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Classroom activities that take on the characteristics of games, puzzles, and simulations are found throughout all disciplines and at all levels of education. Merely styling an activity as a "game," however does not guarantee or perhaps even imply that it will demonstrate the "ludic" qualities that are inherent in a game where "ludic" is taken to mean playful, fun, high-spirited, or enjoyable. Four important aspects that make an activity ludic are that it should 1) appeal to a sense of competitiveness (players should want to win); 2) appeal to curiosity (players should want to know what will happen next); 3) be immersive (it should transport players away from the sense of "doing work" while still achieving the purpose of being educational); and 4) be collaborative (players should benefit from working with others rather than seeing them as a burden they must carry along). This is a tall order. Few of the classroom games I surveyed for the purposes of this project could truly be said to fulfill any of those requirements as they are either too dull and plodding to inspire curiosity, too thinly (and often condescendingly) disguised as a pedagogical activity, or lacking in motivation for students to care who prevails. Often, they require only the real efforts of a few lead students while the others straggle along as spectators. Lacking in context and continuity, they cannot achieve the kind of immersion that a satisfying game requires. As Karl M. Kapp writes, true "gamification" must involve "game thinking," the inclusion of "competition, cooperation, exploration, and storytelling" and cannot be limited to the mere application of "game mechanics" such as leaderboards, "badges and rewards" (Kapp 11-17).

Put another way, "the existence of game-like elements does not translate directly to engagement" (Lee and Hammer 2).

Many classroom game exercises could benefit from application of the above enumerated principles, which I found to be perfectly exemplified in a recently popularized activity known as an "escape room." An escape room is a form of entertainment that places a set of players into a room where they must solve a series of puzzles and clues to complete a set objective and "escape" the room. An escape room is generally undertaken by a group of 4-6 friends or associates who must complete the objective within an hour, and each room is unique in its puzzles, theme and setting. Their popularity arose in the 2010s. ("Lucrative Business"). Some common themes include zombies, psych wards, science laboratories, hostage situations, terrorist plots, and the supernatural. The complexity of puzzles and the difficulty of first locating and then interpreting the various clues is such that the solution within the one-hour time limit is virtually impossible without the equal participation of all team members and efficient, clear communication among them. Sometimes outside knowledge may be necessary, though usually intuition and logic are the primary skills needed.

As an example, a puzzle in one escape room I observed consisted of a set of passports. A collection of color swatches found elsewhere indicated the sequence in which the passports must be "read." Then the sequence of travel described by the passports must be traced out with a marker on a world map (requiring knowledge of some obscure geography). The route traced reveals a series of numerals which are in turn used in a subsequent puzzle.

The example above demonstrates several important aspects of the escape room that are relevant to this discussion. Elements of the solution must be addressed sequentially, with the "conquest" of each element leading to another. The sense of a continuing, forward-moving narrative is of course closely linked to the concept of immersiveness since "finality," "closure," and "score" all negate the possibility of "gameplay over long stretches of time" and are therefore anathema to the attempt to become "immersed in a socially, culturally, and sensorially complex ecology" (Sheridan & Hart-Davidson, 325-326). Though reasoning and insight are important to solution of these puzzles, outside knowledge which could require research must occasionally fill in the gaps. As well, there is too much going on for any one person to tackle the project single-handedly, requiring leadership and collaboration.

Immersiveness is one aspect of the escape room that is rapidly developing. The use of automated technology such as computers, audio players, and cell phones, increasingly elaborate decoration (such as a detailed simulacrum of the Oval Office), and even the use of live actors are upping the ante, making escape rooms more interactive, theatrical and atmospheric. ("Behind the Locked Door").

The escape room has been so successful an enterprise, a single room potentially generating annual revenue upwards of several hundred thousand dollars, precisely because it meets each of those four requirements. In the following sections, I will describe a number of classroom games that I either observed or originally developed and how they can benefit from applying the principles of the escape room. As James Gee writes in relation to video games, the point is not simply that "we should use video games for learning in and out of

schools. It also means that we should use the learning principles built into good video games in and out of schools even if we are not using games" (Gee 198).

