

Minecraft: Education Edition – Dubai Training Partner Summit

Between 28 February and 2 March 2017 Megan Rademeyer, SchoolNet SA Programmes Manager and Microsoft Fellow had the opportunity to attend the Minecraft: Education Edition training partner summit in Dubai. Sessions included “Learning how to play Minecraft”, engaging in a “Build Battle” (where teams built structures together to try out-build other teams), and exploring “Classroom Mode in Minecraft: Education Edition”. The aim of the training session was to certify trainers from Microsoft Training Partners who will then be able to run [Minecraft: Education Edition](#) training sessions with schools. In addition to Megan, representing SchoolNet SA, Dominique Cave and Jethro MacDonald from Computers 4 Kids and Elsabe Hart, a Microsoft Teacher Ambassador were the other South Africans in attendance who are now certified Minecraft: Education Edition trainers.

Megan’s favourite session was [Minecraft: Breakout Edu](#) which involved going through a Minecraft world and following clues to unlock various puzzles. This activity provided teams with an opportunity to collaborate with others, and use Minecraft and thinking skills to work through an engaging challenge. This session would be a good one to run at schools as teachers and/or learners who have some Minecraft skills could be grouped with novice Minecraft players. The challenge required a range of skills and someone who is not a Minecraft expert could still help solve puzzles whilst being exposed to Minecraft at the same time. Other worthwhile sessions involved learning the basics of Minecraft by working through the [Minecraft: Education Edition Tutorial World](#). This activity would be a good place for teachers and students who are unfamiliar with Minecraft to learn the basic controls and features of Minecraft, such as gathering and crafting resources.

Minecraft: Education Edition is similar to Minecraft that many of your learners may already know and love. What makes Education Edition great for teachers is that it utilizes Office 365 to assign Minecraft accounts to students – making it a cost effective way for schools to access the game, and in a way that provides a safe, closed environment in which to play. Features such as the camera and portfolio resources make it easy for learners to document evidence of learning or of structures they have created. Even if a teacher does not have Minecraft: Education Edition, the [Minecraft: Education Edition](#) portal provides free access to range of lesson plans, pre-built worlds and ready-made activities that make it easy for a teacher to integrate Minecraft into a lesson.

Before heading for Dubai, Megan was a complete Minecraft novice, but she is happy to report that spending after spending a few days playing Minecraft she is no longer accidentally destroying quite as many blocks as she did at first! More importantly, she has realised that one does not need to be a Minecraft whizz to use this tool as part of a fun and engaging lesson. Below are some lessons about Minecraft that Megan learnt during the training summit.

Children will generally out-pace adults

My daughter (now 11) has been playing Minecraft for about two years. My sole contribution to her interest in the game was providing my credit card details so that she could download Minecraft: Pocket Edition to her tablet. Every so often, she would me a hotel, or a dream house or a stadium that she has created and I would say something like “that’s lovely sunshine, now how about you go read a book or do some homework.” Now that I have actually tried to make my own house in Minecraft I am in complete awe of the structures she has been able to produce. Without having been on a course, with no instructor and with no manual to tell her what to do. Kids take to Minecraft naturally – maybe because they aren’t afraid of failure and are willing to just give it a try.

You just have to start – you will get faster

I can touch-type. I can produce professional looking reports using Word far more quickly than if I were to write them out by hand. Did I always type quickly? No! I type quickly because I have spent just about every day of my working career typing on a keyboard. Hours and hours of practice has made me a good typist. Years of putting together reports has helped me to figure out shortcuts for formatting them nicely – and quickly. I don't know why I thought I would be a whizz a Minecraft on the first day. My daughter is great at playing Minecraft – but she also has a two year, 5 hour a week jump-start on me. Of course if you aren't willing to even try Minecraft, you will never get good at it. And if you try it once, decide it is too tricky and abandon it, you will think that it is impossible to master. The trick to becoming good at Minecraft is committing yourself to spending a few hours muddling through the basics and slowly but surely getting a bit more skilful and a bit more confident.

There is no undo button – but this teaches resilience

At the Minecraft: Education Edition training session we worked our way through Tutorial World – which teachers use the basic ways of moving yourself through the game. Because I had kept confusing my left and right mouse buttons I kept accidentally destroying blocks when I should have been creating blocks – and as a result had to go back to the beginning of the world three times. Whilst this was frustrating – on each successive attempt I got faster. I got better and better each time I did something. When I destroyed half our team's structure in the build battle I apologised to the team and they quickly put back what I destroyed. I felt bad, but at other times other team members made silly mistakes. We had a laugh and moved on. Sure, we wanted to build a nice structure and win the challenge – but really Minecraft is just a game.

Start small – take baby steps

Just like you weren't doing conditional formatting and what if formulas the first time you used Excel, chances are you won't be lighting up your Minecraft structure using Redstone (Minecraft's "electricity") in your first world. This doesn't really matter. The Minecraft: Education Edition contains a wealth of prebuilt worlds, so a teacher who is a complete novice can just download someone else's creation and use that as a starting point. Or a teacher can just say to the learners "I really don't know how to do this – but I thought of a fun activity that we could try together". Since when does a teacher have to be the expert at everything? Telling kids that you don't know how to do something, or giving them an opportunity to teach you is not a sign of weakness – it is a sign that you are a life-long learner with a pioneering spirit. (Your kids may think you have NO Minecraft skills – but they will think you are cool for having given it a try!)

It is worth checking out Minecraft: Education Edition

Check out the official [Minecraft: Education Edition](#) website for resources that cover curriculum and give learners an opportunity to play a game that they love at the same time. If you are interested in purchasing Minecraft: Education Edition for your school – please see here [\(link to Angela's flier\)](#) for more information. If your school already has Minecraft: Education Edition contact Megan Rademeyer (megan@schoolnet.org.za) for more info about professional development workshops for staff.