



Meet seven international educators who have found success with project learning.
By Jennifer Prescott

Inspired Teachers, Inspired Ideas

The scene, at first glance, resembles an exceptionally colorful science fair. Robotic constructions from the Philippines whirl and gyrate as they demonstrate the concepts of Newton's laws of motion, a group of first graders in France light up Twitter with their

language practice, and—in a ghastly but effective display of the mechanics of decomposition—a pig's heart, swarmed by maggots, decays in a fast-motion forensics video. The room hums with a host of foreign accents. Last November, more than 700 school leaders, educators, and reporters gathered in Washington, D.C., to

celebrate the promise of innovative teaching and project learning to change our global future. The event was the Microsoft Partners in Learning Global Forum, and its purpose was for educators worldwide to connect, learn, and collaborate on some of the most exciting innovations in education, particularly in the use of technology. Now

in its eighth year, the conference — previously held in South Africa, Brazil, and Hong Kong, among other countries—offers nearly 200 educators from 70 countries the chance to win one of 18 Global Forum Educator Awards. In many cases, the teachers who come to the forum have never left their home country before, have never stepped out

of their villages, have never gotten on an airplane. The result is “an amazing global community of teachers,” says Anthony Salcito, vice president of education for Microsoft. “Many of these teachers feel that they're different. They're the ones trying new things and pushing the boundaries. They're true innovators.”

From a virtual travel agency to a school-based music studio to a real-world advertising pitch, the ideas we highlight, from seven amazing teachers, represent inspired teaching at its best. We also suggest ways you can bring innovation to your own classroom. Getting started with project learning is easier than you think!

ILLUSTRATIONS: JAMES CAREY

MAKING MOVIES FROM PRISON

Challenging imprisoned girls to create and film videos on a topic they care about.



Sandra Caldas Saragoca, Brazil



"I teach in a school in Rio de Janeiro that is inside a prison for young females, some as young as twelve years old," Sandra Caldas Saragoca explains. "They are poor; they don't have family. The prison is their reality."

Saragoca wanted her students to feel like they had something to contribute. First she invited them to choose a topic they were passionate about, from preventing pollution to the influence of African words on Brazilian culture to effective gardening techniques. Saragoca then challenged the girls to create educational scenes about their topics using construction toys. Finally, the students learned how to film and edit their projects using Microsoft's MovieMaker software.

"We teach them how to make animated films," Saragoca says, "and then those films are shown outside the prison. In that moment, they feel that they can do something good. The people who are watching these films know they can do something good, too."

Although the young women she teaches might be considered powerless, Saragoca's message to them is that their voices matter and that they can be agents of change in their own education, and in the world. "They learn, and then they teach," she says.

TRY IT Every kid feels like there are times when he or she doesn't have a voice. Try inviting your students to make a video about a topic that interests them or that is part of your curriculum. Have them become the experts. Share the videos online to make the biggest impact.

"Their films are shown outside the prison and... they feel that they can do something good."

Marwa Hussein, Egypt

FINDING A POLITICAL VOICE

Teaching civic responsibility and helping kids find ways that they can help their country.

Marwa Hussein, a teacher at the El Raml Prep School for Girls in Alexandria, Egypt, was understandably moved by the revolution that overthrew her country's oppressive regime last winter. "Each citizen is responsible for Egypt's revival," she explains. "Even those who are still in school."

In the aftermath of the revolution, Hussein asked her students to brainstorm what they could do for Egypt even though they weren't of voting age. Through a Facebook page and YouTube channel (EgyptianLessThan18), they launched a social media campaign calling for the elimination of negative attitudes, which they felt were preventing social growth.

Integrating skills in social studies, language arts, music, and mathematics, the project included inspirational student-made videos, complete with English and French subtitles. The



videos, which are set to music, encourage youth to look toward a future they have the power to shape.

"Teens have such creative energy," says Hussein. "How can that help serve the country and move it forward?"

TRY IT Use the upcoming presidential election to discuss the issues that are important to students, and brainstorm ways they can effect change. Show Hussein's videos as inspiration!



EXPERIENCES TO ENGAGE, ENRICH AND EXCITE.

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LEARNING FROM SOUND AND RHYTHM

Gareth Ritter, Wales



Blending music and technology to hook even the most reluctant learners.

