

Games for Positive Impact Case studies (This is the right one, had to make a small edit

by Josh Thomas

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Games for Positive impact

Assignment 1: The case studies

By Joshua Thomas

Student No. 2404362

Case 1: Minecraft

I don't think this game really needs an introduction; you'd have to be living under the tectonic plates to not have at least heard of Minecraft. Initially being playable in 2009, going from a simple blocky sandbox to becoming one of the biggest video game properties of today, with a big budget movie on the way, Minecraft has come a long way.

But for those who really don't know, Minecraft is a sandbox survival game based in a world completely made out of blocks where the player can make whatever they want out of said blocks, either in survival mode or completely restriction free in creative mode.

In survival these mechanics encourage the player to get "creative" and to use those creations in order to survive. From making a base to call a home to a functional farm for food and a minecart system to get from place to place.

But the blocks and the items in Minecraft can be used for more than structures for survival. Fact there have been some mega builds that have come from this Games from huge cities like Lucastro Made by haraxx which you can check out [here](#) [1] to a recreation of Middle earth from the Lord of the rings franchise by Shorvok which you can check out [here](#) [2]. You can find both of these and more on the list [here](#).

Beyond structures and blocks Minecraft has an item called Redstone that can function as a simple electrical circuit, and people took this and absolutely ran with it. The best example of this is the time a player called mattbatwings made a functional computer that is capable of playing Minecraft, in Minecraft only using in-game items. A video from the creator going over the project can be found [here](#) [3].

On 1 November 2016 Mojang, the current owners of Minecraft released Minecraft Education edition, A modified version of Minecraft designed to teach children a wide array of topics using custom items and systems. The topics includes science, math, computer science, language arts, History & culture, Art & Design, Digital citizenship, social emotional, equity & inclusion and Climate and sustainability. This software is designed for schools so it's hard to come by as an individual but if you want to learn more check out their website [here](#) [4].

Minecraft education edition is already being used in schools with a reported 36 million accounts being registered for the software. It's shown that the software being based around Minecraft helps improve students' interest of the topics at hand, as Monash university has stated: "Research has shown that Minecraft can increase students' engagement and motivation for learning, leading to improved outcomes. As learners communicate with each other about the design, development, and building of their virtual worlds, they improve their collaborative skills. They become peer mentors and teachers of each other, modifying their support and collaboration to meet the needs and abilities of their group members." [5]

But enough of the education edition, to summarise what is the base version of Minecraft able to teach a child. For one the mechanics of Minecraft provide to player with plenty of opportunities for some creative problem solving and resource management when you're playing survival, and creative mode providing players with an unrestrictive environment to let their creativity run wild. This snippet from John Spencer's article on the topic puts it best: "In other words, Minecraft develops creative thinking in the same way that chess develops logic and systems thinking by promoting intense, focused mental engagement. And I'd argue that there are things we, as educators, can learn from Minecraft." [6]

Case 2: Theme Park

The one thing that isn't really taught in schools often is how to be business savvy which is important if you even want to think about starting your own business. Sure, you can study business at college and university but teaching children the basics when they're younger would help ingrain them in their memory, which is where this next game comes in.

Theme Park is a game that simulates the act of running a theme park (shocking I know) but in a fun and cartoonish way. Developed by Bullfrog productions in 1994, the player is tasked with creating and running of a theme park to eventually make it as profitable as possible. The player can make money in several ways from selling food and drinks, merchandise like balloons and toys and of course setting up rides for the park. Of course, a theme park can't be run by itself so you will have to hire employees to do different things like handymen, entertainers, engineers and security guards.

By the end of your first in-game year of running your park you will be given stats of your earnings and your expenses which are then compared to your competition. Once that is over and your second year begins the training wheels are truly taken off and is when the problems begin. For one the parks attendants will start to voice their complaints about the park, this can range from wanting more food and drinks, the area being boring and prizes not being good enough. This can be solved by making more food and drinks stands, upping the price of the prizes and adding some cosmetics to the park, this brings up another problem, however. Your employees can start to become unhappy with their wages and working conditions, this can boil up to the point where a mini game will trigger where you and a staff representative will discuss changes in wage where the player has to haggle to come to an agreement, this cycle of year by year running will go on infinitely until you perfect the park, you fall into the bankruptcy and sell your park or you simply get bored.

Theme Park ended up selling over 15 million copies and got rereleased on a huge number of different platforms including a Japanese localisation on the PlayStation.

The core mechanics of the game serve as a great way to teach players the importance of budgeting and business while giving them a fun way to be creative. I think this was an intention when creating it, as in an interview with one of the programmers of the game "Peter Molyneux" says, "he explained that the primary reason he created Theme Park was because he wanted players to create their dream Theme Park. Another reason is he wanted players to understand the kind of work running one entails." [7].

In conclusion, it's clear why this game stands as a cornerstone of the tycoon game genre and is such an interesting play all these years later.

