



CHAPTER EIGHT

Art, Nature, and Education: Rabindranath Tagore's Holistic Approach to Learning

Kathleen M. O'Connell

WHEN CONSIDERING individuals whose lives represent the fullest artistic self-expression, it is difficult to find a more productive and humane figure than Rabindranath Tagore. As Asia's first Nobel laureate,¹ his genius helped shape the sensibility of modern Bengal and, more generally, India. Considering that Tagore worked without a computer, or even electricity much of the time, and that he had no secretary until late in his life, his creative output is all the more astonishing.

Tagore composed his first poem at age 8 and by the end of his life had written more than 25 volumes of poetry, 15 plays, 90 short stories, 11 novels, and 13 volumes of essays and had founded and edited numerous journals. He prepared Bengali textbooks, kept up a correspondence comprising thousands of letters, composed more than 2,000 songs (including 2 that would become the national anthems of India and Bangladesh), as well as creating more than 2,000 paintings. Besides his educational and literary work, he was an actor, singer, director-producer, religious commentator, occasional participant in the political arena, cultural ambassador, and initiator of rural development projects. It is also noteworthy that his creative output during the last years of life was not only prolific, but also innovative.

The first section of this chapter focuses on Tagore's philosophy of life and education. It begins with his historical and familial milieu, locating him within the 19th-century period known as the Bengal Renaissance, a particularly significant era in that it represented the first extended contact between

Ethical Visions of Education: Philosophies in Practice, edited by David T. Hansen. Copyright © 2007 by Boston Research Association for the 21st Century. All rights reserved. Prior to photocopying items for classroom use, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center, Customer Service, 222 Rosewood Dr., Danvers, MA 01923. USA tel (508) 750-8400 www.copyright.com

Europe and India. The important role that his family and early childhood experiences had in shaping his educational thought is examined, as well as the way that his poetic sensibility and exposure to rural Bengal affected later priorities in his school at Santiniketan. Three central foci of his educational paradigm are highlighted: direct experience, creative sensibility, and dynamic global interconnectivity.

In the second section I look at the working out of Tagore's educational vision within the three components of his learning center at Santiniketan, which is located about 100 miles from Calcutta on his family's property. These include Santiniketan, a primary school founded in 1901; Visva-Bharati, an all-India, Eastern, and global learning center inaugurated in 1921; and Sriniketan, a rural reconstruction center instituted in 1922. In the third section I examine the envisioned role of the teacher as conceived by Tagore as creative facilitator and moral guide. In the final section I assess Tagore's educational legacy and its relevance for today's world.

HISTORICAL AND FAMILIAL INFLUENCES

Central to Tagore's life was the development of a creative alternative educational system in Santiniketan (the Abode of Peace) in Bengal, India, to which he dedicated the last 40 years of his life.² He indicated in his autobiographical writings, which were mostly written in Bengali, that the evolution of his school at Santiniketan reflects his own personal development. Born in Calcutta, West Bengal, in colonial British India in 1861, Tagore came from a distinguished family whose members were participants in three major revolutions affecting India: religious, cultural, and national. The Tagores were on the forefront of these transformations, and they were instrumental in shaping new forms of Bengali language, literature, music, and art, as well as facilitating socioreligious change and nation building. Tagore's grandfather Dwarkanath was involved in almost every aspect of social reform of his period, supporting hospitals, educational institutions, and the arts and fighting for religious and social reform, as well as for a free press. His father, Devendranath, through his leadership in the religious reform group Brahmo Samaj, was also instrumental in social and religious reform, and he encouraged multicultural exchange in the family mansion. Because of their active roles in these movements as outspoken critics of the status quo, the men were often ostracized, forcing them to cultivate a sense of independence and to create their own standards.³ Tagore grew up within this atmosphere of critical thought and artistic achievement, and his appraisal of the existing educational system would have been shaped by the high standards that existed within this richly diverse family setting.

