

# The Educational Paradigms in Tagore's School Through the Lens of Continental Pedagogy

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∞ In today's world, the question of the impact of schooling on various aspects of the personality of children and adolescents is relevant and not just a question of the most effective teaching and learning process. For Tagore, the ultimate goal of education is *the all-round development of the individual to adapt harmoniously to reality*. The purpose of this article is therefore to detail Tagore's concept of comprehensive education and how it is reflected in the functioning of his school in Santiniketan. In addition, a qualitative theoretical analysis is undertaken to determine which of the four identified factors of education in the continental tradition (teacher, content of teaching, child and social environment) is the key medium of education in his school. The systematic analysis of the characteristics of Tagore's educational process and its requirements and objectives shows that he succeeded in integrating all four pedagogical factors known in the European continental tradition, which cannot be said of any of the European pedagogical theories presented (Herbartianism, humanistic or cultural pedagogy, reform pedagogy and socially critical pedagogy). Moreover, Tagore succeeded in bringing many theoretical concepts that are still relevant today (e.g., experiential learning, student participation, embodied cognition, the concept of a hundred languages) into the operation of the Santiniketan School in a very innovative way.

**Keywords:** Tagore, Santiniketan School, continental tradition, pedagogical paradigms, teacher, child, content of teaching, social environment, internalisation, communication

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## Pedagoške paradigme v Tagorejevi šoli skozi objektiv kontinentalne pedagogike

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≈ V današnjem svetu je čedalje aktualnejše vprašanje vpliva šolanja na različne vidike osebnosti otrok in mladostnikov in ne le vprašanje čim učinkovitejšega poučevanja in učenja. Za Tagoreja je končni cilj vzgoje in izobraževanja *vsestranski razvoj posameznika, da se harmonično prilagaja realnosti*. Namen tega članka je podrobno predstaviti Tagorejev celovit koncept vzgoje in izobraževanja ter kako se ta kaže v delovanju njegove šole v Santiniketanu. S kvalitativno teoretsko analizo ugotavlja, kateri izmed štirih identificiranih dejavnikov vzgoje v kontinentalni tradiciji (učitelj, vsebina poučevanja, otrok in socialno okolje) je ključni medij vzgoje in izobraževanja v njegovi šoli. Sistematična analiza značilnosti Tagorejevega vzgojno-izobraževalnega procesa ter njegovih zahtev in ciljev kaže, da mu je uspelo integrirati vse štiri vzgojne dejavnike, ki jih pozna evropska kontinentalna tradicija, česar pa ne moremo reči za nobeno izmed predstavljenih evropskih pedagoških teorij (herbartizem, duhoslovna oz. kulturna pedagogika, reformska pedagogika in družbenokritična pedagogika). Poleg tega je Tagore uspel številne teoretične koncepte, ki so še danes relevantni (npr. izkustveno učenje, participacija učencev, utelešeno znanje, koncept stoterih jezikov), na zelo inovativen način vnesti v delovanje šole Santiniketan.

**Ključne besede:** Tagore, šola Santiniketan, kontinentalna tradicija, pedagoške paradigme, učitelj, otrok, vsebina poučevanja, socialno okolje, ponotranjenje, komunikacija

