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Education Graduation Ceremony
Guest Speech

Professor James Taylor
“Fulfilling Lives: Reflections on a Personal Learning Journey”

1. When invited to be the graduation speaker, I did a little research on the extent to which the audience can actually recall information about the addresses made by graduation speakers. One study reported that within a period of just 3 months:

- 80% of the audience could not recall the name of the speaker
- And almost 100% of the audience could not remember anything that was said.
- It therefore follows that I can say whatever I like with some confidence!

2. Generalizing this research to my own recollections, I found that I could remember what was said by one speaker at just one of the numerous graduations I have attended.

3. The single occasion was my graduation from secondary school almost 50 years ago!

4. The speaker was the Headmaster of the Royal Grammar School, Newcastle, Northumberland. Consistent with the research, his name escapes me, but I can still remember his message: “As you graduate from secondary school, you have two choices - you can either become a specialist or a generalist:

- If you want to become a specialist, you must learn more and more about less and less, until you know everything about nothing!
- Alternatively, if you want to become a generalist, you can learn less and less about more and more, until you know nothing about everything!”

5. But of course, these comments were made long before the advent of the Internet and the World Wide Web. We now talk about the “Google Generation” where anyone with access to the Internet, who has developed appropriate learning skills, can access a huge array of freely available Open Education Resources (OER) which provides the potential to learn more and more, about more and more, until they could know everything about everything! Well to a certain extent!

6. There can be no doubt that educational technology has significantly increased access to educational opportunities – especially over the past 30 years. In the developing world opportunities to access education are still severely limited. This is because of the digital divide and an associated financial divide, and often a cultural divide in the case of many women and girls. Even in the developed world, the potential of online technology to improve access to high quality education has yet to be fully realised. An issue I will revisit later in my address, but first I would like to reflect on some of the changes in education during my life time.

7. Today when planning educational programs the managers of the university experience talk about planning the student’s “learning journey” and increasingly about the need to instil a commitment to “lifelong learning”. I would like to take this

opportunity to reflect on some of the significant milestones in my own learning journey.

8. In England where I grew up, there was a selective school system where at the tender age of 10 all pupils sat a national examination (the 11+) which aimed to identify the top 10% of students. Passing “The Scholarship” as it was known was one of the most significant events of my life. Unlike many grammar schools in Australia you could not pay to attend – the only pathway was to pass “The Scholarship”.

9. I was indeed fortunate to have the opportunity to attend King Edward VI Grammar School (for boys) at Morpeth in Northumberland. King Edward VI was the only surviving son of King Henry VIII. The school received a Royal Charter in 1552, after having been established originally as a monastery school in 1308. Unfortunately, some of the curriculum hadn’t change much in all that time. For example, we were required to study Latin for 5 years!

10. The ethos of the school was competition: academic competition and sporting competition. Academic competition was fostered by posting student rankings publicly in each subject on a monthly basis. The teachers were required to wear academic dress while teaching and the school prefects were also provided with academic gowns.

11. Inter-school sporting competition was paramount. Being passionate about sport, I revelled in this environment, but looking back I appreciate a more balanced approach to the curriculum would have been a much better preparation for life beyond school. In effect almost every aspect of our school existence was managed, indeed regimented by the school system, with the result that adapting to the freedom of university life was a challenge. Taking responsibility for managing myself and being held accountable for academic outcomes was a new experience when I entered university.

12. At the University of Birmingham, I pursued my passion for sport and enrolled in a four year Bachelor of Education degree with a double major in Physical Education and Mathematics. It may sound ridiculous, but one of the reasons that I selected mathematics was that it generally took less time to complete a mathematics assignment than to write an essay, so that I could spend more time playing sport. It was therefore a bit of a shock when the first Mathematics assignment I had to complete was an essay on the contribution to the discipline of one of the many “famous mathematicians!”

13. The ethos of the university was captured by what I now refer to as the “pedagogy of benign neglect”. It was the extreme opposite of the essentially totalitarian regime that I had experienced at school. My lecturers were not particularly interested in whether students succeeded or failed. Success (or failure) was widely regarded as being entirely independent of their teaching skills and

essentially the responsibility of each individual student. Individual interaction with the teaching staff was somewhat rare, although I do recall one instance when the Dean of the Faculty of Education felt the need to write a personal note to me.

14. Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* was the must-read novel of the time.

15. "Dear Mr Taylor, Your tutor has informed me that even though it is now the 5th week of semester, he has yet to meet you. There is a danger that like the dead man in Yossarian's tent, you may be "deemed not to exist".

16. I replied as follows: "Let me assure you that I do in fact exist. I will endeavour to see my tutor at my earliest convenience, but like Major Major he may only allow his secretarial assistant to admit people to his office when he himself is not present."

17. The Dean was a philosopher, who specialised in linguistic analysis and the precise use of language. I recall his setting the following exam question: "Is this a question?" "If it is, this is an answer!"

18. Similarly, in a short answer test he challenged us with the following: "What is the difference between ignorance and indifference?" "I don't know, and I don't care!"

19. While an undergraduate, I came to enjoy taking personal responsibility for my own learning, and the associated freedom to organise my own time and to specialise in my personal interests. While I retained my passion for sport, I developed an intrinsic interest in educational psychology, especially cognition, and I decided that working in higher education would make an interesting and satisfying career.

20. My first job in higher education was at Mitchell CAE (now CSU) in Bathurst. Having applied for the position of Assistant Lecturer in Educational PsychologyI was interviewed by a panel of 11 serious looking academics..... "How would you define intelligence?"

