



AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL STATE SCHOOL ORGANISATIONS LTD

## RESPONSE TO SUPPORTING AUSTRALIAN STORIES ON OUR SCREENS

JULY 2020

## Introduction

The Australian Council of State School Organisations welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the discussion relating to the options paper *Supporting Australian stories on our screens* and provides the brief response below.

## About us

ACSSO represents the interests of the families and communities of more than 2.53 million children and young people attending government schools in Australia. We are one of the oldest continuously operating parent organisations in Australia. Formed in 1947, we bring together various state and territory parent groups, in addition to other families with an interest in public education. Our role is in developing national policies that are reflective of the way families want public education to be offered for all children. ACSSO continues to be consistent in our commitment to ensuring equity and access for all young people attending government schools in Australia.

We believe that the primary obligation of governments, both Federal and State, is to establish and maintain government systems of education which:

- *Engages with family and community at all levels of education;*
- *Are of the highest standard and open to all, irrespective of race, gender, religion, social-economic status, geographic location, or ability;*
- *Can respond to the changing landscape of education in the 21st Century and respond and develop flexible and diverse programs necessary to meet student needs;*
- *Discriminates in favour of those schools and individual students who are challenged with disadvantage and/or disability.*

In the last five years, there has been a rapid transformation in the media and entertainment landscape. New platforms have emerged, including streaming services like Stan and Netflix, and user generated content is flourishing in both volume and variety on YouTube. Digital media has opened new worlds for consumers and creators of Australian content need to keep pace. ACSSO believes that all young people should see the diversity and culture of Australia reflected in the media content they access.

For our children, the media should act as both a mirror with content that reflects their world, where they live and who they are. Moreover, media should act as a window into the world they live in, exemplifying to them the diversity of culture, religions, employment and opportunities that they may not experience in their world.

Studies from many fields (Ward, 2004, Schmader, Block & Lickel, 2015)) have shown that it is important for children to see characters who not only look like themselves and their families, but also sound like them. Without access to Australian content on our screens, young people will not be exposed to their world in their contemporary or socio historical context.

For marginalized groups, in particular, the mainstream media are believed to offer critical insight into how the world at large views their group, its members, and their contributions.

There's a relationship between low self-esteem and negative media portrayals of racial groups, in addition to an association between poor self-esteem. There is a lack of portrayals of particular groups; in particular significantly content relevant to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and our representation of refugees is sparse.

Adolescence, in particular, is a critical time of self-reflection and self- definition (Erikson, 1968; Moshman, 1999; Timler, McIntyre & Hands, 2019) in which young people work to determine both what kind of person they would like to become and how well they are meeting this goal. In making these judgments, teens draw on those around them, both for models and for feedback. Prominent among these influential “others” are parents and peers, whose approval and support have emerged as major contributors to teens’ self-esteem. In addition, televised versions of these representations are also considered valuable contributors in shaping the diversity and inclusion of teen perspectives.

The media are also believed to play a prominent role in shaping self-conceptions, both by supplying ideals to internalize and by providing feedback about the importance of one’s social group, values, or status. Media use is quite high during adolescence, comprising 7.5 hr of each day<sup>i</sup> and offering an abundance of materials for identity construction.<sup>ii</sup> For ACSSO, we firmly believe that this requires Australian content – not only on commercial media but throughout the streamed sources such as Fox and Netflix

Our policy, developed and supported by the families of children in the nation’s government schools is clear:

***All broadcasters should provide programs:***

- (a) which inform, stimulate and entertain children;***
- (b) which promote personal growth of individuals by ensuring quality and diversity in their choice of children’s programs;***
- (c) for all children, especially in early primary years, which reflect experiences they will encounter in their Australian environment;***
- (d) which are sensitive to the multicultural nature of the Australian community;***
- (e) that reflect the needs and sensitivities of the family viewing audiences;***
- (f) give special consideration to the ages and interests of intended audiences;***
- (g) pay particular attention to the time schedule of children’s programs.***

To this end, ACSSO strongly recommends the continuation and expansion of Australian content in programs and would welcome continued discussion regarding its growth and improvement to ensure diversity and inclusion of representation for young people today. A media reflecting our richness and diversity is crucial for the future of Australia.

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<sup>i</sup> Roberts, Foehr, Rideout, & Brodie, 1999

<sup>ii</sup> Arnett, 1995

Mastro, Dana, Riva Tukachinsky, Toni Schmader, Katharina Block, and Brian Lickel. 2015. “Social Identity Threat in Response to Stereotypic Film Portrayals: Effects on Self-Conscious Emotion and Implicit Ingroup Attitudes: Social Identity Threat.” *Journal of Social Issues* 71(1):54–72.

Timler A, McIntyre F, Rose E, and Hands B. 2019. “Exploring the Influence of Self-Perceptions on the Relationship between Motor Competence and Identity in Adolescents.” *Plos One* 14(11):0224653.

Ward LM. 2004. “Wading through the Stereotypes: Positive and Negative Associations between Media Use and Black Adolescents’ Conceptions of Self.” *Developmental Psychology* 40(2):284–94