The Lifeboat Game is a classic team-building exercise of unknown origin that exists in many variations. The basic concept is that players must choose 6 out of 10 candidates to save from impending disaster based on very short capsule descriptions of their assets and defects and then justify their decisions. Typically, the assets are skills that can help an isolated group of persons survive in a post-apocalyptic setting while the defects relate to poor health, questionable morals, or anti-social behaviors. In one variant offered by "Taking the Escalator," a motivational program for overcoming substance addiction, the capsule descriptions are based on various forms of substance abuse. In all variants, the goal is usually to foster cooperative decision-making among the team members and to facilitate a discussion about the ethicality of valuing one life over another. In the critical thinking classroom, there is an additional emphasis on the concept of the warrant, the logical link that an advocate impliedly creates between the claim (e.g., "save this person") and the evidence offered (e.g., "this person is good at farming"). Upon conclusion of the lists, students are asked to share their choices and articulate the warrant in play for each choice (in the above example, "we should save people with skills that will benefit others," or "food is important" or "our selections should reflect our belief that we will not receive help from the outside world for a long time." The difference between good (widely shared) warrants and bad, narrow ones is then discussed. As an additional layer, a discussion can be had about the overall warrants that drove each group's understanding of what the game was about. Were they operating under the assumption that the point was to repopulate the world or just to preserve the best lives for the survivors? Was the underlying moral

imperative to save the useful, those who are most likely to survive, or those who are most innocent (interestingly, this latter is almost never in play).

This is an effective exercise for helping students to understand what warrants are and how they matter. Students becoming surprisingly invested in their support and criticism of the fictional characters considering how brief and cursory their descriptions are. However, those brief descriptions and the bare "staging" of the scenario are far from immersive, the exercise is a one-shot project, and in the end students are not engaged with one of the motivations that resonates most strongly with them – the desire for their views to prevail. There are, after all, clearly no right answers and therefore no winners.

The following modifications, therefore, are proposed. Make the most of the students' investment in these thin, sketchy characters. Let the above activity constitute merely the first "round" of the overall activity, and set aside a small group of students to serve as judges rather than participants and to write their findings as to which team made the most compelling arguments, identifying which arguments were particularly strong, which particularly weak, and where two views competed directly, what made the prevailing view stronger. After completion, present the students with more elaborate fact sheets about each of the characters, giving them a back story and adding new assets and liabilities that complicate their original presentation. Teams must now defend their original choices in light of these new discoveries, capitalizing on new assets and minimizing or deflecting liabilities for their top choices and doing the converse for their opponents' picks. During a third round, new information about the "island" or other environment in which the survivors find themselves is revealed and students must again defend their choices in light of the new information. This serialization of the narrative, as with the escape rooms

discussed above, simultaneously adds immersiveness and depth to the plot while

heightening the incentive to win as players become increasingly committed to defending

their choices. In a final round, each team writes its own narrative of events designed to

highlight the soundness of their decisions while undermining the choices of other teams. At

the end of each round, the judges again assess the merits of each team's arguments,

observing logical fallacies where applicable.

The short story "A Jury of Her Peers" by Susan Glaspell tells the story of Minnie

Foster who has been arrested on suspicion of strangling her husband in his sleep. The story

is set at the beginning of the 20th century and centers on two neighboring women who

accompany their husbands to the scene of the crime where their observation of "trivial"

details in the home reveal the truth of what happened, a truth that eludes their patronizing

husbands. That truth is (or at least seems to be) that Minnie Foster was the object of her

husband's physical abuse over many years and that, isolated and helpless, she killed him in a

fit of psychosis. These conclusions are all left to the inferences of the careful reader,

however, rather than being explicitly stated. The two women resolve to keep their

observations to themselves and thereby obstruct Minnie's prosecution.

In the classroom, students are divided into two opposing teams with a set of judges and

they debate three questions: 1) Did the women do the right thing in concealing evidence; 2)

If all the facts were known, is there a legal argument that could save Minnie from conviction

for murder; and 3) does the story effectively advocate for inclusion of women in the jury

process (which it purported to do) or the contrary? This activity as described already has a

strong motivational component as students are eager to have their views accepted as

correct. The questions touch on two subjects dear to most students' hearts: the griefs that

each gender has against the other, and a knowledge of how the law "really" works.

However, the activity has a few failings. The size of the teams usually means that a good

number of the players play a tacit role. Also, many of the arguments given are speculative

and lack substantive support.

A variation of this activity employing the principles of the escape room might look

more like the following. Concentrate on one single question: "If all the facts were known, is

there a legal argument that could save Minnie from conviction for murder?" Break the

question down into component parts that require more substantial research and distribute

the tasks to individual students. What is the law of self-defense? What is the law of legal

insanity? Has either been applied in the context of a battered spouse? What is the modern

thinking about why a battered spouse chooses to remain in the household? In what sense is

harm from a domestic abuser always "imminent"? What were the legal options for a woman

in the 1900's? How do the facts of the story support the inference that Minnie was a

battered woman in the first place? Or the inference that she acted without premeditation?

There are plenty of questions to go around and, importantly, the failure of any one student

to follow through on their assigned obligation will not be fatal to the overall argument.

