What happened to Puro Bergström? - Using Game-Based Learning in Information Literacy at Lahti Academic Library

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Information literacy teaching and guidance in higher education has been structured around global recommendations for nearly 20 years. First developed in 1999, the Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education presented a framework for assessing the information literate individual, providing five standards recognizing the different skill levels involved in finding, accessing, evaluating, and using information. (Schaub & McClure, 2017) After fifteen years with original framework, the rapid changes in information landscape required attention to be focused on the information landscape as a whole, and the need to organize the many concepts and ideas about information, research, and scholarship into a coherent whole. Thus, the new Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education is based on a cluster of interconnected core concepts, with flexible options for implementation, rather than on a set of standards or learning outcomes, or any prescriptive enumeration of skills. (ACRL 2015)

According to Walsh (2015) one of the main challenges in information literacy teaching in higher education is to find a right way to equip students with higher level, transferable, information skills. In addition, traditional lectures often lack interactivity between the teacher and learners, even though it has been shown that interactivity acts as a driving force in learning.
The learning occurs more likely when the learner interacts with other learners, the content and the instructor. (Kapp et al., 2014)

Game-based learning may be one route to address this challenge, for the creative explorations that play encourages can help the students to become information literate in a way that is not currently widely addressed in Higher Education Institutions. (Walsh, 2015)

Game-based learning (GBL) usually refers to using digital games to teach knowledge and skills. However, Clarke et al. (2017) point out that GBL doesn't have to be limited to digital games, lessons from GBL can also be used in non-digital games e.g. card, role playing and possibly even in escape rooms to achieve defined learning outcomes.

Escape rooms in libraries are not an entirely new idea, even though they have mainly been used for library orientation and in public libraries (see O'Reilly 2016, Reade 2016). In higher education setting, Pun (2017) has created an instruction program focusing on information literacy and research skills applied to the escape room concept. According to Pun (2017), this kind of game-based teaching session could promote information literacy in a way that is relevant, thoughtful, and creatively challenging.

Gynther & Prykäri (2017) also observe that escape rooms are fitting for information literacy teaching as evaluating information often requires similar skills to solving escape rooms: detective work, discovering clues and solving puzzles. The tasks presented in escape rooms require applying knowledge, which is at the heart of information literacy.
The Design Process

The staff at Lahti Academic Library started designing an information literacy escape room in spring 2017. The design process started with defining clear learning outcomes derived from the information literacy curriculum. This was followed by writing a narrative for the game and planning puzzles and tasks that could be easily moved as we didn't have the luxury of converting a room into an escape room. This resulted in a murder mystery, where a student Puro Bergström is murdered in the library and the players have to solve the murder so that they too won't end up dead. Time is of the essence.

Two small groups playtested Murder in the library before it was used in a classroom setting. The testing phase helped to further improve the narrative and weed out some inconsistencies that were noted by the test groups.

Our Experiments in Using Escape Rooms in IL -teaching

The students found this way of learning fresh, fun and exhilarating. We observed during the playthrough that the students discussed the information literacy topics e.g. authority and quality of publications in more detail than they would have done in a traditional lecture, thus enhancing the socio-constructivist element of the class.

Hence our preliminary observations echo Kapp et al.'s (2014) findings that GBL provides more opportunities for interaction and visible application than traditional lectures. Kapp et al. (2014)
also argue that interaction and engagement is needed for meaningful learning.

The feedback collected from the students was generally positive, and the participants felt that the learning outcomes were met. The students also found the escape room a suitable method for teaching information literacy and would recommend attending a different type of class to their fellow students.

Inspired by the encouraging feedback and observations we are planning to develop the game further so that it covers all the key concepts from the information literacy frames (ACRL, 2015) and thus further improves the students' transferable information skills and helps them to become increasingly information literate.

References


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