Rev It Up, Radio! in Pasir Ris Crest Secondary School

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Introduction

In the UK, there is a thriving student media market: student press, radio, websites and even small TV operations. In particular, student radio is no small thing. As ever, the appeal of radio is its immediacy. Student radio can challenge mainstream radio as it is not restricted by commercial pressures and will take risks. Student radio is rapidly becoming the lead medium on campus. An average reach of 16 per cent per week and an estimated reach of 56 per cent per term beat all commercial stations, according to tracking body Continental Research. There are 56 stations in the UK providing a breeding ground for new radio talent. Moreover, over the past two years, student radio has been able to offer nationwide shows, such as the national student chart. This gives the music industry an insight into new music trends that was previously impossible to obtain. This sector has also seen increased investment, improved transmission, more training, and more on-campus marketing support for student stations. (Dubberly E., 1999)

In Singapore, a student radio is almost unheard of, at least not in the secondary school setting. But if a secondary school would like to develop its students to be creative and entrepreneurial by learning and doing something radically different from the standard school curriculum, setting up an in-house radio station sounds like a wonderful opportunity. "Rev It Up, Radio!" at Pasir Ris Crest Secondary School (PRCS) is such an opportunity.

At PRCS, the students have set up their own cool radio station "Rev It Up, Radio!". "Rev It Up, Radio!" is an innovation project undertaken by Ms Foo Siew Yong during her attachment to Pasir Ris Crest Secondary School from March to September 2002, as part of her course work for the Leaders in Education Programme (LEP). The LEP, a state-of-the-art leadership programme at the National Institute of Education (NIE), prepares a specially selected group of vice principals and Ministry of Education (MOE) officers for school leadership, emphasising on knowledge creation and innovation. The "Rev It Up, Radio!" experience is a good case of students benefiting from a programme that is radically different from the standard school curriculum, learning things that they can hardly learn from textbooks and examinations. It is a case of students doing new things and breaking new grounds.

Overview of "Rev It Up, Radio!"

"Rev It Up, Radio!" - the Cool Radio Station at PRCS had its soft launch on 19
Aug 2002. It was officially launched by Dr Ng Eng Hen, Minister of State for Education and Manpower, on 6 Sep 2002 during his visit to the East One Cluster to view the Arts Aesthetics Programmes in the schools of that cluster. "Rev It Up, Radio!" is a radio station run by the students for the students and teachers of PRCS.

"Rev It Up, Radio!" has a 45-min weekly broadcast which is usually aired on Mondays from 1.50pm - 2.35pm. Its weekly theme is carefully chosen to reflect any special events during the week. For instance, "Rev It Up, Radio!" had the theme of ‘Honouring Peace and Brotherhood’ for its programme on 20 Sep 2002 to commemorate the tragedy to humanity that happened a year ago on 11 Sep 2001. "Rev It Up, Radio!" also had a special programme to celebrate Teachers’ Day. Hence, in conceptualizing the programmes for the months, members of the pioneer student crew have to take into consideration not just the school calendar of events but also be knowledgeable about world or national events.

The radio station also has programmes that are based on the tastes of teens and the objective of exposing them to various genres of music as well as history of music. One of the programmes called "Teenz Alive!" featured two segments — "PRCS’ Top 5 Hit List" and "Blast from the Past". The aim of "Teenz Alive!" was not just to feature current pop songs but also to widen the students' knowledge of the history of rock and roll. The school also has plans to broadcast a classical music programme called "A Touch of Class" and this will feature two segments called "Viva la Classics" and "Around the World".

The rationale for setting up the station is that in a world driven by information and communications technology (ICT), the ability to gather, analyse, synthesise and present data that captures the intended audience is a necessary and premium skill to have. "Rev It Up, Radio!" has given students real-life opportunities to run radio programmes that are of interest to them, demonstrate their leadership abilities, and acquire competencies and dispositions to be effective team players. It allows the students to do things that are "out of the box", thereby nurturing their creative and entrepreneurial spirit.

**Pasir Ris Crest Secondary School**

What gave Ms Foo the idea of a radio station and motivated the students and staff of PRCS to make it happen?

