Return on Experience - Latvia

To reflect on the experiencing, creating, working on, and testing educational Escape rooms in Liepajas Raina 6. Vidusskola or Citadaskola, we will refer to the 5 W question method: **what, who, where, when, how and why**, which will fully allow looking back at the project implementation, impact, and outcomes.

What? A theory, a method, an approach, and innovation! STEAMER project intellectual outputs were created to enrich teaching and learning with fun yet meaningful activities.

First, we discovered ourselves what an educational escape room is, then, what skills, knowledge, and resources are needed to create one; afterwards, we participated in designing the online course, which turned to be out the exercise before the real test-real STEAM educational escape rooms in our school. Even though first, it felt overwhelming to create three Educational Rooms on our own, to test them, translate all the rooms' materials, and test a partner's product, it also was very confusing to connect local historical figures and events with STEAM, then it seemed quite impossible to woven 60 min game for 5-6 people at a time on the timetable, to persuade teachers to use them and to find volunteers to lead the game…all these activities were as interesting as demanding for many school workers.

Who? The three English teachers, united by the love to games, who feel that gamification and Escape Rooms can become an effective tool for alternative education, were involved in the work at outputs much more often and much more than others. Others, mostly STEAM colleagues would share lesson plans and tasks, not really believing how that would be possible, but did everything willingly! Also, the project was led by knowledgeable leaders and without their assistance, without helpful partners, we would not achieve so much.

Where? At a state public school, where it seemed impossible to implement all the tasks along with everyday responsibilities and tasks. Lessons, on-line lessons, grading, planning…the pandemic made it triple challenging… Fortunately, teachers' vacations are two months, so the work would move to the garden, university, or a café. When the rooms were built-in into the three classrooms, it was a pity, we could not have permanent rooms for the Escape activities, as it was challenging to keep all

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the boxes, materials, decorations, and … locks. After testing the rooms and having them for more than a month at school, we learned how important it is to keep all the materials safe.

When? In between! Between lessons, between weekends, holidays, between Zooms, between main teaching work and household chores. The project's time management became a very big issue due to the heavy amounts of work to be performed, especially translations. Then as to make it even worse, a bigger challenge-lockdowns came. The work was stopped for almost 5 months when we could not implement our Escape rooms!

How and Why? We, the STEAMER team of Citadaskola, can say we love what we did, made, and created: the result, the Escape Rooms brought us the joy of contributing to our students' “citādas mācīšanas”, which means “unusual learning”, which made our students excited when running and searching the objects and clues, codes and ciphers, and which brought a bit more involvement and meaning into an ordinary STEAM class, and which contributed to our school’s value- bringing up future leaders and boosting curiosity.

First, our teachers and then our students were given a chance to test the rooms and that was a very exciting moment to wait for the first Escapers and ask them the very first question: So, how was it? And then, when we saw smiles on their faces, excitement, and surprise, it was clear everyone loved our products! Then, later, discussing the minor flaws, some mistakes, the failed locks, if too many hints, and disappointment to discover Math problems, Chemistry equations, and Physics formulas in the Escape game, we made few corrections, but everything worked really well. Although there were some critical eyes on the tasks by Maths teachers and some scepticism about applying the method and mostly on WHO will be ready to do it, we know that this is an accepted rule-there must be some negative views!

When the big STEAMER event opened its doors for more than 50 teachers from our school and more than 40 guest teachers from other schools, there was such a worry while presenting our work to the audience! Our team presented HOW to use the method, how to explain the procedure and the process of creating an escape room for the classroom, how to involve students in the learning and mostly WHY to do all this work. The STEAMER generator was met with great enthusiasm by teachers and

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brought a lot of questions; then working in small groups allowed to reach out more understanding of Escape Room method.

So, what is next? Our school staff acquired a technique, instructions, the course, facilitation, STEAMER webpage, the generator, the best practices, which all should make teaching and learning more meaningful and have a long-term effect on education. Our subject departments' leaders came with the great ideas on HOW to use this method for the next school year/years. The ideas we liked were to use the technique as a subject Olympiad, to have the room as a reward to motivate students, and as a tool for team building activities for students and teachers!

To conclude, the big work was done, the big deal was learned, a lot of teamwork was performed and a great experience was gained. Thank you, STEAMER, we will continue.

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