

Doing Canberra

(See 4. *Existing School units* and 7. *New and existing resources* in table on pp.9-10)

Canberra is one of the most popular destinations for schools to take students in Years 5 and 6. For a long time now, the attractions of Parliament House, the Australian War Memorial, the National Gallery, the National Archives, Questacom and the National Film and Sound Archives have been included in these excursions.

Most schools arrange a two-day excursion and stay overnight in Canberra. Bus companies eager to facilitate these excursions go to some trouble to organise an itinerary that is comprehensive and allows students to see as much as possible, at as low a cost as possible.

Syllabus context

In the new syllabus, Stage 3 outcomes and subject matter give a strong basis for excursions to Canberra. Unfortunately, not all excursions make optimum use of this opportunity. Sometimes bus companies attract schools into programs that are high in quantity and low in quality. Doing Canberra becomes a bit like that scene from the movie *European Vacation*, where Chevy Chase, standing outside the Louvre at 10 minutes before closing time, says something like: *We had better hurry, there are over 3,000 works of art to see in here.*

My recent visit to the Australian War Memorial (AWM) brought this to mind. The Memorial offers educational programs to schools that focus on particular aspects of the collection but many schools, when they visit, simply let the students loose for an hour or two and then take them somewhere else. The AWM is one of the densest collections I have seen, and without a focussed study of part of the collection it is difficult to see what students might get from their visit.



Planning

As important as lunches, accommodation and comfort stops might be, educational planning is the key to a successful excursion. A few essential points are:

- What syllabus outcomes and subject matter are the focus of the excursion?
- How does the excursion fit into the unit of work being studied?
- What activities are to be done before the excursion to give students the knowledge, understanding and skills to learn from the excursion experiences?
- What are students to do at each site visited that will enhance their learning?
- Are there any education officers familiar with the syllabus available at this site?
- What follow-up activities are planned to enhance learning when students have returned to the classroom?

One of the tensions that can occur with an excursion is how much the students should do at the sites they visit. Students need to view and wonder at the exhibits and not have this sense of exploration taken away by copious worksheets that must be completed. Getting a balance is difficult, and this is one reason why engaging the education officers associated with these sites can be good for both teachers and students. In fact the AWM is in the process of tailoring programs for the NSW curriculum, and these should be available for 2000.

Visits to the Australian War Memorial can be complemented by visits to the National Archives or the National Film and Sound Archives and Parliament House.



Canberra presents a great opportunity to develop students' knowledge and understandings to achieve Stage 3 HSIE outcomes and subject matter requirements. For a few extra dollars, engaging the educational programs of the Canberra sites might yield better outcomes than seeing everything on a cheap bus and accommodation package.

The Term 4 issue of CURRICULUM SUPPORT will contain a sample unit of work for an excursion as an example of (7) *New and existing resources*. The example will be Canberra.

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