

An Assessment of KFMB's Compliance
with the CTA

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Upon analysis of content and basic compliance with CTA policy, we have concluded that CBS 8's E/I core programming is found to be problematic. Below we have outlined their non-compliance with time regulation as well as their lack of truly educational programming. Overall, we have given KFMB a letter grade of "C-" in terms of their performance in demonstrating a willingness to provide kids with quality and educational shows.

Analysis of Educational Content Presented in the Programs

In terms of content, two out of the three shows featured were either questionable in theme or inappropriately tailored to a child's ability to learn. For example, *Doodlebops Rockin Road Show* claims to target an audience whose ages range from three to eight (FCC Form 398), yet the weak narratives make it impossible for children of any age to draw any educational value from the shows. *Doodlebops* follows a formulaic plot, where a real-life child writes in to the cartoon characters for advice on how to handle a particular issue. The child is then transported to the Doodlebop world, and the plot ensues. According to *Cookie Jar TV's* FCC form, the show aims "(to provide) viewers with a basic understanding and appreciation of music." (2010) While the show features plenty of music, they do not spend any time teaching fundamentals of music; therefore, the claim is unsubstantiated. The segment always ends with a song that sums up the pro-social message, yet the message itself is often rather ambiguous. For instance, the primary focus of the first episode aired on October 16th was to teach kids that it's important to help. Yet the storyline was vague, lacking any concrete examples that children would be able to apply to real-life situations. The summarizing song at the end of the episode reinforced this idea of helping, yet all it instructed children to do was

“help.” Kids in this age three to eight bracket need concrete examples that make the lesson applicable—the learning outcome of the show would have been more on target had they provided examples that helping a younger sibling, helping a parent clean, or helping a friend on the playground. The word “help” is repeated so mindlessly without any foundation that it loses its meaning for a child. In addition, the shows are then divided into two chunks featuring two different plots. There isn’t enough time spent on any one primary lesson for it to be fully integrated into the episode—the songs just become mindless repetition. Furthermore, there is little to no audience participation; while there is plenty of singing and dancing, at no point in the show are the audience members encouraged to play along or repeat back a verse. While an seven or eight year-old would probably be able to decipher the message, the annoying voices and repetition might become annoying for them, as the show does not fit with in with their capabilities or their entertainment needs. While the intent of the show is most definitely to present pro-social values, it is fair to argue that there are other children’s programs that do so more efficiently, in a way where a child can extract the message and apply it to real-world circumstances.

Second, *Busytown Mysteries* provided the most educational content of the all the shows featured. The plot of the episodes follows a systematic formula, where the characters are presented with a mystery and they use clues and make predictions to solve it. At the end of the episode, viewers are walked through the entire plot again, which reinforces drawing inferences and clears up any confusion about clues that a child may have missed. This show helps to enrich a child’s ability to make predictions, analyze, and conclude. The episodes are paced slowly enough that concepts are make clear and a child

has time to come to the answer his/herself. While the show has little pro-social content or explicit educational themes, being able to draw conclusions and make predictions is an important skill for a developing mind to hone—these lessons can be applied in both a pro-social context or in the classroom in an educational setting.

The last show aired for core programming was *Sabrina the Animated Series*. While *Sabrina the Animated Series* might be a funny, magical appealing television show for children, it certainly does not meet the educational/informational needs of core programming. The FCC 398 official Children's Programming report claims that *Sabrina the Animated Series* fulfills children's educational needs because it touches upon the familial, social, peer-group, and school related issues that children face today. The station's report also claims that the show's life-lessons reflect many of the same learning experiences and teenage challenges faced by children today.

It hardly seems appropriate to teach seven to twelve year olds, the targeted audience for this show, about teenage challenges. Why would children as young as seven need to learn about social teenage issues that are more relevant for adolescents twice their age? Moreover, the lessons in the show are not repeated, reinforced or even concrete enough for children to easily apply them to their lives. In one episode Sabrina the teenage witch procrastinates on her history presentation and is unable to quickly learn about history in order to finish her homework. She uses magic to bring Attila the Hun to life so she can show him off during her presentation. A rival witch sees this and brings Genghis Kahn to life. In the end the two historic figures begin to fight and Sabrina must reconcile and work together with her rival to control them. Not only is the "life-lesson" unclear but the story is unrealistic and does not provide a positive reinforcement for good behavior

which limits a child's ability to model that behavior.

