Inspiring High School Students to Pursue Computer Science with Thunkable

For Computer Science Educator Joe Mazzone, teaching low or no code tools to high school students is something he's passionate about. Initially certified on App Inventor, Mazzone transitioned to Thunkable when we launched cross-platform integration.

"I really thought Thunkable was the absolute best because students with very little knowledge can build professional applications that can be used in the real world," said Mazzone. "It's incredibly powerful as I'm teaching important computer science concepts because they're building something, they feel it has a lot of value and meaning, and we can do lots of really cool projects."

For Mazzone, utilizing Thunkable made computer science concepts exciting and digestible for all of his students — CS and non-CS students alike. At the end of their high school career, many students included their Thunkable projects in portfolios, even if they'd taken only one class. “Even if they never continued on a pathway of computer science, even if they did it their freshman year and it was their senior year, that's in their portfolio, the [Thunkable] app," said Mazzone. "They were so proud of it and felt like it was a big accomplishment that they made something useful."

TEACHING THUNKABLE

As a Computer and Software Engineering Instructor, Mazzone spent a year integrating Thunkable into his curriculum and followed the below sequence:

- Year One: low or no code tools, like Thunkable
- Year Two: Python
- Year Three: AP Computer Science, Java

Mazzone says the most exciting part of teaching Thunkable was watching students utilize the live test feature which allows students to test on their mobile device, in real-time, while they are building their app. "Having the Thunkable companion on their phone and seeing it on their own phone was incredibly powerful," said Mazzone.

Mazzone said the coolest part of teaching Thunkable was seeing what students created. When the pandemic began one group of students got to work. "A group of girls built a COVID screening app for the school. Everybody in the school — students and teachers — would report symptoms, if they were symptomatic or anything, it flagged that. We had the database report back to the state, and we'd have a report that the administration could generate. We created the mobile app for everyone to have on their own personal devices with easy convenience and a reminder that pings them in the morning before school. It was really cool stuff."

Mazzone is excited about the future of computer science and credits Thunkable with sparking student interest. He said, "I think it has a huge effect on students, seeing the value in computer science, and provides access to computer science education in the very beginning. I think Thunkable is incredibly valuable."

JOE MAZZONE, COMPUTER SCIENCE EDUCATOR

Joe is an experienced Computer Science Educator and president of Rhode Island's local CSTA chapter. He has a long history of creating open-source curriculum content and resources, facilitating professional development for teachers, and working with state departments of education to expand Computer Science education in schools across the US. Joe has a bachelor's degree in Technology Education from Rhode Island College and a master's degree in School Leadership from Providence College.