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# Educational Uses of Transmedia Storytelling. *The Ancestral Letter*

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## Abstract

The idea that different media can work in conjunction to transmit a story, understood as a distributed narrative, is a new one and has partly been developed as a result of the technological evolution of media. On a basic level, it has been applied in education in a similar way for a long time. However, transmedia storytelling based on digital media is a very new concept for education, particularly for formal education.

An *ad hoc* educational application entitled *The Ancestral Letter* was designed and subsequently tested in a secondary school to verify the interest of this concept. The results, which must be qualified by the specific circumstances of a single experience, show significant improvements in core aspects such as motivation, engagement and the improvement of some competencies.

## Key words

Transmedia storytelling, education, new media.

## 1. Transmedia storytelling

The idea of transmedia storytelling, sometimes called *cross-media storytelling*, refers to the distribution of the same story across several media platforms. The concept has arisen as a result of the progress of the digital society itself, the interconnection between media and the technological and distribution possibilities required by the audiovisual and IT industry. These new production and cultural distribution tools and models are associated with new forms of consumption and participation. Jenkins (2003), who coined the term "transmedia storytelling" for these hybrid forms, defines it as the creation of worlds, fictional or otherwise, involving several media platforms (analogical and digital) that integrate to give coherence to the story. It demands consumption patterns based on the active participation of consumers, who "assume the role of hunters and gatherers, chasing down bits of the story across media channels, comparing notes with each other via online discussion groups, and collaborating to ensure that everyone who invests time and effort will come away with a richer entertainment experience" (Jenkins, 2006).

One of the best known and most extensively analysed transmedia experiences is The Matrix. The Wachowski brothers' creation is a classic example of a transmedia experience. The Matrix, which was released over a series of years, beginning in 1999, was composed of three media elements: animated short films, video games and live-action films. The audience could see a letter in the first animated short film that had to be recovered and sent through a video game. In one of the live-action film, one of the characters, Niobe, reports on the transmission received through a letter, the same one that the video game player would have sent by completing the game. As such, the letter published in the animated short film was recovered in the video game and the consequences were played out in the live-action film. Only through all three media could the viewer fully understand the plot and answer some of the questions that remained unanswered with just one of the media. Other examples, most of which (although not all) are based on films, include Artificial Intelligence, Star Wars, The Beast, Pokémon or Lost.

In essence, transmedia storytelling consists of the creation of stories that are developed in narrative worlds in which each medium reveals part of the plot. Overall understanding of the story is achieved on a cumulative basis as each part is explained through a different medium. This

type of activity requires a certain amount of user specialisation in terms of both the technology and the topic involved in order to understand, produce, remix or modify content on the basis of organisational structures such as fan groups, communities of practice or affinity groups (Gee, 2003). Unlike other practices, in many cases of transmedia storytelling there is no indicator to remind participants that they are involved in a fictional story. It is not based on recreating real experiences, unlike in other cases closely related to virtual reality, but rather it takes aspects from real life to create realistic and fictional experiences. As such, the goal is not to immerse participants in an artificial world but rather to insert the story within their day-to-day reality (Szulborski, 2005).

The high degree of interactivity and participation involved in transmedia storytelling stems from the media that are used, along with the story itself (Ryan, 2004), and goes beyond the limits that exist in other areas from which certain parallels can be drawn, such as traditional video games, in which the pre-established design reduces the possibilities of player participation. In the case of transmedia storytelling, the authors or creators are constantly involved. There is no need to plan beforehand all the actions that can be carried out by participants since the designer can address their concerns in real time and react according to how they feel or act, playing the role of "puppet master" (McGonigal, 2007) beyond the perception of users.

As occurs in other related fields, it is difficult to define the idea of transmedia storytelling with precision. Dena (2009), for instance, argues in favour of using the term "transmedia practices", related to but different from others such as *cross-media*, transfiction, ARG (Alternative Reality Games) or *pervasive games*.

## 2. The educational interest of transmedia storytelling

Approaching transmedia storytelling from an educational perspective enables the devising of an alternative to the possibilities offered by other practices, such as video games, which users can do little to shape and whose application in the school environment is limited. In a similar way to other types of practices, we believe that it also facilitates a high degree of motivation and, con-

sequently, of engagement and impact on students. Listed below are some of the main elements of educational interest, all of which stem from a conception of transmedia storytelling as a tool and not as a purpose in itself.

