

## **Transmedia Story-weaving: Designing immersive transmedia experiences for higher education**

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**Abstract.** This poster outlines a research study utilizing transmedia and game elements to motivate higher education students towards higher levels of engagement and deeper learning within the theme of human rights education. This work-in-progress aims to engage students with stories of displacement via a number of different media, which will be facilitated by a technique known as ‘transmedia storytelling’. The poster will concentrate on the instructional design phase of the project, and will illustrate the stories, media and pedagogic processes being used in the creation of this highly immersive learning experience.

**Keywords:** Transmedia Storytelling · Alternate Reality Game · Higher Education · Refugee Crisis · Game-Based Learning

### **1 Introduction**

‘Transmedia Storytelling’ is a term brought to popular attention by media theorist Henry Jenkins, to denote the ‘process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience’ [1]. Our research project sets out to better understand how this type of storytelling can be used in learning settings, to inspire and motivate young adults towards higher levels of engagement and deeper learning within the context of human rights and sustainability education. Moreover, it intends to inform the instructional design-criteria of future educational transmedia activities.

In order to achieve the aforementioned goals, we are designing an immersive transmedia experience inspired by the current refugee crisis. The participants in our project will be higher education students engaged in undergraduate studies in an Irish university. The transmedia intervention will be incorporated in the university curriculum and will form part of the formal assessment of a human rights/sustainability course.

As the project is currently in the design phase, our poster and abstract will illustrate the design model of the intervention, highlighting the different story-levels, various

media and pedagogic processes being utilized in the creation of this immersive experience for higher education students.

## **2 Designing to Inspire**

For the purposes of this study the researchers have adopted a Design-Based Research approach [2, 3] that will inform all processes of design of the intervention, implementation and revision of design. During the intervention, the students will engage with a number of stories in the form of interactive game-like levels. Each level contributes to the main theme of the project: the sense of displacement. Within each level, participants will critically examine their own beliefs and values bases, engage in critical discourse on human rights issues and ultimately will be encouraged towards becoming change agents in society.

The poster will concentrate on illustrating the instructional design phase of the transmedia learning experience, and will illustrate the stories, media and pedagogic processes being used in the creation of this highly immersive learning experience.

It is proposed that Levels 1 and 2, i.e. 'Post-famine Irish Immigration (1880's)' and 'Displacement caused by Nuremberg racial laws (1935)' respectively, will tell stories of displacement in prior times. The focus of the poster presentation is on displacement at current times, i.e. Level 3 'Refugees of Cyprus (1974)' and Level 4 'Today's global refugee crisis', which are explained in more detail below.

### **2.1 Level 3: Refugees of Cyprus (1974)**

Participants will experience stories of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot refugees, who were internally displaced during the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974. The students will engage with these stories via a public exhibition on the university campus. The exhibition will include among others: poems, newspaper clippings, sound and video clips, excerpts of interviews with the refugees who share their experience of displacement, and interactive elements facilitated by QR codes and tablet screens which will 'unlock' further online activities.

### **2.2 Level 4: Today's global refugee crisis (when does it stop?)**

This level of the intervention will unveil in the form of an Alternate Reality Game (ARG) in the context of the Syrian refugee crisis. The ARG is considered a subset of 'Transmedia Storytelling', and is described as an interactive narrative 'that plays out in real time, using real communications media to make it seem as though the story were really happening' [4]. ARGs engage players in a series of challenges that are deployed both online and in the real world [5]. During our ARG, the students will 'experience' the process and challenges of seeking asylum in Ireland. In this process,

students will navigate through real and fictional websites, decode encrypted messages, solve puzzles, gather clues and interact with fictional characters in order to progress through the story.

### **3 Expected Outcome**

The primary focus of the study will be to ascertain the participants' levels of motivation and engagement, to map their learning pathways and to determine any changes in their dispositions, while participating in the transmedia intervention. Moreover, via the process of re-design and re-implementation we hope to inform the instructional design-criteria of future educational transmedia activities. Through the transmedia design, we aim to take the participants in an immersive journey of stories across time, and ultimately encourage the students to come to more critical understanding of refugee crises. The theme of displacement has a strong presence throughout history and seems to be a timeless phenomenon that is still current with today's global refugee crisis. Through the transmedia experience we are expecting that the students will become more aware and more understanding of the global refugee situation.

### **References**

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