Firstly, PRCS has an excellent music programme. Under the leadership of Mrs Teo Khin Hiang, the school has been developing music as one of its niches based on the following beliefs:

- All students, regardless of their socio-economic background, should enjoy the richness and diversity that music provides. A love for and appreciation of music also contribute to the holistic development of students, which will in turn contribute to a gracious society;
- The discipline acquired through music education will have a positive effect on the students’ behaviour and achievements in other subjects, e.g. Mathematics.

In the formal curriculum, all PRCS students have two periods of music lesson instead of one period, which is common in many schools. The music curriculum enables the students to study Music Theory and play either the keyboard or guitar at the lower secondary level. In addition, the students are exposed to different genres of music such as classical, jazz, blues and ethnic music. At the upper secondary level, the students are also exposed to computer-generated music and can compose their own tunes using midi-sequencing.
technology. A number of original tunes composed by PRCS students were featured in the school's opening ceremony on 12 July 2002.

From 2002 onwards, the school is formally listed with the Music Elective Programme (MEP) schools as one of the centres offering 'O' Level Music. It is the East One Cluster Music Centre, which aims to develop fully the potential and interest of students in music through organising music appreciation, enrichment and 'O' Level music programmes for students in the cluster. To date, more than 2500 students have benefited from the Centre's music programmes and its facilities - 4 special music rooms and the only school to have an audio library in Singapore. Last year, the Music Centre also organised the Choir and Instrumental Public Performance for cluster schools as a platform for students in the East One Cluster to showcase their talents.

In a recent survey carried out to gather the students' perception of the strengths of the school, 97% indicated that they like the school's music programme, giving reasons such as:

- They like learning new skills;
- Music helps them to relax and concentrating better; and
- Music helps them to understand other cultures.

**Setting up the Radio Station**

A series of promotional activities was carried out to arouse the interest of the staff and students prior to the setting up of the station and these activities coincided with the themes of the various programmes, for example:

- Name the Station & Logo Design competition;
- Vote Your Favourite Name for the Pop Programme;
- Donate a CD promotion;
- Name Your Favourite Current Pop Song for the PRCS Top 5 Hit List;
- Pop quiz for soft launch;
- PRCS Oscar Awards 2002 for Teachers' Day, Class TQ (Thank You) Cards for Home Tutors, and chocolates for non-Home Tutors and office staff. (Jointly organised by "Rev It Up, Radio!" and the Students' Council.)

To recruit the student production crew, a half-hour advertisement was carried out to invite students to apply for the following vacancies in the radio station: producers, presenters, researchers and marketing personnel. 32 students responded to the half-hour marketing done on 10 May 2002 and 16 deejays-producers were auditioned with 10 making the cut. These students were chosen based on the following criteria:

- Enthusiasm and charisma
- Oral communication ability
- Knowledge of music, songs and artistes
- Voice quality
- Ability to handle the unexpected

Dedicated external trainers were found to help in training students to market, broadcast and handle sound systems. Professional experts from organisations such as Mediacorp, WKRZ 91.3, Power 98 FM, A*Star and the Esplanade shared their trade secrets in the various aspects of using radio as a broadcasting medium. Six members of "Rev It Up, Radio!" also co-hosted Power 96's "You Asked For It" programme live on 27 Aug 2002, together with incumbent hosts Jeremy Ratnam and Justin Ang. Through the "Rev It Up, Radio!" project, the students learned to:

- Cater to the varied taste of students and
Marketing crew working on a poster.

• Teachers in music as well as shape their tastes;
• Develop effective teamwork skills and attitudes, self-confidence, ability to think on one's feet and good presentation skills;
• Conceptualise and implement the theme and content of each weekly programme, and the various marketing and promotions events needed; and
• Work with different professionals in authentic settings.

Impact of the Project

Given an opportunity, teenagers can prove their abilities in handling business out of the normal classroom curriculum. The team of deejays, producers, marketing crew, research crew and station manager proved that they have the ability, creativity and entrepreneurial spirit to develop high quality radio programmes.

