

What does “cultural identity” mean for you as producer?

PRODUCERS FROM AROUND THE WORLD ON CULTURAL IDENTITY

Sandra Le Blanc, Executive Producer, NDR, Germany



What does it mean to be a German producer? Well, it probably boils down to some core values – I don't even know if they

are German or universal. One thing that might make us typically German is probably the wish to explain a lot. Sometimes we tend to be too focused on the verbal, not trusting the audience enough. And it might even be typical that we are criticising ourselves. There is a constant strive to sort of get away from that or try to find other forms of expression, other than verbalising everything.

How do I integrate cultural identity in our work? Well, for example, we refer to the regional culture of northern Germany in our detective series called the *Pepperkorns* by including geographical points of interest and icons of the region that we can visualise easily, like the water and certain sites of Hamburg (Ill. 1). Also the names of the characters reflect northern heritage. We often try to have names that reflect where the kids come from. It is their last names that usually signify whether they are from Northern Germany or have a Scandinavian background or an immigration background — which we also try to reflect and portray. So it is

very important for the *Pepperkorns*, indeed, to be intercultural and to be multicultural on the other hand.

Bernadette O'Mahony, Head of Development and Production, ACTF, Australia



programming. So we are swamped with British and American content. Which is why we try and make sure that what we do is distinctly Australian and does sound distinctly Australian. The ac-

Well, I am an Australian producer and we are a very small English-speaking territory with not a lot of money in children's programming.

cent is a big part of it: Kids actually hearing an Australian accent on television, because all the Australian animations are done with American voices. So it is only the live-action children's programmes that feature Australian accents.

We have surveyed kids, and they do notice that it is an Australian accent. The other thing is the Australian

landscape in those locations, where we have had kids saying that to them that is the difference in the shows.

Another important thing are the school uniforms. That is a cultural anchor for our kids. It is recognisable, and that is for example one of the successes of shows like *Little Lunch*. It is typically Australian: morning teatime in the school playground. They wear hats because of the sun in summer.

These are tiny little things, but kids say it is Australian. We don't want them to look universal, which is a challenge in co-productions, but that is what makes a good show, to look for those differences, to have a special flavour, to look and feel Australian. Another example is our sense of humour. We can be a bit naughty. We are irreverent – or we can be, if we want.

PROGRAMME

Metka Dedakovic, Editor, RTV Slovenija, Slovenia



Regarding the approach to the culture that is typical, I can say that when the children's department of RTV began working in

1958, we started with showing kids as many of our folktales, classic tales, and children's literature as possible. Folktales or fairytales brought a kind of domestic feeling: being in our family, feeling safe – that is something (also maybe another element) that contributes to the Slovenian profile.

At the core of our identity is that we are a very small nation with our own language. So for me to be a Slovenian producer means taking care to use language in a way that fosters Slovenian children, that it feels good to think and talk in our own language. It doesn't mean proper, standardised language, but to make good use of the many dialects that exist in our country and to be true to children. At the same time, we have a variety of the cultures living in our country and minorities: I am proud that within 10 years we finally managed to dub a puppet show for Roma kids.

Patricia Ellingson, Children's Media Consultant, Canada



For media to truly connect, it's important for children to see themselves reflected in some way. Canada is very much a pluralistic society and the content we create for our children's audience needs to reflect this.

Whether it be diversity in race, religion, culture, ability, sexual orientation, or thought it's important that we create programming that helps children to acquire a greater awareness and not

only accept others around them, especially those who are different. Children like to watch and be entertained by programming that is aspirational, but to truly connect with them it needs to reflect **their** reality in some way. This includes showing a diversity of family structures and settings – rural settings vs. city; living in an apartment as well as homes with large backyards and swimming pools; family structure, rich and poor. The earlier a child can learn about differences, the more likely they will grow up to be an understanding and accepting adult.

Alvaro Ceppi, Zumbastico Studios, Chile



We're a mixture of different cultures that's only recently accepting the complexity of its origins and structure as a society. It's important to understand that there's still

a conflict between our original native people (Mapuche, Aimara, and Rapa Nui among others) and their search for recognition and rights within the state. Recently, Chile has been going through an identity crisis in which we question our origins, social structure, and the values that connect us as a community. Like an adolescent that gets in contact with his or her consciousness and starts to understand one's personal history with a new point of view.