Many of Gareth Ritter's students at Willows High School in Cardiff, Wales, live in difficult environments. They are turned off by school but they

love music. So Ritter had the bright idea to challenge students to compose their own original tracks and then create tutorials for recording various sounds, including guitars, drums, and vocals. Ritter posted the tutorials on YouTube, where they received a surprising 27,000 hits. "My students' videos were used worldwide," he says.

Ritter also brought to the project an adaptation of Kinect for Xbox 360—a gaming system that allows kids to use their bodies, rather than a mouse or a controller, to manipulate the screen. This tangible style of learning helps reach kids with learning disabilities, who respond to the immersive sensation of being "part" of the lesson at hand. "That's bringing the outside stuff from home, which they love, into the classroom," explains Ritter, who used Kinect to test what students had learned in the process of recording sound sources. One hundred percent of the students passed the exam.

In what Ritter calls "a massive success story for my pupils," a group of his students who learned their recording craft through the project were eventually signed with a U.K. record label. Ritter gives praise where it's due: "It's not really what I've done. It's about them. Without them, the project would be nothing."

"That's bringing the outside stuff from home, which they love, into the classroom."

TRY IT How can you use technology—and kids' own interests—to engage students with the curriculum? Ritter's project began as a tutorial, so you might have students write or film instructions for beating a challenging video game, conducting online research, or designing a mobile app. Let students' questions, hobbies, and pursuits outside of school lead the way.

PLANNING INTERNATIONAL ADVENTURES

Tessa van Zadelhoff, Netherlands

Teaching geography through a virtual travel agency where students research, plan, and share advice.



Award-winning teacher Tessa van Zadelhoff left the textbooks on the shelves when it came time to teach her students in Eindhoven, The Netherlands, about geography. Instead, she had her 10-year-olds open a travel agency that operated from the classroom—one in which they researched real trips for friends and relatives.

The Bear Travel Agency used Twitter and a blog to dispense travel advice. Students calculated costs using Microsoft Excel and

created digital tourist guides, videos, storybooks, and translation booklets. In the process, they learned about European geography and created a vital service that, it could be argued, is worth good money.

The kids also figuratively took to the streets to add more value for their "customers." "We made videos in front of the interactive whiteboard while we were 'walking' through the city, using Bing maps' streetside view," says van Zadelhoff. One student navigated through the map, while a second narrated travel tips, and a third operated the video camera.

TRY IT How can you bring your curriculum into the real world? Can your math class consult on tax prep? Can students write a brochure for a local tourist spot? When kids realize that their efforts can impact others, they become teachers and innovators in their own right.

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Jennifer King, U.K.

COMPETING WITH REAL-WORLD EXECs

Making a pitch to a London advertising firm to design an app promoting Olympic sponsors.

After hearing executives at a dinner party bemoan their new hires' lack of skills, Jennifer King asked her students at Strode's College in Surrey, England: "Do you want to put our curriculum on hold for a little bit and learn some skills that you'll eventually need to know in the workplace?" The students agreed.

"I didn't want to fabricate it and make a fake corporation," explains King. So she approached advertising agency Ogilvy, and convinced the head of digital technologies in London to give her students a chance to pitch a campaign.

The creative brief asked for a mobile phone application to promote the sponsors of the 2012 Olympics. Once a week for six weeks, students abandoned their structured lessons and "went to work" for a full six-hour day. In small teams, they generated ideas, gave one another feedback, and produced a pitch. Simultaneously, creative teams at Ogilvy were addressing the same challenge. King's students had to learn organically how to manage their "workday" and follow procedures similar to those of their professional colleagues.

When the project was finished, the class went to London, presented their ideas to Ogilvy, and reflected on the feedback they received.

"We're now waiting to see if a bit of one of the projects is going to be included in the final app—that would be truly amazing," says King. **TRY IT** Don't be afraid to reach out to companies and organizations that can give your lessons real-world grounding. You might be surprised by the partnerships you can develop!

MORE GLOBAL LEARNING

Further opportunities that offer the chance to connect with teachers and kids around the world.

