



Hiscape the fog – Be ready to 'room' around

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Abstract

In Portugal, there is a noticeable growing disinterest for the study area of Social Sciences and Humanities to the detriment of the Science and Technologies study area. While living in a society that values a practical kind of knowledge ready to be used in various jobs, subjects that require insight tend to be discarded, which influences the mindset of educational agents. Therefore, from the idea of a “Humanity without Humanities” (Savater, 1997), the project *Hiscape the Fog – Be ready to “room” around* comes to light, with a practical duration of 6 weeks, extending to a year for evaluation purposes. The project was designed by professionals graduated in Educational Sciences, having taken place within the curricular unit Training, Work and Social Exclusion, lectured by professors Sónia Ferreira, Simone Almeida and Luís Alcoforado. Moreover, it is noted that the present project was guided and supervised by Professor Dr. Simone Almeida. The main objective of this project is to promote the increase of the average History-A grades in the school where it will be implemented. In order to frame the project's dynamic, we would opt for a more active and interactive methodology applied to the school context, more specifically secondary schools. For this, we would adapt the traditional *Escape Room* concept, which meets the parameters we referred to earlier. This method is based on the search of, following the example of Young's words, “valuing the knowledge and moving a pedagogy focused in the student's experience and founded in disciplinary contents” (2010, quoted by Festas, 2015, p. 717). Regarding the used analysis technique, we settled with the SOAR technique (strengths, opportunities, aspirations and results). As for the results, we intend to embolden the motivation and fondness of studying the aforementioned subjects, thus improving the student's performance in their assessments, mainly the national exam. Finally, we suggest the implementation of similar projects in other areas of the school curriculum. Furthermore, it's also possible to adapt the content in accordance with the History programs of other countries that might be interested.

Keywords: History-A, *escape room*, active methodology, humanities

Resumo

Em Portugal tem sido notório o crescente desinteresse pelas áreas das Humanidades, em detrimento das Ciências. Vivendo hoje numa sociedade que valoriza cada vez mais o conhecimento prático pronto a ser utilizado no mercado de trabalho, disciplinas que envolvam uma reflexão mais introspetiva tendem a ser descartadas, o que por sua vez acaba por influenciar o *mindset* dos agentes educativos. Assim, partindo da ideia de se estar a promover uma “humanidade sem humanidades” (Savater, 1997), surge o projeto intitulado *Hiscape the Fog – Be ready to ‘room’ around*, cuja duração prática seria de 6 semanas, prolongando-se a 1 ano para fins avaliativos. O projeto foi desenhado por profissionais licenciadas em Ciências da Educação, tendo decorrido no âmbito da unidade curricular Formação, Trabalho e Exclusão Social, lecionada pelos docentes Sónia Ferreira, Simone Almeida e Luís Alcoforado. Ademais, denota-se que o presente projeto foi orientado pela Professora Doutora Simone Almeida. Este tem como objetivo principal promover o aumento da média de História-A, na escola em que for implementada. De modo a enquadrar a dinâmica do projeto optar-se-ia por dinamizar uma metodologia mais ativa e interativa, aplicada no contexto escolar, mais concretamente, do ensino secundário. Ou seja, adaptar-se-ia o conceito tradicional de *Escape Room* que vai ao encontro das características anteriormente abordadas. Justifica-se este método pela procura, que Young explicita recomendando a necessidade de se “valorizar o conhecimento e de se deslocar uma pedagogia centrada na experiência do aluno e alicerçada em conteúdos disciplinares” (2010, citado por Festas, 2015, p. 717). Em relação à técnica de análise utilizada, elegemos a técnica SOAR (strengths, opportunities, aspirations e results). Quanto aos resultados, pretendemos fomentar a motivação e o gosto para estudar a matéria supracitada de forma a melhorar a prestação dos alunos nas avaliações, no caso específico do exame nacional. Por fim, deixamos como sugestões a implementação deste tipo de projeto noutras áreas do currículo escolar. Além disso, há sempre a possibilidade de adaptar o conteúdo em conformidade com o programa de História de outros países que estejam interessados.

