



The aim of this resource is to encourage teachers with limited experience of recording for radio to set up a simple radio recording project.

The Idea

How to: Introduce Students to Recording for Radio

Although we had been considering doing some work around radio for some time, this particular project came to us, rather than us having to find it. It is often the case that the more you do, the more opportunities arise, and we find we are increasingly invited to get involved in some really exciting projects.

In this case, our Director of Arts received an email from Deborah Hearn, a freelance broadcaster and radio producer who works regularly for the BBC, explaining that she was in receipt of a Heritage Lottery Grant aimed at uniting young and old in a radio project. The idea was a simple one: to get young people to interview older people in their local area in order to create a miniature oral history archive. The project was originally designed to be community based, using youth clubs as the starting

point, but Deborah quickly found that schools were more reliable points of contact. Hence the email to us.

Once completed, the archive was to be handed over to Dorchester County Museum, so it was great for the students involved to feel that what they were doing was destined to become part of a serious set of records housed in the museum for posterity.

It was also important to get students thinking about their local area from a completely different perspective. The opportunity to interact with senior citizens who were not family members was also quite enlightening for them, and enlightening for the older people too, since they discovered that not all young people are as dreadful as *The Daily Mail* would have us believe.

The Outline

The project was designed to run across a year and was in fact very simple. A group of young volunteers would be trained to use professional radio equipment, given advice on interviewing techniques and how to construct questions likely to elicit good answers, and then let loose on the public. They would also be taught how radio is edited and how it is presented.

The project included a trip to the BBC in Bristol where students performed a radio play with full sound effects and did a mock up of the evening news and the weather in front of the green screen.

The interviewees were carefully chosen and vetted by Deborah to ensure that the meetings went well, but this is something that could easily be done in school. Indeed, although we were lucky enough to have a professional leading the project, and access to professional recording equipment, it would be easy to recreate this activity in school, with basic recording equipment and an enthusiastic member of staff.

At the end of the project, the plan was to put on a presentation evening for the friends and family of those involved.

Securing Commitment

We originally planned to make this a project for the most able, or those interested in pursuing a career in radio, but it ended up being directed at those students who thought it sounded exciting and worthwhile. We targeted particular students who we thought would really benefit from the experience and wrote letters home. Parents always respond well to letters which suggest their sons and daughters have been specially chosen.

Thereafter, the group became self-selecting. There were around thirty-five students who expressed an interest and these were invited to a meeting where the plan was outlined in detail. The number required for the project was only fifteen so we had to find a way of shrinking things down. However, when students learned that the work was to be done in



February half term, some dropped away due to other commitments, and some, I'm sorry to say, couldn't handle the commitment required. This left a small, responsible and reliable cohort – exactly what was needed for a project of this kind.

In the end we had students from Years 9 to 12 involved, giving us an excellent mix of ages, though this did present some problems for the teacher in charge in terms of communicating with students in so many different classes. Many mornings were spent charging round the school during tutor time delivering messages.

It was by accident that non G&T students were involved, including one very weak student, but these ended up getting the most out of it – so the lesson was simply, go with what you've got. We ended up with G&T students interested in history plus a small group of those simply interested. These came from a particularly enthusiastic tutor who pushed the programme with her group – so much depends upon staff enthusiasm.

No lessons were missed, apart from the final presentation day and the BBC day in October.

Drawing up the Plan

The plan was simple: there were three lunchtime meetings and a series of activities in the February half

term (with four groups doing a day each).

Dates were carefully chosen to avoid exams and the beginning of term. October proved to be the best time for all concerned.

As it turned out there was a long gap between the work in February and the final presentation in October while the radio clips were edited but this proved not to be a problem. It would have been good to extend the project but Deborah had a thirty-day grant and this was quickly filled up with planning days, visits, the project itself and, of course, editing time.

How not to upset other staff

This was the best kind of project in terms of staff support in that there was almost no disruption to other subjects or activities. The students missed one day of school, when they went to BBC Bristol, but other than that it all took place in their own time. This does, of course, require enormous staff commitment, but we are fortunate as a school to have staff who are always prepared to work with willing students.

Resources

Again, these were minimal. Professional equipment was supplied by Deborah but the whole thing could easily have been done with an iPhone and a decent microphone.

Final Preparations

Students were trained for a whole day per group. In the morning they learned interview techniques and how to devise the questions, a task much harder than it first appears to be. They then found out about the people they were to interview and given some basic background information so that they could work as a group to come

up with some really good questions – ones designed not simply to pass the time but to enable them to elicit some really entertaining and useful anecdotes and information.

Then they practised on Deborah using the microphone, while one member of the group operated the recorder to check the levels.

Once they were ready, they set off into town to make the real recordings, meeting their subjects either in the old folks home or on neutral ground in town.

A neat touch was added later when Deborah returned to meet some of the students in order to record background noises – e.g. the sound of reception at school, the dinner hall, the seashore etc. This became part of the interview and added to the sense of place – a key lesson for many of students, who had previously thought that the aim was to record only the voices and banish all background noise.

The Outcome

The students interviewed four senior citizens – with two or three recordings for each one. They had been well chosen as they all had good stories to tell and were keen to tell them. Deborah had done a lot of the background work on the people to be interviewed – in effect she produced and directed the whole thing.

The students learned about fishing in Lyme bay; Lyme during the war when the GIs were here; Lyme cinema; the Olympic torch in 1948; growing up on the Anning Road estate; and, of course, the school.

One student was amazed to learn that there had



once been a railway station in Lyme Regis, especially when she found out it was directly opposite the school.

The final 'product' was a set of professional, high quality recordings to be stored in the Dorchester archive and made available on the school's website.

Publicizing Success

The highlight of the project for many was the presentation evening, which was very well attended by teachers, parents and friends of the interviewees. Each group talked about the project and what it had meant to them, played clips from their recordings and then did short live interviews with the people they had worked with. The whole thing was both very entertaining and highly polished, and it was clear the students involved learned a huge amount.

Building on the Work

Several of the students expressed an interest in exploring careers in radio and the media. The visit to the BBC opened their eyes to the complexity of the industry and opportunities to contribute, which had never before crossed their minds. They were particularly interested in the sheer range of support posts, for example the technicians and engineers working behind the scenes in a radio studio.

Deborah was keen for students to take ownership of the project and take it forward. Some thought they might like to extend it by interviewing a wider range of local people while others were more interested in setting up their own radio broadcast, something well within reach now that internet radio is so accessible. One student now plans to build upon his interest in Music Technology to set up a school radio channel, getting students involved in monthly broadcasts.

Final Thoughts

Although a very simple project, it turned out to be an inspirational experience for some students. Everyone involved really enjoyed it and it was a particular pleasure to see the generations working so closely together. One of the interviewees commented on how delightful the young people were, while another remarked that they were in fact exactly the same kind of teenagers as they were many years ago. The sense of community produced as the stories connected across the years was very powerful.

Further Information

Further information or just general advice is available from the Jurassic Coast Teaching School Alliance. Contact the administrator Nicola Payne in the first instance:

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