

L2: The Cultural Research Method 1 and the case of the Imaginative Anthropomorphism

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We will begin by considering the cultural research method. For Steiner, cultural research, in essence, consists in trying to understand human beings **primarily as individuals**, i.e. not just as members of a species or groups, as is the case in the organic method, nor as mere outcomes of external events and processes, as in the case of the inorganic method. Essentially, the cultural method involves understanding humans as beings of thought, feeling, will and beings who have a free “I”. In relation to his educational ideas, this has a specialised manifestation and a particular twist.

If you recall, Steiner's idea of education is that the teaching / learning method needs to be adapted to the development of the child. In the first column from phase 2 shown in the last "lecture", you will see that, for Steiner, the child's basic feeling for the world is that "everything is human". This has a particular connection to the "cultural research method".

To begin with, let us consider the cultural research method and an idea which Rudolf Steiner presented in his lecture cycle "The Kingdom of Childhood". Speaking of the first third of the class teacher period he said:

"Therefore it is important to speak of everything that is around the children—plants, animals, and even stones—in a way that all these things talk to each other, that they act among themselves like human beings, that they tell each other things, that they love and hate each other. You must learn to use **anthropomorphisms** in the most inventive ways and speak of plants and animals as **though they were human.**" (chapter 2, p.31).

It would be helpful to read this chapter now, the book is included in the attachments. To try to exemplify this and the cultural research method generally, let us consider the case of the Russian folk tale "Masha and the Firebird". **It would be good to read the story now.**

The imaginative anthropomorphism as presented by Steiner is a teaching method he considered appropriate for most of the first three years of the class teacher period, i.e. when the children are in the age range from just before 7 years to just over 9. In other words, the first three years of formal schooling in Steiner Schools. This method re-sculptures the understanding towards seeing all the world as a human being, a being with thinking, feeling, willing and an “I”.

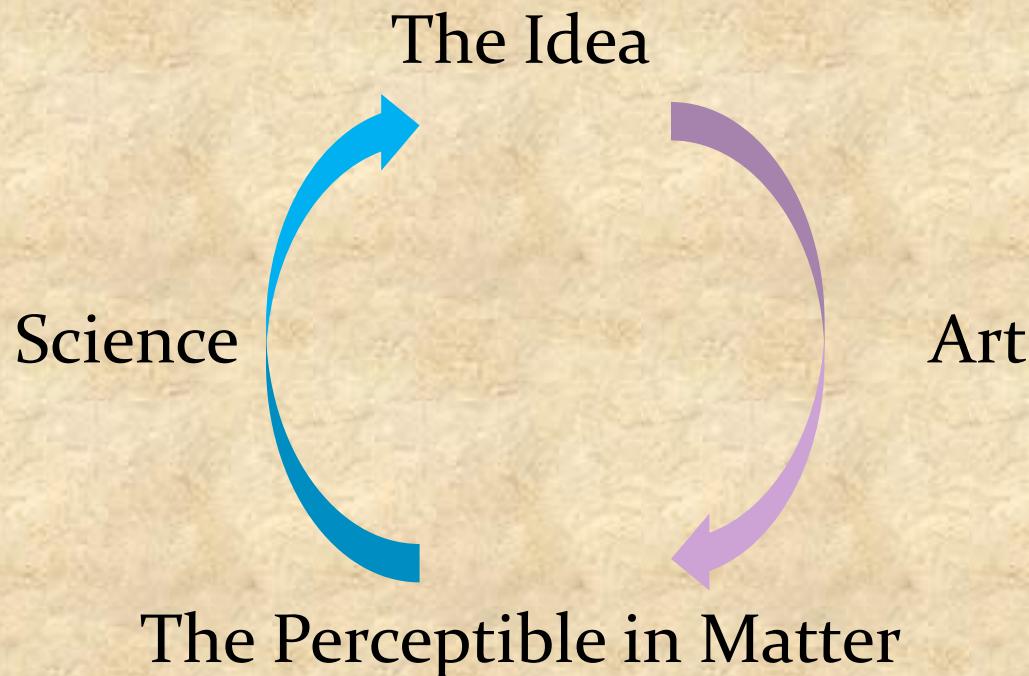
For the purposes of this particular module, this means that the “cultural research method” becomes a primary means to create a curriculum appropriate for this age range. Steiner intended that teachers would create stories around this principle of the anthropomorphism, imaginations as it were, of the beings of nature, whilst at the same time introducing something of the real life character of them.

