

Address to the 2007 Convocating Class of Mothercraft, The Design Exchange, Toronto, October 18<sup>th</sup>.

I am utterly delighted to be with you today. By the end of this little talk, I hope you will understand why. First of all, I have been a teacher myself, a high school teacher and a frequent guest and visitor to schools and institutions throughout the country. Though I have never taught small children myself, I have regularly talked with them and instructed them in areas of poetry, the arts and spirituality. I teach now at the University of Toronto and I promise you I wish my undergraduate students were less spoiled and peevish about their marks than young children are. Children I think, still put fun at the top of the list when it comes to learning---getting into law school doesn't keep them up at night, yet.

You might expect me to talk about the importance of the arts. City hall expected that too when they asked me to be Toronto's ambassador to culture. I told them that the art would never thrive until the citizen started seeing themselves as artists in the construction of communities, families, neighborhoods and cities. The public forum is the canvas of the civic artist---until all citizens see themselves as creative, whether its in the fixing of pot-holes, or as public servants, or entrepreneurs, as restaurateurs, whatever their calling---the arts will not mean anything if we don't first partake of the art of life. The formal arts reflect the art of life done well in a city and nation. But unless the citizens begin with knowing the art of life museums, stages, galleries, libraries will just be archival. Creativity begins in the street, in the home, in the playground, in the workplace in the way we encounter each other day by day, risk-taking with each other, imaginatively, trustingly in an environment where the citizen does not wait for auspicious opportunity, but where the citizen volunteers in the bravery and adventure of civil encounter.

So this message got me started on a stream of talks and consultations ranging from the prime minister's committee on cities and communities, to municipal and provincial initiatives for the furtherance of creative economies.

So where does childhood education come in. There is no creative economy, there is no creative industry, there is no livable citizenship without a climate of trust and empathy among citizens. The introduction and education in trust and empathy begins in the early years, in childhood education. It is hard to reverse the damage done to a creative psyche in the early formative years. Conversely, it is hard to stop the creative intelligence and bravery and experimentation that one has learned in ones early years. Environment is everything. and we live in an environment that manufactures a culture of fear, a culture of accountability, a culture that encourages us to put up boundaries before offering ourselves. We live in a world of negotiated space in which human interaction is being effaced by the virtual and cybernetic. Once, you might have punished your child by send him/her to their room. Now, the worst punishment is to have the child remain in the living room. Such is the attraction of the internet, the virtual, the digital---connecting us all, and making us strangers to each other, robbing us of intimacy and give us connection instead. The market pressures steal time from parents for their children, from souses from each other. We live, if we are lucky, in gentrified communities where there is no one on the streets after 8pm. In a world like this, the casualty is civil encounter and humanness itself. Curiosity about other human beings is being replaced by mere appetite for common interests. Communities try to get closer, when in fact the government knows more about us than our neighbors do. And some of us even like it that we. We are being socially engineered to go in, instead of outwards, to depend on ourselves instead of each other. Human nature as that phenomenon that sought to discover its destiny through its encounter with others is under siege. And the only strategies that stand in the way are good parenting and good childhood education.

Mother craft has taken on the responsibility, of training children in empathy, trust, and social skills. It has earned a world-wide reputation as a generator of care in a global citizenship

that is losing a sense of civic care. Policy, governance, industry have no strategies for empathy, the ability of citizens to identify with each other as an expression of creative love. Parents and teachers are the artists that help begin the masterpiece of a person's life.

On that level, I congratulate the graduates of today, for such dedication as will enable our cities to be livable places infused with a literacy of grace.

And you are called upon, by your presence as educators to begin the project of faith in a person's life. I am not talking about religious faith. But I certainly am not talking about something as paltry as faith in oneself. The accomplishment of self-esteem and self-worth is nothing of one doesn't have an equal amount of esteem for others and for a universe that is larger than all players combined. This educates a young person in mystery, that sense of awe and capacity for wonder that brings delight and initiative to all creative efforts. The imagination that pays tribute to itself is a small imagination, and it robs the individual of the great registers of emotion--ecstasy, joy and the epiphany of having sought and found communion with others. For there is no purpose to the social life if one doesn't take it as an opportunity to fulfill one's destiny through and with others, with the help of others.

Self-sufficiency must be companioned with the sense of dependency on others for the completed canvas of our lives. This brings true citizenship. This is to be well adjusted, to know that one is as frail as others and as noble as others can be. We are all in the same boat together and we don't get to extraordinary lives by playing our cards close to our chests. The art of self worth and the art of humility are one art. To do otherwise is simply to give coping skills and not the appetite for risking while knowing that "nothing ventured, nothing gained".

The sensitivities damaged when young are difficult to mend. Nurturing, mothering, parenting, mentoring, whatever you want to call it is something that you, in your profession must do naturally. But we must be aware that we have produced at least one generation of young adults who have confused any psychological discomfort with true emotional drama. We have developed industries, legal and politically correct to protect ourselves from any friction. In our zeal to be fair to everyone all the time, we have forgotten that life can be unfair, and we do not manage it, and that it takes courage and strength for situations where there is no one to blame. We cannot hope to forever add to the culture of accountability when life will ask to be accountable to bravery, courage and humility in the face of life's obstacles. The kind of faith required for this is in your hands. The kind of person who expects the government to do everything, or who turns to authority at every tribulation, is the kind of person who was not schooled in life. You will provide the school of life. You will teach that compassion is the noblest and sometimes, briefly, the most unrewarding chance one can take. You must teach that empathy for others is never wasted, and from that empathy emerges huge respect for oneself. You must teach forgiveness in a culture that allows no mistakes. You must teach love, and instruct that it is not a negotiation. And that trust is something that you sometimes have to volunteer first, against all the odds, with faith such benevolence will keep the heart open, and not close it.

You will teach them everything that an adult world will try to undo later in their lives. But the roots you will have given them will be deep---the emotional muscularity, that ability to be gentle and firm is the gift of love. And all you must do, to persevere and love well those entrusted to you, is to avoid the culture of fear that surrounds your own lives. Because fear is the worst legacy one can give to a child, fear of others, fear of the unknown and fear of one's limitations.

So it is that congratulate, and pray for you. All the issues, sustainability, livability, citizenship, peace, diversity, mental health--all these issues begin with you, your work and end with what you have been able to accomplish in a child's life. The greatest gift that you, as graduates of mothercraft, can give, is to be present and nurture a human being that will grow up with the courage to mother and father others. Without that, our diversities will be a disaster, and our differences will not be negotiable. You are creating a global citizen, free of allegiances to tribes and agendas. That global citizen must have a heart, and that heart is in your hands.