

Thoughts for the Week

By *Richard Marotta, Ph.D., Headmaster*



This past Wednesday evening I attended the Guild meeting, which is for New York City Independent School heads. We meet three times per year as a group to share our ideas about independent school education, to discuss any major educational issues and simply to provide support to each other as Heads of School.

Our meeting this Wednesday was filled with stories about the opening of school, about changes in the politics of education in Albany and about how our schools often address through curriculum and extracurricular activities some of the major events of our contemporary world. Of course, there are always many different opinions when fifty heads of school are in the same room (as you can imagine), but there is also a genuine resolve to address problems and issues directly in order to find a resolution that works for all of the schools.

In addition to the discussion and support that we provide each other at the Guild meeting, we also gather for three days in early November at the Mohonk Mountain House for a series of very intense and focused workshops. This year's program at Mohonk will cover such topics as the relationship between the school and the student's identity, the schools and transgender attitudes, the idea of social justice and equity in schools, and how we address the issues of race in our schools and in our society. All of these topics have a direct impact on our schools as we guide our students through life in the early twenty-first century.

In my view, an independent school doesn't resolve these issues nor should it impose a specific viewpoint on our students. What we do, however, is to cultivate students in such strong intellectual and moral ways of thinking, that they can confront, understand and then decide about issues for themselves. This is important since we want our students to be critical thinkers and not simply 'accepters' of the opinions of others. Every day we see how difficult it is to ascertain the truth in our media and image driven world. Learning what the facts are, how trustworthy the data is and how reliable are the sources of information, becomes the most challenging areas for schools and students.

Our role is to propose that the justice, equity, freedom, decency, truthfulness, kindness and responsibility (*and others) form the core of our value system. With these basic values in mind, we then encourage our students to examine their daily lives and the challenges they face within the context of each of these ideas. Our mission at Garden School is not to tell students what to think. Our mission at Garden School is to insist that their thinking be authentic.



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