Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
of

THERESA HUNTER

MA (University of California, 1992)
BA (University of Winnipeg, 1987)

“Canadian Child and Youth Advocates: A comparative analysis”

School of Public Administration

Tuesday, April 25, 2017
2:00PM
David Turpin Building
Room A144

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. James McDavid, School of Public Administration, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Lynda Gagné, School of Public Administration, UVic (Member)
Dr. Michael Prince, Faculty of Human & Social Development, UVic (Non-Unit Member)
Dr. Les Foster, Faculty of Human & Social Development, Uvic (Additional Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Brian Howe, Department of Political Science, Cape Breton University

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Michael Bodden, Department of Pacific & Asian Studies, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation is to compare features of eleven Canadian provincial / territorial Child and Youth Advocates (CYAs) and identify factors that contribute to their success at influencing changes to public policies, practices and laws to improve services and programs for children and youth. This exploratory study compares and provides explanations regarding the CYAs’ evolution, institutional designs, legislated mandates, implementation, expectations and accountability structures. This study is based on reviews of publicly available documents and interviews with CYA key contacts, members of their legislative oversight committees and informed experts.

The CYAs are statutory officers who assist their legislatures in protecting children’s rights and holding governments to account. They also provide a valuable source of information and advice for decision-makers and government agencies. Each CYA is uniquely designed to serve the needs and interests of their jurisdictions. They have overlapping functions and use some common approaches to systemic advocacy aimed at laying the groundwork for change. This study identifies several factors that contribute to the CYAs’ success at influencing systemic change.

Comprehensive legislation and adequate resources enable some CYAs to undertake a full range of systemic advocacy functions. Raising awareness helps to build a common understanding of children’s rights and promotes a collective will for change to better serve their needs and interests. Effective use of the media is a powerful tool for raising awareness about the CYAs’ systemic concerns and recommended changes and for putting pressure on governments to take action. Educating and providing guidance to the media aids in controlling messages that are reported. Elevating the views and interests of young people who have direct experience with government systems is an effective strategy used by some CYAs to influence systemic change and increase the participation of young people in public decision-making. Building positive relationships with government agencies promotes greater cooperation with CYAs’ advice. The use of strategic plans for systemic advocacy may aid the CYAs to clarify their goals, objectives and performance measures and to monitor changes over time.