EDUCATIONAL ESCAPE ROOM COURSE – FROM THE 1:1 SPACE, THROUGH THE BOX, TO THE VIRTUAL PUZZLE GAME

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Abstract

• This poster presents a methodological course for pedagogy students (prospective teachers) at the University of Silesia in Katowice. The course titled *"Educational Escape Room"* has undergone a transformation in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, evolving from the traditional in-person format involving the construction of physical escape rooms in a 1:1 scale and miniature escape rooms to the virtual version. Currently, the course is delivered in a blended learning format, incorporating all three forms. Methodologically, the course introduces the escape room method while substantively exploring diverse topics.

Introduction and the Context

• The course has been running for one semester and includes 15 teaching hours every two weeks, with 1.5-hour sessions held either offline, online, or in a combination of both. In the academic year 2023/2024, there are plans to increase the course hours to 30 teaching hours.

• In its full version, the course is designed for students of early and preschool education at University of Silesia in Katowice, while in its abbreviated version, it serves as a working method for students of pedagogy and other teacher education programs within the Teacher Education Block. Since 2022, it has also been offered as an English language course for Erasmus students.

• The classes heavily rely on the use of various digital tools. In the case of virtual escape rooms, the delivery is conducted 100% online. For the mini escape room and the 1:1 version, devices such as tablets, smartphones, laptops, AR glasses, and tools like QR codes, ciphers, SMS communication, and others are employed. Integrating traditional methods with ICT tools constitutes an essential element of the course.

Blended Learning Version of the Course

• The aim of the classes is two-dimensional: on the one hand, the participants get to know and learn the method itself and how to use it in the future in the work of an educator, teacher, or trainer. They practice the methodology and learn about digital tools that can support this method. On the other hand, they learn the substantive content when designing an escape room and then participating in its solution. In the last academic year, the content was focused on media literacy and media and digital education.

