillon & Elektra Panthar

The following initials in the transcription record will identify the speaker:

KS: Dr. Kat Schrier

[2025/11/06 15:01] Leondra Larsson: Hello everyone, and welcome to Virtual Ability's fourteenth annual IDRAC Conference.

I'm Leondra Larsson, and I've been part of Second Life for more than nineteen years.

Over that time, I've had the joy of volunteering for many nonprofit events here in our virtual world.

In real life, I spent over forty years as a teacher, specialist, and advocate for students with disabilities. Now that I'm retired, I continue to be active in community projects that promote inclusion and accessibility—values that are close to my heart.

It's truly my pleasure to introduce our next speaker, Dr. Karen—"Kat"—Schrier.

Dr. Schrier is an award-winning designer, innovator, researcher, and educator. She's an Associate Professor and Director of Games and Emerging Media at Marist College. She's also the author of Knowledge Games, published by Johns Hopkins University Press, and the editor of a well-known book series on games and learning.

She's internationally recognized for her work in gaming, virtual and augmented reality, ethics, and empathy.

Dr. Schrier describes her presentation as "How I Design Games for Health, Peace, Inclusion, and Compassion."

She asks an inspiring question:

What if innovation isn't just about creating new technology—but about creating new forms of care?

In her talk, she'll share examples of games that support accessibility, care, and peace building. She'll also show us some of her co-designed games, like Connected Spaces and My Five Moments, and how these games are designed to foster understanding, access, and compassion.

Audience, please hold your questions and comments to the end.

Please join me in welcoming Dr. Karen "Kat" Schrier!

[2025/11/06 15:04] Elektra Panthar: KS: Thank you so much!
How is everyone? Great to have you all here! Great to be here
I'll talk about How I Design Games for Health, Peace, Inclusion, and Compassion
It sounds like a lot of areas but they are all overlapping

These are some of the books I wrote, some of those are free!

Schrier, K. (Ed.) (2014). Learning, education & games vol. 1: Curricular and design considerations. Pittsburgh, PA: ETC Press (Carnegie Mellon).

Schrier, K. (Ed.) (2016). Learning, education & games vol. 2: Bringing games into educational contexts. Pittsburgh, PA: ETC Press (Carnegie Mellon).

Schrier, K. (2021). We the Gamers: How Games Teach Ethics & Civics. Oxford University Press

Schrier, K. (2016). Knowledge games: How playing games can solve problems, create insight, and make change. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Schrier, K. & Farber, M. (2018). The Limits and Strengths of Using Digital Games as "Empathy Machines"

I'm planning to write one about games for accessibility so if you have any ideas let me know! Write me at kschrier@gmail.com
Let's imagine a new world, a world you'd like to live in
Let me know your thoughts

[2025/11/06 15:08] Gentle Heron: I always want my world to have flowers

[2025/11/06 15:08] Stealth (Cicero Kit): I want lots of biodiversity

[2025/11/06 15:08] Lloud Laffer: I want kindness

[2025/11/06 15:08] Morthwyl Resident: Everyone realizes they're weird in their own way.

[2025/11/06 15:09] Itico (Itico Spectre): People understand nuance.

[2025/11/06 15:09] Namaara MacMoragh: I'd love the physical spaces I move in to reflect more of my RL homestead and Etopia (of course).

[2025/11/06 15:09] Sypha Techno (SyphaTechno Resident): I'm not sure any normal people get into SL lol

[2025/11/06 15:10] Suellen Heartsong: My Mom always said being normal was over rated

[2025/11/06 15:10] Itico (Itico Spectre): Diversity isn't a nicety, it's a necessity.

[2025/11/06 15:09] Daisy Gator (TheGator Resident): Is it weird to want to live in an alligator park?

[Yes, I've never actually been to an alligator park. I just imagine I'd like it there!]

[2025/11/06 15:09] Elektra Panthar: KS: I always think I'm the weird one but I realized there are many ways to be weird, we are weird in our own way

I've been to an alligator park, it was pretty awesome! Whatever floats your boat - a nice world is where we can feel we are meant to be here, where we belong

I took this picture in a museum, it looked like a little world - games are the same, little worlds we can create

Empathy:

“Feeling what another is feeling” or thinking from another’s perspective.

Compassion:

Caring about another’s perspectives and taking action to support them.

