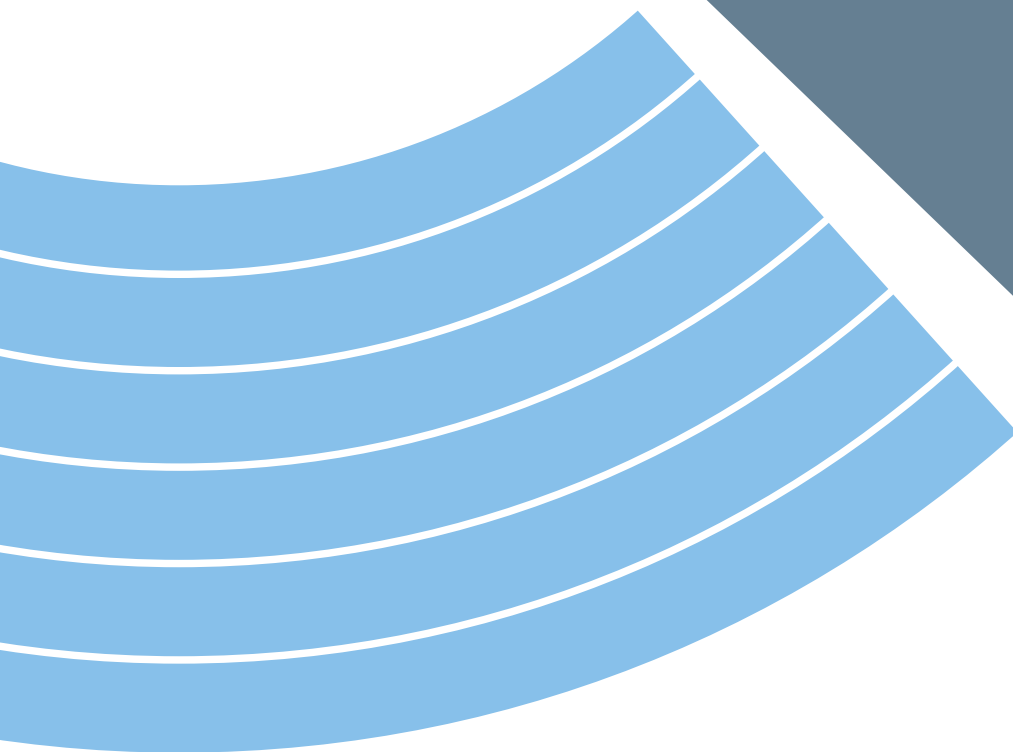


TRANSMEDIA LITERACY

IN THE NEW MEDIA ECOLOGY

WHITE PAPER



Where are we now?

Since the spread of personal computing in the 1980s, the expansion of the World Wide Web in the 1990s and the emergence of social media and mobile devices in the 2000s, digital technology has been a catalyst for social change in contemporary societies. Although schools have made great efforts to adapt to the new socio-technical conditions in the past two decades, the general perception is that the social life of children, pre-teens and teens revolves around a set of digital technologies and new practices that are often very different from the educational protocols of schools.

