

Jan Amos Comenius

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1. Passport



Jan Amos Komensky, Nivnice (today the Czech Republic) --
Amsterdam 1670

2. You let us see what we have to learn

Master Comenius looked through the window of the school in Prerov. Outside the pupils were arriving for a new school day. A few of the children had flowers in their hands: on the way they had picked a field bouquet. In the lead was Vladislav. The bunch of daisies in his hand contrasted beautifully with his dark clothes. By the look on his face, one could see that he liked the idea of going to school. What were they planning to do with the flowers?

Some months ago Comenius had arrived here as the new principal of the school in Prerov. 'Quite a lot has happened since then', he mused by himself. On his journey to the city, carrying the appointment in his pocket, he had thought back to his time as a pupil of this very school. He recalled how he had often left the classroom in tears because he could not make out anything from the strange Latin words. The barbaric method of drumming in had made his school days bitter. Other pupils evidently had no problem with it and the teacher gave most of his attention to them. This recollection of the young Jan Amos steeled master Comenius in his conviction that teaching should be different.

During the first lesson the pupils had looked somewhat expectantly at the new teacher. Vladislav, lurking behind other pupils, had definitely looked suspicious. Then the teacher turned around, with a few deft lines drew a crow on the board and wrote a sign next to it. A movement rustled through the class: what was the meaning of this? Wasn't this a Latin lesson? Even Vladislav had suddenly sat up straight. When the master asked what sound a crow makes, he cawed with enthusiasm. At that sound master Comenius pointed to the sign next to the crow: 'That is the a', he said and he cawed just as enthusiastically as Vladislav. Then a sheep appeared on the board, with another sign next to it. The children were diligently copying the signs from the board. 'Now we see what we have to learn', said one of them.

	Vrána kráká Die Krähe krächzt The crow caws De kraai krast	á á	A a
	Ovce bečí Das Schaf blökt The lamb bleats Het schaaap blaait	bé é é	B b
	Kobylka cvrká Die Heuschrecke zirpt The grasshopper chirps De krekel tsirpt	cí cí	C c
	Dudek dudá Der Wiedehopf ruft The whoopoo says De hop roept	du du	D d
	Dítě pláče Das Kind weint The infant cries Het kind schreit	é é é	E e
	Vitr fíčí Der Wind pfeift The wind blows De wind fluit	fi fi	F f
	Husa kejhá Die Gans schnattert The goose gaggles De gans snatert	ga ga	G g
	Ústa dýchají Der Mund haucht The mouth exhales De mond ademt	háh háh	H h
	Mys piští Die Maus piept The mouse peeps De muis piept	í í í	I i
	Kachna káchá Die Ente schnattert The duck quacks De eend kwaakt	kha kha	K k
	Vlk vyje Der Wolf heult The wolf howls De wolf huult	lu ulu	L l
	Medvěd mručí Der Bär brummt The bear grumbles De beer broemt	mum	M m

That had been the beginning. After that Master Comenius had made a booklet to teach his pupils Latin in a graphic way. He linked up with the sounds the pupils already knew: animal sounds like the squeaking of a mouse or the quacking of a duck. And of course it was accompanied by a drawing of the relevant animal. The sound made by the animal was linked by the master with the sound of a Latin word. This way learning would become easier to all pupils and they would find it more pleasant. That was especially important for the less clever pupils, the master had thought. For of course it had to be possible for all of them to keep up.

Master Comenius awoke from his daydreaming. The street in front of the school was empty, the pupils had evidently already entered the school building. Behind him there was a knock at the door and Master Comenius turned around. The door opened and there they were with their flowers, Vladislav right in front. He took a step forward, nodded slightly as a greeting, lifted up his little bunch of daisies and said in a formal tone: 'See here,

this is for you! Because you let us see what we have to learn.'

3. Historical context

Religious position

Ever since his birth Comenius had a part in a religious movement called the Bohemian Brethren. This movement had a special religious position in Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth century. They stood by the theological tradition of Johannes Hus (1369-1415), theologian and Bible translator from what is now the Czech Republic. Originally the followers of Hus were violent and had gained a certain freedom to confess their faith. To the Hussites the struggle for their faith was at the same time a struggle for their culture. Thus the Bible translation into Czech made by Johannes Hus made not only a religious but also a political statement.

The Bohemian Brethren remained in existence as a separate school, even in the sixteenth century when Lutheranism and Calvinism spread through Europe. However, the Brethren were persecuted ever more severely and finally driven out of The Czech Republic.

By the time Comenius was born (1592) the Bohemian Brethren were characterised by a strong emphasis on practical Christianity: they were averse to dogmatism and abhorrent of violence. They tried to follow the example of the early Christians by living in voluntary poverty. Even among their opponents the Brethren were known for their moral purity,

their peaceful relations with other Christians and people of other religions, the joy they experienced in their faith and their zeal to serve society (Atwood 2009, cited by Smith 2017, 3).

This practical Christianity could also be seen in the life of Comenius. It was all due to his devotion to pedagogy (Groenendijk 2008, 27). To him emphasis on practical Christianity also meant emphasis on education. While working in education he wanted to teach that practical Christianity to children from their youth.

Teaching

As happened in the lives of some other great pedagogues, his own negative experiences at school stimulated him to reflect on improvements in teaching. The negative experiences for instance concerned the fact that education for the greater part consisted of formal grammatical formation. In his preface to his *Orbis sensualium pictus* Comenius later called it 'the prevailing, long spelling exercises, the cumbersome burden of the spirit'. Letters, signs, words and sentences were not used in a context and the young Jan Amos had difficulty understanding them.