**a)** From an educational standpoint, the underlying idea of transmedia storytelling is not new, since formal education has always used different media to explain concepts and procedures. Teachers constitute the fulcrum of a complex scenario that includes their own voice and gestures, along with texts and books, the blackboard or audiovisual projection, classroom computers, experiments in the laboratory or school trips. In this respect, education is a type of narrative that is becoming increasingly multimedia and transmedia-based. A growing emphasis is being placed on the existence of a multimodal code within education based on the "use of different semiotic modes in the design of a product" (Kress y Van Leeuwen, 2001). *In the case of transmedia storytelling, it is associated with the construction of a meaning through various media and platforms in a way that is not always simultaneous.*

The parallel that can be drawn between teachers using several media and transmedia storytelling is of greater interest than might first appear. In fact, while the use of a range of media is not new, transmedia storytelling does present two new aspects in relation to the conception of multimedia messages. The first of these is the use of "non-digital" or analogical media, an issue that features in discussions on multimodality, that is, the combination of modes of meaning in digital media and of others in more traditional media (Ryan, 2004, 2005). From the narrative perspective, each medium imposes a set of important restrictions, especially regarding the type of meaning that it can hold, in addition to "combining" more or less successfully with others (music and film being the archetypal example of cultural forms adopted by the media that combine well). Multimedia messages, unlike transmedia storytelling, involve integration between various digital modalities that are normally grouped together on a screen, forming a new composition of messages. The other aspect that differentiates the two concepts is the way in which meaning is distributed between non-concurrent messages (digital or otherwise). This can be considered a new cultural concept due to the forms adopted by content production itself, such

as in the case of *The Matrix*, and which clearly differentiate this content from the distinctive features of multimedia integration. These two differences bring the transmedia approach closer to what teachers do than to the multimedia messages of a computer.

**b)** Transmedia storytelling is more similar to some types of games than to traditional storytelling on paper, although it may contain elements of both. Its meaning for users is similar to that of many games since it includes a system of rules for interacting with the story, a context that adjusts the meaning of the story and the experience of its unfolding, which involves the interpretation of the story and the meaning attributed to it (Salen and Zimmerman, 2004). In the case of transmedia storytelling, as occurs in some role-playing and pervasive games, the context may include not only the internal context where the story unfolds, called *diegesis,* but also the user's actual reality in which the story takes place. This step, from fiction to living reality and back again to fiction, depending on the type of medium and its place in the story, is not only similar to traditional educational practices but also holds great intrinsic interest for students by placing in the centre of their experience not only the game but also what they themselves do and the way in which they interact and participate.

**c)** The involvement of different non-concurrent media, along with the embedding of the plot in students' reality, facilitates the unfolding of the story in several learning contexts, especially inside and outside school. From an educational point of view, this continuity beyond the time and space restrictions of the education centre enables greater knowledge of students' formal and informal educational practices. A better understanding of the various learning contexts, approached holistically or as an ecosystem, may help to overcome the current division between forms of activity geared towards learning (school-related) and game-based forms of activity in non-school environments (Rodríguez Illera, 2010). *Transmedia storytelling is a good tool for rethinking the relationship between school-related practices and those related to everyday life* or popular culture, a key aspect for meeting learning requirements in the digital society.

**d)** It can be considered that transmedia storytelling increases users' possibilities of action and engagement, to a similar or even greater extent than other simulation or role-playing game experiences (Szulborski, 2005). In addition to the idea of constructing meaning narratively, the participative culture that defines users' activity is another element of educational interest. The analysis of transmedia storytelling from an educational perspective requires the planning of didactic strategies that establish the objectives and the type of activity or practice. The creation of active and student-centred learning environments (stemming from a constructivist approach to the process of teaching and learning) enables *transmedia storytelling to be developed through a project-based learning methodology*. This is a highly valued strategy in educational contexts and is practically inherent to the form of participation in any transmedia storytelling experience. The problem or project to be completed forms part of the core of the plot, while the students are placed in the centre of the action, with a clear common objective.

**e)** The educational value of games from a constructivist perspective has been expressed in terms of their potential to develop "general abilities in programming and creative expression, through abstract principles that service general problem-solving skills" (Bogost, 2007). In the case of transmedia storytelling these skills are understood both from the point of view of specific knowledge domains and in respect of general problem-solving competencies. Both technical and topic-related competencies are necessary in order to develop transmedia practices. These competencies become especially evident when combining different elements (analogical and digital) without which it is impossible to gain an overall understanding of the narrative world.