INTERVIEW

Jenny

16 YEARS OLD - FEMALE
Spain

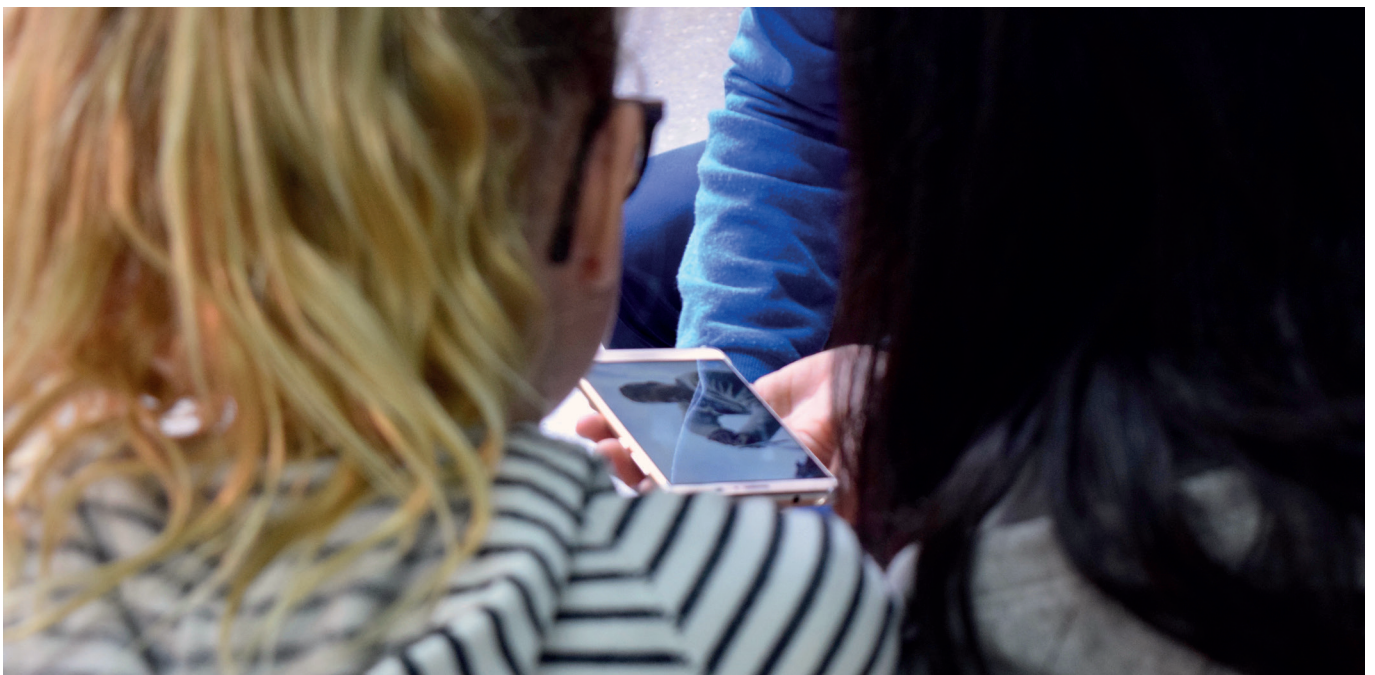
*Researcher: **Have you learnt stuff with videogames apart from what you've learnt at school?***

Jenny: Well, there's this game, "Brain Training" for maths and rapid calculus...

*Researcher: **Would you use videogames to teach people?***

Jenny: I would. I mean, as long as it's interactive, like, interesting... I think that'd be cool.

Research into the relationships between teens and the media has also been challenged by the mutations of the media ecology. New questions, new research objectives and new methodologies have been proposed to deal with this new situation.



From Media Literacy to Transmedia Literacy

The traditional media literacy approaches developed since the 1960s were based on the idea that the media, especially television, have negative effects on children, and therefore it is necessary to 'immunize' young people in schools so they can resist the negative influence of screens.



As the media ecosystem evolved, so did media literacy, which soon included education and risk prevention in relation to using the web, videogames, social networks and mobile devices. In recent years, dozens of concepts have been developed to give a name to these new forms of literacy, from 'digital literacy' to 'internet literacy' or 'new media literacy'.

INTERVIEW

Jorge

12 YEARS OLD - MALE
Portugal

Researcher: Have you read any other books related to videogames?

Jorge: I'm reading a fan fiction about a movie, which is about the Joker, and I'm also reading a fan fiction about Harry Potter and "Until Dawn".

Researcher: [...] What led you to read "Until Dawn"?

Jorge: The game.

Researcher: Is it the same?

Jorge: The fan fiction is quite changed, that's why it's different.

Researcher: Do they give them different endings?

