

**Fostering Literacy to Engage Life-Long Learners**  
**Beyond linear print - Teacher-librarians explore transmedia**

Submission for Treasure Mountain Canada, 2014

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When you think about reading or reading instruction what do you picture?



Something like this?



Or maybe this?



If you hear the term digital literacy you might picture this



or even this.

### **Defining Transmedia**

Collection development is a basic part of the teacher-librarian role. We seek material that is current and that will engage our students. We are always looking for resources that will expand imaginations, challenge them to think critically and encourage them to

consider diverse points of view. For years we've been aware that meaningful literacy experiences often go beyond the print on a page or screen. In the past we looked for connections between text and media: books linked to film, book reports in the guise of a board game, and books scripted from a recent release. With the explosion of new technologies, including new methods of communication, it has become obvious that literacy experiences and links between books and media are changing as well.

The new entertainment marketplace will have to appeal to a generation weaned on interactive media coming from a variety of sources. "The worlds of games, films, and television are merging, and how people are consuming content is becoming more sophisticated" says Ash Sarohia, PCB's vice president of creative development and business strategy. (Karin, n.d., para. 13)

As teacher librarians we became aware of these changes and we began to explore transliteracy and transmedia. We discovered a variety of definitions: [Sue Thomas](#) (n.d.) states "transliteracy is the ability to read, write and interact across a range of platforms, tools and media from signing and orality through handwriting, print, TV, radio and film, to digital social networks (para. 1)". Gutierrez (2012) claims "it's a form of, and an approach to storytelling that boasts a range of potential curricular applications that applies to literacy and the content areas" (p. 32). From an author's viewpoint "transmedia...is a project that uses multiple platforms to create one seamless story through: the written word, video, audio diaries, illustrations, websites, apps and social media" (Carman, 2011, p. 51). As we delved further, we found numerous terms have been used interchangeably such as: transliteracy, digital literacy, multi-platform, cross-platform, multimodality, multi literacy and transmedia. See Appendix A for current definitions of each term.

So just what is it that we're looking at? Gutierrez (2012) explains that transmedia is "a way of telling a story or an experience across various platforms, or [sic] exercising "transliterations" by processing information from multiple media to gain a fuller understanding" (p. 32). It is this fuller understanding that makes transmedia projects must have items in all teacher-librarians repertoires.

### **The Evolution of transmedia**

The term transmedia was first used by "Marsha Kinder [sic] in her 1991 book about children's media, *Playing with Power in Movies, Television, and Video Games*" (Gutierrez, 2012, p.32). Pence (2012) however suggests that it may have begun "in Japan in the 1970's, where it was called "media mix". The MediaWorks Corporation of Japan created a mixture of anime, manga, plastic modelling, and visual novels designed to appeal to the otaku (or nerd) youth culture" (p. 131). Jenkins (2003) claims "in the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best-so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics, and its world might be explored and experienced through game play"(para.1). As 21st century educators we view transmedia as an integrated, interactive, social, multi-faceted experience which engages participants and expands this experience beyond the text.

**What does transmedia look like?** Transmedia can include: interactive online text, TV shows synchronized to personal online activity, hard copy text combined with online links to audio and video files, combined text and social media experiences, combinations of game, text, animation and sound, book based marketing campaigns and spin-offs, augmented reality (AR), and more. Carman(2011) notes "transmedia is an evolving concept" (p.51). It makes connections between text and 21st century tools and social media. This often includes cross platform experiences using: Flickr, Vine, Tumblr, Facebook, Twitter, blogs, email, YouTube, Instagram, podcasts, video chats, Pinterest, video games, and websites.

The following list provides links to current examples of a variety of transmedia projects and experiences that we have explored:

1. Listen to [Raghava KK](#) discuss his interactive picture book app [Pop It](#).
2. Participate in the [Walking Dead](#), an online site synchronized to the real time TV show.
3. Read [Patrick Carman's](#) hard copy books like [Skeleton Creek](#) (video links), or [3:15](#) with audio and video links. Experience a world of horror and science fiction by downloading the [Dark Eden](#) app and immerse yourself in the characters' experiences through [web based links](#).
4. Learn about the extent of the social media advertising campaign to promote the [Hunger Games](#), including fan generated content.
5. Experience [Kate Pullinger's Inanimate Alice](#): a story told through games, text, animation, audio, and video.
6. Be part of the story with augmented reality. Purchase the [Sony's Wonderbook: Book of Spells for PlayStation 3](#) and enrol at Hogwarts. What will you learn from the sorting hat? See yourself casting spells on the screen in the Hogwarts Great Hall. Subscribe to [Brainspace](#) and experience an educational magazine for students that features augmented reality.

### **Teacher-librarians and transmedia: selection, advocacy and promotion**

As with any school library resource, teacher-librarians will follow their school board's selection criteria policy. Teacher-librarians can learn more about new transmedia projects by reading reviews from the following sources:

- [The Horn Book: App Review of the Week](#) App reviews are thorough and cover interactivity and content describing specific options and possible experiences. Both eBooks and apps are reviewed and can be located using the site search function. Availability of each app is listed but age or grade level recommendations are not always included.
- [Kirkus: iPad Book Apps](#): Each resource is clearly identified as an informational or storybook app with recommended age levels before linking to the full review.

Reviews include critical assessment of the content and interactivity. Teacher-Librarians can browse reviews or search using the site search option.

