

How are Our Classrooms Different?

part of our Parent Education Literature Series



by Lisa Lewis

What is so special about the classrooms at the Classical Academy? We have often been asked this question, and it's a great one that has several points to the answer. Size, structure, emphasis, and partnership are unique distinctions of the classrooms at the Classical Academy. Each of these carefully considered and planned distinctions set our classes apart from others on the Central Coast.

The class size limit is twelve for each learning group at the Classical Academy. Research has shown a class size of twelve to fifteen to be the optimum learning size for both instructor and student. There are two reasons for this. The first is practical – if there is whole group work to be done the instructor can easily touch base with each student; if there is small group work to be done it is also easy to form three smaller groups where each student can have an active role within the group work and simply being the passive observer is not one of the roles! The second is relational – with only twelve students in each class, the instructor has the opportunity to know and understand each student's personality, learning style, strengths and weaknesses. This becomes key in helping each student succeed and grow.

The structure of Classical Academy classes varies from a traditional setting not only in size but format as well. Our length of

day is only five to six hours long. It is divided into learning segments approximately one hour in length, addressing four subject areas in grammar school (K-5) – math, language arts (specifically literature and writing), history, and science – and six subject areas in middle school (6-8) – math, language arts, history, science, logic and Latin/vocabulary. The site teachers at the Classical Academy lead the pace of instruction by mapping the course work for the students both on site and at home.

Families have additional academic subjects that they are solely responsible for: spelling, handwriting/keyboarding, fine arts, physical education, and any additional electives, such as foreign language or life skills. Often, it is possible to integrate the instruction of these additional subjects at home into the core subject studies.

Another point of distinction is with what we emphasize within the classroom. The core emphasis at SLO Classical Academy is the development of thinking skills at each progressive level. Students are presented with many open-ended questions, given "think time" and encouraged to

respond in a variety of ways. Within each class there are many opportunities to discuss a topic together as a class as well as in small groups. At each age and stage students are asked to restate concepts or topics learned rather than simply taking a test to show what has been learned. The students are encouraged to research further information on a particular topic and then demonstrate what they learned through oral presentations, essays, or projects to illustrate new knowledge. The

older student is asked to compare current cultural issues with the concerns of the past to link history to present day. Classical education emphasizes the integration of knowledge of the past with current events; questions of 'how' and 'why' are more frequent

than 'what' and 'when' in our classrooms. This focus on developing thinking skills is unique and stimulating, and children thrive academically, personally and even relationally in this environment.

The partnership between home and school that all schools desire is a final distinguishing characteristic of the Classical

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Academy. Classically trained and credentialed teachers lead education of students by mapping the curriculum for families. Within this framework individuals are given latitude to interact with the material at a level appropriate to each student yet always with the goal of growing and stretching further than where they currently are capable. The instructors are available to become both partners in the educational process and

us. Often, the best way to see what is so special about our classrooms is to see for yourself by scheduling a visit. We hope you take the time to observe and we look forward to sharing more of what makes education at the SLO Classical Academy such an attractive and beneficial model for students and families.

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Mentor Teachers to each family within their class. The feedback from families regarding their child is welcomed and encouraged as teachers seek to learn about each student and instruct accordingly. At the same time, parents are expected to take advantage of the experience and knowledge that the teacher brings to the partnership, allowing the teacher to mentor them when needed with the goal of providing the best possible education for each child.

Much more can be said regarding each of these distinctions for the classrooms at the Classical Academy and we encourage you to ask questions that may arise for you in your decision to join

Lisa Lewis brings 24 years of teaching experience in public, private and home schooling settings. She is widely respected as a teacher and is committed to her own life-long learning. Lisa has spent hours becoming versed in classical education and has used classical methods in her teaching. Lisa is one of the founders of SLOCA, and continues to work hard as the Director of Education to keep the vision alive and improve the model and quality of education.

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