

## L2) Fields of Creative Education Research: Finding Oneself, Locating Steiner; Exploring the Wholeness of Human Nature. By Dr Robert Rose

When one comes to researching a subject, such as education, it is thought by modern scholars that we approach it from “somewhere”, not “nowhere”, Alexander, H (2006). What this means in this context is that we all bring with us to a subject a given background, a set of assumptions and pathways of thinking, feeling and acting in relationship to it. With this, especially if one is a teacher or parent at a Steiner school, comes a certain number of hopes and expectations which may, or may not, cohere with the education on offer. Awareness of this is critical to the health and well-being of a school and its participants and puts all parties concerned into a research-like position. This means that it is important to have an understanding of the areas or fields of research there can be in Steiner School contexts as well as how individuals approach these through their own given set of assumptions and pathways of approach.

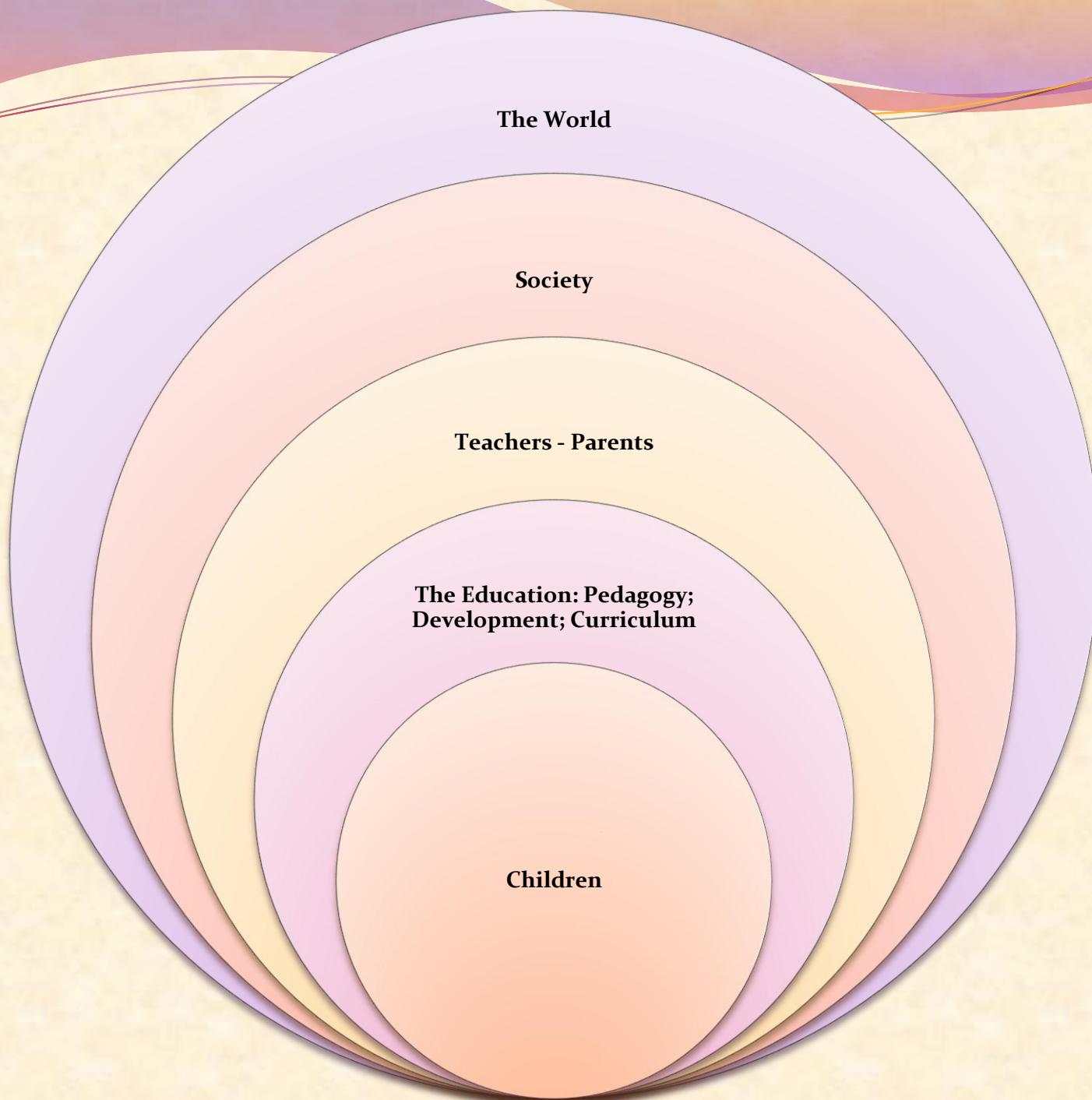
In the previous power point, it was indicated that in Steiner Education there are many areas of research involving many universal as well as specialist fields which play into the education. The task in this power point is to explore some aspects of the **Fields of Research** and their applicability to Steiner Education and to consider Steiner's own views on research in relation to the education as well as find ones own position and question it. This will eventually lead to the central research question of Steiner Education, namely that of Human Nature and its development.