There are many ways to define empathy

When you apply these complex abstract terms to games it becomes even more complicated

I want to go on an adventure with you, to create a game - games are a sort of social space where people discuss, they are a third space like a coffee shop or a town square where people hang out and have immersive conversations with people from all over

There could also be bad things like toxicity

I want to show you what games could do and how they can become more inclusive spaces

Kind Words is about a game where you are tasked about an issue you’re having or helping another person who’s having an issue

You can write back anonymously to these people having problems and write words of encouragement, empathy, etc

I got stuck at one point while writing the book, and I received a letter encouraging me and it helped me a lot

It is a game with a dreamy atmosphere

If you have kindness in your heart it can encourage others to be kind

This is about a teen stuck in a T pose - it’s a collaboration where the goal was to make it inclusive and help people see how it feels like living with an issue

This free game called Quandary you are on an alien planet, you go around asking different people for their perspective and you have to solve a problem

They are creating a new episode of this about AI and using AI to create a chatbot

I am researching how this chatbot and AI works in classes of middle schoolers

3a. Problem Solving Requires Listening.

To design an equitable society, we need to first listen to and evaluate others’ ideas.

Hilliard (2016), Perspective taking and decision-making in educational game play;

Schrier (2016), Knowledge Games;

Noroozi & Dehghanzadeh (2021). Fostering Students’ Argumentation Skills with Game-Based Learning Method

If we truly work together we can solve big problems

3b. Problem Solving Requires Listening.

To design an equitable society, we need to include diverse voices as decision makers and arbiters.

How can we enable players to be participants and co-designers of the community?

Games, Social Simulations, and Data—Integration for Policy Decisions: The SUDAN Game

How can we collectively find the best solution? What’s the best path to peace?

4. Perspective-Taking May Build Connection.

Players may understand each other better, and play together more ethically. But we need careful design (and consideration of potential issues with perspective-taking),

This is *Before I Forget*, a game that deals with memories, someone who's going through Alzheimer's or similar issues

These games give you a glimmer of someone else's experience

This way we can create a more peaceful society

In this game you have to make tough decisions to save your people in time of war

5. Building a Future Requires Understanding Others' Stories.

When Rivers Were Trails

Establish cultural norms up front.

Sharing culture through stories is essential to finding a fair future.

Players should be co-decision makers, not just participants.

It's about the allotment lands, you go on this journey to find a new home after being forced out of your lands

This is about indigenous people and auto determination

A native person cried playing this because he felt represented

Representation is powerful, and he knew some of these stories because they have been passed down from generation to generation

[2025/11/06 15:26] Carolyn Carillon: KS: another game [that hits a little too close to home because it wasn't] too long ago that we had COVID 19!

You play as a virus

Or a bacterium or fungus

Your goal is to spread things

Kind of horrific to play

During the pandemic, they flipped it so you were trying to stop a pandemic

If you want to build a more caring world, we can't see with only one perspective

We need to think about the system and how society moves and changes

6. We Need to Think Systemically. *Plague Inc.*

Developers need to consider dynamic systems to know how to ensure inclusion, empathy, and ethics.

But players also need to be able to access these systems.

Players should be able to push and pull on that system and be able to collectively change it.

Schrier (2021), *We the Gamers*;

Gee (2013), *Learning Systems, Not Games*;

Schrier, K. (2015). Ethical thinking and sustainability in *Fable III*. *Simulation & Gaming*, 46(6): 673-696;

They don't have to be digital games

They can be card games

There are other games we can learn from

This game is similar to *Plague Inc*

But you're working together as people against the game board

The game board is the virus
You're cooperating to make the world safer

Here is How I am Making Inclusive, Caring Games.
Here's a game called My Five Moments For Hand Hygiene: the game
Here are some screenshots
When you open the game, you're in a futuristic world
I wanted to put the values of empathy and compassion in a new world
It's 100 years in the future
I created it for the WHO
It's about how we create a healthy and peaceful future
The goal is to help these alien creatures
Here they are
Hannah is in the hospital for cardiac issues
You play as a nurse who's trying to keep her safe
You're doing hand hygiene at the right moments
You're not just reading a brochure
You're in an immersive environment
You have to do hand hygiene along with all the other things a nurse does
Below is another alien named Ferna who got her teeth knocked out playing soccer
My hope is in the future we could live together with aliens if they come here
Any questions?

[2025/11/06 15:34] Gentle Heron: Language is a problem. "Alien" is now a pejorative term

[2025/11/06 15:34] Mook Wheeler: COMMENT: If the world cannot abide 'migrants' and 'immigrants' right now, I doubt we can live with aliens.....

