

Spirals: A reflective tool for exploring the depth and width of Adlerian practice.



Spirals was developed by Joy Mounter with children in her role as a primary school teacher. Together they created, 'a space we could hold open for our learning and reflections: a space for reflection and reflexivity over time: a space to generate our own understandings and self-identity, giving us the energy of motivation'. Spirals is intended to help us to discover, explore and improve our selves with respect to what gives meaning and purpose to each of our lives. As a living archive it can be in a form of personal choice. One of the oldest geometric shapes, the spiral is fundamental in nature, design and religion' (Mounter,2012)¹

Combining Carl Jung's description of a spiral as a cosmic force, its sacred meaning represents growth and the journey of life - through birth, the phases of life to death (reincarnation). It is the perfect symbol for integrating the journey of personal, academic and life learning into practical wisdom and good judgement. Spirals has become a method suitable for people of all ages wishing to pursue individual or collaborative enquiries in topics of personal interest, or more formal research.

In this video, Joy's class of six year olds speak about how they use the TASC wheel when working on their projects. Accessible at <http://youtu.be/hH2-5xexbAQ>. In the next annotated video Joy explains the development of Spirals to the Adlerian Skype Research group <https://youtu.be/0ZndMWaggXQ>. We consider suitability for Adlerian psychologists searching to explain their practice. Spirals combines two research methodologies TASC (Thinking Actively in a Social Context) and LT (Living Educational Theory).



TASC

TASC offers a guide through an enquiry process that includes personal and collective enquiries within their social context. Wallace's TASC wheel² (2004) offered a learning theory that made sense to Joy's class of 6 and 7 year olds, each engaged in understanding themselves as people, as learners and as part of their learning community. It was a natural progression for their development of the TASC wheel from a two

¹ Mounter's MA Dissertation, 'As a Headteacher Researcher how can I demonstrate the impact and self-understandings drawn from Living Theory Action Research, as a form of Continual Professional Development in education?' University of Bath, December 2012

² Wallace, B., Maker, J., Cave, D., and Chandler, S. (2004). Thinking Skills and Problem-solving, An Inclusive Approach: A Practical Guide for Teachers in Primary School. London: David Fulton Publishers.

dimensional wheel to understanding it as a three dimensional 'Spirals' model incorporating multiple themes. In later reflections and wider learning the children's explanation grew to a five dimensional model (Mounter 2019)³.

TASC offers clear guidance of an action research process suitable for the holism of Adlerian psychology used in practice. What is missing is a method to explain the less-tangible aspects of embodied personal style that individuals develop to make their unique relationships effective. LT research adds methodological support for understanding, checking and explaining individuality in practices.

Living Theory

Jack Whitehead's (1989)⁴ LT offers Spirals methodology for understanding, improving, evaluating and explaining relationship-based practice through the identification of values motivating a practitioner's intended behaviour. Values offer a means of explanation. Values are also useful as standards for the scrutiny of practical activities. A practitioner can show effectiveness and influence in their personal development, in their relationships with clients and in their wider social world by providing evidence of how values are realised in their work.



In Adlerian enquiries, the focus is usually on the meaning and purpose a practitioner gives to their life and work. For Adlerian psychologists, practice values are likely to be closely entwined in Adlerian principles showing the influence of private logic (Pound, 2019)⁵. The values motivating the practitioner's actions and purpose at work emerge and are clarified through the process of enquiring.

While useful to an individual for explaining their practice, values also serve as standards for rigorous checking that practice behaviour is as claimed. When a contradiction between a professed value and the reality in practice is uncovered, a new phase of enquiry is prompted. For more information and examples of LT research see the website www.actionresearch.net

Spirals for Adult Enquirers

For example:

- Practitioners wishing to understand, evaluate and explain their actions.
- Preparing evidence for BACP accreditation
- Research towards academic accreditation for a higher degree
- Exploring an interest such as 'How do I use Adlerian psychology in my life?'

