

**From unity to multiplicity: Comenius' and Montaigne's
didactics and diversity and its contributions to
contemporaneity^{1 2 3 4}**

***Do uno ao múltiplo: as didáticas de Comenius e de Montaigne e a
diversidade e suas contribuições para a contemporaneidade***

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Abstract

During the textual profusion derived from Gutenberg's press, Comenius and Montaigne elaborated pedagogical reflections that, more or less evidently, take the diversity of opinions and interpretations as an object and propose different ways to deal with it. The former tries to neutralize it by reinforcing the divine word as the only one and, hence, the reference to define what is important inside schools, whereas the latter proposes "experiencing the world" and the power of this variety to provide more modest and responsible outlines to what is known. This study aims to describe these viewpoints to reflect on how they may contribute to discuss contemporary classroom, which is also crossed by multiple discourses (whether true or not) originated from digital technologies.

Keywords: Montaigne, Comenius, Didactics, Diversity of interpretations

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Resumo

Na profusão textual derivada da prensa de Gutenberg, Comenius e Montaigne elaboram reflexões pedagógicas que, de forma mais ou menos evidente, debruçam-se sobre a diversidade de opiniões e de interpretações e propõem como lidar com ela. O primeiro busca neutralizá-la afirmando a palavra divina como única e, portanto, critério para a definição do que é pertinente no interior das escolas; o segundo aposta na “frequentação do mundo” e na potência que essa variedade tem de dar contornos mais modestos e responsáveis àquilo que se sabe. Neste artigo, pretende-se apresentar esses dois encaminhamentos com vistas a refletir sobre como podem contribuir para pensar a sala de aula contemporânea também atravessada por múltiplos discursos, verdadeiros ou não, oriundos das tecnologias digitais.

Palavras-chave: Montaigne, Comenius, Didática, Diversidade de Interpretações

Introduction

The Renaissance subject experiences the fluidity of social relations (Heller, 1982, p. 11).

The contemporary subject liquefies patterns of dependence and interaction (Bauman, 2001).

The Renaissance subject is that for whom the “infinity (the infinity of space, time, and knowledge) becomes not merely an object of speculation but an immediate experience” (Heller, 1982, p. 14); a subject who sees their world filled with “new information and abstract experience” (Postman, 1999, p. 50).

The contemporary subject find themselves amidst a “tide of information” (Han, 2014, p. 52).

The Renaissance subject is threatened by a technology that “puts into circulation errors and absurdities, allows those who want to ruin the reputation of an author to usurp his identity by distributing nonsense in his name, confuses thoughts with the superabundance of texts” and that, more than that, “far from guaranteeing the progress of knowledge”, “increases ignorance” (Chartier, 2009, p. 127).

The contemporary subject, “with the formidable swelling of the informational sphere,” is no longer threatened by “lack, censorship, limitation” but rather “by overinformation, overdose, the chaos accompanying one’s own abundance” (Lipovetsky and Serroy, 2011, p. 80). Moreover, the swelling stunts their ability to think (Han, 2014, p. 52).

The Renaissance subject is not the contemporary subject. However, it is perhaps reasonable to assume that what affected them refers to some extent to what affects us nowadays. Thus, this study aims to turn to two Renaissance authors, Michel de Montaigne and Jan Amos Comenius, to outline ways and answers to what concerns us in the present, especially about didactic practices in a profuse scenario of texts and, thus, opinions and interpretations.

Montaigne’s “Essays” (published in 1580) and Comenius’ “The great didactic” (published in its definitive form in 1657) claim at the end of the 15th century — about a 100 years after the invention of Gutenberg’s movable type press (Chartier, 1999) —, that this technology gave rise to a scenario that seems to refer to some of the social characteristics of the internet in contemporary times. The press, as Chartier (2009) and Postman (1993) point out, puts into circulation a number of unpublished texts, populating the European world with ideas and worldviews sometimes more (or less) akin to slogans. Even if they retain their power The sacred and the official (which were perhaps more so due to the absence of contrast rather than absolute sacredness or officiality) can no longer speak alone. According to Postman, “in the struggle between the unity and diversity of religious beliefs, the press favored the latter” (1993, p. 15).

The movable-type press is not the internet but, at the same time, it is difficult to ignore how much some contemporary analyses criticize in the latter what had also been observed in the former. Han (2014), for example, states that digital media promote a “demediatization:” instead of news investigation by professional journalism, the curation of literature or music by cultural agents, and politics by elected representatives, current virtual tools would favor, in the author’s argumentation, a direct contact with the objects of action — users may transform what they experience into news, use their personal tastes to define what is good art or not, and directly participate in political action by polls, publications, and reactions to posts. Postman (1993, p. 15) points out that, as the press Luther used, “by placing the Word of God on every kitchen table, makes each Christian his own theologian,” contemporary demediatization renders relationships with the real direct and therefore multiple.