## Introduction

From the point of view of educational goals, it can be stated that in certain societies school education is mainly focused on the acquisition of knowledge, while in other societies the formation of the students' personality is also an important goal. In the discussion of education, in addition to the question of educational goals, the question of the factors that contribute decisively to the achievement of goals is often raised. For Tagore (1917), "the highest education is that which not only gives us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence" (p. 142). The present article aims to compare his concept of education in Santiniketan with the European continental tradition (Biesta, 2011), where the question of shaping the whole personality is also relevant. Different scientific communities have researched education in different traditions of disciplined inquiry (Bridges, 2006; Lesar & Skubic Ermenc, 2017) and the differences are also reflected in the terminology. For example, the term pedagogy is used in some countries to designate specific scientific (as well as academic) disciplines (e.g., in Germany, Slovenia, Norway, Netherlands, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria), while in some Anglophone countries it has a much narrower meaning to refer more or less to the practice of teaching (Hamilton, 1999; Simon, 1999), for which we use the term didactic in the continental tradition. In addition, the naming of the educational process is not entirely comparable. In most countries that have relied on the continental tradition, two terms are known (e.g., *izobraževanje* and *vzgoja* in Slovenia, *Bildung* and *Erziehung* in Germany, *utdanning* and *oppdragelse* in Norway), emphasising a socio-culturally specific understanding of teaching-learning processes and personality-forming processes. In this article, we will use the term education in a broader sense that covers not only teaching-learning processes but also the formation of the whole individual. The fundamental pedagogical question within the continental tradition is which of the four known factors of education (teacher, content of teaching, child and social environment) is a key medium so "that a particular educational effect occurs, which manifests itself as a change in consciousness and behaviour" (Medveš, 2018a, p. 5).

When India was still an English colony, Tagore already noted that education for sympathy in schools was not only systematically ignored, but also strongly suppressed (Tagore, 1917, p. 142). He therefore concentrated his efforts on building a school that would give more answers to the question of how to achieve "fulfilment through sympathy" (Tagore, 1961) than to the question of an effective learning and teaching process. The case study of the Tagore School will provide a complex description and identification of key features of the educational process in the Santiniketan School through an analysis of relevant

(and linguistically accessible) documents and descriptions of the functioning of the school. Based on Medveš's theory of educational paradigms, a comparative theoretical analysis will also be undertaken to demonstrate the relevance of Tagore's concept of education to the present day from the perspective of someone closer to the continental tradition.

### **Basic features of Tagore's educational concept**

The task set – to compare the key educational paradigms known in continental pedagogy with the educational ideas and approaches as observed within the operation of the Santiniketan School – is anything but easy, since Tagore justified the operation of the school in various sources, not all of which are available in languages I know. I will therefore have to rely on the scholars of his educational concept who have published in English (Das Gupta, 2015; Debnath & Pal, 2015; Jalan, 1976; O'Connell, 2003; Salamatullah, 1961).

As I have already explained in one of my previous articles (Lesar, 2015), Tagore's conception of education in the life of the individual and in society is specific, described by some authors as romantic and idealistic in orientation (Ghosh, 2012; Pritchard, 2014). In his texts, we find many educational goals, such as education for international understanding and universal brotherhoods, and education to support rural reconstruction, among others. However, the ultimate goal of education – which is not derived from the outside world, but from Tagore's own experiences, practices and experiments – should be *the all-round development of the individual to adapt harmoniously to reality* (Jalan, 1976; Tagore, 1917): “The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence” (Tagore, 1917, p. 142). Harmony with the whole of existence can be achieved only when all of the abilities of the individual – physical, intellectual, emotional, social, moral and spiritual – are developed to the highest perfection. Tagore's concern for the development of the whole child is reflected in his specific solutions and the way the Santiniketan School worked.

Tagore attached great importance to *physical development*, as is shown by the fact that yoga, games (e.g., pass the parcel, lemon and spoon, sack race, pick and throw) and sports were prescribed in Santiniketan as an integral part of the education system (Jalan, 1976; Salamatullah, 1961): “Children must dance, they must be restless, when they think, the body becomes restless and ripples with a variety of movement that helps to keep their muscles in harmony with the mind” (Tagore, 1961, p. 102). The movement recognised in his call for the “peripatetic” or mobile school is important because it not only facilitates

learning through direct observation, but also keeps our awakened mental faculties constantly alert and receptive through contact with ever-changing scenes and objects (Jalan, 1976, p. 16). In his demand for physical development and the possibilities of integrating this development into life, one can also see a proximity to the concept of embodied cognition at the Santiniketan School.

