

ESCAPE ROOM

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Introduction

The design, development, and implementation of the escape room, either in a physical space or digital world creates a safe place for intriguing and fun adventures for kids of all ages. Kolar (2017) defines an escape rooms as "...team-based games where players discover clues, solve puzzles and accomplish a specific goal (usually escaping from the room) in a limited amount of time" (p. 1323). Escape room adventure elements appeal to the growing popularity such as: intrigue, mystery, gaming, fun, excitement, winning, suspense, competition, interactive, puzzle solving skills, teamwork, engagement, logic, critical thinking, and problem-solving (Clare, 2017 & Vartan, 2017). Escape rooms are popular activities for entertainment, parties, and vacations. In addition, this interactive activity is invading other areas such as businesses, corporations, museums, and education. Audience appeal varies by theme; with an overarching premise of teams working toward a goal in a natural problem-solving environment (Stone, 2016).

The Room

Each escape room is theme specific and a system of play, whereas player (in groups) work together toward a common goal by solving unique and intriguing puzzles. Bers (2012) indicates that play constitutes a "playground" of learning, expanding, exploring and creating children's cognitive skills. Bers (2012) states: "The playground promotes...a sense of mastery, creativity, self-confidence, and open exploration" (p.23). Exploration of a physical environment, an escape room, permits playground like stimuli for learning through playful explorations such as puzzles and games. Escape room concept is a place (real or virtual) which engages and promotes important life skills with flexible but limited boundaries.

Research indicates that escape rooms provide engaging and fun experiences as an extension of game play to peak curiosity, a component in human existence (Kolar, 2017).

Mallenbaum (2018) states: "...quality time spent with friends, chance to show off...adrenaline rush...puzzling trend...are a few of the appealing attractions (p.1). These elements create an atmosphere of theatrics; a magnetism infiltrated by adrenaline rush, gaming elements, social interactions and solving puzzles. Escape rooms and its' games are trending and exciting brain-based team experiences incorporating various technologies (Clare, 2017 & Vartan, 2017).

Escape rooms are designed to engage participants by arousing the human sense of mystery, curiosity and intrigue in solving puzzles. Johnson (2006) stated that gaming offers a variety of exploratory methodology, making decisions with rewards help generate order and engaged players. Themed rooms are comprised of a series of clues and puzzles to excite and challenge team members as they work together to win or escape before time runs out (The Franklin Institute, 2017). The rooms are designed to maximize the gaming concept and transform the theme into a real-life and real-time game event with clues to solve puzzles setting up competition in a safe and organized situation, resulting in winners and losers.

According to Vartan (2017) escape rooms are a great tourist attraction because it lends itself to active indoor activities which are culturally rich. The escape room can be designed to inform the players about a specific landmark, crisis, including historical and current. If the weather is bad, an escape room is the place to be since it is an indoor activity. Other fields experimenting with the escape room phenomenon are businesses, corporations, museums, and schools. Kolar (2017) explains that escape room ideology in businesses enhance the team-building and morale of the employees. Within interactive museums, Allen & Gutwill (2004) states that specific rooms are theme-based which allure visitors to interactive stations and then entices them to interact which results in a reaction from the exhibit mirroring escape room elements such as curiosity, critical thinking, fun, and learning.

A rising interest in the education field, themed escape rooms and escape room games, comprise new forms of brain-based team experiences and learning within a classroom. Either within a physical place or in a virtual world; this model of engagement and critical thinking is evolving and creating an uproar (Randles, 2017). The virtual escape room can be implemented, curriculum tweaked, and shared throughout the district with very minor, if any safety and budget issues. The expense of a physical escape room can vary by theme and supplemented through grants. The theory of the escape room as described by Stone (2016): "... innovative way to bring technology and critical thinking into the classroom, and the benefits are twofold: Games have a history of promoting engagement in a learning environment, and the collaborative elements help students develop social skills" (para. 2). Students retain knowledge when they are actively involved which is the groundwork escape room are based on (Stone, 2016). Escape room experiences allow students to be involved in active learning, experimental learning, and hands-on activities in a safe place.

The escape room phenomena support multi-facet connections between curriculum content, 21st century skills, cognitive behaviors and fun activities. The wide range of cognitive skills are reinforced allowing for students "...to be a producer, not consumer in our global world" (Bers, 2004, p. 40). The game play moves students' past knowledge and comprehension into the Bloom taxonomy levels of application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Grantham & Grantham, 2017). The relevance in education is multi-faceted which involves critical thinking, teamwork, attention to details, communication skills, game theory and problem-solving. The elements are similar to video games and role-playing games, resulting in animated student involvement and creating intrinsic motivation to learn. Escape rooms and game design engages the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners. According to Stone (2016) escape rooms are just

now entering education and more research needs to be completed, and “...their (escape rooms) potential is undeniable” (para. 25).

My escape room (see Figure 1), *Escape the Evil Powers of a Mad Scientist* is based on intrigue and mystery involving solving puzzles to unlock the Earth’s superhero, SuperBot, who is held captive by an evil scientist. A team of junior scientists are tasked with finding clues, keys and puzzle pieces which will release SuperBot in time to save the world. Based in a science lab, as a team, the junior scientists sequentially need to figure out the clues to solve different puzzles at twelve different stations within an hour. Each station is comprised of an inquisitive scientific puzzle (binary coding, matching, fake receipt, matoran alphabet, invisible ink, popsicle code, black light, mirror decoding, number & color lock code on cups, etc.). Once correctly answered a lockbox (hidden or apparent) will open at that station. Inside each lockbox there is a key and an energy pack puzzle piece. Each puzzle piece is to be placed correctly on a puzzle board built into the wall called the “Energy Pack Puzzle Wall”. Once all twelve pieces are correctly placed on the wall, a drawer from “puzzle & lock box #5 cabinet” will automatically open containing a key and SuperBot’s fully charged energy pack. Next, as a team, they need to find the correct door that fits the key, the door opens to reveal SuperBot. The real energy pack is to be carefully placed into SuperBot’s shield. SuperBot awakens, triggers another door to open and everyone escapes, and the world is saved.



Figure 1. An escape room diagram representing twelve sequential puzzles and lockboxes.

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