Moreover, from the experience, many have grown to be very good team players, displaying characteristics of these four essential elements of effective teamwork

• Sharing in the team's goals (We not I);
• Taking personal responsibility (I do my part);
• Having mutual accountability (We sink or swim together); and
• Celebrating the team's success (We support and encourage one another).

In fact, the students have developed their own "10+1 Commandments of Rev It Up, Radio!":

• Leave your ego at the door.
• If you are in the working room, you are actually required to work.

• You got to speak English... we can understand each other better...
• Strictly NO EATING in the studio ... and yes I am talking to you...
• A deadline is an actual date.
• Be responsible for your action; there is no "It wasn't me"...
• Respecting one another is important.
• Workload is meant to be shared.
• Mistakes are to be learnt from, NOT repeated.
• Always remember; think WE not I.
• There is a time for everything... to play... to be creative... but when we are on air, FOCUS!

"Rev It Up, Radio!" really hit it off with the students. There were many encouraging handwritten remarks from the rest of the students like "PRCS Radio Station Rocks!" and "Rev It Up, Radio Rulez!". The support given to the radio station was overwhelming. In the "Donate a CD" promotion, 155 CDs have been received to date. When the radio station came on live, the number of song dedication and requests averaged 13 per hour. Such was the good business of the station.

The experience has been fun and enriching for the students, who have also grown in confidence and wisdom. They also have reflected upon what they have experienced and learned as part of the project. Some of the reflections:

Liyana Md Khafiz, 15 years old (Brilliant Scriptwriter-cum-DJ):

"Nothing comes easy. You have to work very, very hard if you want to achieve high standards. When Nadiah and I were planning for the soft launch, I thought that it would be easy but I found out how wrong I was. We had to come back on Saturday and Sunday so that we could plan and rehearse for the soft launch. But all of it was worth it. When you work extra hard to achieve a goal, eventually you will succeed and if you
don't, you just have to try, try and try again... I love this radio station. It is the only place where you can present your ideas and make these ideas a reality. The great part of is that I am able to share what I have come up with, with the whole school.

Chu Jie Sheng, 14 years old (Excellent team player, researcher and sound engineer):

"I'm happy to be in this activity. I learnt a lot about music and it helps me better my relationships with others. I know how to work as a team and how a radio station works. I will definitely work in the radio line when I grow up."

Jasmine Tan, 14 years old (Excellent Deejay):

"Come to think of it, it really is a long way here. It all started with a dream or rather a tiny mustard seed - like faith which spring out this healthy tree... (Ever) since we've tried broadcasting, these few days were big time cool! Gosh, I can't wait to host the show with Rahman and hopefully I get to go to Power 98. I love this radio station, so it will be a dream come true for me to go to the station! The person whom I would really like to thank would be Ms Foo as she really helped us up and make our station so hot!"

Conclusion

"Rev It Up, Radio!" has shown potential for future expansion and development. There is a highly passionate, committed and intelligent pioneer group of student leaders and a core group of teachers who will continue to facilitate the project with the possible engagement of a creative consultant.

There is a possibility for the radio station to merge with the Video Club and PA team to form a Media Club, which will produce video magazines highlighting school events. There is also a possible development of an Internet radio website with additional features such as video and news bytes. RADM (NS) Teo Chee Hean, Minister for Education and Second Minister for Defence, said, "An innovative project often has a multiplier effect and will spawn further innovative ideas." (Singapore Government Press Release, 2002) There is a possibility of many other spin-offs from the radio station down the road.

Norman Pattiz, president of the Broadcast Education Association and chairman of the Westwood One Company in the US had wanted to discuss with several universities to form a school of radio, one that taught students the nuts and bolts of the business (Hudis M., 1996). Using "Rev It Up, Radio!" as a successful model, Singapore can have its own radio entrepreneurs right from secondary school.

At the end of the day, "Rev It Up, Radio!" is not just about a radio station in school. It is about students learning and doing something different. Through the project, PRCS has given its students the environment to dream and experiment. It has provided the fertile grounds for entrepreneurs and leaders to be born.

References


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