

# YOUNG REWIRED STATE

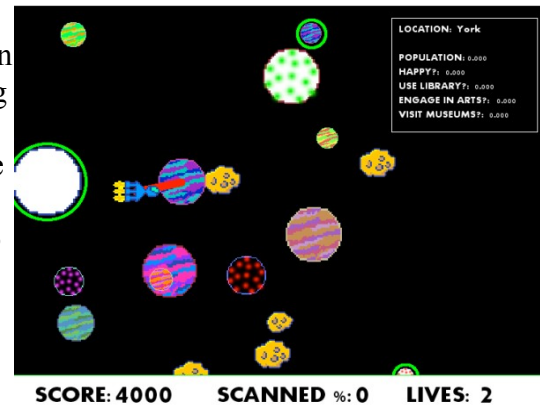
1st → 5th August 2011

For Young Rewired State 2011 I was fortunate to run a centre in my home-town of Ipswich in Suffolk.

The idea of Young Rewired State is simple, take government open data and use it in new and creative ways.

For our project we decided to create a video game, to help “Dave, the Alien” find a new place to live based on how happy people in different English counties are. We had lots of fun and this is how we did it.

Originally I thought we would make a “Vib Ribbon” style game with the government data generating the level design, however I soon realised that although this was happening the user had no access to the data. We wanted to show the data and we wanted to have a reason for looking in the first place. In comes “Dave, the alien” in search of a new home. “Dave” likes the arts, libraries and happy people so those are the things we looked for and found in <http://data.gov.uk/dataset/ni-198-children-travelling-to-school-mode-of-transport-usually-used> report, so we downloaded the .xls file.



The kids really took to the idea of helping “Dave” find a new home and each of the kids had a one on one programming session with me as well as designing the spaceships and colouring in the planets which represent different counties, they also had homework in finding out the estimated population of the fifteen areas we looked at. The kids arguably come from a lower income background and a PC in the home would be a luxury, luckily they all have library cards and were able to Google their way to the answers, thanks again Chantry Library, Ipswich.

The coding was done in Processing and is arguably not my best, several for loops could have been used here and there to neaten things up, but it is important to note that code was actually used as a blackboard to teach these kids how to code. So more complex things like structures, classes and object were left out, and I wanted them to see a direct connection between the numbers in the code and what happened on-screen.

During the project they learned about computer programming, graphics, geography, mathematics, computational thinking, logic, the internet, they even learned for the first time that government data exists and why governments collect it. They learned about statistics, percentages, rounding up and down, and how changing a small number can make a big difference. For them it was a different outlook on what a computer can be used for, not just to consume things but to be creative and be inquisitive.

For me, it was great. I got to use all my teaching metaphors “integers are like boxes, and multi-dimensional arrays are like chests of drawers”, adapting my game making skills to a new way of accessing government data. I had really good fun and I am really proud of my teams effort, it is very difficult for anyone to stay on task for the 10+ hours we worked together over the three days, all the more impressive that they are all under 10 years old.

Sincerest of thanks to Chantry Library Ipswich, Young Rewired State and all the mentors and hackers who took part.

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