• Classes are conducted in a hybrid version. Participants of the course have the opportunity to learn about three types of escape rooms:
1. A virtual escape room, completely designed and implemented in an online space
2. A mini version of a "box" escape room, where the entire project and game take place in a limited space (for example, several boxes, a dollhouse, a separate part of the floor, tables)
3. Escape room 1: 1, when the entire lecture room is turned into a puzzle room
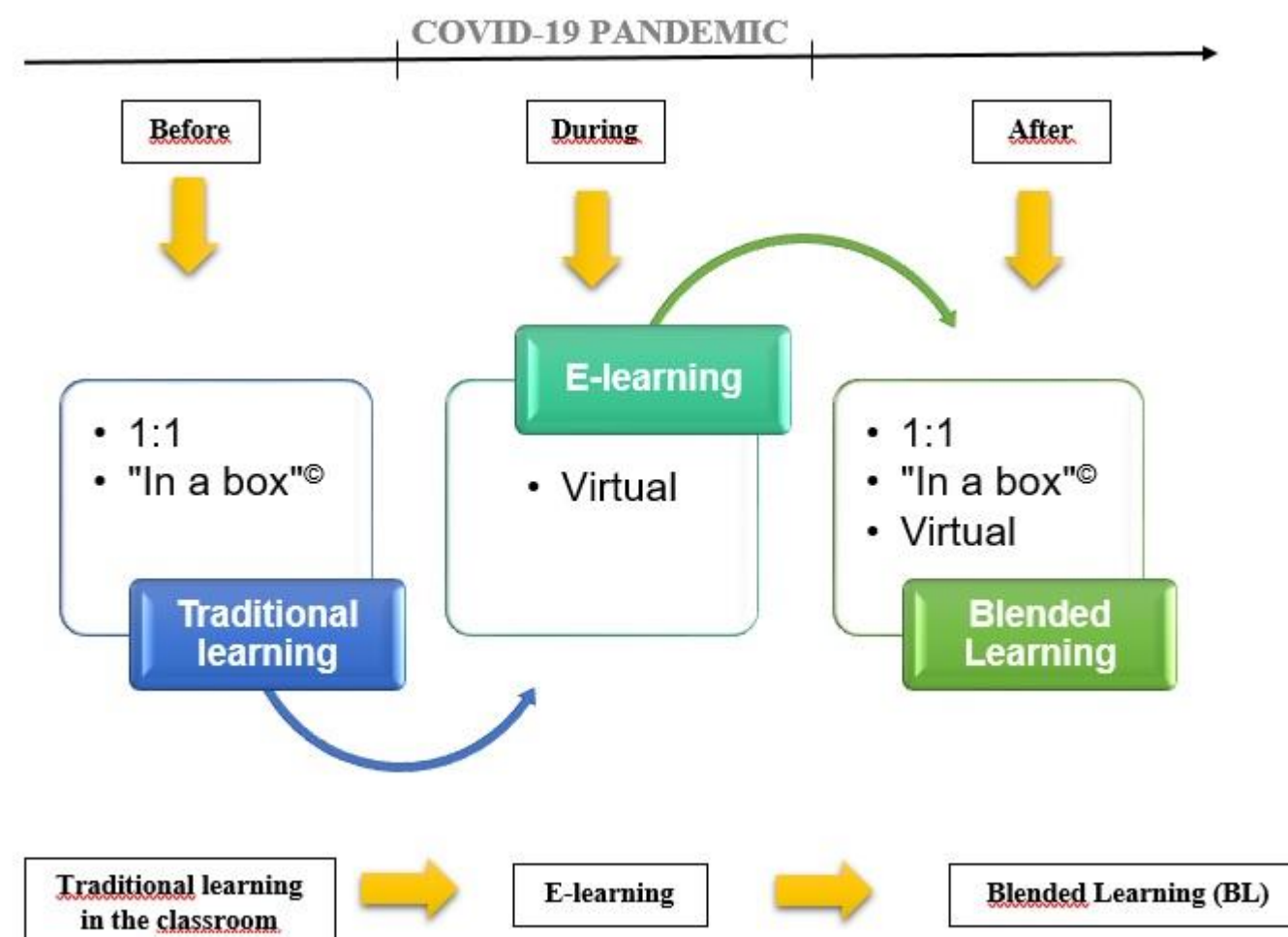
Photographs from Didactic Sessions Implementing 3 Forms of EER
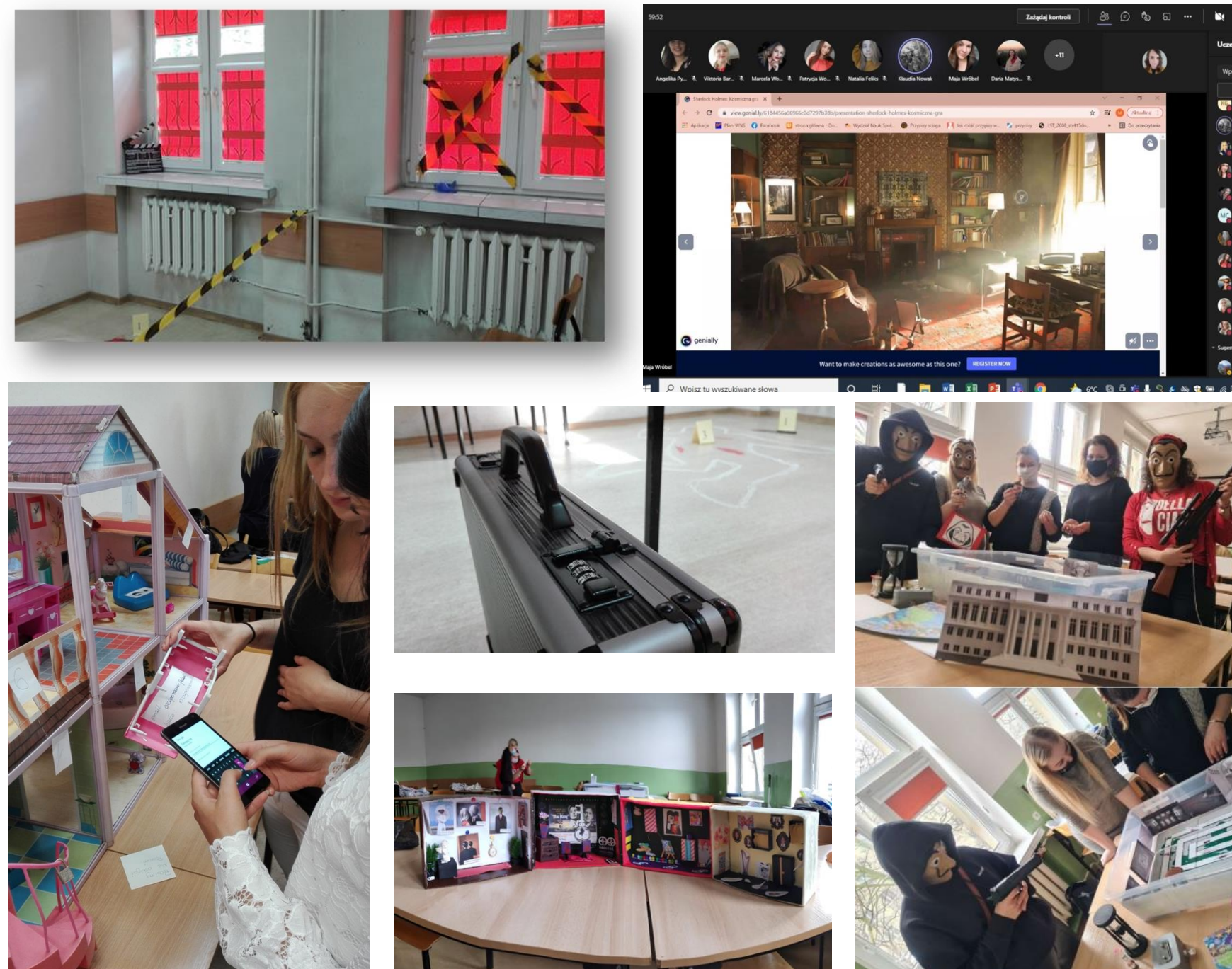
10 Steps' Structure of the Educational Process in a Semester