Jorge: Yes, but even in "Until Dawn" there are different endings for lots of characters because the choices people make are what lead to the endings. But here [in fan fiction], it goes another way, with other characters and stories.



LITERACY



MEDIA LITERACY



TRANSMEDIA LITERACY

Media semiotics (language)	Verbal text (read/write)	Multimodal	Multimodal
Media supports	Books and printed texts	Printed, audiovisual and digital	Digital networks - Interactive media - Transmedia
Aim of the action	To develop critical readers and writers	To develop critical consumers and producers	To develop critical prosumers
Subject interpellation	As an illiterate	As a passive media consumer	As a prosumer
Direction of the action	Top-down	1) Top-down 2) Bottom-up	1) Bottom-up 2) Top-down
Learning environment	Formal (schools)	Formal (schools), no formal and informal	From informal to formal (schools)
Role of the teacher	Knowledge authority - Mediator student/text	Knowledge mediator - Creator of learning experiences with the media	Knowledge facilitator - Cultural translator
Theoretical references	Linguistics	Media Studies (Theory of Media Effects) - Cultural Studies	Media Studies (Media Ecology, Transmedia Storytelling studies) - Cultural studies

KEY CONCEPT

Transmedia Literacy

Transmedia Literacy is understood as a set of skills, practices, values, sensitivities and learning and exchange strategies developed and applied in the context of the new collaborative cultures.

Transmedia Literacy starts from a different reading of the media reality of teens. Without rejecting the postulates of media literacy, it expands and complements them with other research questions and intervention proposals. **Transmedia Literacy** focuses on what young people are doing with the media, considering them prosumers (producers + consumers) able to generate and share media content of different types and levels of complexity.

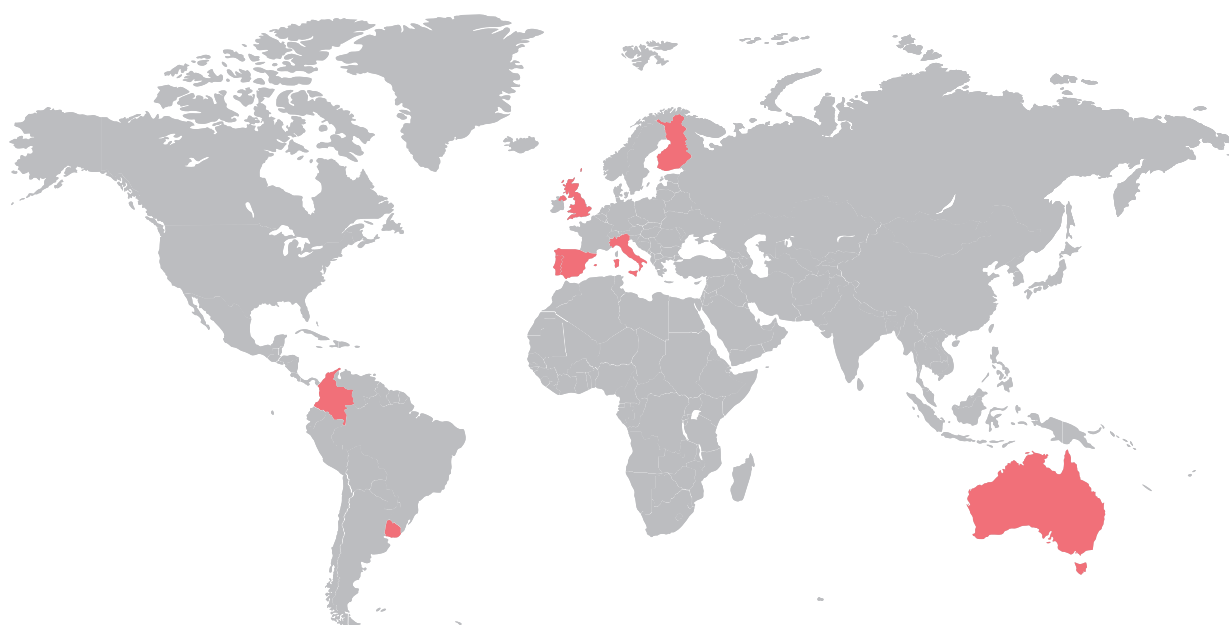
Transmedia Literacy does not deny the need to educate young people to develop media skills, but rather it expands this framework to include research into the media activities that young people do outside educational institutions and proposes bringing this knowledge into the classroom.