One of the questions you might like to consider is: when one contemplates the different fields of education research, are there some research frameworks (ways of doing research) that are compatible and some incompatible with Steiner Education?

Quite often when people think of research in the context of education what they have in mind primarily concerns the **content** of what is taught, i.e. the **curriculum** and the **methods** to get this across to the children, i.e. pedagogy. In Steiner education, the research field is somewhat broader. If we recall from lecture 1, you were presented with the following quote:

“The art of education (about which we will say a great deal during this course of lectures) is based entirely on **knowledge of the human being**. If such knowledge is to have a deep foundation, however, **it must be based on knowledge of the entire universe**, because human beings, with all their inherent abilities and powers, are rooted in the universe. Therefore true knowledge of the human being can spring only from knowing the world in its entirety. On the other hand, one can say that the educational attitudes and ideas of any age reflect the general worldview of that age. Consequently, to correctly assess current views on education, we must examine them within the **context of the general worldview of our time**”. Steiner, R (1921): *Soul Economy and Waldorf Education*, Anthroposophic Press, (p. 14) (my emphasis)

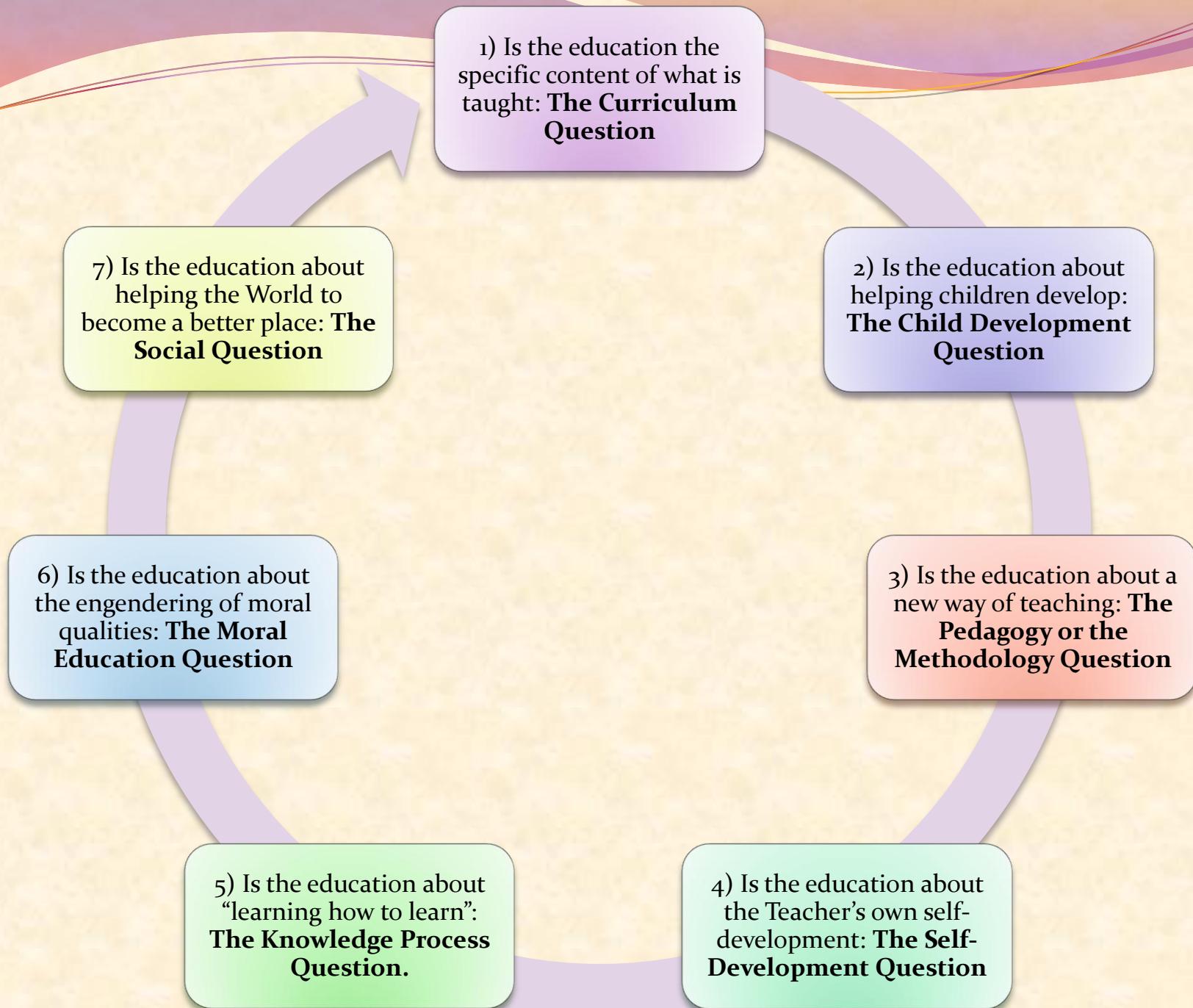
The first question related to this here concerns the **field of beings** that we are referring to and which provide the core of what the role of research is in a Steiner School. Consider the following slide to get an overview of the different fields or spheres of possible research in the context of Steiner Education:



In the context of Steiner Education research questions can arise about the interaction between the different levels represented by this picture. Teachers and parents present in a Steiner School bring with them their own individual knowledge of: the World, Society, other teachers and parents, education and children. Each person has an individualised pathway through life, and its associated knowledge base, and they carry this into the context of school life. With this come many hopes and aspirations. Everybody comes from “somewhere” not “nowhere” and interprets the World accordingly. Of course this is very general, but each element of these levels can be seen mirrored in each individual person and child in a complex number of ways.