[2025/11/06 15:35] Lorin Tone: And if there is a language that crosses barriers, it is music

[2025/11/06 15:33] Carolyn Carillon: KS: What I loved about this game is that you had to make compassionate choices

If you do that, you unlock a task

Like helping Hannah find a missing necklace

I'll show another example

Here's a game for different courses on chemical hazards

It's free

The same as the Hand Hygiene game

This was made by a team that we spun off into a company

We make training of all kinds

It's called Dream Interactive Design

The URL is <https://dreaminteractivedesign.com/>

You can get a sneak peek into the game

Games don't need to be big fancy things

They can be simple and easy to understand

They can be playful exercises

Here's another one that's a 2D game on vaccine preparedness in a fictional country where there's a sudden outbreak

You go through a simulation if you're in the Ministry of Health

You need to get the vaccine created and authorized in your country

Another game I'm proud of is called Connected Spaces

Here are some early images
You're playing as someone who's Nigerian
For Nigerian youth
To give them an experience of playing as a different ethnic group
This is a VR game
You go through a story and make choices
And experience what it is to be someone else
We wanted to know if it enhanced empathy and compassion
And we found it did
I'm not Nigerian but members of our team were
It's important to be authentic
Others need to be decision makers
I was more of someone who understood how to make the game
But they were in charge

Templeton World - charity organization
Lagos Business school - pan-atlantic university
VHCI - Virtual human computer interaction lab
@VHCILAB on Instagram, X, Facebook

Empathy game design principles
Are you ready to design your game? Want players to empathize with a perspective or identity?
Consider using these general principles related to empathy and perspective-taking.
You do not need to use all of them, but consider using a few that make sense for your goals.

- Roleplaying or taking on a role
- Avatar creation and customization
- Deliberation, dialogue and discourse
- Agency and responsibility
- Interactions with NPCs (non-player characters)
- Communication with others
- Opportunities for reflection
- Reading, evaluating, interpreting and analyzing information
- Choices and consequences
- Exploring virtual worlds
- Simulating situations, systems and trends

I created this little white paper about how we can create games or more like a toolkit for those who make games so they can make them more caring
We need to hold designers accountable
Free report at: <https://www.karenschrier.com/projects-3>

We want players to be used to a caring space
So when they're not in the game world, they're practicing care throughout the real and game worlds
Let's Redesign Our World Together.
I hope we can stay in touch!
Join Me - Let's Collaborate!

Dr. Kat Schrier @drgamermom
<https://www.karenschrier.com>
<https://platyplay.com/>
<https://www.dreaminteractivedesign.com>

[2025/11/06 15:43] Lorin Tone: Bravo!!!
[2025/11/06 15:43] Leondra Larsson: ♥ Thank Youuuuuuuuu!! ♥
[2025/11/06 15:43] Lloud Laffer: 🎵🎵 ☀️Thank you ☀️ 🎵🎵
[2025/11/06 15:43] Gentle Heron: Your work is wonderful Kat.
[2025/11/06 15:43] Katie (Katie Canningham): 🎵🎵🎵 APPAWS! 🎵🎵🎵
[2025/11/06 15:43] iSkye Silvercloud (iSkye Silverweb): Thank you, fantastic presentation!

[2025/11/06 15:43] Mook Wheeler: QUESTION: Your list of terms for enabling compassion within games makes me think of a complex Venn diagram, with compassion as the conjunction. Do you see the process as a Venn, or do you see them as more linear? Does compassion require that empathy comes first, and does empathy always need connection/communication to happen first? Is communication necessarily the precursor to any action or result?

[2025/11/06 15:43] Carolyn Carillon: KS: reads Mook's question
Yeah, it's quite a diagram!

It's definitely not linear
I don't know what comes first
I don't even know if anyone knows
People are still arguing
There's a book called Against Empathy
He wants people to care about each other
He argued that compassion was more important
Because empathy is overwhelming
Compassion is more useful
It depends on the situation
It's complex
One thing we wanted to look at in the game
Is how the perspective changed the game
What was more important?
It was so specific
It might depend on the context or experience
It depends on the interconnections
There's no set rule
It's more about having that big mess
That depends on different situations

[2025/11/06 15:43] Sypha Techno (SyphaTechno Resident): How do you combat negative ideas about video games, such as beliefs that they cause violence? For example, I've done research on the positive impacts of games and talked in a paper about how society tends to cycle through a moral panic over new technology.

[2025/11/06 15:47] Carolyn Carillon: KS: we cycle through a moral panic with each new technology

Maybe with AI we'll have less focus on gaming
If you take any community

Like a game

There will be negative and positive aspects

Whether you're in a locker, a town hall ... it doesn't matter

There are good and bad

People focus on the moral panic, the "brain rot" for our kids

Now it's social media and AI maybe

I did research on Fortnite and other games, we found good and bad stuff

How do I combat it?