In addition he was also confronted by the inequalities in education: favouring as a matter of course the better pupils, the social inequality between rich and poor and the fact that being educated was much more a matter of course for boys than for girls. When still young Comenius articulated his point of departure as offering education 'to all'. In the tradition of Bacon's empiricism in this respect he chose for pedagogic realism (Bakker, Noordman & Rietveld-van Wingerden, 23). True science, Bacon claimed, is created on the basis of multiple observations. Likewise Comenius in his pedagogic realism wanted to take the perceptible as a starting point in his teaching. In the preface to *Orbis sensualium pictus* he wrote: 'Children who are attracted by this book, are encouraged to observe and to acquire knowledge about the most important things in the world in a playful and entertaining way.' [quote translated from the Dutch]

Apocalyptic times

To many in Central Europe the seventeenth century was an absolutely apocalyptic time. Not only was the very violent Thirty Years' War raging in Germany, in the surrounding regions war followed war – not least in what is now the Czech Republic. It will become evident below that Comenius experienced the inevitable consequences of this.

The protracted and gruesome wars made a contemporary issue of the question where the world was headed. As a consequence of the apocalyptic circumstances of the time, the notions of chiliasm started spreading: since things were now so bad in the world, the second coming of Christ could not be far off.

Coupled with this was the idea that preparations had to be made for the kingdom of Christ. Radical Anabaptists did that in the fifteenth century with violent behaviour, for instance when they conquered the city of Münster in 1534 and founded the Kingdom of Zion there. That violence prompted anti-violence in turn and the Baptist movement was overthrown. However, with this the expectation of the imminent coming of Christ did not disappear: long after Münster even Comenius lived in this expectation. However, he saw preparations for this advent quite differently than the conquerors of Münster did.

According to Comenius all aspects of religious and social life had to be improved. He therefore wrote improvement programmes for many of these domains. Thus he hoped that by the development of a universal language world peace could be promoted. He saw the different languages as a source of division and an obstacle to the unification of all nations in Christ. Comenius was looking forward to unity among all nations becoming a reality and wanted to contribute to the realisation of this ideal. His pedagogic writings also were aligned to that ideal: good education would make the world ready to receive Christ. With reference to this Hábl spoke of a 'soteriological role of education': 'It is a God-given means of the salvation of mankind' (Hábl 2011).

Religious politics

The wars in Europe during the seventeenth century were not only about power. Religious conflicts always formed part of it. The most important confrontation was between the

Roman Catholics and the Protestants. It seems that among the Protestants it was mainly the Lutherans and Calvinists who had a part in this but not the Bohemian Brethren (to which Comenius belonged). When the European war subsided somewhat after 1648 the Protestants in various parts of Europe obtained freedom of religion, but that did not apply to the Bohemian Brethren. According to the religious Peace of Augsburg the sovereign determined what religion would be followed in his territory. From 1627 the Roman Catholic Habsburger kings ruled Bohemia. Therefore the Bohemian Brethren were driven out of the Czech Republic and Comenius became a wanderer who sought refuge in different European countries.

Study questions

1. Is there a connection between your particular theological view and your view of education?
2. To what extent is your view of education concerned with the expectation of the kingdom of God?

4. Theme: Teaching everybody everything

Both in the domain of education and outside of it Comenius busied himself as a true *homo universalis* with numerous themes. In the field of Pedagogy his influence was particularly great. 'Although didactic knowledge and experiences existed before Comenius, he got the honour to be the founder of didactics who set scientific foundations and gave it forms and directions of future development.' (Lukas 2014, 32). Mollenhauer formulates it even more concisely: 'The *Orbis pictus* symbolises (...) the birth of modern Pedagogy' (Mollenhauer 2017, 71).

Therefore choosing only one theme from the educational writings of Jan Amos Comenius is like choosing the most beautiful peak from an imposing range of mountains. Comenius himself summed up his view of education in three words: *omnes, omnia, omnino*, that is to say everything, everybody, comprehensively. This motto has also been summed up as 'teaching everybody everything'. With reference to this we can explain what Comenius envisaged in education.

Everybody

Comenius' intention of education for 'everybody' was quite revolutionary in his time, the seventeenth century. Children from rich families were educated, that was a matter of course. Education for children from poorer families happened much more seldom. Education for boys was a matter of course, not so education for girls. Comenius had quite different ideas about this. 'Neither can any sufficient reason be given why the weaker sex – and I must state it here emphatically -- should be completely excluded from the study of science (whether it be Latin or the mother tongue). For they likewise bear the image of God and likewise have a part in the future kingdom of God, and have been just as much gifted with a spirit receptive to wisdom (often more than the male sex)' (Comenius 1892, 101).

Everything

The statement that he wanted to teach 'everything' brings us to the pansophism of Comenius: the universal and all-encompassing wisdom. According to Comenius this 'encompassing wisdom' concerns all people and combines philosophical, scientific and religious insights. In an organic system all knowledge is ordered: knowledge of God, nature, human beings, society, and in that system the answers to all possible questions have been combined. In his books to be used in teaching like the *Janus* or the *Orbis* he showed that he wanted to bring together in context all available knowledge for pupils as

well. For instance, in the introduction to the *Orbis* Comenius wrote: 'The booklet, as you can see, is quite small but it contains a concise summary of the whole world and all the essentials from the complete language' (Comenius 1991, 26).

All knowledge from God

This coherence is achieved by the starting point that all knowledge comes from God. In searching for the 'encompassing wisdom' Comenius therefore did not mean the wisdom of human beings. He did not want to do what later happened during the Enlightenment, namely exalting human reason or pursuing encyclopaedic knowledge. Human knowledge never is an object in itself, but serves the Creator and the duty of a human being on earth. This becomes evident for example from the fact that in the books mentioned above the chapters on human knowledge and skills are enclosed in chapters on creation, on God as the Creator and about the second coming of Christ. In this way, said Comenius, it becomes clear what the universal principles of ordering are which permeate reality. Macrocosm and microcosm are both, because of their origin, characterised by a harmonious order, and likewise by their mutual relationship (Woldring 2016, 12).

