CHAPTER 2

Miguel Sabido's Entertainment-Education

Miguel Sabido

When Lauren Frank and Paul Falzone came to me and asked me what the “principle” of Sabido’s entertainment-education (EE) is, I naturally answered that I come from a theater background and education. My major was theater, and my minor was philosophy. I am a theater and television director, scriptwriter, and producer; in other words, I am a communication practitioner. Additionally, I studied epistemology, which equipped me to create a Theory of the Tone in human communication. This communication theorizing led me to talk with Wilbur Schramm, Everett Rogers, Marshall McLuhan, and other great personalities during the World Encounters in Communication conferences in 1974 and 1979 that I designed and produced for Televisa.

THEORY OF THE TONE

Since I was 18, I have been interested in knowing what effect I had on the audience with my college plays. I started developing a methodology based on the theories of Eric Bentley (1967) to find out what effect melodrama, farce, tragedy, and so on had. My initial attempts toward entertainment-education began with a first column devoted to establishing a theoretical

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framework and posing a testable hypothesis. In the second column, I placed the production and direction procedures that I use in order to achieve the hypothetical effect that I proposed. Finally, the third column highlights the importance of evaluation to test whether I had achieved the effect proposed in the hypothesis. As I have learned from my projects, I have added to this initial framework to create my comprehensive approach to entertainment-education (see Fig. 2.1).

In one of the plays I directed in college theater I discovered that the actress, Martha Zavaleta, changed her energy in her body, thus changing the tone of the scene and for that matter the tone of the whole play. Therefore, she changed the effect on the audience. Described in greater detail in my previous book chapter (Sabido, 2004), I called the points she could take her energy to “nodes” because they were points in which

Fig. 2.1 Comprehensive approach to entertainment-education

nerves, veins, arteries, and lymphatic vessels met. For two years we worked together searching for those changes of energy. By using this system, we had great hits like the Grand Honor Prize of the Colombia Theater Festival in 1965.

We discovered that there are “nodes” behind the eyes; when energy was placed there, the tone became intelligent and lucid. Meryl Streep in *The Devil Wears Prada* is a very good example. When energy is placed in the base of the neck, the actor can deeply move the audience, thus giving the scene an emotional tone. Again, Meryl Streep is a good example in *Sophie's Choice*. Third, there are nodes in the lower part of the body, which are more “reptilian.” For instance, a “node” in the pit of the stomach generates a tone of terror when the actor energizes it; an extraordinary example is Janet Leigh in the shower scene of Hitchcock's *Psycho*. Similarly, some actors and actresses can generate a fierce tone using those nodes (Catherine Zeta-Jones in *Chicago*), a sexual tone (Marylin Monroe), or tones of mystic enrapture like those produced by Maria Douglas in my play *The Temptations of Mary of Egypt*.

From this, I deduced that the human body could generate three types of tones: intellectual, emotional, and reptilian. I then set up a theoretical framework composed of all the “schools of theater of the world.” Intellectual tones had been proposed by Diderot and uniquely used by the Comedie Française. I also employed the emotional tone used by Stanislavsky and his followers. Finally, the reptilian tones were used by Grotowski, Barba, and Garcia.

These findings led to my work on the Theory of the Tone in human communication (Sabido, 2004). It has a core hypothesis: it is possible to arrange the elements of the flow to intensify, weaken, degrade, highlight, amplify, and/or diminish the tone of the communication. Using this theory, I was able to establish the main premise of my work: it is possible to use entertainment to achieve a proven social benefit without losing the audience.

Over time, I have adapted my theory. I was able to create a 3 by 3 grid of nine items. The grid features micro (interpersonal), medium (gatherings of 50-500 attendees), and macro (broadcast television or radio, streaming video, public transit, etc.) communication crossed with the three tones (intellectual, emotional, and reptilian). In this grid any communication media accessible to any human being can be located.

ENTERTAINMENT-EDUCATION PROJECTS

In February 1967 under the sponsorship of the Mexican Institute of Social Security, I devised a project using the first of my models of tonal communication. In this project, I used a supermarket-rack magazine with a predominantly reptilian tone to convey intellectual data to inner-city audiences. My goal was to have the audience read the magazines and then go to the clinics of the Social Security System to get service. I used my “three-column method” and was able to support my hypothesis, as attendance for health services (my desired outcome) significantly increased.

Following that, with the backing of TV producer, Ernesto Alonso, I devised a second project to heighten the tone of the underrated format, the telenovela. I gave a virile and epic tone to historical telenovelas in *La Tormenta* (The Storm) in 1967, *La Constitución* (The Constitution) in 1970, and *El Carruaje* (The Carriage) in 1972 and *Senda de Gloria* (Path of Glory) in 1987.

Having successfully created my desired tone in these telenovelas, I embarked on a project in which I combined my theory of the tone with Wilbur Schramm’s (1955) theory of communication, Eric Bentley’s (1967) drama theory, and Albert Bandura’s (1977) social learning theory. I collaborated with Emilo Azcárraga Milmo, Televisa’s CEO. For the first time I was able to control production procedures, and I found that I needed to add a moral framework to the theoretical framework. In my entertainment-education projects, that moral framework was the most difficult task.