21. I spent 5.5 very happy years at Bathurst, before moving to Toowoomba in July 1979 (almost 33 years ago), when I was appointed to what was then the DDIAE as a Lecturer in the Psychological Foundations of Curriculum. After one semester, I moved full-time into the Department of External and Continuing Education (DECE) and become fully committed to the development and management of distance education.

22. In 1982, I attended my first international conference, that of the ICDE, the International Council for Distance Education, in Vancouver at the University of British Columbia. The theme of the conference was "Technology's the answer, but what is the question?" This is a question that is still worth asking today! The conference provided me with a global perspective.

23. USQ's current international profile in open, distance and online education was built on innovation and an entrepreneurial spirit. As early as 1985, DDIAE was

selected by the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee to represent Australia at the UNESCO Summit on "Advances in Communication Technologies for Higher Education Purposes". The event was held at STOU in Bangkok. The project responsible for DDIAE's selection was the teaching of engineering at a distance, using our specially designed print materials supplemented via satellite tutorials and residential schools in Fiji and Tonga. Sounds unlikely – it was! Our Engineering faculty built a satellite antenna on the top of E Block, and we connected to students at the University of the South Pacific via a NASA satellite. One of the complexities was that NASA would occasionally interrupt our tutorials for their own purposes with no warning...

24. With this entrepreneurial spirit, we achieved a number of innovations that proved to be significant in the development of USQ. In the early to mid-eighties: we launched the international DE program in Hong Kong then Singapore (the USQ international program now includes over 7,000 international students from 85 countries), we developed our own Computer Managed Learning (CML) program, we introduced telephone tutorials, then audio-graphic tutorials using the Optel Telewriter. We also made the first interactive videodisc, a forerunner of the CD and the DVD. We embraced every opportunity to explore emerging technologies, not least the Internet and the WWW.

25. In 1995, USQ was the only Australian institution to gain a Global Learning Initiatives research grant from the AT & T Foundation in the US. The grant of US\$50,000 was used to develop and launch the first purely online program in Australia, the "Grad Cert in ODL" in 1996. In 1997, this pure online program was then selected as a showcase of best practice for the meeting of the Commonwealth Ministers of Education associated with CHOGM in Gaborone, Botswana.

26. In all these developments, USQ has always been driven by pedagogy not technology. Even though we made extensive use of emerging technologies, we were driven essentially by the pedagogical models that create powerful learning experiences for students.

27. It has been a privilege to be part of such a wide range of significant changes at USQ, which has been recognised by the granting of a number of national and international awards for institutional excellence in open and distance learning. These developments and awards are a reflection of the enormous contribution that USQ has made to expanding access to higher education and thereby to fulfilling lives. During my tenure at USQ, the number of distance education students has grown from about 400 when I first joined DDIAE to over 18,000 students today, more than 75% of USQ's current enrolment of almost 25,000 students.

28. Increasing access to educational opportunities through the judicious deployment of emerging educational technologies continues to be the key to fulfilling

lives, not just in Australia but throughout the world. The majority of national governments has set targets to increase participation rates in higher education. Australia from 32 - 40%, UK 50%, US from 40-60%. Yet all governments are struggling with supporting the financial investment necessary to meet such targets.

29. A recent article in the Australian by Mike Gallagher, Executive Director of the G8, made the following observation. "If Australia succeeds in achieving the current expansion target, by 2030 there could be 450,000 additional students requiring the development of a further 24 medium-sized universities of which 9 would need to be in Queensland."

30. Just last year a study by Sir John Daniel (President of the Commonwealth of Learning) and some of his former colleagues at UNESCO found that worldwide there are about 165 million people enrolled in tertiary education. Projections suggest that participation will peak at 263 million in 2025. Accommodating the additional 98 million students would require more than 4 major universities (30,000 students) to open every week for the next fifteen years! Such a scenario is impossible....clearly we need to do things differently.

31. Another recent study posted on the UN website argued that the world will need 18 million new teachers in the coming decade in order to meet demand worldwide for primary education alone! We definitely need to do things differently!

32. Fortunately, there are a number of current online innovations, which will continue to increase access to higher education, and importantly will create a more sustainable business model for higher education. Significant among these is the new approach to copyright licensing developed by Creative Commons, which is expanding the range of creative works available for others to build upon legally and to share freely. Since its establishment in 2001, there has been an exponential growth in the sharing of open educational resources. For example, CC has acted as the catalyst for such initiatives as the Directory of Open Access Journals, which now includes over 7,500 journals which are freely available. By December 2010, there were an estimated 400 million works licensed under Creative Commons. These included open textbooks and open courseware. The potential to develop high quality courses based solely on OER has led to the emergence of the OERuniversity, which will provide free access to higher education. Naturally the OERuniversity will provide access to many students who are currently excluded. Indeed, at all levels of education, the influence of open textbooks, open access journals and open courseware will continue to enhance the financial sustainability and quality of education. I am pleased to say that consistent with its current 2020 Vision "to be recognised as a leader in open and flexible education", USQ is continuing to contribute to this next significant phase of educational innovation.

33. Graduands as you continue your own learning journeys and as you contribute to the learning journeys of many more individuals; my advice is to embrace

innovation. Make the most of the opportunities that exist for virtually unlimited online access to knowledge and personal and professional networks.

34. You have joined a noble profession that is a genuinely transformative force for the betterment of individuals and societies throughout the world.

35. You will be the leaders of the ongoing digital education revolution. Make the most of your own opportunities and help others to make the most of their opportunities. Approach the future with positive energy and optimism and you will indeed have fulfilling lives. I wish you well as you continue your lifelong learning journeys.