***Transmedia Literacy* research project**

In this context the main questions that the ***Transmedia Literacy*** research project asked were: **What are teens doing with media? How do they learn to do things with media?** To answer these two questions, a methodological strategy was designed that involved more than 50 researchers from 10 institutions in 8 countries.

Participating countries

Spain (coord.), Australia, Colombia, Finland, Italy, Portugal, United Kingdom and Uruguay



The research started on 1 April, 2015, and finished on 31 March, 2018. In 36 months the research team carried out a lot of activities:

- Designing the **research strategy** and testing it in Barcelona (2015)
- Carrying out the **fieldwork** in 8 countries (2016)
- **Analysing the data** (2017)
- **Integrating the data analysis and dissemination** of outputs (2017-2018).

Methodology

surveys, participatory workshops and in-depth interviews.



The fieldwork followed a sequence of five complementary phases:

1. Schools were considered the best interface between the research team and the teens. They were the starting point for fieldwork and a secure way to obtain the **informed consents** of institutions, parents and teens, as well as make a first contact with teens.
2. An initial **questionnaire** was filled in by the participating adolescents to get to know their socio-cultural backgrounds and media uses and perceptions;
3. **Participatory workshops** were held to explore in an immersive way the teens' transmedia storytelling practices and engage them in media production and gameplay;
4. **In-depth interviews** were made with the most active teens and they were asked to fill out media diaries to get to know their doings and sayings with media, social networks and videogames;
5. The last phase of the data-gathering process was an online observation of the teens' favourite websites, celebrities, and online communities (**netgraphy**).

Participants were aged **from 12 to 18 years old** and different school profiles were selected in each country (private/public, urban/suburban, high-tech/low-tech schools, etc.).

During the data-gathering process **1,633 questionnaires, 58 participatory culture and videogame workshops, and 311 interviews** were completed.

RESEARCHER

Sonia Livingstone (UK)

'Research must now identify, in textual terms, how the Internet mediates the representation of knowledge, the framing of entertainment, and the conduct of communication. And, in tandem with this analysis, it must investigate the emerging skills and practices of new media users as they meaningfully appropriate ICT into their daily lives.'

Source: Livingstone, S. (2004). Media Literacy and the Challenge of New Information and Communication Technologies. *The Communication Review*, 7:1, 3-14.



What are teens doing with media?

Teens are doing many things with media, from playing videogames with friends to writing fan fiction, sharing pictures on Instagram, watching – and sometimes uploading – videos on YouTube and participating in ‘real world’ events dedicated to their favourite characters and stories. The research team of the **Transmedia Literacy** project has defined these competences as ‘transmedia skills’.

Obviously, not all young people have these skills or have them to equal degrees: while a teen may have many production or social management skills, he or she may have very little ability to detect and analyse media representations of stereotypes. In this research the team did not find 'digital natives': they discovered a complex world of interactions, practices, fears, conflicts, joys, participation and collaboration.

KEY CONCEPT

Transmedia skill

Transmedia skills are a series of competences related to digital interactive media production, sharing and consumption. These skills range from problem-solving processes in videogames to content production and sharing in web platforms and social media; the creation, production, sharing and critical consumption of narrative content (fanfiction, fanvids, etc.) by teens is also part of this universe.

RESEARCHER

danah boyd (USA)

'Many of today's teens are indeed deeply engaged with social media and are active participants in networked publics, but this does not mean that they inherently have the knowledge or skills to make the most of their online experiences. The rhetoric of 'digital natives', far from being useful, is often a distraction to understanding the challenges that youth face in a networked world.'

