Classical Education and Learning Differences

 Our Savior Lutheran School is a classical Christian school in the Houston areas serving the community of Garden Oaks/Oak Forest. Classical education is an education for “all” and is a wonderful way to serve all abilities. The classical model is a way to teach “with the grain” ensuring that all students of all abilities learn how to learn and how to think. As a classical school of excellence, Our Savior Lutheran School has served non-neurotypical scholars well.

 To that end, this school year Our Savior Lutheran School has opened a Student Success Center for scholars in the second and third grades. Scholars in this age group who have been diagnosed with dyslexia have been invited to be a part of a self-contained classroom led by one of Our Savior Lutheran School’s teachers, Mrs. Tammie Wright. Mrs. Wright joined the faculty in the 2020-2021 school year from a Lutheran school in California where she served as the Resource Teacher. Last year, Mrs. Wright served as a first-grade teacher where she was able to assess students and identify needs for these children.

When our children begin school, learning to read is foremost on our minds. This concern is not without merit as everything we do as scholars revolves around being able to read efficiently. School then can be especially difficult for people with learning differences. Classical education addresses these difficulties in its methodology.

Classical education in the early years is the grammar stage. In this stage, instruction is focused on the building blocks of education, laying a foundation for later years of instruction. At its core, classical education is a systematic, explicit, and repetitive style of instruction. Learning to read in the grammar stage begins with direct phonics instruction. Our Savior uses an Orton-Gillingham based curriculum that follows the science of reading. The lessons taught are explicit, systematic, and multisensory. Each lesson is structured and builds off the previous lessons. Building those reading skills is much like building a house, you need a strong foundation. The use of an Orton-Gillingham based curriculum is beneficial to all students, but for students with learning differences, it is essential for them to succeed in gaining the necessary tools to read, write and spell.

Reading isn’t the only area where students with learning differences will succeed in a classical school. Learning how to properly form letters using cursive is an important process for the brain. Cursive helps children with the decoding process because it integrates hand-eye coordination, fine motor skills and other brain and memory functions. When writing cursive, the word becomes a unit, rather than a series of separate strokes, and correct spelling is more likely to be retained. Because all lower-case cursive letters can begin on the line, fewer of them are likely to be reversed. However, most critically, handwriting engages more cognitive resources than keyboarding does.

 Grammar students with dyscalculia will benefit from the systematic, repetitive, and consistent reinforcement of math concepts. Those with recall weaknesses can retrieve stored facts and rapidly identify numbers. This enables them to demonstrate their knowledge with the accommodation of extended time to complete work. Older students with reading and written language difficulties who are in the Logic and Rhetoric grades are given greater opportunities to demonstrate their strong cognitive abilities with the use of debates and discussions alongside their peers. Teachers at Our Savior Lutheran are equipped to teach using visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities which is excellent instruction for all students but especially for those with learning differences.

Students with learning differences will succeed in a classical education setting because the methodology equips them with a firm foundation in the Word of God and guides them on the pathways of learning.  Our Savior Lutheran School is pleased to be able to serve the community with classical education for all abilities.

Powers, Cyndi. “Why Bother with Cursive?” *International Dyslexia Association*, 1 July 2015, dyslexiaida.org/why-bother-with-cursive.