

PRE-ALPHA BUILD AUGUST 2016

DON'T HATE THE PLAYER: AN EARLY SCREENSHOT
OF TED BROWN'S *CHESS HEROES*

ChessHeroesGame.com

Video Games at School

**EUGENE GAME MAKERS AND RESEARCHERS
MAKE LEARNING FUN BY AMY KLARUP**

According to a 2014 study in the *Journal of Communication*, up to 40 percent of parents are taught how to use computers by their children.

Whether you think kids are tech zombies or you think computer coding should be taught as a second language, tech is here. And kids love it.

Video games have infiltrated schools for decades — the widely adored *Oregon Trail* game launched in 1971 — but as technology advances, game developers and researchers, including ones here in Eugene, see an opportunity to combine play and learning through educational gaming, or gamification.

Ted Brown, a local indie game developer, created a

video game called *Chess Heroes* that introduces kids to chess, teaching them the basic skills they need to play with a physical board and chess pieces.

“I felt like this was a chance for me to make a game that could actually make a difference in people’s lives in a real way,” Brown says.

Brown recently launched a Kickstarter campaign to raise \$20,000 for the game. If he meets his goal by Oct. 1, he plans to offer the game to schools for free through Steam, a game-downloading platform.

Chess can be daunting to young kids, but in the form of a computer game, with cute chess pieces that fly across the board and dance, it becomes something more appealing.

Brown says he knew the game could resonate with kids when he posted a demo online and got messages from excited parents who couldn’t believe their kids wanted to play chess with them.

Magdalen Rose, media producer for *Chess Heroes*, says the game of chess teaches skills like logic and critical thinking, and research shows it can help children who lack impulse control to hone their ability to plan ahead.

“It helps not just with math and science, but also with reading and comprehension,” Rose says.

At the University of Oregon’s Center on Teaching and Learning (CTL), researchers test the ability of gaming technology to reinforce mathematical concepts, and they’re examining various technological strategies to help struggling young learners before they fall too far behind their classmates.

Chris Doabler, an assistant professor with the University of Texas at Austin with a research appointment at CTL, is one year into a four-year project called *Precision Math* that uses both print-based and tech-based methods to help first graders learn foundational math skills.



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