Other factors outside of the show's lack of educational information make it unsatisfactory for core programming. First, Sabrina's physical appearance exemplifies all of the characteristics that children did not like in the IZI Television study. Sabrina's unrealistic and sexualized body image is one cause for concern. Her chief outfit is a very short cropped top that exposes her extremely skinny waist. The show also lacks in ethnically diverse characters. In one scene Sabrina and her friends are at a fair, and when they pan the crowd every single character is white. There is not one person of color in the entire show. A series that is supposed to be targeting the educational, informational, emotional and social needs of children should be responsible for showing racial diversity. Lastly, the series limits the roles of girls to those who are mean, catty and selfish. Although Sabrina and her rival work together for a second, they do not solve their problems for good. Their cooperation is minimized while their conflict still continues.

E/I Labeling, Consistent Scheduling, and Ease of Accessing Programs

The E/I label was present throughout the entire duration of the CORE programming.

On the CBS8 website, the 'morning kids' shows are identified as E/I and on TVGuide.com. KFMB meets the three hour rule, yet online scheduling tended to be little confusing—TV Guide.com only had programs listed from seven to nine a.m., even though there was another hour of programs scheduled until ten a.m. In addition, the shows were preempted with a *Cookie Jar TV* jingle, which serves as an easy way for both children and parents to recognize that the programs about to air are for kids.

Compliance with Advertising Time Limit Rules

The Children's Television Act clearly states that commercials during children's core programming are to be limited to 12 minutes on the weekdays and 10.5 minutes on the weekends. Our observations found that on Saturday October 16, 2010 during Core programming from 7am to 10am the FCC's rules for commercial time were broken twice. Between 7am-8am during the *Doodlebops* 12 minutes of commercials were aired. Then the second offense occurred from 8am-9am during *Busytown Mysteries*, with 11 minutes of aired commercials. However, during the least educational show, *Sabrina the Animated Series*, only 8.5 minutes of commercials were aired.

According to the TVGuide.com website, programming for Saturday October 30, 2010 and Saturday November 6, 2010 is only scheduled for *Doodlebops* from 7am to 8am and *Sabrina, the Animated Series* from 8am to 9am. Leaving out one hour of requirement. In contrast the CBS8 website indicates scheduling for all three hours on both of these days. The FCC's rules limit the amount of commercial airtime to 10.5 minutes per hour on weekends and 12 minutes per hour on weekdays. Our observations found that on Saturday October 16, 2010 during Core programming from 7am to 10am the FCC's rules for commercial time were broken twice. Between 7am-8am during the *Doodlebops* 12 minutes of commercials were aired. The second offense occurred from 8am-9am during *Busytown Mysteries*, with 11 minutes of aired commercials. While time constraints were clearly violated, there were no instances of host-selling or other unethical forms of advertising.

CBS 8 and Cookie Jar TV Website Content

Cookie Jar TV's supplemental website was mediocre, featuring summaries of the TV shows and some games, yet it managed to provide some educational content for children. The website was simple enough for a child to navigate through on their own, and it featured links to *The Doodlebops* website, which featured games that appealed to different skill levels. The games were basic and paid little attention to learning, focusing more on hand-eye coordination than on providing educational content. Furthermore, the website did not feature any advertising, request any personal information, or feature any product placement. While the website was definitely not the product of intense effort or a willingness to create quality gaming, it did feature an accessible way for children to interact with some of their favorite TV characters.

Conclusion

Overall, *Cookie Jar TV* features very little true educational content and shows a lack of willingness to create quality E/I programming for children. Ironically, *Busytown Mysteries*, its one redeeming factor, is made and produced in Canada. This example serves as an indication that American children's E/I programming is lacking in a truly educational foundation; instead of spending money to import quality foreign programming, perhaps TV networks should be focusing their E/I budget on creating domestic products that are suitable for children and fit their educational needs. Overall, we gave this station a "C-" for their E/I programming, due to their violations of commercial length, lack of quality programming, and their lack of enrichment activities on their website.