

Author uses playfulness as a tool for learning

KAREN KOTZE

To Renee Lighton, teaching is child's play. Literally. At a vibrant 50 years of age, the Claremont resident draws on all the facets gleaned from her full and varied choices, and is wholly delighted by her purpose in life... teaching parents, teachers and children how to play.

"It's phenomenal how much we learn when we are having fun," she says, flashing a ready smile.

"Let's Get Ready" is the author's first self-published book, and already she's investigating having the book translated into Xhosa.

No stranger to the writing world, Mrs Lighton co-authored a range of Foundation Phase English second language books which are widely used throughout SA.

"This latest book sat quietly refining itself in my head until the time was exactly right, and its whole creation has been a pleasure," she says.

"Let's Get Ready" is an ingenious look at the innumerable ways to create the essential learning environment of playfulness with parents, teachers, au pairs – anyone working and playing with young children.

It includes reading, writing, phonics and maths ideas where learning happens through play.

"No stress, no anxiety, just play. And it's applicable on so many lev-

els. Give me an eggbox and I can show you 50 ways to play, count, and create for kids – right through to refining your own life goals," she says.

I believe her. Mrs Lighton embraces learning – and teaching – as a lifestyle and is utterly enthused with the recognition of the rare opportunity that teachers have to positively impact their children.

She's also of the opinion that life's great because we learn and grow constantly and laughing, says we are here to remind each other to choose to be the best we are able to be, maybe especially on the glum days.

"I'm a real teacher, I can't help myself," she grins as she takes a pen and writes the word 'reaction'. Then with an impish grin she writes 'creation'.

"Same letters, rearranged. We have to keep asking ourselves if we are reacting to the world or actively creating in it."

She does the same thing with the word 'attraction'.

Slashes it into three, and points out that this word holds within it the words 'action' and 'traction' which she says is a reminder that what we want isn't going to fall into our laps, and that we are required to take action and then develop traction in our goals.

Somehow in Mrs Lighton's life all learning is child's play... and immense fun.



■ Renee Lighton with her books for children, teachers and parents alike.

She also practises what she preaches and specialises in a variety of service oriented choices, ranging from educational coaching, being an author and inspirational speaker to life coaching.

"I don't have any qualms with teachers who don't know how to do something, provided they bring in the knowledge, outsource it somehow. Networking allows everyone who is good at something the oppor-

tunity to excel at that and share their talents," she says.

She says teamwork is an essential ingredient in the process of whole education.

And as a mom she has raised two teenage daughters whom she credits with being among her best teachers.

"As a parent you get to see yourself warts and all in your children. Keeping a sense of humour is crucial. So is playing alongside them," she says.

Mrs Lighton speaks at schools, runs workshops, writes and distributes educational products. She loves Cape Town, the mountain and seeing people extend themselves and in so doing, create an improved environment for others.

Her approach is not limited to her books, instead her books are a reflection of her attitude of light but heart-felt service.

"I am very moved by what I see that is so right in schools today, and that includes a growing social consciousness. I would love to see an established high school class take it one step further.

"Instead of the high drama of their matric dance, why not have a pretty dress and party, but instead of doing the outlandish outlay, imagine the class pooled those funds and sponsored one child from a disadvantaged school for a year's education? What a legacy to leave..."

Looking for tales from our 'Antarctic nation'