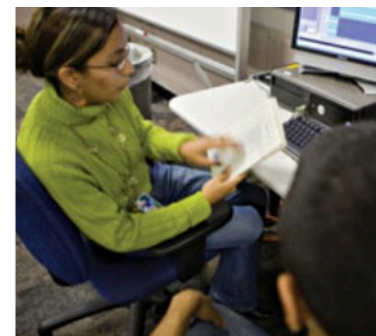


Teens Radio KJZZ

South Mountain
High School students
Robert M. Green, left, and
Celestina Muñoz, right,
are learning the art
of radio.



Take a handful of high school kids, throw in a few microphones, and send them out to gather sound and story. Tap a 20-something reporter willing to shepherd them through interviews with the likes of Sheriff Joe Arpaio, an admissions dean at Arizona State University, the Phoenix police, and plenty of their peers. Gather them into a KJZZ production booth to shape their work for the airwaves, and presto—you've got the KJZZ teen radio project, a pilot program that lets young people ask the questions and develop their own stories for public radio.

Giving youths an opportunity to produce radio journalism isn't a new idea. The concept likely grew from a Berkeley, California after-school program originated in 1992 by veteran journalist Ellin O'Leary. A former NPR reporter herself, O'Leary built Youth Radio, which today offers a well of news and commentary that NPR and other media outlets dip into for stories straight from the mouths of today's youth—who are, unquestionably, the "media generation."

And they have plenty to say. "They are thoughtful, creative and although they think about some of the same things—war, the economy, families, relationships—they think differently than older people," says Ginny Berson, who manages the National Youth in Radio Training Project. Public radio listeners, in particular, says Berson, yearn to hear from a variety of perspectives to help them understand the world.

Teens happen to be a big part of that world. And contrary to what Hollywood and Madison Avenue might have us believe, there is no such thing as a typical teen. Berson notes, "How teens are portrayed in the mainstream media simply doesn't originate from teens themselves." When given an outlet, however, they offer a kaleidoscope of perspectives.

At the start of the fall 2007 semester, KJZZ reporter/host Tony Ganzer signed on to begin the teen radio project with students from Arcadia High School's media arts program in Phoenix. During spring 2008, Ganzer expanded the program to include students from Dobson High School in

*Teen radio project lets
young people share
stories about themselves
and their worlds.*

By Vicki Louk Balint
Photography by Art Holeman



TOP: Tony Ganzer talks to students about sound, while the new teen radio project instructor Daniel Newhauser looks on. BOTTOM: Jesus Castro works on a story about teen pregnancy, which he hopes will air on KJZZ.



Mesa. He developed a curriculum designed to introduce students to public radio, offering a chance to participate in the inner workings of the KJZZ newsroom. The idea is to give teens a shot at pitching stories, interviewing subjects, writing copy, voicing a story and, perhaps the most fun of all, gathering sound.

Ganzer begins his presentation to a classroom of students, many of whom have never heard anything about public radio, by playing a montage of his own stories. He includes the one about the hip-hop artist in Tucson who raps mainly about immigration and drug trafficking. Also in the mix is a story about Arizona's water supply, and those mysterious underground aquifers. As the stories play, says Ganzer, the idea of how to use sound begins to sink in. "You watch these kids in class as they listen, maybe for the first time, and they get it. They understand what we are talking about. 'Oh, you mean I can use hip-hop music in a story?' Or 'Just water? That tells me something,' they say. And it does. They start to realize that," Ganzer says.

Even though participants study journalism in class, or have been involved with their high school radio station, for most it's a first crack at conveying meaning without pictures or print. "If you want to do a radio story, Ganzer tells his classes, "you need to look for the sound." So, that's one of

the first assignments. "Bring me back sounds," he tells his charges, sending them out, KJZZ recorders in hand, to play around for a day. "Find a faucet, the students in the hallway, the air-conditioner, a door slamming, kids outside in the parking lot. I don't care. Just bring me sounds." And they do.

Next, it's time to get down to brainstorming story ideas. What are they interested in? For Jessica Testa and Rebecca Bever, co-editors of Dobson's student newspaper and spring 2008 participants in KJZZ's teen radio project, that wasn't so easy. "We had to give our generation a voice on an important Arizona issue," says Testa, "and there were so many things that we could have chosen."

