

**GRADUATION ADDRESS
UNISA APRIL 4 2008.
MICHAEL ROWAN**

Thank you first to the Council of the University for conferring on me the honour of emeritus professor.

Thank you to Emeritus Professor Mackinnon for your generous citation.

Thanks to the family and friends of the graduands for your support of our students – it is very hard to succeed without a support group, and you have, I am sure been, more important in the success of your son, daughter, husband, wife, partner, mother, father, sister, brother, all remaining category of family member or friend, than you realise.

That is certainly true in my case, and I thank my wife, Prof Eleanor Ramsay, and my sons Kim and Louis for their friendship and support for my work.

Thanks finally, and most importantly, to the graduands, both for choosing to study at UniSA – without you I would not have had a job! – and for seeing through your studies to the point that you are ready to graduate and take up work as an educator.

I am delighted to be speaking at a graduation ceremony for Education, for in educating teachers – whether they work in early childhood centres, schools or adult education – we are making possible the continuation of the University by ensuring the education of future students.

I am grateful that I was trained as a teacher and as a philosopher, and originally appointed to the University to teach philosophy of education. I always found these disciplines an excellent foundation for my work as an academic manager and leader.

While I diligently went to some management training courses, and read a little of the literature, essentially I approached my work as an educator – and also of course, a learner. I trust you will too, whatever you go on to do, and many of you will go on from teaching to other things, including leadership positions in education.

But many of you, I hope most, will make your career as teachers and it is to you that I want to pay particular respect.

As I end my career in the University I am increasingly thinking about those of my teachers who had the greatest impact on me – from grade three to my PhD supervisor.

I was educated at the Port Lincoln Infant School, at Kirton Point Primary, Port Lincoln High School, then Flinders and Adelaide universities. In each of these, one or more teachers had a profound effect on me, opening up possibilities which would not have existed for me without their help.

You too will have the opportunity to have that effect on your students. Indeed, you could not choose another path in life with more potential to assist your fellows better themselves.

In my youth this potential of teachers to transform the lives of their students was reflected in the high esteem in which the profession was held. That has changed somewhat now, I think largely because while in earlier times the local teachers were usually amongst the most highly educated members of the community, it is now much more common for people in many professions to have degrees.

That changes many things and particularly the relationship between teachers and parents which now must be more of a partnership. But it does not lessen the respect individual children and parents will have for your work. I recall some years ago when I was the Chair of the School Council at eldest son's primary school, taking up the collection for a present for a long serving teacher who was leaving the school – let's call her Jill. Our initial plans for what we would buy had to be repeatedly revised upwards as parent after parent said 'Jill was a fantastic teacher for my kids. They still talk about her years later' - while pressing a \$20 bill into my hand. I came across a thank you letter Jill wrote to me while packing up my papers last week, and in it she reflected on the generosity of the parents saying that it is too easy to jump from the day to day concerns you have as a teacher with individual children to the level of the media's analysis of the deficiencies of teachers and schooling, and not pause for a middle level view of the impact that your particular career is having on a whole community, which only becomes evident at times like a farewell ceremony.

So I urge you to be confident about your choice of career, and to see yourself as someone who will have an important role in building our future communities through your work with individual children and their families.

Certainly our communities will face many challenges in the coming years, particularly flowing from climate change and the social and economic tensions that will create. We will need to drastically rethink individual and national success, to get us off a path of consumerism and endless growth in the consumption of energy and raw materials.

We will have to derive more of our pleasures from non material things, from things that appeal to the mind and spirit – art, science, literature, film, games, sport and relationships.

We will have to become much more aware of the whole life cycle of everything we consume – its raw materials, the energy required to produce it, how it is disposed of, and what energy is required to do that safely.

Educators will be needed to lead the way in this major change, opening up the life of the mind for all their students, and ensuring that their education provides all our citizens with the knowledge they need to be environmentally aware. Our communities will not be able to make the transition to a low carbon life without you.

So on behalf of all the individual students whose lives you will profoundly influence for the better, and on behalf of the communities you will assist remake themselves, thank you for choosing to become an educator, and my best wishes for your future success.