The *cultivation of the intellect* (e.g., the development of the imagination, creative freethinking, constant curiosity and alertness of the mind) to compensate for emotional immaturity and instability was also very important for Tagore. However, he believed that this could not be achieved by reading books, so the rejection of book-centred education and the focus on practical and relevant teaching is evident in the Santiniketan School. In this context, Tagore mentioned: “[...] legend is that eating of the fruit of knowledge is not consonant with dwelling in paradise” (Tagore, 1917, p. 141). He was aware that “since childhood, instead of putting all the burden on the memory, the power of thinking, and the power of imagination should also be given opportunities for free exercise” (Jalan, 1976, p. 42). As pointed out by Salamatullah (1961), in the curriculum of the Santiniketan School

Handicrafts were accorded an important place besides nature study, art, music, etc. But here the craft was not intended to be a source of income for the school but a medium for self-expression, so that children may produce beautiful articles out of raw material of various kinds and thus satisfy their creative impulses and realise their aesthetic capacities. [...] Educational institutions should provide for practical industrial training and cooperative work, and they should be engaged in such projects as go to improve the economic, physical, moral and intellectual life of the people. (p. 137)

Tagore introduced a new idea of *emotional education* (orig. *bodher sadhana*), which is different from the education of the senses and the education of the intellect. Emotional education consists in the realisation of man’s connection with the universe through the spirit, through the soul and through a deeper intuition of feeling (Jalan, 1976, p. 12). The arts are essential for the cultivation of feeling and experience, as well as for the expression of man’s bond of union with the universe and his infinite side (Lesar, 2015, p. 122; Salamatullah, 1961, p. 137). In this context, it is understandable that, for Tagore, sociability and human fellow feeling were considered as an indispensable aspect of a truly educated person (Jalan, 1976, p. 44).

For the fundamental purpose of education is not merely to enrich ourselves through the fullness of knowledge, but also to establish the bond

of love and friendship between man and man. So long as we do not come down to the level of the common man and feel a bond of kinship with the poor and the lowly and the lost [...] our education will be sadly incomplete. This idea of fellow feeling was not limited to one's own countrymen but spread the message of internationalism. (Tagore, 1351 B. S. 71, in Jalan 1976, p. 45)

In the Santiniketan School, these characteristics can be recognised at different levels or during different activities. The older students were encouraged to connect with the local community, with villagers, either helping to look after the younger ones, organising various games, or teaching the older ones (which may be related to the practices later developed by Freire). In addition, the Santiniketan School often hosted artists and scholars from different parts of the world, as Tagore had many contacts with internationally known figures of that time.

I invited thinkers and scholars from foreign lands to let our boys know how easy it is to realise our common fellowship, when we deal with those who are great, and that it is the puny who with their petty vanities set up barriers between man and man. (Tagore, 1929, pp. 73–74, in O'Connell 2003)

Last but not least, there was also a lot of emphasis on learning about other cultures and their cultural creations, as well as the diversity of religions, after becoming thoroughly familiar with the creations within one's own (Indian) culture.

Tagore noted that for holistic development of the human personality, *moral and spiritual* education were more important than bookish knowledge. There must be adequate provision for the development of selfless activities, cooperation and love of empathy and sharing among students in educational institutions. He stressed the importance of discipline in a moral life, and true discipline means protecting raw, natural impulses from unhealthy excitement and from growing in undesirable directions (Jalan, 1976, p.44).

What the intellect is in the world of Nature our will is in the moral world. The more it is freed and widened, the more our moral relationship becomes true, varied and large. Its outer freedom is the freedom from the guidance of pleasure and pain, its inner freedom is from the narrowness of self-desire. We know that when intellect is freed from the bondage of interest it discovers the world universal reason, with which we must be in harmony fully to satisfy our needs; in the same manner

when will is freed from its limitations, when it becomes good, that is to say, when its scope is extended to all men and all time, it discerns a world transcending the moral world of humanity. It finds a world where all our disciplines of moral life find their ultimate truth, and our mind is roused to the idea that there is an infinite medium of truth through which goodness finds its meaning. (Tagore, 1917, pp. 105–106)

In addition to the aforementioned key features of his educational concept, the role of nature and freedom should also be noted. Tagore based his arguments on the assumption that *nature is the best teacher of the student*, so-called green pedagogy (Ghosh, 2012), and that nature itself has the purpose of giving the child the fullness of his or her growth (O'Connell, 2003; Pridmore, 2009).