Much of the cultural exchange that occurred during this period took place right within the Tagore home, called *Jorasanko* (the living university)

as he later called it), the sprawling joint family mansion that now houses Rabindra Bharati University, in Calcutta. There, foreign visitors and pundits⁴ of great learning would visit his father's drawing room to discuss politics, the scriptures, and sciences while musicians displayed their skills. Tagore's 13 siblings and extended family created a self-contained educational system, and it is not surprising that he found outside schooling greatly lacking by comparison. His immediate family excelled in math, literature, music, theater, and journalism, while his cousins, who shared the family mansion, showed great interest in science and spearheaded a new art movement that became known as the Bengal school of art. As the youngest, Tagore especially benefitted from this richly stimulating environment and was able to develop the many facets of his intellect and creativity in an unregimented manner. His early experiences at Jorasanko greatly affected his later ideas on education and convinced him of the need for a flexible, open-ended educational system that operated at multiple levels, as well as of the desirability of a hospitable community as learning environment.⁵

Tagore's emphasis on individual freedom in education and on the essential role of the arts for developing empathy and sensitivity can be directly linked to these early years. As he wrote,

Fortunately for me I was brought up in a family where literature, music and art had become instinctive. My brothers and cousins lived in the freedom of ideas, and most of them had natural artistic powers. Nourished in these surroundings, I began to think early and to dream and to put my thoughts into expression. (1917, pp. 139–140)

He also felt an intense connection with the natural environment. Nature was experienced as a vital playmate and companion who had something cupped in her hands and was always asking with a smile, "What do you think I have?" As he discovered, such an early sensitive connection with nature was a state that set children apart from adults and must be nurtured at an early age or it would be lost.

Tagore's poetic perceptions also profoundly defined his approach to education and the outside world. He credits several illuminating experiences from his youth with shaping his life and creative direction; in particular, he spoke of one experience that occurred when he was 18. It began while he was standing on a balcony watching the sun rise, and carried over through the next 4 days. Its impact remained with him all his life; so much so that he was still speaking of it on his 80th birthday. It was a heightened moment, he wrote, as though a mist had lifted and "the invisible screen of the commonplace was removed from all things and all men, and their ultimate significance was intensified in my mind" (1931, pp. 93–94).

The perception of a vital connection between an ever-changing natural world, humanity, and a guiding creative force profoundly influenced Tagore's educational vision. It is worth quoting at length on the epiphany that led him to this worldview.

The whole scene was one perfect music—one marvelous rhythm. . . . Everyone, even those who bored me, seemed to lose their outer barrier of personality; and I was full of gladness, full of love, for every person and every tiniest thing. . . . That morning was one of the first things which gave me the inner vision, and I have tried to explain it in my poems. I have felt, ever since, that this was my goal: to express the fullness of life, in its beauty, as perfection—if only the veil were withdrawn. (1929, p. 24)

As poet-seer (*kavi*), he felt responsible to a creative force, to which he gave many names over the years: the Great Accomplisher of Creation, Greater Man, Universal Man, the Ever Furtherer, the Exquisite Reveller, the Beguiler, the Great Architect, the Great Rejoicer, and so forth. As the years went on, his vision of a unity underlying creation became expressed educationally in ever-widening terms of global inclusion and cultural interaction.

Another formative experience that set Tagore apart from his peers was his connection with rural Bengal in the 1890s, when his father surprisingly put him in charge of the family's rural properties in East Bengal. This would have been unusual given Tagore's position as the youngest son of the family. At first Tagore's poetic imagination was inspired by the beauty of the countryside, and a series of poems, stories, and letters poured forth. Gradually, though, he became aware of the acute material and cultural poverty that permeated the villages, as well as of the great divide between uneducated rural masses and city elites. These experiences led to the later establishment of a Rural Reconstruction Center at Sriniketan that involved students and teachers in constructive service: literacy training, alternative educational methods, social work, and the promotion of cooperative schemes.

PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE AND EDUCATION

Direct Experience

As Tagore matured into one of the world's great artists, he began to critique the existing educational system, something he found woefully inadequate for developing the immense potential of the human personality. Children, he argued, have enormous, unrealized potential and a unique "freshness of the senses" that becomes dulled and is gradually lost if not cultivated in the early

years. Education, he argued, must consider all dimensions of the child's personality, not just the verbal or cognitive level. The type of nonlinear, subconscious learning that he envisioned was something vitally connected to all aspects of life, and it contrasted starkly with what he found in the foreign-model schools that he attended and rejected. He likened their negative learning to an educational factory that was "lifeless, colorless, dissociated from the context of the universe, within bare white walls staring like eyeballs of the dead" (Chakravarty, 1966, p. 214). There, the physiological needs of children were stunted and ignored, and they were forced to sit inert, "like dead specimens of some museum," while lessons were pelted "from on high, like hailstones on flowers" (Chakravarty, 1966, p. 214).

Tagore's first major address on education "Siksar Herfer" (Discrepancy in Education), delivered in 1892, constituted one of the first comprehensive critiques of English-medium education in India.⁶ In it, he criticized the discrepancies that existed between an English model of education as it existed in England and an English model of education in India. He argued for a creative style of teaching and learning that would encompass the education of the whole child, advocating (1) the need for joyous learning and the experience of mental and physical freedom, (2) a linguistic medium connected to a child's social and cultural environment, (3) accessible well-educated teachers who inspire, (4) a multilevel curriculum to stimulate critical thought and creative imagination, and (5) learning in the holistic world of nature for empathy. Later addresses would reinforce the emphasis upon direct experience in learning and the need to balance cognitive and affective learning:

We have come to this world to accept it, not merely to know it. We may become powerful by knowledge, but we attain fulness by sympathy. The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence. But we find that this education of sympathy is not only systematically ignored in schools, but it is severely repressed. From our very childhood habits are formed and knowledge is imparted in such a manner that our life is weaned away from nature and our mind and the world are set in opposition from the beginning of our days. Thus the greatest of educations for which we came prepared is neglected, and we are made to lose our world to find a bagful of information instead. We rob the child of his earth to teach him geography, of language to teach him grammar. His hunger is for the Epic, but he is supplied with chronicles of facts and dates. . . . Child-nature protests against such calamity with all its power of suffering, subdued at last into silence by punishment. (1917, pp. 116-117)

For Tagore, creative education starts with a closeness to nature, and one of his central goals was to enable his students to vividly experience the ever-changing patterns of the natural environment. Turning to the indigenous model of the *tapovan*,⁷ or "forest school" of ancient India, he set out to

develop a small alternative learning center on the family estate in Santiniketan in 1901. In the practical working out of his vision, Santiniketan was an ideal location in that it provided a beautiful natural setting that had associations of physical and mental freedom for Tagore. He had been able to retain his sensitive appreciation of nature, or his "child-mind," as he called it, and to make it the basis for understanding the needs of children.

Through his art and the structure of the curriculum, Tagore tried to convey to the students the subtle resonances that existed between the moods of nature and their own personalities. The school day began with a short period of meditation, and he created seasonal plays and ceremonies to celebrate nature's changes in order to help sensitize the students to its fluidity. "One of the seminal lessons children learn in nature," he writes, "is improvisation without the constant imposition of the ready-made" (1931, p. 178). This gives them the occasion to explore their abilities through "surprises of achievement" and to observe creative patterns in life. The great gift of children, he writes, is that they are able to come directly to the intimacy of this world with the freshness of their senses: "They must accept it naked and simple and must never again lose their power of immediate communication with it" (p. 173).

Creative Sensibility

Also central to Tagore's educational vision, and linked to a direct experience of nature, was the enhancement of a student's aesthetic sensibility. His goal in starting a school, he stated, was to create a poem "in a medium other than words" (1961, p. 286). Drawing on his home life at Jorasanko, he tried to create an atmosphere at Santiniketan in which the arts would become integral and where there would be a sharpening of the senses. One of the first areas to be emphasized was music. He writes that in his adolescence, a "cascade of musical emotion" gushed forth day after day at Jorasanko. "We felt we would try to test everything," he writes, "and no achievement seemed impossible. We wrote, we sang, we acted, we poured ourselves out on every side" (1917/1962, p. 198). Dance and the visual arts were also built into the daily life of Santiniketan students.

