

IP Proposal - Michael Dawe

by Michael Dawe

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Independent Project

(ACCA6020)

What proven methods can be implemented
to increase player engagement?

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Introduction:

"The heart of engagement is based on players' motivation. The right type and leverage of player motivation is one of the most critical aspects to take into consideration for [...] game design. Doing so provides the structure and groundwork for both short and long term of player investment into the game" [1]. I will research, test, and implement methods for improving the player's in-game experience, resulting in them remaining motivated for longer or coming back to the game more often.

According to an article by yellowbrick.co [2] these are the top player engagement strategies: Interactive Storytelling, Reward Systems, Social Interaction, Personalization, Feedback Mechanisms, Dynamic Difficulty Adjustment, Gamification Elements, Live Events and Updates, Feedback Loop, and Continuous Playtesting. By focusing on one or two of these strategies, for example interactive storytelling through characters and dialogue, or dynamic difficulty adjustment in a level or map, I will be able to investigate their effectiveness.

Prakhar Juego states that "When players feel connected to the characters, they are more likely to invest emotionally in the game. This connection is crucial for maintaining player interest and encouraging them to explore the game world further" [3]. Character design can be used to increase the time players stay in the game and when they return to continue the story. An article by Juego Studios also points out the importance of game balance and player choice [4]. This could be addressed by building multiple routes into a level, focusing on different strategies, for example stealth or high ground, while keeping them matched in terms of difficulty, through the placement of enemies, power-ups, etc.

For this to be a useful investment in my development as a games designer, I will need to successfully identify and implement a specific method based on research and testing. This will be presented in a game environment which complements and enhances the experience.

Proposed Ideas and Implementation Methods:

Outline:

I will explore various methods to improve player engagement while building a game prototype. As I gather more research, I will narrow down my specific direction, applying a few key elements which work together to create an engaging and immersive experience.

Practical Implementation:

For the practical assignment I will make a playable game prototype providing over an hour of gameplay, with multiple levels, multiple endings, and achievements or collectables.

I currently have two ideas for the practical assignment. Firstly, *Children, Please* based on my GDD from last year, a puzzle adventure game intending to help people to recognize child abuse and take the right action. This would focus on character design and dialogue. If level design proves to be a more effective method of increasing player retention, I would create three or more levels where the player has multiple options through different challenges.

Ethical Considerations:

If I work on *Children, Please* I will take ethical considerations into account throughout the development process. Including the collection and use of materials for the in-game characters, the way information is presented to the player, and disclaimers to make it clear to the player that the game includes sensitive content before they play. On the other hand, working on level design and game balance should not need any ethical consideration unless the game collects player data, for example to iteratively tune the game's difficulty curve.

Details Based on Research:

For character design, the focus would be on portraying the character's personality and situation in a way that would evoke an emotion in the player. This could be achieved with dialogue, body language, and situational storytelling, as well as visual design.

Research by Matthe Grizzard and C. Joseph Francemone "found that when characters had backstories that humanized them (e.g., number of children they had, their likes and dislikes), players felt more guilt than when those characters did not have such backstories" [5]. This research was in relation to violence towards in-game characters; however, it indicates that the emotional connection is increased, therefore this is one method of improving player engagement when designing characters.

Another study backs this up, stating that "Players' empathy, curiosity, and emotional involvement can be increased through characters with interesting backstories, gripping stories, and meaningful interactions within the game world" [6]. This implies that not only are backstories important, but that interaction, perhaps through dialogue, and the ability to affect the character's storyline, can also increase emotional connection. This needs further research and would be a key element in the production of this idea.

Level design is also important for keeping players engaged and establishing the story of a game; bad level design can ruin the most graphically detailed and flashiest of games, as players will not find the levels any fun to play [7]. For level design, the focus would be on creating multiple options for the player while keeping them either equal or specifically suited to different play styles, such that an equal number of players choose each option. This would include the placement of tools and power-ups, and balancing risk and reward; for example, a

level might have one route with weak enemies, and one with strong enemies and a power-up which will help the player later.

Matczak Mateusz [8] says players need to have purpose and reward, however this should be provided without narrowing the players' options down to where they always follow the same path. This backs up the idea that players should be offered balanced choices throughout the game.

An article by the Institute of Design highlights the importance of flow to keep players immersed, as any break or rough edge can give a point when the player can snap out of the game, and potentially stop playing. "Well-designed games create a state of flow, where players are fully immersed and deeply focused on the task at hand. This state is achieved through carefully balanced challenges that match the player's skill level" [9].

