



GARDEN SCHOOL NEWSLETTER



Richard Marotta, Ph. D., Headmaster

Volume 94 Number: XV

"Cultivating Success in Every Child"

Friday, January 6, 2017



Thoughts for the Week

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

Welcome back to school and a happy new year to all members of our community. The advent of a new year makes us reflective of what took place in the 'old' year and anxious about what will occur in the 'new' year. It is really a matter of an agreed upon moment in which we see ourselves ending and beginning. The sense of beginning forces us to reflect on what has transpired and think about ways of moving our own lives and the lives of those around us forward more positively and productively.

For us in school, the new year call for a degree of self-reflection about the past several month and then acting upon those intentions to envision the next several month in ways that continue to fulfill our mission. My interpretation of 2016 focuses on the transformations that took place in our culture, our politics and our language. We witnessed an almost paradigmatic shift in our public discourse and the relationship between discourse and reality.

In a school such as Garden, we try to concentrate on the use of language. For all of our classes, the language used reflects the 'reality' of the subject matter. In math, we strive to understand the abstract nature of representation; in science, we use language to describe the conditions of nature; in history, language organizes the past; in English, we study and use language as an expression of our thoughts; in music, we examine the language of sound; in art, we examine the language of shape, lines, color and design; in physical education, we look at the connection between language and action.

For each one of us, teachers and students, our firm belief is that the words we use will enhance our minds, our social interactions, our understanding of the different aspects of our world and that our inner life will be expanded by our growing self understanding. However, more and more, the media, our political leaders and misleaders and our consumer-driven economy move us away from the correspondence between language and reality.

In a stimulating, balanced and important book, *What the Internet is Doing to our Brains: The Shallows*, Nicholas Carr explores in detail the impact of the internet on our intellectual, social and inner lives. He begins with Marshall McLuhan groundbreaking study, *Understanding Media*, in which McLuhan made the now famous point that the medium is the message Carr writes:

What's been forgotten in our repetition of this enigmatic aphorism is that McLuhan was not just acknowledging, and celebrating the transformative power of new communications technologies. He was also sounding a warning about the threat the power poses---and the risk of being oblivious to that threat.

Carr's point clearly makes sense in our world today in which the media, from TV to Tweet, seems to have become the center of information, opinion and reality. Throughout Carr's book he attempts to balance the positive and negative aspects of the media and the internet, but he also realizes that individuals now have a greater responsibility than ever to control and interpret the world on far more significant terms than that of the 'showman' media: "The showman exaggerates to make his point, but the point stands. Media work their magic, or their mischief, on the nervous system itself."



Thoughts for the Week (cont.)

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This has become our reality. Garden School and other independent schools have an obligation to teach critical thinking which means, in addition to the traditional academic areas, we need to guide our students to an understanding of the strength, the weakness and the 'danger' of information and of media. We need to help our students and ourselves to manage life in a world which is now driven by the electronic impulses of technology. We need to humanize learning and make it authentic.

**Richard Marotta, Ph.D.
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