The Spiral Process

Developed by Joy with children in a primary school:

We began by considering how we 'create knowledge', what does this actually mean? These are my thoughts developed as we wrote together:

³ Mounter, J (2019) Using Thinking Actively in a Social Context and Spirals in Living Theory research in explanations of educational influences in a global social movement. *Gifted Education International*

⁴ Whitehead, J. (1989) Creating a living educational theory from questions of the kind, "How do I improve my practice?". Published in the Cambridge Journal of Education, 19(1); 41-52

⁵ Pound, paper on values and private logic?

'Time through learning is a transitional experience that ripples out affecting all it touches as specks of consciousness, momentarily felt. Dimensional impacts bounce and meander, spiralling within the sphere we create and beyond those we are aware of. This transitional inflection or vortex, stores on some level the awareness to process in the moment it is felt or until that moment may never be found again. Can we be reflective learners if we only have the ability to reflect in the near moment and not within the vortex of thought that impacts on who we believe we are, but have no recollection of the time or space it was created. We cling to the awareness or feeling of some distant thought or connection or let it go and return as a variation of thought, as a connector to our past. The creation of knowledge implies by its nature, the concept of birth and oneness of ideas, but isn't it a mirror of all that we are through the moments we save, the connectors produced and analysed as new growth. Tangled but clarified by historical reflections and strength of the future we as yet have no experience of?'

(Joy Mounter, 2008)⁶

Names the children gave to the sections are retained in the Spirals adaptation presented here:

Dear Me

Dear Me is the first part of Spirals. It is space to reflect on past experiences, present situations and how these are affected by your passions, values, beliefs, opinions, attitudes and interests. Reflect here on the person you are and the person you show others.

For Adlerians, life style and personal goals arising from private logic, social history and creativity will influence the direction of these reflections.



PRISM: a Rainbow of skills and resources

Communication: Online, Questioning, Empathy, Self Expression
Inquiring Mind : Curiosity, Reflection and Outlook, Making links
Active Learning: Resilience, Grit, Focus, Optimistic Belief
Creativity: Passions, Interests, Imagination, Creativity, Hopes, Joy
Self-identity: Myself as Researcher; Myself as practitioner
Emotional Resilience and Well-being, I am important, My future
Problem Solving: Reasoning, Planning, Lateral Thinking
Adventure: Active, Healthy Living, Courage, Social



Adobe stock

⁶The Time is Right Now! 'How can I enhance the educational influence of my pupils in their own learning, that of other pupils, myself and the school?' 3rd MA Educational Enquiry

MeSearch - bringing the threads together


MeSearch is a place to pull threads together from other sections as you ask and explore the project question. This is the Generate segment of TASC where creative ideas emerge and are checked with others asking similar questions. Ideas are tested in practice prompting more questions. Further explorations and firming up of ideas follows in collaboration with all involved. Together an explanation is built. This collaborative questioning and checking, using values as standards is the rigorous validation process of LT.

MAD - Making a Difference in Community

Joy's pupils, by asking how she could write about learning without them, changed the fluidity of the teacher role between her and her pupils. It led to their awareness and desire as a learning community, to make a difference to their own learning and to the learning of others.

'Making a difference (MAD) that is important to each of us', Joy reports, 'is the community thread running through Spirals, with a community ethos held open for each of us, our classroom and other practices. We are contributing, feel valued and have a voice. We are exploring our learning skills, attributes, beliefs and popular learning theories whilst spending time understanding ourselves and our place in the world.

*Reflections through TASC and Spirals leads us to a sense of well-being, confidence and living wisdom as we continue to grow. The more we reflect and explore our learning, the more we feel need for a way to hold that space, as an inner understanding and resilience, to others in community. LT adds the description of a life-affirming energy, experienced and held within, but offered as a gift in community to make a difference that contributes to flourishing of humanity.'*³



Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

- Margaret Mead