In the case of digital media, *transmedia storytelling can contribute directly to improving advanced digital literacy***,** understood as the critical use of multimodal codes**.** Furthermore, it enables digital literacy associated with cultural competencies, such as appropriation, cognitive distribution, collective intelligence, negotiation or judgement, among others (Jenkins et al., 2009), along with the use of tools and the capacity to communicate (Dena, 2009).

The use of different media in a context characterised by a globalised yet culturally diverse world gives rise to new literacy needs and to the emergence of a new communications order in which new forms of communication coexist, making it necessary to acquire new competencies, social skills as channels of interaction within a community and not only as an individual skill for expression (Jenkins et al., 2009). In this respect transmedia storytelling enables a better understanding of students' non-standardised literacy practices, described by Cassany as vernacular practices, "that can contribute to improving our overall understanding of the phenomenon of literacy and offer suggestions for improving their education in school settings" (Cassany, 2008).

## 3. Transmedia practices in formal education. The Ancestral Letter

This view of the potential of transmedia storytelling in education far removed from its "mere" media-related uses, together with the desire to explore a hitherto little-explored field were the main motives behind the design of the project entitled *The Ancestral Letter*, a fictional and collectively composed transmedia story with educational purposes. The project was designed and implemented with two main goals in mind: to gain a better understanding of the characteristics of transmedia storytelling, especially when developed in a school environment and, specifically, the case of *The Ancestral Letter*; and to explore the pedagogical benefits of its application in a formal educational setting.

The project included an initial design phase that lasted several months, during which time the experience as a whole was developed. This mainly involved defining the type of transmedia experience that would be implemented, the interactions with students, the decision-making moments and the story around which the experience as a whole would be structured. This story involved an authentic and very broad *narrative world* to which the students gained partial access but which was constantly reflected in each of the many media and types of content used. A summary of the main plot of this narrative world is provided below.

**The plot of *The Ancestral Letter***

The main character in the fictional story developed for this project is Tony Jupiter, an android or *mimet* who has just 30 days to live. At the start of the story, in the main *Rabbit Hole*[1], Tony asks for help to stop him from being disconnected and to bring to light the plans of his creators, the Ancestrals, a secret community from Ancestra, who have devised a plan to protect the Earth from their main enemy, the human race. The Ancestrals have initiated a process, which they call the "Great Substitution" and which consists of gradually replacing humans with androids (*Image 3*). Tony Jupiter, one of the *mimets*, has achieved such a high degree of integration that he has developed human emotions and decides to rebel against the Ancestrals and attempt to stop their plans. When Estrella Blanco (*Image 5*), Tony's creator and one of the Ancestrals, discovers the young android's intentions she decides to reprogramme him so that he will be disconnected and die in 30 days' time. Tony decides to escape and, from his hiding place, asks for help to save his life. The only way to help him is to gain access to the intranet of the company Mimets, Inc., where the Ancestrals store all the information on their plans, along with the code to reprogramme Tony. But to gain access to the website it is first necessary to decipher a code written in the ancestral alphabet *(Image 4).* To decipher the code it is necessary to discover clues and information through analogical materials, such as a personal diary *(Image 2. Adelaida's personal diary), and* digital materials, including a webquest or a treasure hunt (*Image 1),* among others.

[1] In transmedia storytelling Rabbit Holes are covert entry points through which participants are invited into the narrative universe. The concept is based on a metaphor from the book "Alice in Wonderland". (Montola et.al., 2009)


**Image 1**. WQ Spanish Civil War

**Image 2.** Adelaida's personal diary


**Image 3**. Treasure hunt: robots

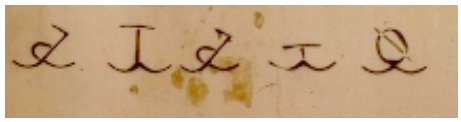

**Image 4.** Code written in the ancestral alphabet

**Image 5.** Estrella Blanco

**The development of The Ancestral Letter**

Secondly, once the story had been fully scripted and all the materials had been produced, the project was rapidly implemented in May and June 2011 at the Esteve Terradas Secondary School in Cornellà de Llobregat, Barcelona, where 70 4$^{th}$ year secondary school students (16 years old) took part. The main action took place during school hours over 12 sessions integrated within the social science course, in addition to some activities completed voluntarily by students outside school hours.

