

SOME EDUCATIONAL ASPECTS IN ENGLAND IN THE 16th CENTURY

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It is well known that the term Renaissance refers to a new age in the history of western civilization supposed to separate the Middle Ages and the Modern times or, as Aldo Agazzi puts it, Scholasticism, medieval society is followed by Humanism, the socio-cultural movement which started the Modern Age.

The concept of the Renaissance is no longer as clear-cut as it was to the Renaissance Humanists themselves. It did not emerge suddenly out of the medieval darkness but out of the urban setting and sophisticated intellectual environment of medieval society. The idea of a revival of culture began with the Italian writers and scholars of the XIV, XV and XVI centuries who were called humanists because they occupied themselves with the “*studia humanitatis*”.

The XIV century Italian poet Petrarch introduced the myths that antiquity was a perfect age, the middle ages was a period of darkness and that a revival of culture and an improvement of society were dependent upon a revival of classical learning. This rebirth was both an imitation of ancient models and a recovery of the ability to observe and imitate nature. Although there seems to be an inherent contradiction between the imitation of antiquity and the spontaneous revival of creative impulses, evolution of Humanism from the earlier stages seems to have solved the problem.

At the end of the middle ages, society had changed profoundly. Commerce had expanded and life in the cities had been modified. Economic and political power, which had been in the hands of the

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hierarchy and feudal lords, was taken over by the city burghers. The use of vernacular languages was spreading. Higher education was still largely based on Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas who tried to reconcile Aristotle with medieval christianity. But scholasticism was crumbling before the XV century and new tendencies broke the unity of its abstract reasoning. A pragmatic outlook and the ideal of self-development through action were favoured by the new conditions.

With all these changes undergone by society it was clear that a new kind of education was needed as well as new educational structures and institutions. These did not develop suddenly, in a similar way to what had happened to humanistic thought. It is clear, for example that the educational institutions originated in the schools set up in the free cities at the end of the XIII and XIV centuries as an answer to the needs of the newly "important" population.

The pedagogists of Humanism took into account all the transformations experimented by society and worked out new theories that often went back to the classical world. In the early days of Humanism, education was elitist. It was mainly princes and rich men and women who had to be educated. The masses were despised.

The aim of education was to develop a complete and harmonious personality. As man is made up of soul and body, this second element has to be looked after as well and that is why physical education and games are important also, "mens sana in corpore sana". The student has to develop his physical, intellectual and moral attitudes.

To reach that goal it was necessary to follow more than one road. Individualism, present everywhere is also present in the varieties of schools and teachers, each of whom had their own educational system which was based on their own didactic experience. The contrast with the methodological uniformity in the middle ages is clear. But above that variety mentioned there is one principle in common: man, the individual, with all his activities is taken as the centre of the educational interest.

Whereas in the middle ages the most important factor when teaching was the doctrine to be transmitted and which was passively absorbed by the students, now the educator had a great confidence in the students' personal

resources and he helped them to achieve those values and skills for the benefit of the spirit and the body.

The humanists thought that education was a continuous process and it was neither completed at school nor limited to the time when one is young. Knowledge meant the possibility of penetrating the thought of the ancients. The reconstruction of the past enabled a better understanding of themselves and of their own time.

Laicization of culture made secular schools spread out. Secular people received a christian education but they lived in circumstances different to those of the ecclesiastics.

Humanism started in Italy but humanists from other countries were anxious to demonstrate that the Italians did not have a monopoly of eloquence, belles lettres and some other aspects. Let's remember Erasmus of Rotterdam who was one of the intellectual leaders of the XVI century. He emphasized the European wide scope of the movement. At first those who wanted a humanist education had to go to Italy and many foreigners could be found in the Italian universities and schools. Among the Italian humanists who visited England in the XV century we can find Poggio Bracciolini, among the English visiting or studying in Italy, (Padua, Vercelli, Vicenza and Bologna mainly) we can mention: John Tiptoft, William Grey, John Free, Robert Flemmyng and John Gunthorpe (Oxford). All of them studied with Guarino in Verona.

