



The press GANG

REPORTS OF THE DEATH OF THE SCHOOL MAGAZINE HAVE BEEN GREATLY EXAGGERATED, INSISTS LUCY METCALFE – AND THAT’S GOOD NEWS FOR ALL KINDS OF REASONS...

In the past, school magazines were often generated by media or English departments, creating thriving extra-curricular opportunities for students to explore the world of journalism and make an impact with their ideas and talents across the whole school. Students loved the buzz of the ‘press room’ and worked incredibly hard to meet the deadlines, get the scoop and try out the role of the journalist. However, today few schools seem to produce their own student magazines, despite the fact that DTP is so much better and more accessible than ever before. So, in an age of the digital revolution, with media ever-present in our lives – is the school magazine dead?

A Dying Breed

Well, it would seem that this is the case in the vast majority of schools. Many teachers report a lack of time to organise a magazine or newspaper, or apathy by their students. A large number of schools rely now on staff-generated newsletters, which go out to parents either in hard copy format or via email each week. Media teacher Louisa King says, “I think it would be

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good to excite some interest and enthusiasm from learners to create their own magazine, though it is difficult to find a group of learners that will commit to a publication long term.”

Another issue is funding to publish products. Another media teacher, Lesley Kerr, used to run a successful magazine at her school, but found the project was jeopardised when funding was withdrawn. “We made it into a partnership creative arts magazine,” she explains. “Our sixth formers worked with first and middle school students in our partnership schools to compile artwork, poetry, photography etc. We did manage to get funding by doing it that way. It fell apart when the funding stopped but the students enjoyed doing it.”

Perhaps, one of the key issues today is that

students no longer read newspapers as a general rule, and many also don’t engage with magazines as they used to, preferring now to be updated instantly via Twitter or online publications. Many teachers I spoke to on this topic reported that they felt the print format was outdated and out of touch with young people’s interests. Brian Turner, who works in media production, told me, “Our school’s newspaper is dying, and the magazine died years ago. Stand alone print is endangered.” So how do we change this pattern? Or is it time to move on away from our own nostalgic feelings on school magazines? Brian agrees with the latter point, “I would have a video element and interactive media to get the student audience’s attention,” he says. “Kids take digital photos on their phones all the time. They have virtual avatars in games, and use virtual currency. I really doubt they need a physical copy of a magazine they made. Kids are virtual; we need to teach in their playground, not an outdated empty lot.”

Media teacher Keith Langdon echoes the sentiment, “We no longer have a school magazine, mainly due to lethargy and lack of interest. Interestingly, we do have quite active



official school Twitter and Facebook feeds – I wonder if these might have an impact on the ‘need’ to have a ‘voice’.”

The move to new technology formats seems to be quite common, with teachers and colleagues from a wide variety of backgrounds suggesting that working online is far more advantageous to staff and students alike. Shira Rossiter, from the University of Brighton, and a contributor for XYZ Magazine, believes a blog is the best option. “They can be updated whenever and are easy to read and manage,” she states. “And then they are also able to host articles, videos, photos and much more.”

It would seem then that for us to keep motivating and inspiring aspiring journalists, we need to move into the digital format, taking

print to screen to ensure young writers are engaged and receiving experiences that will later be mirrored in industry if they choose to pursue this career path. More important than the format, believes Louisa King, is to give students the opportunity to take part, however the magazine is published. “I think it is an excellent idea to give learners a voice and to communicate with the local community about their achievements, concerns and ongoing projects,” she observes. This sentiment is echoed by several other colleagues who argue that working on a school magazine is a student’s first impression of real journalism and provides essential experience for those aspiring to such a competitive career.

Success Stories

Hetton School’s ‘Hetton Headlines’ seems to buck the trend of the decline in school magazines. This online blog is published in print format three times a year, as a result of the generous funding by the school, and is issued to every student, alongside primary feeder schools and the local community. The magazine has even received the ‘North East School Newspaper of the Year’ award from the

Journal newspaper last year. Andrew Hindle, who runs the magazine, says, “It’s really popular, but a lot of work for me sorting it all out. We do it to show off our students’ work and it’s a mix of student written articles and staff contributions. I collate all the articles and pictures, we then send these off to a local designer and get around 2000 copies of a 20-page magazine printed.” The secret of the success of this paper, Andrew believes, is involving the students in the production process, as well as the writing, “We’ve moved more now towards students doing the editing as well as writing the majority of the articles,” he points out. “The Year 10 media class members basically oversee the writing for the magazine and help with articles.”

This year, I’ve offered a smaller scaled project in my own school with a group of Year 10 students, who have produced a half-termly newspaper aimed at their year group. Many of the young people involved in this project were media students, who chose to take part to develop their skills in this subject. “I thought it would look good on my CV,” comments contributor Olivia Whyte. “I want to be a journalist so I thought it would help me in my career. It’s important to have a student newspaper or magazine as it brings a sense of unity. Our newspaper has helped the year group come together and celebrate our success.”

Meanwhile, fellow writer Molly Harmon says, “It’s a great opportunity to get involved in school activities. I’d also like to work in the media so this was a perfect way of getting experience and started in my chosen profession. I like working in the team as the ideas seem to come together easily. When I write the articles I work by myself and this gives me a real sense of pride.”

So, it can be done! Perhaps, moving format or changing focus to more modern ways of reaching niche audiences is the answer. One thing is certain; the school magazine can live on with a bit of determination and commitment from your staff and students – and whichever way you present it, it’s a great way to capture their imagination.

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