Toast to the Gown
Town & Gown Dinner 19 June 2007
By Gail Davidson, Principal, Northcote High School

Thank you Vice Chancellor Glyn Davis.

Chancellor Ian Renard, distinguished guests, colleagues and neighbours. What an amazing opportunity it is to be here tonight at such a significant time in the history of this grand university.

A toast is to raise your glass, to pause, to celebrate, congratulate, reflect on what has been, what is and what can be.

A **human hand** holds the glass… **two hands** and we hold our humanity, our future.

Look at our thumb….how quickly it has changed and become the digit of our younger generation.

So, perhaps it is ***Change*** that we start with, the Melbourne Model and the University that is creating it, about to make a significant change to what has always been.

We all face change…in our schools….in our businesses…in our university… in our personal lives. 10 years ago, a Hewlett Packard R&D Director told me they no longer speak of change, but rather it is "flux"- constant change.

Yet, the ancients said "Nothing endures, but change." So, maybe it has always been that way.

Why does it feel so different? Perhaps, it is what is at stake.

In my office there is a framed picture of a small child with a quote that reads,

"Children are always the only future the Human Race has.
Teach them well."

There is also a black and white photo of two young children, boy and girl, walking down a path, hand in hand, through a forest.

Perhaps it is the change we are facing as a human race, a world…and the clear realisation that the future <u>is</u> in our children's hands and <u>we</u> must teach them well.

The ***Challenge*** for all of us in organisations, in institutions, is how do we respond to and reflect the changes in the world? How do we prepare our students, our organisations, ourselves for this changing world?

Jim Collins and Jerry Porras, wrote in <u>Built to Last</u>, that enduring businesses, communities and organisations "preserve the core and stimulate progress."

But, how do we preserve the core while stimulating progress? How do we stop terrorism and yet preserve the fundamentals of democracy that we fight for? How do we learn and educate in ways that allow people to wrestle with the issues and ideas facing the world while many of those same issues so directly challenge our very being?

I believe the University of Melbourne's vision is to do just that. To preserve the core and stimulate progress. To build from its strength and look forward. To dream large.
To stimulate progress while preserving the core greatness of the institution. But greatness means more than 1+1; it is the exponential power of human endeavour when people work together.

There is ***Complexity*** in all these changes and challenges… and in taking action and leading in a way that makes sense within such complexity.

It does no good if the response to the EU's move to biofuels means the Indonesian rainforests are cut down to grow palm oil. We must have thinkers and leaders who understand the amazing complexity…and simplicity of life.

Schopenhauer said, "Thus, the task is not so much to see what no one yet has seen, but to think what nobody yet has thought about that which everybody sees."

Together we must strive to develop thinkers, learners, students, academics, researchers who will think what nobody yet has thought about that which everybody sees.

Remembering too that each complexity has a ***Context*** and each of us brings a different perspective to it.

As educators, we recognise that each school must meet challenges within its own local context. Yet, we must never let our context blind us from seeing new possibilities.

The University of Melbourne is striving to be a leader in multiple contexts…in our Town, in our Country, in our World. It is that complex understanding of context that requires students, researchers and academics to think deeply within disciplines, but to also "think outside their discipline" in order to fully apply their deep knowledge and understanding.

Change, challenge, complexity, context…courage…and oh how it does take ***Courage*** to endeavour to make the changes necessary to create a more positive future. Courage…is what I most sense at the University of Melbourne. It is the courage to look to the future, to lead, to seek to understand and to respond to the interdisciplinary nature of the world.

It takes such great courage for such a prestigious university to accept the world's challenges and embark on such a change, knowing it is the ***right thing to do***. For it is said that, "Managers do things right and leaders do the right thing. "

***Change, Challenge, Complexity, Context and Courage*…five fingers, five concepts**

But one hand is not enough. One hand clapping doesn't work. Many great written plans have failed. It is not the words, but the deeds. It is not the targets, but the actions. It is the human endeavour, the life blood within each of us that makes the difference.

It is the single hand that reaches out to the other hand…the "person", the human, the conversation, the connection that helps us see, feel, think and act as humans in this world.

It is holding the hand of a child. It is giving a helping hand to a friend. It is the sincere handshake across the table… between people, nations and cultures that unites us.

So, as I have the privilege of representing the Town, I represent each of you and each of our colleagues, friends, family members, neighbours and citizens in reaching out to the University and to the dedicated human beings who have made up this great university in the past and those today who work to ensure the support for the future thinkers and world contributors of tomorrow.

Each of us speaks in multiple ways.

Tonight, ***I speak as principal*** of Northcote High School:

Last year, we celebrated 80 years of excellence in education in the northern region of Melbourne.

We have the vibrancy of a multi-cultural student body of over 1300 students from over 40 countries, a wonderfully supportive community and a learning environment of respect and achievement.

We want our students to be confident and active learners. High school is that amazing time in each person's life where they enter as a child and leave as a young adult. Adolescence is the place where students learn about the world and enter into the world.

As schools, like the University, we must expand the types of interactions all of our students experience and recognise that this type of ***being in the world*** allows them to develop the essential skills, attributes and thinking they will need in the world. We must provide opportunities for students to be able to work on teams of diverse thinkers, converse and learn from people of different generations, backgrounds, cultures and perspectives.

Our current Leading Schools Fund Project is focused on Year 9 students learning to be global citizens, learning to "contribute purposefully".

As a school, we have a strong focus on the study of multiple languages, humanities, visual and performing arts, sports, technology …AND a proud tradition of excellence in science and mathematics. Our science roots are deep with many scientists and surgeons making up our Alumni roll call.

