

Supporting Australian Stories on Our Screens submission

I am a member of the board of the Australian Children's Television Foundation ACTF, from the Northern Territory. I have read the ACTF submission and fully endorse the *Supporting Stories on Our Screens* content.

Being a member of this board enables the unique perspective of the Northern Territory in content being developed for children and in particular that the stories and voice of Aboriginal Australians are represented. It has been a privilege to participate in discussions and decisions that focus on quality content that tell unique stories linked to children's sense of place, their cultural identity and that stories are created especially for them, with characters that look and sound like them.

I am the Director of the early childhood parent support program, Families as First Teachers, FaFT, in 53 communities across remote and very remote locations in the Northern Territory. This unique role oversees resources that support Aboriginal families and children. As an educational program we have had most success with learning resources developed for families and children that acknowledge their faces, stories, perspectives and languages. These have been key in delivering messages about early learning and development and underscore the need to represent all faces and types of families.

Engaging parents in content for children is critical, a child learns more alongside a helping adult, therefore sophisticated content that engages both is required to develop critical thinking, problem solving, critical analysis of characters, building empathy and resilience is increased when child and adult are together. Screen content that keeps the adult in the room also keeps the child safe. In a time of ever increasing engagement with screens, the development of appropriate content for children is significant. The ACTF is noteworthy in this field, developing and supporting those who write for child and family audiences, without this significant work on and behalf of Australian families, children may view less than high quality, well developed stories that stimulate early learning.

Engagement in the earliest years with quality teaching, and teaching materials that illustrate appropriate social interactions are most important in setting young children up for future learning. As children and their parents turn to screens more than ever for entertainment, there is moral imperative for the television children view in these formative years is of a high quality.

Stories that represent all children's lives, that takes note of child development and exposes them to characters who are smart, critical thinkers solving real world problems and using the Australian vernacular is vital. Unfortunately much of the content that children are exposed to is not quality and has little educational value. We want our children to grow up recognising their unique place in the world and not as Gillian Armstrong recently commented 'talking about maple syrup and the school prom'.

Australia is not a homogenous society, all children have the right to see and hear themselves reflected in the culture around them and in their everyday experiences. This includes the curriculum materials and screen content aimed at teaching key concepts and more importantly the ability to build empathy for characters that are designed to highlight emotional and social development and real world problems. National educational initiatives that have focussed on bullying, including those who are less able or different have featured in ACTF developed content, such as First Day. These are unique representations of our

children solving real world problems in a sensitive way that invites audiences to identify and empathise.

Children's television content is an engaging vehicle for teaching children in so many ways. Sophisticated shows like *My Place*, *Dance Academy*, *Hardball*, *First Day*, *The Inbestigators*, *Little J and Big Cuz*, *Thalu* – are extraordinarily important to educators who have been able to reliably use screen material to support teaching in literacy, critical thinking and problem solving. Increasingly, the material has been used as a vehicle for building understanding of unique problems faced by children in modern Australia.

During the COVID 19 pandemic, the screen productions the ACTF has supported, featured significantly in each state and Territory's approach to online learning. The quality of this content provided confidence for educators with ready and reliable material, engaging students in a sharply challenged environment where education, like many other sectors of society was not ready for the impacts of lockdown.

In closing, I would like to highlight the extraordinary role that the ACTF plays in supporting many of Australia's premiere children's productions from all over Australia. The government has access to a highly experienced, awarded foundation that has considerable expertise in bringing stories to life for our children. The government should take advantage of this and ensure that the ACTF is enabled to continue to invest more in high quality content, distributing that content around the world and to the nation's schools.

Whatever measures the government takes to support Australian stories on our screens, as an educator, I ask that government to prioritise content for the children's audience, as investment in children is vital.

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