



It is said that there are only two places where you spend more time than it takes to complete the assigned tasks. These two places are school and prison. The educational escape room offered to students of Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, Lithuania, by lecturer Evelina Bendoraitienė, PhD, has something in common with both of them. You have to get out of it, but simultaneously, you can learn something new. The key difference is that the time spent there passes quickly and is associated only with positive emotions. Lithuanian students seemed to confirm this proposition, as they loved this form of homework, had a lot of fun, and learned a lot at the same time.

ESCAPE ROOM



AS HOMEWORK

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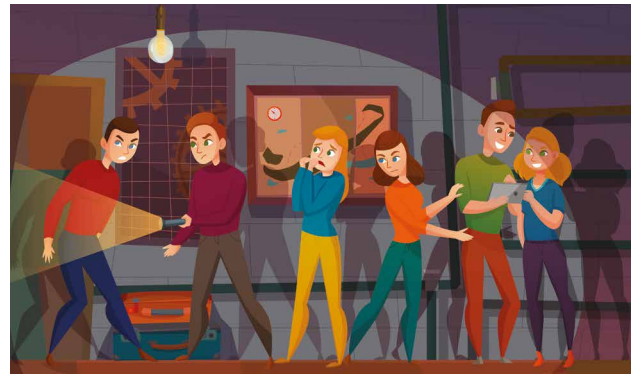


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An escape room is literally a room you have to escape from used primarily for entertainment. This is well known to Evelina Bendoraitienė, PhD, whose company offered this form of leisure activity in five Lithuanian cities. Over time, she expanded her offer, proposing projects based on the escape room idea in various private and public institutions. While working at a university, she turned it into an innovative educational method she offered to her students. ‘After completing my PhD, I knew that my future was in business. I didn’t think I would be teaching at all. When the opportunity came up, I decided to try it, and it turned out to be a good decision. I love it! I enjoy working with students immensely, and I am happy to know they enjoy my classes. This motivates me to be creative. Hence the escape room’, admits the scientist.

The first attempt to introduce the escape room method occurred two years ago. The students were divided into groups. One group prepared a scenario with tasks in the form of an escape room, while the other group had to solve puzzles their fellow students put together to get out of the room.

‘What surprised me was that the tasks prepared by the first group were challenging. I asked afterwards why and they replied that they didn’t want the second group to solve the puzzle too fast. The bigger the challenge, the more exciting it gets. It’s not easy; you

have to think and struggle a bit; that’s the secret to having fun’, she adds.

The students are responsible, among other things, for preparing the physical space in which the task is carried out. The first escape room resembled an aeroplane, and the task of the second group was to determine the landing coordinates so that the machine would not crash. ‘I was also involved in the task. Students contacted me each time they discovered more pieces of this complicated puzzle’, says Evelina Bendoraitienė, PhD.

Another challenge was to organise an educational escape room in a virtual space for a group of international students. There are suitable platforms to complete the task, although moving through real rooms provides greater excitement.

As it is a form of homework, in both cases, the students determine the time they work on the tasks. Their feedback is enthusiastic, and they get very involved in the activity. Other academics are also interested in the method itself, with whom Evelina Bendoraitienė, PhD, shares her experiences during workshops.

The most significant advantages of the educational escape room, she admits, are not only the information provided in a very creative way but also the opportunity to develop many competencies. These include: critical and logical thinking, cooperation and teamwork in general, effective com-

munication, scenario building, and creativity. It is also a great tool to motivate students to become more involved in the classroom.

The most challenging task, the VMU researcher admits, is evaluation. She wondered how to evaluate the students taking part in such a project. This is a type of knowledge that needs to be reviewed at the end. She asked each student in the class to evaluate the work of those in the opposite group. This included assessing the tasks in terms of their logical structure, attractiveness, and involvement. Students could also suggest changes that would improve the quality of the tasks in their assessment.

‘I can recommend the escape room form to teachers looking for interesting educational methods. You have to try it at least once to see if such a method works for you, if you feel comfortable with it, if the students like it, and if it suits your classes. I will certainly return to it regularly, and this year, I plan to combine a real escape room with a virtual space’ concludes the scientist.

The ‘Life Escape Room’ project by Evelina Bendoraitienė, PhD, was awarded in the international Innovative Teaching Award competition organised by the European University Transform4Europe.