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Transmedia Storytelling in Education

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Abstract

Transmedia Storytelling is process where integral elements of a fiction are systematically broadened through a number of distribution channels in order to create a coordinated form of entertainment. With each new medium accessible to the mass users has caused the change of storytelling. Transmedia stories are based not on individual characters or specific plots but rather complex fictional worlds which can sustain multiple interrelated characters and their stories. Using transmedia in classroom becomes still more and more popular in schools. It makes students to be more engaged into the topic. I would like to present the definition of transmedia and show its implementation and point that there are other styles of teaching which can be more effective.

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Transmedia Storytelling

"School to play."

J. A. Comenius

Transmedia storytelling can be defined with many definitions. This phenomenon could be described as transferring and developing stories which can be spread through various platforms. Transmedia storytelling entertain us on computer or TV screens and from these basic platforms is widen to numerous other types of media with the most important influence of transmedia – participation, engagement, interaction or collaboration of the audience. The engagement with successfully adding each additional media increases audiences understanding and enjoyment for the story. According to the definition of Dr. Henry Jenkins Transmedia is "a process where integral elements of a

fiction get dispersed systematically across multiply delivery channels for the purpose of creating and unified and coordinated entertainment experience" (H. Jenkins: *Transmedia Storytelling* 101).

Transmedia can be used not only for entertainment or increasing the engagement of the audience; it can be an extremely useful instrument to engage students in education. Nowadays most of the schools in the Central Europe use the basic model of memorizing knowledge. This is happening in contrast to the message which left us the "teacher of nations" J.A. Comenius who is considered as the founder of modern pedagogy. He reformed our school system already in the 17th century. Based on his reform proposal there are several pillars and 2 of them related to transmedia and education can be summarized into these principles: principle of clarity under which we can understand direct student's experience and principle of activity and engagement which means that students should get their own experience to use them in practice. Based on these principles we can speak about the higher engagement and involvement of the students in education.

At present, the education system in most of the schools in Central Europe has its roots on the basis of the school reforms known as *Ratio educationis* (1777) introduced by Maria Theresa and subsequently by her son Joseph II. In each school the pupils and students should gain *trivium* which means that they should be able to read, write and count. The intention was aimed to foundations of general literacy.

The school system in Central Europe is still going through transformation process and for a long time was influenced by former communist regime. A lot of primary and high schools do not enough support independence, creativity, self- confidence and courage of the pupils and students. Very often is ignored natural curiosity and desire to developed creative abilities. Students need to fight with memorizing of amount of encyclopedic information based on a concept that is the essence of intelligence when a man has a brain full of greatest number of facts.

Forcing pupils and students to know facts without understanding why they need to know it is contra productive and unnecessary. Much more effective is to encourage their curiosity that stimulates their need to reach the decision based on logical connections.

For centuries mankind sought the most effective way of upbringing and education of pupils and students. Development of modern technologies – internet, mobile phones, tablets, notebooks should brings more creativity, engagement and interaction into classrooms. Students are able to process the information more effective if they have the possibility to interact with other students, with teacher, with new technologies through interactive programs. This should be considered as add on or alternative to the classical teaching methods.

I started to follow this topic after my personal experience, when I saw my 2 years old nephew playing with mobile. For the first view it seemed that he is playing some game. He showed me this game and I found out that he has on screen a set of animals and after touching the selected animal he could hear its sound and English name of the animal. After this experience I started to ask myself, how much time kids spent occupied with new technologies. Based on the information provided in *The New York Times* in article entitled "If your kids are awake, they're probably online". This article is based on a research report of Kaiser Family Foundation – *Generation M2: Media in the Lives of 8 – 18 years Old*. The most interesting information of this research is total media time exposure on this group which involves so called multitasking. This means situation when there is a parallel impact of several different media simultaneously. For year 2009 it is 10 hours and 45 minutes – actually we can speak about almost continuous action. I had to ask myself, if young people like various types of new technology platforms, that they are so highly engaged, how could be this popularity of transmedia used in classroom.

Transmedia through various platforms – such as comics, books, short videos, alternative video games and movies or documentaries should increase engagement of the studied topics, simplify process of memorizing knowledge and skills and make the teaching process more effective and entertaining. This is the way of education which today's students expects from the modern form of education. Nowadays students are growing up with the modern technologies, for them is totally natural to use new media that the older generation don't. Majority of them have

permanent access to online games, videos on YouTube, e-books etc. If young people would know that some interactive application which should be used on several media – based on their preference or based on teacher's instructions – they are more willing to try them and use them.

If young people spend more than 10 hours using different media, there is a challenge to persuade students to use these media for education process also during their leisure time.

Challenging would be to have several interactive programs where in the centre is placed book accompanied with interactive tables, maps, videos and video games. The book should introduce the basic information about the issue, awake and stimulate the interest in the topic. The teacher or guide of the lesson should provide them with the information where additional information could be available on internet, very briefly show and introduce them web page/s, watch a video and play an interactive online game. I would like to present an example of using transmedia in teaching subject - history.

Based on the web page 20th century (dvcatestoleti.eu) which is dedicating to learning of history of 20th century you can choose the period which you would like to go through with your students. For example – for topic World War II, there is comics available which descriptive explains the reasons of beginning WWII. On the first page are as an element of the story internet links to the theme of WWII. Next there is available photographic documentation of selected period. You can "hear" history of the 20th century through musical and radio recordings of that time. Extremely interesting is online game that serves for better understanding of the historical moments of the 20th century. Pupils and students can identify with the main characters and through selection in each historical moment can choose his destiny. The principles of the game consist in reflection of particular and individual life decisions in the history. Characters are developed during the game and based on the choice from 2 options you will determine your future fate and career. After finishing the game, the pupils and students can print their destiny (curriculum). Then it is expected further cooperation during the lesson in classroom and the confrontation with the "real" lives and historical decisions. Under the guidance of the teacher, pupils and students can analyze specific historical personality / celebrity. Young people can show their attitudes and consequences of their decisions. The game history can be discussed also on social media like facebook etc. Available is also 2D and 3D exhibitions and list of museums thanks to which virtual "world" can be linked to the real environment. In addition, the "museum briefcases" collection items related to the selected period of the 20th century directly into the school and class on request. Emphasis is also put on regional aspect, allows the creation of individual exhibition projects and thus supports research education of the students.

The project has been financed by European Social Fund and State budget of Czech Republic. The project was developed by the National Museum.

This is exactly the way how the learning process in the 21st century should look like. For young people engagement into topic is very important, an interactive learning experience via participation through passing several levels of game, passages in book, reading comics etc. can help to understand key issues.

Of course life is not so easy and there are several obstacles concerning using of transmedia.

First of all it is a question of money. Project of such significance could be hardly financed from private resources without using additionally paid licences. Particularly this project has been financed by the European Social Fund and partially by the State, can be after participant's registration used for free. Using these learning programs we have to take into account also the costs of teachers which needs to be trained for this specific kind of education.

Secondly it is availability of the technology. Not every school, every pupil / student is equipped with the media required for this type of education.

Third issue is flexibility of teachers. As the average age of teachers is in Central Europe round 50 years, there can be legitimate concern of using new media, interactive tools. All concerned (teachers, students, pupils and also parents) need to be trained.

Proactivity, positive approach and creativity of both sides (teachers and pupils / students) play significant role in introducing transmedia into education.

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