2006 Inquiry submission

Children, Young People and the Built Environment

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Inquiry submission – Children, Young People and the Built Environment

1. Position

1.1 This submission recommends that the Committee on Children and Young People direct the Commission for Children and Young People to guide the production and operation of a curriculum resource in the form of an interactive webpage. The webpage would be designed to assist NSW students in informing the Commission about their needs and wants in regards to the built environment, whilst allowing students to achieve some of the outcomes of the existing NSW curriculum.

1.2 As a final year Bachelor of Social Work (Honours) student at the Australian Catholic University, and as someone who holds a Bachelor of Arts (Education) degree with a Diploma in Education (Macquarie University), my interests are from both a social welfare perspective which reflects principles and values including the respect for the needs and wellbeing of individuals and groups within our community, and the promotion of public participation in societal processes and in the development of policies[1], as well as from the perspective of someone who has an understanding of the NSW school curriculum and it's use.

1.3 The issues relating to children, young people and the built environment, as outlined in the Issues Papers, are vast and complex. Within this submission the focus will be limited to the issue of increasing child participation in decision making in regards to the built environment. Whilst this submission focuses on children who fit within the K-6 curriculum, the ideas presented could be applied similarly to relevant curriculum for other age brackets such as high school students.

2. Recommendation

2.1 The website would be designed to provide the students with information about proposed developments and the processes that are involved in getting proposals

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[1] Australian Association of Social Workers. (2002). *AASW Code of Ethics 1999* (2nd ed.). ACT: Australian Association of Social Workers.

from an ideas stage through to the implementation and maintenance stage. It would also contain areas asking for student's ideas and opinions which would allow the Commission to gather the student's thoughts about what they want in relation to the build environment around them, and their opinions on current proposals and how they think they might be, or are, affected by them.

2.2 The website would be designed in consultation with the Board of Studies so that it is constructed in a way that would most assist students in meeting particular syllabus outcomes. This would mean that as well as being of benefit to both the Commission and to students, teachers would be more likely to use it as a teaching resource. It would also mean that the skills of more professionals who have knowledge, training and experience in engaging with children at their various levels, would be utilised in order to maximise the effectiveness of the resource in gathering opinions from as large a range of students as possible, as teachers are skilled at ensuring students of all levels of ability participate in every lesson.

2.3 Syllabus outcomes that particularly lend themselves to such a resource include several from the Human Society and Its Environment K-6[2]. Two examples of outcomes that students could attain through the use of such a resource include:

"ENS3.6

Explains how various beliefs and practices influence the ways in which people interact with, change and value their environment" (p. 21).

And

"SSS2.8

Investigates rights, responsibilities and decision-making processes in the school and community and demonstrates how participation can contribute to the quality of their school and community life." (p.21).

3. Advantages and outcomes of recommendation

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[2] Board of Studies NSW .(1998). *Syllabus Human Society and Its Environment K-6.* Sydney: Board of Studies NSW.

3.1 As highlighted in the Committee's Issues Paper 1, children and young people are rarely included in urban planning decisions. The results of which can have important impact on their day to day lives[3]. As discussed in UNICEF's document *The State of the World's Children 2003*[4], it is the responsibility of adults to ensure that children and adolescents become involved in decisions that affect their lives so that they can learn how to become competent in meaningful and authentic participation. The creation and use of such a resource as is proposed would provide children with a real opportunity to have their say. It would develop their skills and competence in sharing their opinions and in being actively involved in the processes of analysing the built environment around them, as well as analysing how it influences their experiences.

3.2 As stated in the Committee's Issues Paper 2, children and young people's needs are constantly changing along with the world within which they live. It is for this reason that a curriculum resource which can be used in an ongoing fashion would be of great benefit, as children can provide their views in a way that will mean they are current and up to date with the context within which they are living.

3.3 The website would also encourage children to become active participants in democratic society. If students are to become citizens who are actively involved in the democratic system, which is described by Parliamentary Education and Community Relations[5] as being essential for the survival of Australian democracy, it is important that they learn how to, and become confident in participating in democratic processes. Sharing their opinions regarding the built environment with a government body would allow them to be part of democratic processes.

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[3] Roe, Maggie. (2006). 'Making a wish': Children and the local landscape. *Local Environment, 11* (2), 163-181. Retrieved April 13, 2006, from Metapress (division of EBSCO Industries Inc).

[4] Bellamy, Carol. (2003). *The State of the Worlds Children 2003*. New York: UNICEF.

[5] Parliamentary Education and community Relations. (2005). *Playing your part: Parliamentary activities and resources for teachers*. Parliament of NSW printing services. Retrieved 13th April, 2006 from http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/publications.nsf/0/C5C80F4AAFCCA048CA257045 00164B33/$File/PlayPartweb.pdf

3.4 The *streetSPACE*[6] project that commenced in Braybrook, Victoria in 1998 is an example of where students were included in a community environmental design project that also met some objectives of a current curriculum area. One advantage of such a project is that it does not require any changes to be made to syllabus documents. This will avoid the expense and logistical concerns relating to the organisation and implementation of any curriculum changes.

3.5 Another advantage of such a website is that it allows for a high level of accessibility. Children in schools in rural areas of NSW are able to participate and have their say in the same way as those who live in metropolitan areas.

4. Conclusion

4.1 The proposed website package has the potential to address issues of child participation in relation to the built environment as outlined in Issues Paper 2. It would enable the Committee to access ongoing input from children, and potentially young people, so as to keep up to date with the changing environment within which we all live. It would allow for children's participation in decisions being made about the built environment and at the same time allow them to meet some requirements of their existing syllabus.

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[6] Hamilton, R., & Malone, K. (1998). *Streetspace: Artists & Environmental Designers in Schools Program (Application)*. Retieved 13th April, 2006 from
http://www2.deakin.edu.au/faculty/education/GUIC_project/Streetspace/AEDISappl.htm#anchor15681
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