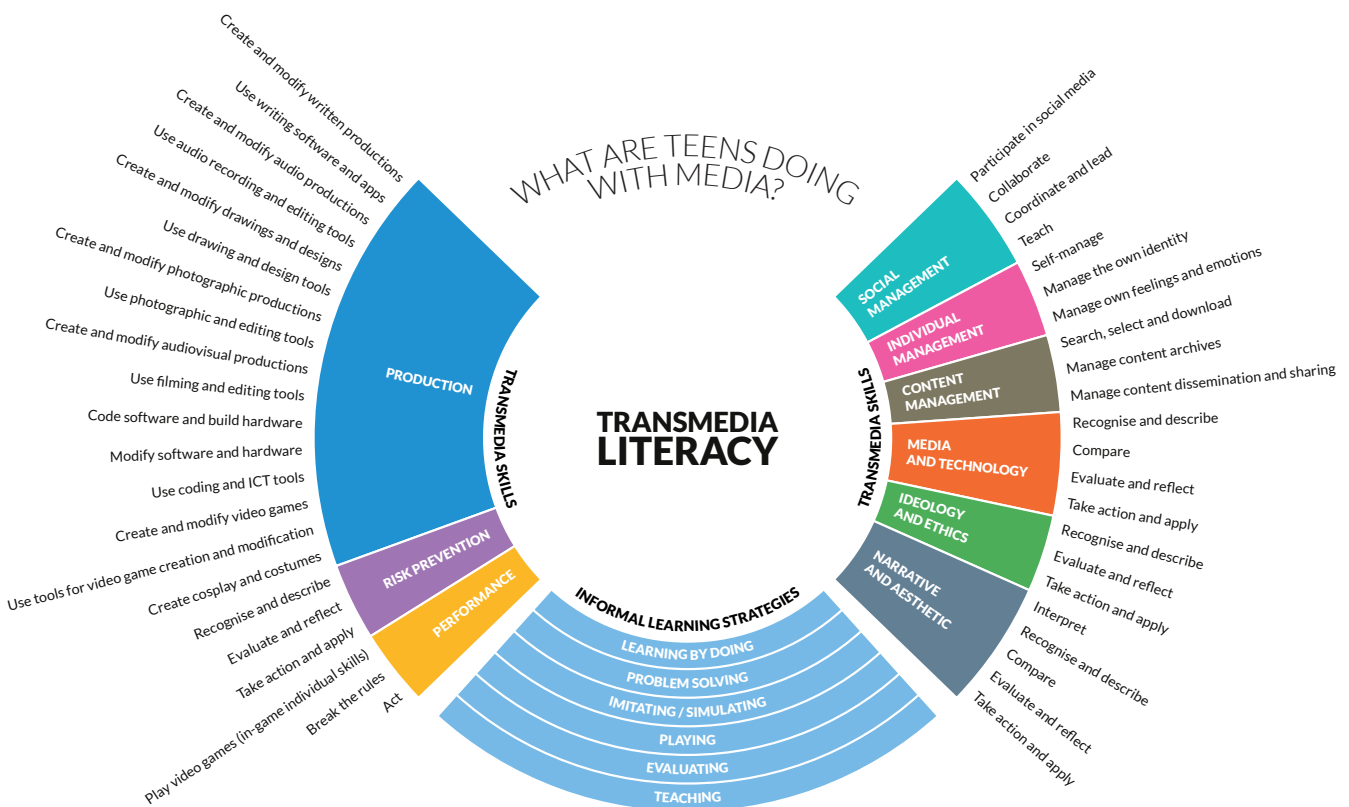
Source: boyd, d. (2014). *It's Complicated: the social lives of networked teens*. London/New Haven: Yale University Press.



Transmedia skills

The *Transmedia Literacy* research team generated a complete and updated taxonomy. It is one of the most exhaustive maps of skills related to media production, consumption and post-production in the context of youth transmedia culture.