Following this first wave of humanists there was another one in the following generation, that is, at the end of the XV century: William Selling, who studied in Padua and Bologna and translated one of Juan Crisostomo's works into Latin and he influenced his disciple Thomas Linacre. This. Together with William Grocin and William Latimer he reestablished the study of Greek in England and ensured the definite establishment of Humanism in this country from 1500 approximately.

Thomas Linacre (ca. 1460-1524) from "All Souls College" in Oxford, accompanied Selling to Rome in 1485. He dedicated his time to the study of the humanities. He studied with Poliziano for some time as well. In Venice, he translated from Greek for Aldo Manucio. He had a special interest for the criticism of the bible and for medicine and also translated three of Galeno's works from Greek for Aldo. When he came back from

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Italy in 1494 he started teaching Greek in Oxford and he also contributed to the foundation of the “Royal College of Physicians” in London.

About William Grocin (ca. 1446-1519), we can say that he was also very influential in the reimplantation of the studies of Greek in Oxford. He legated all the books from his library to Oxford many of which went to the different colleges. As James Bowen says, the list of Grocin’s books received by Merton College is in itself, for example, a testimony of the cultural change experimented in Oxford, if we take Merton as a representative institution. Grocin’s books show part of the literature in fashion; at the end of the XV century books about the most varied topics, either in Greek or Latin were in circulation

The flowering of both humanistic studies and educational institutions taking place at the end of the century in England favours a rapid transition from the middle ages to the renaissance and it was due in part to the development of printing, but there were many other factors which have a socio political character. It is clear that the economic and social conditions behind the intellectual and cultural revolution of humanism in Italy were also present in other parts of Europe, even though they took different forms. In some European states political power was being concentrated, so humanism and educational reforms developed around the courts. In other countries it was the burghers who concentrated the economic and political power. The educational reforms in northern and western Europe developed slowly, but they were lasting as they affected a greater number of people than in Italy.

According to James Bowen, the new movement had a much more profane character in Italy than in England but some other authors do not agree with this, they think that the programme of christian humanism had been laid out by Italian humanists such as Lorenzo Valla, who showed how the critical methods used to study the classics ought to be applied to problems of biblical exegesis and translation and to church history. He was one of the founders of classical philology. The only thing was that his programme started to be carried out in the XVI century. During all the time that humanism flourished one constant feature it showed was his constant preoccupation for educational aspects. They wrote about school management, teaching methods, curricula and students behaviour.

As we previously mentioned the aim of education was to develop a complete and harmonious personality and many teachers -to reach that goal- tried to promote educational reforms by teaching themselves using their own methodologies or writing their own textbooks. Of all Europe, it was in England where these reforms were more efficiently taken into practice. Three outstanding figures: Colet, Erasmus and More helped powerfully to apply humanism to the christian religion and to the progress of education.

The English humanists wrote excellent texts for studying the classical languages. Linacre was the author of *The Emendata Structura Latini Sermonis Libri Six*. It was very popular the grammar outlined by Erasmus but written by John Colet and William Lily to be used in the school established by Colet sometime after 1508 in St. Paul. Lily was the first director of this school (1512) and this grammar was the one used there becoming the standard textbook for two centuries and its use was nearly made compulsory by Parliament. In 1758 after some amendments it became the Eton Latin grammar. Its popularity was due in part to the fact of being made a compulsory textbook. Henry VIII decided to adopt a single textbook for all the schools in the country (and he chose Lily's), introducing (in1542) some prayers of the new Anglican Church and an introduction to the grammar written by the king himself. Lily had previously written (in 1515) a Latin Syntax: *Absolutissimus de Octo Orationis Partium Constructione Libellus*.

John Colet influenced the generation that made the Renaissance the instrument of Reformation. He had a typically English mind, conservative and practical, the value of the classical learning for him being the use it could be put to in effecting spiritual reform. The aim of a true interpretation of Scriptures was to discover the personal message which the individual writer meant to give. He was the first to introduce the historical method of interpreting Scripture. Dean of St. Paul, he tried to translate christian humanism. into practice. The foundation of the new school in the London cathedral had a very important role as the old one was languishing. It was meant for the education of 153 children with no money.