In terms of the children, as well as each child being a unique individual, reflected in their being are images, or elements, of the World, Society at large, their past education, their parents and teachers as well as other children. These are significant areas of research from a Steiner Education perspective as the education is formed or adapted to child/human development and these layers are reflected there and may aid or hinder the educational process. Knowing which of these it is, is a research question.

A further aspect to researching Steiner Education can be seen as a series of interconnected questions about what the education is aiming for:



# Human Nature as the Primary Research Principle

As has been stated in the module descriptor: **the focus of this module is Steiner's concept of Human Nature and its role in understanding child development and education.** The next few slides give a very brief overview of this, the details of which can be found in power point L2b. This concept is the foundation of the whole of Steiner/Waldorf Education and, without it, could not exist. It is important therefore for participants to begin an in-depth study of this as we will be returning to it repeatedly throughout the course.

The power points L3 & L4, give more of a background to how Steiner developed these ideas from the point of view of the research process. In that sense, it would be of value for participants in order to orientate themselves to different approaches to knowledge itself. Thereby we will make some inroads into knowledge of the human being and then education based on body, soul and spirit.

In Steiner education, the idea of Human Nature is normally associated with wholeness as Steiner often said that education should aim to develop the **“Whole Human Person”**:

“Our task is to introduce an education that concerns itself with the **whole person - body, soul, and spirit** - and these three principles will become **known** and recognized”. Steiner, R (1924/1995): The Kingdom of Childhood, Anthroposophic Press, p. 5. (My bold)

The question then is: what do these words mean in the context of Steiner’s views on education? What is the **Whole Person** and what are **body, soul and spirit**? This power point and a study of “Education of the Child” will constitute the beginning of an answer to this question; the power points L3 & L4 consider the question as to how this is **known**. This “knowing” is what philosophers might call the “epistemology of human nature” (see optional study at the end of this power point). For now we will explore the concept of Human Nature.