The transmedia skills identified during the research were organised into 9 dimensions (production, risk prevention, performance, social/individual/content management, media and technology, ideology and ethics, narrative and aesthetics), each of which included 44 main skills, and on a second level, 190 specific skills.



Depending on the dimension, the organisation of the taxonomy revolved around texts, subjects, technologies and processes. The skills were organised, when possible, following a path from writing to multimodal productions, from simplicity to complexity, from technical to critical and ethical practices, and from cognitive to pragmatic attitudes.

INTERVIEW

Anna

14 YEARS OLD - FEMALE
United Kingdom

Researcher: *On Instagram, is that the only place you post your photos? Sorry, photos of your art?*

Anna: *Yeah, on Snapchat occasionally but mostly Instagram.*

Researcher: *Yeah, and does it feel like a community thing?*

Or are you kind of fans?

Anna: *I don't think we're fans, but there is an art community.*

Researcher: *And do you talk back and forth with people that you don't know in real life that are part of that online community?*

Anna: *Occasionally yeah, like I'll comment on their photo.*

Transmedia skills follow a diverse and uneven topography. The skills that emerged during the research cover both a broad media spectrum in which teens 'live' and, at the same time, a wide-ranging list of abilities, from the most technological to the more narrative or aesthetic capacities. It should be noted that some of the skills detected are very marginal and only developed by a handful of teens (e.g. the skills related to ideology and values), while others are much more widespread (e.g. production skills). This is important from the perspective of future **Transmedia Literacy** actions: there is a much higher probability of having teens with an elevated level of production skills in the classroom than teens with ideological or ethical skills.



How do teens learn to do things they do with media?

Learning outside the school is not a new thing: although the concept of ‘informal learning’ was introduced by Knowles in *Informal Adult Education* (1950), John Dewey and other early 20th century education philosophers, such as Mary Parker Follett, had already encouraged and valued informal learning practices.

KEY CONCEPT

Informal learning strategy

In the context of *Transmedia Literacy* research, ‘informal learning strategies’ are defined as the individual or collective sequence of actions to acquire and accumulate knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights from daily experiences and interactions in different environments.

RESEARCHER

Joanna Black, Juan C. Castro and Ching-Chiu Lin (Canada)

‘Formal learning environments remain important while informal learning environments are gaining increasing significance as they play a key role in the modern education of our youths (...) Youths in our digital age are self-taught, forming communities of culture as they immerse themselves in social media outside of our classrooms.’

Source: Black, J., Castro, J., & Lin, C. (2015). *Youth Practices in Digital Arts and New Media: Learning in Formal and Informal Settings*. New York: Palgrave.



If informal learning strategies were present long before the emergence of formal education systems – for example, in libraries, churches, and museums – today technological advances have expanded traditional learning situations by creating new spaces like social media, websites, and online communities, etc. YouTube, fan communities and social media can be informal learning spaces.

It is not easy to identify and analyse informal learning strategies. These 'wild' experiences are often invisible or directly rejected by (adult) researchers and teachers. The research team's objective was to overcome these prejudices and consider common practices like videogaming, writing fan fiction, doing cosplay or sharing memes as an important part of teenagers' cultural life.

Informal learning strategies

RESEARCHER

danah boyd (USA)

'So much is projected onto youth that it is often difficult to discuss what they are doing, and why, without observation being obscured by ideas of what they *should* or *shouldn't* be doing. Youth are rarely seen as deserving any agency and, yet, they are also judged based on what they choose to do [...] people think that they know something about youth either because they were once young or because they are parents to a young person.'

Source: boyd, d. (2014). *It's Complicated: the social lives of networked teens*. London/New Haven: Yale University Press.

The research team organised the different informal learning strategies detected during the fieldwork into six modalities.

