

## Historical dimensions of the pedagogic thought

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### Abstract

*The history of education begins in the ancient antique, medieval, Renaissance cultures. The history of pedagogic thought begins with the work of Comenius, Didactica Magna (1657) which analyzes education based on some specific concepts, according to a paradigm conditioned by the theological perspective which was specific for those times. The subsequent evolution of the pedagogic thought reflects the characteristics of historical epochs: a) Pre-modern (Comenius XVII century, Locke, Rousseau, XVIII century); b) modern (Novel education, XIX-XX centuries); c) Postmodern (J.Dewey, R.W.Tyler, B.S.Bloom, J.S. Bruner, the second half of the XX century-the XXI century, until present). The paradigms asserted historically – magister-centrist, psycho-centrist, socio-centrist, curricular – universally confirmed, may also be identified in the Romanian pedagogy. This study analyzes only the historical dimension of the pre-modern pedagogy which prepares the passage from the pre-scientific to the scientific stage.*

**Key words:** *history of education, pedagogic thought, pre-modern pedagogy*

**T**he history of education begins with the appearance of man, integrated in different *communities* of the ancient antique, medieval, Renaissance cultures.

*The history of pedagogic thought begins with Comenius’s work, Didactica Magna (1657) which approaches education based on specific concepts: education, instruction, didactic principles, organization of the educational system on three levels (primary, secondary, superior), organization of the educational system on classes and lessons. The presence of the paradigms may be demonstrated only after this historic moment which marks the apparition of a*

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strict field of knowledge, even if it is situated in a pre-scientific stage, under the influence of theology and philosophy.

*The evolution of pedagogic thought* may be analyzed in accordance of these two criteria: a) the appearance of a distinct field of knowledge, sustained by *specific pedagogic theories*; b) the existence of specific pedagogic theories and of some paradigms which approaches these theories in a specific manner. Thus we identify three evolution stages of pedagogy – pre-modern in the pre-modern society, pre-industrial (XVI-XIX centuries), modern, in the modern society, industrialized (XIX-XX centuries), postmodern, in the postmodern society, post-industrial, informational (the second half of the XX century – XXI century, until present) – see Sorin Cristea, 2010, p.26-44).

### **Universal pre-modern pedagogy**

*Pre-modern pedagogy* evolves from the *pre-scientific* to the *scientific* stage. It corresponds to the pre-modern, pre-industrial society epoch (XVII-XIX centuries).

#### ***Pre-modern, pre-scientific pedagogy***

It is especially represented by Jan Amos Comenius (1592-1670), John Locke (1632-1704), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778).

1) Jan Amos Comenius, approaches the problems of education in his *pedagogic* treaty, „*Didactica magna*” (1657), which tends to represent „*The art of learning everything to everybody*”. He does this by means of some specific pedagogic concepts: a) *education*; b) *the power of education / educability*; c) *the purposes of education (erudition, virtue, piety, health)*; c) *the contents* corresponding to these (education: *intellectual, moral, religious, physic*); d) the general *principles* of education and educational / *didactic principles*; e) the didactic methods which were mend to make accessible learning based on the supreme principle of *intuition*; f) *the organization forms of education*, according to the chronologic age (primary, secondary, superior educational system); g) the

main organization form on classes and lessons, respecting the pupils' age particularities.

*The pedagogic theory* of Comenius is developed according to a paradigm which is known under the formula of „education according to nature”, perfect, created by God”; this paradigm is included in the current of the “pedagogy of essence” (Bogdan Suchodolski, trad.1970).

2) John Locke valorizes in education his philosophic empiric conception about knowledge (knowledge derives from experience) – see *”Încercări asupra intelectului uman”* (1690); we remember the thesis with multiple pedagogic openings, according to which „nothing enters the intellect which previously hasn't been in the senses”.

- The pedagogic representative opera is published in 1693 – *„Câteva cugetări asupra educației”*; It is presented under the form of letters addressed to a noble; it is centered on “the education of a nobleman” – it proposes, in this sense, *the pedagogic ideal of gentleman*, derived from the nobility class, „but who is able to run his businesses with *raison* and purpose”; it anticipates thus the productive qualities of man in the future capitalist, industrialized society

- *The education's finalities* are thought in the spirit of the mentioned ideal, which: a) has a moral signification, transposed at the level of physical and intellectual education; b) it is especially supported by the strategic purpose, asserted by Locke in the first phrase of the book „a healthy mind in a healthy body”; these finalities, of maximal generality, will orient the three dimensions of education, based on *specific purposes*: a) *physic education* – cultivation of *health* by rational life (clothes, food, daily hygiene, living in open air, simple nourishment, existence as natural as possible); b) *moral education* – *virtue*, with the domination of the senses by *raison*; *wisdom* and a „good raise” / politeness etc.; c) *intellectual education* – specially placed after the *physical education and moral education*; *intellectual education* represents *instruction* which is so necessary to man, „but only in the second place and only serving the other greater qualities” associated with *moral education* (*good manners*) and with

physical education (*good living habits* which cultivate health) – see John Locke, *Câteva cugetări asupra educației*, trad.1971); the content of *intellectual education* includes several disciplines (languages, mathematics / arithmetic, geometry; geography, history, philosophy, music etc.); important is „the purpose – the cultivation of the interest for knowledge - and *the method* (which *illuminates the path of the one who learns*).

