

Using Transmedia in Expanded Learning Settings

AN EVERY HOUR COUNTS PUBLICATION

First, what is transmedia?

Transmedia, also known as “transmedia storytelling,” is the technique of telling a single story across multiple media platforms. Each platform—for example, television, videogame, or website—offers a distinct element that contributes to the user’s understanding of the overall story.

How does transmedia support learning?

In transmedia storytelling, children follow a story across multiple platforms while being exposed to the same set of skills, reinforcing their learning. They may try new approaches to math and reading, and transmedia play encourages them to ask and answer questions, make connections among information, and share their knowledge with others.ⁱ

As part of The Ready To Learn Initiative, an effort funded by the U.S. Department of Education, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and PBS have partnered to develop and deploy dynamic new educational content to support math and literacy learning among children ages two to eight, especially those living in poverty. The approach relies on carrying familiar PBS KIDS characters and narratives across multiple platforms—including interactive games, television series, apps, and websites—to create a coordinated learning experience for children [see below]. These materials are available for educators and caregivers to use.

Research has shown that PBS KIDS content developed through The Ready To Learn Initiative can have significant educational impact. Independent research conducted during the 2005-2010 round of The Ready To Learn Initiative found that using combinations of

well-designed educational media across platforms can boost literacy development and other academic skills among low-income children—and in some instances, narrow or close the achievement gap with middle-class kids. Research from the current round (2010-2015) has similarly found gains in children’s math vocabulary and numeracy skills.^{ii,iii}

Transmedia is a good fit for expanded learning opportunities.

Expanded learning programs and The Ready To Learn Initiative share a key goal: they aim to narrow the achievement gap by providing children of low-income backgrounds with high-quality learning experiences. Expanded learning opportunities (after-school, summer, and expanded-learning time programs) are particularly well suited to digital learning because they offer the time and flexibility for the informal learning experiences and hands-on activities characteristic of transmedia. These activities, in turn, support personalized learning, nurture positive adult-youth relationships through shared inquiry and/or mentorship, and engage families and communities.

Tips for using transmedia in expanded learning programs

The experiences of PBS stations implementing resources from The Ready To Learn Initiative locally suggest that expanded learning providers and public media stations can make effective use of PBS KIDS transmedia content by^{iv}:

1. **Forging strong partnerships.** Public media stations rely on expanded learning providers to help reach

TRANSMEDIA IN ACTION

The Electric Company is a PBS KIDS series featuring a group of friends that solves problems created by neighborhood pranksters. Through the multiplatform experience Prankster Planet, kids can join the Electric Company characters on TV, online, or at home and help them solve a series of math challenges using graphs, addition, subtraction, and money skills to stop the Pranksters from messing up all the words on Earth. Learn more at www.pbskids.org/electriccompany.



underserved kids and their families with PBS KIDS and other transmedia content. Stations offer training and resources to familiarize front-line staff with instruction and use of that content. A director of education or outreach coordinator often serves as the point of contact.

2. **Making use of turn-key resources.** Informal educators have little time to develop new curricula and lesson plans, and may lack familiarity with transmedia content and related technology. Local public television stations can offer ready-to-use materials, such as information sheets, activity cards, art supplies, and books, that can be disseminated among classroom and informal educators.
3. **Sharing resources.** Technology is expensive. A program site might be able to afford only one smart board, or wireless internet access is unreliable. One solution is to invest in a single, comprehensive set of resources and share them across sites. Many PBS stations involved in The Ready To Learn Initiative purchased items for a “mobile media lab”—laptops, Mi-Fi wireless sticks, videogame consoles, etc.—that they lent to partners on a rotating basis.
4. **Getting parents involved.** Kids are more excited to use transmedia content and more likely to continue learning at home if their parents or caregivers are a part of the process. Educating parents at family nights and involving them as participants in activities (e.g., through a “Mommy & Me” program) helps them become familiar with the technology and know-how to create engaging educational experiences for their children at home.

Resources to get started

The following resources developed as part of The Ready To Learn Initiative may be useful to public media stations, teachers, and community partners across the country:

- The [Corporation for Public Broadcasting](#) website, which explains more about The Ready To Learn Initiative and CPB’s mission.
- [PBS KIDS Lab](#), a one-stop shop with games, curriculum guides, at-home activities, and the latest research on The Ready To Learn Initiative.
- The Electric Company [Extended Learning](#) and [Summer Learning](#) program guides.
- [PBS LearningMedia](#), a destination for instant, free access to thousands of classroom-ready, digital resources.

The following websites offer resources on expanded learning opportunities:

- The [Afterschool Alliance](#)
- The [Collaborative for Building After-School Systems](#)
- The [Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project](#)
- The [National Summer Learning Association](#)
- The [Wallace Foundation Knowledge Center](#)

About Every Hour Counts

Every Hour Counts, formerly the Collaborative for Building After-School Systems (CBASS), is a national outreach partner to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting on The Ready To Learn Initiative. Every Hour Counts is a coalition of citywide intermediary organizations that work to expand the availability of high-quality learning opportunities, including after-school and summer, that help children gain the skills, knowledge, and experiences they need to lead successful lives.

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¹Herr-Stephenson, B. & Alper, M. (2013). T is for Transmedia: Learning through Transmedia Play. Los Angeles: USC Annenberg Innovation Lab. Retrieved from <http://www.slideshare.net/ebreilly1/transmedia-play-final-144>.

²McCarthy, B., Li, L., & Tiu, M. (2012). PBS KIDS Mathematics Transmedia Suites in Preschool Homes: A Report to the CPB-PBS Ready To Learn Initiative. San Francisco: WestEd.

³McCarthy, B., et al. (2011). Evaluation of The Electric Company Summer Learning Program. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

⁴Agrawal, N. & Seidel, B. (2013). Bringing PBS KIDS Transmedia to Expanded Learning Settings: Emerging Practices. New York: The Collaborative for Building After-School Systems.