Palavras-chave: História-A, *Escape Room*, Metodologia ativa, humanidades

Introduction

The curriculum constitutes a set of knowledge and competencies which must be attended to and promoted in the school context. However, what is “known” or what is intended to be hidden is the particularity and emphasis given to the technical-scientific domain, of which “teaching plans tend to reinforce scientific or technical knowledge”, the so-called practical utility, seen as indispensable for the job market. Concretely, this involves a sharp separation between science and literature, where one seeks, fundamentally, to replace learning with doing. Thus, based on the idea of promoting a “humanity without humanities” (Savater, 1997), and that children and young people are “a new human being and [are] on the way to becoming a human being” (Arendt, 2006), the importance of safeguarding a complete humanity is a necessity, where all professionals linked to education, including specialists in Educational Sciences, reflect and practice responsibility for the world, not approving it but effectively assuming it for what it is. Because those who love the world sufficiently, must be able to save it from ruin. As Damião & Valenzuela (2018) indicate, we need knowledge that humanizes, moving us away from the humanist narrative, and bringing us closer to humanist education.

The area of Humanities is in decline, losing more and more importance in the national curriculum, which chooses to overvalue certain subjects to the detriment of others. Reproducing Schleicher 's words, he says in an interview with the *Observador*, that Portugal "(...) needs to be careful to educate children for their own future and not for our past" (Carriço, 2017). Continuing, the director of the Directorate of Education of the OECD then says that “to limit education to the transmission of academic knowledge is to run the risk of stupidizing students, reducing them to competition with computers” (Carriço, 2017). This type of discourse shows the discredit that the more theoretical areas are suffering, with a tendency to place the more technological, practical areas in the foreground. This type of speeches, which become guidelines, open the doors for giving more importance to the sciences than to the humanities at a national level. When looking at the number of classes in both areas, there is an imbalance between them, with a tendency towards the sciences area. In fact, it is by studying what happened (through a certain perspective) that a chronological thread is woven, allowing the historian to compose a history, which in turn is available to be changed/added, in case any discovery justifies it. However, the so-called lay past does not necessarily have to be discarded, one cannot just be guided by it, since it does not have the same robustness as the historical past.

Lee (2011) continues, this time quoting two authors himself, Plumb and Oakeshott, and says that “(...) without history there [can] be no rational past” (p. 25). If there is a need to understand the past, then we need to “(...) seek the best knowledge we can obtain about it” (pp. 25-26). Opposing the argument that there is no use for History (and since usefulness is such an acclaimed aspect these days), the author then alludes to the fallacy in which individuals live, who choose to ignore the past, even saying that “if our knowledge of the present world is never an “instantaneous knowledge”, and brings us, whether we like it or not, some substantive conception of the past, then, to be historically ignorant is, precisely, to be ignorant” (p. 26).

Entering now the field of history teaching itself, it must be based on evidence, thus allowing its students to acquire ways of analyzing and interpreting the facts presented to them, in order to be able to extract the maximum amount of information (Lee, 2011). Returning again to the topic of the usefulness of History, Lee (2011) poses the following question: “if the study of history does not offer laws on which predictions can be based, can it offer everything that will give us some product in the future?” (p. 32). Having the idea that it is possible to predict certain future events based on similar past events, then come into question predictions without scientific content (Lee, 2011). The author then explains that, even if general laws are not used, it is still possible, at certain times, to make predictions that, despite not having a prescriptive character, can help clarify the present. In this context, one of the ideas that most alludes to History arises,

that is, that it is cyclical (which repeats itself), and that, consequently, it is used as one of the points to, in a way, prove “its value”. Having briefly stated some particularities that make History so important, we then move on to the need to captivate students who have embarked on this path of study. Many, unmotivated, do not understand why History is such an important subject, and end up creating barriers in learning it. This is where the project in question comes in.

