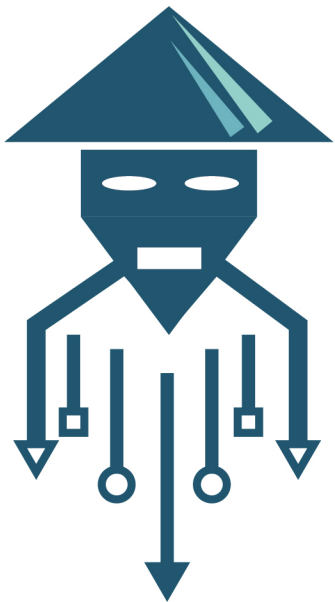# Part 2 - B1.1
Narration Techniques

NEET SYSTEM

Online Educational Escape Rooms to
Re-engage ESLs and NEETs

The player and the avatar in Escape Rooms

Escape rooms offer experiential learning and attract the interest of players looking for a non-traditional game (Wiemker, Elumir & Clare, 2015). One of the main distinguished characteristics of the Escape Room Games lies in the relationship between the player and the avatar.

Specifically, unlike the digital games where there is a separation between the player and the avatar in the game world, in escape room games the player and the avatar are the same (Nicholson, p. 1).

The concept of meaningful play

Drawing from Salen and Zimmerman's views on game design from their book "Rules of Play", one of the most important concepts in making a successful game lies in the *Meaningful Play* (2004).

Engaging the player to meaningful activities

In order for a player to be engaged in meaningful game activities the actions of the player need to be:

discernable	integrated
• which means that the player understands the result of what he/she is doing.	• which means that each action of the player makes a difference in the game plot.

Meaningful Escape Rooms Tasks

In the context of escape room games meaningful play means that the challenges that will be created and the tasks:

"are not simply there to be barriers to winning the game, but each challenge has a purpose and is tied into the larger narrative, giving the player a way to find meaning in their actions"

(Nicholson, 2015, p. 6).

Connection of the player to the narrative

The first way that challenges can be made meaningful is by initiating the player into the context of the game (Howard, 2008). Specifically, if the game doesn't create a deeply engagement of the player to the game setting already from the beginning then the player can be forgetful of the role he/she is supposed to be taking.

In this regard, the game narrative needs to provide a balance between the narrative and the meaning of the game in order to promote the active participation and interest of the player (Nicholson, 2015, p. 7).

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Dystopia?

Detective?

Time travel?

Celebrities?

Interesting story?

Can you think of an interesting setting that will engage NEETs in playing Escape Room Challenges?

Disengaging plots

Research on the design of escape room games shows that there are many escape rooms which

"consist of challenges that don't make sense in the genre, the settings, or the world in which the game is placed"

(Nicholson, 2015, p.2).

Avoiding the player's disengagement

In order to avoid the player's disengagement, escape room game designers can follow Lee Sheldon's advice (in Nicholson, 2016) on the three things that audiences want from storytellers:

Take me to a place I have never been.	Make me into someone I could never be.	Let me do things I could never do.

Consistency in the escape room narrative

During an Escape Room Game, the player comes across a series of challenges which are connected to the game narrative, the game setting and the actions of the player. However, if there is no consistency of the above with the escape room game, it will cause a mental disengagement of the player.

Many times, inconsistencies as such exist because the designer of the game simply never stepped back and asked "*Why would this exist?*" (Nicholson, 2016, p. 9).

Engaging players in the thinking process

Specifically, escape room games prompt players to engage in thinking process while solving a puzzle. This process requires from individuals to work on the puzzles using multiple approaches to knowledge (Wiemker, Elumir, & Clare, 2015). In order to achieve the player's understanding of each puzzle there is a need to provide good scripts so to avoid misunderstandings and disappointment in the process of solving a puzzle.

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Revealing suggested solutions

For this reason, players need to be provided with useful hints that reveal suggested thinking actions for reaching a solution.

Solving Puzzles

Good scripts

Useful hints

Thinking actions

Keeping the back story simple and short

According to Schell (2008), a key design strategy is **keeping the backstory simple** so that players can better understand how the challenges fit within the narrative and the game setting.

It is extremely important for designers to understand that during a short period of play, the escape room players don't have the time to explore an in-depth backstory.

For this reason, Sheldon (2014) proposes that:
"*the best solution is to reveal backstory through exposition brought to light during the action of an ongoing story*" (p. 198).

Exposing the backstory in small pieces of content

When the backstory is partly exposed to players through the game challenges, then the story content can be presented in small pieces instead of placing lengthy story texts during the pre-game narrative.

Specifically, by placing short story texts as part of the challenges, while it may seem from the designer's point of view that he/she will be trapped into creating linear escape rooms, the player can understand the game setting without being overwhelmed with lots of information at once (Nicholson, 2015, p. 6).

Questions for reflection

◎ Why do you think a long backstory would be overwhelming for the players?

◎ Can you provide some examples of a short but engaging backstory?

◎ Can you think of some examples of backstories that can be used during particular school subjects?

Thanks!

Any questions?

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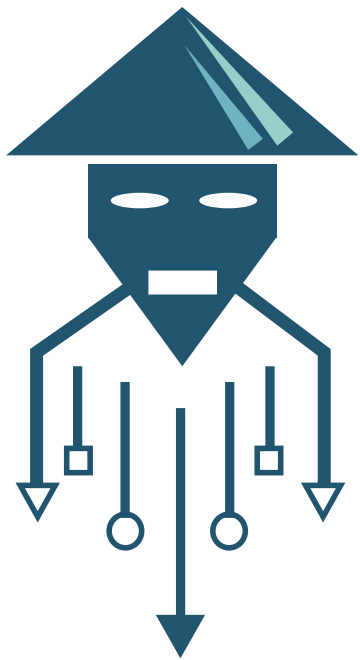
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