The hybrid cycle of semester classes usually takes place according to specific phases:

I. As participants, students learn about various escape rooms assigned by the teacher. They perform tasks, play, and solve puzzles.
II. Students are divided into teams of several people and receive a substantive topic - a batch of knowledge that their puzzle room should carry out.
III. Students deepen their knowledge of a specific topic
IV. The lecturer explains the mechanics of different types of escape rooms, i.e., miniature version, 1:1 version, and virtual version. The lecturer presents the tools.
V. Students choose the type of escape room they plan to create
VI. Students in teams undertake creative and design work, the so-called desk work
VII. Students start implementing projects, i.e., either preparing a completely digital or traditional version with the use of ICT solutions in the lecture hall
VIII. Students take up the challenge of solving tasks in escape rooms created by other teams
IX. Summary and discussion on both the methodology, substantive topic, and social interactions
X. Evaluation

Advantages and Benefits for the Group during the Course

In the social sphere, the results are:

- group integration and development of social competencies for cooperation with others (the possibility of participant observation, the result verified in the summary discussion), which is essential in the context of future teachers and the idea of lifelong learning

In the technological sphere:

- development of media and digital skills (result in the form of ready-made projects; 100% of teams prepared a complete project using various technological tools; prepared projects also concerned the subject of media and digital education)

In the substantive sphere:

- increase in knowledge about the method itself and the selected substantive topic (measurable results are ready-made scenarios and links to ready-made educational projects)

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