According to Ordine (2017), “if you don’t understand the usefulness of the useless, the uselessness of the useful, you don’t understand art”, this means that it is a mistake to reinforce the idea that certain knowledge is more important than another, because deep down it is not about expectation as an end in itself, but about a reality as a means to an end, where in a society prospers the instrumentalization of education in deteriorating areas considered more introspective (such as Philosophy and History). Therefore, although the main objective of the project is to promote an increase in the History A average of a school in the municipality of Coimbra, it reinforces the need to question the extent to which disciplines linked to the Humanities are recognized in the curriculum, and how one can act to enhance them. It is, therefore, following this guideline that the project entitled *Hiscap the Fog: Be ready to ‘room’ around* was idealized, from which, focusing its attention on the discipline of History, an attempt was made to promote a more active, interactive and different methodology, applied in the school context and in secondary education.

Young (2011) in his work points to the importance of conceiving a curriculum that is intrinsic to the motive that is intended to be developed in the other, as a form of engagement and not mere compliance (pp. 610-611). But to what extent can active participation be promoted and act differently in order to encourage the intellectual development of young people? It is with this basic question that the game *Escape Room* was resorted to, that is, according to the English dictionary Merriam-Webster (2012):

a game in which participants confined to a room or other enclosed setting (such as a prison cell) are given a set amount of time to find a way to escape (as by discovering hidden clues and solving a series of riddles or puzzles).

The choice of an active method is based on the search for the student's cognitive involvement according to what they already know (prior knowledge), not so much based on memorizing content, but on meaningful and contextualized learning. This method is justified by the demand, meeting the words of Young, in “valuing knowledge and moving towards a pedagogy centered on the student's experience and grounded in disciplinary contents” (2010, cited by Festas, 2015, p. 717). The active method is, from the perspective of Bidarra and Festas (2005), “(...) anyone who enables the student to construct a representation of the new information to be learned, is anyone in which the student is cognitively active, regardless of whether or not he is behaviorally active”. Therefore, as Willingham (2009) states: “(...) curiosity leads people to explore new ideas and problems, but when they do, they quickly assess how much mental work will be required to solve the problem” (p. 7). It is necessary to know how to captivate the student without overloading him, to teach but not to preach. Regarding the use of the *escape room* and quoting Taraldsen et al. (2022), who in turn reference Bober (2010), although it is known that “game-based learning is not new in the educational environment (...)”, the truth is that “(...) not much is known about the use of escape rooms in education” (pp. 170-171). However, in his literature review Taraldsen et al. (2022) note that a large part of the available literature concerns areas related to science, such as mathematics, or in the case of higher education, professions related to health. It is important to highlight the potential competencies that the *escape room* intends to promote, explicitly the critical and problem-solving abilities of students, using specific knowledge in the area in question. In addition, we also emphasize the increase in deductive capabilities to be able to connect the dots, the threads that lead to the resolution of the *Escape Room*.

Hiscap the Fog: Be ready to ‘room’ around it is, therefore, a combination of the struggle to counteract the tendency to ignore the humanities, specifically History, making reference, in a pun format, to the myth of D. Sebastião (which in this case represents the hope of promoting change), from the use of the game *Escape Room* (Hi + escape to the fog), where the end of this activity will be the discovery of clues in the space designed for which they will have to try to leave in time. Through the title, the aim is to indirectly and enigmatically project the objectives at hand, the dynamic theme, and the methodology used to work with its contents.