All the elements involved in *The Ancestral Letter* were designed and produced specifically for this story, forming a broad structure of small sub-plots explained in each of the media, through which the students could extract useful information for the denouement of the story. Clues were provided on the experience through each of the media. As such, and as occurs in many trans-media experiences, "active participation is rewarded with related information, so the active journey through the various media is made with the goal of learning more and solving the mystery" (Davidson, 2010).

In total, 30 materials were produced in different media, real and virtual locations and characters (Table 1). Three basic requirements were established in the design and production of the materials (whether interactive or not) in order to integrate them within the story:

**1)** Verisimilitude. The project materials and content seemed real, that is, not the product of a fictional story. This is a characteristic that sets *The Ancestral Letter* apart from other trans-media products that do not aim to look authentic. The project materials, along with other rhetorical mechanisms (e.g. the teacher's complicity, the presentation of the ancestral language in an apparently casual manner and prior to the start of the activity, and several others) aim to place participants in a state of sustained uncertainly regarding the extra-narrative reality of the story and of their own involvement, thus facilitating their immersion in the story *as if it* were real. The design of authentic-looking materials within the story made it possible to place them within the context itself, helping to facilitate an environment of immersion. (Murray, 1999)

**2)** Connection. Each medium provided new information that could be connected (with varying degrees of directness) to the main plot. The students' expertise or interest in the materials determined their success in obtaining useful information for the unfolding of the story. This useful information stemmed from a broad background of parallel sub-plots explained in each of the media, which belonged to the *narrative world* created in the design and to which we have referred above. This made it possible to attach a meaning to each medium beyond its direct contribution to the main plot.

**3)** Interest. The basic objective of the elements that form part of the story was to sustain and, if necessary, increase the participants' interest and enthusiasm in continuing the search for new information, strengthening their motivation to develop responsibility in decision making (Lacasa, 2011).

The table below displays all the materials (analogical and digital) involved in the unfolding of the story, along with the locations and characters (*Table 1*):

| Media | | |
|---|---|---|
| Interactive resources | Non-interactive resources | |
| Facebook | Video letters | Personal diary |
| Short story competition | Ancestrals website | QR codes |
| Blog | Photo exhibition | Ancestral alphabet |
| Treasure hunt | Postcard | |
| Webquest | Mimet t-shirt | |
| E-mail | Mimets, Inc. website | |
| Locations | | |
| Real locations | Fictitious locations | |
| School | Headquarters of Mimets, Inc. | |
| Citilab | Tony's hiding place | |
| | Farmhouse in Pyrenees | |
| Characters | | |
| Interactive characters | Secondary characters | |
| Tony Jupiter | Adelaida | Isidro |
| Eliza Sebastians | Tony's father | Ama Rosa |
| Aurelio Mestres | Mr. Alvaro | |
| Estrella Blanco | Mrs. Fina | |

**Table 1**. Media, locations and characters that form The Ancestral Letter

Thanks to the characteristics of the media, along with flexible design and planning to meet the requirements of the formal setting in which the project was applied, the story unfolded satisfactorily, ensuring the presence of one of the key elements of transmedia storytelling: that all those prepared to invest their time and effort in the story could achieve a richer experience (in this case emotional but also educational).

Over the course of the 12 sessions the students explored the various media with varying degrees of intensity depending on both their individual and collective interests, which were basically determined by the usefulness of the activities in respect of the progress of the story and the mystery posed. In parallel to the activities proper (creation of a story, communication with the main characters, quest for and processing of information, etc.), practices of meaning-making and interpretation took place, giving rise to a particular mode of reception, characterised by emotional proximity and critical distance (Jenkins, 2006). Although the students were not explicitly asked at any time to recreate the story, at various points they appropriated the texts, filling in the gaps deliberately left in the story, in the form of hypotheses concerning the ultimate meaning of the plot and the characters' fate.

## 4. Results

Let us recall that our main interests were: 1) To gain a better understanding of the characteristics of transmedia storytelling, especially when implemented in a school environment and, specifically, the case of *The Ancestral Letter* and 2) To explore the pedagogical benefits of its application in a formal educational setting.