- [Fun Educational Apps: Top Apps for Kids: Apps for Teens:](#)
- [Storybook Apps; PAID Children's Book Apps](#) (Interactive-Highly Rated);
- [The Digital Media Diet; Digital Storytime](#)
- [School Library Journal: Books and Media/Reviews/Apps](#): Interactive reading apps are regularly included in School Library Journal reviews which are archived or can be accessed through a Touch and Go blog feed. The site includes an option allowing readers to search. Posts are extensive and include review of content, image and text, interactivity and options as well as grade level suitability and publishing information.

Teacher-librarians should also follow blogs written by transmedia champions like [Henry Jenkins](#) or [The Sequential Tart](#) to add to their transmedia repertoire. Foster a collaborative learning commons environment by continuing to solicit transmedia project recommendations from students and colleagues.

We believe that teacher-librarians have a responsibility to advocate for the use of transmedia. In Gutierrez (2012) Fleming states "as a school librarian, I feel I have a responsibility to teach my students how to read and write across media and to provide a learning environment that allows for the freedom to think about story in less conventional ways" (p. 34). We feel that our role goes beyond our work with students and includes modeling the use of transmedia for teachers; leading to collaboration and co-teaching. We need to not only select transmedia projects for our school libraries but we need to promote their value in delivering an integrated curricular experience.

Gutierrez (2012) explains "teaching with transmedia guides students through various media formats to provide an immersive experience that makes any topic or narrative more vivid and personal" (para. 6). Along with the obvious links to language and media expectations, Hovious (2012) shares seven literacies that can be found in exemplary transmedia projects: multimodal literacy, critical literacy, digital literacy, media literacy, visual literacy, information literacy and game literacy. But as with any good teaching we don't want our students to only be consumers of transmedia. "Transmedia offers educators a gateway into understanding the fundamentals of storytelling" (Gutierrez, 2012, p. 34). By immersing students in story, transmedia products are a natural outcome.

Promoting transmedia projects is no different than promoting a good book. Teacher-librarians should hold 'book' talks, share apps, provide author links, embed trailers and videos into their library blogs and host shared classroom transmedia events. Consider offering clubs to students. Several years ago a *39 Clues* Club run during nutrition break resulted in over 60 grade five students sharing computers to delve into the missions, games and clues of the Cahill families while sharing what they'd discovered while reading the books.

### **Into the future**

Carman (2011) suggests that we develop a "completely new way of thinking about what a book could be" (p.51). When we consider some of our favourite stories maybe we need to picture what they would become if they were developed as transmedia projects.

Transmedia projects open the door to a whole new multi-literacy experience. Carman (2011) concludes "while it may be a difficult thing to pin down, one thing's for sure: transmedia by any reasonable definition will play a critical role in the future of books"(p. 51).

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## **Images**

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## Appendix A - Definitions

**Cross platform:** (synonymous with multi-platform): A term that describes a language, software application or hardware device that works on more than one system platform  
Retrieved Apr. 14, 2014 <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/cross-platform>

**Digital literacy:** is the ability to effectively and critically navigate, evaluate and create information using a range of digital technologies  
Retrieved Apr. 14, 2014 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital\\_literacy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_literacy)

**Enhanced Storytelling:** (see transmedia)

**Multiliteracy:** to incorporate the term multiliteracies is the way technology and multimedia is changing how we communicate. These days, text is not the only and main way to communicate. Text is being combined with sounds, and images and being incorporated into movies, billboards, almost any site on the internet, and television. All these ways of communication require the ability to understand a multimedia world.  
Retrieved Apr. 14, 2014 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multiliteracy>

**MultiModality:** In its most basic sense, multimodality is the mixture of textual, audio, and visual modes in combination with media and materiality to create meaning. Where media are concerned, multimodality is the use of several modes (media) to create a single artifact.  
Retrieved Apr. 14, 2014 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multimodality>

**Multi-platform:** (see cross platform)

### **Platform:**

A computer platform is, in the most general sense, whatever pre-existing environment a piece of software is designed to run within, obeying its constraints, and making use of its facilities.  
Retrieved Apr. 14, 2014 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Computing\\_platform](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Computing_platform)

**Transliteracy:** The ability to read, write and interact across a range of platforms, tools and media from signing and orality through handwriting, print, TV, radio and film, to digital social networks.  
Retrieved Apr. 14, 2014 <http://www.reference.com/browse/Transliteracy?s=t>

**Transmedia** (synonymous with enhanced storytelling): storytelling across multiple forms of media  
Retrieved Apr. 14, 2014 <http://www.reference.com/browse/transmedia?s=t>



## **Appendix B - Other transmedia projects**

Other transmedia projects can be viewed at this link: [More Transmedia projects](#).

Please help to build this list by adding new projects using this google docx link: [Add a new project to the list](#) or by sharing with us via twitter #tranmediaprojects.

### About the authors



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**Brenda Roberts** is a teacher-librarian in a K-5 school in Ontario. Over a 30+ year career she has taught Kindergarten through grade 6, contained gifted classes, family groupings and additional qualifications for teachers in reading. She was thrilled to open a new school library and explore the dynamics of collaboration through her teacher-librarian role for the past ten years. She has recently graduated from the University of Alberta with an M.Ed in teacher-librarianship. Her passions include: reading, technology, gaming, play, tennis and social justice. @FictionFaerie