The books Comenius wrote for pupils show how he ordered 'a concise summary of the whole world'. A good example is *Janua linguarum reserata* from 1631. This *Open door to languages* contains a hundred short chapters containing in total a thousand short sentences. Each chapter introduces a specific theme: creation, the elements, the firmament, stones, plants, animals, the body and the soul of a human being, human activities (like trades), the circumstances of life (i.a. marriage, birth, family), city, church, religions, authorities, war and peace, school and education, sciences, virtues, death and funerals, God's providence. In this way the children learned eight thousand words in their context, but simultaneously they also got a coherent picture of the world.

The structure that he discovered in creation, was regularly applied to pedagogic issues. Thus the first chapters of *Orbis pictus* are obviously a parallel to the days of creation. The implications for teaching is that the various fields of knowledge may not be strictly separated. It is precisely the coherence that gives insight into reality. This coherence is a sign of the harmony that is fundamental to the pansophism of Comenius. 'Each separate fact should be presented to the child in such a way that it becomes clear what its relation is to the whole so that it becomes understandable what significance it has for life' (Mollenhauer 2017, 61). In addition Comenius had great expectations for education. If all people were to learn the same things, they would become wise and then the way to the improvement of the world would lie open (Lukas 2014, 35).

Suggestion for action

Two boys are rolling on the school ground, fighting and shouting. As a teacher you cannot tolerate that, therefore you separate them. They stand facing each other with flushed faces. 'He began it!' 'But you called me a nigger!' You want them to think about what happened and you speak to them about friendliness and respect (as Christian virtues). But is this talk enough? Comenius would say: 'Virtue is practised by deeds and not by words' (Comenius 1907, 2013). So something more than a mere talk has to follow.

A fine approach would be to change the class into a court of law. Here are the two suspects facing each other, but there should also be witnesses. Lawyers can defend them and the judge has the freedom to search for the underlying motives in public. This approach is at the same time a good example of Comenius' idea of interrelating various contexts in life. But it can also be done on a smaller scale. If the two hot-heated pupils shake hands, look each other in the eyes and articulate the intention of treating each other differently in future, it already is a good step in the right direction.

Broad formation

With his idea of teaching everything to everybody, Comenius also referred to the broad objective of formation in education. For this he used the words knowledge, virtue and

piety. From his books pupils learn coherent knowledge about life and the world around them, like the arts and the languages. When it comes to virtues it is not merely an issue of being well-mannered, but about an inner motivation and the correct way of engagement with one's fellow human beings. 'The youth must be taught that we are born not for ourselves alone, but for God and for our neighbour, that is to say, for the human race' (Comenius 1907, 2014). Piety is connected by Comenius with 'the inner reverence, by which the human spirit commits itself to the highest Being and follows Him' (Comenius 1892, 71-73). He considered it important that education should encompass all three aspects of knowledge, virtue and piety but his focus is clear. In Chapter 23 of his *Didactica Magna* when looking back on all the 'preparatory work' he described above, Comenius wrote : 'What then is our true work? It is that study of wisdom which elevates us and makes us steadfast and noble-minded – the study to which we have given the name of morality and piety, and by means of which we are exalted above all other creatures, and draw nigh to God himself' (Comenius 1907, 211). 'The proper aims of moral education in Comenius' *Didactics* are the so-called key or cardinal virtues of wisdom, moderation, courage, and justice (*prudentia, temperantia, fortitudo, iustitia*), without which the structure of pedagogy would be unfounded' (Hábl 211, 143).

Study questions

3. To what extent do you have room in your particular social context to teach 'everybody'?
4. Comenius wanted to give his pupils a broad forming and in this respect spoke about knowledge, virtue and piety. To what extent do these concepts have a role in your particular work as a teacher?

Natural development

Comenius developed his pedagogic ideas by thinking from the angle of the child. In order to be able to teach everybody everything, he regarded it as very important to link up with the natural development of the child. In each phase of life children had to receive 'an all-encompassing moulding of intellect, faith and the competence to act correctly' (Groenendijk 2009, 69). He did admit, however, that there are differences between pupils. A teacher has to make out whether a pupil is 'clever, inquiring or has the capacity to be developed', for this has consequences for the way in which each pupil should be approached (Comenius 1892, 120). The heart of the coherent pansophistic knowledge is already dealt with in the nursery school (for the youngest pupils) and is systematically broadened and deepened in the subsequent phases of life.

Linking up with interests

Comenius strongly emphasised the use of the senses in the presentation of knowledge. This is an additional way in which he wanted to sustain his intention of 'teaching everything to everybody'. 'The beginning of knowledge should always be by means of the senses (for there is nothing in the intellect that was not in the senses first). Therefore why should teaching not begin with seeing things instead of distinguishing them in words?' (Comenius 1892, 207). The pictures in *Orbis sensualium pictus* are thus not meant as fillers on the page, but a means of activating the senses. With the same purpose he stimulated teachers to put together a collection of important objects in the classroom or to take the pupils outside to experience nature. His appeal for using games in teaching also fits in with this. 'Much can be learned in play that will afterwards be of use when the circumstances demand it', Comenius stated (Comenius 1907, 2014). This is also the reason he for instance wrote plays for his pupils. Linking up with the level of development of each child is difficult to organise if every child follows its own programme at its own tempo. For this reason Comenius introduced the rule that once a year there could be an intake of pupils. In this way they would work through a joint programme all together year after year.

