



GARDEN SCHOOL NEWSLETTER



Richard Marotta, Ph. D., Headmaster

Volume 93 Number: XIII

"Cultivating Success in Every Child"

Friday, December 18, 2015



Thoughts for the Week

By Richard Marotta, Ph.D., Headmaster



As we prepare to break for the winter holidays, I realized that almost half of the school year has quickly transpired. At a meeting last night, some heads of school and I were discussing the speed with which the school year unfolds and how rapid and dynamic the teaching is within these first few months of school. More and more of our discussion focused on teaching—its pacing, its dynamism and its challenges.

I have been thinking about this for a long time and have been teaching and observing teaching for many years in many different schools. This ‘act’ that we call teaching has many sides to it, none more important than the interaction between teacher and student. Yet this in itself can have many faces to it as well. Perhaps some of the basic context for the activity comes from the etymology of the word ‘teach’, which emerges from an Anglo Saxon word meaning ‘to show.’

I suppose that the etymological meaning of ‘to show’ touches upon the role of teacher in a very static way. Showing characterizes a more traditional and conventional approach to teaching that assumes a degree of certainty in the teacher’s knowledge. It also suggests that there is a fixed body of material that the teacher can ‘show’ by a method of presentation that is clear but distant. Yet we use the idea of “show,” such as a movie or a documentary, throughout our culture to share what we know, to demonstrate a process or to enlighten our audience.

Perhaps etymologies give us the origins of the word with the understanding that a word itself is not static; it evolves with the thinking that uses it and re-imagines it in terms of its own needs and goals. ‘Showing’ in our culture and school does not encompass the art of teaching that supports and fulfills our mission. We have defined teaching in a more dynamic way: engaging, motivating, inspiring, guiding, learning. As a teacher, I realize that I have to show a certain amount of ‘material;’ I also know that that is not enough. I know that I also need to inspire students to ‘own’ the importance of a subject or an idea. I know that I need to motivate students to move out of themselves or into themselves at any given moment. I know that I need to learn from the students as well as ‘show’ them what I think I know.

My point is that teaching has moved beyond its etymology into a more dynamic, fluid and esthetic reality. Teaching touches upon the communal nature of our identities, upon the shared and agreed upon body of knowledge, upon the undiscovered body of knowledge that is waiting to be uncovered through exploration. Teaching can reach into each one of way and help us discover our own identity within a very complex and plentiful world. Teaching is a response to life.

I wish everyone in the Garden School community a very Happy Holidays!