From the Cultural to the Artistic Method

In the context of Steiner education, the cultural method introduced here comes into close contact with another method, namely that of the artistic. This can take on many forms and does not merely refer to the pictorial, but can also include other types of art such as music, sculpturing, eurythmy, etc. What I want to introduce here, however, is Steiner's basic artistic method or research as indicated in the slide on the seven types of research. From his "Theory of Knowledge" he writes:

“The activity of cognition, as well as that of **art**, requires that man elevate himself from reality as product to reality as the producing; that he ascend from the created to creation; from chance to necessity... Every object of reality represents to us one of the innumerable possibilities lying hidden in the creative bosom of Nature. Our mind rises to the vision of that fountain-head in which all these potentialities are contained... Our mind rises to the vision of that fountain-head in which all these potentialities are contained. Here one sees how the true artist must create out of the fountain-head of all existence; how he stamps upon his works the inevitable which, in science, we seek in the form of Ideas in Nature and in the mind. Science discovers in Nature her conformity to law; art does no less, except that it imprints this upon crude matter. An artistic product is no less a part of Nature than is a natural product, except that natural law has been poured into the former as it manifests itself to the human mind.” Steiner, R (1888): A Theory of Knowledge Implicit in Goethe’s World Conception, XXI Scientific Knowledge and Artistic Creation.

These are lofty thoughts, so a picture may help to indicate the distinction Steiner makes between the scientific and artistic methods of research:



So what you see here is that Steiner defines the difference between the scientific and artistic research methods in terms of a difference in **direction** between the “Perceptible as Matter” and the “Idea”. For Steiner, science is defined in terms of the process going from the Perceptible to the Idea and art is defined as the opposite direction: from the Idea to the Perceptible. So what does this mean for the practice of education?

Exercise:

This section involves you carrying out an activity which explores a number of different elements. Firstly, it involves a cultural science research activity, including the principle of anthropomorphisms; secondly, it considers the exercise as an artistic research method.

Assuming you have read the story of “Masha and the Firebird”, could you do the following:

- 1) Identify the main characters and what their human-like (anthropomorphic) qualities are.
- 2) Make a detailed description of the nature of the eggs including what is on them (see slides later). Identify the inherent “Idea” of each egg and its component “Ideas”. Consider here the artistic research method in respect of how specific “Ideas” have been translated into matter. You will need to be quite inventive here.

- 3) Identify the point in the story when things started to go wrong for Masha and what was the ethical character of this moment.
- 4) What were the moral trials that Masha had to undergo due to this. Describe the nature of the trial and what were the main creatures associated with them.
- 5) What did Masha have to do with the eggs and why do you think this was important. Identify and practice the artistic process of creating the representations on each egg.
- 6) What do you think the essence of the story is and do you think there is a connection to the World's environmental and social questions.
- 7) In what ways is it good for children to have an **imaginative** sense for these things.

Masha and the Firebird: a Cultural and Artistic Research activity

In the book, you can find the following poem and pictures. It would be a good exercise to try to get a feel for these by having a go at painting some eggs. You don't need to copy the ones below, but they may give you a starting point. You may also like to try to create and write an extended poem or a song that encapsulates the essence of the story. **From Masha and the Fire Bird:**

**“Earth and Water, Fire and Air,
Firebird’s eggs so rich and rare,
Life and Death together dwell,
Cradled by love in a perfect shell”.**

Earth Egg



Water Egg



Air Egg



Fire Egg



Cultural Research Method 2

In these power points, we will look at another example of the cultural method, particularly to do with the spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of Steiner Education content. The example we will look at is the so-called “Canticle of St Francis of Assisi”. As you will see, it is of a “more older character” than “Masha and the Firebird”.

St Francis (1181-1226) was an early 13th century Christian monk and has been recognised by some as the patron saint of ecology. He was renown for his connection with nature and wrote the “Canticle” (a type of spiritual poem or hymn). If you are not a religious person or of a different faith, just see it as a poem. It would be helpful to read the canticle now:

Saint Francis of Assisi (1181-1226): Canticle of Brother Sun

Most High, all-powerful, all-good Lord,
All praise is Yours, all glory, all honour and all
blessings. To you alone, Most High, do they
belong, and no mortal lips are worthy to
pronounce Your Name.