In the context of Steiner's concept of whole human nature, one of the prominent features of his education is that it is more "**human capacity**" orientated rather than **content** orientated (see next slide). Even the latter is seen as a means to help the human being develop such that Steiner Educators ask the question: how does this or that subject of the curriculum help with the development of human capacities? In other words, **Steiner / Waldorf Education strives to cultivate the different human capacities through the education process:**

"We must realize above all that by employing our method we will, in a certain way, harmonize the higher human being (the human spirit and soul) with the physical body (our lower being). The subjects you teach will not be treated as they have been up to now. In a way, you must use them to develop the soul and physical forces of the individual correctly. The important thing for you is not to transmit information as such but to **utilize knowledge to develop human capacities**. First and foremost, you must begin to distinguish between the conventional subject matter of tradition (though this may not be stated clearly and concisely) and knowledge based on the recognition of universal human nature". Steiner, R (1919): Practical Advice to Teachers, Anthroposophic press, p 1. (My bold)

If you have read Rudolf Steiner's early work "Education of the Child in the Light of Anthroposophy" (1909), you will find that a central example of creative research in Steiner Education is that of Steiner's philosophy of human nature and child development or human development more generally. **If you haven't read this text, it would be good to read it now and try to develop a good understanding (see L2b).** When reading it, it would be good to bear in mind what it is that Steiner is trying to explain. That is, there is a set of **phenomena** that he considers to be accessible to anyone willing to make observations of their own, as well as other people's, nature. He then makes the case for quite distinctive types of **explanation** which refer to a number of **levels of reality** or **types of capacity** of the human being. When you consider these levels or capacities contemplate the nature of your own experience of them and see if they tie up with Steiner's explanations. As you will see, in this text, Steiner first describes the nature of the whole human being in terms of body, soul and spirit. Try to see if your own experience and explanation of them agrees or disagrees with Steiner's. I have summarized these very briefly in the next slides:

You will also find this concept in his earlier works, such as “Theosophy”. There Steiner described his views concerning the “Three-fold” nature of the human being:

	<b>Level of the Human Being or Type of Human Capacity</b>
<b>Spirit</b>	The “I” or “Ego” as the Centre of the human being, the Point of Self Reflection and Power of Creativity.
<b>Soul</b>	Inner reality: Thinking, Feeling, Willing, Perception and Consciousness.
<b>Body</b>	Outer Reality: Physical Substance, Forces and Form.

He then expanded each of the three into a further three, giving the nine-fold human being:

# Human Nature

TYPE OF BODY / FORCE		PHENOMENA / EXPLANATORY PRINCIPLE
Spirit	Spirit Body	The “I” “substance” in terms of higher ideals such as truth and goodness.
	Life Spirit	The “I” metamorphoses or “grows” through higher ideals.
	Spirit Self and “I”/Ego	Active Inner Agent and Power of Self Transformation. The “I” individualises itself through ideals
Soul	Spiritual / Consciousness Soul	The Inner awareness of the “I”/Spirit-Self and the power of thought as applied to the spirit.
	Intellectual Soul	The power of thought as applied to sense-perception.
	Sentient Soul	Feeling, Desire and Will Impulse in themselves
Body	Soul / Astral Body	Foundation of Feeling, Desire, Perception and Will Impulse in the Body.
	Life Body	Growth, Life, Metamorphosis, Propagation, Habit.
	Physical Body	Mineral / Physical Substances and Forces

Steiner subsequently contracted this down to four as he conceived them as a unity in daily life:

I / Spirit	As the lived unity of spirit-self, life-spirit and spirit body coupled with the consciousness soul.
Soul or Astral	As the unity of sentient body and soul and intellectual soul.
Life or Etheric Body	The powers that give life
Physical Body	The fundamental materials and forces of the body

