

**THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE**

**TOWN AND GOWN 19<sup>th</sup> July 2006**

**GOWN SPEECH**

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Thank you for your generous Toast to the Gown Michael!

Chancellor, Michael Traill representing the Town, distinguished guests and my colleagues of the University community.

Melbourne – what a Town it is indeed! In the 7 months since taking up my new role at the university, the most striking impression of Melbourne has been the strong interaction between town, gown, culture, government, and the community. An extraordinary achievement, the deep passion for the arts supported by both government and Town and developed in partnership with the Gown, the drawing upon the Gown for input into government and community issues, and Town's connection with communities through philanthropic work, backed by government initiatives, and involving the Gown and often the arts. This coherence and interconnection across such different sectors forms the basis for what is recognized as one of the most innovative cities in the world, as witnessed by visiting delegations such as the delegation from the Greater Seattle a couple of months ago, the home of Microsoft, Starbucks, and until recently Boeing, here in Melbourne, to learn first hand about an innovative city.

So how do we nurture this elusive quality called innovation which is so sought after around the globe? Innovation is most commonly associated with technology breakthroughs or improvements, which are tangible, measurable. Tonight Michael Traill, however, gave us a quite a different take on innovation. Michael showed what is possible when knowledge is connected across sectors which do not usually interact – using corporate principles to enhance the endeavours of the socially disadvantaged, or as he put it, connecting ‘the head and the heart’, and then seeing the magic happen. At the University of Melbourne we have embarked on the development of knowledge transfer, to connect and embed the university more deeply into the community.

Human resource directors of companies rate creativity and innovation as THE most important graduate skill which will be needed over the next ten years. How do you teach those traits in a lecture theatre? Earlier this evening we heard about the interaction between the Department of Philosophy and Phillips Fox which led to new outcomes on both sides, and the creation of the company Austhink that had its origins in the frustration of not being able find real examples in text books with which to illustrate the theory of Philosophy to students. The Melbourne Theatre Company gave us a taste of ‘real time’ innovation, which is bread and butter for the performing arts, but often not recognized as such.

Tonight’s taste of the different examples of iterative, two-way learning processes, with outcomes that can move forward issues, create new knowledge, or build solutions, are at the heart of what we are defining as The University of Melbourne’s particular knowledge

transfer characteristics. To date we have managed to unearth more than 360 examples of knowledge transfer from across every faculty in the university, showing a myriad of ways which we have worked with over 1300 organisations, and still counting – government, industry, and community groups, from the local to global level. The analysis of this work, for the first time, will document the contributions to a broader view of innovation – perhaps it is time for some innovative thinking on innovation itself!

This came to mind strongly when I was a panel member some weeks ago for the topic Innovation and Entrepreneurship. Fellow panel members proceeded to enthusiastically define the parameters around each of these terms, leading to some dispute about the finer details and whether they belonged best to the meanings for ‘innovation’ or to ‘entrepreneurship’. The discussion was narrowing down to a very linear and constrained approach to these two terms, oddly in contrast to the original concept of innovation and entrepreneurship! This type of discussion was not in fact much different to other discussions on these issues, and the numerous committees which have been set up to do something about the lack of sufficient innovative or entrepreneurial thinking in Australia, followed by introducing courses/executive development/new processes and mechanisms, to ensure these attributes can be fostered. And still, a decade later, though we indeed have moved forward, we still seem to be facing the same issues and sometimes seem only the smallest step closer – so what’s going on, or should I say, what’s not going on?

I recently came across one of the most striking clues to this dilemma when I listened to Melbourne’s John O’Toole, Professor of Art Education, when he delivered the Faculty of

Education's Dean's Lecture. The work originated from some pretty fundamental knowledge transfer – the knowledge came from pre-school children and the learnings have been transferred to researchers and teachers. John did a very simple thing, he juxtaposed the learning characteristics of children before and after they started school.

