

Students, families, teachers, staff and honoured friends. Thank you for joining us today to celebrate our 27th leaving class who have completed their two year journey through the UWC Adriatic.

I would be remiss if I did not begin by thanking all those who have made this journey possible.

- Italy – Rome, the Regions and Duino
- National committees
- Our private sponsors a number of whom have been able to join us today
- Families – both of students and of teachers
- Social Service and Activities partners
- Staff, Desco, Cooperativo people
- Teachers

Today may be the exception with the emotion of the day but what has struck me from the day I arrived at this school five years ago is the happiness of the student community, the clear joy they take in being in each others' company, as many of you had the pleasure of witnessing last night. I'm increasingly convinced that friendship is a defining feature of our college. Now I don't want to downplay the critical role that our teachers play in steering our students through the rigours of the IB diploma programme, in leading social services and activities, of serving as residence and personal tutors... The 'meat' of the UWC educational model. But the centrality of friendship helps me to understand a related phenomenon – whenever I speak to graduates of their time at the college, it is inevitably the relationships they formed with their *primi*, co-years and *secondi* which define their experience. To the point that one wonders if there were any teachers here at all (as I am sure some students secretly wish at times, particularly when seen after curfew 😊)! This is the magic of UWC Adriatic (and likely all UWC's). In bringing students from around the world together in a spirit of friendship and intercultural understanding, it allows for a 'personalization' of humanity to take place that would not otherwise be possible. Once here, immersed in our community, the challenges facing the world are no longer viewable solely through the abstract lens of the internet, evening news or daily newspapers, as the degrees of separation between students of the college and the wider world have been reduced dramatically. To a great extent, the abstract becomes real.

But is friendship enough? It is the main element perhaps, the bedrock upon which we build, but I would like to suggest that there are at least two other essential ingredients.

Kurt Hahn, the founding father of the UWC movement once wrote: "I regard it as the foremost task of education to insure the survival of these qualities: an enterprising curiosity, an undefeatable spirit, tenacity in pursuit, readiness for sensible self denial, and above all, compassion."

Compassion is a somewhat dated term, and speaks of Hahn's time, but I don't feel it is quite the right word in today's context as it implies a sense of pity that inclines one to help or be merciful – allowing for a distance to be maintained between peoples.

Sympathy is a near synonym that one might consider but it too falls short on engagement, suggesting a sharing or tendency to share an emotion, sensation or condition of another person or thing.

No, the characteristic that must be nurtured is empathy, the power to identify oneself mentally with (and therefore comprehend) a person or object of contemplation.

As Jeremy Rifkin argues in his latest book 'The Empathic Civilization' human beings are 'soft wired' for such 'empathic sensitivity' – a response, he argues, whose potential has been heightened throughout history by technological advances that have brought diverse people together both physically and virtually. The UWC, in my view, accelerates this response even further, much as a hot house would for seedlings prepared for spring planting. Through a national committee network that nominates students of promise and potential from around the globe we are blessed with some of the best 'seeds' to be found. If we then do our job well of providing good growth conditions – proper food,

soil, water, light – the outcome will be students better prepared to be socially responsible as empathic citizens of an increasingly globalized world.

But a hot house has its dangers as well. It's all too easy to get the conditions a little wrong – too much light, too much heat, too little water or food – or to mistake life in the greenhouse as reality. For at some point, we need to transfer the young plants from the greenhouse to the field, where they will have to face the 'real' world where there are no guarantees of conditions – not to mention the prospect of four seasons. This is the process that takes flight today as we celebrate your transition from students to graduates.

So how do we ensure that the conditions are right? Through healthy introspection – no doubt – questioning what we do and how and why we do it. But such introspection must be undertaken with a view to developing a new best practice for a new world versus wishing for a time that has passed. The UWC movement was born nearly 50 years ago at the height of the Cold War. As recently as the foundation year of this college in 1982, Breshnev was still General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the Falklands War had just concluded and Cold War rhetoric was heating up with Thatcher and Reagan in their first terms of office. The world today and the world of tomorrow present different challenges than those of yesterday.

