

Čapková, Dagmar

Some Educational Innovations as Proposed by J. A. Comenius (Komensky)

Rozprawy z Dziejów Oświaty 25, 137-146

1983

Artykuł umieszczony jest w kolekcji cyfrowej Bazhum, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych tworzonej przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego.

Artykuł został zdigitalizowany i opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie ze środków specjalnych MNiSW dzięki Wydziałowi Historycznemu Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.



DAGMAR ČAPKOVÁ

SOME EDUCATIONAL INNOVATIONS AS PROPOSED BY
J. A. COMENIUS (KOMENSKY)

The lack of knowledge of the work of Comenius and of its development in socio-historical context meant that many principles stipulated by him had had to be rediscovered later, be it by Pestalozzi, Froebel, or others. Some ideas of his work, incorporated into his system of education had not been recognized at all, or had been treated in isolation from the whole of his system and so had often been misinterpreted.

It was not until the nineteenth century that some principles of the Czech *Didactica* and of *Didactica magna* were recognized. And, apart from a few exceptions, it was not until this century that the meaning of his system of education and of social regeneration, notably as expressed in the General Consultation on the Reform of Human Affairs¹ was adequately appreciated. It has been necessary to differentiate critically the elements that belong to the past from the ideas directed to future development since society in the time of Comenius did not offer conditions for both understanding and realizing them.

The development of the work of Comenius reflects the many-sided endeavour of the Czech thinker to negate those powers of social and ideo-cultural development which had destroyed the Czech state of estates and the culmination of the Reformation Humanistic culture in his native country. The work of Comenius is also a manifestation of the endeavour to help in the transformation of the structure of European society of the 17th century into a harmonious peaceful creative community of all men and to give a fundamental directive for cultural and

¹ The whole of this work, entitled *De rerum humanarum emendatione consultatio catholica* [General Consultation on the Reform of Human Affairs] was, in 1934, discovered by D. Tschizewskij in Halle/Saale and, in 1966, edited as „editio princeps” in Prague. It is in seven parts: *Panegersia*, *Panaugia*, *Pansophia* (*Pantaxia*), *Pampaedia*, *Panglottia*, *Panorthosia*, *Pannuthesia*. Cf. *Consultationes de Consultatione* (ed. D. Čapková), J. A. Comenius Institute of Education, Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, Prague 1970; “Acta Comeniana”, esp. 1—4 (XXV—XXVIII), Prague, Academia, 1969—1972.

ideo-political activity. The complexity and discrepancies of this endeavour showed in his struggle with external economical, social and political conditions of the Czech and of broader European development: however, they were caused also by internal conflicts and crisis since he attempted tasks that were beyond the powers of individual man.

The requirements of the contemporary middle class pushed him towards peripheral work—i.e. the elaboration of textbooks for the Latin school; but he did not wish this to obstruct his much deeper work on broader issues. It was his aim to discover the laws governing the development and education of man and mankind in the process of history².

The Humanistic way to emancipate language by returning to the ancient elegance of Ciceronian style, or to reform the curriculum by returning to the content offered by the authors of the Antiquity could not be a sufficient way for Comenius to solve the problem of the backwardness of the school curriculum in comparison with the advancement of learning. Nor was the Aristotelian philosophy that prevailed in schools and encyclopaedic activities without a unifying idea and method a satisfactory solution.

Comenius agreed with Vives, Ratke, Bacon a.o. that the prime need was to study things, not mere words, and he tried to explain the broad social function of language as a means to express one's understanding of the world. By his *Janua linguarum*—a new type of textbook—he contributed to a change that meant an innovation both in language education and concept of curriculum. This innovation was put into practice already in his century. But the philosophical basis was not fully understood.

