

OPENING SPEECH FOR THE NORTH DURBAN JUNIOR AND SENIOR SCHOOLS.

VENUE : VIRGINIA PRIMARY SCHOOL

DATE : 16 AUGUST 2010

Tonight I have been asked to do 3 things

1. To share my philosophy as an artist, as teacher and mother to two children that fall very neatly into this age bracket. A girl of 9 and a boy of 11.
2. To keep this speech very short...
3. To open this exhibition and I declare this to be now before I even speak because I feel that in my place should be the shoes on the feet of every art teacher in this room. You are the ones that have impacted the lives of the children represented here and those not here. You are the ones that have encouraged, directed, tried to bring out of each one individual expression whilst teaching new skills and a new language.

Without art life would be dull. Buildings would be concrete and walls bare and expressionless. There is something beautiful about being able to create and being able to receive a created item.

As teachers you know all too well that art reaches deep into the hearts of some of your pupils. For many it is full of play and fun and ironically considered merely a void to be filled. And to others it requires persistence, determination, discipline and diligence. Words so valuably strung together just recently by Mr Bannister at one of the award ceremonies.

To many art amounts to much frustration as the left brain releases its hold on analytical, predictable thought patterns and begins to swim into the warm waters of creativity held within the right sphere of the brain.

With such an innate need to seek out perfection, it takes courage on the part of the pupil to truly see what it is they are copying and then to represent it with full integrity.

‘Everyone can draw! The question lies in whether or not you have the patience to interpret what it is you are drawing.’ Mona Brookes, psychologist and art educator who has impacted many fields including business men in the States seeking innovative ways of thinking.

It has been said that during 90% of drawing time, the pupil is looking down at their drawing pad instead of looking out there where the information is. And the perk of observing is that it is free! Being taught to look and break down what is seen into shape is an invaluable skill to be taught.

I was 11 when I encountered the therapeutic meaning in art making. My brother, 8 years older than I, died instantly in a car crash. My parents had divorced a year prior to that and my other brother lived with my father. I remember nights of waking with incredible sadness. I'd turn the light on and begin to paint. Sometimes symbolic, free drawing but mostly engaging in the art of copying. Today I know that I stumbled upon a life skill.

Drawing and journaling is what aided my son and calmed him down enough to be able to endure the death of his special cat. He associates art with peace. Just the other day i was doodling and he turned to his father and said, “look dad, mom is seeking her inner peace.”

In teaching i have documented how students feel like a spin-wheel, dislocated and frustrated with self and the world. They leave more connected and more at peace. Those of you familiar with Scot Peck’s work, “The road less travelled” is reported to have said Life is difficult, acknowledge it and move with it. Art making is an invaluable tool to enable one to cope.

You, as a teacher may not always get your children to produce a beautiful and complete item and that is okay. On this side of heaven there is no perfection. It is in Art that one welcomes mistakes, welcomes experiences, encourages play and doodling. It is the only subject that has no concrete answer. And as you encourage this in your pupils, they will grow in confidence to be able to see shape and find inner individual expression.

Indeed today in the contemporary art world skill and training is important but it is the freshness of someone’s individual approach that catches the eye of curators. It is the work in progress that at times is more appealing than an over worked image.

When these children leave grade 7 they enter into a very self conscious phase of their lives where the risk of experimenting is harder. So if they have been taught how to see elements of shape they will be able to look around them and copy anything.

I want to take this opportunity to encourage you art teachers. I want to encourage you to stir up the gift that lies within you. It is not a coincidence that you teach art. Perhaps you felt you were not good enough or failed but somewhere along the line you were selected to become the art teacher. You were good enough then. Dabbling in your gift is like tasting your dreams and it will refuel you and inspire you. It will allow your fire to keep kindling as you pour out to your pupils.

For you i end with this quote by Ben Okri from “A way of being free”.

The creative self has one side facing the dark waters and the other facing the bright and joyful firmament. Creativity flows into all things. As thoughts and ideas arise hold onto them, look at them, you might just want to entertain them and grow them. Never lose the spirit of play. Always create with a smile in your soul. Discipline, diligence and hard work is indispensable but balance it with a playful creative spirit.

Again well done to all you teachers. 500 children may walk through your doors per week. And for each child 2 parents await masterpieces . Let us be reminded that the masterpiece lies within the child and that there is no mistakes in creativity.