



at



**HEIDT
CENTER OF EXCELLENCE**
BY THE CHILDREN'S HOME

“Who just took my stuff?!”

“Okay, all you have to do is put three wood planks in the top of your crafting table and one stick below that, and another stick below that.”

“Wait a second. Are we making a portal or is there one here already?”

The above dialogue permeated a digital space within the walls of the Heidt Center of Excellence by The Children’s Home as the sandbox video game, Minecraft, was navigated by students in the Heidt Center’s ESports Diamonds Minecraft Club.

But there is a lot more going on in this world of infinite blocky terrain filled with differing electronic-bionetworks, sheep, pigs, skeletons and zombies – to name a few.

Caitlyn Lynch, autism intervention specialist at the Heidt Center, developed the lesson plans for her students participating in Minecraft Club. She said the immersive, detailed environment rewards skillsets and attributes like critical thinking and dynamic planning. ***story continues...***



“Minecraft contains a very exacting and deliberate digital ecosystem,” she said. “This space is very conducive for stimulating higher cognitive functions in developing minds.”

“This is a group of young learners working together in an emergent gameplay scenario where they are collaborating to reach a common goal,” explains David Schmidt, autism educational aide at the Heidt Center. “This is not unlike what you’d find from a team-oriented sport associated with any school.”



David Schmidt, autism educational aide, works with the students at Minecraft Club to navigate obstacles and complete objectives.

In a recent scenario, students were tasked with working together to craft the proper materials to reach their objective of navigating to the nether – a separate realm within the Minecraft universe.

This involved working

as a team to find the rare materials needed to build the portal, which is required to get to the nether before the allowed time expired.

Some students were obviously very familiar with Minecraft and were able to begin navigating and crafting the needed items right away. Others were novices and needed help from their fellow players.

That, Schmidt says, is a key aspect of Minecraft Club.

“Some of our students have been at home with little socialization among their peers since the onset of the pandemic,” he said. “An ESport environment fosters teamwork, socialization and dialogue. Some of our students have challenges with... ***story continues***”