In presenting a model for his teachers, Tagore tried to re-create the same stimulating Jorasanko cultural atmosphere of artists and thinkers to inspire his students. He held up his brother Jyotirindranath as a model educator for how he had treated his pupil—none other than young "Rabi" himself—as an equal and encouraged him emotionally. As he developed his Santiniketan model, Tagore, or Gurudev, as he was affectionately called by his students, provided an inspiring role model, albeit a difficult one to follow. With his multiple talents, he could spontaneously create games, plays, dances, and songs to engage the students

In an effort to develop self-esteem, Tagore treated the Santiniketan students with great respect. In teaching, he also believed in presenting difficult levels of literature, which the students might not fully grasp, but which would stimulate them. Students were allowed access to the room where he read his new writings to teachers and critics, and they were encouraged to read their own writings aloud in special literary evenings. The writing and publishing of periodicals had always been an important aspect of Jorasanko life, and students at Santiniketan were encouraged to create their own publications and published several illustrated magazines. Children were prompted to follow their ideas in painting and drawing and to draw inspiration from the many visiting artists and writers. Tagore was able to attract such notable artists as Nandalal Bose, Ramkinkar Baij, and Binodbihari Mukherjee to live among the students and mentor them on a daily basis. A highlight of the school year was the Nanda Mela, which celebrated the artistic achievements of faculty and students, permitting them to display and sell their work. This process continues to the present day, when students are fortunate to have resident artists such as K. G. Subramanyan and Jogen Choudhury to mentor and inspire them.

Most of Tagore's dramas were written at Santiniketan, and the students took part in both the performance and production. He was also one of the first to support and bring together different forms of Indian dance. He helped revive folk dances and introduced dance forms from other parts of India, most notably Manipuri, Kathak, and Kathakali. He supported modern dance and was one of the first to recognize the talents of dancer Uday Sankar, who was invited to perform at Santiniketan.

Dynamic Global Interconnectivity

As Tagore gained international fame and began traveling and establishing links with artists and intellectuals throughout Asia and the West, the educational curriculum at Santiniketan broadened further. His initial educational concern had been to develop an alternate model for primary education. When he established Visva-Bharati as an Indian university, he turned to the development of a national model for higher education.⁸ Just as the *tapoban* had served as his prototype for Santiniketan, for Visva-Bharati he referred to the ancient Buddhist monasteries of Nalanda, Taxila, and Vikramshila as Indian models of hospitality, cosmopolitanism, scholarship, and a harmonious relationship with the local community. Visva-Bharati was to operate on three levels: as an Indian university, as an Eastern university, and as a global cultural center.

The motto chosen for Visva-Bharati was *yatra visvam bhavati ekanidam*, or "where the world comes together in a single nest." The constitutional statement, in effect a mission statement, articulates the broad, integrating

ideals of the institution and designates Visva-Bharati as an Indian, Eastern, and global cultural center:⁹

- To study the mind of Man in its realisation of different aspects of truth from diverse points of view.
- To bring into more intimate relation with one another, through patient study and research, the different cultures of the East on the basis of their underlying unity.
- To approach the West from the standpoint of such a unity of the life and thought of Asia.
- To seek to realise in a common fellowship of study the meeting of East and West and thus ultimately to strengthen the fundamental conditions of world peace through the free communication of ideas between the two hemispheres.
- With such Ideals in view to provide at Santiniketan a Centre of culture where research into the study of the religion, literature, history, science, and art of Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Zoroastrian, Islamic, Sikh, Christian and other civilizations may be pursued along with the culture of the West, with that simplicity of externals which is necessary for true spiritual realisation, in amity, good-fellowship and co-operation between the thinkers and scholars of both Eastern and Western countries, free from all antagonisms of race, nationality, creed or caste and in the name of the One Supreme Being who is Shantam, Shivam, Advaitam. (Visva-Bharati Prospectus, 1922, p. i.)

