



“Pushing Boundaries not Pushing Barrows”

We would like to thank Julie Bishop, the Commonwealth Minister for Education, Science and Training, for opening the 2006 National Conference (entitled *‘Pushing Boundaries’*) on Friday.

In his brief address in reply, the National President of the HTAA, Nick Ewbank, noted that the Minister’s address reflected the value of disputative and dissonant voices if democracies are to progress.

Conference delegates, from around Australia and internationally, (mostly history teachers and educational administrators) reacted with both interest and dismay to the Minister’s provocative remarks. History teachers and their students are sensitive to context and audience. While the issue of national curriculum is of profound interest to teachers, to choose such a time and place to launch such a wide-ranging political salvo was, at best, unfortunate.

Most of the audience were attending in their own time, and at their own expense. This was a politically neutral setting from which the Minister chose to launch a politically loaded statement. In essence, the Minister chose to make political capital from the opening of a national history teachers’ conference.

Along with other audience members, we welcomed the Minister’s announcement that she has commissioned work on a model Australian history curriculum. However, an anticipated completion date of March 2007 leaves little time for meaningful and quality consultation with the stakeholder groups identified by the Minister herself in her speech.

There are dangers in a centrally-imposed, compulsory national curriculum. Prescribed uniformity is unresponsive to the diverse needs and interests of students, their parents and school communities. Good history curriculum recognises and reinforces those things that unite us as Australians, but it also recognises and celebrates the diversity implicit in our national story.

The Minister’s speech, while challenging, contained much that was worthwhile. Importantly, she recognised that “government policies should help the teaching of Australian history, not hinder it”. We look forward to working with the Minister in

ensuring this is the case. We look forward to developing a history curriculum which is engaging, responsive and coherent across the years of schooling.

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http://www.historyteacher.org.au/files/20061008_letter_to_the_editor.pdf