Methodology

With the main objective of promoting an increase in the average of History-A and taking into account the nature of the data in this project, we have chosen to use a quantitative methodology, more specifically from the collection of statistical data for later analysis and comparison. A quantitative study, according to Vieira (1995), aims "essentially to explain the phenomena, according to a deductive logic", characterized "by respect for a sequence of steps, so it is common to say that this type of investigation follows a pre-defined structure of specific moments, each one of them deriving from what preceded it" (p. 10). Specifically, it is about welcoming statistical techniques, firstly, descriptive and later, inferential, since it is intended to characterize the target audience of the project, in order to consequently draw conclusions "about the relationships and differences found in the investigation" (Borg, 1987, p. 100) . In addition, it is worth emphasizing the use of a wide range of data collection techniques, since, according to Amado (2014), "(...) methodological triangulation, (...), was one of the fundamental strategies for validating a study" (p. 206).

That said, the following idea is proposed as a hypothesis: employing a more active methodology, there was an increase in understanding and consequent performance in the History-A discipline by the project participants. For this, we will try to understand how the students reacted to the dynamization of the *escape room*, if this method was valued as a means to motivate and consequent favorable response to this same methodology. In order to implement this methodological procedure, a school year was idealized. However, in practice, the project would last for 6 weeks, with the remaining time (before and after putting it into practice) used for preparation, monitoring and evaluation, respectively: in preparation, an attempt would be made to develop context and document analysis as adapted to the needs and interests of those involved; after this diagnostic procedure, the *escape room* would be implemented, adapting to the class and schedule of each school. Accordingly, we consider organizing groups of 4 to 6 elements so that there is greater flexibility in their constitution. As an example, in order not to disturb the functioning of the school, we chose to place one group per week to make the project more viable, resulting in its extension for 6 weeks. Finally, in terms of monitoring and evaluation, they would be divided as follows: in the short-term evaluation, this is done according to the application by the teacher of two evaluation tests (before and after the implementation of the escape room), and in the last one, this would include a set of optional questions regarding the content dealt with in the *Escape Room*; in the long-term evaluation we would use the national exam if it covers the content addressed in the project. Furthermore, we highlight the application of satisfaction questionnaires with the aim of perceiving the repercussions and effects of the project on the student and teaching community.

Participants

Regarding the sampling, it would focus on Humanities classes in the 12th year of secondary education. This, although being relatively small (<30 students), it would be "(...) representative of the population (...)" that is proposed to be studied, namely the History students, considering that "(...) it's intended to generalize the results (...)" (Vieira, 2007, p. 61). Vieira (2007) defines the concept of sampling as being "(...) the selection of a certain number of subjects representative of a given population" (p. 61). Continuing, the author highlights the idea of target population, which for Vieira (2007) consists of "(...) all members of a real or hypothetical set of people, events or objects, to which the results obtained in the study are intended to be generalized" (p. 61). With this, Vieira (2007) indicates that, for reasons of practicality (and even feasibility), researchers opt to form smaller groups, or samples, from the target population they intend to know. Since the idea of the project would be to cover the widest possible audience (with the exclusion criteria being the refusal of participation by parents and/or students), randomization of the sample is not applicable in this context. In this sense, the information regarding the composition of the sample would then be made through document analysis, namely the composition of classes (taking into account the Normative Dispatch n°10-A/2018, of June 19, 26 to 30 students per class are foreseen). Therefore, it can be considered that the sampling in question could be a cluster sampling since "(...) the sampling unit is not the individual, but the groups, as they present themselves, naturally" (Vieira, 2007, p. 68). However, we

acknowledge that opting for this type of sampling may raise some constraints, particularly with regard to the generalization of the results obtained.

Context analysis

The analysis used, entitled SOAR (table 1), presents four parameters: *strengths*, *opportunities*, *aspirations* and *results*. In this way, it is a strategic analysis tool, which is based on the SWOT analysis, and is intended to generate positive results, in this case, for the school in question (Nisembaum, 2021). Thus, by carrying out this analysis, which allows the visualization of the school's positive points, weaknesses, desires and goals to be achieved, an attempt will be made to present a dynamic view of the current position of the school and where it wants to go. It should be noted that the aspects presented later are in line with a model school in the municipality of Coimbra selected with the aim of guiding the context analysis and, consequently, data collection and analysis.