He advised that we should encourage and educate our children to love and respect nature, instead of alienating them from it, so that they could realise that nature is an integral part of ourselves, and not merely a storehouse of resources to be transformed into cash at will, and that our continuity as a species depends entirely on maintaining the ecological balance in nature and survival of our planet. (Quayum, 2016, p. 14)

Furthermore, human beings can achieve their fullness of growth only through freedom (Jalan, 1976; O'Connell, 2003; Quayum, 2016; Salamatullah, 1961). Tagore postulated *three kinds of freedom*: freedom of the mind, freedom of the heart and freedom of the will (Jalan, 1976, pp. 15–16).

Freedom in the mere sense of independence has no content, and therefore no meaning. Perfect freedom lies in the perfect harmony of relationship which we realize in this world – not through our response to it in *knowing* but in *being*. Objects of knowledge maintain an infinite distance from us who are the knowers. For knowledge is not union. Therefore, the farther world of freedom awaits us where we reach truth, not through feeling it by our senses, or knowing it by reason, but through the union of perfect sympathy. (Tagore, 1961, p. 52)

These are the basic features of Tagore's idea of education. Below, educational paradigms and educational factors will be briefly presented as the basis for further analysis.

## The educational paradigm in the continental tradition through the lens of Medveš

The Slovenian pedagogue Zdenko Medveš, a prominent professor of the history of pedagogy and an educational theorist, has developed an innovative classification of pedagogical paradigms (Protner, 2020). Medveš (2015, p. 15) recognised the teacher as the specific medium of education in Herbartianism; humanistic (German: *Geisteswissenschaften*) or cultural pedagogy presents *content* as an educational medium; reform pedagogy is based on the thesis that the medium of education is *the child* him/herself; while socially critical pedagogy recognises the medium of education in *the social environment* (Medveš, 2015, p. 15). Although some observers doubt that the teacher is the key factor of education for Herbartianism and that the content of lessons is the most characteristic factor of humanistic pedagogy (Protner, 2020, p. 94), these four factors of education still remain relevant.

Although each of these pedagogical theories specifically addresses the role of the teacher, his or her role in the educational process is understood differently in Herbartianism, which emphasises the direct personal influence of the teacher and presupposes an internalisation of his or her personal attitude and character (Medveš, 2015, p. 15). Humanistic or cultural pedagogy requires from the teacher not only a high moral image, but also a personal attitude in accepting all of the treasures of the spirit. This means not only understanding the historical state of mind (German: *Historische Betrachtung*), but also participating in its shaping and in the efforts to solve the “world of mystery” (Medveš, 2011, p. 153). In reform pedagogy, the teacher can challenge the activity of the student through personal commitment (as can be understood in the concepts of Steiner and Montessori), through social activism and commitment to justice (emphasised by Freire), and by promoting communication with reality and values (highlighted by Biesta and Luhmann). Socially critical pedagogy, on the other hand, gives the teacher the task of analysing the social conditions of the school environment and then working and acting accordingly, with the aim of providing a good school education and overcoming living conditions (poverty, linguistic diversity, etc.) that strongly influence the child’s development (Medveš, 2011, p. 153).

### *Education as internalisation vs. education as communication*

In the above overview of the development of educational theories within continental pedagogy, we can see that the process of internalisation was relevant for Herbartianism (internalisation of the teacher’s personal attitude and character) as well as for humanistic pedagogues (internalisation of the spiritual



and cultural tradition) and socially critical pedagogues (internalisation of the symbolic structure). In contrast, reform pedagogues consider education as communication with values, in which the child him/herself creates a value orientation (Medveš, 2018b, p. 49).

