

The superpower that enables you to design the future

By  Ilse van den Berg

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WeThinkCode_ is a network of revolutionary tech institutions dedicated to deliver Africa's human potential and meet the increasing demand for software engineering skills. We chat to founding partner, Arlene Mulder, to find out more.



 ***WeThinkCode_ has quite a unique story. Tell us a bit about how it started.***

WeThinkCode_'s story begins in Johannesburg in 2015.

After meeting by chance, Camille Agon and I connected over our rebellious spirit and shared passion for education. We wanted to do things differently, unlock untapped talent in Africa and, most importantly, design the future.

Ecole 42 is the answer, said Camille. Let's bring it to South Africa, said I.

Around the same time somewhere else in Johannesburg, entrepreneurs and MBA friends Justinus and Yossi, were finalising the plan for their Hello Africa Foundation, designed to unlock coding talent in Africa.

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It was not long before the four of us met and collaborated to design a digital and educational revolution that would change the lives of thousands of African youth and help build the country's tech industry.

WeThinkCode_ was born.

■ ***How many students and campuses do you have currently?***

We have two campuses based in Johannesburg and Cape Town with over 300 students. Our mission is to establish five WeThinkCode_ campuses across five African countries by 2024.

Over the last three years, we have received 105,000 applications, welcomed 1,700 students to Selection Bootcamp, and have selected 600 students to join us for the two-year course.

■ ***I really enjoyed your talk at the HeavyChef event recently. You mentioned that you "democratise access and remove barriers to access". I loved hearing about this different approach to enrolment and qualifying for the programme. Tell us a bit more about the process.***

We believe that talent comes from everywhere and strive to democratise access to education. As such, our only entry requirement is that applicants need to be aged 17-35. No previous coding knowledge or matric certificate is required.

Interested applicants can apply online, where they are guided through three online games that test for a coding aptitude.

Successful candidates who are likely to be #BornToCode are then invited to attend a three-week Selection Bootcamp; where they will learn C Language and also have an opportunity to see if they enjoy our unique peer-to-peer learning environment.

Successful candidates from Bootcamp are invited to join our two-year, tuition-free, full-time software engineering course.



■ ***Have the majority of the students had experience in coding? Is it a requirement?***

The majority of our students do not have any coding experience when they join us and, as mentioned above, it is not a requirement.

■ **Talk us through this phrase "Don't learn to code, learn to think code".**

Our students learn to solve problems using technology as a tool. As such, we do not just teach them one coding language.

Because we have no teachers, our students also learn how to learn, teach and think code so that years down the line when a new coding language is introduced into the industry, our graduates are able to easily adapt.



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■ **What impact do you think can youth who "learn to think code" have on the future of Africa?**

We believe that coding is a super-power that enables youth to #ReCodeTheFuture in incredible ways. Youth who "learn to think code" can create tech solutions that are relevant for their communities using coding as the tool.

Learning to "think code" also enables our students to be able to adapt to an ever-changing tech world, where new languages are developed every day.

■ **What inspiring/motivational message do you have for young people interested in the tech industry this Youth Month?**

Coding is the superpower that enables you to design the future.

ABOUT ILSE VAN DEN BERG

Ilse is a freelance journalist and editor with a passion for people & their stories (check out Passing Stories). She is also the editor of Go & Travel, a platform connecting all the stakeholders in the travel & tourism industry. You can check out her work here and here. Contact Ilse through her website here.

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