Once the information has been compiled, students will present their arguments

dramatically, simulating a mock trial in which characters role-play Minnie, the women

investigators, an expert on the law of self-defense, an early 20th century historian, etc., and

present their findings in a question-and-answer format followed by closing arguments. This

aspect of playing meaningful roles that are fruitful for learning is a core aspect of Lee's and

Hammer's definition of "gamification": "By making the development of a new identity

playful, and by rewarding it appropriately, we can help students think differently about their

potential in school and what school might mean for them" (Lee and Hammer 3). Each

person can also be cross-examined by designated persons on the opposing team. In this

way, a single-day assignment can become a project in collaborative writing, substantial

research, and argument with rebuttal. As Douglas Thomas and John Seely Brown point out,

the struggle to plan a strategy and "perform tasks in concert with others" is a precept of

gaming with strong parallels to the tasks required in collaborative writing (Thomas and

Brown 159). The role-playing adds immersiveness, and the serial presentation of witnesses

creates the sense of a developing narrative complete with the suspense of a legal drama.

 Scotland, PA is a film inspired by the plot of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in which an

overly ambitious fast food employee is goaded by his manipulative wife into killing the

restaurant's owner and seizing control of the business. The murder scene develops more as

a dark comedy of errors than as a cold-blooded thriller, and the result is a sequence of

events that could serve as the fact pattern for a comprehensive course on the law

concerning homicide. Specifically, the perpetrator abducts and binds his victim, threatening

to drop him into a fry cooker filled with boiling oil if he will not divulge the combination to

the safe. In the climactic moment, the perpetrator punches his victim, then grabs him to

keep him from falling but is startled by something else and consequently drops his victim

into the fryer unintentionally. Is the death intentional? Is it the logical and probable

outcome of other intentional actions? Do the preceding actions constitute extreme

recklessness as to the value of human life? There is much room for debate concerning not

only the physical acts leading up to the death, but also all the conversations by the

perpetrators leading up to the event which offer insight into their frusratingly ambiguous

states of mind.

Later in the movie, the perpetrator's wife intuits that her husband will kill his friend who has become suspicious (the "Banquo" figure of the plot). She takes certain actions with the intent of helping her husband but because she does not truly know his plan her actions are of dubious value. Is she an accomplice? Does it matter if her helpfulness was not actually helpful? Does it matter that her husband is unaware of her attempts, or that the plan she thinks exists is not actually the plan?

The activity I have used in the past concerning this film has been to assign teams to argue for the innocence or guilt of husband and wife in each of the two crimes. Although there is a wealth of evidence to use which makes for a great opportunity to build arguments with textual support, the format is often chaotic and the debate devolves into nit-picking. As well, students often work from an imperfect memory of the events.

An improved version of the activity would benefit from application of the elements of the escape room. Here, the wealth of evidence is the asset to rely on for there is enough for each team member to be assigned a specific scene or sub-segment of a scene. Working with either a video clip or the screenplay transcript, each student contributes a portion of analysis for their assigned scene in coordination with the overall strategy of the team. This ensures true collaboration.

Fortunately for the sake of the learning experience, there is no clear answer as to the guilt of either character. Thus, once the students have made their arguments and presented their evidence, a second round can begin in the guise of an appeal. As part of the appeal, students are presented with a series of analogous cases that could be used in support of either position. This second wave of complexity initiates the serialization of this particular narrative as students must now continue to defend their positions in light of this new

guidance. This process can be extended a second time with further readings, challenging students to build their skills in comparison and contrast as they struggle to convince their audience that the cases which favor their side are highly analogous while those that oppose are clearly distinguishable.

With this, as with other trial simulations the great danger is that it will become a victim of its own success and devolve into chaos as students too zealously attempt to shout each other down. While an excess of enthusiasm is a nice problem for a teacher to have, this lack of order runs the risk of stripping the activity of its educational value and becoming a game for gaming's sake. A few adjustments to the rules of procedure can help address this. To begin, allowing students to "cross-examine" other students can be an invitation to trouble. Many students lack the tact or professionalism (naturally) to couch their questions in a way that is fair and respectful. The result is often resentment and defensiveness, leading to a 'meta-debate' about who offended whom rather than the subject that was supposed to be under consideration. One solution is to have opposing questions filtered through the instructor who can both weed out irrelevant/redundant questions and also present the remaining ones in a manner that is conducive to useful debate.

