

Therapeutically Applied Minecraft



A Workshop for PAX East 2022

GameToGrow



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Social Flourishing and “Social Skills”

What is Minecraft?

Minecraft is owned by Microsoft and developed by Mojang (*MOH-jang*) studios, a Swedish video game developer based in Stockholm.

- First released in 2011
- It is part of a growing IP franchise.
- Started as an independent game and was bought by Microsoft in 2014
- Best selling video game of all time



What is Minecraft?

- First-Person Computer Game
- Solo and Multiplayer Options
- Sandbox Playstyle
- Procedurally Generated World
- Multi-Platform



Editions of Minecraft

- Java Edition *
 - PC specific
 - More community driven.
- Bedrock Edition
 - Multi-Platform
 - More privately driven
- Education Edition
 - Designed with School classrooms in mind
 - Completely education driven

* We use this version



Therapeutic Minecraft is the intentional melding of Minecraft with established therapeutic interventions to support the development of insight and growth with participants.

Research on Applications of Minecraft

- Minecraft used to foster collaboration and social connectedness with autistic youth (Riordan & Scarf, 2016).
- Minecraft and other online games can create opportunities for social connection and community building for autistic youth that may be more in-line with their communication preferences (Ringland et al., 2016).
- Minecraft used as a setting for increasing collaboration skills with autistic youth (MacCormack, & Freeman, 2019).
- Minecraft has been used to support the narrative component of trauma-focused treatment with neurodivergent individuals (Gerhart & Smith, 2020).

What games have supported your communication with others?

- What was it about this game that helped?
- Did this translate to outside of the game?

What is a game that has made you feel more connected to others?

- What about the game helped you connect with others?

(Small Group Reflection)



“Mushroom Village”



Why use Minecraft?

- Engaging to participants
- Universally known
- Cultural touchstone
- Natural excitement about it
- Flexible in its implementation
- Virtual space
- Easily accessible
- Facilitates rapport
- Shared experiences
- Modifiable
- Strong community support
- Participants invest in in-game outcomes
- Naturalistic simulation training
- A focus lens for interventions
- Alternative to ‘traditional’ interventions

Common Challenges When Utilizing Minecraft

- The technical skill curve
- Your personal knowledge and experiences with Minecraft
- The participants' knowledge and experiences with Minecraft
- Your comfort handling conflicts that arise within the game
- The ethics of using Minecraft as a therapeutic tool
 - Friending and social account integrations
 - Privacy, security and confidentiality
- The game being too distracting for desired goals
- Everyone being overwhelmed (Minecraft is HUGE)

Minecraft is a Game

- Designed to promote player engagement within the game itself.
 - Goals of facilitator may differ from the goals coded into the game.
- Progression and exploration are foundational aspects of the game.
 - This can cause difficulty when using Minecraft with specific intentions outside of its designed play style.

