Medical English Escape Room

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Short summary:

I designed and ran an escape-room style game in which participants must work together to solve a variety of puzzles within a limited time for my medical English students as both a review for the final exam and a fun activity for their final lesson with me. I decided to do this to both end the school year on a memorable high note and to give my students a chance to learn in a novel way to help boost their recall of some of the test content. I will be talking about the process of planning, creating, and running the game, along with some of the challenges that I encountered, as advice for other teachers who may want to do something similar.

Game information

Title: Medical English Escape Room

Publisher: I created this activity myself, but was inspired by Fiona Wall Minami's 2024 LLP talk about escape rooms, as well as escape rooms that I have experienced in the US.
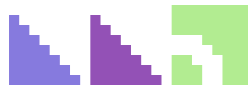
Availability: The activity used common objects and materials that would be available at any dollar/100 yen shop, such as a small cooler box, a bicycle lock, and plastic vials, as well as items that students should have with them such as pencils and smartphones.

Technology requirements: The only technology that was needed for the activity was a smartphone to be able to scan the QRcodes and listen to the audio files that were recorded by me.

Cost: Roughly 1000 yen for materials.

Play time: Students were given 1 hour to complete the puzzles and open the locked box.

Player count: Classes had an average of 20 students, who were asked to make groups of 3-4 people. With a larger space and more copies of the game materials, any number of players would be able to take part. In the case of multiple classes, each room would need a teacher/monitor.

Other important details for classroom implementation: Teachers may want to include a hint system for groups that get stuck on a puzzle, or otherwise monitor groups and see if any are struggling and need help. For example, each group could be given a set number of tickets that could be given to the teacher in exchange for a hint or some kind of assistance. In my case, students did not ask for hints, but I provided some suggestions and ideas for groups that seemed to be struggling or focusing on the wrong details.

For students that have difficulty focusing or staying on task, it may be a good idea to ask groups to decide on roles for each player. These roles might include a leader (keep the team focused and on task), a writer (take notes of important clues and hints, track which puzzles have been completed), timekeeper (manage time and set priorities), and an explorer (search the game environment for hidden clues, look for details that other members might overlook). In my own class, there were some students who seemed less motivated and let the other members of their group do most of the work, so I feel that assigning clear roles would help to balance out the work.

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"comfort zone" to engage with novel
objects and tasks.

Why is the game important for play (for ludic literacy)?

1	It creates an atmosphere of fun, challenge, and mystery. Most students have heard of or participated in escape rooms before, so they came to class knowing that it would be very different from a normal lesson.
2	This was a largely analog/physical activity. Students needed to move around the room, arrange pieces of paper like a jigsaw puzzle, manipulate small plastic test tubes, and finally open a physical combination lock to open a box. In normal lessons, students mostly interact with their textbook, notebook, and smartphone/laptop screen, so this experience pushed them outside of this "comfort zone" to engage with novel objects and tasks. In a small but still significant way, this helps to mirror the work they may do in the future, which will not always be predictable or based on a textbook.
3	Unlike the tasks and activities that we normally did in class, these puzzles were presented with no instructions, and students had to think, experiment, and collaborate to both find out what each puzzle was asking of them and how to solve it. This required a very different mindset that focused on independence (little or no direction from the teacher) and teamwork (depending on other members to progress). Without direct instruction, teams approached puzzles in different and creative ways, such as moving together to find and memorize information hidden around the room versus splitting up to try and cover the whole room at once. My students seemed excited by this extra layer of puzzle, and most of them worked hard to figure out how to progress.

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very helpful for forcing me as a teacher to
look at the lesson content (vocabulary,
prefixes/suffixes, medical questions) in
different and interesting ways.

Why is the game important as a teaching tool (for pedagogic literacy)?

1	Some of the puzzles presented the lesson content in unique and memorable ways, such as scanning a QR code to listen to an audio clip of a patient describing their symptoms, and then having to match that clip to a specific illness or medical condition. This adds an aspect of realism and authenticity to the overall experience.
2	Students were given limitations during the activity, such as a 1 hour time limit and not being allowed to use their textbooks or notes. They needed to work together as a team to complete each puzzle, making this an exercise in collaborative learning and problem solving. At first some students seemed frustrated but quickly they tried to rely on their own knowledge and that of their teammates. Also, without access to notes, I feel that many students were more open to making mistakes.
3	The creation and planning process was very helpful for forcing me as a teacher to look at the lesson content (vocabulary, prefixes/suffixes, medical questions) in different and interesting ways. Though some of the puzzles are straightforward matching or word-jumbles, I wanted to include other aspects such as words hidden around the room, a jigsaw puzzle that required players to tape a paper back together, and QR codes that linked to audio files.

How will you show/play the game on the day at the event?

I have a document with photos, explanations, and the original puzzles that I will share. I would also like to have participants try some of the puzzles themselves, so I will prepare some of them in a way that works digitally.

Sample puzzle: 🔷 Medication Calendar puzzle

Presentation slides: 🟨 Medical Escape Room

All puzzles and materials: 🔷 Medical English Escape Room