SANTINIKETAN, VISVA-BHARATI, SRINIKETAN: THE SCHOOL AS MICROCOSM OF THE LIVING WORLD

Santiniketan

In developing his educational paradigm, Tagore likened the subconscious mind to a tree that absorbs its nutrients from the surrounding atmosphere, and he aimed at creating an open-ended, alternative learning situation that reflected the world. The starting points were the local environment and the natural world. With these in mind, he formulated a curriculum that would revolve organically around nature, with classes held in the open air under the trees, providing for an unstructured appreciation of the plant and animal kingdoms and seasonal change. He also insisted on simplicity in the learning environment, arguing that luxury, too much educational paraphernalia, and excessive concern about methodology actually prevented children from experiencing life directly. He ~~felt that preoccupation with~~ material things

coarsened the sensibilities, whereas concern with beauty and order released the mind from inertia, greed, and ineptitude. "The joy of creative writing increases in proportion," he writes, "as we are able to shed the ornate and the superfluous." He argued that the simple ashram procedures provide the opportunity for "revitalizing the principles of cooperation in daily life" (1983, pp. 13–14). For the Santiniketan students, community cooperation extended to caring for their sick peers, as well as helping to fight fires in the neighboring villages.

To illustrate the way in which the externals of education can dominate and overshadow the real purpose of education, Tagore wrote a fable titled "Totakahini," or "The Parrot's Training," featuring a bird that sings all day but never recites scriptures. A brief summary of the allegory provides insight into the simple but penetrating way in which he often presented his educational critique. The story involves a local Raja, who decides that the parrot needs to be educated and summons his pundits, who decree that the bird's ignorance is a result of his living in a nest. A golden cage is built, and the pundits decide that textual materials are needed. Scribes diligently copy from books, and copy from copies, until manuscripts are piled up to an unreachable height. Everyone agrees that great "progress" has been made. Later, the Raja summons his education department to see how things are going. They come to the Great Hall with conch shells, gongs, horns, bugles, trumpets, cymbals, drums, kettledrums, tomtoms, tambourines, flutes, fifes, barrel organs, and bagpipes. The pundits chant mantras, while the goldsmiths, scribes, supervisors, and countless cousins all cheer. The Raja is forced to agree that it all seems "fearfully like a sound principle of Education" (1964, p. 86). Finally, a fault finder asks the Raja if he's actually seen the bird, and the Raja has to admit that he has forgotten entirely about it. Before he has a chance to concentrate on the bird, the pundits distract him with elaborate explanations of the methods they have been using in instructing the bird. By comparison, the bird seems ridiculously unimportant and not worthy of attention. Anyway, its throat has become so choked from the pages of books, it can't complain. Occasionally it flutters its wings in the morning light until a blacksmith forges a chain, and the bird's wings are clipped. At last, the bird dies, and the Raja is informed that its education has been completed.

"Does it hop?" the Raja asks.

"Never!" reply the nephews.

"Does it fly?"

"No."

"Bring me the bird," commands the Raja.

When the bird is finally brought, the Raja pokes its body and discovers that only its inner stuffing of book leaves rustles, as outside the "murmur of the spring breeze amongst the newly budded *asoka* leaves makes the April morning wistful" (1964, n. 88).

Tagore's goals at Santiniketan were for a learning environment that was simple, flexible, and organically related to the child's needs. Children did not sit on chairs, but rather on hand-woven mats beneath the trees, which they were allowed to climb and run around between classes. Nature walks and excursions were a part of the curriculum and students were encouraged to follow the life cycles of insects, birds, and plants. The afternoon schedule included outdoor games and free time in nature; evening functions were also outdoors and astronomy was a part of the evening activities. Class schedules were made flexible to allow for shifts in the weather or giving special attention to natural phenomena.¹⁰

With one of the world's finest nature poets as their mentor, the Santiniketan children were able to listen to first readings of his work and participate in festivals and plays that he created on-site to celebrate the nuances of nature. Such festivals included the Basant Panchami (Spring Festival) and the Barsha Mangal (Rain Festival), which later included a special tree-planting ceremony, the Brksha Ropana, introduced in July 1928. As part of this ceremony, each child was encouraged to adopt a tree. It was, in Tagore's words, "a ceremony of the replenishing of the treasury of the mother by her spendthrift children" (quoted in Mukherjee, 1962, p. 235). In the villages, he celebrated the harvest cycle with Hala-karshana, a festival celebrating the cultivation of the land, and a harvest ceremony, the Nabanna, which welcomed the new rice crop.

