

MARCO TORRES

California



Teaching at a gritty urban high school in Los Angeles, Marco Torres knew the deck was stacked against his students. Acknowledging the situation, Torres knew his choices were simple: he could quit, he could complain, or he could innovate.

Torres, who teaches social studies at San Fernando High School, decided to innovate. His method is simple: reach students through the media most familiar to them. That means video, music and movies. Torres introduces students to the techniques of media creation and then turns them loose on projects that are actually relevant to their lives. For most of them, that equals their community, their heritage, their family and their experiences. Student projects have focused on gangs, violence and migration issues. At the end of the semester, Torres showcases the projects in what he calls the iCan Film Festival. Today, the festival attracts more than 1,000 people.

The problems facing educators are huge but not insurmountable, says Torres, who believes we can innovate our way out of problems. By reaching his students with lessons that are meaningful and relevant, by providing tools they can use to communicate, Torres inspires his students to achieve.