Suggestion for action

'I contend that the real challenge of Comenius' "method" is in his specific understanding of the relationship between the cognitive and the moral capacity of human beings. Comenius' theory implies the very close union of knowledge and morality, but not, however, that they are an identity. (...) In contrast to the modern interpretation, Comenius never thought that knowledge education could, in and of itself, lead to morality (and piety). In fact, it's exactly the opposite. It's precisely because knowledge cannot guarantee morality, that it's necessary to accompany it with moral education' (Hábl, 2011).

This idea of Comenius stimulates teachers to think about the contents of the subject matter which they present in ordinary lessons. Reflect on how, when reading a text in a language class, when investigating a historic situation, when studying atoms, et cetera, you can raise the issue of morals quite naturally.

Focusing on God

The most important point of 'teaching everybody everything' is the idea that children should be helped to focus on God. Knowledge, virtue and piety are not neutral. It should in the final instance be focused on God. This moulding is fully concerned with turning children in the direction of their Creator – in other words, with conversion. The ideal of Comenius is that as a result of a good education every child should take up the right place in creation. For only in this way can that child contribute to the preparation for the coming of Christ.

He is furthermore not pessimistic about the opportunities of education and teaching. All of it is linked to his view of the child. To Comenius every human being is God's creation and, what is more, has been created in the image of God. To him this means, for instance, that acquiring knowledge is not only a possibility, but that a human being is created with the wish to increase knowledge. Comenius sees this as a reflection of God's omniscience. Likewise the germs of virtue are innate and every human being for instance has the tendency towards harmony (Comenius 1892, 81).

According to Comenius as a result of the fall the inner powers of a human being have been weakened but not destroyed. The natural longing for God has been derailed by the fall and nobody can return to the right way by his own strength. But by his Holy Spirit God takes away our corruption. Did He not send his Son so that the fallen can be restored by Him? 'It is shameful and foolhardy, as well as a sure sign of ingratitude when we keep on pointing out our corruption and forget about the grace -- when we constantly claim what the old Adam effects within us, but never experience what the new Adam, Christ, can do in us. Oh, let us beware of diminishing the grace of God that He wants to pour out on us in abundance' (Comenius 1892, 84-85). This does not mean, by the way, that Comenius was of the opinion that all people are automatically true believers. He stated that there is an eternal punishment for those who do not believe in Christ (Comenius 1678, 313).

His view of human beings and children therefore made the Czech theologian optimistic about the possibilities of education and formation, precisely because he formulated his pedagogic and didactic ideas with a view to the education of children from Christian families. They are 'not the first-born of the old Adam but the reborn of the new Adam, the children of God, the young brothers and sisters of Christ' (Comenius 1892, 85). This places a great responsibility on educators. In this respect Comenius referred to Aristotle who compared the human spirit with a clean slate (*tabula rasa*) on which nothing has been written. Education fills this slate with writing. 'He who understands the art of teaching, can draw everything in the human spirit.' And if something goes wrong, 'then it definitely is not the fault of the slate (except when it is rough), but of the incompetence

The Great Didactic

Setting forth

The whole Art of Teaching
all Things to all Men

or

A certain Inducement to found such Schools in all
the Parishes, Towns, and Villages of every
Christian Kingdom, that the entire
Youth of both Sexes, none
being excepted, shall

Quickly, Pleasantly, & Thoroughly

Become learned in the Sciences, pure in Morals,
trained to Piety, and in this manner
instructed in all things necessary
for the present and for
the future life,

in which, with respect to everything that is suggested,

ITS FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES are set forth from the essential
nature of the matter,

ITS TRUTH is proved by examples from the several
mechanical arts,

ITS ORDER is clearly set forth in years, months, days, and
hours, and, finally,

AN EASY AND SURE METHOD is shown, by which it can
be pleasantly brought into existence.

of the writer or the draftsman' (Comenius 1892, 78). In line with this Comenius could also speak about our temporary life as a workplace in which a human being is formed. The visible world was not only created to propagate the human race and feed it, but also to 'ennoble' it. For this temporary life is no life in the actual sense but an introduction to a true and everlasting life.

Study questions

5. Read the title page of the *Didactica Magna* printed in this paragraph. Which of the pedagogic ideas discussed in this paragraph can you find on the title page?
6. Mention a concrete example from your teaching practice where you deliberately tried to link up with the interests of your pupils.
7. What are your thoughts on the quotation in the text about ten lines higher up: 'He who understands the art of teaching ... incompetence of the writer or the draftsman'?

5. Biography

On 3 September 1624 Jan Amos Comenius celebrated his second wedding. After his first wife had died of the plague he now married Dorota Cyrillová. Due to the menacing situation for the Protestants in Bohemia many family members and friends of the bridal couple were absent. During the wedding reception the bridal couple had to leave the guests unexpectedly: the imperial decree that all Protestant preachers had to leave the country, also hit the groom. The authorities were looking for him (Riedel, 78-79).

What happened on this wedding day is only one example of the dramatic events in the life of Comenius. The first years after the birth of Jan Amos Komenský, as his Czech name was, were peaceful. The life of the miller's family in Nivnice (Moravia) seemed carefree. Jan Amos grew up in the sphere of the Bohemian Brethren or Unitas Fratrum, one of the oldest Protestant movements in Europe.

Ten years later his life changed completely when in a year's time Jan Amos lost both his parents and his sisters. There followed other dramas, alternately caused by illness, the struggle for power and religious conflicts tormenting Europe. Comenius' time at school was cruelly interrupted in 1605 by Turkish troops who raided his hometown Strážnice. The rest of Moravia likewise became the victim of their devastating attacks. This was the first time that the young Jan Amos had to flee.