Visva-Bharati

The meeting-ground of cultures, as Tagore envisioned it at Visva-Bharati, would be a learning center where conflicting interests were minimized, where individuals worked together in a common pursuit of truth and realized "that artists in all parts of the world have created forms of beauty, scientists discovered secrets of the universe, philosophers solved the problems of existence, saints made the truth of the spiritual world organic in their own lives, not merely for some particular race to which they belonged, but for all mankind" (1922, pp. 171–172). At the opening ceremony, he turned over the Santiniketan land, buildings, and library, along with the copyright for his books and interest from the Nobel Prize money, to Visva-Bharati. He spoke of the radical changes taking place in civilization and the need for new forms of education. Visva-Bharati was to be an experiment in which individuals of different civilizations and traditions learned to live together, not on the basis of nationalism, but through a wider relationship of humanity (Sykes, 1947, pp. 84–85).

To encourage mutual growth and understanding, Tagore invited artists and scholars from other parts of India and the world to live together at Santiniketan and on a daily basis to share their cultures with the students of

Visva-Bharati. His goal at Visva-Bharati was nothing less than the establishment of a cultural center in tune with the totality of global life, but he also realized that the only way to start was on a small scale. True to his expectations, stereotypes of various sorts began to break down as the Santiniketan residents lived beside one another over periods of time, forming long-term relationships and sharing their languages and music, dances, and other artistic forms. As an important experiment in human living, Visva-Bharati was highly successful, particularly in the early days when the community was small.

Sriniketan

There was also the outreach to country and villages, which was represented by Sriniketan activities such as literacy programs, malaria eradication, artisan-revival programs, and health cooperatives. In this way, Tagore worked to reduce the great divide between the educated urban elite and the villagers. Hoping to create a model for the country, he stated, "If we could free even one village from the shackles of helplessness and ignorance, an ideal for the whole of India would be established" (1961, p. 322). With the help of British agronomist Leonard Elmhirst and an able group of volunteers, Tagore set up programs to make the villages surrounding Santiniketan economically independent and culturally vibrant.¹¹

Tagore's emphasis on self-reliance and critical thinking was evident from the early days of Santiniketan, when students were required to take care of themselves as much as possible and to assist others. This philosophy characterized the Sriniketan activities as well, and various projects to help the surrounding villages with literacy training, fire control, and health improvements were initiated. As Tagore wrote,

Children need training in self-reliance and self-help from their early childhood. In our country this aspect of education is sadly neglected. Let the child never tire in his efforts to give play to his creative joy by inventing things with the help of whatever material lies ready at hand. Let him at the same time learn to find delight in voluntarily performing tasks calculated to add to the health, happiness and comfort of the community. . . . We are always ready to suppress any initiative on the part of the children to organize their own immediate environment for themselves. (1983, p. 13)

One of the most innovative of the educational initiatives at Sriniketan was a school called the Home School, or Siksha Satra, meaning "where education is given free." The school began in 1924 with 6 students and had increased to 20 by 1929. The learning framework reflected a more practical adaptation of the Santiniketan ideals: a close connection with the natural

environment, independent learning, training of the senses, holistic learning through creative activities, and the development of social responsibility and leadership skills. On the educational side, Tagore urged that mass education in the vernacular be undertaken through *melas*, or "country fairs," that would educate the villagers through folk plays, songs, mythological stories, traveling libraries, and lantern-slide exhibitions. The annual Sriniketan mela, which was instituted in the early 1920s to showcase various aspects of rural education and culture, continues to the present.

