

An Interview *with* Jude Delia

SCIENCE TEACHER
PORT-AU-PRINCE, HAITI

01. Initiative

On his first day of filming and without any further assistance, Delia showed up in a bare room at TelePacific with a white board and markers that he had purchased out-of-pocket. He set about filming his class with unenthused technicians, following the MENFP curriculum and ending with homework.

Every week, he works hard to respect the allotted hour, which he religiously begins with a health message about the risks of coronavirus and prevention measures. When asked what prompted him to include this message, he replied that his audience — science students — have rational minds; therefore, they have an opportunity to bring awareness to their communities about the virus, amid a climate where many in Haiti question COVID-19's existence.

02. Response

Delia says he never expected the reaction his classes have garnered. The first surprise came with the volume of homework students returned for correction. Students sent him pictures of their work on whatever material they had available, or they would post pictures on social media being sure to tag him. He believes his experience has revealed students' real thirst for knowledge and learning, which ultimately encourages him to keep filming.

Today, Delia's pre-recorded classes have thousands of views on the network's YouTube channel and countless reposts and shares on Facebook. He notes that although many of the posted comments are positive, some people argue that he is probably getting rich off of a government subsidy. Delia admits these negative comments hurt, especially since he is actually getting poorer through this endeavour: since the lockdown, his school has been paying him less than 50% of his salary, and the gas to get to and from the studio is not cheap.

Background

Jude Delia is a 29 year-old science teacher at a small Port-au-Prince private school. When COVID-19 forced school closures in Haiti, he could not just sit around while students across the country missed out on learning, yet again. He wanted to be a part of a solution that included all students. In late March, Delia's school principal connected Delia to the owner of TelePacific, a Haitian television network. The network has a significant presence on social media, an active Youtube channel with 45,000 subscribers, and a Facebook page with over 86,000 likes. Leveraging this online presence, Delia quickly hatched a plan to create a television show to keep his students learning during the pandemic.

One week, the TV cancelled his hours to record a different program. Comments flooded the network's social media pages, requesting Delia, and within the week, the network's owner was calling Delia to ask him back. Delia receives pleas directly from students all over the country, asking him not to "abandon" them. It stuns him to see students who he would have never crossed paths with otherwise watch his classes. Students pay to recharge their phones just to watch his class, turning off all their other apps in order to save data: when they top-up, it's to watch his class and upload homework. Students will gather in small groups to watch the class on one device and do homework together, oftentimes inviting Delia to join Whatsapp and Facebook homework groups. As a result, he now also records classes specifically aimed at correcting homework.

03. Landscape

Delia believes cellphones are the main way students access his material but knows that more students could be reached if there was a more accessible medium: in particular, one that did not require electric power. He is open to adapting his classes to fit a radio broadcast and simply wants to keep Haitian students engaged in learning. He believes Haiti should work more aggressively towards integrating technology into the education system. To him, the days of cramming students into a classroom are passé.