Assessment in Practice

Escape!
How to Build Faculty Assessment Teams Through the Use of Escape Rooms

Denise Kruizenga-Muro and Jude Whitton
Riverside City College

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Assessment is often met with moans and groans no matter how much you try to change the hearts and minds of your community. If, however, you incorporate something new and innovative this can create the buzz and new type of interactivity that your college can benefit from. An escape room can be useful because it requires your colleagues to collaborate on solving an assessment-based problem creatively and innovatively which could ultimately lead to innovative work and solutions on their real assessment projects. Breakout games have the potential to help your participants develop communication with one another and the assessment-specific skills you want them to hone in on and develop together (Rouse, 2017).

CULTURE OF ASSESSMENT AND THE PROGRAM ASSESSMENT WORKSHOP

Over the last five years, Riverside City College (RCC) has made significant progress in enabling faculty to understand the value of assessment across campus. In an effort to create a culture of assessment, administration and faculty formed the Assessment Committee, which was tasked first with getting faculty familiar with what assessment is and then getting faculty to move from simply doing assessments to recording assessment results and discussing those results with others. Today, thanks to a concerted effort by the Assessment Committee, and its offshoot, the Program Assessment Workgroup, RCC has a culture of student learning outcome assessment.

While course-level assessment has been on-going in several forms over the last few years, program-level outcomes assessment began in earnest in 2016-2017 with the formation of the PAW, or Program Assessment Workgroup, consisting of faculty representatives from each campus division. We were pleased to have broad representation on this workgroup because we knew getting buy-in from our colleagues would require a close connection between individual faculty doing assessment and the broader campus community, especially considering that many of our programs are interdisciplinary.

The PAW's work included creating a vision statement that guided our work; developing specific goals, including building program-level assessment models; and strengthening communication between faculty and departments.

With the hiring of the dean of institutional effectiveness, continuing vigorous outreach efforts, and the creation of the PAW, the foundation for the culture of assessment was laid. While this culture change came with its challenges, as any change does, most faculty at RCC came to see the value of examining the assessments they were already doing. We are now at the point where most of our faculty are assessing their student learning outcomes, many have moved into program-level outcome assessment, and we are ready for regular and sustained program-level outcomes assessment college wide.

ESCAPE ROOM PURPOSE

As new assessment coordinators, we knew we wanted something big to kick off the college's push toward program-level outcome assessment. But what? We considered our options and realized quickly that just another presentation would not do what we wanted. We knew we would need something that would be both fun and educational, something that would teach our colleagues about assessment while getting them involved in a hands-on activity that would show them how to think about program-level outcome assessment. An escape room game seemed like a great option.

WHAT IS AN ESCAPE ROOM?

An escape room is an adventure game in which participants solve a series of puzzles using clues, knowledge, and strategy to complete the particular objective. Since their inception, escape rooms have been played by friends, families, and colleagues. More recently, they have been used as forms of collaborative learning by educators. In general, escape rooms are typically done over a set amount of time during which participants look at clues that have been left around a themed room. If this is done well authentic learning, collaboration and contributions can be made. If it is not done well, it can become a time-consuming gimmick with plenty of fun, but nothing of value.

We found that an escape room can be a useful tool for a variety of reasons. Many of the same skills used in escape rooms are also required when completing assessments. Colleagues have to collaborate to reach a common goal while overcoming challenges and changing their fixed mindset when it comes to assessment.
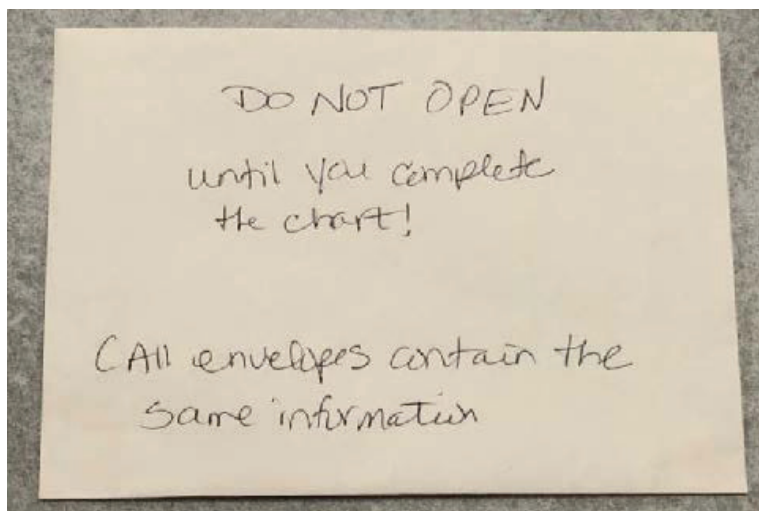
ESCAPE ROOM GAMES

We set up an escape room scenario involving a sick colleague who, due to an illness, was unable to complete her assessment project. It was then up to the participants to complete their sick colleague's project. There were four tasks overall that needed to be completed. The teams had an hour and a half to finish them, and the team who completed first won.

