SeekBeak as an Immersive Tool for Online, In-class, and Emergency Learning

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This article highlights the web application SeekBeak as an important digital educational tool for engaging students in online, emergency, and traditional teaching.

Keywords: web application, digital education, engagement, online teaching, digital escape room for education, DERE

Introduction

The COVID pandemic presented educators across the globe with the challenge of finding ways to engage their students in a sudden and forced digital environment. With the lack of knowledge of online learning pedagogy across all educational sectors, many uninitiated teachers were left scrambling to piece together resources in short order, resulting in suboptimal online lesson delivery (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust, & Bond, 2020). A simple solution going forward is to provide knowledge of online resources that can be used in conjunction with videoconferencing, online, and hybrid classes. The SeekBeak.com web application is one such resource which allows users to design a myriad of creative activities that utilize a two-dimensional 360° photo, and objects to explore within the photo.

The technology with examples

Seekbeak.com was designed to be a “virtual experience and interactive tour creator for 360° and flat images” (SeekBeak, 2021, n.p.). The app allows the account holder (teacher) to design an immersive environment where the 360° image envelops the viewer, rotating spherically in all directions around the centrally-fixed point of the viewer’s perspective. The cursor can be moved inside the image with a mouse, touch pad, or arrow keys and hover over hotspots (links), which are often located at areas of interest. When the hotspot’s icon is clicked, it opens to reveal whatever linked object the teacher has attached. The hotspots can contain links to any number of possible objects, from photos to audio files, external links, phone numbers and texts, to videos, gifs, and even links to other 360° rooms created by the teacher. Examples and directions for how to use the technology are available on the website, and queries through email are promptly answered.

To make the digital environment, the teacher needs to search online or capture a 360° image, upload it as a “snap” (or room), and then add hotspots for the viewer to click on. Currently, high-quality 360° images are widely available for free from sites such as flickr, Shutterstock, and commons.wikimedia. Figure 1 shows an example of a 360° image of a coral reef.

In the following examples, the SeekBeak snap has been designed
to function as a digital escape room for education (DERE), defined as any 2D,
immersive, digital escape room environment containing educational content and/
or language with the primary objective of teaching and learning, and at least partly
designed by the educator. In Figure 2 there is an example of a DERE. Within
the DERE there are multiple clickable hotspots represented by animals and
deep-sea objects, some of which display
only pictures, and others reveal puzzles to
solve or locks to open.

Figure 3 shows an example of an educati-
onal puzzle that opens when the whale
icon hotspot in the room is clicked. The
students must solve the puzzle to re-
trieve a code which unlocks one of the
other hotspot items on the reef. Puzzle
activities can be created for free through
LearningApps.org, where the feedback
message can be edited to display a lock
code, while locks can be created using the
scavenger hunt activity on flippity.net.

To participate in the escape room over
Zoom, a group of 3-5 student players elect
one person to share their screen showing
the Seekbeak room. The students each take
turns navigating the room in 5-minute in-
crements, requesting remote control of the
screen on their turn. They continue taking
turns until the room is solved or the time
runs out.

**Advantages**

Escape Rooms aside, SeekBeak’s appeal
lies in its ability to let teachers design a re-
alistic immersive educational environment
while affording the creative organization of
multiple types of media that can be used
as lesson components, materials, and
activities. Some of SeekBeak’s potential
educational uses include virtual tours, in-
teractive close readings, scavenger hunts,
interactive flipped lessons, educational
escape rooms, interactive quizzes, and im-
mersive surveys, polls, and other data col-
lection. An additional bonus of SeekBeak
is that it can also be used in face-to-face
classrooms across many devices, including
desktop computers, laptops, tablets, and
smartphones. It is an effective tool to have
in cases of “emergency remote learning”
(Hodges et. al, 2020), but it is also simply
an engaging learning tool to have and use in general. In my ongoing re-
search using this technology, students often reported learning more about
their subject from the digital room than from their regular remote learning
course. Additionally, Seekbeak snaps/rooms can be designed to suit any
language level if time is taken to model the use of the technology for stu-
dents. Finally, the combination of a realistic environment and inclusion of
relevant tasks make for a unique digital experience where students can work
with their classmates and learn as they explore the image room.
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