I don't

Because those negative ideas are there

There's bad stuff there but I want to focus on the good stuff

I want to move the needle toward the good stuff

How do we do that?

It's just like any community

Whether it's policy or design, how can we make better communities?

[2025/11/06 15:47] Sypha Techno (SyphaTechno Resident): Yes I'm getting frustrated at the AI negativity after researching moral panics for sure!

Thank you!

[2025/11/06 15:53] Itico (Itico Spectre): The panic on books was about control people when people can read they're less easy to control.

[2025/11/06 15:48] Mook Wheeler: Follow-up comment: If there's "no set rule", then how do games work/succeed in the long run?

[2025/11/06 15:48] Carolyn Carillon: KS: There's no set rule about how games succeed in the long run

You know the basic principles because they're researched

That's the framework but you need to test it

You have to test early and often with people to see if your ideas are getting across

They might work well in one context (country, age) but not in another

That's why we test

We need to understand the conditions that support change

[15:44] Lloud Laffer: How do you think Dr. Chris Milk's idea of VR as empathy machine has aged?

[2025/11/06 15:50] Carolyn Carillon: KS: (responding to Lloud)

I co-authored a paper

When you hear something like "empathy machine" it stick in your head because it's visual

It got people talking

It got it into the public sphere so we can have more nuanced discussions

Like are we using the right words?

Are we focusing on the right idea?

I'm glad that idea got into the zeitgeist but I'm glad we're moving past it

We want to think about the ethics of something but people have trouble thinking about complex things

[2025/11/06 15:51] Lloud Laffer: so true - thanks

[2025/11/06 15:52] Lorin Tone: Empathy....Compassion...heard Todd Rundgren's songs with those titles?

[2025/11/06 15:52] Gentle Heron: QUESTION- At what level of immersion does an environment become no longer a game? Some people consider SL a game, but most of us here strongly disagree.

[2025/11/06 15:55] Carolyn Carillon: KS: (responding to Gentle's question)
I remember when SL came out and people talked about whether it was a game
It's not a game; it's a platform
There's no goal
No possible outcomes
It doesn't meet the definition at all

[2025/11/06 15:55] Itico (Itico Spectre): That's a shallow definition of game.
Some people think that life is a game.

[2025/11/06 15:56] Lloud Laffer: yes @itico - and how do you play this game? Ha ha

[2025/11/06 15:57] Morthwyl Resident: You can't beat RL's graphics. (rimshot)

[2025/11/06 15:55] Carolyn Carillon: KS: but you have to think about the general public not understanding what games are

SL can look like a game
It's valuable to think about these virtual worlds and how people interact here
That's important too

[2025/11/06 15:57] Carolyn Carillon: [15:54] Mook Wheeler: QUESTION: Do you think the sycophancy of current AI can actually be useful or used as an "empathy source"?

[2025/11/06 15:57] Carolyn Carillon: KS: do you mean an AI therapist?

In a way it's no different from an NPC in a game

Where you have strong connections with your NPC pet or a mentor in a game who's not a human

You can even have romantic connections

The problem with the difference

Eventually GenAI will be having conversations in games

Everything an NPC does or says was designed by a human

Someone vetted it in some way

It's gone through many eyes

If you're using an AI chatbot, it could be anything that it's generating

It's not reviewed by a human

That's potentially problematic

It could support empathy

I've used a chatbot

It showed empathy and care even if it was contrived

But humans can be contrived too

But then there's the danger that it can go awry because it's not reviewed

You could have a person who's young, etc

We have to be ethical about how we use that in a game

I think I'm at the end of questions???

Any other questions?

Did I miss something?

It is time so ...

[2025/11/06 16:00] Lorin Tone: The newbie questions: "How do I make money and where's the sex?" LOL. A virtual world is a platform for creation. If I may offer Virtual Ability as a shining example. Gentle, Eme, the leadership gang have demonstrated the power and positive manners of the platform

Fantastic presentation, and I've offered to have a discussion with you!

[2025/11/06 16:01] Gentle Heron: Thank you Kat. This was a powerful presentation

[2025/11/06 16:01] Itico (Itico Spectre): Thank you so much Kat.

[2025/11/06 16:01] Stealth (Cicero Kit): Thank you!

[2025/11/06 16:01] Suellen Heartsong: thank you!!

[2025/11/06 16:01] Lloud Laffer: 🎵🎵 ☀️Thank you ☀️ 🎵🎵

[2025/11/06 16:01] iSkye Silvercloud (iSkye Silverweb): We would love to talk more with you, perhaps you can come back again?