An escape room is an adventure game in which participants solve a series of puzzles using clues, knowledge, and strategy to complete the particular objective. Since their inception, escape rooms have been played by friends, families, and colleagues.

Since the event was attended by individuals from across the college, some of whom were very familiar with assessment and others who were not, we needed everyone to speak the same language. Therefore, the first task was an assessment terminology word scramble with terms drawn from Linda Suskie's book Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide (see the Appendix for sample task materials). The completion of the task led to discovering the first step of program-level assessment: setting goals.

The second task then allowed the participants to think about whom assessment should be shared with so that it can be useful within an institution. For this task participants had to move through a different room, their colleague's office, where they deciphered this clue by using their colleague's shorthand found amidst a desk filled with files, student papers, and red herrings. The players found that there are both internal and external audiences for assessment, and it is imperative to think about these audiences when completing assessments.

The third task took the players to another room, where they examined direct and indirect assessment to see which type of assessment had the four characteristics necessary for useful assessment. The participants looked at artifacts on their colleague's desk sorting them into direct and indirect assessment categories. Once they sorted the artifacts into categories, they used the first letter of each assessment type to unlock a box that had the key to get out of that particular room and move on to the final task.

The final task required players to collaborate and integrate what they learned throughout the game to develop a plan for beginning program-level outcome assessments. The participants had to brainstorm what the assessment team might look like and then create a direct assessment that could be done. Once this was completed, the players received their final task: a jigsaw puzzle which, when assembled, revealed the key to good program assessment—the word "teamwork."

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POSTSCRIPT: BEST PRACTICES

In the weeks since our escape room game played out in real life, we have had a chance to reflect on its impact on our college and the best practices it highlighted. If you are creating an escape room game for your colleagues, here are some best practices.

1. **Don't panic!** The same knowledge used to prepare a lesson for the classroom is the same used to create an escape room. Begin with your outcome in mind and work from there. You want to ask yourself questions like: Why are you doing this game? What do you want colleges to learn from this exercise? What will be the most important idea that you want to cover? Remember that you always need to keep your overall goal in mind, so the escape room does not just become a gimmick with no larger purpose.

2. **Don't reinvent the wheel.** You do not have to start from scratch creating a game. There are many sites you can visit to get ideas, from Pinterest to Teachers Pay Teachers. These sites can help you generate ideas for the types of games you might want to have your colleagues play and can provide templates for answer keys or clue sheets. Or perhaps you even have an escape room expert on your campus!

3. **Get creative.** All escape rooms have a plot to give the game a purpose and to immerse participants in the game. You will need to create the scenario. Our escape room involved a sick colleague. Maybe many of your colleagues are fans of zombie movies; create a zombie-themed escape room. If sports are popular on your campus, maybe a local sports hero has been kidnapped and needs saving by completing assessment-related puzzles. You can be the judge based on your campus culture.

4. **Don't skimp on the props.** The more realistic the scenario feels, the more fun it will be. We included boxes of tissue in each room, cough drops scattered around the desk, and plenty of antibacterial wipes for participants to wipe the desks down so they didn't catch their colleague's flu. Escape room locks, puzzles and riddles can amp up the adventure and excitement. Again Pinterest, Amazon and other sites will help you in finding the various types of gadgets you can use. For our escape room, we purchased locks from Amazon and had our college's graphic design team create our jigsaw puzzle

5. **Don't forget a test-run.** When we did our test run, we found small glitches that could have proved disastrous if not discovered. You may discover issues within your game or even in the narrative itself. You may also uncover various objectives you were hoping to achieve aren't being met.

6. **Recruit room monitors.** On the day of your game, you will need to have room monitors who can check on the progress of your participants, watch them struggle, give hints when needed, and ultimately check off their clue once completed. Speaking of struggling, let your participants struggle. Room monitors should be instructed to provide hints to the solution but not give the answer.

