



Video Games are Bad for Kids? Who Says?

LOUISVILLE EDUCATORS INCORPORATE
NEW COMMON CORE STATE
STANDARDS INTO ONE OF THE MOST
POPULAR VIDEO GAMES EVER

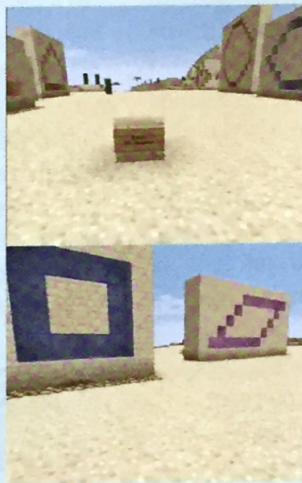
By Nicholas Sella

Teaching the Common Core State Standards can be a difficult task, but two educators from Carter Elementary in Louisville, Ky., have found a way to teach the requirements in a creative and fun way using the massively popular Minecraft video game.

Jason Hubler and his wife Crystal teach fifth grade at Carter. Their classrooms are across the hall from each other, and both enjoy playing Minecraft. They knew their students enjoyed the game too, so the couple thought it would be a perfect tool to help them teach Common Core subjects.

The open world game has no specific goals and allows players the freedom to explore and create anything they want by placing blocks. Released in 2011, Minecraft has sold over 54 million copies to date.

"We came up with the idea of building Common Core areas on a Minecraft server. We started playing with the idea and looking at the different plug-ins they had," says Jason. "The community online was really supportive and started making us specialized plug-ins." One of the plug-ins asks a Common Core related question every few minutes and the first student to respond gets an in-game reward.



The Oasis of Geometry (pictured above) is a desert level full of 2-D and 3-D shapes that teaches players about geometry including perimeter and area.

Creating a Common Core Digital World

The process of developing the Minecraft server was no easy undertaking and was completely funded by the Hublers. Creating the world that includes areas modeled after historic time periods and locations, and includes activities and problem solving games to teach Common Core related material, took six months and hundreds of hours to prepare.

"We started during the summer and we spent six to eight hours a day working on it—editing everything and scripting the characters to talk to the kids and testing everything. And we had to go through all the [Common Core] standards and make sure we were hitting everything," Jason explains.

The couple initially created the game just for their school. As success grew, other schools in their district—and parents—began making requests. Soon, the mayor's office in Louisville caught wind and wanted to make it available as a community wide project. Piloted last summer in the Louisville Free Public Library, the game was available to summer program groups and students.

Results in The Classroom

Feedback from students after they've taken tests and completed assignments covering material indicates the game helps to increase their understanding of Common Core material.

An example, says Jason, is the student who wrote, "I remember doing this in the game and I was able to add these details into my answers." Jason and Crystal also learned the game really helped with extended response and short answer questions which require the students to write about their learning.

Even with the school year in full swing, the Hublers return home after a full day of teaching, eager to make adjustments and add new content to the game. The game can be easily packaged and made available for other schools and states to download and use. That was the hope all along, Jason says.

"We like hobbies and thought it would be good for the kids," he adds. "We didn't think it would grow as big as it has. I thought if I could package it up and other cities could use it—at least here in Louisville—we could test it out and get it up and going and someone else wouldn't have to go through all that work." ❏

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—JASON HUBLER, FIFTH-GRADE TEACHER, CARTER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, LOUISVILLE, KY