



Interview: Fay Rhodes

By Hispabrick Magazine

Name: Fay Rhodes
Age: 60
Occupation: Designer/Educator
Nationality: American

How did you get involved in MINDSTORMS?

How did I get started? It was through my husband, who was looking for something he could do with his very-intelligent teenage son. Rick, a Presbyterian minister, lived in Massachusetts, while Connor resided in Oklahoma with his mother, so they each had a kit. Rick often reminds me that my first reaction to the NXT was, "\$250?!!!!" (x 2) We laugh about it now.

Now, neither Rick, nor Connor use the NXT, but I'm still using it—and hoping it will inspire my granddaughter to be all she can be. I'm happy to report that her favorite activity is building with the Duplo blocks I gave her. (She's 3 years old.)

How do you contribute to the MINDSTORMS community?

Unlike the other MCP members, I have no advanced degree beyond as BS in Education (título de grado en educación) which was earned many years ago. What I do have is curiosity, a love of problem-solving, a lot of perseverance and a little artistic talent.

I've found that there can be benefits to not knowing all of the mathematical formulas and scientific "laws". Like Isaac Newton, I learn by 1. observing and 2. following that observation up with experimentation and research. I suppose another difference is that I view building NXT robots as a form of kinetic art. From that perspective, I see the NXT as an opportunity to engage students who aren't normally

interested in math or science---and, also, to keep the fine arts integrated into any classroom curriculum. Also, people don't often think about the fact that scientists need to be able to think creatively, in order to solve problems. Inventions are creative applications of not just textbook knowledge, but of observation and creative thinking.

My first reason for writing was to provide material that would appeal to girls and non-competitive boys---or be gender-neutral. I suspect that's the reason most elementary school teachers buy my animal robot books.

I think of my books as inspiration, primarily. For teachers, that seems to be a primary use, as well. I even heard from the folks in charge of the Darwin anniversary event in the UK, saying they were using the Zoo! book for inspiration.

My newest book, Robots Alive! Endangered Species, is self-published. Commercial publishers don't publish full-color books, and people on the NXTStep Blog have been saying they'd willingly pay more for color books; so I thought I'd test that. The results are that most people really don't want to pay for full-color. (My 110-page book is priced at \$22.95 on Amazon.) So, that's why you only find black-and white instructions in the bookstores....

I've earned back the cost of publishing, and received a very small profit, in order to keep the price as low as possible. But it's still expensive. It's good I'm not doing it for the money!

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