



# Radio rules the waves

**Brian Asbury** investigates how starting their own internet radio stations is inspiring creativity in schools among pupils at all levels, with help from BETT Award winners Radiowaves.

**Time** was when creating 'media' in the classroom was limited to the production of a class magazine. Now, of course, with the advent of the Information Age, the creation of school and even class websites is commonplace, as are class-produced CD-ROMs. But now your class can actually experience the world of broadcasting with a school radio station that not only disseminates programming to the school – but to the world!

Leaders in this field are 2004 BETT Award winners Radiowaves. Their website [radiowaves.co.uk](http://radiowaves.co.uk) is a network of online radio stations that enables schools to create a web-based radio station and use this as a teaching tool across the curriculum. Students can record and publish their own work and radio programmes within a safe learning environment and can have their voices heard by other students across the globe. This can be keyed into a whole range of

curriculum areas, including literacy, speaking and listening, ICT, citizenship, media studies and music, and encourages peer review and assessment for learning through activities that really engage.

The creation of a school radio station offers schools proven educational benefits, through fun and collaborative ways to meet key curricular objectives. It raises the profile of the school in the wider community and nationally, and gives students a greater sense of ownership and responsibility about their work. Radio is a real-life experience which pushes them to develop independent thinking and problem-solving skills. When pupils pick up a microphone, there can be an amazing transformation. It gives them a reason and the confidence to speak to people they would not normally approach; it allows them to take risks and responsibility for their own actions.

Having an audience for their work, pupils become motivated and engaged in the activity. This boosts their self-confidence and helps them to build relationships and to enhance their ICT skills.

### Inspiring learners

The service provided by Radiowaves offers everything a school needs to inspire learners through engaging activities, and also to empower teachers by giving them the tools, support and confidence to ignite creativity in the classroom.





It gives your school its own online radio station, with homepage and content sections accessible via the Internet, and is fully compatible with both the Apple Mac and Windows PC platforms. Included in the package are pre-recorded and focused 'show me' tutorials for all members and continued support.

Although it may sound technical, Radiowaves is very simple to establish and easy for teachers to use. It does not require any new schemes of work and it does not add to already difficult workloads. It isn't necessary for anyone involved to be a 'techie' as audio, pictures and text are easily uploaded to the Internet through Radiowaves's own system. It is simple to log on from any workstation with internet access.

Even so, Radiowaves do provide training for teachers or students. Schools can organise for a trainer to visit and provide guidance and CPD for your staff, helping to set up the system you want and need and ensuring that staff are empowered to use radio as a teaching tool across the curriculum.

There are various levels of training available, from basic instruction in how to set up an online radio station and publish stories to the Internet, to Masterclass Workshops that offer a wide range of in-depth sessions to help you add exciting new dynamics to radio programmes. These range from training on innovative new technologies such as live broadcasting to workshops in journalistic skills and microphone techniques.

## Radio in action

But what do schools actually *do* with this? Let's look at the experience of Pudsey Grangefield Secondary School as an example. The school, in Pudsey, West Yorkshire, created Pudsey Grangefield FM, a month-long FM station broadcasting for 13 hours each day across the local area and on the Internet. The station started as an in-house lunchtime club and grew into a community project whose aim was to develop broadcast skills and encourage teamwork, raise self-esteem and improve communication skills among those participating.

The station's daily schedule of speech-based programmes and music saw the students take responsibility for contacting guests, originating material, presentation, negotiating with advertisers, technical work and studio management. Visitors were impressed with their high standards, and students felt a tremendous sense of achievement and pride as they produced their live programmes.

Content on the station was provided by departments across the school, including English stories and poetry, radio drama, recorded packages about citizenship issues from media students, GCSE music and news bulletins from Year 11 students. Studio interviews included the local MP, a representative from Marie Curie Cancer Care, the organiser of a local wildlife reserve and local

junior school pupils. The school challenged its students to communicate with a wide range of people and they succeeded in style.

Highlights of the project included pupils arriving at the school at 6.30 am for the breakfast show, and one Year 10 girl who was about to pull out because of nerves but who bravely tackled the mixing desk and proved to herself that she could do it after all. As the staff commented: "No one let us down. Everyone worked for the team. The voice of young people shone brightly throughout this project. Yes, there was risk, it was live, but there was also trust, and with that combination we achieved some remarkable outcomes."

## Something to say

School radio is not just for the secondary phase, of course. A cluster of primary schools in Leeds started using radio as a tool to inspire learners in speaking and listening. Quotes from the evaluation report included:

- "Has had a very positive effect on children's speaking and listening and thinking skills."
- "Keeping programmes simple is more successful than something complicated."
- "The process was often more important than the finished programmes; however, the programmes are of a good standard."

The schools involved now use radio across the curriculum. Pupils in maths record fictional aerobics classes with angles, while there are game shows in science with gases and news reports from World War II in history lessons. The project also worked with Creative Practitioners to support teachers in this learning process.

Some example topic titles from across the curriculum include:

- I've got something to say
- Angles aerobics!
- Science spectacular
- Reportage
- Evacuation!

## Special radio

Special needs can also benefit from school internet radio. Hillside School is a residential school in Aberdour, Fife, Scotland for boys aged 11-16 with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The school's aims include a wish to foster community spirit and encourage pupils to develop their concept of self.

A Radiowaves station, Hillside Beatbox, was introduced to the school, and classes across the school's entire age range have contributed stories to it, primarily to document key events in the school year or class and individual work. The class which has contributed (and benefited most) from

this ICT has been the S3/S4 support class.

The minimum equipment needed to produce MP3 audio which is compatible with Radiowaves, is a standard MP3 player with built-in microphone (to allow mobile recording of speech) and *Audacity*, a program freely downloadable from the Internet which allows audio to be mixed and altered. Additionally, *Audacity* converts the .wav audio file on the MP3 player to an uploadable .mp3 file.

Using the MP3 player is highly motivating for the pupils as it gives them control over what is recorded. After using *Audacity* for a couple of hours, pupils become adept at editing and manipulating music and speech. Those who produce 'good copy' are rewarded by seeing their work on the home page of the school intranet and on the World Wide Web. All pupils and staff are notified of a new story on the station by email, which enables pupils to see a tangible end result to their labour.

Stories on Hillside Beatbox have emerged from creative work in art, English and craft, educational visits and curriculum enrichment activities both in and out of school. The pupils are highly motivated to produce good quality work as the reward for this is their story being linked to the Radiowaves home page, in a section reserved for those articles deemed to be well written and appealing to a wider audience.

## Conclusion

As its use in schools grows, radio has the potential to become like pen and paper, increasingly used in schools to add a unique dynamic to motivate learners and make life better for teachers. Pupils have always wanted a voice, and a school radio station can help your school to ignite their creativity by giving them their own.

### ■ Brian Asbury



#### Information

Visit Radiowaves on stand G780 at BETT 2006 to find out how to inspire your learners with radio across the curriculum.