Pre-school children learn through all the senses, with brain, body and emotions all working together. There is constant exploring and testing, trial and error, and taking risks - learning by getting it wrong the first time, to get it right the next time, or to discover a completely new path. Pre-school children learn through creative leaps, humour & jokes, learning is not in isolated bite sized chunks but scaffolded, building on what is already known; by copying and social interaction, learning from everybody around them, from peers & playmates, television, the people they see and meet. There's a discovery through play – musical, linguistic, visual & design, dance, and dramatic play.

Now what happens when a child starts school? They must leave play outside in the playground - 'None of that in here please'. Ban the emotions, movement and the body, and focus on the brain - 'No tears', 'stop laughing', 'stop fidgeting'. Language and social interaction becomes restricted or banned '- A quiet classroom is a good classroom', 'Stop talking and listen to me'. The diverse surroundings are replaced with - 'The Classroom', exploring is replaced with 'The curriculum' - 'We have to cover this by Friday'; playmates, television and the people around them are replaced by 'The Teacher'. Forget trial and error or risk, as there is only the correct answer and penalties for getting it wrong – 'I'm disappointed in your marks, Kim'. Gone are the creative leaps, imagination and

jokes - ‘Don’t be silly’, ‘That’s not funny’. Knowledge is delivered as isolated segments - ‘Today we’ll learn about...’ and above all, the arts are marginalised - ‘that’s messy/noisy/disruptive/outside the curriculum’.

Now let’s look at the list of graduate attributes that employers’ most highly value. A report that was released last month by the UK group DEMOS, 54% of HR directors say they find it increasingly difficult to find the right graduates with the right skills, creativity is regarded as vital for a company’s future. 67% of companies now report that they train managers to identify and develop new ideas, and rank ‘having a workforce able to identify, develop and adopt new ideas’ as the important factor underpinning innovation. And what are the elements of some of the training given to managers to foster creativity and innovative thinking? Brainstorming, permission to throw ideas around without risk, to scaffold and build on ideas rather than confine them, explore divergent paths, use laughter, role-play, movement, team interaction, drawing, gluing, creating pictorial and 3 dimensional structures – sound familiar? How about those characteristics of the entrepreneur – the lack of which we constantly lament here in Australia. Entrepreneurs take risks, in fact a serial entrepreneur is the best kind because there’s nothing like a couple of failures under your belt to learn what to do right.

Back at school, those that have trouble fitting in for whatever reason, can be marginalised, the failures, the dummies, destined not to succeed. And guess what can reconnect these marginalised kids – the use of art, performance, use of body and movement through sport, building with hands, expressing thoughts and sentiments which

are valued – utilising some of those broader range of learning attributes. The University has been involved in this type of reconnecting work, across a range of faculties and with a range of partners. The *Project I*, is a study of homeless young people in Melbourne and Los Angeles, a collaboration between the Key Centre for Women’s Health in Society in collaboration with the University of California, LA. The findings are now being used to inform an implementation plan for the next decade of service delivery to young people who are homeless in Victoria. Two popular publications were produced for young people ‘Getting Out – true stories of homeless young people’ and ‘674- A pocket guide to keeping well on the street’, funded by the Office of Housing and Ian Potter Foundation respectively. Data on family conflict resulted in the development of a statewide service on family mediation, run by Melbourne Citymission, to name but a few of the 70 partners in the project.

Innovation clearly leads to economic benefit, but the route taken can be via social benefit whose impact can have broad ramifications that we have not begun to measure. The Town, and Gown, is already taking this route, and there are indications that a deeper connection into the community is desired, one that creates sustainable longer term benefits.

Putting together different partnerships can create amazing results – magic indeed can and does happen. The interconnection that is already in the fabric of Melbourne can take a deeper dimension, through new models of partnership, such as one that we are exploring with Social Ventures - imagine the possibilities if we leveraged further the

interconnection that Melbourne already has. Let's take that journey together and proactively shape the world we live in. I raise a toast to the Town, and indeed what a Town it is!

Can I now ask my University colleagues to stand and to honor the toast to the Town "I give you" the Toast of the Town.