- The philosophy of education, promoted by Locke, by the proposed ideal, frames in *the pedagogy of essence* even if by his pleading for „natural life,, he anticipates the conception that in the XVIII century will be promoted by J-J.Rousseau

- Next to Comenius, Locke contributes to the progress of pedagogy, anticipating its evolution as a science of education by the proposed specific concepts, referring to ideal and purposes, principles, contents of education, instruction methods (see Ion Gh.Stanciu, 1997.).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau publishes *Emile or about education*, in 1772. It is a first treaty of *modern pedagogy* which initiates *the paradigm of education centered on child*. It is retaken the thesis of Comenius of the education in accordance with nature. But it is also considered the concrete nature of the child which is good, but the society corrupts it. It is anticipated the paradigm of the pedagogy of existence (in Bogdan Suchodolski's terms).

*The child* is discovered and treated as *object of pedagogy*, a theme which anticipates the current *New Education*. Rousseau has *unlimited trust in the force of natural education* conceived as a non-formal free activity, without the constrictions of the formal, institutional instruction. The principle of *nonintervention* in the child's education (or of *negative education*, by isolating the child from the society) anticipates the *nondirective* movement in *modern pedagogy*.

*Pre-modern pedagogy* in the XVIII-XIX centuries evolve in the direction of achieving a new stage closed to the *scientific* one. There can be underlined two significant moments: a) the elaboration of some *specific theories: the theory*

of the primary education (Pestalozzi); the theory of preschool education (Froebel), lesson theory (Herbart); b) the attempt to construct pedagogy based on socio-humanist sciences (*ethics* – Herbart; *anthropology* – Uşinski) or nature sciences (*biology* – Spencer).

### **The elaboration of specific theories**

Johan Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827) develops a *theory of primary education* through his works which continues the line sketched by Rousseau: *Leonard and Gerturda*, socio-pedagogic novel, 1781-1785 (I-V part); *How Gerturda teaches her children*, 1801, translated in Romanian by I. C. Petrescu, 1929. Primary education is projected like „a system of instruction destined to masses” (I.Gh.Stanciu, 1997, op.cit.pag.64-70). It puts accent on the child’s natural, individual state, but also on the social one; *the didactic principles* put accent on learning based on intuition, on observation of nature, on development of language, on organizing the contents on main, “guiding” ideas, with the instructor’s permanent warm closeness to his pupil’s soul.

Friedrich W. Froebel (1782-1852) develops a *theory of preschool education* („Education of man”, 1926). *The organization of preschool education* is accomplished under the influence of Pestalozzi’s work and Rousseau’s ideas. He considers the assurance of a continuity between preschool education and primary education.

The activities from the school education are centered on the game’s multiple formative resources: *a game with objects, game of perceiving things, plants, animals; game of cultivating the physic and the spirit, social games* etc.; the contents and the methodology valorize the model of „gifts games”, organized in the „children garden”, an institutional environment which will rapidly impose in numerous countries, including in Romania.

Johan Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841) develops a *theory of lesson (General pedagogy, 1806; Pedagogic lectures, 1835)*. This theory will have a great influence in Europe and in the world. It valorizes a psychological conception

about learning, considered as a linear process, based on *interest, attention, apperception*. It is a theory of the *psychological steps*, justified, in Herbart's opinion, by the necessity for the child to cross the „path from concrete to abstract and afterwards to concrete again” through „*operations* which correspond to the internal laws of psychic life” (Ion Gh.Stanciu, 2000-2001, pag.27).

The four psychological steps of the lesson are: a) *The lesson clarity* ensured by the presentation of the new knowledge by intuitive means (images, objects etc. or / and verbal (words); b) *The association* of the information considered representative for understanding the lesson; c) *The lesson system*, which assumes „formulation of generalization – definition, rule, principle”; d) *The lesson method* which means „the exercising of the abstract thinking and the application of new knowledge”.

### **The attempt to constitute pedagogy based on sciences**

#### 1) J.Fr. Herbart – *Pedagogy based on ethics*

*Pedagogy* as a discipline of study necessary for training educators, is constructed based on *ethics*, understood as *practical philosophy; the purpose of education has an ethic foundation*; it focuses five *moral ideas: interior liberty, perfecting, good will, justice, equity* (Ion Gh.Stanciu, 1997, op. cit.); the means of education which have to correspond to the purpose ethically founded, have a *psychological* basis, reflected at the level of the practice of didactics, in projecting the *lesson stages*.