MODALITIES	DESCRIPTION
Learning by doing	The learner puts into practice a set of activities related to the skill they want to acquire. These activities usually involve trial and error processes that gradually help the learner to perfect said skill.
Problem solving	The learner is faced with a problem or issue that motivates them to acquire the right skill to solve it.
Imitating / Simulating	The learner reproduces actions, sequences and decisions taken by someone with greater expertise.
Playing	The learner acquires a certain skill by engaging in gamified environments.
Evaluating	The learner acquires or perfects a skill by examining their own or others' work, or by others examining their work.
Teaching	The learner acquires a skill by transmitting knowledge to others, inspiring the learner to master an existing skill or to gain another skill that helps them in the teaching tasks.

In a second step, the research team introduced a set of formal categories to expand the taxonomy. In this context, the six modalities were divided into four main dimensions (subject, time, space and relationships), each of which encompasses a series of oppositions (individual/collaborative, online/offline, short-term/long-term, etc.).

INTERVIEW

Federico

14 YEARS OLD - MALE
Uruguay

Researcher: Is this the game you have on your mobile phone?

Federico: Yes. I have "Studio Tycoon" installed on my computer. It's like a YouTube simulator [...]. It's like you are a youtuber but it isn't real, it's like a game in which you pretend you are a youtuber, you earn money and everything. I mean, you earn money in the game.

Researcher: But you record yourself?

Federico: No, no. It's just a simulation. You don't record anything.



The Teachers' Kit

Based on the scientific outputs of the research, the **Transmedia Literacy** team produced a series of open-access didactic activities for high-school teachers: the **Teacher's Kit**. Each card presents in a simple way a didactic activity inspired by the transmedia skills and informal learning strategies detected during the research.

In a few words, **Transmedia Literacy** is not restricted to the analysis of practices of participatory cultures, youth-generated contents and informal learning strategies: it goes beyond the scientific intervention and proposes alternatives for applying and benefitting from teenagers' transmedia skills – developed outside school – inside the formal educational system.

Conclusions

Seven tweets to summarize the research outputs:

#1

The distribution of *#transmedia skills* among teenagers is not regular or balanced *#TransmediaLiteracy*

#2

While some of these *#transmedia skills* change very little over time (e.g., those related to values), other skills are subject to incessant technological change (e.g., those related to social media) *#TransmediaLiteracy*

#3

#Transmedia skills are gender-biased (e.g., girls use media that focus on relational aspects, while boys tend to focus on playful aspects) *#TransmediaLiteracy*

#4

Teens are aware of the need to acquire risk prevention skills *#TransmediaLiteracy*

#5

Teens apply traditional informal learning strategies in new digital environments *#TransmediaLiteracy*

#6

Imitation is one of the main informal learning strategies that teens apply *#TransmediaLiteracy*

#7

YouTube is one of the most important online learning spaces and occupies a central role in teens' media content consumption and (sometimes) production *#TransmediaLiteracy*

Transmedia Literacy project

TRANSMEDIA LITERACY CONSORTIUM PARTNERS

Universitat Pompeu Fabra (coord. Spain)
Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (Spain)
University of Oxford (United Kingdom)
Jyväskylän Yliopisto (Finland)
Universidade do Minho (Portugal)
Universidad de la República (Uruguay)
Pontificia Universidad Javeriana (Colombia)
Università degli Studi di Torino (Italy)
Ars Media (Italy)

With the participation of:

RMIT University (Australia)
INDIRE (Italy)

COLLABORATORS

Ateneu Barcelonès (Spain)
Avanguardie Educative (Italy)
ECOLearning (Europe)
eNorssi Network (Finland)
MENTEP Project (Italy)
Obras Educativas Lasalle (Spain)
Plan Ceibal (Uruguay)
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Transmedia Week
United Nations Alliance of Civilizations

AUTHOR

Carlos A. Scolari (Universitat Pompeu Fabra – Barcelona)

