



GARDEN SCHOOL NEWSLETTER



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Thoughts for the week

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Building a community of learners is one of the primary tasks of an independent school. It is within the structure of our community that learning becomes simultaneously an individual and a collective act. This process of blending the individual and the collective takes its origins from the very beginning of educations. As we look over the history of education, we have to acknowledge that the word college, for example, comes from *collegiums*, which means to read together.

The practical issues surrounding building a community of learners center on the school's ability to create an environment in which mutually shared, or at least acquired, interests can flourish within the framework of the learning community. When we think about curriculum, we need to look at the history or the literature we study. Does that curriculum unite us in a collective exploration of a topic that allows us to see the links between the past and the present, between the choices faced by prior generations and the choices faced by the current generations, and perhaps, even more profoundly, how does the study of history, literature, science etc. help explain the very essence of human nature?

All of our curriculum work ultimately is an attempt to understand our nature and our identity. When we examine a historical moment, we, of course, focus on the details of that experience: the context, the causes, the effects become the center of the approach to the topic. The same is true for literature. When we examine a character or a narrative, we seek to identify the primary characteristics of the experience. Yet, the embedded curriculum is the same one that Plato and Aristotle struggled with in their philosophy: what is the essence of human nature? Ultimately, that is the heart of all curricula.

The high level of self reflection through the examination of an objective idea or situation brings us to the meaning of evolving into a community of learners. We study a subject to understand it objectively; then we extrapolate from that subject a level of collective or communal meaning and finally, we move to the issue of what does our course of study teach us about human nature. The difficulty for all of us is that human nature combines the biological, psychological and the culture. Unpacking this complex association of forces is the true essence of education. *Nosce teipsum—know thyself.*