As regards the first point, the lack of experiences that can be directly compared with *The Ancestral Letter*, along with changes regarding the concept of transmedia storytelling, have posed difficulties in terms of devising the type of project. However, some aspects stand out clearly:

- The story is fictional and takes the form of a thriller.
- Not all the elements hold meaning in isolation.
- The practices are carried out in virtual environments and in real locations.
- The students take part without being aware of the dividing line between reality and fiction, rather like games that tend to blur the boundary between gaming and reality, such as pervasive games, LARP or ARGs.
- The story unfolds from a collective perspective.
- The students participate in the unfolding of the story but not in its design.
- The materials involved are both digital and analogical.

- The proposed activities make it possible to gather evidence of cultural and curricular competencies, specifically related to the following subjects: language and literature, and social science, geography and history.

It is clear that each of these characteristics has imposed certain limits and offered certain possibilities. As such, this is just one kind of transmedia storytelling experience among many possible types. However, it closely matches Aarseth's conception (2004) in considering that the driving force of games (or their motivation, we might add), is their quest-centric nature, taking precedence over conventional narrative, which is not always adopted.

Secondly, in order to understand the pedagogical benefits of its application it is necessary to examine the gathered data and focus on the educational importance that can be attributed to it. The aim is clearly to gain an initial understanding in relation to a field that is itself in a state of flux.

As regards the instruments used, Facebook activity was observed, in depth interviews were carried out with the students and teacher, the materials produced by the students were analysed, and two diaries were kept: a diary of the sessions and a research diary. The most noteworthy results are as follows:

**a. Observation of students' participation in the Facebook social network**

The first significant element is the extent of student participation. Of a total 63 students who had their own Facebook profile before beginning The Ancestral Letter, 54 interacted with the profile of the story's main character, Tony Jupiter. This activity was largely carried out by girls. As regards the type of activity, most contributed to a topic that had already been started and Facebook was mostly used as tool for joint reflection, debate and negotiation (*Table 2*). In respect of the timing of the actions, one can observe that most were carried out outside school hours. (*Table 3*)

The data on the type of actions carried out, along with their timing, may be of interest in terms of understanding the use that the students decided to make of the social network, along with its framework of use, in this case preferably outside school hours.

**b. Analysis of the materials and the work produced by students**

In this case the following elements were analysed: a treasure hunt, a short story, a postcard, a webquest on the Spanish Civil War and a question and answer exercise on industrial colonies.

These materials were assessed by the teacher and no noteworthy differences were observed in her evaluation in comparison with habitually evaluated curricular work. Some aspects of interest were observed in respect of the unfolding process. First of all, the intrinsic motivation of the story can be directly associated with the students' degree of engagement in carrying out the activities, increasing the amount of dedicated time and completing tasks without incentives in the form of scores. In the tasks that involved the most explicit attention of the students a greater degree of motivation was observed, fulfilling the premise that "the more intense the audience attention, the more involved it will be in the performance and the greater will be the emotional and intellectual impact." (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998). As for the competencies shown during the project, a widespread deficiency was observed in writing skills and spelling. These are commonly observed general shortfalls and the materials produced by students in The Ancestral Letter proved no exception.

**c. Semi-structured in-depth interviews**

In-depth interviews were carried out with 32 students in total, selected on the basis of extreme case sampling.

In their assessment of the structure and activities of *The Ancestral Letter*, the students showed greater interest in some materials than others. The most highly valued were: Facebook, the Mimets, Inc. website, video letters and QR codes.

In their general assessment of the experience, students highlighted the freshness that *The Ancestral Letter* brought to their habitual school activities as the most interesting aspect. Project-based work though narrative as a motivating element and as a facilitator of learning was particularly highly valued. Meanwhile, in response to the same question, the teacher felt that the most interesting element was the removal of boundaries between the school life and private life of students, enabling situated and continuous learning to take place within and outside school.

| **Purpose of actions** | |
|---|---|
| Joint reflection | 13 |
| Debate | 17 |
| Negotiation | 24 |

**Table 2**. Purpose of actions

| **Timing of actions** | |
|---|---|
| During school hours | 5 |
| Outside school hours | 49 |

**Table 3**. Timing of actions

**d. Analysis of the research diary and the sessions diary**

The activities and materials of greatest interest according to the teacher's observations have the following characteristics in common:

- They generate instant feedback.
- The students feel that they are being directly addressed.
- They enable the students to identify real and known locations or settings.