At a time when middle class society was rapidly advancing there was a need to include and classify the knowledge derived from the changing view of the universe. There was also a need to include natural observation as emphasized by Bacon, whose philosophy, in fact, advocated the secular and utilitarian function of science and curriculum. However this could not penetrate immediately to education where religious tradition was deeply socially anchored. It was the authors bound by Christian tradition who were predominantly interested in the problems of education rather than the representatives of the new developing science. This was also the case with Comenius. The fact that, at the same time, he wanted to keep step with the advancement of learning caused contradictions in his work. (E.g., on the one hand, he introduced natural sciences into the school curriculum, on the other hand, he clung to the Mosaic Physics.) Nevertheless the way in which he developed

² Cf. D. Čapková, *Some Comments on the Interrelation between Comenius's Concept of History and his Concept of Education*, "Acta Comeniana", 3 (XXVII), pp. 107—115.

some ideas inherited from the Czech Reformation and tried to integrate them with the stimuli of European culture is worthy of attention.

It may be recalled that the Czech Reformation, beginning with the Hussitism of the early 15th century, advocated many significant aspects³ of equal social rights, including education open to everybody⁴. Noteworthy also was the concept of the relationship of man to God, as expressed by the Czech Reformers. They taught that through an active relationship man could slowly achieve permanent perfectibility. Therefore not the Lutheran "sola fide" only, not a Calvinist "predestination" only but permanent human activity which has been given always a moral and social function. So in the main trend⁵ of the *Unitas Fratrum* (The Unity of the Czech Brethren) in Bohemia and Moravia this concept developed in a peaceful democratically based cultural activity characterized by the aspects of lifelong education, by the principle to integrate mental and manual activities and by permanent endeavour to try to improve everything and everybody⁶.

Comenius was a sensitive observer of basic social conflicts⁷ of his time. After 1620 he had painfully lived through the social, religious and political conflicts that had taken place in his own country. He urgently sought an integrating factor to find a way out of all labyrinths, whether individual or collective. During the 1620's he was stimulated by some authors of the Neo-Platonic orientation⁸ such as Cusanus, Rosecrutians a.o. who emphasized the whole as a starting point, and also by Bacon, with his stress on natural observations, a.o.

³ Cf. D. Čapková, *Domáci kořeny základních rysů Komenského pojetí universálního vzdělání* [The Czech Roots of Fundamental Characteristic Features of Comenius's Concept of Universal Education], "Pedagogika", 23, 1973, pp. 439—458.

⁴ Especially notable was the education of people who became a political authority in the Hussite movement; it also meant the improvement of the social position of women as an important factor in the religious-social development and their education.

⁵ The Unity of the Czech Brethren (*Unitas Fratrum*), as a Reformation Church, originated in Bohemia in 1467. The requirements of the first Brethren, mainly members of the lower strata of country population and of poor intelligentsia, were based, like those of the early Hussites, on the democratic ideals of the Christians. They formed a close community. At the beginning they refused contacts with corrupted class society, including academic culture. In the course of the 16th century most of the members of the Unity opened the door for a broad culture.

⁶ Cf. especially synodical decrees of the Unity, called very often "Reform" ("Improvement"), dealing with education of children, parents, other adults. E.g. the Reform of 1533 has a subtitle: "The permanent Admonition of all faithful men in all social ranks..."

⁷ Cf. his works written in the period before his exile, esp. *The Labyrinth of the World* and the *Paradise of the Heart*, *The Sorrowful* (all in Czech).

⁸ Comenius derived inspiration from the Neo-Platonically oriented philosophy of N. Cusanus but gave it a different direction. While Cusanus dealt primarily

Comenius, with the background of the tradition of his native country, found that it was necessary to consider the problematics from the aspect of human life, of man's place in the universe and his position in society. For this reason he began his *Didactica* and then *Didactica magna* with a philosophy of human life and he connected the questions of educational process with the questions of man's relation to the whole world⁹. So in these and other works of the 1630's Comenius arrived at important principles and later expanded them. E.g.: Educational practice must be developed from a theory of education based on a philosophical theory which can answer questions about man's position in universe, in his contemporary world, in society, and further, which can provide a methodological basis for correct orientation among the complexities of life¹⁰. These provided the roots of his lifelong considerations on the interrelations between the general and the particular, the whole and the part. He was interested in the interrelations between human life and education, general education and specified education in individual disciplines, (such as sensory, intellectual, language, manual, moral, religious education, social and emotional aspects of education, education of individual