Praised be You my Lord with all Your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,
Who is the day through whom You give us light.
And he is beautiful and radiant with great
splendour, Of You Most High, he bears the
likeness.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and
the stars,
In the heavens you have made them bright,
precious and fair.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brothers Wind
and Air, And fair and stormy, all weather's
moods, by which You cherish all that You have
made.

Praised be You my Lord through Sister Water,
So useful, humble, precious and pure.

Praised be You my Lord through Brother Fire,
through whom You light the night and he is
beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You my Lord through our Sister,
Mother Earth
who sustains and governs us,
producing varied fruits with coloured flowers
and herbs.

Praise be: You my Lord through those who grant
pardon for love of You and bear sickness and
trial. Blessed are those who endure in peace,
By You Most High, they will be crowned.

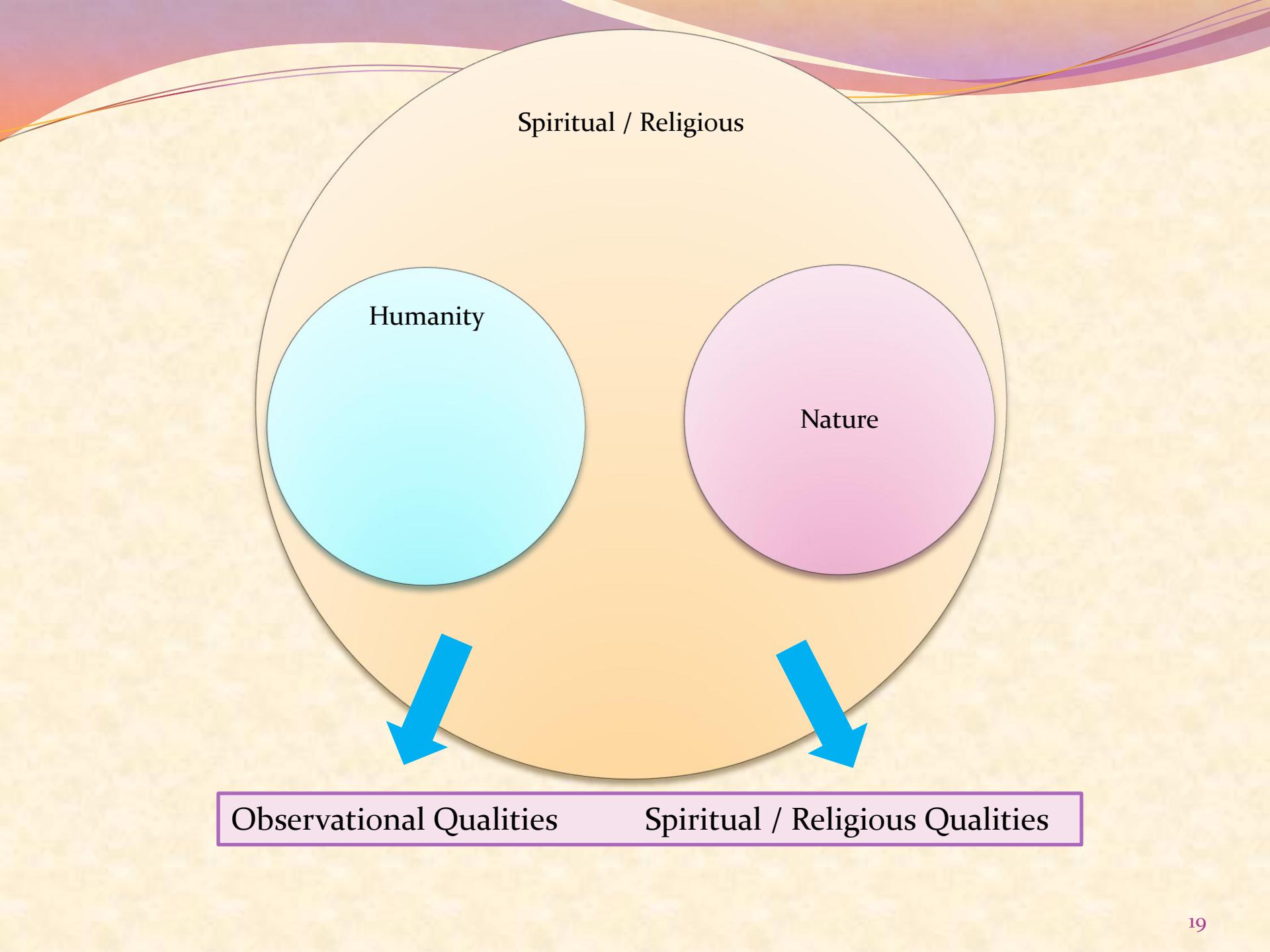
Praised be You, my Lord through Sister Death,
from whom no-one living can escape.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin!
Blessed are they She finds doing Your Will.
No second death can do them harm.

