



GARDEN SCHOOL NEWSLETTER



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Thoughts for the Week

By Richard Marotta, Ph.D., Headmaster



First let me wish all of the members of our Garden Community a happy and healthy new year. I hope that the winter break was a restful as well as productive time for all of our students and their families.

As we move into the New Year, I have just received the latest issue of *Independent School*, the scholarly quarterly journal published by our parent organization, NAIS (National Association of Independent School). The entire issue is devoted to presenting and exploring "The New Skills" that seem to be emerging as 21st Century competencies. The lead article, *21st Century Competencies*, written by Charles Fadel, raises some very tantalizing questions about the nature of 21st Century teaching and learning. Fadel, who is the founder and chairman of the Center for Curriculum Design and visiting scholar at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, has outlined

the five areas that he believes to be the keys to mastering these developing competencies. They are as follows:

Knowledge	Character
Skills	Meta Learning
Making it all work together	

His idea of knowledge encompasses some of the traditional areas of learning and studying, but also insists that these areas be integrated with developing areas in those disciplines. So that math should be accompanied by lego-robotic and engineering, history by a recognizing of global themes, science by understanding biosystems and many other forms of literacy, including digital design and environmental literacies.

For skills, we need to work on what are the traditional literacy and computational skills; however, we need to add other dimensions to what we consider to be skills. He calls the other skills, the higher order skills, the "4 C's:" creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaboration. By moving skills from the traditional to the modern, the idea is not to eliminate basic competencies but instead to recognize that other competencies have gained in importance and can be fused with our notion of basic.

Character defines how with 'engage in the world.' In order for that engagement to be effective we need to focus on educators as models of behavior, on the nature of history, understanding public support, recognizing cultural, societal, personal and global challenges. These areas emerge as areas of character because of the necessity to engage in this kind of broad spectrum activity that depends on understanding oneself as well as the world.

One of the more interesting points Fadel makes is about Meta Learning. His definition of Meta Learning is essentially that one has to be aware of learning and cognitive ability, experience and type so that the ability to reflect and grow becomes as important a skill as any other. With the rapid advance in learning in our new technological and global society, being aware of one's own style of learning and the effective of learning assumes a far more important role than it had in a purely prescriptive learning environment.

Finally, the idea is that any type of curriculum design has to be able to bring all of these forms of skill and knowledge, including traditional knowledge into a coherent pathway of learning. In a world that changes quickly, our schools need to reflect the *how* and what of those changes in meaningful and appropriate curriculum experiences. Notice that I avoided using the world model to describe curriculum because of the inherent rigidity of the idea of a model; rather the goal and the challenges is to create curriculum experiences that reflect the dynamics of the new world and the new learning.