with the universe, the centre of Comenius's interest was man and his education. Although Cusanus stressed the need for human activity so that man might rise towards God, in fact, he paid attention notably to the human mind alone. Comenius set a similar aim, the harmony of man with God, the Highest Perfection; but he concentrated mainly on man's path towards this aim, i.e., the improvement of many-sided human activity, both theoretical and practical, activity which enclosed within it hierarchically classified particular aims: lifelong universal human cultivation, both individual and collective (and institutional), and a general social improvement.

⁹ Comenius agreed, as it is known, on many questions of intuitive, pleasant, easy and thorough teaching with Wolfgang Ratke (Ratichius). There are however important differences of approach between them, and especially in regard to the question as to whom education was to serve. While Comenius wished education to be open to all, Ratke concentrated narrowly on its benefit to the Germans and sold his method to the mighty of the world. In the conception of education for everybody Comenius differed from many other authors, as well as in the conception of education as a system dialectically interconnected with the development of any individual and with a broad social reconstruction.

¹⁰ Cf. notably *Prodromus pansophiae* (1637); his considerations on the system of pansophic textbooks in which some books had to introduce general knowledge on the world and education (be they called *Janua rerum* or *Pansophia*), some textbooks introduced particular knowledge (be they called *Janua linguarum* or *Pan-historia*, etc.) Both aspects have been integrated in the eight parts of *Pantaxia*. On this development of the application of pansophia to education and social practice see D. Čapková, *Neznámý deník Komenského* [Unknown Diary by Komenský], supplement to "Studia Comeniana et historica", 8—9, Uherský Brod 1974/75; by the same author, *Některé základní principy pedagogického myšlení J. A. Komenskeho* [Some Fundamental Principles of Educational Thought of Comenius], Prague, Academia, 1977.

age stages and the lifelong education, education of individual man and education of a whole society, etc.). These concepts have been elaborated by psychologists, educationalists three centuries later.

At this point it might be useful to consider the concept of pansophia which became a philosophical basis for his theory of education as well as for social reform. Pansophia should answer the questions of existence, of necessary knowledge, of the reason why everybody has to learn and be educated in a universal allround way. Pansophia covered a broader field than contemporary needs of better instruction. It specified the aims, content and methods of the development and education of all men. Comenius expressed the pansophic aims, content and method in universal terms as "omnes omnia omnino" and expanded and elaborated them¹¹. The terms meant that all men without discrimination ("omnes") have to be taught all things that are significant and useful for human life ("omnia") in such a way as to enhance human development and powers of action and direct them to common good ("omnino"). It is because the scope and content of the three terms "omnes omnia omnino" developed during the course of Comenius's life work that it is possible to distinguish four main stages in his integration of pansophia (philosophy) and education. In short, let us say only that it is the development of the views of Comenius beginning with "formatio hominis", as expressed in *Didactica magna*, and culminating with "cultura universalis", pampaedia, and panorthosia, i.e. the universal lifelong education of everybody and broad social reform, reconstruction, as expressed in *Consultatio*¹².

What this universal approach implied was the working out of principles governing not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the relation of education and knowledge to the purposes of social and spiritual regeneration, as Comenius puts it, to the perfectibility of man and of society as a whole.

The move towards a system of pansophia and pansophic education was also the product of an understanding of social conditions and potentialities. For instance when working in Sweden and in Poland, Comenius was asked to concentrate mainly on the problems of the Latin grammar school. When however he was in contact with England at a time of political and cultural revolution he could develop his ideas about broad social reform (*Via lucis*) derived also from the Czech Reformation tradition.

