



GARDEN SCHOOL NEWSLETTER



Richard Marotta, Ph. D., Headmaster

Volume 92 Number: XVII

"Academic Excellence Since 1923"

Friday, January 30, 2015

Thoughts for the week



By Richard Marotta, Ph.D., Headmaster



As I covered the ninth grade English class this morning, we were discussing the opening of Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*. Our opening discussion was how the setting of the French Revolution enhances the personal story that will take place as a result of that precise moment in history. We talked about how the historical and the personal can intersect and enrich the very nature of the storytelling.

After the class, I continued thinking about how larger contexts often form the basis for very particular stories and missions. Whenever a novel uses a major historical event to contextualize the smaller more localized personal story, there are always moments during which the personal story is affected by the events taking place around it.

This seems to me to be true of schools as well. A hundred years ago, a school's mission was to teach Latin, mathematics, physical science, etc. Its mission focused on academic disciplines and the importance of those disciplines in helping a student become an educated member of his or her society. The idea of being 'educated' relied heavily on the context, the social and traditional context, of a classical education. An adult in the middle or upper class needed to be familiar with Latin and Greek authors and ideas in order to attain social acceptance and fit seamlessly into the fabric of the larger cultural assumptions.

Education today, I believe, is far more aware of the larger context that influences what a student needs to know in order to become a successful member of society. It was necessary for an 18th Century student to know Latin; it is necessary for a 21st Century student to know technology, writing, mathematics, science, social behavioral skills, communication skills, problem solving skills and cooperative skills. The context of education has dramatically changed.

The influence of the context in our world has become more immediate, changeable and necessary. The role of education as the means to achieve financial as well as social acceptance has been altered by major economic and social factors. A school's role has had a correspondent adjustment to the needs of those changes. Our school's mission sets "academic achievement, personal development and social involvement" as goals, a blend of academic and social achievements, which in earlier historical periods would not be the goals of an educational institution.

Today our educational mission touches upon all of those elements necessary for success within the context of our 21st Century world, which has the blinding rate at which change occurs as one of its major characteristics. Our students now need to be adaptive learners, whose experience in school with academic, social and personal growth will allow them to adapt to the changing conditions of the market place. The role of education has shifted from being the upholder of tradition to the responder to an ever and quickly changing social context. In the words of Dickens, "it was the best of times, it was the worst of times." Through this dynamic tension, a Garden School education weaves its magic.