

Parenting *ideas* INSIGHTS

Building parent-school partnerships

WORDS Jason Fox

Don't be daft about Minecraft

Minecraft may be the best trend to hit boy world in years. Writer Jason Fox explains the attraction and outlines the benefits for kids.

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If you have a young child or teenager, chances are you've heard about Minecraft. It's a video game that's kind of like digital LEGO, except that you're in an ever-evolving world with seemingly limitless possibilities. It's a game that inspires deep exploration, collaboration and creativity.

It has been the subject of international conventions. Some schools and universities have even incorporated Minecraft into their curriculum, where students learn about city planning, environmental issues, getting things done, and even how to plan for the future, as well as things like maths and problem solving.

The open sandbox nature of Minecraft makes it one of the most exciting games on the market – and not because of its flash graphics or blood and gore (there are none of those). The gameplay experience design just works. And on top of all that, it's rated one of the safest video games for kids ever.

But parents are worried.

And rightfully so, to a degree. Too much of a good thing can be a bad thing.

But some parents are freaking out about the amount of time their kids are investing in the game, and are imposing blanket bans of it without first understanding its magic.

So, let's have a look at what makes Minecraft so engaging, why blanket bans aren't a good idea, and how to manage your child's play.

Minecraft is an infinite, non-winnable game. Unlike a book, a game of chess, or a football match, a Minecraft game doesn't end. There's always more that can be explored, and more that can be done. The projects you undertake in Minecraft are self-initiated: no one is telling you what to do. And the process of making progress within Minecraft is completely autonomous – no one is telling you how to execute your projects and achieve your goals. It's self-regulated learning at its finest.

So, when a parent bans Minecraft it's a lot different to banning other games. You're not simply cutting your child out from a source of entertainment. You're preventing them from accessing a world where it's safe to fail, learn, explore, build and share. In essence: it can be pretty devastating – particularly when we put things back into the context of the future of work.

Why? Because your child's ability to participate in and contribute to unprecedented, self-driven, creative and collaborative work is going to be one of the key employable talents in the future. Your child could already be building a digital portfolio of project work, without you even knowing it.

But being able to 'unplug' and manage time and energy are essential skills your child needs to learn too. So, here are three ways you can help them manage Minecraft in your house:

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... Don't be daft about Minecraft ...

1 Show genuine interest (this should be your first step)

If your child plays Minecraft, ask them to take you on a tour. Show an interest in their passion, and ask them questions like: what are you trying to build? What are your goals? What are the steps you need to take? What's the coolest thing you've found? Set aside at least an hour for this. It's highly likely they'd love the chance to share this with you, which will help you to open up a new level of connection with them.

2 Encourage interactivity correctly

Minecraft's multiplayer mode allows your child to play and build in the same online world as their friends.

But remember: there are a lot of idiots on the internet, so do the following two things:

- a) Create your own server or 'whitelist' – it's like having an invite-only friend list.
- b) Use a family-friendly server – you can Google these to find the right one to play in.

3 Don't ban – bracket

Banning something like Minecraft should be the very last resort, as it usually only serves to enhance the craving for it. Instead, make it part of their daily 'free time'. Try not to have this at the end of the day or make it contingent on homework being completed, as this may only create angst, rushed homework and late nights. After school is best, especially if it's bracketed by dinnertime, where all phones and computers are turned off.

My true hope is that you give option #1 a very good go first. And if #1, #2, #3 don't work, I'm hoping you've found them an even better game to play.

Jason Fox



CHECK OUT MINECRAFT:

» Check out the Minecraft review at The Parent's Guide to Video Games:
<http://safevideogames.blogspot.com.au/2011/01/minecraft-review.html>

» And this wonderful article from Penny Flanagan of Kidspot:
<http://parenting.kidspot.com.au/what-is-minecraft/>

» And finally, check out the brilliant work of Dean Groom and Massively Minecraft (a place for both kids and parents to play):
<http://massively.jokaydia.com/>

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