As children's TV producer, I would say that most of our work deals with identity and the place of an individual or a community in the larger world. Although we work in comedy and animation, those questions have a role in any kind of format. For example one of our series, *Zumbastico Fantastico*, was about characters that were different in their society and tried finding their place in it. And *Paper Port* deals with surviving the personal changes in puberty and adolescence and accepting

yourself as a unique individual. From that point of view, I think these shows reflect the kind of conflict that stems from a specific identity. If in other cultures, the hero (or anti-hero) is against nature and all odds, in a major fight between good and evil, in our culture the worst enemy is yourself and the structure of society that surrounds you.

Roziyah Naam, Section Strategic Planning, RTM, Malaysia



Malaysia is very diverse culturally and embraces being inter-faith. It's very difficult to characterise "Malaysian".

Historically, due to economic demands, we have imported Chinese migrants from China mainland, Indian migrants from India, and the Malay descendants from the archipelagos from Oceania up to South East Asia. Inclusivity for the original people (local ethnics) is a must, too. Thus, today, in this multi-cultural society it's a big challenge, and it takes a concerted effort to sustain the integration of cultures. Everyone needs to play a significant role; society, school/education system, media, and first and foremost, the government.

Of course it's very important to ensure harmony in diversity. Though some irresponsible individuals would like to see it crumble; and they try to do so by instigating on racial elements, injecting harmful thoughts on economic equity and political divides which will somehow give way to negative thinking.

As media people, we have all the tools either to make the matter worse or to ensure that the "gelling agents" cohesively intact. We provide platforms for expression through our programmes; we reach out to people in the most remote places to hear them. We do not suppress or marginalise but encourage and promote understanding and high

tolerance of the differences. In parallel, we bridge the government and people to ensure that expectations of both parties are met. We encourage love, respect, and elements of integrity to the young in our programmes, too. We eliminate the element of colours and faith as separators – instead we make use of them in order to celebrate the differences.

Nils Stokke, Founder/CEO, Spark, Norway



Norwegian culture plays quite a big role in our drama series. Here, we have the small bits and pieces of Norwegian values: how kids play together,

how they interact with their parents. The child-parent interaction is more on equal terms. Not like peers, of course, there is still a hierarchy, but we treat children more equal, give them more responsibility and, I guess, trust them more than it is usually done in some other places.

When it comes to topics, my favourites are those that are spot-on what the kids are doing, what is on their minds. We are trying not to put too many arbitrary conflicts or characters into the story. If we happen to spend too much time in developing and taking apart those bits and pieces of characters or stories – that really doesn't make much sense in children's lives. Rather tell it in the way the kids really experience it!

Alison Stewart, Head of CBeebies Production, Animation and Acquisition, BBC, UK



The UK is formed by England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. These territories hold very hard to their own national history

and identity, but there are times when the 4 parts really work together as the United Kingdom – this famous historical island.

We are very aware that the identity of the young people in the UK is changing very rapidly. Around 20 % of children under 16 belong to ethnic groups which are not white British. For children it is not a big deal – they grow up with this diversity, and when we are making content for young people in the UK, it always has to reflect this mix. We are lucky enough to have CBeebies – a preschool channel that plays everyday, all day until 7 pm. There is time to put a mix of content on the channel that reflects the UK communities in all their differences as well as their similarities.

For instance, there is a show which we made about cultural and religious celebrations, and we featured celebrations of all the major faiths as well as some of the British cultural celebrations. There are shows about the countryside, about growing food, about farming – again another big community there. We have shows for children with special needs and learning difficulties.

If we want our countries and our communities to prosper, everybody has to learn. Everybody has a right to live alongside of everybody else. That is what I think we need to teach children more than anything. Of course we need to teach them literacy, numeracy, and science. We need to teach them everything that is wonderful about the world.

But basically, if they don't get on with other people, if they don't respect other people, then they are not going to get very far in life. I think that is the biggest message that we try to communicate in all our programming really. ■