

THE TORCH BY NOVA CLASSICAL ACADEMY

THE TORCH

A DEEP DIVE INTO CLASSICAL EDUCATION

The Torch: Spiraling in Classical Education November 2021

“All things from eternity are of like forms and come round in a circle.”
-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations II. 14

Last month in *The Torch*, we explored the Trivium and how we can apply the learning stages to many different disciplines. This month, I'd like to delve into the concept of “spiraling” in regards to classical education. Back in February of 2021, our Nova pedagogy leads -Becky Lund from the School of Grammar, Brandon Foat from the School of Logic, and Sara Seal from the School of Rhetoric- presented a professional development session for our teachers about the Curricular

Tapestry at Nova. In this presentation, they offered the **three tenets that define our Nova curriculum: Classical, Connected, and Spiraling.**

I will delve deeper into the Classical and Connected portions of our curriculum in a later *Torch*, but as this month comes to an end, I'd like to briefly talk about Spiraling and why we do it at Nova. Spiraling is an instructional practice where concepts are first taught in their simplest form. At some point in the future, **the curriculum loops back (or spirals) to teach the content at a level of increased complexity.** This process can be done many times and helps ensure that the learner is ready to process the new content as it is building on their previous knowledge.

Something you'll start to know about me (or maybe you already do) is that I love to dig into the meaning of a word and unravel that meaning in order to better understand it. The word *curriculum* is of Latin origin meaning "a running" or "course" (as in a race course). Whether it be a chariot race from *Ben Hur*, or the NASCAR races of current times, the course goes **round and round in an oval- spiraling ever closer to the finish line.**

In classical education, there is no finish line *per se*, but **spiraling allows our students to build from a broader to a deeper understanding of subject matter**, work with more sophisticated primary texts, and develop a clearer conception of how ideas have unfolded over time. Our Nova curriculum spirals from grade to grade- a student will come back to the concept of verbs each year in Language Arts or Latin, as well as spirals from stage to stage - students will study the American Civil War in 4th grade (Grammar stage), 8th grade (Logic stage), and 11th grade (Rhetoric stage) History.

This spiraling allows students to sort and classify their thoughts. As we learn, we sort material that we revisit as important and therefore move that information to a place where we can easily retrieve it for future reference. Students are **prepared to refine their perspectives on the American Identity in 11th grade history due to their experiences in 4th and 8th grade** history. Peter Brown in *Make it Stick* describes the practice of Spaced Retrieval where we can see spiraling at play: "working backward and forward helps [the learner] stitch less familiar material to more familiar, deepening his mastery of the [material] as a whole". The revolutions around the curricular spiral are not in vain, but based on the science of learning.

2020 was a year of many monikers, but one standout of quarantine was that 2020 was the Year of the Rewatch. People stuck in their houses uncertain about the future came back to familiar series: *The Sopranos*, *Seinfeld*, and *The Office*. Nielsen data showed that Americans streamed more than 57 billion minutes (!) of *The Office* in 2020, nearly 10 million minutes more than its closest rival. There are several interesting theories as to why people continue to rewatch series to that degree, but the most compelling to the concept of spiraling is the idea that **returning to a subject again and again allows the viewer to deepen not only their own understanding of a subject but also their connection to that subject.** The feeling of connection (to anything) became more and more important as the year went on, and so rewatch ratings continued to climb- and still do.

At Nova Classical Academy, we strive for understanding and connection in our collective learning. **The spiraling nature of our curriculum provides a space where we build on a firm**

foundation, regularly return to that foundation, make connections, and refine our thinking. In December, we'll explore the Grammar Stage of Nova's pedagogical model, which will bring much needed light to the darkest month of the year.

Light a candle and snuggle in for your favorite rewatch,



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