Because he had an enquiring mind, Jan Amos persisted in his education. In 1608 he studied at the Latin school of the Unity of Brothers in Prerov. His own experiences with being taught Latin would later become an extra motivation for his writing of school books. He felt that the method of teaching being used was uninteresting and because of

that the language was difficult. 'I don't see what I have to learn. One can only learn well and with pleasure when one can see what one learns. But I see nothing!' (Riedel, 27). Three years later he further pursued his education at the University of Herborn. In this period he became interested in the themes that would occupy him as long as he lived. First of all this concerned theology. In Herborn he got to know the reformed version of it. But he also became intensely interested in the chiliastic-mystic ideas of Prof. Johann Heinrich Alstedt (1588-1638) who taught Theology and Philosophy in Herborn. In addition Comenius here became acquainted with the idea of pansophistic knowledge. Many scientists at the time were striving for an all-encompassing and coherent theory of wisdom. For this they used the concept *pansophism*, but as yet there was no unambiguous meaning of the concept. Comenius took over the term pansophism and attached his own interpretation to it. He wrestled with the question of how education should be organised to serve as many children as possible with this pansophistic knowledge. It is then that the pedagogic-didactic domain comes into view. In 1614 Comenius had returned from Germany to his fatherland where he stood at the head of the school of the Unity of Brethren in Prerov. Some years later he became a minister in the *Unitas Fratrum*. From 1618 he was at the head of the congregation and of the school in Fulneck. All his life he would combine ecclesiastic and pedagogic work.

Meanwhile the Thirty Years' War had broken out involving a great number of the European states. Roman Catholic and Protestant parties were fighting one another. The Protestant movement in Bohemia and Moravia had little power and was finally crushed in the violence. Comenius suffered from the consequences when Fulneck went up in flames in 1621. He lost all his possessions, his library and his manuscripts while he himself had to flee. Shortly afterwards his whole family died of the plague and Comenius became a lonely fugitive. While drifting around he supported the scattered members of the congregation of the Brethren. He got to know the geography of his native country in detail and recorded this knowledge in a number of detailed maps. On one of these maps Komenski first used the name Comenius.

In 1628 there followed a new imperial decree against the Protestants in Bohemia. Thirty thousand families left the region, a great number of which settled in the Polish Leszno (Huijts, IX). Among them was Comenius. In Leszno he once again taught and decided to offer an alternative to the teaching methods which were inadequate in his opinion. In 1631 he published *Janua linguarum reserata, The open door to languages*. In a completely new way he laid a connection in this book between insight into language and insight into the world. So the *Janua* was a concrete development of the ideas he had penned down some years earlier in the first draft for his *Didactica Magna*, his *Great Theory of Teaching*.

This publication as well as others did not go unnoticed. The *Janua* not only became known in the greater part of Europe but was also translated into Arabic. In various countries people took an interest in Comenius' ideas and different governments attempted to persuade him to come and reform their educational system. He lived in England and worked in Sweden for quite a long period.



In 1648 it became clear that Comenius would never be able to return to his fatherland. The Peace of Westphalia stipulated that Bohemia and Moravia were Roman Catholic countries – the now famous son of that region was no longer welcome there. He returned to Poland for a short while and worked in Hungary for some years. In 1655 he was living in Leszno again.

Although the whole of Europe was no longer engaged in war after 1648, the struggle was still on in Poland. The heretical Leszno was razed to the ground. Comenius wrote to his son-in-law: 'We, who have escaped the destruction of Leszno, are indeed still alive but we are poor and uncertain. All of us have lost everything there and have only come away with our lives. But I have suffered the greatest loss of all, for not only my properties but also my manuscripts have been lost' (Riedel, 219). All these terrible experiences strengthened Comenius' motivation for stimulating good teaching. Improvement of education (apart from improvements in politics, in the church and in other spheres of life) would prepare the world for the coming of Christ.

For quite some time already Comenius had found a guardian in the Dutch merchant Lodewijk de Geer (1587-1652), a banker, industrialist and arms dealer. De Geer introduced Comenius to the Swedish royal household. In 1656 Comenius went to the Netherlands to stay there with the support of Lodewijk's son, Laurens de Geer. In the relatively tolerant environment of the Low Countries on the coast he could work undisturbed on his ideas and publish his collected works. In the period between 1656 and 1670 about fifty works of his were published (Groenendijk 2009, 71). In 1670 he passed away and was buried in Naarden. Up to today his grave is a place of pilgrimage to many Czechs.

6. Source text

Source text 1

Jan Amos Comenius, *Orbis sensualium pictus* – To the reader

Education is a remedy for ignorance. It should therefore be administered to the minds of young people at school in its true, full, clear and solid form. Education is considered to be true if only what is beneficial to one's life is taught, in order that all later lamentation may be precluded over our ignorance of the necessary things, because we have not been taught them. Education is considered to be full if the pupil's mind is brought to wisdom, the tongue to eloquence, and the hands to the activities that they are expected to perform in life. This is the well-known grace of one's life, namely to be wise and to act and speak wisely. Education is considered to be clear, thus also firm and solid, if all that is taught and learned is free from obscurity or confusion, clearly ordered, distinct and articulate, like the fingers of one's hand. The main thing is for sensual objects to be rightly presented to the senses first in order that they may be made comprehensible. I insist and emphasize that the latter principle is the basis of everything. For one can neither act nor speak wisely unless one understands rightly all that one is to do or speak about. Now, there is nothing in our understanding that has not passed through our senses. Exercising our senses in correct perception of differences between things means laying the foundations for all wisdom, all wise discourse and all wise acts in life. Since this is commonly neglected in schools, pupils are presented things that have not been properly introduced to the senses and are thus incomprehensible to them; it so happens that the process of instruction and learning poses problems and affords little benefit. The schools have therefore been provided with a new aid, which visualizes and denominates all the main things in the world and all the activities of human life. In order that you, dear school-teachers, may use this aid freely, I will explain briefly what good it can be expected to bring.

