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NMA Review Secretariat
Dept of Communications
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Review of the National Museum of Australia Schools Programs Section

The Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA) is a professional association for educators. The membership base of ACSA includes teachers at all levels and from all learning areas in state, Catholic and private systems. Principals, educational administrators and consultants, teacher educators, academics and educational researchers; parents representing individual schools as well as state and federal associations; and an increasing number of students are also members.

ACSA was founded in 1983 with a specific brief to provide a national voice on curriculum matters; to encourage and promote curriculum research; to provide forums for the exchange of information on curriculum developments; to develop and publish curriculum resources and materials; and to promote self-critical curriculum practice.

ACSA is very aware of the quality of the education programs at the National Museum of Australia and there are a number of aspects of the program that I would like to comment on in particular.

Resources

The resources developed build on the exhibits of the Museum and by doing this take the Museum out to those who cannot physically visit. Like the Museum programs they are educationally sound and attractively presented. Many are discovery learning based and aim to have the students engage intellectually with historical and social issues. Most importantly they take into account the curriculum frameworks of the states and territories and are therefore practical and usable for classroom teachers. The recent publication of the 'Our Voices' series is a very good example of all of the above. As Garry McLean, chairperson, Curriculum and Support Services, Catholic Education Office, Victoria, and an executive member of ACSA wrote in a recent review of these materials

*Teachers implementing an integrated curriculum will find **Our Voices** an invaluable curriculum resource, which captures the essential ingredients necessary to awaken students' respect for Australia's unique history, culture and environment. Beautifully presented and written in the present, the books contain age appropriate text and short,*

sharp excerpts providing essential factual information.

School Programs at NMA

The overall impression of the school programs offered is that they are carefully designed to make maximum use of the exhibits at the Museum in ways that add value to what the students could learn from other sources. Teachers have reported that the Museum adds another dimension to students' learning and that this happens in ways that are fun for the students. The secret of the success seems to be a combination of the interactive way that many of the children's exhibits at the Museum were set up in the first instance and the innovative way the Education Programs Staff have designed learning programs around these exhibits.

One of the long term benefits of these programs at NMA is they portray museums as interesting institutions in their own right – something which cannot be said of all museums. In terms of life long learning this is a valuable learning outcome.

The education programs also make maximum use of new technologies as a learning tool. Within the Museum even very young students are encouraged to use digital cameras to capture and display their own images of particular historical events. And the online teacher resources provide an excellent means of connecting teachers with the Museum and also of taking the Museum to those who cannot come to it.

Productive Partnerships

The Education Programs Section has been proactive in involving other organizations, such as ACSA, with innovative work at the NMA. For example, ACSA worked in partnership with the NMA to conduct the *2002 National Discovering Democracy Forum* which brought approximately 130 key educational stakeholders to Canberra to discuss various aspects of civics and citizenship education in schools and teacher education programs. Having the NMA as the venue for this forum served a number of purposes. It introduced participants to the facility itself and allowed them to find out about education offerings at NMA, and at the same time the museum was used as resource to workshop issues such as the development of an Australian identity. Evaluations of the Forum were overwhelmingly favourable about the Museum as a venue and a resource. The combination was described as 'unique', 'different' 'innovative' and 'exciting'.

In 2003 the Education Program Section and ACSA will again work together to host the *2003 National Discovering Democracy Forum*. This year the Forum will have an international dimension with guests from the UK, the USA and Hong Kong. One of the features of the program will be the highly acclaimed NMA Talkback Classroom which will involve Year 11/12 students interviewing the Minister for Education, Science and Training, the Hon Dr Brendan Nelson.

Joint ventures such as those described have gone a long way towards educating educators about the NMA, and this has only occurred through the initiatives of the personnel in the Education Programs section and the support of the Director.

Concluding Comments

What the Education Program Section offers is more than the sum of the parts. Teachers value these programs because they inspire students to want to know about their heritage. They provide both a starting point and a place of extension for the study of Australian History.

Joan Warhurst
Executive Director
Australian Curriculum Studies Association