As you can see from your reading of the canticle, the text is enveloped by religious language of 13th century Christianity. You might want to pause and have a think about the relevance of this today, particularly in connection with Steiner education, bearing in mind the global reach of this education and the applicability of it to other cultures and religions.

As you will see during the Diploma, Steiner education often has elements within the teaching periods that are of a “spiritual” nature. So, for example, a typical lesson may have near or at the beginning a poem or a song to introduce the day’s or week’s topic in artistic form. The poem then acts as a kind of “spiritual” envelope for the subject to come.

It also needs to be born in mind that the aim is not to do this at the cost of the nature of the subject concerned, but to try to make a connection with what Steiner considered to be the deeper dimensions of human life and the World generally. There are of course many questions surrounding this approach, such as its justifiability, but for now we would like to describe the type of thing that may occur in Steiner Schools (not that it does or must, simply that it can).

In this, then, there are at least a couple of descriptive qualities that may be used, one that may depict what I will call the “spiritual” and the other the “observational” (meaning accessible to the ordinary senses). This can be presented as follows:



Spiritual / Religious

Humanity

Nature

Observational Qualities

Spiritual / Religious Qualities

As you can see from the canticle, there are distinct spiritual and observational qualities to each of the beings represented. At the top of the canticle is that which St Francis calls the “most high” and I am taking this to mean his view of “God”. Most of the stanzas below have some reference to this in addition to providing some observational qualities.

Exercise:

Make a list comparing the different qualities, spiritual, anthropomorphic and observational/phenomenological, of the beings that appear in each of the stanzas. From this build up a picture of the structure of the universe as depicted in the canticle. Make some reflections on whether or not this, or something like this, could play an important role in education today as well as modern society. You might find the following table helpful. If you want to do it on your own, don’t move to the next slide yet.

Structure of the Cosmos:

	Spiritual Quality	Anthromorphic Quality	Natural Quality
The Most High			
The Sun			
Moon & Stars			
Wind & Air			
Water			
Fire			
Earth			
Humanity			
The Divine			

Exercise:

You might like to try a poem of your own which meets the same criterion as this one. You might also like to create a more artistic picture of this rather than just a list.

Try to have a think about the educational value of this kind of approach and how it may lead to a different relationship to nature and humanity as the child grows up.

As said, the canticle shows a distinction between “observational qualities” and “spiritual/religious qualities”; this is something that can be deduced from the Canticle. Most modern forms of education focus on the first of these, the observational qualities, as it is based on influences from natural science (as we saw to some extent by the “Hard Times” text). Religion, or spirituality more generally, frequently concentrate on the second type of qualities. The question for education is: should or can these be unified?

There is a question here concerning the mismatch between the normal forms of mainstream education and that of Steiner. Most of us have been educated in a predominantly **Secular Education**, which requires the separation of the content of most of the curriculum from religion or spirituality. This may appear to stand in quite a stark contrast to what is sometimes called “integrated learning” of which Steiner Education is one example. The following slide shows a table characterising some differences:

Secular Education	Integrated Education
<p>Separates all subjects of the curriculum: a religion/spirituality part, a physics part, a history part, etc.</p>	<p>Tries to integrate the subjects where relevant and / or make connections between them.</p>
<p>On the positive side, is an attempt to prevent indoctrination. But, in an extreme form has the potential to lead to fragmented learning and ultimately to a fragmented society.</p>	<p>Considered by some to lead to indoctrination into religion, but can be argued to lead to connectivity of facts and values in learning and a feeling for wholeness in knowledge and society.</p>

Research Questions:

- 1) Does nature have “spiritual” qualities that are linked to observational qualities?
- 2) Is our responsibility for nature dependent on integrated education about spirituality, morality and nature?

Perhaps you might like to look into these questions and the role they could play in a person's education and life generally.

If you want to extend your studies on this topic, please read the article: **“Creating place-based Waldorf festivals an ethnographic study of festivals in two non-European Waldorf schools, by Vera Hoffmann, RoSE Journal** (No connection to my name by the way). This article is included in the learning materials for this module.