The book, as you can see, is of no great bulk, but it contains a brief summary of everything substantial in the world and the whole language. It contains a richness of pictures, denominations and descriptions.

- 1 The pictures are representations of all the visible things (with invisible things also mentioned) of the whole world in the order in which they are presented to the learner in the Gate to Latin Language (*Janua Latinae Linguae*) and with such completeness that nothing that is essential and necessary is omitted.
- 2 As its denomination, each picture is provided with an inscription summarizing the whole content in a general, all-encompassing word.
- 3 The descriptions comment on the things visualized in the pictures, which are thus given their own proper denominations. Each of these denominations is assigned the same number as the respective thing represented, which indicates the mutual bond between the image and the denomination.

The layout and the arrangement of the booklet is sure to attract the pupils' interest, so that they will stop looking at school as torment, but a kind of pleasure. For it is well-known that boys, including those in their early childhood, delight in pictures and are willing to please their eyes with these sights. If we succeed in turning the scarecrows out of the gardens of wisdom, it will be very well worth the pains.

The book will also be used to stir up and to sharpen the pupils' attention. Because man's senses (as the leading factors in the process of cognition in childhood, the mind not having so far developed so as to be able to handle abstract notions) always seek their own objects, and unless they find them, they weaken and tend to wool-gather; where as if they manage to find suitable objects, they grow merry and they willingly allow themselves to be fastened upon them until they have thoroughly examined them. The present booklet will thus help to discipline boys (particularly those showing lower concentration ability) and to prepare them for deeper study.

And this leads us to the third good, namely the boys attracted by the things and brought to observe them will acquire knowledge of the most essential things in the world surrounding them in a playful and amusing way. In short, it is hoped that the present book will make the study of the Vestibulum and the Gate to Languages (Janua Linguarum) more pleasant, for which end it was at first also primarily intended. And should a mother-tongue version of the book be deemed useful, three more merits could be adduced.

1 The book will afford a device for learning to read more easily than hitherto, namely with the help of the symbolical alphabet in the form of pictures printed on the introductory pages, i. e. the characters and the images of the creatures whose voices recall the sounds represented by the letters printed. A mere sight of the creature will help the beginner to identify the meaning of the respective letter. And when the pupil's mind has got used to it and the habit has become fully established, these things will easily reach the pupil's mind. If he also looks through the table of the most important syllables (which we did not consider necessary to include in the present edition of the book), he can proceed to view the pictures and the inscriptions over them. The mere sight of the thing represented in the drawing will suggest its name and will tell the pupil how the title of the picture is to be read. And after the book has been gone through in this way, no pupil will fail to learn to read, and nota bene, without that currently used syllabication, that tiresome torment of the mind, which this method can help to completely avoid. Repeated reading of the book, including the descriptions of the pictures, can greatly upgrade the reading skills of the learners.

2 If the mother-tongue version of the book is used in national schools, the pupils will be able to acquire complete knowledge of their mother tongue, including its foundations, because in the explanations mentioned above, the words as well as the phrases, chosen from the whole range of the language, are most suitably arranged. A brief grammar of the mother tongue, analysing clearly the language already learnt, indicating how words are to be inflected, and giving the rules of how the words are linked with one another, can also be added.

3 And this leads us to still another use to which the book can be put: translation into the mother tongue will make the process of acquisition of the Latin language easier and more pleasant, as witnessed in the present edition. Throughout the whole book each word and each phrase of the mother tongue is faced by its foreign equivalent, so that the book is one about everything though in several idioms, which can be compared to one and the same person clad in different clothes. And at the end of the book could be added a survey of, and some comment on, where the Latin language differs from the mother tongue. For where there are no differences, no comment is needed.

Since the introductory lessons should be plain and simple, only the basic things, and those comprehensible to a child's understanding, have been included in this textbook of elementary reading, and the fundamental words upon the knowledge of which depends the cognition of the whole world, the command of the whole language and the knowledge of all things. Should somebody miss a more perfect description of things and seek fuller knowledge of the language and clearer enlightenment of his mind (which we do owe him), he could easily find it somewhere else with the help of our present encyclopaedia fully accessible to the senses.

In the end let us add the following concluding remarks concerning the pleasant usage of the book.

1 Let the pupils have it, so that they may indulge in looking at the pictures and get acquainted with them as much as possible at home before they start going to school.

2 Then let them repeatedly be examined and asked (particularly at school) what this thing and that thing is and what it is called, so that they may know how to name all the things they can see and may point out all the things they name.

3 Let the pupils be shown the things named both in the pictures and in reality, for instance, the parts of the body, various articles of clothing, books, houses, kitchen utensils, etc.

4 They should also be allowed to redraw the pictures with their own hands, if they like, and their willingness should be encouraged, firstly in order that their attention to things may thus be enhanced, as well secondly in order that they may realize the mutual relationship between parts, and lastly in order that they may develop dexterity in handling things, which is immensely useful.

5 If some of the things here mentioned cannot be presented to the pupils' eyes, as for instance colours and tastes, which cannot be expressed with the help of the printer's ink, it will be very useful that they should be presented to the pupils directly. For this reason it would be desirable that every more distinguished school should possess collections of rare things as well as those that cannot be found in the respective country in order that the pupils may be shown these things whenever they are to be told about them. Only under these conditions would a school become a real school of the things obvious to the senses — a prelude to a school of the intellectual world. But enough now, let us proceed to the thing itself.

Study questions

8. The pedagogic view of Comenius is summed up in 'Teaching everybody everything'. Which paragraph from this source text shows clearly that this was the objective of *Orbis sensualium pictus* ?

9. Comenius deliberately used pictures in his teaching. Why did he do this? To what extent can pictures have the same function in your own teaching context?

