

Radio for Change: a youth and community development education project run by Global Link Development Education Centre

Gisela Renolds and **Ruth Davies** reflect on a media project which clearly illustrates the difficulty of marrying education and media agendas.

Radio for Change is a 3 year pilot project funded by a DFID mini-grant which ends in March 2006. As a pilot project using radio as a relatively new medium we feel there is learning worth sharing with other development education practitioners.

The principal objective of the Radio for Change project is to generate increased interest in global issues and commitment to global development amongst youth and community groups in Lancashire, and listeners of BBC Radio Lancashire.

The project activities included meeting interested groups to identify their local and global issues of concern; researching the chosen issues in different ways, including reading, web research and interviews; and then writing and recording the broadcast. If the groups' issues of concern were local issues, the project worker found ways of introducing a global dimension to the issue. For example, a Morecambe youth group complained about poor public transport. The project worker then explored the relationship between public transport and global warming.

The project has been very successful in generating interest in global issues with the youth and community groups, but not in reaching a wider audience through BBC Radio Lancashire.

The first learning point is that the idea of making a radio programme was very motivating for all of the groups that we worked with. This allowed us to work with groups who we might not otherwise have had the opportunity to work with. For example, a group of students at a local high school became involved with the project *because* of the radio dimension; had we approached them with the idea of doing a piece of work on a particular global issue, they would not

The fact that they had to communicate their ideas for radio meant that they had to clarify and articulate their own knowledge clearly.

have responded so positively. Thus the task of creating a radio programme is an excellent vehicle for new learning with new groups. The project was successful in that the groups we worked with greatly *extended* their learning about global issues, even those groups who already

had some awareness, such as the MAKEPOVERTY HISTORY group. The fact that they had to communicate their ideas for radio meant that they had to clarify and articulate their own knowledge clearly. The project also increased individuals' media literacy as they had to carefully consider the conventions of structuring the communication of information.

The project was stimulating for both the participants and the project worker as it enabled the project worker to initiate experiences for the groups that they would not otherwise

have had; for example, interviewing people, writing a play, or participating in a full weekend simulation of a refugee camp. This meant that many of the groups were personally very challenged by their experiences. One student who participated in the refugee camp simulation admitted to having had very negative attitudes towards refugees prior to the simulation; afterwards she said she had learnt a great deal about herself as well as the issues, and her attitudes towards refugees had been totally transformed. In another group, a boy who had been in trouble for racist abuse was found chatting about music to the young refugee man his class had just interviewed.

Finally, with some groups, the radio programme 'added value' to development education work they were already doing, and enabled the participants to deeply reflect on their own learning process. Two groups, for example, made programmes about the links they had with a school in Ghana and a youth theatre group in Kosovo.

Unfortunately, for reasons beyond our control, the project was less successful in reaching a wider audience of radio listeners. Global Link initially approached BBC Radio Lancashire who were very keen on the concept of 'user-led' radio, and embraced the project as our key partner. The agreement was that we would produce the broadcasts and they would edit, broadcast and record feedback from the programmes.

Problems soon emerged; there were funding cuts at the BBC. Timescales were very different; we have three year projects; radio stations are planning material for tomorrow or next week. Our programmes were a drop in the ocean of the material the BBC was producing. Our agendas were different; whereas our primary commitment was to the groups and their learning, the BBC had no such commitment. We soon found ourselves unable to inform the groups when their material would be broadcast, even if it was ever to be broadcast. This made it hard to approach new

Timescales were very different; we have three year projects; radio stations are planning material for tomorrow or next week.

groups, knowing we would be asking them to invest a lot of time and energy for an uncertain end product. Thankfully two new community radio stations emerged, which have already used some of our material, and we hope they will use more. However, their capacity for editing material is limited, as is their licence. Another solution has been to put the material on our website – look for the Radio for Change pages on www.globallink.org.uk.

Funders are very keen on the idea of 'partnership' but we would question the viability of having true partnership with an organisation that works on different timescales, with different agendas, and with, in this case, as it transpired, low commitment and poor communication.

For other organisations considering developing a similar project, we would advise approaching the plethora of community radio stations which are currently receiving temporary or permanent licences. The editing process is very time consuming and needs to be allowed for. Finally, ensure that there is a broader commitment from the radio station than from just one individual. While not all of the programmes will have been broadcast by the end of the project, we nevertheless feel that it was a profound learning experience for each of the groups we worked with, as well as for ourselves.

Gisela Renolds is Co-ordinator of Global Link DEC and has worked for Global Link since 1997. Whilst working as a development education worker she planned this project with BBC Radio Lancashire.

Ruth Davies is the development education practitioner delivering the project.

For further information contact r.davies@globallink.org.uk