

Bush Radio's CREW project: growing with media education

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The best we can hope is to share with you some of our experiences as little a radio station at the foot of Africa, which aims to serve the townships of the Cape Flats.

Bush Radio – Africa's oldest community radio station project - has many projects that it runs. It is affectionately known as "the Mother of Community Radio in Africa".

Radio, however, is perhaps only 20 percent of our activities...in a country that is still busy healing itself from a rich yet difficult past, it cannot afford the luxury of simply running a radio station. We aim to contribute to this healing through our mission statement which boldly proclaims; "to ensure that communities, who have been denied access to resources, take part in producing ethical, creative and responsible radio that encourages them to communicate with each other, to take part in decisions that affect their lives, and to celebrate their own cultures.

Through such radio, communities will affirm their own dignity and identity, and promote social responsibility and critical thinking."

In order to better understand the role of Bush Radio in media education we have chosen to select one project that Bush Radio runs and which combines all the philosophies that the station has with regards to education in particular and development in general.

This project is called the Children's Radio Education Workshop (CREW). The project started in 1996 with the express aim of giving young people a voice in media. But broader than just that, it is to enable them to be active participants in the media and, in doing so; they will hopefully get involved in shaping their own stories. The project aims to give young people the tools to holistically understand media.

When Bush Radio started with its CREW project, many radio stations did not want children in their studios - their argument was that they're going to break the equipment and would be difficult to manage.

We've had fewer breakages with the children than with the adults in terms of headphones for example.

We don't want to turn them into disc jockeys or even radio broadcasters. We simply want them to understand what media is and can be used for. And whether it is through radio or eventually through TVⁱ or the Internetⁱⁱ, we will try and give them the understanding of media and how the media operates. That's the aim of CREW essentially.

A parent may think that "it's cute to have my child on air". Yes it's cute, but that's not why they're here. And when they become teachers, engineers, nurses or whatever else they choose to become, they will understand how to use media and how important media is in communication. They will not simply be consumers of media, but initiators.

CREW was also born out of a need and a desire to involve young people in programming at Bush Radio.

In 1996, six grade-ten high school studentsⁱⁱⁱ were recruited from a Cape Town high school and trained to conduct interviews, use field-recorders, edit on reel-to-reel machines, and operate the on-air studio.

The outcome of the intensive training programme was a half-hour programme called Ragged Edge that aired on Thursday evenings at 6.30pm.

This programme later became Street Seeds, a one-hour programme that aired on Saturdays.

Street Seeds called on a more diverse group of youth and included township schools.

By 2000, children's involvement was encouraged in a more formal way through CREW, the Children's Radio Education Workshop, which by 2007 comprises about fifty children between six and eighteen years of age and has a structured training and evaluation programme.

The training programme includes radio, video and print, it also has a section devoted to the use of new media.

The various components of the CREW project play a crucial role in expressing the voices of young people in South Africa.

Providing an outlet for their creative, political and social expression, Bush Radio helps youth in South Africa to form a kind of generational realisation, providing a physical and ideological space in which they can forge a common identity, develop a sense of community, and gain membership to a new social generation.

Furthermore, the presentation of these ideas on the airwaves allows intergenerational awareness, allowing parents and other adults to listen to the programme and to increase their awareness of the discourse of the youth. (Bosch, 2003)^{iv}

There is a lot of confusion around what our children will need to face a future. A future that will have us wishing we had planned better.

We, as guides and facilitators, can give our children and youth tools that they can use to find much needed answers to some of the complex questions they're facing daily.

Media is one such tool.

It helps that broadcast media like radio gets the child to enjoy a healthy serving of science, technology and the performing arts. Using your voice to project an image requires us to tap into our artistic side.....a side too often neglected when we think of preparing our children for the future.

Do we want them to be broadcasters? No ... what could be scarier than a world overpopulated by egotists who end up doing late night shows when they are not rushing around trying to make ends meet.

The idea that they as young people can share their views with many people over the airwaves is compelling to a young mind. In order for them to articulate their views effectively to the listening audience it has to be ordered in a logical and clear sequence. They develop an even greater realisation of the power of media when they experience how what they have articulated on-air affects change within listeners.

They also develop skills which enable them to justify their arguments, thoughts and beliefs when they are challenged by their audience.

We as educators, mentors and shapers of minds need to allow the free flow of ideas and constantly challenge them. This we need to do without being prejudiced by our own bias.

Needless to say...we look at media and specifically grassroots media as an amazing tool to build bridges. Of course, one could use a soulless, commercial transnational entity to build bridges for the people you want to serve. But this means that certain values are imposed on your audience. Through an organic organ of social change like Bush Radio, the people with the challenge, develop solutions that best suit their needs. All too often we want to parachute solutions into situations where they are not wanted, practical or, more importantly, not needed.

They can use the medium of radio to draw pictures in the minds of their listeners through story telling and drama. The youth can talk about their ambitions, their hopes, their fears ...and how to face them. They can convey messages like the importance of safe sex in this perilous time of HIV and AIDS.

Bush Radio media education does not stop with CREW – it speaks to our philosophy of having young journalists train at Bush Radio through our relationship with the journalism department of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology's experiential programme, and the practical training offered by the station to the International Colleges Group (ICG) correspondence course students.

The idea of lifelong learning continues with the Bush Radio's internal policy that during their trainee period at Bush Radio they must be enrolled at an institution for further development. This station attempts to fundraise for this training, and to this end many who have been part of the station have gone on to complete degrees and excel in other fields.

Bush Radio literally offers media education from birth. The children from the free daycare facility offered to factory workers at the station, which accommodates children from the age of three to eighteen months, interact with the regular staff, in the work environment at least twice a week. We believe that a three-month-old eyes and ears take very sharp pictures, and if one of the pictures etched in his or her mind is a young blind women sitting in front of a microphone, we have already shaped his idea of what is possible with media.

ⁱ Bush Radio is involved in developing the community television sector in Cape Town

ⁱⁱ Since the 2006 Media Kidocracy Konference (conference intentionally spelt with a K)

ⁱⁱⁱ Nashira Abrahams – De Jongh was one of these children. She currently serves as CREW co-ordinator

^{iv} Dr Tanja Bosch started as a trainee programme co-ordinator at Bush Radio, later completing her PHD at Ohio University

^v A merger of the Cape Technikon and Peninsula Technikon