

Students travel world without leaving school Internet program gives insight to different cultures

BY JUSTIN MASON

When Jenny Buccos graduated from the Fonda-Fultonville High School, she hadn't seen very much of the world outside of the United States.

After attending college in Boston, she became an investment banker and traveled the globe, experiencing cultures she had only read about in books. Now, more than 12 years later, she's trying to bring some of these cultural experiences back to elementary, middle and high school students in the Capital Region, who might not otherwise have an opportunity to venture overseas.

Buccos is the executive director and founder of ProjectExplorer, an Internet-based multimedia educational tool that allows kindergarten through grade 12 students to experience the many intricacies of foreign culture without leaving the classrooms.



HANNAH JANTSCH/PROJECT EXPLORER Director Jenny Buccos frames a shot of Big Ben and Parliament across the Thames River from the London Eye, built in 1999 to celebrate the new millennium, for a ProjectExplorer lesson on London.

"It's really to open the eyes of children to the outside world," she said. "Our projects and materials are designed not only to expose students to various regions, traditions and cultures, but also to help shape the next generation of global citizens."

Founded in 2003, the nonprofit agency allows teachers to download streaming videos, photos and lesson plans for free from the Web to incorporate into their teaching. The language and learning used in each segment are tailored for specific age groups, so that the information is both useful and accessible to students.

Buccos said the Web Site, www.projectexplorer.org, will be updated with material from a new region of the globe. To start off, she said ProjectExplorer has focused on an "expedition" called "Shakespeare's England," where a small team of accredited teachers, filmmakers and experts take a 27-day journey across the English mainland.

The journey is broken into four segments, each focusing on a different area of English culture. These segments are broken down further into smaller chapters, each featuring a short five-minute video clips exploring the culture — from enjoying a Turkish meal in London to learning the finer points of falconry in Warwickshire.

Each clip is also accompanied by an interactive information page that provides both explanatory links and digital photographs. In addition, each clip has an accompanying lesson plan posted on the ProjectExplorer Web site, which includes suggested curriculum connections.

Next year, Buccos said work is expected to begin on a new chapter called "Storytelling: South Africa," which will explore the nation's modern history, conflict, culture and community. Eventually, she plans to expand ProjectExplorer's expeditions to even more distant regions of the globe, such as Southeast Asia and the Galapagos Islands.

News of the new educational tool has spurred significant interest among educators, Buccos said. So far, more than 600 educational institutions have registered with the site. "We have roughly 40,000 people using our Web site, and it's used globally," she said.

Buccos has shared the site with teachers from both the Greater Johnstown School District and Fonda-Fultonville. She said the site offers an easy way for anyone to take a voyage through distant cultures. "You're never more than one click away," she said.

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