



# GARDEN SCHOOL NEWSLETTER



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"Cultivating Success in Every Child"

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## Thoughts for the Week

By Richard Marotta, Ph.D., Headmaster



This morning our students engaged in a character study project about generosity. They watched a short video about the idea of generosity in its many aspects. Last week, students worked on a reflection piece about character, in which they reacted to a short presentation about the idea of character in response to a line by Austin Kleon from his book *Steal Like an Artist*: "Invite others to wonder with you." I have read some of these responses and have found them to be thoughtful, reflective and insightful.

The idea of educating students about character in a formal way has taken hold within the world of educational philosophy over the past several years. In a sense, it is derived from the developing idea that education contains a more expansive range than the purely cognitive. We all recognize the importance of cognitive learning and the development of cognitive thinking, reasoning and academic skills. We also all recognize that cognitive skills form a part but not all of what our students need for success in the modern world. Other

skills such as cooperative skills, problem solving, openness and the ability to focus have been recognized as equally important to navigating through our new global society.

In his most recent book, *How Children Succeed*, Paul Tough explores how children can benefit from other forms of learning, one of which is character study. He writes about how his son, Ellington, is a part of this cognitive educational apparatus:

Ellington would be growing up in a culture saturated with an idea you call the cognitive hypothesis: the belief, rarely expressed aloud but commonly held nevertheless, that success today depends primarily on cognitive skills—the kind of intelligence that gets measured on IQ tests, including the abilities to recognize letters and words, to calculate, to detect patterns—and that the best way to develop these skills is to practice them as much as possible, beginning as early as possible.

This is a brief summary of what for years has been the dominant educational model. However, over the past decade some of these ideas have been changing as new insights into how children learn, what they learn and how that learning prepares them for the future have begun to cause a shift in the educational paradigm. Tough goes on to write about how more recent work has developed an alternative point of view:

But in the past decade, and especially in the past few years, a disparate congregation of economists, educators, psychologists, and neuroscientists have begun to produce evidence that calls into question many of the assumptions behind the cognitive hypothesis. What matters most in a child's development, they say, is not how much information we can stuff into his/her brain in the first few years. What matters, instead, is whether we are able to help her/him develop a very different set of qualities, a list that includes persistence, self-control, curiosity, grit, and self-confidence.

So many of these ideas and aspirations play a major role in the manner in which we carry out our mission at Garden School. By adding the Character Education Program to our curriculum, we have created a paradigm in which the cognitive and the emotive have found common ground. Our students use both their intellects and their emotions to respond to these prompts and bring together these two equally important aspects of education.