

## PLAYTESTING AT ELIZABETH FORWARD



We were welcomed back to Elizabeth Forward Middle School to playtest – this time with full classes of students during their normal class periods. On Wednesday, with two 6th grade classes of approximately 20 students, we playtested Anthony’s Roman architecture lesson and Eugene’s minecart race – modified by the instructor to include science questions from the current curriculum of the class.

We returned on Friday to test with two classes of approximately 20 7th graders. These students ran through Dave Faulkner’s tower challenge (adapted from the real-world Marshmallow Challenge) and Yotam’s geography contour lines lesson.

Finally, we were invited to go over to Elizabeth Forward High School to test the tower challenge map with their new “Games Through the Ages” classes of 22 students from 9th, 10th, and 11th grades. We also got to talk to these students about our own experience, especially relevant since many of them are interested in a potential future in game development.

## DATA

We installed our modified version of MinecraftEdu on all the machines used at Elizabeth Forward, so we’ll be able to take those data files and actually use and view them in our Lesson Review Tool. Especially as we were observing 20 students in real-time, we realized that this sort of tool is almost a necessity for a teacher to be able to comprehend what students are actually doing in any given game session. And while we’d always intellectually understood this, it was another matter to gain that experience of working with a full class within this virtual world. It really gave us a new perspective on our project’s work and goals as a whole.

We took extensive observational notes on what we saw in the classroom itself and within the game world, and videotaped all of the classes. After each lesson, we were able to talk to individual students about their experience.

Our key questions were:

*“What surprised you?”*

*“What frustrated you?”*

*“What else did you want to see?”*

*“What did you learn?”*

We were aiming to avoid asking anything with a definite “right” or “wrong” answer, and really get a sense of what students were expecting and how they felt and reacted to the process.

## RESULT

We’ll be dissecting and analyzing our formal data next week, but the simple act of using MinecraftEdu in an actual classroom as part of the teachers’ and students’ normal workday was both illuminating and energizing. We were certainly surprised by some of our results.

One immediate takeaway was the thought that we may have gone into this asking the wrong question with our research. While “**what** can Minecraft teach well?” is definitely a worthy question, we found that the more compelling question starts with **how**. Further, our testing seemed to tell us more in that vein.

*“How can Minecraft best be used to teach?”*

## PRIOR RESEARCH HINTS, FUTURE DIRECTION

In our prior research into existing examples of classroom lessons within Minecraft, we’d found some surprising results that hinted at this. For instance, an initial reaction to Minecraft being used to teach creative writing may be to note that Minecraft is not a text interface, and that objects like signs in Minecraft can be more restrictive than Twitter or phone text messages.

However, we found a great example of a teacher who had created a basic story frame for his 7th grade students’ adventure: they were pretending to be shipwreck survivors on an island, and encouraged to just play Minecraft as a class. After each session, they would document their experiences as if it were the personal journal of their game character.

As a team, we felt that this question was more compelling, and answering it in-depth may do more to start a meaningful conversation in the educational and game-based learning communities.