These he then converts to the time image shown in the slide below showing the different **levels of the human being** in a **phased time development** as well as the **distinctive modes of learning and teaching** for each phase of development (This will be developed much more in module 3):

# Steiner Education, Life Phases and Pedagogy

“We shall not set up demands nor programmes, but simply describe the **child-nature**. From the nature of the **growing and evolving human being**, the proper point of view for Education will, as it were, spontaneously result”. Steiner, R (1909): Education of the Child in the Light of Anthroposophy, paragraphs 8 & 9. (My emphasis)

	Developing Levels of the Human Being			
Human Development	Physical Body 0 - 7	Life Body 7 - 14	Soul 14 - 21	I / Spirit 21 - 28
Pedagogical and Learning Principles	Imitation	Imagination, Feeling and Memory	Independent Thinking and Soul	Self – Activated Learning

## Research Questions:

There are many research questions that could arise in connection with the above table, here are some very general ones:

- 1) What are the research methods available, if any, in contemporary education research that may help understand Steiner Education?
- 2) Are they compatible with Steiner's theory of education or are they incompatible "paradigms"?
- 3) What role do Steiner's own research methods play in this?

For an **optional** extended study, we will next briefly consider some modern education research methods next in light of these questions.

# Modern Frameworks of Education Research:

Contemporary Education Research is based on a number of different questions which lead to different fields of inquiry and which influence the understanding and practice of education. In coming to an understanding of Steiner Education, it is important to have an overview of the different perspectives that education researchers have in order to evaluate a given type of education or an aspect of an educational philosophy. Outlined below are some of these perspectives and which can be found in more detail in the book by Cohen *et al* (2007) which you can find in the “Advanced Reading” file available on request:

- 1) What kinds of things exist in the World: for example, do the soul and spirit exist or only the physical? If so, should we teach on their basis and even teach children about them? [Philosophers call this field of study “**metaphysics**” or “**ontology**”]. As the previous slide shows, Steiner proposed an idea of education based on the real existence of soul and spirit and not just the body, or physical things and processes. So how does this influence the education?
- 2) A closely connected question to this is: how do we **know** what exists? By what principles of knowledge can we find out? As we will see in the next lectures, Steiner also had his own view about what knowledge is and through it he founded a new kind of education based on an extended view of knowing [Philosophers call this study of knowing “**epistemology**”].

3) What is human nature and does it develop? As can be seen, Steiner thought that the human being develops in terms of the different layers of human nature and not just with the accumulation of knowledge. Steiner thought that human beings were in their essence developing towards freedom, but there are other views which claim that the human being is conditioned, either by nature or society. [This is called **“Human Nature” Studies** and is a specialised branch of ontology / metaphysics].

4) Are there distinct methods to find out about human beings, are we just members of species or individuals? **[Methodology]**. Is there one type of method or many?

5) Is the social / moral a significant part of the content and method of education? [Social/Moral education research is sometimes called **“Axiology”** which can be seen as a part of **Ethics**]. For Steiner, Ethics in the context of education plays a very important role, not just in terms of educating the children from an ethical perspective, but also as a way of Being for the teachers and parents and as a way of improving teaching and learning.

In short, education research concerns itself with the following fields of questions:

- 1) Ontology / Metaphysics**
- 2) Epistemology**
- 3) Human Nature**
- 4) Methodology**
- 5) Ethical or Moral theory**

As we will see, each of these questions play into all forms of education in terms of **Curriculum** (i.e. the content of what is taught), **Child Development**, the **Principles of Learning**, and **Pedagogy** (principles of teaching).

In the next lecture, we will consider the role of “openmindedness” as the **primary** research position to come to an understanding of this view of human nature as well as other fields of research in Steiner Education.

As an exercise, you might like to write down your own view of human nature and education and how this compares to that of Steiner.

## Exercise

On the basis of a thorough study of “Education of the Child in the Light of Anthroposophy” (attached with these materials) and these power points, using your own words and giving explanations and evidence, write your own summary of Steiner’s 3-fold and 9-fold human being. Discuss these in light of what it means to educate the whole person. This could be of value for your assignment.