



From Paper to Screen a Transbook conference

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LITERATURE, LEARNING, AND VIDEO GAMES:

Looking for new forms of digital storytelling

Children are currently living, communicating, and learning through screens. The question is not to know if but how digital technology is going to broaden the horizons of creators and the prospects of digital editors and producers.

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Transbook
children's literature on the move



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In the words of **Laurent Bazin**, we are experiencing a clash of civilization: we are witnessing a paradigm shift away from the written world of logic and reason towards one where imagination and immersion are taking more and more space. It is common to see written works and digital media put at odds. The same is true for what we define as educational or playful. Yet, when they are fully utilized, games can bring much to education. This raises the question of how digital technology is changing our relationship with stories and narration, and how it allows us to transform and reinvent our models of education.

Of the many influences of video games and digital technology on education and narration, the impact of interactivity seems to be the most prominent. Interactivity was the common theme of the conference "From Paper to Screen." Thinking about interactivity allows us to analyze how video games address questions linked to storytelling and knowledge building.

THE SPECIFICS OF VIDEO GAME STORYTELLING

There is a stark contrast between two major elements of today's video games story building: on the one hand, some static elements are reminiscent of the way stories are built in books and movies (with campaigns – the backbone of the story – and cut scenes – elements of storyline injected between playable parts of the game); on the other hand, dynamic and interactive elements participate in creating the unique world of each game.

Making the player live the stories

According to **Olivier Henriot**, interactivity determines how we tell stories. With games, he says, "we don't tell stories, but rather, we make the player live the stories." Much information at the root of the scenario of a game is generated by level art and design rather than by the storyline and the dialogues. This includes systemic dialogues (recurring dialogues from non-playable characters) and environmental narration, which allows to tell the story through choices of settings and of elements that surround the player. The dimension of exploration in a game and the impact of choices on the storyline, such as in stories with multiple storylines, are also important tools given by interactivity to break away from the main linear storyline.

Branching storylines are a good example of the impact of the choices the player makes on a game's story. Marc Pestka shows us how, in Remember Me, as the player changes the memories of non-playable characters, the storyline of the rest of the game is influenced and changes accordingly.

Gameplay driving the story

However, gameplay is the main component that helps building the story of a game. To be able to tell a story in a game, attention needs to be paid to the player's actions. He has to be at the center of all the issues, and the motivations of the playable character have to be aligned with his. **Marc Pestka** explains how interactivity and the choices given to the player have here their greatest impact as they allow him to bring his own personal elements. The choices offered by a game such as Far Cry 4 illustrate this. Each player has to elaborate his own personal strategy to solve a given problem: during an assault, for instance, will he choose infiltration or aggression? By projecting his perceptions, his actions and his emotions on the screen, the player creates new elements of plot.

The Yoda parable: Introduced by Olivier Henriot, this parable illustrates the impact of the player's choices and of what he projects on the scenario of a game. When Luke wonders about what he will find in a cave where Yoda is leading him, he only gets as an answer: "You will find only what you bring in."

Such dimensions of gameplay can be found in games such as the ones created by Toca Boca, who don't define themselves as storytellers, but as play enablers. **Willow Tyrer Mellbratt** demonstrates how this stance allows to rethink how children's games are created: you don't show them how to play, you allow them to play intuitively with the medium; you don't limit the way they can play, you bring new dimensions to traditional games.

EDUCATIONAL GAMES INSIDE THE CLASSROOM

Similarly, interactivity is what delineates the future of education and educational games. Technology is everywhere and is becoming a way to teach while using motivating tools.

Issues linked to educational games in the context of the education system.

Michèle Briziou underlines how, in the context of the classroom, games can sometimes not be perceived as such by children and be rejected by them as a consequence. Introducing games in the classroom also forces the teacher to change his teaching practices. He needs to adapt to new tools that he doesn't necessarily know, and this adaptation needs to take place in a given class and for a given curriculum. Educational games question the temporality and the setting of the classroom, as well as the role of the teacher. Teachers who are not familiar with the newest tools can also get lost within the app market and the catalog of available educational games. Finally, issues can arise due to the complexity of the purchasing process and the lack of budget of some schools and therefore slow down the purchase of new media.

Educational games? Chloe Letaille Benaroya from Tribal Nova tells us how difficult it is to define what an educational game is. Even so, she lists some fundamental characteristics that help teachers and parents navigate the market: games tested with children and teachers, with learning analytics, which cater to a specific age group and deal with a specific subject.

Transmedia productions, a solution?

Solutions exist to assist teachers in the process of choosing educational apps. Apart from choosing apps made by well-known editors and about famous series, transmedia productions can help teachers be more comfortable with the material. Suzanne Freyjadis explains how transmedia allows students to explore the various aspects of a work of art through its many adaptations while giving teachers the opportunity to use well-known material. Indeed, teachers have to trust the content for an educational game to be successful. Similarly, books enhanced with digital content can provide a good transition to allow new technologies to enter the classroom by combining the ease of using classics with the interactive elements of games.

The many adaptations of Alice, by Lewis Carroll – in films, with the Tim Burton movie and the animation film from Disney, and in games with the version by American McGee – illustrate well the contributions of transmedia: with a classic from literature well-known by teachers, students can reflect on the questions of adaptation and on the possibilities of a work of art in terms of scenario.

The benefits of educational games

Video games are not obstacles in the classroom. Thanks to their specific features, they can help teachers and students apprehend complex notions by giving them very practical applications. Games can also be adaptive and allow each student to learn at his own pace and to stay interested. The fastest students can become teachers themselves. According to Suzanne Freyjadis, with educational games, teachers don't need to be the experts anymore, which encourages peer-to-peer learning: the collaboration and transmission between students in the same classroom. Educational games also offer tools and learning analytics that give the possibility to follow each student's progression and to adapt to their difficulties.

Educational games give new ways of teaching to students. For instance, they allow to bypass language and to go back to experience, as shown by Jean-Baptiste Huynh, who, with his game, provide students with a tangible experience of the meaning of mathematical objects before bringing them back to the more traditional language of algebra. Organizing contests and events also helps keeping students interested and motivated. In short, with educational games, "we go from a logic of knowledge to a logic of skills: we go from knowledge to know-how."

In January 2014, the Algebra Challenge, a contest organized nationally in Norway, gathered more than 40 000 students. A significant number: during more than 40% of the time, students were playing from home. This event highlights the similarities between regular games and educational games in terms of commitment and motivation. It also raises the question: is the market for educational games taking place at home or at school?



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