The question arises as to whether imitating the personal attitude of the teacher, the internalised spiritual and cultural tradition, or the recognisable symbolic structures of society is the most effective way to influence the education of the individual. If we want to achieve the moral autonomy of the individual, their emancipation, their ability to lead and resist (as the goals of education have been defined in most educational concepts of the last century), internalisation will not be the most effective. As the German sociologist and author of the systems and interaction theory, Luhmann, puts it: “The concepts of imitation and education do not fit together” (in Medveš, 2018a, p. 9). Therefore, communication is the way in which we can most effectively influence the child’s ability to think critically and independently and make responsible decisions, which are the basic skills necessary to achieve the goal of education, i.e., moral autonomy and emancipation of the individual.

Medveš concludes that even through the communication system we cannot fully control the formation of the system of consciousness, but can only challenge and stimulate the child’s potential for critical thinking and creativity. On this assumption, he concludes that consciousness is established as an autopoietic system and that *the child is therefore a key medium of education* (Medveš, 2018a, p. 9).

This means that in the process of communication each individual reacts to the other according to his/her own laws and with his/her own filters. We must therefore offer the child different alternatives for decision-making and open views on individual alternatives in communication, without the intention of imposing any of them. We perceive the teacher only as a facilitator, who, by choosing the alternatives, nevertheless sets the framework for what can happen. Ultimately, however, it is up to the individual to decide whether to conform to the norms of reality or to resist them. (Medveš, 2018a, p. 9)

The idea that communication is at the core of the entire social and private life of a human being, and that communication is the only way an individual can change the outside world, since human consciousness cannot directly influence the outer world, is a starting point that is difficult to dispute. The question nevertheless arises: what communication? In systems and interaction theory, on which Medveš based his explanation of communication as a fundamental

type of educational action in reform pedagogy,

Communication is only an interactive interpersonal relationship, which – if we express ourselves more elementarily – is only possible in a symmetrical relationship of mutual recognition of equal subjects. In relationships where the roles in communication are asymmetrically distributed, which is common for relationships in institutions and especially in schools, it is difficult to establish communication as a dominant or global relationship. (Medveš, 2018a, pp. 9–10)

Although the relationship between teachers and pupils is characterised by asymmetry (in terms of the amount of knowledge and experience, and in terms of social status), Medveš's (2018a, p. 11), analysis shows that there are opportunities for communication at school: in class (so-called communication didactics contribute to increasing personal motivation to learn and to participate by promoting self-regulating learning), as well as in “maintaining the world of school life” (thematic discussions relevant to pupils, classroom activities, decision-making by voting) and in conflict resolution (peer mediation, group changes, retraining, educational contracts).

### **Tagore's concept of education viewed through the factors of education**

In the continuation, we will examine which of the four known educational factors of the continental tradition can be identified in Tagore's educational concept and are most clearly visible in the Santiniketan School.

#### *Teacher*

When Tagore was confronted with the question of his son's enrolment in school, he recalled not only all of the bad experiences of his own school days, but the traditional way of education in India also came to mind. This traditional relationship between teachers and students, which has endured for centuries, was the basis for the establishment of the school at Santiniketan in 1901, initially under the name Brahmacharya ashrama.

The students live in their master's home like the children of the house, without having to pay for their board and lodging or tuition. The teacher prosecutes his own study, living a life of simplicity, and helping the students in their lessons as a part of his life and not of his profession. This ideal of education through sharing a life of high aspiration with one's master took possession of my mind. (Tagore, 1917, p. 157)

Tagore said that education could be imparted only by the teacher and never by a method.

Man can learn only from a man. Just as a water tank can be filled only with water and fire be kindled only with fire, life can be inspired only with life [...] The mere pill of a method instead shall bring us no salvation. (Tagore, 1351 B. S. 128, in Jalan, 1976, pp. 12–13)

In school, teachers should act as substitutes for the mother, offering children the freedom of love through understanding, compassion and free community. Tagore never used coercion or punishment against misbehaving boys in his school. He interpreted the freedom of the heart as an unrestricted human relationship. After all, the freedom of the will or the free activity of the soul consists in creating a world of its own. The way to realise this ideal is to invite the student to participate in the growth and development of the school. Accordingly, Tagore gave the students a free hand to develop their interest in any area they wished (Jalan, 1976, p. 15).

