Cracking the Code

Demystifying Experience @ Day School Workshop

By HALLIE CANTOR Acquisitions, Yeshiva University

In our digital day and age, to be codeless is to be clueless.

On Monday, April 23, NYMA's School Library Workshop "Would You, Could You, Should You Code? Connecting School Libraries to Coding" -- co-chaired by **Leslie Monchar and Bruchie Weinstein**, and hosted by **Noreen Wachs** at Ramaz Middle School -- gave curious attendees a glimpse at the how-tos of computer coding, for both children and adults, and their instructional uses within school libraries.

Presenter **Anna Canino-Fluit**, graduate of Syracuse University iSchool, is librarian and tech instructor at Rush-Henrietta CSD -- first at Roth Middle School and now at Vollmer Elementary School -- where she built the library for their new building from scratch. During her PowerPoint *Clueless about Coding? How to Introduce Coding without being an Expert*, she discussed coding websites, many of which offer various free tools and tutorials -- Code.org, CodeCademy, Scratch, Lightbot and Khan Academy.

"I recommend Code.org for the beginners," she declared.

Each website contained different applications for specific age groups and levels of proficiency. Anna also suggested different strategies in bringing students into the library to code, such as Hour of Code events, which would encourage them to try coding.

Numerous Gains

But why learn coding at all?

Anna listed the numerous advantages:

- Development of problem-solving skills.
- Importance of perseverance and grit.
- Empowerment through the creation of activities.
- Demystification of technology.

Suddenly that iPhone is no longer a passive object. By discovering, "Hey, *that's* why Apple works that way!", students find a real comfort zone with technology and a familiarity with the infrastructure behind all the websites, operating systems, and software that we use so abundantly today. They also learn that details — grammar, capitalization and spelling — matter in order for their codes to work.

"However," she warned, "you also have to know when to quit." She elaborated, "Sometimes the programs are buggy. You have to report the module and move on."

Determining how, when, and what to teach students depends largely on what kind of tech is available, what you want them to accomplish, and, simply, how much time is available.

Win-Win

From basics, continuing onto the next steps, Anna led us through some of the app programs, answering our questions and offering advice with knowledge and patience. Basic app instruction, for elementary school (and a few adults!) involved object-orientation, showing cute animals or simple instructions (e.g. a square lighting up). Higher-age apps, many of which featured logic or puzzles, showed an astonishing breadth of creativity or sophistication.

While some coding websites were tailored for the independent learner, others required instructor participation. It is a win-win situation: Enacting a coding initiative not only benefits our students, but also raises our own relevance as librarians and value to our institutions.

Anna's PowerPoint presentation is available: *https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1inkbSiqtFRMELYJ9EdxwKhq2pRr5S8nEuud9HtGxsWk/edit#slide=id.p.*■

NYMA News

Newsletter of AJI-NYMA Vol. 28 / 2018