

Dream of an Australia that Exudes Creativity

Centre for the Mind Director and International Australia Prize winner **Allan Snyder** presented an address at this week's Australia Unlimited Round Table Conference in Melbourne (5 May 1998). Other speakers included John Howard, Kim Beazley and International Monetary Foundation Chairman Michael Camdessus.

My dream for the new millennium is for an Australia that exudes creativity.

A creativity that uniquely reflects our disparate parts, our disparate heritage. A deep multifaceted creativity, manifest in all domains - art, culture, humanity, science and technology.

The consequence of realising this dream for exporting our creations is alone considerable. After all, the great nations of the future will be those whose creativity has a global impact. But the enrichment of our country through inheriting a more vibrant intellectual tradition will be immeasurable.

All of us are by nature intrinsically creative, but for some reason certain cultures are perceived to be more innovative than others.

The challenge for us is to nurture our creativity and to elevate it to the global arena.

How can we do that when creativity is such an illusive affair?

Some powerful insights do emerge from the analysis of great discoveries. My favourite insight is that breakthroughs do not normally come from those with the most knowledge of something. Rather, they come from way-out in left field. This only underscores how we are often blinded by our expertise and by our expectations.

The lesson here is that we want a society which affords us the freedom to cross traditional boundaries. We also want a society that promotes cross-cultural collaboration because different cultures bring different perspectives to the process of creativity.

But, is it really enough just to look at the world anew and to make unforeseen connections?

Consider what the celebrated Sigmund Freud said of his creativity: "I am not really a man of science, not an observer, not an experimenter, and not even a thinker. I am nothing but...an adventurer - a conquistador - with the boldness and the tenacity of that type of being."

In other words, we must have the courage to challenge conventional wisdom. And here is where Australia triumphs - a deep scepticism for authority is our national characteristic. A national characteristic which should be ever more celebrated because it is crucial to the process of creativity.

As I said from the outset, the great nations of the future will be those whose creativity has a global impact!

Australia's future lies in its ability to export the products of its creativity.

And here is the problem. To export the products of our creativity, we must first be perceived by others as innovators. It is not enough merely to be creative; only those societies that are presumed to be creative are the ones that will corner the market.

This is our potential vulnerability and the challenge is to confront it head-on. We must break the mindset of those countries who wrongly perceive Australia as a place of only beaches, minerals and sports.

The Centenary of Federation as well as the 2000 Olympics afford the opportune moments to break this mindset. But to do so, we need bold, even daring, Australian initiatives.

I leave you with one suggestion for breaking this mindset about Australia - a possibility which capitalizes on the golden opportunity afforded by the Sydney 2000 Olympics.

Because sport has as much to do with the mind as does the body - recall, the barrier to the 4 minute mile proved to be a mental barrier - I propose that Australia mastermind a permanent intellectual component into the Olympic movement.

And I suggest that this Australian innovation be declared by our Prime Minister before the world at the opening of the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

This single initiative would catapult us into the arena of global innovation. Make this a reality, and Australia will exude creativity!