Case 3:

Not every game has to be made with the direct intention of teaching the player something to send a positive message, either with intention from the developers/director or simply a coincidence in storytelling. I believe a game just like that is one named Nier Replicant.

Nier replicant released in 2021 is an updated version of the game Nier that released in 2010, and besides from the graphical upgrades and some story additions that I won't be getting into I'm going to stick with the version I know and will be referring to replicant from here on out.

Nier replicant takes place 1000s of years after a massive disaster basically destroyed the world, only leaving a handful of people scattered about the planet. These people are threatened by creatures called shades, shadow like beings that are that only seems to be interested in killing the remaining people on earth.

You play as an unnamed boy who travels around with a magic talking book looking for a cure for your sisters' illness. For the sake of my work and your and my time I'm going to summarise the story so I can get to my point.

So, after running into some dead ends in search of the cure and finding some new companions a massive shade attacks the boy's village, his sister is taken by what appears to be the leader of the shades and one of your companions has to sacrifice themselves to seal away another shade we couldn't defeat. After this happens the game skips 5 years, and the protagonist appears a lot more aggressive towards the shades. After helping the companion, you sacrificed themselves you and your companions are tasked with finding a way to break into the home of the shade that took the protagonist's sister.

So where am I going to with this, well after this point the game enters a strange loop of sorts as after you finish the game you are brought back to the point I was just talking about, where you go around defeating shades that are holding onto pieces of a key that unlocks the entrance to the home of the shade. On the first playthrough it goes as a typical fantasy tale, a group of heroes goes around defeating monsters threatening other people's lives in order to save a family member, you start to get cutscenes of the shades you intent to defeat and it becomes clear that these shades aren't simply mindless creatures. Now things do get sad with nearly all of the shades you encounter, but I couldn't talk about all of them because it would take too long so I'm going to talk about the one that sticks out to me the most.

I know I'm taking a while to get to the point but I'm nearly there, so let me tell you two stories.

In the desert lives a tribe of people who are being threatened by wolves when the tribe tries to gather and hunt for food. This comes to a boiling point when the wolves sneak into the tribe's village and kill their to be queen. This angers the king so he, his guards and a handful of trusted outsiders go and seek out the pack leader, who turned out to be a shade. After a hard-fought battle, the leader and the wolves are defeated, and the tribe can rest easier.

In the desert lives a pack of wolves struggling to survive as their once woodland homes has long since been destroyed by humanity and fell into the ruin of the desert. Their number has fallen to as little as 10 after the remaining people in the desert started to hunt them down after some of the pack attacked one over some food. In one final attempt to get the people leave them alone they sneak into the village of people in order attack their leader, after the attack got the wrong person, the pack are chased into a corner and after a long battle the leader is killed, and the park is practically extinct.

As you can tell the creative director of this game (Yoko Taro) is very anti conflict dislikes how some stories told from only one perspective. He wants players to see that every conflict has two sides of people who fight who are simply fighting for what they believe is the right thing to and could be avoided if they simply try to understand each other, in a panel

at GDC ([Game Developers Conference \(GDC\)](#)) he stated the design of Nier was heavily influenced by 9/11 (please bear with me) "Yoko moved on to discussing Nier and some of the ways in which that game attempts to move the player. For Nier's design, he revealed, he was deeply influenced by the events of 9/11 and the world thereafter.

9-11 was an unfortunate event that triggered out of a situation where both sides believed they were doing the right thing. The question is, what did they see from their point-of-view? What does it look like from each other's perspectives? These were the thoughts that went through his head when he was making Nier."

To me, the Nier games aren't simply about how bad conflict can be on both sides but the importance of knowledge and understanding of one another and how this simple action can have such a large effect on the world.

Bibliography

In order of appearance

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GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

GENERAL COMMENTS

Marks Breakdown

55/100

1. Engagement With Literature Skills (60%)

References are featured in text showing independent learning has taken place as a part of the assignment. A few more could be present here, especially in the second and third case studies.

A bibliography in IEEE format is presented as part of the work, as requested by the brief – this is good to see.

2. Knowledge & Understanding Skills (54%)

Application of some of the content covered in class might be good to see – e.g. Theme Park is not designed as an educational experience, but it can be used as a management and budgeting trainer – which is known as Game-Based Learning. This would demonstrate a wider awareness of the topics covered in the module and how they relate to the games you have produced Case Studies on.

Try to use a little more formal language in your written work so it sounds less like a blog or conversation – doing so would be good practice for the Third-Year dissertation.

3. Cognitive & Intellectual Skills (52%)

There is some evidence of analytical thinking, though large sections of the case studies feel a bit more descriptive – try describing why certain things are present alongside what happens – this should hopefully result in a more detailed piece of work.

4. Practical Application Skills

(not assessed in this assignment)

5. Transferrable Skills for Life and Professional Practice

(not assessed in this assignment)

Overall Mark: 55.1%

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