## 5. Discussion

As far as the first objective is concerned, the results obtained highlight the difficulty involved in identifying and classifying transmedia practices.

In the case of *The Ancestral Letter*, there are several aspects to consider that distinguish it from other types of transmedia practice. On the one hand, it has a rather rigid structure, in which students have little real margin for decision making even if they do feel that they are deciding the course of the plot. At some points they do steer it (e.g. when informing or failing to inform the *mimet* of the code that he needs to save his life, and when informing or failing to inform him that his girlfriend is also a *mimet*), but not in many other instances. Of course, there are technical reasons for devising the story in this way since it is a project that alternates between moments of action in real time and asynchronous ones, the latter of which must be preprogrammed and pre-produced. A decision as simple as the one referred to above involved shooting three different endings with the actors. In most of the narrative scenes the players have scenarios and options to develop. The designers' task is to respond to the students' requirements and strike a balance between meeting their needs and maintaining the pre-designed structure. Therefore, although the students do have a certain amount of influence on the course of the story, the power to control the game lies with the designers or "puppet masters" (McGonigal, 2007).

As such, the particular nature of the school environment increase the difficulty in devising a transmedia story that takes place entirely in real time, especially if it involves the use of actors, media and curricular content.

Meanwhile, the importance of the teacher's role must be highlighted. She served as a true intermediary between the experience as it unfolded and the designers. To a large extent the teacher formed part of the design team, although her role focused on the unfolding of the story and on providing almost instant feedback on the students' actions and feelings, tweaking the story to ensure that their expectations continued to be met.

Once again, when we consider transmedia storytelling in school environments, its special characteristics are fundamental. The role of teachers cannot be ignored; they serve as mediators and ensure student engagement. This means rethinking the structure of the kinds of transmedia stories that can be developed in a formal educational setting.

One of the other most noteworthy elements is the interaction between reality and fiction, the way in which the story was interwoven with the daily lives of students being of particular importance. This was the element valued most highly by the students themselves and the teacher in the interviews. Given that the thinking behind the design and production was to set the most authentic scene possible, with the full collaboration of the teacher, the results are in keeping with the aims. However, other types of transmedia storytelling, involving openly fictitious stories with no pretence of reality, remain to be explored.

As regards the second objective, the results enable us to make some initial considerations concerning the type of activity, the competencies shown and the students' cognitive, social and emotional engagement. Furthermore, the analysis and evaluation of the materials produced by the students reveals significant shortfalls in basic competencies (writing, processing of information), as well as highlighting much more successfully acquired competencies (communication, use of social networks). In the webquest they experienced some difficulties in processing information and checking the reliability of the information sources used, although they showed great expertise in seeking out the said information. We can sum up the positive and negative sides of these educational consequences by focusing on three aspects:

**a)** In their evaluation of *the* structure *and activities of the project, the students* showed particular interest in the websites and in communicating with the main characters, whether through video letters or Facebook. Meanwhile, the activities that they showed the least interest in were those that they identified as being curricular, especially reading-based activities and those involving the writing of texts. This phenomenon can be explained by the fact that the students could iden-

tify school-based activities within a familiar framework of action, while they had no reference framework for describing and assigning the remaining activities (Montola et al., 2009).

As far as the use of media is concerned, the students stated that they had not experienced any technical difficulties in terms of understanding or deciphering codes, showing advanced digital literacy competencies, although they experienced some difficulty in activating deductive thought in order to put forward hypotheses and establish connections between pieces of information from different media for the purpose of drawing conclusions. Negotiation and collective debate proved to be the main tools for overcoming these individual shortfalls.

Overall, it seems that transmedia storytelling helps to improve "advanced" digital literacy ("advanced" being understood as a complex and critical use of the multimodal codes necessary for understanding and taking part in this kind of story), on the basis of a conception of literacy that goes beyond a stable system of rules, viewed as a social activity that can be described in terms of literate practices (Barton, 1994), although it does not improve the basic competencies that students have failed to acquire beforehand in school. This conclusion must be qualified by the small amount of time devoted to this particular experience.