Table 1: SOAR Analysis

Strengths	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum matrix organized and with programmed contents based on the document <i>Student Profile on Leaving Compulsory Schooling</i>; • <i>Essential Learning</i> document that organizes a set of knowledge, skills and attitudes to be acquired by the student; • Compulsory education for all students; • Materials available to all – textbooks; • Qualified teachers; • Summative assessment in order to take stock of the learning developed; • Balanced distribution of the workload that allows a longer period to study; • Balanced distribution of subjects throughout the week; • Measures to promote educational success (ex. multidisciplinary team and pedagogical support). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous training of teachers related to the curricular contents taught and also related to the needs of the school's functioning; • Openness to work with other institutions; • Coordination between teaching and non-teaching staff; • Promotion of extracurricular activities.

Aspirations	Results
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage students prepared for higher education and for the job market; • Originate autonomous and gifted students with critical thinking; • Create better interpersonal relationships; • Develop creativity and self-help; • School known for the positive development of averages in national exams. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement of the school's national <i>ranking</i>; • Improvement in the average grades of national exams, namely in the History-A subject ; • Implementation of more dynamic and active learning;

Methods and techniques

In this sub-section, the methods and techniques that would be used in the collection of information and subsequent treatment will be discussed. As Vieira (1995) says, “the different objectives that motivate researchers to develop scientific studies, and the nature of the subjects in question are factors that condition, in a way, the type of techniques chosen for data collection” (p. 72). Starting from this idea, and looking at our project, we found that, taking into account the project's objectives and the context in which it focuses, the most appropriate method to be applied would then be the quantitative method. For McMillan and Schumacher (1989, quoted by Vieira, 1995), “the main objective of collecting data from a quantitative investigation is to obtain ‘descriptions, relationships and statistical explanations’, whereby various techniques can be used to summarize, in numerical form, often large amounts of information” (pp. 73-74). With this, and noting that a documental analysis would be applied (analysis of the students' grades both in the test referring to the matter hosted by the *escape room* as the previous one, as well as verification of what is given greater prominence in national exams), we highlight the idea that the various techniques that incorporate the methods are not reserved only for them, and can be used, in certain cases, in studies in which the base methodology does not align with the chosen method (Vieira, 1995). However, and returning to quantitative research, this places greater emphasis on “(...) the use of rigorous data collection techniques, many of them standardized (...), which ensure the validity and fidelity of the collected data” (p. 74).

Choosing to insert *structured observations*, these would consist of “(...) [the] observation of phenomena [being] guided by predetermined categories of responses” (McMillan & Schumacher, 1989; Adler & Adler, 1984, quoted by Vieira, 1995, p. 76). Therefore, these observations would be aided using previously made observation grids, which in turn would allow employing “(...) their counting, resorting to descriptive statistics techniques (ex. frequency, percentage, proportion)” (p. 76). For this, the summative assessment tests, applied by the teachers of the subject in question, would be taken into account, in order to understand whether the project had a positive impact on the performance of the students. These tests are seen by McMillan and Schumacher (1989, quoted by Vieira, 1995) as “(...) a standard set of questions, which are presented to each subject, and which require, on their part, the performance of certain tasks” (p. 78). More specifically, and looking at the quantitative investigation, in the same, these are “(...) usually standardized, with a uniform procedure for administration, quotation and interpretation of the results obtained by the subjects (...)” (Moore, 1983, cited by Vieira, 1995, p. 78). Turning now to their application in the project, the tests provided by the teachers would have an optional group regarding the subject covered in the *escape room*, so as not to harm students who had not participated in the project. These would then be our control group. Also, it should be noted that, in addition to taking into account the aforementioned tests, precedents for the execution of the project would also be analyzed.

