Chapter 13:

Joining the Dots: Edu-entertainment for Civic Responsibility and Development in Latin America

(Excerpt from Part Three: Praxis in Latin America)

In “Joining the Dots” (13), Javier Ampuero Albarracín shares the experience of PCI Media’s My Community, a long-running series in Latin America of edu-entertainment programmes (which use radio drama, magazines and face-to-face mobilisation in schools and community spaces). Ampuero Albarracín highlights the case of Aquí no pasa nada (Nothing Happens Here), an educational programme about youth sexuality, linked to a network of 21 organisations working in HIV/AIDS in Peru. In the process, he points to the stories and relationships as being the real substance of communication and shows how drama mixed with discussion can be an appropriate and effective format to bring those to life within an education-and change-oriented context.

More information: www.col.org/LearningWithCM

COL’s Healthy Communities programme: www.col.org/HealthyCommunities
Communication goes beyond spreading information. It includes motivating people to take on new ideas and ways of doing things, new products and services. It encourages dialogue and eases the relationships between people so that they get to know and understand each other, learning to interact despite their differences. The raw material of communication — what we work with as communicators — is not information or media channels, as commonly believed. Rather, it is stories and relationships of human beings.

Are adolescents able to decide autonomously about their sexuality? Can men act responsibly on their impulses? Must women always set the limits on men’s behaviour, thinking of the consequences? Values, disguised as common sense, circulate as stories and discourse through society. As communicators we can either reinforce them or question them, creating spaces to make them visible and of concern. And by doing this we can prompt public debate about them.

Is it possible to create dialogue between parents and children without the imposition of authority? Can women take responsibility for health, not just at home but in public, by influencing political authorities? Communication can help improve the relations between diverse social actors, making the attributes of each more visible and bringing them closer together despite their differences.
Edu-entertainment: communicating from and to the soul

Edu-entertainment makes it possible to take a long-term view while: highlighting specific development problems and initiatives; empowering the primary individuals and groups to take on active roles in finding solutions; generating new knowledge; and changing attitudes and everyday practices at the community level.

The advantage of popular entertainment formats and resources to deal with development topics is that they present alternatives to news headlines that speak, time and again, of insoluble problems. Such formats help overcome the limitations inherent in campaigns, often filled with repetitive slogans and too reliant on ready-made recipes for solutions. The problems of fictional characters are felt first-hand as lived experiences. On a daily basis the audience relives the protagonists’ dilemmas, which helps them — the characters and the audience alike — find better ways to resolve their conflicts. As well as enjoying the stories told, listeners are able through edu-entertainment to consolidate their learning in the

11 Entertainment education (also known as edu-entertainment or edutainment) uses appropriate narrative and symbolic models from mass culture (e.g., radio serials, TV soaps, music videos, comics) to promote learning about specific social topics. Edu-entertainment — on topics ranging from HIV/AIDS and family planning to gender equality — has been proven to generate positive changes in knowledge, attitude and behaviour at an individual and social level.
context of their everyday lives, building on their identification with characters and the emotional commitments created through daily listening.

“What I have learnt as a mother is that I must always be near my son, to guide him and support him with any doubts he may have. If I don’t know the answer to his questions, I look for help so that he can make the right decision, in the good times as much as in the difficult ones; to be there so that he doesn’t make mistakes... Despite the fact that sometimes there is useful information on the television or the radio, there aren’t the life experiences or stories about the things that happen everyday; not like I have lived them listening to the radio serial.”

My Community: a path to recreate edu-entertainment in Latin America

Since 2002, PCI Media Impact has been exploring a promotion and recreation model for edu-entertainment in Latin America called My Community. Over the years, allied organisations in Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Mexico have worked and reflected on the My Community programme.

Together they have consolidated, from across diverse initiatives of community communication and participation processes, the following set of inter-related elements key to developing a successful My Community programme:

1. Production of a locally made dramatic educational series as the central piece of content, its starting point being the stories, conflicts and characters inspired by the community’s own reality and imagery.

2. Production of an interactive radio magazine in which the serial is broadcast to generate dialogue and debate with the audience, as well as promoting information and services related to the subject.

3. Design and implementation of a plan to stimulate discussion and opinion formation, and to motivate civic actions in public spaces (e.g., parks, streets, markets, schools and public transport).

4. Design and implementation of a means to monitor and evaluate each programme initiative, which should realise both the systematisation and enrichment of the edu-entertainment strategy.

An interesting result has been the way in which making edu-entertainment programmes has changed as the different communities and organisations have taken up the challenge. Each has added new
elements based on findings from experience in their own localities and on the topics of interest their audiences identify.

One example among dozens of experiences is the initiative undertaken by the Cusco AIDS Network (RSC), a grouping of about 21 organisations in Peru. Between 2009 and 2010, RSC produced two seasons (28 episodes in total) of the radio serial *Aquí no pasa nada* (Nothing Happens Here), based on a series of creative workshops with youth. The programme explores subjects such as taking decisions about sexuality, intergenerational communication, and the prevention of pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS.

The civic mobilisation catalysed through this edu-entertainment initiative was extremely substantial. On one hand, the radio serial was broadcast simultaneously for 28 weeks in three provinces through radio magazines, which were open to audience feedback and dialogue. The programmes were produced and presented by school-based teams of youth from the different localities involved. A team of 50 edu-entertainment facilitators complemented the on-air broadcasts with publicity campaigns and information fairs on buses, streets and public squares. Over 100 teachers from 11 different schools, all of which used the radio serial in face-to-face teaching sessions, received training on sexual and reproductive health, which they used in interactions with over 3,000 students.

This model, integrating different communication strategies and channels, made it possible to reach as far as the family context, where it helped to open up new processes of learning, discussion and action, such as the one shared by Ivana, a 15-year-old adolescent from Cusco:

“At school they got us to listen to *Aquí no pasa nada* (Nothing Happens Here) so we could then share our points of view. They told us that they would broadcast the radio serial and I thought to listen to it with my parents and with everybody in my house. Since we had breakfast quite late on Saturday, I would coax my family with the excuse of *Let’s go get breakfast* and we all would start listening. This occurred to me because I wanted to share my experience with my family so that we could have a more open communication at home. One day I was very surprised when, after listening to the radio serial, my parents said that it was outrageous, and even worse: that it incited young people to have sexual relations. I said to them, *You should have been the ones to tell me these things in the first place and now look at what you are saying*. I left the table and told them that speaking about sexuality is something normal for young people and so they should try to adapt and to try to understand what we go through in our lives.
“With time I started to notice a big change in them. I had already tried to touch upon the subject of sexuality with them but my dad, who was somewhat conservative with me, wouldn’t talk about it. With my mom I could just about mention the issue but still it was difficult. As we have kept listening to the radio serial, however, they have started to loosen up and begun to share their own experiences so that I would know how to take care of myself. I believe it is thanks to the radio serial that parents have learnt to get over their shame of talking about sexuality with their kids so that, when the time comes, the kids don’t make the same mistakes.”

The success of this experience was such that the regional Cusco government reproduced the two seasons of Aquí no pasa nada and its discussion guides, and trained professionals from educational institutions and health establishments across the whole region to use the radio serial as a teaching tool.

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PCI Media Impact is a leader in entertainment-education and social change communications. For 25 years, it has been working with local partners to produce more than 3,000 episodes of 100 television and radio programmes to address pressing social and environmental issues. Together these programmes have reached more than 1 billion people in 34 countries. PCI Media Impact combines entertainment-education stories with the reach of mass media to mobilise individual, community and political action and be a catalyst for positive change.

For further reference, see:

- http://mediaimpact.org/