In the *Statuta Paulinae Scholae* in the section entitled “Capitulum Primum de magistro primario” he tells us that the teacher must be saintly, virtuous honest and versed in the Latin literature and also in Greek, if possible. Nevertheless from the point of view of education. the most

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important sections are the ones dealing with “The children” and “What Shalbe Taught”. The curriculum was in harmony with the humanistic theories and true christianity: the students should be instructed in the good Latin and Greek literature and in the good authors specially those christian authors who wrote wise things in clear and chaste Latin. His purpose was: to increase the knowledge and veneration of God and Jesus Christ and the good life and christian behaviour in the children. Colet is well remembered now for his educational work and as the founder of St. Paul School.

Thomas More (1478-1535) graduated in Oxford in 1492 having Grocin and Linacre as teachers, then he went to Lincoln’s Inn in London to study Law. He succeeded Wolsey as Lord Chancellor in 1529 resigning in 1532. It is interesting to remember that Henry VIII repudiated Roman authority making the Church of England independent from it after a very long and conflictive process in which More was very deeply involved.

Apart from his work as a statesman, he was very interested in Pedagogy to which he dedicated part of his work *On the Highest State of a Republic and on the New Island Utopia* (1516). In it More saw the connection between educational, social and political problems and the influence that society therefore has on education. He discusses many of the problems, interests and activities of his time (voyages of discovery, political speculation, the iniquitous wars and leagues of rulers scrambling for extension of dominion in Europe, royal indifference to social injustice, the growth of crime due to unemployment and the possibilities of a policy in which wealth and well-being for all are sought, in which national service is applied to construction instead of being applied to destruction). It is possible to see modern social development in More’s imaginative island. According to N. Abbagnano and A. Visalberghi, among the Utopians, culture, apart from the practical objectives has to give pleasure to the spirit during the leisure time, for in Utopia no one works more than six hours a day, but they have the maximum well-being, as everybody works.

Utopia’s theme had his locus classicus in Plato’s *The Republic* and in many things this work depends on that classical idea of an ideal society. It deals with the activities required by a just and balanced society and its success depends on its learned mass of citizens. *Utopia* is more realistic than *The Republic* and the educational theories expressed by Erasmus are those manifested by Plato’s *The Laws*. In his allegory More breaks with many of the educational practices which were in current use in Europe at

that time. More considers basic for social progress and instruction the role attributed to personal merits and the importance of each individual's nature. He seems to be conscious of his own personal rise and Erasmus, from a relative anonymity.

He preferred vernacular languages as a vehicle for instruction during childhood and probably during adolescence. Vernacular adolescence seems to be the perfect time to start learning the classical languages. This means a radical contrast with scholasticism and his contemporaries as children started learning Latin when they were seven or even before that age. The idea behind that was to give children an education in vernacular language enough to make them fit for future professions or works. As for the education of young girls More gave his daughters a classical education by means of preceptors.

Utopia is a transcendental work as it clearly reflects the expansion of a new social conscience at the beginning of the XVI century. It was published in a moment of very deep religious feelings and growing conflicts in this field, let's remember that Erasmus, Luther and Pomponazzi published their works practically at the same time and life and the whole society in Europe was suffering a profound revision according to some new values.

The XVI century in general was a period very conscious of the value of education. The most outstanding figures of the time dedicated much of their time to this field. But theirs was not an isolated work, they only expressed, perhaps with more clarity and in front of a more numerous audience that which had been told and written by many others. Many thinkers occupied themselves with the different stages of the educational process and tried to widen its range of concepts. Many men of letters either directly connected with educational activities or institutions or indirectly connected with them when reflecting a public consciousness, wrote about schools, colleges and universities. On the other hand the typical scholar of the XVI century used to be an European rather than a national figure - Erasmus is the best example. There were some cases, for example in Germany, where Luther and Melanchthon tried to make the schools serve as an instrument of a determined religious doctrine, but in general, most reformers of education intended to improve schools and their curriculums independently from any specific doctrine.

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The last aim of education was to lead man towards God but, as it has been previously said, there were many roads to be followed and no unanimity in points of view as far as education is concerned. Erasmus and Luther are idealists and both have a certain impracticality in what they defend. Their thoughts reflect the circumstances of the period dominated by both the events after the different protestant schisms and also the deep changes which were taking place in the economic political and social life. Apart from Erasmus and Luther there were some other intellectuals who, working within the limits established by tradition, when they tried to make improvements in the schools and teaching institutions where they were working they went further than the limits of what was then considered the concept of education. Among such men were the aforementioned More and Elyot.