10. 'The main thing is for sensual objects to be rightly presented to the senses first in order that they may be made comprehensible. I insist and emphasize that the latter principle is the basis of everything. For one can neither act nor speak wisely unless one understands rightly all that one is to do or speak about. Now, there is nothing in our understanding that has not passed through our senses.' (lines 11- 15)

Do you try to explain things to your pupils more with the help of their intellect or more with the help of their senses? Give an actual example of both possibilities from your teaching practice and then answer the question what method you mostly use.

11. 'Man's senses (as the leading factors in the process of cognition in childhood, the mind not having so far developed so as to be able to handle abstract notions) always seek their own objects, and unless they find them, they weaken and tend to wool-gather; where as if they manage to find suitable objects, they grow merry and they willingly allow themselves to be fastened upon them until they have thoroughly examined them.'

(lines 46-51)

Give a concrete example of 'fitting stimuli' that you give your pupils to prevent their attention from flagging.

12. 'And after the book has been gone through in this way, no pupil will fail to learn to read, and nota bene, without that currently used syllabication, that tiresome torment of the mind, which this method can help to completely avoid.' (lines 73-77)

To what extent do you attempt to replace the 'prevailing, long spelling exercises' (including the repetitive exercises in other subjects than the languages) by more appealing forms of work? Give actual examples.

13. 'If some of the things here mentioned cannot be presented to the pupils' eyes, as for instance colours and tastes, which cannot be expressed with the help of the printer's ink, it will be very useful that they should be presented to the pupils directly. For this reason it would be desirable that every more distinguished school should possess collections of rare things as well as those that cannot be found in the respective country in order that the pupils may be shown these things whenever they are to be told about them. Only

under these conditions would a school become a real school of the things obvious to the senses — a prelude to a school of the intellectual world.’ (lines 116-123)

With his emphasis on teaching with visual aids Comenius wants to bring about a situation where pupils meet reality. How do you as a teacher bring about such true meetings in our age of the Internet?

14. Comenius wishes his teaching to form pupils ‘to be wise and to act and speak wisely’. (line 8) How do you see the relationship between knowledge and wisdom and what meaning does this have for your teaching practice?

Source text 2

Jan Amos Comenius, *Orbis sensualium pictus*, chapter 1 Introduction



Teacher: Come, boy. Learn to be wise.

Boy: What does to be wise mean?

T.: To understand well, to do and to express well all that is necessary.

B.: Who will teach me this?

T.: I, by God's help.

B. How?

T.: I will guide you everywhere, I will show you everything, I will name you everything.

B.: Here I am. Lead me in the name

of the Lord.

T.: Before all things, you ought to learn the plain sounds of which man's speech consists and which the living creatures know how to make and your tongue knows how to imitate and your hand can picture. Then we will go into the world and view all things. Here you have a live and vocal alphabet: (see page 2).

Study question

15. How does Comenius see of the role of the teacher? To what extent do you agree with his view?

Source text 3

Jan Amos Comenius, *Orbis sensualium pictus*, chapter 60 Morals



Our life is a path with a parting in the form of letter Y, the left-hand branch of which is broad, the right-hand branch narrow. The broad path is the way of depravity and vice, the narrow path is the way of virtue. Mind my words, young man! Follow Hercules. Do not take the left-hand path. Avoid vice. The left-hand path invariably has a pleasant start but an unhappy end. Take the right path even though it may be thorny. For virtue no way is inaccessible. Follow virtue wherever it may guide you,

through hardships to freedom and the gate of glory. Do not stray from the golden mean and the right path; this will give you safety. Put a good bridle on the wild horse of your passions lest you should come off. Avoid treading the left-hand path out of sheer laziness, but keep on heading for the goal. So you will find virtue.

Study questions

16. To what extent do you think, does moral shaping form a part of the object of teaching?
17. How would you describe the way of moral forming that is depicted in this short chapter of *Orbis pictus*?
18. If you are of the opinion that moral forming is the objective of teaching, is the way that you described it in the previous question also the manner in which you yourself would deal with moral formation? Give an explanation of your answer.

7. Impact

There are not many pedagogues in our times who are still honoured with a museum specially for them but this does apply to Comenius. The museum in Naarden, the Netherlands, where the mausoleum of Comenius can also be found, attracts many visitors from the Czech Republic. In that country Comenius is still a national hero. But his impact as a pedagogue goes much wider than this. For instance, in the Netherlands, Germany and the United Kingdom there are many schools named after him. That his influence was huge also became apparent in his own lifetime. As has been said, his books were translated into many languages. Shortly after its publication, for instance, the *Janua* was published in German, Polish, French, Italian, Spanish and Greek. Later on there followed translations into Arabic, Turkish, Mongolian and Persian (Lukas 2014, 37). For two hundred years the *Orbis pictus* reached the highest number of editions of all books for teachers and pupils (Mollenhauer 2017, 57). During his lifetime various governments asked Comenius to reform the educational system in their countries.



These restructurings meant the development of his pedagogic realism by means of which a practical and functional pedagogic programme came into being in contrast with the humanist education. That programme was carefully put together and Comenius was one of the first who wanted his programme to link up with the natural development and interests of children. This is the view from which he wrote his school books that, by virtue of their use of illustrations, were examples of teaching with visual aids. Its continued effect can be seen, for instance, in the nineteenth century practice of using wall charts in teaching.

To Comenius' pedagogic realism belongs also attention to the senses. Someone like Maria Montessori (1870-1952) elaborated this further, amongst others with developmental material intended to stimulate the senses of the child. The use of playing in teaching (Comenius wrote plays for his pupils) would later also become a matter of course. Comenius advocated a broad knowledge of reality. After his death attention for the subjects in which many facts are presented or *realia* like geography and history steadily increased. For languages it was mainly Comenius' books for the teaching of Latin that

were important. In these he kept the grammatical rules simple and followed each rule

directly with exercises.