THE TEACHER AS CREATIVE FACILITATOR AND MORAL GUIDE

Throughout his life, Tagore put great emphasis on the importance of the individual, stating that he did not place his faith in any new institution, but in the individuals all over the world "who think clearly, feel nobly, and act rightly, thus becoming the channels of moral truth" (1922, p. 153). In seeking role models for his teachers, Tagore drew upon the forest gurus from the Indian past who, with their family and students, sought to create lives that were in harmony with nature. Along with presenting nature as the prime teacher, Tagore wanted students to live in close association with dedicated teachers of high aspiration who lived a life of "serene sanity." A "guru," as defined by Tagore, was a teacher who devoted his whole mind and spirit to the service of his students, was able to rise above financial considerations, and was able "to put life into his pupils with his own life, light their lamps with his own learning, and make them happy with his affection" (1961, p. 79).

Tagore felt that a teacher's ability to recognize the unique personality of each child and to guide each according to the students' capacities was far more important than facility in a particular teaching method. Teachers were advised not to be preoccupied with method but to allow their instincts to guide them, since each child differed from the next. Thus, "one must learn to know them, to navigate among them as one navigates among reefs. To explore the geography of their minds, a mysterious instinct, sympathetic to life, is the best of all guides" (1917/1962, p. 53).

The teachers whom Tagore sought for Santiniketan were those who were caught up with their subjects and, therefore, taught by transmitting a love of the material. Similarly, he placed ability over teaching qualifications when it came time to choose his instructors. The early Santiniketan teachers were chosen for their skill in a particular discipline, as well as their ability to inspire their young students. Teachers rotated subjects, and they were involved with their own special projects, in which the students were invited to collaborate.

Today, most teachers would be hard put to create a natural *tapoban* setting. Yet even within the *crowded urban conditions in which many teachers*

find themselves, there are lessons to learn from Tagore's example at Santiniketan. One would be the application of environmental relevance, that is, to connect the students to the natural and cultural environment and to study how this relates to the wider world. Tagore knew how influential the teacher as mentor and role model could be, and how much the students gained when a teacher demonstrated a real passion for his or her material. He argued that before one can become an effective teacher, one must develop a personal aesthetic and moral capacity and broaden one's outlook as widely as possible. In teaching, the instructor must always keep in mind that there are many ways to learn and many facets to each student, and that the non-verbal, nonlinear, affective side should be considered, as well as the linear verbal-conceptual side.

TAGORE'S EDUCATIONAL LEGACY

Tagore's educational efforts were groundbreaking in many respects and must also be seen in the context of a global network of pioneering educators, such as Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori, and Dewey, who rebelled against existing systems of rigid, authoritarian education. In a contemporary setting, his philosophy would have resonance with thinkers who advocate organic learning and cultivation of the affective side of the personality. In India, Tagore was one of the first to argue for a humane educational system connected to the environment and aimed at overall development of the personality. Santiniketan became a model for vernacular instruction and the development of Bengali textbooks; it also offered one of the earliest coeducational programs in South Asia. Similarly, the establishment of Visva-Bharati and Sriniketan led to pioneering efforts in many directions, including models for distinctively Indian higher education and mass education, as well as pan-Asian and global cultural exchange.¹²

Tagore's legacy as a pioneer educator is diffuse, living on through a vast circle of influence: artists whose work has affected Indian and foreign art; artists and scholars who went on to found or staff various artistic and academic departments and institutes; schools that have been patterned after the Santiniketan model; former staff members who have gone on to play significant roles in educational policy formation; distinguished graduates (including Indira Gandhi, Satyajit Ray, and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen) who have had a major impact on national and global affairs. Further, the example of Santiniketan and Tagore's articulation of the importance of cultivating one's artistic sensibility has helped to shape curriculums in many schools within India and abroad.¹³

The role of Rabindranath Tagore and Santiniketan in promoting ongoing educational reform must also be mentioned. As Humayun Kabir, a promi-

nent former Indian education minister, observes in his assessment of Tagore's educational work, "Practically every new development in Indian education since the beginning of the century owes something to the work which was initiated at Santiniketan" (1959, p. 52). One can find the influence of Tagore's ideas on vernacular and rural education in such important documents as the 1938 Basic National Education recommendations of the Zakir Hussain Committee, which were drafted by E. W. Aryaratnam, who had earlier been part of the Sriniketan team.

