# Never too young to code

The finale of DC WeCode Competition 2015 unveiled a crop of talented children, writes Marissa Asfirah.



Some of the participants at the WeCode competition

IT'S not a rare sight these days to see children transfixed on the screen of their computer. Games are not the only pulling factor as more and more youths are experimenting with coding. It is undeniable that learning the language of computers and being up-to-date on technology is pivotal these days. The recent WeCode competition Asean Edition, organized by Eduspec Holdings and Youth on Unity, gathered local young talents as well as those from Vietnam, the Philippines and Indonesia. The competition was divided into three categories: Freshman (for children aged 6-9), sophomore (10-12) and Executive (for students 13 and above).

## Creating From Scratch

The competition challenged contestants to create a game from scratch. These young children and teenagers built the entire mechanics of their game, from selecting pictures, arranging audio, set-ting up the story, building characters, and setting the flow and transition of events for the whole game. All these were done within an hour for the freshman and two hours for sophomore.

Using the scratch software system introduced by Carnegie-Mellon University, one of the most prestigious universities for computer science in America, the contestants were challenged to create something tangible and useful in the form of a game.

There were three stages of the WeCode Competition: State level, the national level and the international level. A total of 167 students from 40 schools across the four participating Asean countries gathered at the halls of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) for this event.

The contestants were judged on a few criterias, including story, game design, difficulty and overall look, and sound of the game. The judges were UTM Bachelor's of Science Industrial Design students.

## Winners

In the Freshman category, Malaysian students dominated the artistic design, entertaining program and creative story awards. Likewise, for the Sophomore category, the original idea, structured and educational game awards were all won by Malaysia. The WeCode friendship award went to two teams each from Vietnam and Malaysia. In the Executive category, the three winners were from the Philippines, Malaysia and Vietnam.

The Digital Campus also hosted two other competitions: Digital Arts & Animation which was conducted in Jakarta, Indonesia, and Robotics competition in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. For those interested, applications are open annually at this time of the year. Details at www.eduplay.com.my or www. fb.com/eduplayasean on the contests as well as the Eduspec and Youth On Unity's other initiative.



Jonathan Ho Kai Jian, Malaysia (11 years old) Winner, Sophomore Educational Game Award.

**Q: How did you start coding?**
I was introduced to coding in a computer class in school and found it very interesting. I like the creativity that coding offered me and I went on to learn more to get better, especially after I passed the national level.

**Q: What is your game all about?**
It's about fighting a virus on the computer. My character makes a mistake and downloads a game that contains a dangerous virus. The mission is to attack the virus using keyboard sequences.

**Q: What process was involved in creating the game?**

Since I only had one hour to create the game, I began by searching for pictures and songs to make the game fun. Then I arranged the story and coding for it.

Through this game, I want garners to learn that we should check first instead of simply downloading things from the Internet.



Ngo Danh Chau and Tran Quynh Chi, Vietnam (10 years old)

**Q: What is your game all about?**

Ngo: It is about the importance of cyber security. There are two levels which involve questions and quizzes that tests the user's knowledge of firewalls. Tran searched for pictures and sounds while I came up with the code and dialogue for the characters.

**Q: Why do you like coding?**

Our idols are Steve Jobs and Pham Nhat Vuong (Vietnam's first billionaire). Their successes in business and IT are inspiring and got us interested in creating our own game using computer codes.

**Q: How does it feel to participate in this event?**

What do you plan to do after this? It's exciting to be in a different country representing our school. We were nervous but this was a good experience. We plan to join the Robotics competition under Digital Campus next year.

Phillipe Miguel, Philippines (17 years old) Winner, Executive Educational Game Award

**Q: Why did you start coding?**
Society's needs are changing and coding has become a necessary part of our lives. I began researching and looking up YouTube tutorials to learn more about it. This competition serves as a huge boost for me.

**Q: How does it feel to represent your country in this event?**
It is a good starting point for me to try and apply what I have learnt. The scratch software that is used in this competition is something new for me. I hope the organisers will include C++ programming in the future events.