According to Vieira (1995), “when the variables that the researcher wants to study involve affective dimensions of behavior, such as attitudes, values, beliefs, interests, self-concept, etc., it is common to use what McMillan and Schumacher (1989, p. 253) designate as non-cognitive instruments” (p. 79), in this case called questionnaires. These questionnaires would serve to evaluate the feedback of people directly involved in the project, that is, teachers and students. This would focus on these people's opinion about the applied methodology and whether or not it allowed facilitating/motivating the learning of History-A. In practice, they would be applied after the execution of the project and would consist of the application of a Likert scale, with the possibility of including, in addition to closed items, open questions.

Findings

Regarding the findings, one significant point to highlight is the student's engagement in this type of project, which tends to be high. By using a different and practically unknown methodology, students become curious and motivated to learn subjects that they might otherwise consider less appealing. Combining theory with practice in an interactive way and removing the exclusivity of teaching History from the classroom context, the use of active methodologies is put into practice, in this case using an Escape Room. This not only motivates students to lean the mentioned discipline but also shows them the multitude of possible connections that can be made with it. For example, they can see how a particular event in one part of the world has the potential to influence another seemingly unintentionally. The use of an Escape Room crates an engaging and immersive learning experience that helps students understand the interconnectedness of historical events and fosters a deeper appreciation for the subject matter.

Focusing on the application of the tests (pre and post) it is expected to verify positive discrepancies in relation to the syllabus covered. Alternatively, when analyzing the questionnaires, it is assumed that, on the one hand, students will have a more active attitude towards their own learning, along with a more favorable perspective in relation to History-A. On the other hand, teachers will demonstrate a positive view in relation to this type of complementary approaches to the curriculum and, subsequently, to teaching, as well as being able to present possible suggestions for improvement.

Results

In accordance with the previously presented hypothesis (using a more active methodology, there was an increase in the understanding and consequent performance in the History-A discipline by the project participants), it is anticipated, as the expected result with the implementation of the present project, an increase in the level of academic results in this discipline in view of the dynamization of the *escape room* allied to the directive teaching promoted in the classroom. On the other hand, there may be a change of perspective in relation to this area of teaching, this because, given the character of novelty and innovation encouraged in learning, the idea is perpetuated that History-A can go beyond simple facts. In addition, in the view of possible positive results, it could be observed that other schools may adhered and adopt to the project and/or the applied methodology.

However, we highlight some limitations in relation to the lack of real scientific and empirical data, namely the lack of studies regarding the application of this method in a teaching context. Incidentally, we emphasize the predominantly theoretical nature of this work, which makes it impossible to draw reliable and concrete conclusions, thus leading us to raise assumptions and predictions with regard to the results.

In order to promote greater visibility and consequent application of the project in question, we suggest expanding it to other spheres. On the one hand, extending to other areas of specialization, which will imply adjustment and reformulation depending on the program of each discipline and exposed needs. On the other hand, given the opportunity to access other contents, it would be pertinent to integrate and build different scenarios about a certain historical period. Having made recommendations to expand the project nationally, it would ultimately be desirable to scale the project internationally. For this to happen, they must consider the guidelines and follow the directives of each foreign ministry of education that intends to implement the project.

To conclude, we would like to leave some ideas in order to encourage a deeper reflection on the purpose that we want to reflect within the scope of the project. The projected was designed based on the theoretical assumptions that focus primarily on the practical and utilitarian aspects of the curriculum to develop children and young people for the job market. Unfortunately, this approach has led to the devaluation of theoretical and introspective areas, including History. In addition to addressing the "what" of learning, we found it crucial to consider the "how" of promoting learning. Therefore, complementing the active methodology of the escape room with the practices developed in the school context became a determining aspect of the project. In line with this, we believe it is pertinent to propose a change in the way information

is present and treated, aiming to enhance learning, and sparking interest in the field of History. By adopting a more engaging and interactive approach, we can encourage students to explore historical topics, make connections with their own lives, and develop critical thinking skills. We want to challenge the traditional teaching methods that might lead students to perceive History as a mere list of facts to memorize. Through this project, we aspire to plant seeds of lifelong learning and a genuine appreciation for the richness of our collective human history.

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