*The development of pedagogy based on ethics* allows its structuring on three main domains, elaborated in accordance with three fundamental notions:

a) *Governing – Pedagogy basis*, sustained by: the conception about educator and educated and about the educative values and means which tend towards a necessary equilibrium „between constriction and liberty”);

b) *Education – The theory of education / instruction / General didactics*, which has in its center „*the theory of lesson*”, sustained also by the *principle of*

accomplishing *an educative educational system* based on stimulating the relation between „the multilateral interest” (empiric, speculative, esthetic, sympathetic, social, religious) and the pupil’s capacities (spirit of observation, abstract thinking, a sense for beauty, sympathy, civism, religiousness).

c) *Moral education – Theory of moral education*, based on a *general purpose (virtue)* which may be accomplished through special principles and means (moral convictions, fixe rules, adequate behavioral habits etc.)

2) Konstantin D. Uşinski (1824-1871) – *Pedagogy based on anthropology (Man as an object of education*, vol. I; II, 1867)

His fundamental work, *Man as object of education*, has the subtitle ”*Pedagogic anthropology*”. Pedagogy must base on the sciences which study „man or his life conditions (anatomical, physiological, psychological, geographical, economic, political etc.)” (Dicţionar de pedagogie, vol.I, 1963) .

*Pedagogic anthropology* valorizes the data of these sciences from the perspective of their utilities in the process of the human development and training as an educable spiritual being. The study object of this pedagogy, regarded in a wide sense, is the *practical activity of the educated man*; in a restrained sense it is fixed at the level of the educator’s didactic art (Ion Gh.Stanciu, 1997, op.cit.).

3) Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) – *Pedagogy based on biology (Essays about education*, 1861)

His *Pedagogy* promotes a conception about education, based on the principle of *evolutionism*. It starts from the idea that *evolution* is the fundamental law of the universe, implicated in change at the level of organisms (vegetal, animal, social) by *adaptation* to the environment. This law cannot be ignored nor at the level of education, regarded as a *system*, with specific *content*.

*The education system* must valorize the man’s dominant activities which can assure: a) health; b) economic resources means; c) necessary means for

family and education; d) social-political order; e) utile passing of free time, from physical, affective, esthetic perspective etc.

*The instruction contents* must be selected in accordance with these dominant activities. They include: physiology and hygiene; reading-writing, counting, sciences of nature, sociology; psychology and pedagogy (for „the job of being a mother and a father”); history, arts. In consensus with the pedagogic conception promoted by Spencer, in the sciences considered more important, substantial for pupils’ instruction „*biology is on the first place*” (Ion Gh.Stanciu, 1997).

#### ***The passage from pre-modern pedagogy to modern pedagogy***

We have to underline the process of scientification / scientization of pedagogy. It is a complex process which imposes a special analysis. Inside it *modern pedagogy* evolves as a *scientific pedagogy* necessary for the human’s efficient formation and development in the modern, industrialized or about to be industrialized society (the end of the XIX century - XX century). In this perspective we remember the assertion of: a) the current *New Education*; b) the *two* paradigms of the modern pedagogy – psychocentrist sociocentrist – which confront during the entire XX century, with prolongations until nowadays.

*The New Education* continues at superior level Rousseau’s conception. It is anticipated by the *pedocentrist conception* promoted by Ellen Key, through the book programmatically entitled, „*The century of the child*”, 1900. It is represented by important authors: Claparede, Montessori, Decroly, Ferriere etc. Most of them develop ideas promoted by the *psihocentrist* paradigm (centration of education on the psychologic resources of the educated). From the current *New Education* may also be identified contributions brought to pedagogy from the perspective of the *sociocentrist* paradigm.

*The paradigms of modern pedagogy* are promoted in the process of scientification / scientization of the field.

*The psychocentrist paradigm* is initiated in Germany by Meumann (*Introductory lectures in experiental pedagogy and its psychological basis, vol.*

I-III, 1911-1915) and in France by Binet (*Modern ideas about children*, 1909). This paradigm valorizes the researches made by the psychological sciences. Education is centered on the educated' *psychological* demands.

*The sociocentrist paradigm* is initiated in Germany by Natorp (*Social pedagogy* , 1899) and in France by Durkheim (*Sociology and education*, 1922). This paradigm valorizes the researches made by the social sciences (mostly by *sociology*). Education is centered on the demands of the society towards the educated.

The two *paradigms of modern pedagogy* confront during the entire XX century, with implications until present. It is tried the solving of this conflict in *postmodern pedagogy / society*, by asserting a new paradigm, *the paradigm of curriculum*, in the second half of the XX century, until present.

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