Thomas Elyot (ca. 1490-1546), wrote the first treatise in English that dealt with education: *The Book Named the Governour*. It was widely read and used in the whole country especially by the low nobility in the provinces. Up to then all treatises intending to reform education had been written in Latin and it was dubious that influenced many teachers and educators who, due to their persistent ignorance, did not probably read Erasmus, Sadoleto or Vives. *The Governour* analyses the existing discontinuity between the ideal thought of the time and the common practice of education and it is probable that it was written in vernacular language because Elyot wanted to reach the ordinary school teacher. Then the author goes on to deal with the decadence of education in general although his expressed intention was to deal with the theme of superior education of those who would have the future economic and political power in their hands. They had to study the classics but that study had to be supplemented by the needs of the new mercantile class: the English language, manual arts, drawing, music and sports.

Roger Ascham (ca. 1515-1568) was perhaps the best Greek scholar in England. In 1570, in *The School Master*, he wrote about the importance of the English language, even though he was a professor of Greek. He cared very much about style and stated that the way to gain it was to read widely and exactly. He believed that physical training was important in education, but not only for the nobility and the leisured classes but also for the students and teachers.

Richard Mulcaster was an experienced educator at St. Paul's School and at the Merchant Taylor School, a Latin secondary School maintained by the taylor's guild in London and the most famous of all the "guild schools". His many ideas were about education for the best. Mulcaster saw the possibilities of efficient training and enrichment of the mind in and through English, and maintained that teachers should be paid more adequately. As the lutheran reformers, he thought that education should be open to all, even women, who should have the opportunity of higher education.

The religious transformation of Luther and Calvin had a fundamental contribution to the formation of the modern mentality. Its influence was also decisive in the pedagogical aspect, among other reasons because the extension of education at the elementary level was seriously taken into account. As a consequence, the new pedagogy had to take into consideration the realities of the situation, that is to say that the new schools combined the learning of a practical trade with traditional studies, which meant less time was spent on unpractical books and the vernacular language took on a new importance. Public education was necessary as all christians had to know how to read the holy Bible. In some aspects, the protestant reform was in consonance with the humanistic and Renaissance attitudes but in others, it violently opposed them.

The Renaissance, as we have said has already posed the problem of the renovation of religious life but the religion of the platonic Renaissance people was exclusive to scholars, more than a religion it was a theological philosophy which could not be extended to the popular masses and it could not be taken as a principle of religious renovation.

Reform of religious life could only be the result of a turning back to the origin of Christianity, that is, not to the classical theologians but to Christ's teaching as it was shown in the Bible. This turning back to the origins of christian tradition was intertwined with the philologic movement developing in connection with the classical texts, but in the northern humanists it was biased as well towards the study of the Old and the New Testament.

Erasmus himself is the one who fuses the humanistic attitude and the aspiration to an authentic religious renovation. In *The Praise of Folie*, he criticises the religiousness of his time. Erasmus knows how to present his

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ideas with gentle humour or biting satire depending on the occasion. He and his colleagues had the typical humanist belief that an eloquent appeal would help to convince people of the truth of their message and they relied on education as a means of reforming Christendom. As moralists, they were interested in dogmatic differences and were early symbols of religious toleration. In this aspect they were not in tune with the times for the Reformation polarized European society along confessional lines and the result was paradoxical, as Christian humanists had done so much to lay the groundwork for religious reform. They ended up being suspected by both sides. Radicalism was in fashion whereas toleration was not.

The principle of free will met drastic limitations among the reformers who elaborated new dogmas. It was not only a matter of dogmatic diversity but of different socio-political movements at play.

The religious reforms brought about by Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and the English ruling family were both the cause and effect of transformations. In those European countries that broke away from the Church of Rome in the XVI century, new political and social systems developed and although there are some essential differences separating the two principal Reforming branches, there is a substantial identity and from the point of view of education, they share certain characteristics in common. They are:

- i.) The principle of instruction for all was reinforced.
- ii.) Schools intended for the low classes spread out and they were completely different from the classical schools (which were meant for the rich classes).
- iii.) The almost total control of instruction on the part of the lay authorities.
- iv.) A growing national physiognomy of education in the different countries.