Testing and Evaluation:

Game testing will be conducted with a small sample of the target demographic throughout the design and development process. Feedback will be used to iteratively improve the game. The success of the game will be determined through feedback, recording play duration, and simple tests including asking users to play for half the length of the game, while they are free to quit sooner or continue to play the whole game, this will give an idea of how engaged they feel.

Conclusion:

Player engagement is essential to a successful game, as any game must keep the player interested in order to create an enjoyable experience that the player will keep coming back to and recommend to others. By considering the research above we can see that though there are many methods which can be implemented to increase player engagement, they typically revolve around balance and emotion. I will research these subjects further and choose one to implement and test in my practical assignment.

References:

- [1] D. Eng, "What is player engagement?," University XP, <https://www.universityxp.com/blog/2023/10/17/what-is-player-engagement> (accessed Oct. 20, 2024).
- [2] "Top player engagement strategies for video game design," Yellowbrick, <https://www.yellowbrick.co/blog/animation/top-player-engagement-strategies-for-video-game-design> (accessed Oct. 20, 2024).
- [3] P. Juego, "How character design influences gameplay and storytelling," Medium, <https://medium.com/@prakhari/how-character-design-influences-gameplay-and-storytelling-325a97d358cd> (accessed Oct. 20, 2024).
- [4] Juego Studios, "Game balance: Why game balancing is crucial in game designing?," Juego Studio, <https://www.juegostudio.com/blog/why-game-balancing-crucial-game-development> (accessed Oct. 20, 2024).
- [5] M. Grizzard and C. J. Francemone, *Video Games: A Medium That Demands Our Attention*, N. D. Bowman, Ed. New York, New York: Routledge, 2018.
- [6] A. F. F. Andreean, M. F. Anugrah, and C. Tho, "Exploring of Emotional Character in Online Games Toward Player," Science Direct, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877050923017465> (accessed Oct. 20, 2024).
- [7] "Game Level Design Tips: Player engagement," Pluralsight, <https://www.pluralsight.com/blog/film-games/keeping-players-engaged-tips-great-game-level-design> (accessed Oct. 20, 2024).
- [8] M. Mateusz, "Level design: Maximizing player engagement," Medium, <https://medium.com/@matczak.mateusz01/level-design-maximizing-player-engagement-1600ee805edc> (accessed Oct. 20, 2024).
- [9] "The impact of game and level design on player engagement," JS Institute of Design, <https://js-instituteofdesign.com/the-impact-of-game-and-level-design-on-player-engagement/> (accessed Oct. 20, 2024).

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GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

GENERAL COMMENTS

75/100

BA GAMES – PROJECT PROPOSAL – ACCA6020
INDEPENDENT PROJECT (5%)

Student Michael Dawe
Mark 75

Intro / A&O (500 words)		
Project title; Identification of a specific problem to be investigated; Well-defined aims and SMART objectives; Explaining why this project is worth doing; Discussion of what the project needs to do in order to be a success; Description any deliverables that will be produced at the end of the project	40	27
The structure and wording of the report is clear and professional, with goals outlined clearly and research directly relating to the project's theme.		
Deliverables are identified which are justified with a grounding in supporting		

research and theory. Expansion into formalised SMART goals would be good to see as this would help clearly outline the aims of the project alongside the justification already provided.		
Background to the Project (500 words)		
Description of how the work to be done by in the project relates to the work identified in the literature review; Discussion of any ethical issues raised by the project Identifying what has already been done within the field; Topic familiarity; Brief literature review using appropriate sources – 6-8 journal papers and book chapters rather than just websites; Selection of relevant models & concepts References feature throughout the proposal, showing evidence of applied information and studies from a number of sources. A good understanding of engagement strategies and the research/literature around them is evidenced – this demonstrates that a thorough research process is already underway and should serve to motivate further work on the project.	40	33

Ethical considerations relating to the sensitive subject matter of the project have been acknowledged and identified. This may still not be as controversial as perhaps it is expected but I feel it is probably wise to investigate the most appropriate course of action during the development of this project.		
Document Presentation		
Correct spelling, grammar and punctuation; Flow of narrative/fluency; Coherence; Word processed ; Correct use of referencing with bibliography; Strict word limit Presentation of the proposal is professional and contains elements expected of submissions at Level 6, including title screen, bibliography, contents and section headings. This helps the submitted work present its content in a clear and concise manner.	20	15
TOTAL	100	75

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TOTAL	100	75

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