

THE TORCH BY NOVA CLASSICAL ACADEMY

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A DEEP DIVE INTO CLASSICAL EDUCATION

The Torch: What is Classical Education Not? April 2022

In his poem "The Wastelands", T.S. Eliot's narrator calls April "the cruelest month". There are varying analyses about why he might have called April "cruel": spring is supposed to appear and yet it is still freezing, rainy, and unpleasant (sound familiar?); or winter is a place of coziness and the hope of spring is a jarring contrast. This paradox was a lovely way to start thinking about **what classical education is not**. In order to walk the path along with me, we will need to hold two truths as valid and not contradictory: **classical education is both constant and changing**.

Classical education has consistency in its pedagogical practice of the grammar, logic, and rhetoric stages. However, our educational environment is changing and there are certain places classical

education evolves along with it. I'll speak to those points as I offer some **nots** and **usually nots**:

- Classical education is **usually not** experiential, that is, "learning by doing". An example of this concept is how our Lower School students do not come up with hypotheses to science experiments on their own, but are guided by their teachers in the research process. As students progress through School of Logic and School of Rhetoric, they hone their research skills and can move into more experiential learning with a solid foundation.
- Classical education is **not** a flipped classroom, that is, content at home and practice at school. Teachers deliver content and allow time for guided practice in the class period. This methodology protects students from absorbing incorrect information during independent learning.
- Classical curriculum is **usually not** consistently changing. However, sometimes we need to make changes to existing and entrenched curriculum because it no longer serves the mission of our school. It is likely that Nova Classical will continue to teach epics such as the Iliad and the Aeneid, but we have let go of some literature that our students used to read when I first started here in 2011.
- Classical education, at least at Nova Classical, does **not** utilize a 1:1 device model for learning. Technology in the classroom is a tool used to enhance knowledge and is not the primary teacher.
- Finally, classical education does **not** have a specialized curriculum such as a technical or vocational school would. Instead, classical education leans on a wide range of subjects and reading in order to give students as much exposure to the world in order to be informed and liberated citizens.

Every now and again, I like to discuss education with my older sister, a reading specialist at a non-classical public school in North Dakota. During our discourses over the last decade, she has shared that their superintendent's office has changed the district reading curriculum at least twice, and taken on at least three new teaching and learning initiatives. If you're paying special attention to the math in the previous sentence, that means her district adopts an initiative and then allows it to fall away in order to pick up the next. My sister is one of the most positive people I have ever met, but even she is disillusioned by the consistent cycle of inconsistency. After these conversations, I find myself breathing a sigh of gratitude for where I work. Classical education is both constant and changing, which may seem paradoxical in definition, but is effective in practice.

Finally, as with all educational models, classical education **cannot be** everything to everyone. I was recently musing on a teacher from my background with whom I did not mesh. He would often ignore students who were struggling in my math class, since he was a staunch believer in "either you get it, or you don't". Instead of looking at this teacher as "bad", I have challenged myself to find ways in which his teaching inspired my own practice. To that end, we in classical education will continue to identify places to grow and change after analyzing current learning data and reflecting on stakeholder feedback.

May you find joy in paradox during the last week of April and beyond,



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