

## A RADIO JOURNALISM MINI-PROJECT

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Half way into those fifty-odd teaching days that stretch between Christmas vacation and Easter break, I felt myself going down for the third time. The survival kit that kept me afloat right then was a radio journalism mini-project.

I worked with four classes of eighth graders divided into eight small groups, arbitrarily assigning 13 or 14 students to each. The K-I-D-S Radio Station — call letters voted by the members of one particular group — chose its managing director, an engineer, three announcers, one weather person, and three each for the news, sports, and advertising departments. These choices were made by the students themselves with the consent of the student director, according to the strengths and interests of each.

Before we arrived at this point, however, we had listened to radio newscasts and commercials. We studied the difference between news and editorials. We analyzed commercials and decided which kind appealed to teenagers. We auditioned announcers on a cassette tape. Everyone tried out. We listed every possible source of news within the school plus a few impossibles. We practised interviewing to get the facts right the first time. We made a field trip to our local radio station to watch the Noon News and talk to the professionals.

I led the classes through these discoveries by using a contract-type study guide that had plenty of space to write notes, to staple examples of writing, to copy lists of whatever the student thought he might need to produce a five-minute

news program. After that, all we needed was a small recorder and a cassette tape for each group. K-F-U-N and K-I-D-S and all the other broadcast companies used the school's conference room as a studio. It served well because it was not too large, and it was in a prestigious location. It was quiet when we closed the doors. The deadlines for each company were scheduled so that a five-minute newscast aired each day just prior to the regular morning and afternoon announcements. When the groups were ready to go to work, I promoted myself to Chairman of the Board and spoke only to the managing directors. I also wrote hall passes for the roving reporters.

Results of the project pleased me. Each group taped a five minute news, weather, and sports program complete with three commercials. Everyone in school listened to the programs. All the students involved felt good about the final product. This much I had hoped for, but I was delighted with the bonuses. The writers edited each others' work. If a story ran too long, the writer honed it. If a reporter left out an important fact, a friend noticed. The advertising departments prepared imaginative and often clever spot announcements like the one offering for rent to any seventh grader a locker in his own area, clean, with a lock that worked and the quality that made it such a rare value, absolutely empty. One reporter became so involved in his story he could not trust anyone else to read it aloud, and so for one broadcast, we had an extra announcer.

The two weeks flew by. Everyone learned by doing. At times, ordinary eighth grade problems popped out at us. We solved them as best we could and kept going. There was a deadline to meet. Some learned to write concise,

factual sentences. Some learned to read faster out loud, and to respect time limits and deadlines. Others learned to plan ahead so the school bell wouldn't destroy an entire taping session. Most learned to listen with a more critical ear, and to admire an original way of saying something.

And they were admired in return. One middle scholar expressed it this way, "Hey. You're lucky. When I get up to eighth grade, can we do that?"