LEADING THE WAY IN CODE.ORG

Only 100 affiliates around the United States conduct training workshops for the Code Studio curriculum and we have one of our very own at the University of Northern Iowa. Ben Schafer, an associate professor in Computer Science at UNI is specifically trained to conduct training workshops.

Code.org is a non-profit founded by Hadi and Ali Partovi in January of 2013. Their goal is to bring programming to K-12 education and make it accessible to everyone. They began with a series of web videos featuring tech bigwigs and sports and entertainment celebrities explaining why learning coding is important. As a follow up, they created the “Hour of Code” campaign to correspond with Computer Science Education week – the second week of December each year. The Hour of Code campaign produced a series of puzzle tutorials featuring Angry Birds, Plants vs. Zombies, and this year, the characters from Frozen, which engage participants in the process of programming. To date, the Hour of Code initiative has reached at least 72 million students, although they hope to pass 100 million this week during the second Hour of Code campaign).

In addition to Hour of Code, Code.org has designed and recently released a FREE, K-5 Computer Science curriculum referred to as the Code Studio program. Code Studio consists of three courses containing 20 lessons each which blend “unplugged” classroom activities and browser based “plugged” activities to teach the fundamentals of computer science/programming. Dr. Schafer says that through Code Studio students learn how actions, events, and vocabulary from their daily life correspond to principles of computer programming and how such connections can help them improve their communication and problem solving skills.

Ben is joining with Code.org to offer FREE one–day workshops for educators interested in teaching the Code.org computer science curriculum. “Code.org wants to make sure that teachers understand the curriculum and are prepared to implement this curriculum in their classroom. As such, they are funding free, full-day teacher training workshops all around the country. Any teacher or administrator involved with K-5 education can sign up to attend these workshops scheduled all over the country. Furthermore, any school/district/organization can request to host such a workshop and have one scheduled in their community. I have conducted five in the last month, have one more this year, and currently have 12 public and 2 private workshops scheduled around the state of Iowa for Spring of 2015.”

Teachers who attend a workshop will receive a complete copy of the entire curriculum, lesson materials, and some nifty Code.org swag. During the workshop they review the curriculum, experience several of the unplugged lessons, work with the Code Studio website, and engage in peer-to-peer discussions regarding teaching strategies, implementation strategies, and overcoming barriers.
When Ben first heard about this organization, he had to be a part of it.

“I have been working for five years to engage students, pre-service teachers, and in-service teachers with the concepts of computer programming. When they first organized in 2013, I was very interested in their efforts and how simple yet engaging their materials were. I’ve learned that there is a very recent feeling in the US that computer science is more than just a little fad that we might teach to kids. More and more teachers are recognizing that.

Ben has been able to learn so much as an affiliate for code.org. “The skills kids learn in a computer science classroom translate into other areas including increased ability to communicate, collaborate, problem solve, and think critically.”

“I love what I’m doing. The excitement that is present in each of the workshops I’ve conducted is very real. The teachers who have been coming WANT to be there and they want to know how they can help give their students necessary skills.”

If you are interested or know an educator who is interested in attending or hosting a code.org workshop, you can find more information at Ben’s website:

http://www.cs.uni.edu/~schafer/outreach/k5/

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