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Promoting Child Care And Development
Through Television

By

Wagiono Sunarto
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PROMOTING CHILD CARE
AND DEVELOPMENT THROUGH TELEVISION

Wagiono Sunarto

Since television has been introduced in Indonesia in the early 60's, it has gradually become a very popular media and plays a major part in the dissemination of information throughout the country. Television is a very strategic medium. It can bridge the physical barriers of the more than 13,000 (stretched along 3,200 miles archipelago) islands separated by waters and jungles. Television is able to communicate to distant areas and remote places and it reach is far more effective than other conventional media. It transfers ideas, pictures, information, news and entertainment in a very comprehensive way. It links the country in a fast way and maybe is the cheapest possible medium to link millions of people in a single sharing experience. It is a major source of reference for the population, that consists of a great variety of ethnic groups, social and economical strata, religions, professions and ages.

Because of its strategic and central role, the Indonesian National Television (TVRI) Broadcast, the official government broadcast, operates with a mission to be the agents of development and has the means to promote social economic stabilization. The national television is fully funded by government and became the source of authorized national informations. TVRI also broadcast many programs and entertainment emphasizing the formal interest of the nation.

TVRI now has one central station, and 18 regional stations which cover almost all areas of the country. It runs centralized program 9 hours daily in Jakarta plus 2 of local program hours daily in the provinces. The number of households with TV in Indonesia is ...., bearing in mind that TV watching in Indonesia is mostly a family gathering event and in many cases a communal event.

With the introduction of the first private TV, RCTI, in 1988 and its expansion to the provinces, and with the opening of Educational Television (TPI) in January 1991 there are now alternatives and additional viewing hours. The networks and the hardware are there and are growing. The 'on air time' is increasing, the reach and penetration is progressing. The questions now are now to be focussed on the quality and the contents of the programs.
Problems Faced

1. The Indonesian National Television Broadcast which is fully supported and funded by the government has a certain mission; which is to promote government programs at all levels. In planning the programs and its contents, many justifications should be considered. It has to accommodate the official interest on all levels in the capital and the provinces, and it is designed for a great variety of spectators.

Then the problem is finding a way to design a program that has to be broadcast to 3 time zones, and has to be appreciated by a great variety of audiences, and in accordance with the policy and criteria established by the government.

2. A good program for children requires funds and talents, which are still rare and hard to find. The cost of producing a series of programs is not easily available and the industries and commerce are not yet ready to sponsor complete series on a continuous base. As a result, TVRI, RCTI, and TPI are renting ready made imported programs which are cheaper, are more attractive and available. The production of these imported programs are guaranteed by the competitive worldwide market which can provide sufficient funds for quality productions. In turn it is also supported by talented and experienced producers who had long training in the field.

In turn, we in Indonesia are facing a situation, that because not so many children programs are produced, very few opportunities are available for Indonesian talents to have appropriate professional training and education to produce a good children programs. This condition can be worse if there is no political will to encourage the industry and decision makers to promote the production of quality children programs by Indonesians. A recent small research conducted by the Indonesian Child Welfare Foundation, found that out of 10 favourite programs for children, only 1 was produced in Indonesia. If Indonesian producers have problems with competing with imported programs in Jakarta, one can imagine the quality of producers in the provinces.

3. The other concern is that because television in Indonesia is a young enterprise, not much is really known about its impacts. We grow with television and we take it for granted, but how and what is this medium doing to us? Massive research on a national scale has not yet been endeavored, studying all aspects and finding the TV watching pattern throughout the country. This survey can be a very useful step in evaluating the influence and role of this
medium, and the information gathered need to be used to plan the annual program.

These concerns are shared with other institutions, and we do understand that there are no easy answers for all of these questions. We want to see improvement in the quantity and quality of children programs. We want to see more good Indonesian programs and less imported programs. There are many criticism concerning the uniformity of the way of our modern cities look like, the lack of opportunities for Indonesian talents for appropriate training and education.

4. The other question is whether a good imported children program is the right program for the Indonesian child. Besides language barriers, cultural differences might offend their perception of things and events. Also the frame of reference would not be the same, and the examples of the problems of the story might not reflect the need and the situations in Indonesia. We see the same plazas, hotels, shopping malls and highways all over the world, we don’t want to have the same ‘International style’ TV programs everywhere.

5. There is a common perception that promoting children in television has to be done through children programs, more specifically children educational and entertainment programs. We tend to forget that parents and also parents-to-be, and the general public need special programs that can help them understand the care children need. Negative impact of television on children is certainly a major issue, especially in an industrialized country with dense information consumption but there are many others issues that have no sufficient exposure by the media.

There are very few issues on child survival, child protection and child development. Television can play a very vital role in parental and community education in overcoming problems such as mortality, morbidity, immunization, nutrition, child abuse, neglected child, child worker, street children, difficult child, and many others. Television also educate parents in raising the children, and giving them the best atmosphere and stimulation to their mental, cultural, and spiritual development. We would like to see more of this in our television.

We also would like to see more of parental and community educational programs promoting child care and development. The family is the core of a society, where the future generations are best nurtured and cared for to become the hope of the future. We need to bring TV back to the families and make it work for the families.
We hope that in this forum we can contribute some thoughts about some ways on how to maximize the role of television in shaping the future. And how to promote a sense of social responsibility to anybody involved in television and in the industry of producing and broadcasting children programs.