

Sun-Sentinel Covers Unique Teaching Techniques at University School

University School uses Minecraft to introduce engineering skills and Mind Lab strategy games to give students a potent reason to slow down and problem-solve with action plans that have real-life application.

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Lot more than fun and games

Davie school incorporates Mind Lab, Minecraft into the learning process

By **SCOTT FISHMAN**
Staff Writer

University School in Davie is using popular games to help youngsters learn.

Teachers say the students in grades 1-5 have benefited through the incorporation of Mind Lab and Minecraft. Mind Lab has been incorporated into the curriculum the last five years, with students testing their critical thinking, social skills and emotional intelligence, said Cory De La Fuente, associate director.

"We saw the ability of teaching children how to think in a different manner," she said. "... We are in an age now where children have everything instant. Technology gives them instant gratification, instant everything right in front of them. These games teach them to slow down, stop and to think!"

Mind Lab encourages the development and exercise of thinking abilities and life skills through strategy games, according to its website.

De La Fuente said it teaches children that it's OK if they can't

solve a math problem right away. They use the "Stoplight Method." Stop, pause, think about what your next move is going to be.

Third- through fifth-grade classes are further motivated with the end-of-the-year Mind Lab Olympics. Students who make it past the in-class competition go on to face others from the various grade levels. Games include Abalone, Quoridor, Octi and checkers.

The popular Minecraft video game is being offered as an after-school activity for the first time this year. It provides a virtual environment where children can use their imaginations to build, explore and engage in their own

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First-graders Dante Midei and Alanna Frier use Mind Lab to help boost their learning at University School.

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world. Minecraft focuses on STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) development.

Matt Munro, geometry and AP computer science teacher, said it allows children to explore engineering principles in a simulated environment.

"Minecraft is an immersive environment," he said. "In its traditional state, it requires the player to battle against nature and beasts with nothing but with what they can make. Effectively, the more you know, the more powerful you are in

the game. ... [The class allows] students to explore the intensely creative video game in a completely safe and controlled environment and introduces engineering skills, which students use to craft, create and build a 3D world where technology and science come together."

Upper School students fluent with the program teach the third- and fourth-graders with the help of the teacher. Munro has found it to be a great collaboration of classes with Minecraft providing a wealth of educa-

tional benefits.

Munro cited a study showing "that game-based play could raise cognitive learning for students by as much as 12 percent and improve hand-eye coordination, problem-solving ability and memory. ... Bringing tools such as Minecraft and Mind Lab to students enables us to use games to show students that there are many different ways to solve a problem."

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