# Using escape rooms to teach information literacy

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## Introduction

How to make library instruction (LI) more relevant and engaging for students has been a question asked by many librarians. A traditional lecture, with demonstrations and a few active learning activities, has been used for years to teach new students of Farm Management and Technology (FMT), a cegep-level program, how to use find and use library materials. During the session, students exhibited a lack of interest, which manifested through chatting with friends or playing with their cellphones.

To engage students and make it more fun, I decided to create an educational escape room.

## What is an escape room?

Originated in Japan, escape rooms are "live-action team-based games where players discover clues, solve puzzles, and accomplish tasks in one or more rooms in order to accomplish a specific goal (usually escaping from the room) in a limited amount of time" (Nicholson, 2015).

Each clue, puzzle and task required will build on each other to help students learn how to use new research tools, assess the credibility of the information they find and develop new searching skills in a playful manner.
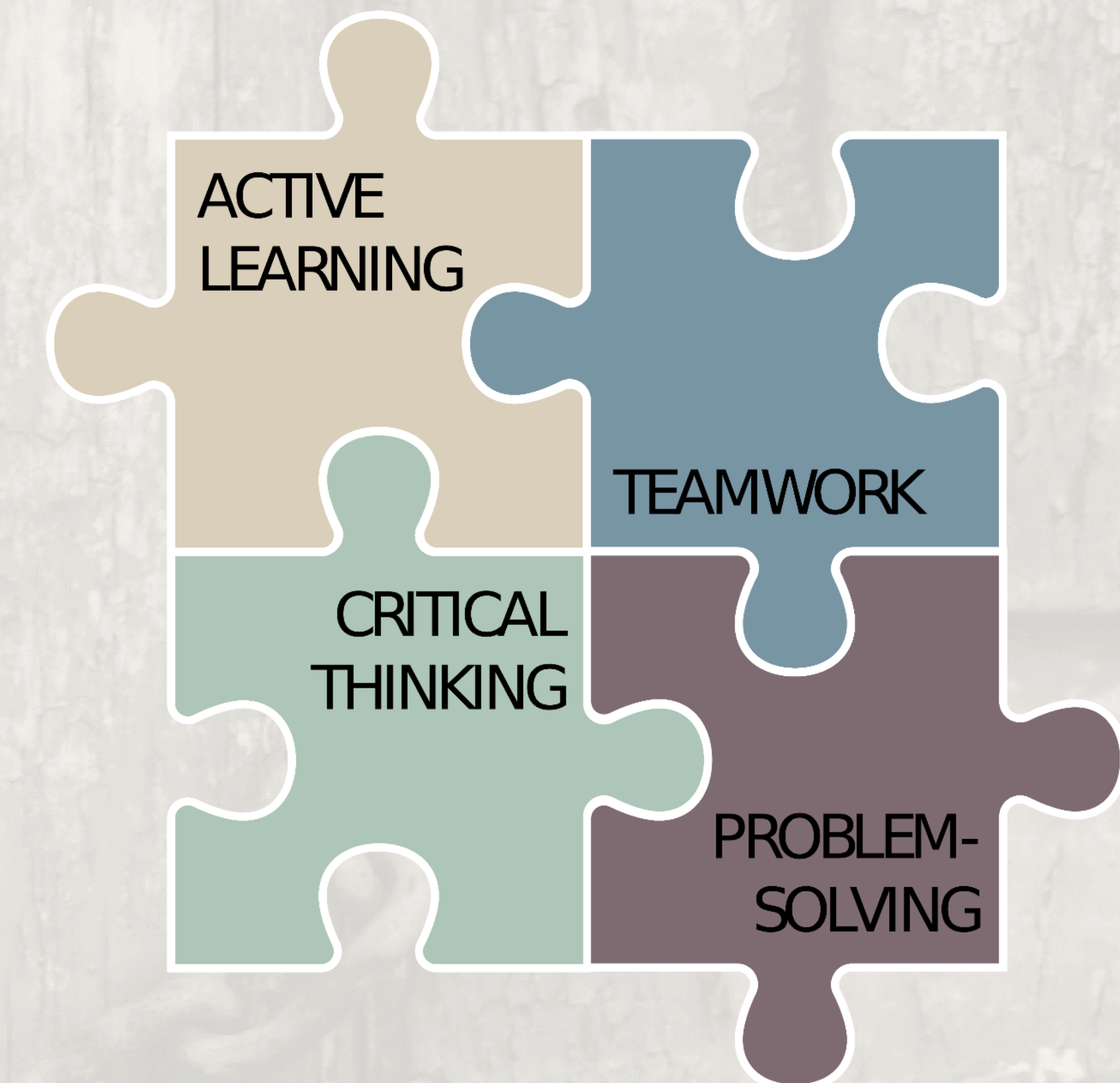
An example of clues: an old letter and keys

## How?

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

A LI escape room encourages students, through play, to develop their information literacy skills, such as searching the catalog, finding books using the call number, creating a reference. The ACRL Framework and the original lecture were used to design clues players had to solve to escape the room.

### NARRATIVE

Even though there is a debate as to which, puzzles or narrative, is more important (Nicholson, 2017), a compelling yet simple story will catch the players' interest from the start. The players' role and the end goal of the game are also determined by the narrative.

### ATMOSPHERE

Music, ambient sounds and a few well-thought-out props, chosen to fit into the narrative, will greatly contribute to the quality of the experience and make the game more immersive. To increase the sense of urgency, a countdown timer will do the trick.

### PUZZLES

If the narrative hooks players in, the puzzles are the game's backbone. Tasks, puzzles and clues must be consistent with the narrative. Backward design and a clear flowchart will ensure that all puzzles are accounted for and serve a specific purpose.

### TEST

To evaluate clue difficulty and length of the game, it's important to have volunteers try out the room before its first run. Some adjustments may be required to enhance the players' experience, which will become apparent with feedback. A trial run is also useful to assess how long it takes to reset the room.

## Why an escape room?

ACTIVE LEARNING

TEAMWORK

CRITICAL THINKING

PROBLEM-SOLVING

This problem-based game would also give me a look into the information-seeking behavior of these cegep-level students.

## Next steps

- Finish puzzle and clue flowchart
- Test escape room with first-year students before official run
- Pre- and post-test FMT students to determine if escape room is a success based on knowledge retention and interest

## References

Association of College and Research Libraries. (2016). *Framework for information literacy for higher education*. Retrieved from http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework.

Nicholson, S. (2015). *Peeking behind the locked door: A survey of escape room facilities*. Retrieved from http://scottnicholson.com/pubs/erfacwhite.pdf

Nicholson, S. (2016). Ask why: Creating a better player experience through environmental storytelling and consistency in escape room design. Retrieved from http://scottnicholson.com/pubs/askwhy.pdf

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Photo of keys by Nietjuh found on Pixabay
Photo of locked door by dimitrisvetsikas1969 found on Pixabay

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