Crafting Our Future

Computer games have a bad reputation when it comes to education. What could anyone learn from thumbing a controller or wobbling a mouse about? In many ways, they are the 'feared technology' for contemporary adults, joining the ranks of Rock 'n' Roll music, record players, personal stereos and television.

However, one game has encapsulated the desire to think, plan, create and freely explore: Minecraft; and SCC's Minecraft Club has the students queueing at the door…literally.

Minecraft is a computer game that places your character in an open world where you are free to roam. If you dig (mine) you can build (craft) different kinds of 3D blocks into new materials allowing you to build an almost infinite number of objects.

The sun rises and sets as you go about your work, gathering materials and making tools. Sometimes it rains, or you might get caught in a storm. There are even animals you can tame, farm or use for food. Depending on which mode you're playing in, you might also need to fight for your survival against hunger, danger and baddies. You can even chose your profession - a warrior, a farmer or even a miner.

Therefore, it should be no surprise that one of the most popular clubs at SCC is the Minecraft club, run by Mr Kesang Bhutia every lunchtime, and after school on Wednesdays. The room is crammed with eager creators playing with the mechanics of the game to build and boast about their latest creation.

Mr Bhutia explains, "Minecraft isn't just a mindless game. It has vast scope for young people to use their reasoning and creative skills. Yes, Minecraft can be played on your own, huddled away from the real world, but what I see in my classroom is lots of students sharing their work, helping each other, praising each other and really experiencing what it means to be in a community. We have a set of rules for how we chose to treat other people in our club, as well as rules for our online town we all share, and the students respect them. In fact, 'respecting others' is something anyone will notice if they visit."

Sophie Williams, Year 7, says, "I like that you can almost do anything. There's a creative world where you can build anything you want. On 'Survival Mode,' it's tricky because you might die. It is possible to play with other people online, but I prefer the club because I can

play with friends. I can walk around the house I made in the game and see my friends' characters walking around inside at the same time. I sometimes help my friend to play because she's not that confident with it. I have decided that my job in the game is to help people build, or provide them with food. I sometimes fight, but I usually run away."

Paul McKechnie, Year 7, says, "I started playing at the age of seven on the Xbox 360 and since then it's got easier and easier. I'd like to make a really big Minecraft 'Red Stone' invention. (Red Stones is a material I can build with that allows me to use electricity in the game. These can then make circuits and machines. You can even make things like clocks and mobile phones...really!) Plus, it's even more easy to create when you get to play with friends in the club because online is very competitive."

When asked about the future, Mr Bhutia saw many positives. "There's definitely scope for other subjects to incorporate Minecraft into their teaching. There are already some schools in the U.K. who are trialing this idea as we speak. Who knows what can be achieved when learning and fun work together for our young people."

The final word must go to Noah Jones, Year 7, who best sums up the club when he says, "Although Minecraft is just pixels and blocks, it doesn't mean people can't show their imagination and potential."