Arte y Parte/PROMESA, Paraguay

Combining Mass Media-, School-, and Community-Based Approaches

By Patricia Aguilar and Sonia Marchewka Brooking

The mass media, which are one of the most popular and important sources of information for adolescents, are the basis for a peer education intervention in Paraguay to educate youth about sexual and reproductive health. Initiated in 1997, Arte y Parte is a program of Population Services International (PSI)/PROMESA and is targeted at adolescents ages 15 to 19. Arte y Parte’s goals are:

• increase the knowledge of sexual and reproductive health issues among adolescents;

• promote responsible sexual behavior;

• increase the media’s understanding and coverage of adolescent reproductive health issues; and

• improve communication and negotiation skills of adolescents in relation to sexual and reproductive health issues.

Objectives and Activities

Peer educators ages 15–19 become Arte y Parte members after receiving 80 hours of training during their school vacation. The training covers such topics as contraception, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), reproductive health rights, negotiation and communication, street drama skills, and concepts of mass media and publicity. The peer educators help design each Arte y Parte activity or product to ensure that they truly respond not just to adolescents’ needs, but to their interests and language as well.

Arte y Parte supports different types of activities, such as:

• In-school workshops. Three different workshops cover topics such as contraceptives, STIs, and communication and negotiation. Each has its own thematic video, part of the series "Hablemos Claro sobre la Sexualidad" (Straight Talk about Sex), which is accompanied by an explanatory booklet. These workshops are also carried out in the community, with youth organizations and neighborhood committees.
• Street drama. Theatrical skits are performed on five different topics during street concerts and other public events with messages about abstinence, contraception, and cultural and social beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that affect young people.

• Two weekly radio programs. "Con S de Sexo" ("S is for Sex") is a one-hour program in which Arte y Parte’s peer educators talk about different reproductive health topics each week. The two radio programs include phone calls or messages from the audience asking questions plus interviews with professional or famous people about the topic of the day.

• Other activities carried out by the peer educators. A monthly column in Paraguay’s Top Teen magazine, a magazine for young people. In addition, interviews are conducted with mass media personalities or newspapers about adolescent reproductive health.

Program Success

Arte y Parte is successful because it uses peer education by having teens talk to teens. Its materials are designed to appeal to young people. Peer educators participate in selecting and implementing strategies to reach adolescents and in producing the videos and the radio programs. Arte y Parte’s success in attracting adolescent participation is partly the result of the respect the program shows for the capabilities of youth. The project is also an alternative for adolescents who want to spend their free time in activities where they can use their creativity and energy in a healthful and safe way—and also learn and have fun while they contribute to their communities.

Arte y Parte is also successful because the owners of the mass media are committed and engaged with the project’s goals. All the radio time and newspaper and magazine space used by Arte y Parte is provided free of charge. Although at the beginning it was not easy to encourage the media to incorporate reproductive health topics into their work, the project has won their respect and recognition.

Meeting Program Challenges

The greatest challenge to Arte y Parte was resistance from a conservative minority that is affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church who believe that discussion of sexual and reproductive health with adolescents will encourage sexual activity. In response, Arte y Parte reviewed its materials with other
nongovernmental organizations and made changes that addressed the critics’ concerns.

In addition to the Church, the project has broken barriers related to discussing sex among adolescents and among teachers, parents, and young people. The mass media are also more open now to publicizing information about family planning, STIs, and other reproductive health topics related especially to adolescents—and increasingly, other groups are now also raising the awareness of Paraguayan adolescents about the need for good sexuality education.

Results

A recent evaluation of Arte y Parte showed that the program has been successful in reaching a significant proportion of youth in the Paraguayan capital of Asunción and in the county’s central areas. Almost 44 percent of youth who were polled indicated that they had either heard of, or participated in, at least one Arte y Parte activity. The project was less successful in reaching youth of lower socioeconomic status or those who had left school.

Thanks to Arte y Parte’s call-in radio show, "Con S de Sexo," people in neighboring Clorinda, Argentina, heard about Arte y Parte and invited the program to bring its sexual and reproductive health messages to a workshop for Argentine youth.

Lessons Learned

Mass media–based interventions are an effective means of reaching large numbers of adolescents at a modest cost (if media time is donated or discounted). Using media sources and language with which youth are familiar helps break down communication barriers. Because mass media may not provide a forum in which youth are able to engage in dialogue and to ask specific questions (except for radio call-in shows like "Con S de Sexo"), mass media are even more effective when linked to other, more interactive resources for adolescents.

As evidenced by the results of this program, adolescents are not a homogeneous group. Therefore, communications interventions, market segmentation, and message targeting, which can be aimed at specifically defined demographic groups, are crucial for success in interventions seeking to maximize reaching youth.
It is also important to establish a link between the information provided by the different activities and the facilities providing services for adolescents. In other words, it is not enough to provide information. Services too must be available to respond to adolescents’ reproductive health needs for counseling, contraception, etc.

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