[2025/11/06 16:02] Lou Netizen: thanks for doing this

[2025/11/06 16:02] Leondra Larsson: ♥ Thank Youuuuuuuuu!! ♥

Really great presentation! lots to think about.)

[2025/11/06 16:02] Gentle Heron: Yes! We need to invite Kat back!

[2025/11/06 16:01] Carolyn Carillon: KS: thank you so much for your amazing engagement and questions

I appreciate your support and presence

I hope we can connect

in RL or in Doom or on Discord

I would love to come back again

yes yes yes everyone

Please email me or go to my LinkedIn

We will talk

Thank you thank you

GH: If you ever want to create a game in a virtual world, we can do that!

KS: maybe I could do that

GH: click that box by Kat's feet to get her references

[2025/11/06 16:03] Gentle Heron: What an extraordinary day it has been. So much to think about. So much to keep in mind.

I wish to express my thanks for all we have learned from all our presenters and panelists.

I want to thank each of them, which for many meant braving entrance into a new (to them) world for this conference.

Thank you. Erica, Arash, Susan and Kat. What a wealth of information you have shared today.

I also want to thank our panel moderators Elli, Carla and Delia, as well as all the panelists: Carol, Rose, Charee, Henry, Biji, Kimberly, Namaara, and Stealth.

I learn so much from hearing different viewpoints.

I want to especially thank all the Virtual Ability community members who volunteered and contributed to today's success.

Our greeters are the first contact with the Virtual Ability community for many attendees.

Thanks to Gemma Cleanslate for organizing the greeters, and to

Phanessa, Vulcan, L:orin, Carla, Arisa, and Pecos for greeting our guests, and Zip and Thomas for being back-ups.

I'm proud of the VAI members who introduced presenters today.

These conference team members are Jill, Dotty, Sarannalyn and Leondra, with Andee as their understudy.

Thanks to our behind-the-scenes streaming team: Marcus, James and Rhiannon. Great teamwork, guys.

Special thanks and icepacks for their RL non-avatar wrists to our excellent transcriptionists: Elektra, Carolyn, Katie, and Sypha.

Their efforts exemplify the work we all do to ensure accessibility for everyone in the community.

Thank you to Mook, iSkye, Itico, Eme and Pecos for their ongoing support and hard work throughout the months leading up to today.

Thanks to Andee and Daisy who voiced for some of our community members, and Orange for helping with tech issues.

They served a very important role, as those who had to step up from being an understudy quickly found out. Thank you kindly.

If you ever wondered about the power of teamwork, you saw several living examples of it today.

Thank you to our audience for sharing this conference with us. Without you and our excellent presenters and panelists, the conference would not exist. Thank you for coming today.

A reminder that we will archive the text chat and the videos of individual sessions for future review or if anyone missed a session.

A quick invitation to visit the poster sets on Healthinfo Island (to our west) for additional information about topics related to our conference theme.

A notecard about this month's Healthinfo Island poster sets is in the blue sign on the left of the stage.

Please stay healthy, everyone. Let's continue to enjoy our virtual world together.

[2025/11/06 16:07] Lorin Tone: Bravo all of VAI, thanks to the great presenters, streamers, transcriptionists, VAI does events like these like nobody else. Gentle is a throbbing conference Rock Goddess! lol.....etc.

[2025/11/06 16:07] Leondra Larsson: ♥ Thank Youuuuuuuuu!! ♥

[2025/11/06 16:07] Suellen Heartsong: thank you

[2025/11/06 16:07] Stealth (Cicero Kit): /me applauds

[2025/11/06 16:07] Lou Netizen: thank you!

[2025/11/06 16:07] Pecos Kidd: Yee Haw!

[2025/11/06 16:07] Daisy Gator (TheGator Resident): Thank you, Gentle!!!

[2025/11/06 16:07] Elektra Panthar: 🎵🎵🎵 Applauds 🎵🎵🎵

[2025/11/06 16:07] Morthwyl Resident: Woot! Thank YOU Gentle. :)

[2025/11/06 16:07] Katladybug Resident: Thank you!!

[2025/11/06 16:07] Phanessa (Phanessa Svenska): ★★🎵☆🌀☆🎵★★ Applause Applause

★★🎵☆🌀☆🎵★★

[2025/11/06 16:07] Stealth (Cicero Kit): thank you

[2025/11/06 16:07] Katie (Katie Cunningham): 🎵🎵🎵 APPAWS! 🎵🎵🎵

[2025/11/06 16:07] Itico (Itico Spectre): And Thank You Gentle for all that you do.

[2025/11/06 16:07] Gentle Heron: Never forget, it's a team, a community

[2025/11/06 16:07] Carolyn Carillon: <<transcription ends>>