

Changegamer Strives to be a Gamechanger

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Guest blogger Mike Farley has been teaching middle and high school Geography for 12 years in the Toronto District School Board and currently at University of Toronto Schools in Canada (UTS is an independent school affiliated with the U of T). He shares how he uses games and simulations in his own classroom, as well as his valuable teacher support resource, [Changegamer.ca](#). Mike can also be contacted via email at mfarley@utschools.ca. His general teaching website is www.mikefarley.weebly.com.

For the past ten years I have been using 'social change' computer games in my Grades 7-12 Geography classes to explore themes such as natural disasters, energy management, urban planning, environmental issues, economics, peace and conflict, and civic action. The excitement and depth of learning demonstrated each time I have used these simulations has shown me the power of games in education.

I created the [Changegamer.ca](#) website a couple of years ago because I was having difficulty finding teacher-ready activities and assignments to use with the simulations. The website highlights over 25 online games and includes free and editable worksheets that I have created along with interns from the University of Toronto teacher's college (OISE).

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One of my favorite games to use with my Grades 7-9 students is the energy management and urban planning simulation 'Electricity'. Before starting the simulation, the students spend some time researching the pros and cons of ten types of renewable and non-renewable energy production (eg. coal, natural gas, nuclear, solar, geothermal, etc.). While playing Electricity they have the chance to test out those types of energy and get a small taste of the complexity of powering a city.

'Inside the Haiti Earthquake' is another of my preferred simulations that I use with my senior classes. It combines documentary footage with some game elements to teach about the devastation of the 2010 earthquake. The often disturbing video clips create a strong emotional impact as the student takes on the role of either a survivor, journalist, or aid worker. Research prior to the simulation and discussion afterward based on several analysis questions leads to a very rich learning experience overall.

The activities on [Changegamer.ca](#) range from simple one-period worksheets to multi-period assignments with assessment tools. Feedback about any of the activities is greatly appreciated. In addition, if you have any game suggestions or even some of your own game activities, I would love to hear about them!