### *Content of teaching*

The educational process at the primary school level, which includes children aged 6 to 12, is generally conducted in Bengali. The curriculum includes compulsory subjects (Bengali, English, Sanskrit, Mathematics, Social Studies and General Science) and electives, which are divided into (a) Humanities (Bengali, Sanskrit, Hindi, Oriya, History, Civics and Economics, Ethics and Psychology, Vocal Music, Instrumental Music, Dancing, Drawing, Painting and Modelling, Home Science) and (b) Science (Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Mathematics, Geography). Gardening is also a compulsory activity for students.

Physical training and games are compulsory for all students. In the case of students in classes IX, X, XI, the maintenance of at least 75 per cent of attendance in physical training and games classes is a requirement for admission to the Higher School Certificate Examination. (Jalan, 1976, p. 97)

In addition to the implementation of the formal curriculum, the school attached great importance to extracurricular activities aimed at developing the personality of the students, enhancing their ability to organise, cooperate and coordinate activities, and developing healthy competition through a variety of social, literary, artistic, musical and various other activities. The Student Council (orig. *Asrama Sammilani*) played a key role in planning and implementing these diverse activities, and the teachers acted only as advisors (Debnath & Pal, 2015, p. 207).

It should, however, be noted that Tagore did not distinguish between compulsory and elective subjects with clearly defined curricula and extracurricular activities; instead, he had the curriculum of life in mind (Jalan, 1976, p. 99). The emphasis was always on learning for life, not on living with the intention of learning. Tagore called for a flexible or dynamic and above all realistic curriculum. This came to the fore in the experiment Siksha-Satra (school for village children), which he conducted together with Leonard K. Elmhirst. In this experiment, they assumed that children in the countryside are used to taking on their share of responsibility or various jobs (e.g., cattle raising, gardening), thus making an important contribution to the survival of the family. For the teachers, this fact is the basis for experiential learning in the broadest sense. In such a system, textbooks, classes and laboratories played no role:

*Geology* becomes the study of the fertility of the plot; *chemistry* the use of lime and manures of all kinds, of spray and disinfectants; *physics* the use of tools, of pumps, the study of water-lifts and oil-engines; *entomology* the control of plant pests [...] and diseases [...]; *ornithology* the study of birds in their relation, first to the garden plot and then to the world in general. (Elmhirst, 1961, p. 73)

### *Child*

Based on his own unhappy memory of school, Tagore concentrated on children and emphasised their creativity, the need for atmosphere and natural surroundings (Jalan, 1976, p. 61; O'Connell, 2003).

We all know children are lovers of the dust; their whole body and mind thirst for sunlight and air as flowers do. They are never in a mood to refuse the constant invitation to establish direct communication coming to their senses from the universe. (Tagore, 1917, p. 143)

Tagore tried to build an institution where children would have more freedom to explore and learn by themselves in the open learning environment of nature (Jalan, 1976, p. 41; O'Connell, 2003; Pridmore, 2009). Therefore, he considered

nature as a part of education for my boys to let them fully realize that they are in a scheme of existence where trees are a substantial fact, not merely as generating chlorophyll and taking carbon from the air, but as living trees (Tagore, 1917, p. 145).

At the Santiniketan School, the children were often allowed to participate and make their own decisions, such as choosing subjects to attend in class,

and taking part in the planning and implementation of various projects (which are also key features of the Summerhill School founded by Neill in England in 1921), and helping and cooperating with the surrounding villagers. The children were especially encouraged to create through different artistic languages, as Tagore put it, and his record was translated by Das Gupta:

A large part of man can never find its expression in the mere language of words. It must, therefore, seek for its expression other languages – lines and colours, sounds and movements. Through our mastery of these we not only make our whole nature articulate but also understand man in all his attempts to reveal his innermost being in every age and clime [...]. It is the duty of every human being to master, at least to some extent, not only the language of the intellect, but also the language of the personality which is the language of Art. (Tagore 1335 B. S. 139, in Das Gupta, 2015)

### *Social Environment*

Tagore was convinced of the extraordinary influence of both the physical and the social environment on the developing child. When founding the school, Tagore drew on his own deep experience of connection with nature, which is why the children of the Santiniketan School initially spent most of their time in the natural environment. In designing the school, Tagore was guided by the idea that we can find meaning and fulfilment in our relationship to everything, and was also greatly influenced by the rich cultural experience in his own family.