We were particularly proud of our ex-student Mr Robert Marshall when he received his doctorate in medicine last year from the University of Melbourne at 80 years of age after a long and distinguished career as a surgeon.

As an IT Navigator School and a State Science & Technology Centre we have hosted the State STAV ICT Conference for 7 years bringing together science teachers and active scientists from all sectors across the State. Last year all were inspired by Professor Peter Rathjen, Dean of Science at University of Melbourne when he shared his stem cell research.

We so strongly believe in the importance of engaging our students with our community and with the University through programs such as:

- "Bringing Science to the Community" with scientists like Professor Carl Schiesser talking about his research in Free Radical Chemistry. On July 4th, we will host Professor Ian Frazer discussing his life saving cancer research.
- The Tall Poppy Program has brought elite scientists such as Dr Shane Huntington to work with our students in Years 9-12 in cross age workshops exploring the challenges that we might face in 2020.
- In2Science peer mentoring not only provides a human connection to science learning, but I am pleased to say that several of the university student mentors have gone on to become secondary science teachers.

These are just some of the community and university links that have helped us create the rich learning environment that has seen our numbers in Mathematics and Science continually grow in an era of decline. Science is alive and students recognise that a career in science is one significant way they can contribute to the world.

I also speak as an educator.

Recently, I met as part of a team of principals, with Professor David Hopkins from the UK-HSBC Chair of International Leadership and Professorial Fellow at the University of Melbourne. Professor Hopkins is part of a wider dialogue of principals and educators.

In October of 2006, he met with a group of 100 principals from fourteen countries (G100) at the National Academy of Education Administration in Beijing to discuss the transformation of and innovation in the world's education systems.

They concluded their conference with a ***G100 Communiqué***:

- "We need to ensure that moral purpose is at the fore of all educational debates with our parents, our students, our teachers, our partners, our policy makers and our wider community."
- "We define moral purpose as a compelling drive to do right for and by students, serving them through professional behaviors that 'raise the bar and narrow the gap' and through so doing demonstrate an intent, to learn with and from each other as we live together in this world."

This year, the University of Melbourne is implementing the Kwong Lee Dow Young Scholars Program. In doing so, the University is reaching out to all schools to identify and support the young scholars that are in <u>all</u> schools across our state.

There must be that moral purpose the G100 Communiqué speaks to, so that the partnership is one that allows all schools and the University to learn with and from each other so we can raise the bar for <u>not only</u> our Young Scholars, but for <u>all</u> of our students and also narrow the gap.

Through reaching out to all schools, there is an opportunity for the University to partner in new ways. For when <u>all</u> schools learn, <u>all</u> students benefit by such collaboration with the University.

I speak as a citizen.

I am a proud Australian citizen. I am also a dual citizen. I often describe it as similar to being a mother of two sons. Both are different, both unique and I love them both. But it is time we are all global citizens for we must all love this globe.

- We are in a global world and the University is and must be a leader in that world.
- Vice Chancellor Davis speaks passionately about the need for students to be global citizens, global leaders.
- I agree completely, and fundamentally believe the solutions to the world's problems will not reside in any one country, compartmental faculty or professional silo, but in the creative interdisciplinary thinking and problem solving that is currently happening and can happen more within our world. Melbourne University is leading the way.

I speak as a mum and grandmother.

One of my sons graduated from UC Berkeley in Engineering including a year at the University of Melbourne. He went on to do a Masters in Architecture at UBC in Vancouver. It was a program where all the Masters students came from different undergraduate degrees…arts, physics, philosophy, engineering, design. The goal was to bring together people who would approach situations and problems with new and different perspectives…see old problems in new ways. He now works through a non-profit Dynamic Cities Project engaged in an international exchange and dialogue helping communities and organisations to deal with the impact of Peak Oil and Climate Change. As a mum, I know my son must be engaged in this way.

As a grandmother of 3 month old twin girls living in Melbourne, I know it will be even more important that Hannah and Amelia engage in this way. They grab my finger as if their life and the life of the world depend on it. Little do they know that the University has the courage today to create the university and the learning that they and the world will need in the future.

Finally, *I speak tonight as the representative of our Town*, proudly living in our great city, deeply committed to the belief that we are at a time in our lives and the lives of all in this world that we must find ways to unite, to work together, to partner:

- not as university or public sector
- not as labor or liberal
- not as rich or poor
- not as those concerned with the economy or with social justice
- not as public or private
- not as city or country
- not as town or gown

But as a community, as a humanity.

It is hoped that the University of Melbourne will not only allow our brightest to dream large, it is hoped that the members of the University will work with us – the schools, businesses and communities so we can **dream large together** and think, learn, act and lead in ways that create the exponential power of human endeavour.

Margaret Wheatley wrote in her book, *A simpler way*:

"But the world is not a machine. It is alive, filled with life and the history of life…As we change our images of the world, as we leave behind the machine, we welcome ourselves back. We recover a world that is supportive of human endeavour."

And as she expressed so succinctly and beautifully at the Worldwide Leadership Conference,

"All progress is based on relationships."

Change, Challenge, Complexity, Context and Courage
Speaking as principal, educator, citizen, mum and member of our Town

Will you please join me tonight in raising your glass to recognise and congratulate the University of Melbourne

- for accepting the challenge to **lead us** in our complex world of change
- for having the courage to engage **with us** in all of our different contexts
- And for extending the hand of friendship and partnership **to us** in order to build the relationships that support our human endeavours as individuals, as a community and as a world.

Please stand with me and let us make our toast to the Gown.