Luther encourages the establishment of new popular schools with an eminently practical character where vernacular language is used but at the same time he tends to reform the Humanistic school, so well spread out by then, giving a more serious content to it. There is no connection between

both kinds of school but he tries hard to create a deep cultural and effective link among all believers encouraging sacred music and religious chanting in chorus.

An important aspect from Luther's pedagogical point of view is his absolute rejection of violent methods. He believed it was necessary that children found study, if not more pleasurable, then equally as pleasurable as play.

The separation of the Church of England from the Church of Rome under Henry VIII in the XVI century did not have the repercussions in the scholastic field that were experienced by the continental Reformations. In the period preceding the Reform, the Renaissance had strongly influenced the secondary school system existing in England and there were about three hundred grammar schools in existence. But due to political reasons, the situation became precarious.

Henry VIII in his policy of concentration and consolidation of power in the hands of the state, included the schools. In 1548 the Chantries Act was passed, confiscating the estates of the church expressly for use in education. But the funds allocated to education were diverted from that end after Henry VIII's death and the turmoil of the times. Primary schools and grammar schools retrenched their operations for lack of funds and many of them disappeared.

But the religious and political problems previously mentioned were also reflected in the development of Oxford and Cambridge Universities which had become, as George Sampsom says, part of English life and thought and the teachers who did not agree with the successive varieties of theological opinion came into trouble.

In 1558 Elizabeth I succeeded to the throne and brought more tranquil times and during her reign the universities were restored to their formal function. Requirements for degrees determined the lines of scholastic classical disciplines. The accepted subjects were: Rhetoric, philosophy, both ethical and natural, and logic. The objective of every master was to lay the foundations of prose style. English style was very much cared for and the study of Latin developed taste in words and a sense of the logical texture of speech.

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After the strictly historical and literary humanism was over, society provided new solutions and perspectives to educational problems. In the modern states money changed from one social class to another giving way to an internal transformation. Outside, the universalist ideal of the Roman Sacred Empire collapsed and, as we previously saw each country concentrated its strength towards a strictly national policy. We could also see some pedagogical innovations:

a.) the preference of the mother tongue instead of the classical languages.

b.) the wish to learn modern languages (there were clear economical reasons)

c.) contraposition, in general, of a diffuse cultural ideal which is utilitarian and specializes to a humanistic culture which is “altruist”, aristocratic and aesthetic.

d.) the inclusion in their curriculum, in these more numerous schools, of natural sciences and mathematics, taken as the most useful disciplines for the modern man.

These general tendencies, which were beginning to emerge in previous centuries, were much more emphasized now and they found their philosophical justification in the Renaissance Naturalism and later on in the Empiricism spread by Bacon in the XVII century.

The inductive experimental method was thought of as fundamental to the knowledge of nature, which we had to obey in order to control. As Bacon said: “*Naturae parendo imperator*”, pedagogy had to follow this principle also and he tried to extract from nature and its laws the necessary inspiration to apply its norms in order to carry out an efficient job in education.

When applying the experimental method in the schools they gave more importance to the intuition of the things and phenomena rather than to books. Observe the psychological human reality and take into account the gradual spiritual process of man according to his age. Physical education, practiced in the open was very important and the purpose behind it was to

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have a direct contact with nature. It was important as well to study the physical and familiar milieu in which education developed in order to determine its influence in the students' temperament and character. The number of professional schools grew. Schools in which mechanical arts, drawing, physics and arithmetics were taught. The state took part in helping private enterprises. These are some of the general characteristics of what is called Pedagogic Realism. Due to the limit of space, we can not study the Pedagogic Realism in more detail.

From what we have said before, we can conclude that:

1.) All the changes experimented by society are taken into account by pedagogists, who try to "modify" the kind of education, the educational structures and institutions, according to the new needs.

2.) The changes in education do not happen suddenly, but they develop from something which comes before. Pedagogical Realism comes after Renaissance Naturalism as an evolution from Humanism itself.

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