I tried my best, to develop in the children of my school the freshness of their feeling for Nature, a sensitiveness of soul in their relationship with their human surroundings with the help of literature, festive ceremonials and also the religious teaching which enjoins us to come to the nearer presence of the world through the soul, thus to gain it more than can be measured. (Tagore, 1961, p. 58)

Tagore tried not only to relate the economy and education, but believed in the influence of society on children and thus on education. He argued that all of the problems of social reform are interconnected, and that no educational experiment can succeed unless the vicious circle that connects society and education is broken once and for all, being replaced by a virtuous relationship (Das Gupta, 2015, p. 10; Jalan, 1976, p. 56).

An analysis of the functioning of the Santiniketan School shows that all of the known factors of education were represented in a very specific way, undoubtedly due to the cultural and historical origins of the school and the

specific view of humanity, which is not based on the dualism of body and soul, but on the idea of the connection of the individual with the whole universe. Living with *teachers* in the school, where there are no limits to when teachers are on duty and when they are not, suggests that Tagore expected teachers to devote themselves almost exclusively to pedagogical work. He demanded that teaching should be predominantly non-traditional, i.e., mostly not in the classroom and not with the help of textbooks. Therefore, there are obvious elements of communication didactics in the teaching of teachers at the Santiniketan School. It should be noted, however, that many teachers at Tagore's school are involved in socio-cultural events in the immediate or wider environment. Through their artistic work or activities in these events, they draw attention to obvious injustices or contribute to overcoming them, thus undoubtedly serving as role models for the students. Moreover, if we consider the other requirements for the implementation of communication didactics, we can conclude that the teachers also encourage students to communicate with reality and values. The *content* of the lessons at school is rather loosely defined and can usually be adapted to the students' interests. Nevertheless, it is obvious that a lot of time in school life is spent on various cultural topics, especially through live contact with artistic languages and artists and through the experimental (scientific) study of reality, which they draw on when implementing their projects. Tagore's school is characterised by the so-called open curriculum, as it is obvious that there is a need to learn from participation in life practice, which has a particularly strong educational effect (Kroflić, 2019) and which further promotes the implementation of communication didactics. Interestingly, Tagore attributed quite an important role to *the environment* in the development of the child's personality, as the child's environment should be as natural as possible, especially in the early stages, and children should be protected from modern technology and the urban environment. Nature makes it possible to sharpen the senses, while the observation of natural phenomena maintains curiosity and promotes communication with the phenomenon – all of the basic phenomenological postulates that can also be recognised in the concept of embodied cognition. However, Tagore designed all of this with the intention that the school should serve the children and promote their overall development, with the activity of *the children* being the central and most recognisable feature. The students are therefore at the centre of the action and play an extremely important role in the process of their overall development. In a rather select environment (in the countryside, with the constant presence of teachers, in a “boarding school” type of setting) the students are free to decide whether they want to attend classes and participate in extracurricular activities, and they also receive many incentives to get

involved with and help the villagers. We can say that education as communication and autopoietic are very obvious in the Santiniketan School: apart from the communication didactics already mentioned, it is obvious that the “co-creation of the world of school life” is strongly emphasised, so that the students can really take part. From the point of view of recognisable values (Medveš, 2015, p. 15), we see that personal freedom and freedom of choice are most present, but spirituality, humanity and emancipatory engagement are also clearly recognisable. Perhaps the least obvious is the ethics of duty.

