All Aboard the Coding Express!

Product Review by Dr. Amanda Sullivan, Ph.D.
www.AmandaAlzenaSullivan.com

Disclaimer: *A free Coding Express set was generously given to me for the purpose of this review. However all opinions & reactions are my own and not influenced by Robobloq!*

Got a little one who loves trains? They will LOVE Coding Express! Coding Express, from the company Robobloq, combines all the fun of a classic wooden train set with the exploration of foundational coding & STEM concepts. The best part is that children as young as three can get in on the fun!

I've been trying out Coding Express with my own 3-year old and we have been learning so much and having a blast in the process. In this review, I'll break down the nitty-gritty of how it works, what kids learn, and the pros & cons of this product.

What it is: Coding Express is a programmable robotic train designed with an early childhood audience in mind (ages 3+). Children program the train's actions using inductive stickers that can be placed along the wooden track. The train uses built-in sensors to react with sounds and actions. The result is a fun and interactive train experience!

How it Works:

Paste the stickers on the track to tell Coding Express where to go, what sounds to make, and how to react. There are 19 unique color-coded stickers, but you get lots of extras in the kit so you can program your train to do the same thing multiple times. The stickers can easily be peeled off and re-arranged and re-used as well.

The train actually works with two modes: **Track Mode** and **Free Mode**. In **Track Mode,** the train will execute the stickers' instructions when passing over each one. In **Free Mode,** the train can be used without the track. Kids can start or accelerate the train with a whistle, and even interact with it with their hands.

What Kids Learn:

With Coding Express, children have the opportunity to explore a range of STEAM relevant skills such as:

- **Logical Thinking** *(What actions make sense with my track setup?)*

- **Computational Thinking** *(e.g., debugging & representation)*

- **Problem Solving** *(How can I build my track a certain way?)*

- **Creativity** *(How many different ways can I make the track?)*

- **Collaboration & Social Skills** *(Can we take turns & share?)*

Now, are they actually "coding" per se? Fair question, since the word "code" is right there in the name of the product. If you are expecting your child to be writing or building out lines of visual code à la other early childhood products such as [ScratchJr](#) or [KIBO](#), then the answer is "not exactly." It depends how the track is set up and how committed your child is to creating an ordered sequence of actions for the train. The train is going to move whether or not you lay stickers out on the track, so there is some element of intrinsic motivation that is required on the part of the child in order to engage with the coding opportunities of the product. But I don't think that is a bad thing! A child can use Coding Express in many different ways, making it versatile as an educational product, or just as a fun toy.

Pros:

Compatible with popular wooden train tracks - Use with Thomas & Friends, BRIO, or IKEA wooden train tracks.

Affordable- If you already have wooden tracks, just snag the [train & stickers for $23.99 on Amazon](#)! If you want [a set that includes the track](#), you can get that for only $40.99 on Amazon.

Screen-free- I love that this product is totally unplugged! No apps or screen-time.

Multiple modes - Endless ways to play with the train and endless ways to build the track. Every play session is different!

Fun- My son gets so excited whenever I bring out our Coding Express. It's undeniably fun!

Cons:
If my son were writing this review, there would be no cons- I think that speaks to the overall appeal of this product. I really don't have anything bad to say about Coding Express either. That said, I think it's fair to point out a couple of things parents or educators may want to consider:

● **Durability-** Some of the buttons are easy to jam, especially if you have a young child that is rough with their toys like I do. We had a broken train on our hands in less than a week when it first arrived. That said, Robobloq provides excellent customer service to address any problems. With our replacement train, my son and I had a very long talk about handling it carefully. Now it has been over a month of regular play without any issues.

- **It's very similar to other products-** Not necessarily a con, but it is worth mentioning that this product isn't really bringing anything new to the table as far as STEM offerings. We have a Duplo train set that does many of the same things this one does. Just check out this Duplo train (that's also called Coding Express by the way) from LEGO Education and you'll see what I mean. *(But you'll also see that set retails at around $200. Do what you will with this info.)*

My Overall Opinion
Coding Express is a fun & affordable toy for young children around ages 3-7. Successfully fosters problem solving & creativity. I recommend this set for the little train enthusiast in your life!

Where & How Do I Get One?
- Amazon or on Robobloq's website are your easiest options!