7. **Debrief and assess your escape room game.** You cannot just run the escape room and move on; you have to provide players with a chance to process the activity they just did. You want to go back through the tasks again to make sure that everyone understood the process because some players may have watched passively. This provides an excellent opportunity for your participants to share how they collaborated, what they discovered, and how they worked as a team. Not to mention that this will also give you perspective on how the activity went. We also advise that you do some direct assessment of your participants, such as a brief questionnaire at the end that will give you general insight as to how things went overall.

The same knowledge used to prepare a lesson for the classroom is the same used to create an escape room. Begin with your outcome in mind and work from there. Ask yourself: What do you want colleges to learn from this exercise?

REFERENCE

Rouse, W. (2017). Lessons learned while escaping from a zombie: Designing a breakout EDU game. *The History Teacher, 50*(4), 553-565.

TASK #1: TERMINOLOGY

It appears that your colleague was studying assessment terminology found in Linda Suskie's book *Assessing Student Learning* when the flu hit her and left her brain a little fuzzy and disorganized.

Unscramble the words and fill in the blanks. Then unscramble the letters to see what the first step in program-level assessment should be.

TASK #1: TERMINOLOGY

- Teaching, learning, and <u>mesasnsest</u> should occur on a continuous cycle.

- Assessments should be used to improve teaching and <u>nnilerag</u>.

- A program should not have any courses that don't help students achieve a <u>algo</u>

- A <u>magropr</u> is more than a group of courses.

- <u>Tapscone</u> courses are a good place to administer a program assessment.

- Program-level assessments can bring <u>ytlfuac</u> from diverse disciplines together.

- Research papers, presentations, and performances can all be appropriate program-level assessments. <u>Oflpoiorst</u> can also be used for program-level assessments.

- The best program-level assessments have a clear <u>soppure</u>.

Write your answers on the answer cards, and then move to the next task.

TASK #1: TERMINOLOGY ROOM MONITOR KEY

1. Teaching, learning, and _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ should occur on a continuous cycle.

   - Answer asSessment, key letter S

2. Assessments should be used to improve teaching and _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _.

   - Answer lEarning, key letter E

3. A program should not have any courses that don't help students achieve a _ _ _ _.

   - Answer Goal, key letter G

4. A _ _ _ _ _ _ _ is more than a group of courses.

   - Answer prOgram, key letter O

5. _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ courses are a good place to administer a program assessment.

   - Answer capsTone, key letter T

6. Program-level assessments can bring _ _ _ _ _ _ _ from diverse disciplines together.

   - Answer fAculty, key letter A

7. Research papers, presentations, and performances can all be appropriate program-level assessments. _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ can also be used for program-level assessments.

   - Answer portfoLios, key letter L

8. The best program-level assessments have a clear _ _ _ _ _ _ _.

   - Answer purpoSe, key letter S

- KEY TO EXIT THE ROOM: SET GOALS

ESCAPE ROOM

Answer Sheet

TASK 1: Terminology

1. ☐☐▨☐☐☐☐☐☐☐
2. ☐▨☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐
3. ▨☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐
4. ☐☐▨☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

5. ☐☐☐☐▨☐☐☐☐☐☐☐
6. ☐▨☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐
7. ☐☐☐☐☐☐▨☐☐☐☐☐
8. ☐☐☐☐☐☐▨☐☐☐☐☐

The first step in program-level assessment should be:

Code Words: ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

The shaded letters will reveal the letters for your code word. Unscramble the letters to reveal your word

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ESCAPE ROOM

Answer Sheet

TASK 1: Terminology

1. ☐☐▨☐☐☐☐☐☐☐
2. ☐▨☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐
3. ▨☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐
4. ☐☐▨☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

5. ☐☐☐☐▨☐☐☐☐☐☐☐
6. ☐▨☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐
7. ☐☐☐☐☐☐▨☐☐☐☐☐
8. ☐☐☐☐☐☐▨☐☐☐☐☐

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About NILOA

- The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) was established in December 2008, and is co-located at the University of Illinois and Indiana University.
- The NILOA website contains free assessment resources and can be found at http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org.
- The NILOA research team has scanned institutional websites, surveyed chief academic officers, and commissioned a series of occasional papers.

NILOA Staff

Natasha Jankowski, *Director*

Gianina Baker, *Assistant Director*

Katie Schultz, *Project Manager*

Erick Montenegro, *Communications Coordinator & Research Analyst*

Verna F. Orr*, Post-Doctoral Researcher*

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