

MARY L'S TEACHER ED PORTFOLIO

Games in the classroom & some happy memories

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Screenshot from <https://www.minecraft.net/en-us/article/bonsai-biomes>

Intro to Minecraft

Two weeks ago, students from Colquitz Middle School helped our cohort explore the world of Minecraft, a new world for most of us. A friend recently described it as “legos, but digital”, and I think that captures the aesthetic. My favourite times playing were when everyone shouted out to each other, to ask questions, or joke with each other, or to express our excitement or alarm about something happening. The room had never been so happily noisy. The experience made me think about my own experience with games.

I actually love games

Although I don't think of myself as a gamer, I have actually loved video and computer games. During my undergrad, I fell hard for the **Sims**, and spent blissful early mornings playing, before I had to walk to class. With my brothers, I played **Age of Empires** on the family desktop, and of course the classic console games of **Mario Kart** and **Duck Hunt**. My dad bought me **King's Quest**, which I adored, and together we explored the world of **Myst**. I remember going to friends' houses to play computer games that I now can't remember... there was one where you landed planes on different coloured runways in space.

Benefits to games



Weeks ago, I watched this TED talk by Jane McGonigal – The Game That Can Give You 10 Extra Years of Life.

She describes a specific mental health app called Super Better, but she also talks about the incredible benefits of games, and in particular their unique abilities to light us up with happiness – the very thing I felt in our class when we played Minecraft together.

Games in the Classroom

I don't plan to make Minecraft a part of my classrooms right now – the required infrastructure alone is more than I am willing to take on. But I am definitely intrigued to include games in some form in my classroom. Again, I am sent down memory lane, now recalling my own positive experiences with games.

In fourth grade, my teacher Mr. Chin incorporated games in a way that he truly seemed to enjoy, and it was infectious. We played the classic game **Frogger** on bulky computers (during breaks? as a reward? I can't remember), laughing at each other's efforts to cross the river. We also played **Oregon**

Trail, using one computer. Mr. Chin created teams in which each member was given a specific role. As a team, we had to roll the dice and make decisions to survive. Would we use our money to buy a space wagon wheel, or to stock up on medicine? Again, the effect was noisy, happy, collaborative fun. We were valued both for our individual contributions, and for our ability to make decisions as a team.

As an English language teacher, I definitely saw the class energy zoom up when we played games of any kind, and people's concerns about being wrong go down.

Going forward, I would like to look for opportunities to insert games, or to gamify activities.

EdTech, Gaming

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