### **What can we conclude from the present analysis?**

Researching Tagore’s educational concept, which was developed more than a hundred years ago in a specific cultural-historical and socio-political environment, and the comparison with the knowledge of continental pedagogy developed over more than two hundred years is really surprising. Previous analyses of the educational concept in the Santiniketan School (Lesar, 2015, 2016) have led to the conclusion that many of the solutions implemented by Tagore in his school can be found in other contemporary and modern authors:

- the emphasis on experiential learning that has been known in pedagogy since Rousseau, most obviously by Dewey at the beginning of the twentieth century;
- opportunities for students to participate in the whole of school life in Santiniketan or self-government in Sriniketan, most obviously introduced by Neill in his school in Summerhill, founded in England in 1921;
- the importance of movement and physical development can be associated with the idea of embodied cognition, today propagated mainly by the new cognitive sciences;
- the organisation of the school to support the process of rural regeneration and adult education can be related to practices later developed by Freire;
- the emphasis on learning and facilitating expression in different languages (not only in “the language of words”, but also in the language of lines and colours, in the language of sounds and movement) can be related to the later ideas of Malaguzzi, the concept of a hundred languages.

The present analysis further confirms how modern Tagore’s concept of education is. He rooted the design of his school in the child, seeing children as one of the most important educational factors and providing them with a strong teacher with whom education as communication takes place. Teachers

at his school should not only be committed to their pedagogical mission, but should also be socially engaged in the quest for a more just society and encourage students to actively participate in life and communicate with reality and values. Interestingly, Tagore also attached significant importance to the social environment in education. This factor of education is important in his educational concept because it invites the child to communicate and not only to internalise influences from the social environment (the predominant way of understanding influences of the social environment on the child in the continental tradition). We can state that none of the factors known in the continental tradition were overlooked, since all four factors of education (child, teacher, content and social environment) play an important role in Tagore's concept of education. Moreover, we can conclude from the analysis that Tagore's concept of education places great emphasis on communication with the values of the nearby and wider social and cultural environment, and does not only endorse the internalisation of the primary culture.

The question arises as to whether Tagore was familiar with the European continental tradition. According to the information available, he knew some of the pedagogues of the continental tradition (Pestalozzi, Frobel), and in 1920 he had contact with some of the pedagogues active at that time (Montessori, Geheeb) (Quayum, 2016, p. 12). It is therefore not surprising that the school Tagore founded in Santiniketan in 1901 was one of the first schools of the new school movement that swept the world in the twentieth century (Bhattacharya, 2014, p. 71, in Quayum, 2016, p. 12). With regard to whether Tagore's concept of education can be classified as reform or progressive pedagogy, Salamatullah reminds us as early as 1961 that

There are people who hold the view that the Tagore's educational experiment is just an echo of that educational movement of Europe and America which seeks to exalt the child to the central place in educative process and which is known as the Progressive Education. Undoubtedly, there are certain similarities between the Tagore's educational experiment and the Progressive Education. [...] Rugged individualism of the West which, in fact, is an outcome of a social order based on selfishness, greed, competition and conflict is not acceptable to Tagore. To him the fountain-head of true individuality is self-knowledge. This is the stage at which the individual cares more for giving and less for taking and where he loathes to rush forward by pushing others back, but advances in company with others levelling the path collectively to reach the desired goal. Here the individual's gift turns into a veritable blessing for all. This distinguishes the Tagore's educational philosophy from the so



called Progressive Education of western countries. (Salamatullah, 1961, pp. 138–139)

On the basis of this analysis, however, we can see that Tagore succeeded in implementing ideas that were partly unknown in Europe at that time, and that he even went beyond the findings of individual pedagogical theories from Europe. Primarily because of his own bad experiences with school – “It was not any new theory of education, but my memory of my school days” (Tagore, 1917, p. 138) – and with an extraordinary sensitivity to the needs of children, as well as a very deep respect for earlier teaching practice in India, he was able to bring many theoretical concepts that are still relevant today (e.g., experiential learning, student participation, embodied cognition, the concept of a hundred languages) into the operation of the Santiniketan School in a very specific way. Moreover, in a very innovative way, he succeeded in integrating all four educational factors known in the continental tradition, which we do not find in any of the European educational theories presented (Herbartianism, humanistic or cultural pedagogy, reform pedagogy, socially critical pedagogy).

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