Endless rounds of circular arguing can also be avoided by a combination of time limits and turn limits. Allowing each side one turn to present and one turn to reply with strict time limits ensures that students organize their information most effectively and prevents stand-offs where neither side is willing to cede the last word to the other. Finally, vague, unsupported, reactive arguments can be prevented by requiring that every assertion presented must be preceded by presentation of an actual excerpt from the text – an analogue to "turning over discovery" to opposing counsel. If no text excerpt is supplied to

ground the argument, the argument is simply not allowed to be made ("not allowed into evidence").

Another approach to ludic pedagogy has been the actual playing of standalone games in the classroom as part of a larger activity. One game that has been put to such use with great frequency is Side Meir's Civilization and the various sequels it has engendered. In Civilization, each player takes on the role of an ancient civilization and builds an empire in competition with others by conducting exploration, warfare, and diplomacy, micromanaging units and cities in an ever-growing network of production and resource accumulation. Each player has to make decisions about movement of units, improvements to cities, building of roads and rails, allocation of resources between research and taxation, forms of government and religion, advances in science, and how to transform the land for maximum benefit. Threats arise in the form of incursions and clashes with rival civilizations. The game is of tremendous scope, spanning from the pre-Bronze Age through the Space Age. Victory can be achieved in several ways, including the elimination of all foes, the achievement of space colonization, a diplomatic triumph, or cultural domination.

The pedagogical aims of playing such a game either in class or as an out-of-class assignment divide roughly into two groups. One common trend is to focus on the process of playing the game as a subject for reflection and exposition. Since often "students have little access to the discourse communities that they are writing about or attempting to write within," resulting in their production of writings with 'decontextualized meaning,' the idea here is to allow them to write about a process with which they are presumably familiar" (Colby and Colby 301). Students write and present about what their strategy was and how they implemented it. They write about what they discovered in the game's mechanics that

was not necessarily divulged in the documentation or review the strengths and weaknesses of game design. In other instances, they write "how-to" pieces in which they guide others to achieve the successes or avoid the failures that they experienced. Since games of this nature operate according to highly complex algorithms whose workings are difficult to know, one popular type of assignment involves qualitative research and experimentation in an effort to induce the mechanics that drive the game. For example, one instructor uses the similarly complex World of Warcraft ("WoW") game to create a writing assignment wherein students conduct "controlled and semi-controlled quantitative experiments of WoW game mechanics that are posted on the Blizzard forums and other websites. Students can learn basic statistics, the importance of a large sample size, and the basics of the research method through these experiences." (Colby and Colby 309).

As another example using a simpler game, Jason Custer of Florida State University relates his experience with his class playing the game Papers, Please (a simulation of an immigration official who must learn to detect fraud and handle increasingly complicated scenarios of immigrants applying to enter the country). In Custer's words, "We. . . discussed the game as a set of processes, and what argument those processes seemed poised to make by creating collaborative Google Slides presentations in small groups and presenting them in class." With this and other simulation-style games, Custer encouraged his students to answer "questions about how these representations match or deviate from the general opinions or stances established based on formal research, and why those differences might matter to someone playing the game" (Tarsa).

The other common trend is to focus on the game as a purported simulation of human history (or other experience) and to write about ways in which the game succeeds or

fails in capturing the rhythms and processes by which human societies evolve. For example, one aspect of Civilization is that a civilization cannot hope to keep pace with the military might, cultural significance, or diplomatic importance of rival nations without adopting the same technologies, even where those technologies are harmful to the environment. Eventually, the need for speed in transporting goods and for range of distance requires modes of transportation such as rail and later flight that cause pollution, creating at times more problems than are solved. Another phenomenon is the question of isolationism whereby nations who refuse to interact with others fall behind because they lack the trading connections that permit diversity and exponential growth – yet international interaction invariably leads as well to social discontent due to cross-fertilization of foreign ideas and new iconoclasms.

Although the high degree of sophistication in such games makes them appealing, this approach to integrating "play" into the classroom is fraught with far more difficulty than the others studied. Games like Civilization are complex and require a substantial effort to learn, time that detracts from course content. The method of play is beyond the ability or interest of many students, and a deep polarization often arises between the students who take naturally to these types of games and those who have no interest whatsoever. In short, far from a seamless integration with other class material, introduction of these sorts of games is often highly disruptive and problematic (Koster 42).

As with everything in teaching, the need for balance is key. A game must be intricate and sophisticated enough to engender interest and engagement, but not so much that it alienates those who are not gamers by nature or that it threatens to take over the curriculum. The entertaining aspect must be cultivated but not to the exclusion of the

educational goal. Undoubtedly, some experiments venture into excess but the vast majority

of games being conducted in the composition classroom still err on the side of reserve, and

there is great potential to push the limits further and with considerable reward.

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