



GARDEN SCHOOL NEWSLETTER

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Thoughts for the week

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Throughout the independent school community there are discussions taking place about the idea of literacy. For centuries and in the most traditional sense, literacy has been defined as our ability to read and write a specific language. Today, that definition has been expanded to include a wider definition of language. We speak of technological literacy, global literacy, emotional literacy, economic literacy, media literacy and so on.

As our world has grown and changed in the way in which it both sees and presents itself, our 'languages' have mirrored that growth in what may be considered to be almost exponential. Each area of our lives has developed a specific language with its own vocabulary, connotative and denotative ranges and with a specific correspondence to a reality. Fifty years ago, economic literacy meant understand savings and interest rates; today it requires us to understand all of the different instruments in our investment or retirement portfolios. Fifty years ago, global literacy mean studying geography; today it means understanding the intense political, economic and cultural links among nations. Fifty years ago, technological literacy meant knowing how to make a long distance call; now it means knowing how to navigate the internet, face time, video conferencing, depositing checks with a cell phone; fifty years ago emotional literacy meant thinking about mental states in almost moralistic ways; today, emotional literacy means understanding how the emotional, non cognitive aspect of our lives can be a force for success or failure; fifty year ago media literacy meant choosing between a FM or an AM radio; today, media literacy means understanding how to live stream a conference that ten thousand miles away on your cell phone.

The list is endless; however, the point is clear. Our world has created various and complex forms of literacy that we, our children and our students need to understand, be able to use, create and, most importantly, to humanize. Especially with technology and media, we must be served by its use and not find ourselves instead at the mercy of our reliance, or worse dependence, on technology. As our 'language' demands become more complex, our need to humanize these 'languages' and to integrate them in a balanced way into our lives grows equally in importance.

For the last two decades, I am gratified that Garden School has grown in relation to these changes as well. Our incorporation of technology has developed into a support and an expansion of curriculum; our celebration of the global community has encompassed both curricular changes as well as an international student program. There is a far greater understanding of the importance of emotional sensitivity and of the emotional intelligence throughout our school.

All of the changes point to the modern school model which, more than ever before, is a model of change and adaptability. When we think that the university curriculum didn't change for a thousand years and now our curriculum has changed in a thousand ways over the past twenty years, our responsibility is to help our children thrive in this new environment. Our educational conversation needs to center on how to make these skills available to our children, how to encourage them to enjoy this new world, how to stimulate them to take ownership of all of the "literacies" required to live a full and successful life in a world in which opportunity is created every hour.

Finally, the greatest literacy of all is for our children to understand their environment and to move the conversation about their world forward in the most humanistic way possible. That is the mission!