



Participants work in teams to develop their response to a given challenge

# ENGAGE YOUR COMMUNITY WITH A HACK JAM

Hack Jams support teacher development and provide inspiring and engaging experiences for students

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**W**ith all the external pressures that teachers are under (curriculum reform, performance-related pay, and school league table comparisons to name a few), teaching currently feels like a very high-stakes profession. Can we really expect teachers to take risks, experiment, and be more creative when such great emphasis is placed on national tests and exam performance?

Hack Jam events provide teachers with a sandbox learning environment, where they can feel free to innovate and experiment with new resources and approaches to teaching and learning. They provide learners with a social experience that facilitates access to fun, stimulating, engaging challenges:

activities that they might not normally encounter in a timetabled lesson, without fear of failure. At the same time, parents and other adults are able to support these learning activities without the

Hack Jams I have taken part in gave me some great ideas. I found that I was able to incorporate the best features of the Hack Jams into my everyday teaching, for the benefit of all my students.

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usual barriers or constraints of a normal school or business day.

If you're looking to put the fun back into learning, then a Hack Jam will absolutely help you to achieve that. Better still, the

## What happens at a Hack Jam?

The Hack Jams that I've organised on behalf of exa.foundation typically start in the late afternoon or early evening. They last for two to three hours, are free to

## RESOURCING A HACK JAM

A Hack Jam might focus on creating with:

- micro-bit
- Raspberry Pi
- Physical computing
- CodeBug
- Scratch
- Python
- Minecraft
- Mozilla Webmaker

A collection of Hack Jam resources can be found at [helloworld.cc/2p1jwwG](http://helloworld.cc/2p1jwwG)



■ Physical computing: mother and son collaborate to create an alarm on a breadboard controlled by a Raspberry Pi

attend, and attract between six and 60 children and adults with a wide range of digital making experience. Occasionally I've organised Hack Jams with one specific purpose in mind: to heighten awareness of an important issue, or to target certain groups, such as learners from a particular background, or under-represented group.

To allow for a wide variety of experience in the group, I like to start Hack Jam events with a 'mini-teach' introduction, lasting

around 20 minutes. I use this time to demonstrate one simple example showing how the project resource can be used.

Following the mini-teach, all participants work in pairs or teams to develop their response or solution to the challenge they have been set. Throughout the event, additional activities, and mini-

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challenges are set to encourage sharing and collaboration. Sometimes we include inspiring lightning talks during the course of the Hack Jam.

Just before the conclusion of the event, all the teams take part in a joint show-and-tell activity. They exhibit their creations to other participants, who move around the space to visit the different exhibits.

### Organising a Hack Jam?

■ **Investigate:** If you're considering hosting your own Hack Jam, start by visiting one, reading more about them online, and contacting other Hack Jam hosts to find out what they think works best. No two Hack Jam events are the same.

■ **Commitment:** Seriously commit yourself to a future date on the calendar, and invite one or two local teacher friends and a handful of their students to a small Hack Jam at your school or library. Don't worry too much about prizes or refreshments: these are nice to have, but not essential to the success of your event. A BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) Hack Jam reduces the stress on the host to provide the necessary kit or devices.

■ **Focus:** Identify a specific group you would like to target with a Hack Jam event. Don't worry too much about the challenge activity, and never give up after the first one – the first event is always the hardest. Instead, make Hack Jams a regular occurrence on your calendar. After three Hack Jams you'll have cracked it, and you'll start to see the benefit in your own teaching practice. (Hw)