Comenius was of the opinion that pupils all had to be admitted to school at the same time so that groups originated who would stay together for the whole of their school career. It took some time before this argument in favour of class teaching was accepted. During the nineteenth century class education (in Western Europe) was gradually entrenched in educational legislation.

'Based on the analysis of available historical literature on pedagogy, as well as by observing practical pedagogical work in modern school, we can conclude that the modernity of pedagogical ideas of John Amos Comenius, the creator of school bell and 45-minute lessons, has been permanently present in the life of school for 355 years. His organization of class-subject-lesson school system defined subjects, a special book as a source of knowledge for each subject, and precisely determined the beginning and the plan of work for annual, monthly and daily teaching (and these complicated innovations of that time have not changed up to the present). He also envisioned school year, timetable, didactical principles, teacher-fronted instruction, as well as ideas of life-long learning in the organizational sense that are still alive today' (Lukas 2014, 39).

Up to the present we find inspiration in the works of Comenius and his work is studied by scientists from different countries. A short search in scientific data banks will confirm this. As examples we here mention the Evangelical schools in Germany which are oriented towards his ideas (Berg 1990), the numerous articles on Comenius in the Czech language (see for instance the data bases EBSCO and ERIC) and the American editions of David I. Smith.

8. Actualisation (Making things relevant)

Jan Amos Comenius reflected on pedagogy in the context of his times. We do it in our own particular time which differs from the sixteenth century in many respects. Yet the ideas of Comenius can help us when reflecting on current themes from the theory of teaching. We could think of matters like:

School subjects or areas of learning?

During the past centuries educational subject matter has increasingly been cut up into subfields. Due to this pupils tend to think within the borders of the school subject. For instance, they no longer make a connection between issues dealt with in economics and those treated in history. Comenius rectified a full-blown division of reality with his emphasis on coherence and harmony.

Broad formation

Formation is a widely used word in reflecting on teaching. But what exactly do we mean by it? Are we mostly directed towards the pupil (shaping of personality) or are we guided by the needs of the community (shaping of citizens)? Is formation more directed towards the intellect or do we aspire to a broader formation? Comenius emphasised the broader forming that looked at the pupil as a whole person ('head, heart and hands' but also 'knowledge, virtue and piety').

View of reality.

In the Western world the Enlightenment resulted in a limited world view. Reality is what we as human beings can observe and understand. On what is outside our perception or understanding we cannot make any statements – if we even admit the possibility of its existence. Comenius saw the reality in which he lived as a created reality. Which implies that people and things are in a relationship with their Creator, even though sin has brought a serious disruption in this relationship. This not only throws a different light on education and teaching but also on the subject content presented in teaching.

Connecting school with life.

Comenius regarded it as important to connect teaching with the actual living context in which pupils find themselves. Family, peer group, fatherland, city or town... Themes that can be connected with actual life contribute more to the development of pupils than more remote themes.

Learning as long as one lives.

In his book *Pampaedia* (1669) Comenius described human life as a sequence of seven 'schools': from the prenatal school up to and including the school of death. Of course by these schools he did not mean any actual institutes but a continuous practical learning experience. From the seventh to the twenty-fifth year of their lives learning takes place within the school but even afterwards people should be prepared to learn. The current idea of learning for life links up with this.

Teaching with visual aids.

When speaking about teaching with visual aids reference is often made to the use of illustrations in school books, films during the lesson, animations et cetera. Comenius is then honoured for being the first to pay attention to these forms of learning. Yet in his teaching with visual aids Comenius wanted to go further than using a picture. He pursued teaching directed by experience where a pupil not only learns by using his eyes but because an appeal is made to all the senses.

Two kingdoms.

Comenius had an awareness that in education there is a connection with the conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, the way Augustine described it. This clearly emerges from the following quote: 'For our enemy Satan is on the watch not only while we sleep, but also while we wake, and as we sow good seed in the minds of our pupils he contrives to plant his own weeds there as well, and sometimes a corrupt nature brings forth weeds of its own accord, so that these evil dispositions must be kept in check by force. We must therefore strive against them by means of discipline, that is to say, by using blame or punishment, words or blows, as the occasion demands' (Comenius 1907, 2016).

In our times in which the majority of the youth have unlimited access to the Internet, and social media have an enormous impact, it is important to reflect on these things: what is the good seed we are sowing, where are the weeds being sown and how can we curtail its growth?

Study questions

19. Do you recognise the fact that the way subjects are structured in education fragments reality in the perception of pupils? To what extent do you regard this as a problem?
20. How do you view the relationship between the subject(s) you teach and the reality created by God?
21. In what degree is your own teaching directed at experience? Can you give actual examples?
22. Which theme from the actualisation above appeals most to you with regard to your own teaching practice and why is this so?

9. Keywords

Teaching everybody

Comenius regarded it as important that all children should have a part in education. In his times education was primarily meant for the boys from rich and noble families.

Comenius wanted girls and children from poor families to be taught as well.

Teaching everything

Comenius wanted pupils to become acquainted with all aspects of life. For this pansophism was needed (see below under this heading). Younger children learned the primary knowledge; as the children grew older the knowledge was broadened and deepened.

Broad formation

Comenius was of the opinion that forming in education and teaching had to be directed at the whole person of the pupil. He called knowledge, virtue and piety areas of formation.

Pansophism

The idea of the 'encompassing wisdom'. All wisdom originates from God as the Creator. Therefore there is coherence and harmony in this wisdom.

Senses

Comenius regarded it as important in education and teaching to make an appeal to as many different senses as possible. Children acquire wisdom by sensory observations and experiences.

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