

The Arawang Primary School Earth Charter Project

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My involvement with the Earth Charter began because colleagues from the Australian National University who run an outreach program, a BISACT program, invited us to do something creative, knowing full well that we would respond to that request! We have been working with the BISACT team for the last five years. They come into our school and they work with the children in the biological sciences. The idea is that we are reaching children at an age when this sort of work will have the biggest impact. This was a culmination of basically two terms work involving studies of particular ecosystems – for example, the Black Mountain ecosystem – debates about environmental issues, essay writing which was based on viewing the Nature of Australia videos produced by the Australian Broadcasting Commission. The children then chose a topic that interested them and wrote an environmental essay on that topic.

When we were asked to think about the Earth Charter, we then had to bring together the work we had already done and try to focus it in a slightly different way. We asked the children to individually brainstorm their hopes for the future of the planet, and we asked them to look at local issues, Australia- wide issues and global issues. We had lots and lots of discussion. Lots of information was gathered and recorded on lists and concept maps and so on. We then came together, shared our ideas and chose the ideas that we thought best expressed what everyone in the two groups – 60 children – were hoping for the future. We then had to standardise the form of expression for putting the work onto the banner, which we also did as part of our English work in the classroom. We then had to plan the banner and what we were going to put on it. We decided that we would use the ecosystems that the children had been studying as the basis. These ecosystems were the desert, the ocean, the rainforests, the woodlands and the wetland areas. After deciding on that, it really became a happening. I put all the children in one big room, gave them the fabric and said, 'Here you go, kids. What are we going to do?' Once again, with consultation, we worked out that our banner should take a circular form to give that feeling of continuity and wholeness, and that the banner would be divided into the different areas. From there, the children just took it, as children will do when they are given the opportunity. They found the creatures that appealed to them that they would like to have on

that banner. We painted them on fabric, cut them out, glued them on, *et cetera*, and that was how it came about. They had also done a lot of creative writing, especially using the Japanese Haiku form, which fits thoughts about nature beautifully – it is designed to do that. We wrote the poem in the centre together. After we had written it, we realised that the term 'earth keepers' is actually the name of a program that Birrigai Outward School runs, so that linked with the children who had done the earth keepers program in Year 5, which was still fresh in their mind.

On the banner you will see global statements of what they hope for everyone on the planet. You will see more individual and individual-type statements, and you will also see poetry that they have written about the creatures or the places that they feel very strongly about. That was how our banner was created. It was the culmination of a wonderful two terms of work, really in-depth study with lots of opportunities to discuss environmental and personal issues. Being school children, they enjoyed the opportunity to be creative.

Images of the Arawang Primary School Earth Charter Banner