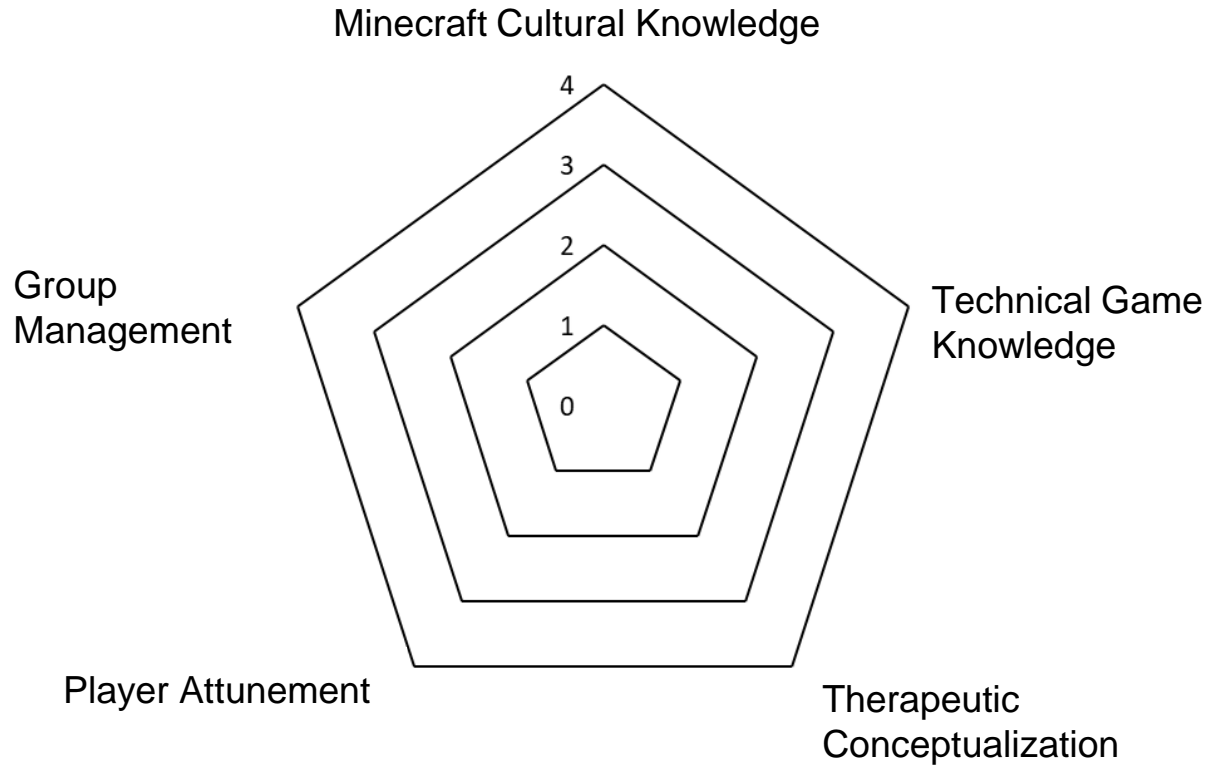
Minecraft as a Tool

- To use as a tool, facilitators first have to understand how it is ‘supposed’ to be used.
- When designing therapeutic activities in Minecraft, participant play norms and preferences should be considered.
 - What is ‘typical’ engagement for your players?

Minecraft Is Personal

- Participants have their own expectation of how Minecraft is played.
- Participants' previous experiences within the game influences the way they approach a facilitated activity.

The Balance of Minecraft Facilitation



Technical Game Knowledge Skills Checklist

- Connecting with Participants
 - In-person, online, group
- Moving and interacting with the world
- Game modes
 - What are they and how do you switch between them?
- Teleporting
 - Specific location
 - Self to player
 - Player to self
- Death options
 - Difficulty setting
 - PVP
 - Inventory loss
 - Spawn point
- Building Damage
 - TNT
 - Creepers
 - Endermen
- Worlds
 - Overworld
 - Nether
 - End
- World/Navigation
 - Coordinates
 - Biomes
 - Structures

Not All Dogs Are The Same...

A common mistake is to assume that because Minecraft is a virtual game, what happens in it does not have a real-life impact on participants.





Yukon Gold
@GrahamKritzer

Today my 7 year-old came into the room crying. I asked him what happened and he said that his 5 year-old brother put 80 cows in his house in Minecraft while he was offline and that it was "entirely too many cows" and honest to christ I have no idea how to parent any of this.

“My child's experience in a school-run club was horrible. Another player really messed up his base and the teacher did not know how to handle the situation. My kid is still really worked up about it.”

Financial and Technology Accessibility

- No real-life monetary value added to in-game items or cosmetics.
- Cross platform play adds to ease of access in Bedrock edition.
- The Minecraft cultural experience is mediated by the method of access.
 - Youtube, Xbox, social settings (school)...

Intersectionality

- Identity markers for gender and race within Minecraft.
- There is a lack of racial and gender diversity throughout the greater Minecraft Community.
- Intersectionality is important to take into account.



Ways to use Minecraft

Formats

- In-person or online
- One-on-one or in a group setting




Styles

- Shared language
- Show-and-tell/Observation
- Parallel play
- Cooperative play
- Designed experiences

Shared Language

- Utilizes language that participants relate to.
- Opportunities for co-created metaphors.
- Creates a linguistic link between in-game and real-world experiences.

CHECK IN

5	
4	
3	
2	
1	

Show-and-Tell or Observation

- Opportunities for naturalistic observation.
- In-the-moment opportunity for reflection and insight-building.
- Participant-as-expert.



Parallel and Cooperative Play

- Participants can build comfort with engaging with or near others.
- Participants can build shared experiences with low-stakes opportunities for engagement.



Participant - Designed Experiences

- Low-stakes opportunities for perspective taking, planning, and collaboration.



What are two things you are going to do with this knowledge today?

(Small group reflection)

References

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