We also need to test ourselves with forays into the outside world. In this regard, a healthy interaction with the local community is an essential ingredient to life at our college and I am very happy to see renewed desire for, and commitment to, this amongst our student population. Through the dedicated study of Italian on the part of all students (even if it is one's '7th' subject), and a social service and activities programme that puts interaction with the local community at the forefront, we are all in a position to be enriched by this connection. It is all too easy to spend too much time inside the greenhouse – directing our energies to internal politics and policies vs outside needs – versus trying to tackle the issues outside our school walls.

This is the equivalent to throwing stones in our glass house which is always dangerous.

In this respect, bringing in teachers from like-minded institutions for one or two year exchanges is a healthy exercise. We began this practice this year and will continue to look for these opportunities in the future. Bringing an outside perspective is also achieved through our guest speaker programme.

Every year we have the good fortune of receiving visitors from a myriad of fields to speak to us about their areas of expertise. This year was no exception with over a dozen guest speakers ranging from Prof. Alison Cooper (Colby College) speaking of WWI poetry and the Italian front to Sir Luis Blom-Cooper speaking of the foundation of Amnesty International to Patricia Pearson speaking of her memories of her grandfather – former prime minister of Lester B. Pearson of Canada – and the connection between idealism and personal commitment. But for me two of the most inspiring talks were delivered by UWC graduates – Suzie Alexander, a first generation graduate of this college – and Horatio Clare – a graduate of Atlantic College. What inspired me was how they illustrated through their personal histories that UWC ideals and values could be 'lived' in a variety of ways. The burden of the UWC movement can weigh heavily on our graduates who can be overwhelmed by their desire to put the mission into action (of making education a force to unite people, nations and cultures for peace and a sustainable future) and imagine there are only a limited number of ways for this to be realized whether it be working for an NGO, the UN, or some other organization that places – at its forefront – the public good. Heaven forbid they be accused of not being true 'UWCer's.' But both Suzie and Horatio have risen above such narrow classifications to engage in very different pursuits. Suzie turned her back on the world of consultancy in London to move to rural Tuscany with her husband and two children and become an organic olive oil producer. While she could little imagine such a future during her time in Duino, she credits her experience at the school for giving her the courage to pursue a path less taken, to risk failure in the desire to find a more 'sustainable' life for her and her family in the broadest sense of the term. Her story is one that continues to evolve as the reality of organic farming and small scale olive oil production compete against the needs of her young family. But she is happy to be living the experience as she attempts to pursue a life style that agrees with her personal convictions.

Author Horatio Clare spoke as part of our tremendous theatre arts' week at the college and enthralled his audience with the tale of the research and writing of his latest book 'A Single Swallow: Following an Epic Journey from South Africa to South Wales.' The book recounts his experience of following migrating Barn Swallows (*Hirundo Rustica*) from their wintering grounds in South Africa to their breeding sites in south Wales. But as we quickly came to realize, Horatio's experience was more about the shared humanity of the people he met along the way than the birds themselves as he travelled over 10.000 km through Africa and Southern Europe in the 3 months he followed the swallows. The phrase that has remained with me since his talk was a response he received to a question he posed to one of the people he met early on in his journey about the safety of travelling alone in Africa. The interlocutor's advice –approach the adventure with a level head and a humble heart and all would be well. What better advice could our students receive (or we as adults of the UWC community) for the adventure of life. For as we try and capture the traits necessary for realizing the UWC mission in one's life, a sense of humility has to be near the top.

So dear secondi, go out into the world with the knowledge that friendship, empathy and humility will carry you far. Be open to new ideas, to new people. Continue to challenge your comfort zones. Commit yourselves to everyday acts of kindness. Take responsibility for your actions, and for their outcomes whether intended or not. And be aware that the only thing you can truly control is your effort and that to try and to fail is better than to never try at all.

We salute you for all that you have accomplished in your time here and look forward to following your exploits in the years to come.

And we look forward to the day that you will return to lead an INA and tell us of the lessons you have learned along the way. Please keep in touch and *in boca al lupo*.