The Imagine Cup

This global technology competition (finals will be held in Australia in July 2012) asks students to "imagine a world where technology solves the toughest problems." Student participants also get support in turning their ideas into businesses. imaginecup.com

Shout

This worldwide program is designed to help educators and students use technology to address global environmental issues. This year's focus will be on improving global drinking water access and quality. shoutlearning.org

Partners in Learning Network

The sponsor of the Partners in Learning Global Forum, Microsoft's network for educators offers a wealth of resources for using technology in the classroom as well as for connecting with teachers around the globe. Don't miss the "Teacher's Guide for Free Tools." pil-network.com

Kara Barker-Astrom and Roger Lister, Sweden

BECOMING FORENSIC SCIENTISTS

Getting kids interested in science with a high-interest, straight-from-TV approach.

"Our students weren't gravitating to science or math as much as we hoped, so we wanted to develop something that would get them enthusiastic and curious," says Kara Barker-Astrom. She and colleague Roger Lister landed on a project not for the weak of stomach: To get real forensics experience, students learned how different conditions affect decomposition of organic matter. They left one pig heart outside in the elements, and the other in the school attic under a webcam. Students found that the



heart outside vanished completely—devoured by a host of insects that could manage to ingest the chewier parts—while the heart in the attic shifted and morphed, becoming as tough as leather.

"The students stitched that together into a movie to show what happened and how [the hearts] decomposed," Barker-Astrom explains. Of their own volition, "the kids stayed late on a Friday to complete this," she adds, with an expression of pleased disbelief. **TRY IT** Forensic science kits are widely available from companies like MindWare and Delta Education. Try one as a way to get started on science for the intrepid. □

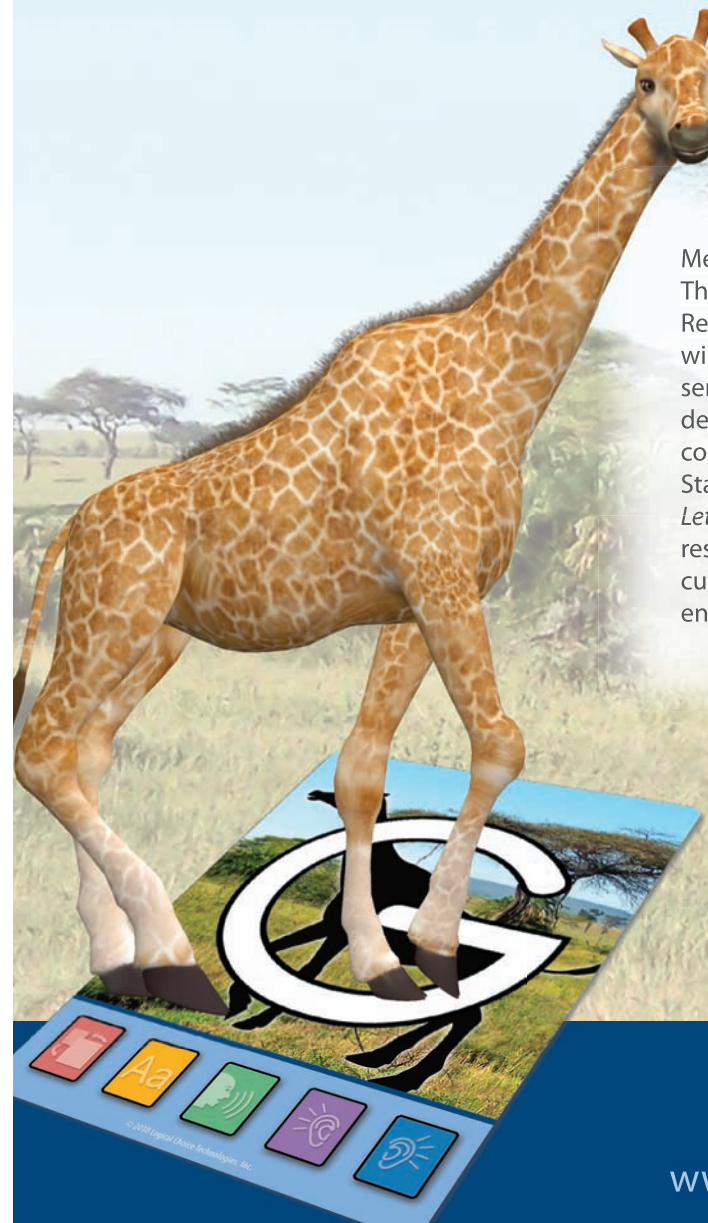
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