**b)** The second aspect is *the students' engagement*. This consists of an attitude of willingness to become actively involved in the story and its unfolding. In this respect, the high percentage of students that participated actively in the Ancestral Letter, although with varying degrees of engagement, was noteworthy. Most appeared willing to believe that it was a real situation or, in cases where evidence of a fictional world undermined these convictions, remained willing to participate in the game as a simulation of reality. Meanwhile, the students who did not participate in the proposed activities confirmed in the subsequent interview that they had not felt sufficiently motivated to do so, having seen that other fellow students had assumed an active role. However, they all followed the plot, albeit from a distance. The teacher felt that the interweaving of reality and fiction was a key element in motivating and immersing the students in the story. Likewise, from the students' standpoint, the identification of real locations or being addressed directly were some of the most highly valued elements according to their experience.

**c)** *Appropriation* is another particularly noteworthy element. We understand appropriation as the phenomenon whereby students become personally involved in the story, making it their own, incorporating it and adapting it to their own system of beliefs and interests.

Throughout the process of *The Ancestral Letter* the integration and reinterpretation of the content were encouraged. Furthermore, the design proposed engaging the participants in collective decision making and, as such, they all worked together to achieve a common goal. This collective process constantly involved situations in which the need to negotiate arose, whether to give meaning to fragments of the story or to make decisions on their position regarding the characters. As already stated above, transmedia storytelling enables "interaction with the action, with the story and interaction with the group, creating spaces of affinity, but also developing teaching and learning processes constructed collectively" (Rodríguez Illera, 2010).

Without a doubt, appropriation of the story represents the highest degree of motivation to participate actively in the said story, whether individually or as part of a group. Not all the students went through this process, although a significant number of them did, presenting clear indicators: refusal to consider that it had "only" been fiction, interest in meeting the actors-main characters, questions and queries about several media and their veracity, invitations in Facebook to help stop the *mimet* from being disconnected, among others.

## 6. Conclusions and perspectives

The results discussed above indicate that transmedia storytelling has enabled, in the first instance, a higher than normal degree of student engagement in school-related activities. The level of intrinsic motivation appears to have been high in a good number of students, due to the simple fact of understanding and participating in a real or fictitious story that was closer to their personal and social interests and, crucially, involved similar practices to the ones that they carry out outside school hours, when they are consumers of audiovisual stories and narratives (characters from their age group, help motive, quest/solve format, varied media, puzzles and sus-

tained tension). Increasing motivation is without doubt the way to ensure that students engage and participate voluntarily in complex activities sustained over time. We must also include the teacher as a crucial agent, and with a very high degree of motivation, due in part to observing the positive effects on her students.

Furthermore, the type of pedagogical strategy employed has facilitated active and project-based learning, in terms of both strictly curricular content and, above all, in the transfer of content and competencies from informal environments to the school setting. In this respect, the results suggest that transmedia storytelling is a good tool for the integration of curricular content and ICT tools, as well as for the development of literacy practices. However, it does not provide a solution to problems or shortfalls in digital competencies and others of a more basic nature, such as writing skills, which must be addressed by the institution and cannot be altered by short-term experiences such as The Ancestral Letter.

These conclusions enable us to increase our knowledge and understanding of the possibilities of integrating transmedia storytelling in formal education. It is clearly necessary to expand upon and rethink perspectives on the interest held by transmedia storytelling, especially from an educational standpoint. Perhaps the most important development would be to implement a wider range of transmedia practices (Dena, 2009), that is, to try out other configurations in the use of a complex narrative in educational contexts, enabling other kinds of interaction and participation.

Another interesting avenue to explore is the analysis of the practices carried out by students to gain a better understanding of their engagement. Furthermore, it is important to set out clearly the specific elements that form part of transmedia practices and that link them to the game, such as motivation, for instance. If intrinsic motivation is an important factor in distinguishing games and some types of transmedia storytelling (and other kinds of learning environments) from more school-based settings, it is fundamental to analyse and understand this factor in order to comprehend why transmedia storytelling can have a significant impact on some school practices (Rodríguez Illera, 2012).

In conclusion, and notwithstanding the limitations of this project, transmedia storytelling holds great interest for education due to the use of new narrative forms, different media and associated languages, and due to the possibilities that it offers of exploring new forms of engagement and motivation in both formal and informal educational settings. We do not believe that it offers a solution to more general educational problem issues and perhaps it is not a key competency in the digital society either. However, it does constitute a way of incorporating in the educational agenda new media that students are accustomed to using and enjoy in their everyday lives.

## 7. References


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