¹¹ Cf. *Pansophia (Pantaxia)*, *passim*; *Panegersia* IX, 25—29 (*Consultatio* I, 91—93, pp. 81—82); *Panaugia* III, IV, 13—16 (*Consultatio* I, 127—134; 136—138, pp. 103—107, 108—109). Cf. *Pampaedia* I—IV (*Consultatio*), Prague 1966, t. II, col. 4—56 (pp. 15—40); *Panorthosia* I, 8—11 (*Consultatio* II, col. 362—363, p. 212), etc.

¹² Cf. *Didactica magna* VI, VII, already the title of the chapters; *Pampaedia* I, 1, 6—13 (*Consultatio* II, 4, p. 14; 4—7, pp. 15—16).

Let us consider his attempt to elaborate pansophy in the function of a general methodology of knowledge and of all human action. It is known from *Prodromus pansophiae*—and it is then evident especially from the structure of the eight grades or worlds of *Pantaxia*¹³ that Comenius considered pansophia from two main aspects. One aspect should be a sort of selected items of knowledge on the whole world based on a careful selection, respecting nature, human many-sided activity, and the spiritual world. The other aspect should be a selection of the principles of the existence and function of the world. Comenius called this second aspect the pansophic metaphysica. However, this metaphysics differed from all known systems of metaphysics in which metaphysics was an ultimate discipline “a posteriori”.

Though the traditional term is preserved Comenius transformed the content and function of metaphysics to provide a kind of ontology with a significance and consequences in terms of epistemology, education, social practice—to put it approximatively in modern terms.

This transformation of metaphysics under cover of the traditional terms was meant as a methodological introduction to knowledge as a whole and to education. But, in accordance with Baconian criticism of Plato¹⁴, Comenius did not take the realm of ideas as one apart, totally separated from the real world, but as one dialectically interconnected with it. The ideal world should be a model for our real world, a guiding criterion. This is why Comenius gave his pansophic metaphysics a function for human life and practice.

That is why Comenius—when he elaborated his pansophic system of the knowledge on the whole world in eight graded *Pantaxia* or his system of textbooks—always desired to combine a Platonic approach

¹³ *Pantaxia* (= *Pansophia* as the third part of *Consultatio*) is a Neo-Platonic concept of selected knowledge on the universe and expressed as a series of pansophic worlds (or “gradus”): The first world, called “mundus possibilis” (“idealis”), as a system of hypothetically conceived general ideas, is pansophic metaphysics. It is followed by the seven “real worlds” (“mundi ideati”). After “mundus archetypus” and “mundus intellectualis” there is “mundus materialis” (on nature), “mundus artificialis” (on man and his labour), “mundus moralis” (on human behaviour towards himself and towards other men, i.e., “ethica” and “politica”), “mundus spiritualis” (on religion) and “mundus aeternus” (on God). However, unlike Neo-Platonic schemes Comenius introduces an active element, the creative activity of man by means of which man transforms and changes the given world and so continues the act of Creation. As has been discussed already the theories of Comenius differ from all Neo-Platonic concepts which contain only descendent worlds while with him the series of the worlds includes also an ascendent process, the world of human labour being the decisive turning point for it; cf. J. Červenka, *Die Weltsschichten bei Campanella und Comenius*, “Acta Comeniana”, 4/1 (XXVIII/I), Praha 1979, pp. 117–157.

¹⁴ Cf. in the quoted study by the author, *Neznámý deník [Unknown Diary]*, p. 32.

“a priori” with empirical sensationalism (empirical sensory experience) and rationalism. His concept is remarkable not only for the presentation of subject matter in a natural succession regarding the usefulness to individual and social life, for the intuitive method applied intelligently and regarding the natural development of the child. It is also significant because it reflects interconnections between a general methodology and both the special and general problems of education and of particular disciplines. Particular disciplines are not separated from each other. They represent a certain aspect of the world, not the world as a whole but that particular aspect under examination; however, they are always interconnected with the general knowledge of the whole world.

