CoderBunnyz – My STEM Startup that Teaches Kids to Code

Samaira Mehta
Founder of CoderBunnyz
Correspondence: mrakeshm@yahoo.com

Last summer was different for me: no camps for a change! I stayed home with my younger brother and did things that I would normally not have time to do. One such day I finished playing many board games with my parents and when they got bored (actually they kept losing and didn't want to play anymore) I went to the computer to do coding and then thought today has been an amazingly cool day. I did two of my most favorite things - coding and board game - if I mix these two I could create something really cool. After all there are so many people who learn real estate from monopoly and spelling from scrabble. It's an old trick that can still be used to learn new things. I added my favorite animal bunny to it and that's where I got the name of my coding board game - Coderbunnyz! I have to say this all started with my love for board games and passion for computer coding.

You know what? Computers might seem very smart but they are just boxes that follow instructions very quickly and intelligently. That's where coding comes in. Coding to the rescue!! Coding is step-by-step instructions that tell the computer what to do.

Let me tell you the story of how I got to know about coding. A few years back, my dad played a little prank on me. He showed me something on his laptop that had one button and a command that said, "Press this if you are beautiful". He ask me to give it a try, But when my mouse pointer touched the button, the button disappeared. I was like, how did you do that? Am I not beautiful, what's going on in here? He said this was made by coding and then I was like, "I want to do that too!" and that's where it all started.

From then on, whenever I got on the computer, I would go to the website to practice debugging, problem solving, sequencing and conditional. As the tasks got harder, I enjoyed the challenges that each new level presented to me. I began to learn problem-solving skills that I now think are essential for everyday life. It's very important for kids to learn coding because coding is starting to become an important part of life.

It's so important that they have to start when they are young. So after I got this idea about CoderBunnyz, with the help of my parents, and graphic designers from Iowa, Ohio and New Zealand helped bring my ideas and sketches and inspiration to life.

Yes, my true inspirations were my parents and my family. My biggest one is my younger brother. He is 4 years old and I am a mini teacher to him. While teaching him, I got the idea of doing workshops, that is, teaching more kids at libraries, schools, tech events, community events and for corporations (like Google) and have taught more than 1000 kids so far.

So, how does CoderBunnyz teach coding? Kids roll the dice, program the bunny with the code cards to hop through the maze, help him eat a carrot, jump around the puddle, turn around the fence and then hurry to reach the destination. You need to find the shortest path to be a winner.

When you move forward, turn left or go in any direction and make a code, that's called sequencing, one of the concepts in this game. If you run into a fence, you can go around it. That's an example of a conditional, another coding concept. A conditional means, 'if this happens, then do that.' You have to think of other ways to reach the destination.

While playing, kids learn basic coding concepts like sequencing, conditionals, debugging and advanced concepts like loops, functions, inheritance, writing code and many more. It turns out that all programming language like Scratch, Python and Java use the same concepts. So once kids learn fundamentals, it makes it much easier for them to learn any coding language. All this while playing a board game and having fun.

There has been amazing support and a lot of interest among kids and parents. In fact kids are already having CoderBunnyz in their wish list for Santa. How cute is that!!

I am also the Founder of another initiative, "Girls U Code". This is an attempt to teach coding concepts to girls who would otherwise not have gotten a chance to learn coding. The workshops are for girls only and I try to reach more and more underrepresented girls in partnership with libraries and school districts.

CoderBunnyz is a journey. In my journey, I get to meet amazing people in the community and that supports and motivates me. I love getting young kids excited about coding. You know, coding is going to be everywhere. For kids who want to be the leaders of tomorrow, there is perhaps no skill as important as learning to program. While not every student will become a coder when they grow up, a basic coding understanding can make them better thinkers and to reach their start early, by starting now!!

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Samaira Mehta *is an inventor of STEM programming board game "CoderBunnyz". She is an avid blogger, coder, singer and an elementary school student in Silicon Valley, California. Her mission is to get kids excited about coding in a really fun way!*