Tagore's life and work have special relevance for our own time. Above all, his insistence on the fullest possible development of the creative personality within a responsible and pluralistic social setting, his resistance to rigid narrowness or dogmatism of any sort, and his advocacy of human freedom and dignity continue to inspire those who strive for harmony in an increasingly divided world. His particular sensitivity to the problems of race, language, cultural differences, economic disparity, and political imbalance speaks to concerns that are with us nearly a century later. From 1912 through the 1930s, his global travels, Nobel Prize fame, and broadened exposure to other educational programs affected both his personal growth and the educational idiom at Santiniketan. Everything he learned became incorporated into his educational vision as he came to view education as a means to mutual understanding as much as to self-understanding. His approach was always open-ended, dynamic, and focused on real-world realities.

Tagore did not live to see India's independence, but he was very much caught up in the issues of national autonomy. As someone well versed in both Indian tradition and Western thought, he was constantly trying to navigate a space for modern India that included the most positive aspects of each, but was not imitative of either. His earlier participation in the Swadeshi movement had influenced his response to Mahatma Gandhi's educational and political goals and means, which he perceived to be narrow, authoritarian, and potentially violent.¹⁴ Thus, at the height of Gandhi's Non-cooperation in 1921, with laws and taxes imposed by Great Britain, Tagore argued for international cooperation and rejected political solutions in favor of social and educational ones. He inaugurated Visva-Bharati and expanded its emphasis on the arts to become an "Indian Center of Culture," broadened its linguistic and cultural links with other parts of Asia to become an "Eastern University," and allied its identity with all humanity in its activities as a "Global Learning Center."

Likewise, Tagore's desire to overcome social and material poverty and to break down the barriers between the urban elites and the uneducated rural population were expressed through the rural reconstruction ventures at Sriniketan. He knew personally the difficulties in trying to overcome innate prejudices and national chauvinism, and he spent his life developing creative ways for

individuals to relate harmoniously. Important to this scheme was

an emphasis on the aesthetic links between cultures and shared human concerns. His approach avoided stereotypical abstractions and advocated a small-scale approach. As he said, "Unity did not mean uniformity" (1961, p. 247). This places a strong emphasis on human respect and creative ways to bring various individuals into contact with one another in a hospitable and civil environment. Cooperation, mutual understanding, and "education for sympathy" (1917, p. 116) are championed over hostility and confrontation. What becomes important in Tagore's educational vision for educators today are the ways in which cultures and communities have furthered the human race through their creative and constructive visions of a shared humanity.



C H A P T E R N I N E

Artful Curriculum, Evaluation, and Instruction: Lessons Learned from Rudolf Steiner's Spiritually Based Waldorf Education

P. Bruce Uhrmacher

AN EMPHASIS ON the arts, the child's changing consciousness, and academics epitomize Waldorf education. But where did this perspective come from and why did it gain popularity? What are the details of its application to education today and the consequences of these principles and practices? In this chapter, I will elucidate the philosophy of education of the founder of Waldorf education, Rudolf Steiner, by discussing how he and those who have promoted the Waldorf approach aspire to create a better world through a distinctive fusion of traditional and nontraditional ways of educating. In particular, I highlight two core ideas in the Waldorf philosophy: the role of stories and storytelling, and the art of evaluation.¹ As we explore these ideas, Steiner's alternative views will be proposed as a path to refresh, revitalize, and reconceptualize our educational imagination. Were our world moving easily toward peace, justice, global prosperity, and environmental sensitivity, we might not bother to look beyond present-day philosophies of education. But given the many troubling trends in the modern world, alternative ideas such as those at the foundation of Waldorf education may offer new opportunities.

THE GENESIS OF STEINER'S WORLDVIEW

Rudolf Steiner was born in 1861 to Austrian parents in the small town of Kraljevec, Austria (now in Croatia). His father worked for the railroad and

Ethical Visions of Education: Philosophies in Practice, edited by David T. Hansen. Copyright © 2007 by Boston Research Association for the 21st Century. All rights reserved. Prior to photocopying items for classroom use, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center, Customer Service, 222 Rosewood Dr., Danvers, MA 01923, USA tel. (508) 750 8400.