



GARDEN SCHOOL NEWSLETTER



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"Cultivating Success in Every Child"

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Thoughts for the Week

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As you know, Garden School's Character Education Program used David Brook's *The Road to Character* as its contextual starting point. Brooks has written a rather extraordinary account of the role of 'character' in our lives and, in fact, throughout human history. He is particular alert to changes in our cultural and ethical paradigm that reflects our attitude toward and our interpretation of the idea of character. After all, character in a cultural sense embodies how we live our lives both as individuals and as members of a society.

In an early chapter of his book, Brooks investigates what he considers to be a major shift in our attitude toward the self in our cultural paradigm. Beginning with references to the language and views expressed at the end of World War Two, Brooks builds an understanding of how self-expression and self-worth have shifted. He does this by examining the public language used to reflect on the end of the War, which had consumed the intellectual and emotional life of our society for years.

Brooks makes reference to a radio program, *Command Performance*, which announced and discussed the end of World War Two on August 15, 1945. The language used by the broadcasters was very much the language of humility rather than victory. Bing Crosby, a famous singer and broadcaster made the following statement: "Today, though, our deep-down feeling is one of humility." This is a rather remarkable statement about the end of the most ferocious war in human history. There was no bravado, no hubris, no sense of triumph; instead the dominate sentiment, repeated throughout the broadcast, as Brooks reports, was that bravery, sacrifice and conviction led to the victory for which we should feel " more grateful than proud."

As we think about this language, we can realize that achievement is less of a celebration of the self and more of a recognition that the self is contextualized by many factors, including others, and that human accomplishment tells us that we should value each other because of our understanding that life at times is collective. Many critics of Elizabethan Drama, while recognizing that Shakespeare was a dramatic genius, also recognize that his work didn't occur in a vacuum but was a part (the pinnacle) but still a part of a larger explosion in the writing of drama.

Brooks further remarks that "It occurred to me that I had just watched more self-celebration after a two-yard gain that I had heard after the United States won World War II." His reference here is to watching a defensive lineman dance around the field after making a tackle after a two yard run. The point being that the paradigm has shifted from understanding triumph as an act of humility and celebrating it as a larger moment in one's life to the current situation of self-directed self-congratulatory expression of the miracle of the individual.

For us at Garden School, the idea of the individual is an important one; however, the idea of the individual and the relationship between that individual's success and the context in which that success occurs. In a way, what Brooks is suggesting is that we as a cultural have developed into a paradigm where each individual act receives the adulation as each success is the equal of every other. What this suggests is that our culture has emphasized only one kind of success: that measured by numbers, wealth and power. Brooks suggests that there is another version of success that should be measure by character growth, the embodiment of value and the degree of altruism present within that model of success. Our mission is to fuse these two modes of success into one: celebrate the individual and the collective success both for its qualitative accomplishment and for its quantitative growth. No easy task—but one worth all of our individual and collective energy.