Comenius tried to make this concrete and clear when dealing with question of language teaching. He provided philosophical grounds in terms of a general theory of existence, and the provided pedagogical ground in terms of a general theory of education and then made interconnections in language teaching in terms of methodology and practical didactics not forgetting applicability in relation to social purposes. He did this in *Methodus linguarum novissima*¹⁵ placing as much emphasis on extending useful knowledge as on perfecting language or literary expression. Considerations of the interconnections between reality and thinking, speaking and acting became a necessary background to his proposals for reforming language teaching and other disciplines.

The structure of *Consultatio* shows in the best way Comenius's endeavour to seek and emphasize interconnections between education, knowledge and social life. It shows his endeavour to educate man in his relation to the whole world, integrate him as an individual and social being and integrate all components of human personality. He demonstrated that educational practice must be based on a philosophical theory which can answer questions about man's position in his contemporary world, in society, and further, which can provide a methodological basis for positive orientation among the complexities of life. Seeking a correct correlation between general and specific aspects of education by means of pansophia also implied that certain laws may modify the chaos of multitude and variety. Then education in specific disciplines could not continue to have a narrow utilitarian function only, but must always be considered in relation to the broad social and cultural basis of human life. In generalized terms his endeavour to integrate aims, content and methods of education, his seeking connections between education and general methodology of knowledge, etc., implies recognition of and respect for the dialectical interconnections between large and narrow structures and within any given structure. This dialectical approach is stimulating although Comenius never relinquished his concept of the pa-

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 51 s., *Methodus linguarum novissima* was written during Comenius's stay at Elbing (Elbląg) and published in 1648, Leszno.

parallelism of areas of the universe and was often wrong when using analogy as an argument.

His concept of pansophic education contained an important aspect of natural education¹⁶. With Comenius education is no automatic repeated procedure only; but it becomes a lifelong unfinished process. This processing was later emphasized by Rousseau under different conditions. Unlike Rousseau, Comenius wanted rather to create a system of pansophic lifelong education that could be applied to both the social development and the natural development of man. Comenius introduces the ideas of development into education¹⁷. He discovered education as a fundamental factor in achieving better theory and practice. For the first time in history he examined education as a dialectical relation of individual and social universal all-round development. For him it was natural to integrate physical and mental health¹⁸; the whole education should have a broad hygienic meaning. And it was also natural to contribute to social reform. Comenius respected the child and childhood and the individuality of the child. But he also felt that education in society with other children is natural and necessary.

For Comenius it was natural to develop all capabilities and faculties of the child. The best way to do so is through activities, both mental and physical (manual) which have to be integrated. Let us remember his "fabricando fabricamur"¹⁹ penetrating throughout his educational writings beginning with *Didactica magna* until *Consultatio* and culminating in *Pantaxia* with the concept of "mundus artificialis", the world of human labour, and its central position in the system of pansophic worlds, "gradus".

Labour was conceived by Comenius not only from the utilitarian point of view as a means to achieve certain profession and position in

¹⁶ The characteristic feature of Comenius's concept of human nature is that he defines it not only in relation to nature but also in relation to the Highest Perfection and thus opens possibilities for always higher creative activity. Cf. D. Čapková, *Die Beziehung zur Natur und die Bildungskonzeption Komenskýs*, „Colloquia Comeniana", Přerov 1969; J. Červenka, *Die Naturphilosophie des Johann Amos Comenius*, Praha, Hanau, Academia, 1970; J. Popelová, *La concezione della natura umana nella "Consultatio"*, [in:] *Comenio o della pedagogia*, Roma 1974, pp. 129—142.

¹⁷ Cf. also B. G. Ananjev, *Voprosy psichologii v trudach Jana Amosa Komenskogo*, [in:] *Materialy naučnoj sessii APN RSFSR*, Moskva 1959, p. 206.

¹⁸ Cf. esp. *Schola pansophica*, 59 s., *Opera didactica omnia*, III, 23 s., and *Pampaedia* VII, and *passim*.