EDITING

Catherine Stonehouse

DESIGN AND PRODUCTION

Ars Media

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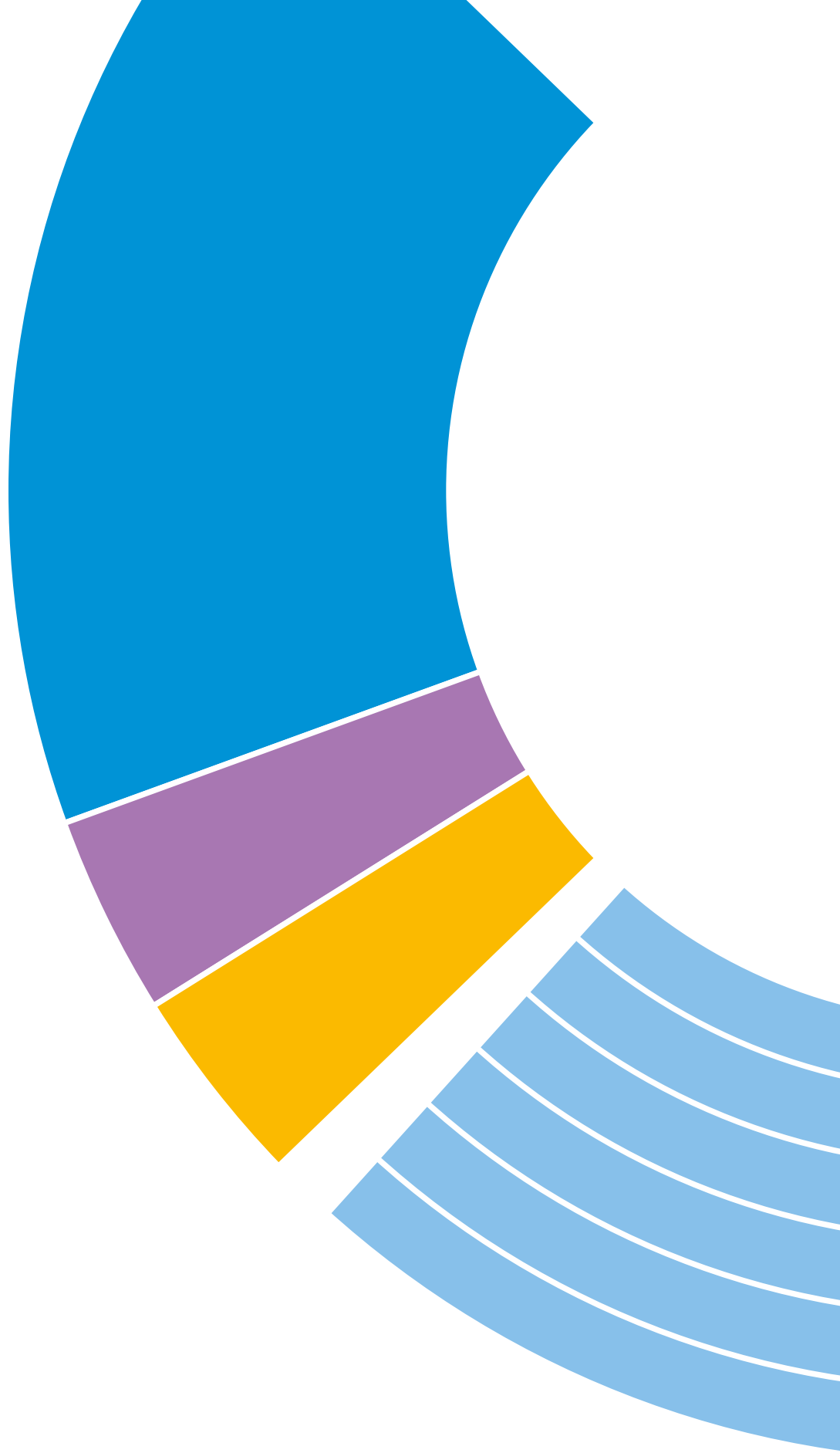


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