Mr. Azcárraga provided the means to research, not only the quantitative but also the qualitative results. His sponsorship was absolutely revolutionary in the history of entertainment-education. My model requires knowing all elements of the problem to be solved. An efficient infrastructure to solve the problems must exist. Additionally, we track quantitative research on the ratings (viewership), share (percent of television viewing audience), and sales, and qualitative results on the change in audience attitudes, opinions, and behaviors.

Obviously, it is an expensive and complex model, but the results can be totally spectacular. In the case of the telenovela *Ven Conmigo* (Come with me) in 1974, results were indeed spectacular. More than half a million people enrolled in the National Plan of Adult Education. All stakeholders involved accepted the goal value “it is good that adults go back to school” that was the foundation of the theoretical framework. This telenovela—280 episodes of 30 minutes had 31 points of rating—was one of the most watched in the history of Mexican television.

Encouraged by this success, I proposed an additional project to Mr. Azcárraga featuring three commercial telenovelas, a radionovela, intellectual brochures and a daily segment in a miscellaneous TV show devoted to life/family planning. This is an extremely powerful model employing several means of communication from the micro to macro levels. The three telenovelas were born: *Acompáñame* (Come Along with Me) in 1976, *Caminemos* (Let's Walk Together) in 1978, and *Vamos Juntos* (Let's Go Together) in 1979. Each reached world notoriety. They had successful qualitative results, and the research carried out by my team confirmed that the intended value ("it is good that families plan their lives") was accepted, reinforced, and enacted. The big surprise came when David Poindexter (2004), President of Population Communication International (PCI) approached me, jointly with the United Nations. Later known as the Mexican Demographic Miracle, the growth rate in Mexico decreased from 3.7 to 2.4 over a five-year span.

David Poindexter took Sergio Alarcon, President of the World Entertainment-Education Foundation, and me to India. We met with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi who asked me to teach a workshop to her top television producers (Poindexter, 2004). The outcome was a telenovela on family planning, *Hum Log*, described in detail by Arvind Singhal and Everett Rogers (1999) in their now-classic book, *Entertainment-Education: A Communication Strategy for Social Change*. The news spread around the world.

In 1997 Mr. Azcárraga passed away. I submitted three telenovelas based on my model that were refused by the new management at Televisa. I voluntarily submitted my resignation. Two years later, Mr. Guillermo Cañedo White sponsored my next entertainment-education project on his online platform. With the change in technology, I gave up the telenovela and designed the backbone for a "webnovela" using the resources the Internet allowed at that time.

In 2011, I designed a model for remote education to train teachers to use the Educational Reform generated by UNESCO upon request of the World Bank. Again, this model had a telenovela *Aprender a Vivir* (Learn to Live). This model made me get acquainted with the challenges of remote education. Now I am designing online workshops. I will be commissioned by the World Entertainment-Education Foundation and Inter-Congress-International LLC, to present my models and hold interactive workshops for those persons, agencies, and countries actively engaged in EE efforts around the world. For the record, I want to state that even

though millions of dollars have been raised around the world to implement my methodologies, read my books, I have never received, nor even offered, a single cent for it.

LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES

It has to be understood that my model can only be implemented in a tight collaboration with the government that provides infrastructure services and with the private sector. Coordination is key for the entertainment-education project to actually yield behavior change.

Many a time, I have been told that fashion runways, documentaries, or masquerades touching upon social problems are considered entertainment-education. I respect all of them and believe that they are full of good faith. But to me, the essence of an EE effort should have a solid, viable hypothesis that can be quantitatively and qualitatively tested. Without this proof, and I say it affectionately and respectfully, EE efforts are just good intentions or wishful thinking.

Throughout my career, I have adapted my model to new technologies and new social problems. Eight years ago, I explored and developed a model for remote education. Now, the COVID-19 pandemic has made this model common and fundamental. More recently, my work on web-novelas has allowed me to reach new audiences.

The most serious problem that I have found in my 50 years of work is setting up a moral framework accepted by all society stakeholders. The easiest one was adult education; no one opposed the idea of older adults going back to school and learning how to read. The most difficult one was family planning, especially in countries colonized by Spain or with specific religious beliefs that did not allow family planning. Unfortunately, this problem is being solved in a single and terrifying way: mankind is about to perish, and if all of the seven billion inhabitants of the planet do not unite efforts, the human race is on a serious impending path to disappearance. How can we unite efforts? Countries with colonial backgrounds could organize service infrastructures that are efficient, familiar, and not corrupt. Large organizations like the World Bank could set up information centers and data redistribution to all countries that need it. These organizations could share lessons from all EE efforts that have actual proof of results and clear information on how to use them (like my models and those of *Sesame Street*). We must work together so that all inhabitants of the planet plan the life of their family; awaken their spirit to fight against poverty; plant a

tree or a hydroponic orchard; prevent teen pregnancy; dignify the role of women in society; and, above all, create an awareness that all humans are one, a humankind, and that there is only one possible home: the womb of mother nature in our beautiful blue planet. Let us hope that the terrible COVID experience will unite mankind and save the planet.

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