

Gaming for the Goals

We wanted to make a difference during lockdown even though many of us were not even allowed back into the country. We discovered that the World Food Program (WFP) had an app called "Free Rice" where we could improve our academics and feed a child in need. By the end of half term we had raised 131 000 grains of rice as a school and the WFP had won the Nobel Peace Prize. Sadly, we saw that we were earning less rice as donations dried up due to COVID. We decided to see if we could raise enough money to feed a child for a year (UNSDG 1) and if the WFP was using gaming, why couldn't we?



This was a brave decision because most people wanted to decrease screen time instead of increasing it. During online learning, we were spending 6-10 hours a week online and this was not healthy. Parents were concerned about addiction, cyberbullying and weight gain from sitting too much. Teachers were worried about students gaming and not doing their learning and they were reporting that students were not sleeping. Many students were playing violent content that was not suitable for their age and what would this do to our school's reputation if we were encouraging a gaming tournament with this addictive technology? The other issue was adult supervision: many teachers were scared to participate in online gaming with students because the teaching unions warned that they could be legally responsible for any accidents online. Sadly, without this supervision, younger students would continue to be exposed to violence, bullying and addictive behaviour so our other goal was "Good Health and Wellbeing" online.

On Dec 8, we presented research to Mr Ward (our headmaster) to request permission to hold a gaming tournament. We were honest about the risks to show that we had researched them but we also presented the benefits of gaming which include increased creativity, social skill development and improved mental health. We also showcased [games](#) that we had [coded ourselves](#) on Scratch that did not have violence or where we had reduced the level of violence. We don't teach coding at our school but it is a very important subject and we argued that our school needs to support young people who are pursuing this skill instead of just focusing on addiction and bullying.

Mr Ward agreed that we could continue researching and this meant that we had to make more brave choices. We had to prove that our games would not harm younger students and if we found any evidence of harm we would need to stop. We sent an anonymous survey to all MYP students to measure their online behaviour and we promised to keep it confidential. Students would not be honest with adults in case they took their devices but they would be honest with us. That put a lot of responsibility on our shoulders as we were dealing with important issues like addiction and mental health but we promised to maintain confidentiality. This also took a lot of courage on our part and from our teachers.

Our courage paid off as students opened up about topics that they were too afraid to mention. Over 50% were getting less than 6 hours of sleep but our teachers and parents were wrong to blame gaming. 39.4% of students don't game but 91.5% watch YOUTUBE. In fact, 49.3% of the kids stay up to watch youtube and 56.3% stay up to be on their phone whereas only 29.6% stay up to game. The major risk at our school was not gaming but addictive technology which could be blocked or controlled by parents or apps like "self control".

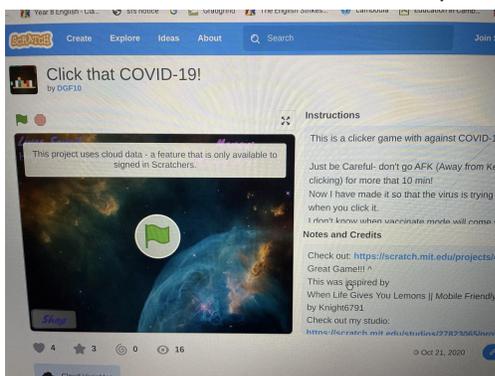
During February, we invited the deputy director of the Mental Health services for the Ministry of Public Health to examine our research. If she thought that our gaming tournament was a good idea then we could confidently get our teachers and parents on board. Again, it took a lot of courage to present to such an important person when we were only children ourselves. Not only did she praise our “excellent research”, she also taught us that gaming was an important tool for young people to destress and form communities during the lockdown. In many ways, it improved mental health and only became addictive if not supervised properly. She sent us some resources for parents on how to help their children online and this was shared by our head of pastoral.

Based on feedback from the ministry, we had approval for our tournament and we made a guide for parents about which games were safe to [play](#). One student who received a lot of hate for faking that he supposedly made “fake” games started to prove his innocence by making a great game for GSL inspiring grade 6 and getting almost 200 visits. The game is used for our own platform of [Roblox](#) and we prototyped it in class. This was a struggle as all the IT was blocked and we had to convince the IT managers that we were using Roblox for educational purposes. We also had to create a YOUTUBE livestream which was very complicated but we eventually succeeded. Unfortunately, COVID numbers spiked and we had to postpone the tournament until May 20 but we did not forget the message we received from the Ministry of Public Health. Now, more than ever, students needed to have fun as part of a community so we made the game free and invited anyone from our community to play.

Something amazing happened. The grade 6s who were playing violent games started playing our game instead and wrote to our teacher to say “we understand why the other games were too violent and the GSL is helping us make our own levels. Will you play them if we design them?” We have now got a school gaming club that is supervised by teachers who play with us and even girls have joined. There is no bullying and we play the levels that we create as well as other age appropriate content. We haven’t helped the World Food Program but we definitely made a difference for Mental Health and Wellbeing.

Adults now know more about our online habits and how to help us. We can showcase our technology skills and be a good influence to younger students who were at risk of addictive behaviour. This means that teachers are no longer afraid and they are joining our live streams.

And we are not finished. Gaming addiction develops because we have nothing else to do so we are currently creating a fitness channel with chair fitness during lockdown. We want to have fitness challenges online and physical games instead of just online games. By getting adults to face their fears about addiction in children, we are improving mental health during lockdown.



Games we designed to improve mental health. [DGF10 on Scratch \(mit.edu\)](#) ← Scratch Games

