

The Comenius Museum in Naarden (The Netherlands)



I received an invitation to attend the opening of an Exhibition in the Comenius Museum in Naarden, the Netherlands, on June 26, 2009.

Comenius is the Latin name for Jan Amos Komenský who lived from 1592 – 1670. He was born in Czechia. Comenius was a philosopher, a theologian and a pedagogue. Religious conflicts forced him to roam through Europe. However, in 1656 he obtained asylum in Amsterdam. In those days the Netherlands were still willing to welcome people with different opinions who – in other countries – were prosecuted for their religious beliefs. Comenius was buried in Naarden in a big Mausoleum, which nowadays is part of a Museum dedicated to him.

Things in common

The ideas of Comenius as a pedagogue have three things in common with the ones of Dr. Montessori:

He is of opinion that children must be taught to be keen observers. Therefore the senses must be trained. And concepts that have been observed must be laid down in language.



Vrána kráká
Die Krähe krächzt
The crow caws
De kraai krast



á á

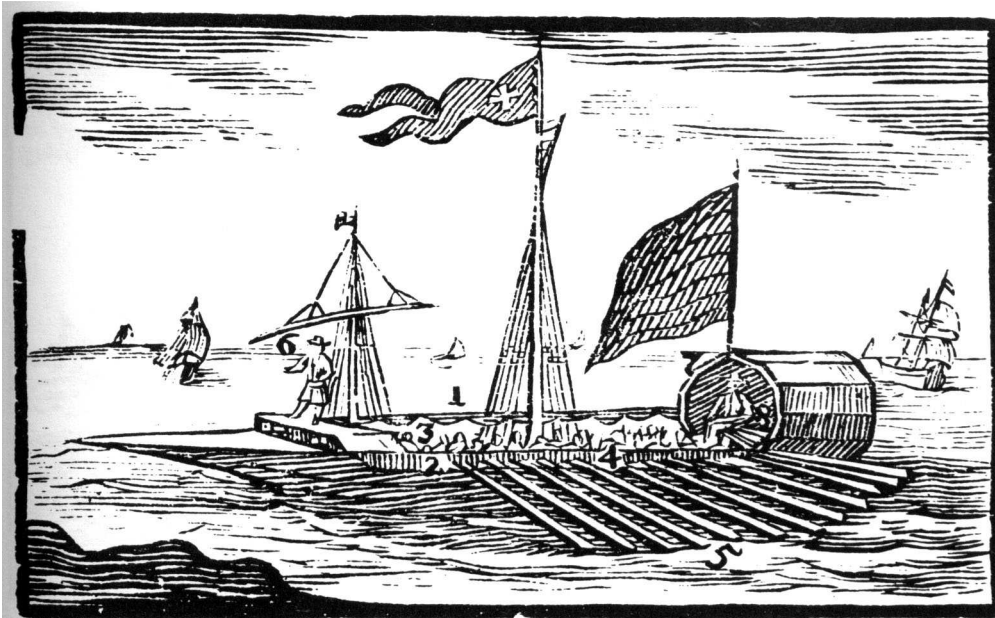
A a

It is necessary for a child to be able to read in order to explore the world. For this purpose Comenius combines a picture with the sound of a letter and with the symbol itself. For instance there is a picture of a crow with the text: 'The crow caws.' Next to this little sentence the sound is laid down as 'á á'. Then follow the letters A a. Next to descriptions in the child's own language he puts a translation into Latin. The language of science in those days. Comenius believed that this way, the child would learn Latin without effort.

Finally he presented the world to the child by means of a book that combined a text with a picture. These pictures were wood engravings that gave a detailed picture of

what the world was about. Montessorians would call this 'Prepared paths to Culture'. This book is called 'Orbis Sensualium Pictus', The World in Pictures.

'Orbis Sensualium Pictus', The World in Pictures



A galley (rowing boat)¹ has one or two benches² on which oarsmen³ sit at the ship's beam-ends⁴ rowing⁵ by striking the water with oars.

The shipmaster⁶ standing in the fore-castle and the helmsman⁷ sitting in the stern and holding the rudder⁸ steer the vessel.

De galei¹ heeft een of twee bancken², waarop de roeiers³ zitten aan de zijkanten⁴ van het schip en in het water slaande roeien ze met roeispanen⁵.

Het schip wordt bestuurd door de kapi-tein⁶, die vooraan staat, en de stuur-man⁷, die achteraan zit en het roer⁸ vast houdt.

The exhibition in the Museum was dedicated to this book. It was opened by Dr. Jan Terlouw, who is well-known in the Netherlands as a scientist, an author of books for children and a politician. The exhibition was put together by the Museum in co-operation with the National Museum for Education in Rotterdam.

Montessori materials

The similarity between the ideas of Comenius and Montessori was demonstrated by displaying Montessori materials. In order to demonstrate the connection between sound and sign there were sandpaper letters. Good idea, of course. But why were these letters in print whereas Dr. Montessori advises script? Moreover, the letters showed arrows indicating in which direction to trace them. This is what you will not find in AMI's blueprints of materials. There were materials for the education of movements: the dressing frames. But the sensorial materials, meant for the education and the organization of sensorial impressions in the mind were hardly displayed although they are of paramount importance for this subject. Moreover not all the materials, supplied by the National Museum for Education were Montessori

materials. Symbolising the world by a puzzle map is a good idea, of course. But why not the World Map or the Globe, indicating the Parts of the World, instead of the map of Europe. Indeed: in the eyes of a Montessorian the materials are not something to be trifled with!

From Childhood to Adolescence

In her book 'From Childhood to Adolescence' Dr. Montessori mentions the 'Orbis Sensualium Pictus' as a revolution in the transfer of knowledge. Here the word is combined with a picture for the first time and it resulted in an enormous enrichment of knowledge.

Dr. Montessori continues with the statement that she wants to go beyond this level. The child must be put in contact with the real world directly and not only via a picture. When studying the development of a particular plant, for instance, from seed to plant, we can imagine that some other plants follow the same cyclus.

Dr. Jan Terlouw



It was a pleasure to listen to Dr. Terlouw's lecture since he is a universal person. As a natural scientist he appreciated Comenius. However, he disagreed with him where Comenius made a connection between science and religion. He praised the way Comenius presented knowledge to the child. Since he is a writer of books for children Terlouw can be seen as an expert in this field. Finally Dr. Terlouw presented himself as a politician (He was the Minister of Economic affairs from 1981-1982, among other functions.) when he advocated more attention for the role of education and science in the process of revitalizing our stagnating society.

It was a very pleasant afternoon.

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