When they proposed the idea of investigating the challenges faced by illegal immigrant teens in Arizona, Ganzer grilled them on the hows and whys of the topic, which, at first, seemed to hold plenty of potential—just spot-on NPR stuff. "But then I started quizzing them," says Ganzer, "and it became clear that none of the arguments were their own. Teachers, principals and parents had found out they were participating in an NPR project—and they influenced it! I had to throw out everything."

So Ganzer switched gears. "What bothers you?" he asked the teens. "This is your project; that is why I'm here." Testa and Bever, who now attend Arizona State University, settled on the topic of teen transportation. They talked to a variety of students at their school—those who drive, carpool, even a skateboarder—to explore the challenges of getting around the Valley. They also interviewed representatives from the Arizona Department of Transportation, as well as Valley Metro, about the future of public transit. The story, titled "Teens Getting Around," aired last May on KJZZ's *Morning Edition*. Bever, who voiced the story, says that after hours of hard work, the two were ultimately very happy with the finished piece. "We knew what we were talking about," adds Testa. "We knew what we wanted to say."

Youth radio projects don't only provide a distinctive point of view for their audiences. Often, they aid in the self-discovery process that is a natural part of the teen years. Matt Butson, a recent graduate of Scottsdale's Coronado High School, commuted to Arcadia High's media arts program in his senior year to pursue an interest in film editing. There, he caught the radio bug, and decided to work on a story about teens and DUI, which included a trip downtown to interview Sheriff Arpaio. The piece ultimately became the KJZZ teen radio project's on-air debut. But the story that Butson will never forget, he says, turned out to be "Flying Toward Higher Education," which aired last spring.

Faced with big dreams of film editing, but a small budget for college, Butson was at a crossroads—the kind that senior year often brings. As they discussed ideas for the teen radio project, Butson shared his anguish with Ganzer, confessing he was scared to make a mistake, since he didn't want to waste time or money floundering after high school. Ganzer responded that *that* was his

"You watch these kids in class as they listen, maybe for the first time, and they get it."

story. "You're confused, you feel like you're the only one. Let's see if that's the case," he said. And a story idea began to take shape: What if they tapped into Butson's dilemma and talked to an ASU dean of admissions, an educational psychologist, perhaps other teens? The result is a peek into one young man's stress over choosing a school, a major, a future, and how to pay for it all.

Butson says his actual life plans came together within the process of interviewing and assembling that story. He reassessed his decision to attend ASU and began to explore other options for college, looking more deeply into media and film programs, and job opportunities. Ultimately, he stuck with ASU, but credits his work with Ganzer and the project for guiding him to greater self-awareness. "It led me to find out what I'm doing for my future," says Butson. "That was really powerful."

Ganzer hopes the program will continue to grow so that more teens can share their stories. So much so that he's spreading the word around the world. A recipient of the prestigious Arthur F. Burns journalism fellowship, Ganzer spent nine weeks reporting in Germany last summer. While there, he visited a business-oriented high school and middle school in a small Alpine village in Austria. He touted KJZZ's teen radio project to the head librarian and tenured educator at the school, which integrates English into part of its day. Now, the school is looking to replicate the program there.

Meanwhile, closer to home, the project continues with new crops of students at Dobson High School and South Mountain High. Daniel Newhauser, another young reporter, is now teaching the class, while Ganzer keeps a watchful eye.

"I feel like I am facilitating some kind of dialog between young Americans and whoever else wants to listen," Ganzer says. "I can actually see it happen right in front of me." 🎧

The Voice of Youth

Programs for teens in radio are as diverse as the kids themselves. Here's where you can hear teen voices from around the country:

Youth Radio

Stories, commentary and music from teens in the Bay Area.
YOUTHRADIO.ORG

Radio Arte

Teens from Chicago's Latino community produce radio novelas on issues of immigrant health.
WRTE.ORG

Voices of Youth—Moab

A project designed to connect teenagers with the history, folklore, people and issues of Canyonlands country.
KZMU.ORG

Blunt Youth Radio Project

Teens, both free and incarcerated, produce a weekly call-in show in Portland, Maine.
BLUNTRADIO.ORG

WNYC's Radio Rookies

Young people in New York City produce radio documentaries.
WNYS.ORG/RADIOROOKIES