¹⁹ The meaning of the words is that, by means of his labour man creates possibilities for his own perfectibility; or: when working he is improving himself. Cf., e.g. *Didactica magna* XXI, 5 (*Opera didactica omnia* I, 121); *Methodus linguarum: Praefatio* 28 (ODO II, 14); *Schola pansophica* 81, *De cultura ingeniorum: Schola latina* II, 26 (ODO III, 30, 81, 121); *Pampaedia* XIII, 3 (*Consultatio* II, 197, p. 111), etc.

society but also as a fundamental element for universal human improvement including physical, intellectual, emotional and social relations. Therefore, in a similar way to that one in the *Unitas Fratrum*, though more philosophically than any of his Czech predecessors, Comenius expressed important new principles. The value of the individual and the ways in which he can establish relationships with the changing environment is reflected in his work.

Comenius still stressed the importance of innate ideas. But he formulated them unlike the Neo-Platonists. His triad of innate instincts, notions and faculties²⁰ was taken in a dynamic way as open possibilities, i.e., a chance of the lifelong all-round education of all men, of the action based on right knowledge and aiming at the improvement of everybody and everything.

Comenius was also influenced by the representatives of new methods of investigation, Bacon and Descartes. However he was not concerned merely with the investigation of nature, to the secret of which, as he wrote²¹, Bacon gave the key by his method. Nor was he concerned with merely enriching the human mind²². He was looking for a method of influencing the development and education of the entire human personality and mankind as a whole. He wanted man to become the true master of the world including himself and, through lifelong activity, to renew the lost original perfection, as Comenius puts the term. So, while Comenius remained in the pre-scientific age in the investigation of nature, in matters of education he founded a system worthy of consideration (not only for the time of transition from feudalism towards capitalism). In fact he felt that education had no laws in the sense of natural sciences. He never abandoned those elements that gave pansophy and education a broader socio-cultural and spiritual basis. His *Dedication of Via lucis* to the members of the Royal society²³ indicated that he welcomed scientific research and discovery in so far as it tended not only towards investigations of the truths of nature but also of man in all relationships of his towards the world, including man and society. The general as well as particular aims Comenius set forth concerned the whole of mankind in historical development, peace as a rule for any human action, social order which ensures human dignity, rights, tolerance and social justice. It is evident that with Comenius we can

²⁰ The aspects of pansophic metaphysics.

²¹ Cf. *Prodromus pansophiae* 63, 80, 87, 98.

²² Cf. *Continuatio admonitionis fraternae* 59.

²³ *Via lucis: Dedicatio (Illuminati seculi phosphoris, nascenti reali philosophiae feliciter obstetricanti Regiae Londinensi Societati salutem et prosperos successus)*, Amsterdam 1668, esp. § 27—31.

speak not only about innovations in education but also in philosophy, linguistics, etc. Comenius worked for the future²⁴ and opened a new trend in the development of European culture.

²⁴ Cf., e.g., "Acta Comeniana", 3/XXVII, Praha 1972, esp.: J. Polisensky, *Comenius — notre contemporain d'honneur* (pp. 21—31); A. I. Piskunov, *Odkaz J. A. Komenského jako jeden z pramenů idejí pedagogiky novověku* [The Heritage of J. A. Comenius as one of the Source of the Ideas of Modern Times], pp. 33—37; F. Hofmann, *Über die Modernität des pädagogischen Vermächtnisses J. A. Komenskýs*, pp. 39—44; D. F. Cregan, *The Relevance of Comenius for Our Age*, pp. 47—49; H. J. Heydorn, *Die Hinterlassenschaft des Jan Amos Comenius als Auftrag an eine unbeendete Geschichte*, pp. 51—56; K. Schaller, *Die politische Pädagogik des J. A. Comenius*, pp. 67—77; B. Suchodolski, *Jan Amos Komenský — le problème de la réalisation de l'utopie*, pp. 215—218, a.o.—J. B. Čapek, *Dalla „pansophia” alla „panorthosia”: educazione e salvezza*, [in:] *Comenio o della pedagogia*, Roma, 1974, pp. 97—109; J. Kyrášek, *La „Pampaedia” nella problematica pedagogia moderna*, [in:] *Comenio o della pedagogia*, pp. 161—172.