Obviously, neither Montaigne nor Comenius thought about the internet since they wrote in the 16th and 17th centuries, respectively. However, both Montaigne's "On the education of children" (2002) and Comenius' "The great didactic" (2011) put diversity of opinions and readings of the world on the scene. Each, however, approaches it in their own way. For Comenius, as evident above all in the 25th chapter of his book, it is necessary to affirm the unequivocal truth of the divine word and organize what does or does not belong to education around it (and only around it). His is a didactic of a single book, of a single word, which delimits well what is and what is not true and serves as a sieve to define what should be taught inside the classrooms he intends to organize with his proposals. Montaigne, on the other hand, argues that nothing should be lodged in understanding by authority or custom alone: everything must be put to the test, and learners, the philosopher asserts, will decide if they can. Otherwise, they will remain in doubt since Montaigne (2002, p. 226) "(...) love[s] to doubt, as well as to know crazy". The French philosopher, unlike Comenius, bets on an education that throws learners into a diversity of opinions, into the "commerce of men:" it is only there, by the friction of their knowledge with that of others that they can have a fairer notion about themselves and what they know.

In "Why read the classics?," Italo Calvino (1993) states that a classic book never says all it has to say because we always question it from a present that is ours, rather than that of its writing. This desire to listen with today's ears, to read with today's eyes what Comenius and Montaigne wrote a few centuries ago motivates this study. We believe that, faced with the impasse of a classroom in which socially less and less consensual knowledge circulates, observing how authors who dealt with the "excess" and the "diverse" in pedagogical actions may be productive. Their answers seem to be diametrically opposed and, for this very reason, show a contrast rich in possibilities.

Thus, this study, which further develops a discussion raised in my PhD (Coppi, 2021), aims to describe these authors' answers to the following question: what to do in the face of an excess of interpretations and convictions in a classroom? To this end, we first offer a detailed reading of chapter 25 of Comenius' "The great didactic" that will show that by the 17th century a posture answers our question by defining what is true and what is false and thus inappropriate within the school. Then (and in contrast to Comenius' guidelines), we will address how Michel de Montaigne deals with opinion variety in his pedagogical propositions — although our analysis will focus on "On the education of children," we will mobilize some of the notions in his other

articles, namely: “Of pedantry” (which gives rise to his essay on childhood education) and “Apology for Raymond Sebond” as it provides rich material to understand what Montaigne thinks of the aspirations of human reason. The opposition between these views seems to reside in the relation the authors establish with a supposed absolute truth: while Comenius affirms it, Montaigne seems to be unable to pinpoint it. This second stance seems to bring a rare pedagogical potency. Strategically aligned with Montaigne’s conceptions, the end of this study will outline some possible directions arising from a critical and responsible affirmation of variety, rather than denying it.

Comenius: the Bible against the Library

The 25th chapter of Comenius’ “The great didactic” is entitled “If we wish to reform schools in accordance with the laws of true Christianity, we must remove from them books written by pagans, or, at any rate, must use them with more caution than hitherto.” It contains a few noteworthy points. First, Comenius bets on what would constitute “true” Christianity, which, by contrast, suggests the existence of false faiths. Second, he draws attention to the fact that the existence of what is true implies mechanisms of selection, of definition of what fits or not within schools. Establishing these boundaries well would facilitate the identification, on the one hand, of the type of book that can be worked on in class and how that work should be done and, on the other hand, what book to categorically deny learners. Before we dive deeper into this chapter, however, we must understand the context of the book containing it a little better.

In the preface to the book, Comenius states that his intention is to “teach all things to all men” (2011, p. 11), and that his didactics show the universal art, “the right and excellent way,” to achieve this end. For this, the author continues, “the principles of all that is advised are drawn from the very nature of things” (Comenius, 2011, p. 11), and he concludes his initial reflections by making use of Psalm 67, chapter 1, verse 2, which contains an appeal so God may make “your ways may be known on earth” (Comenius, 2011, p. 12). The way Comenius presents his project establishes a claim to objectivity that stems from affirming what is true. This study aims to reflect on what follows from establishing something (whatever it is) as an objective and unequivocal rule about what reality is and how it works, rather than discussing what occupies

this position. Comenius claims that the divine word occupies this place: it delimits the nature of things, thus following it is agreeing with that very nature.

Once this truth is identified, the author can dedicate himself to elaborating the methods for conceiving schools as “workshops of humanity” through which “man really becomes man” (Comenius, 2011, p. 96), whose first characteristic is that they be rational creatures. Now, as the truth and the nature of things have been identified, it is easy to specify what configures the rationality that characterizes the subjects coming from the school. Comenius (2011, p. 53-4) writes that “To be a rational creature is to name all things, and to speculate and reason about everything that the world contains,”— if nature (reality) is already defined as coming from divine will, knowing can only be, after all, identifying. The divine word is unequivocal, it is one: that is why, later on, when defining the principles that should guide the educational process, Comenius (2011, p. 162) claims that “nature is always attentive to avoid contrary and harmful things” and as education mirrors “the nature of things”, “folly to introduce a student to controversial points when he is just beginning a subject, that is to say, to allow a mind that is mastering something new to assume an attitude of doubt” (Comenius, 2011, p. 163). It is necessary to keep youth “from incorrect, intricate, and badly written books as well as from evil companions.” (Comenius, 2011, p. 163), he says.

In this scenario, we arrive at chapter 25. Comenius states that school content should practically restrict itself to the Bible. He will try to refute the criticisms or reservations that could oppose such a proposal. Note that this study takes Bible less as a synonym to Truth and more as a Truth that is considered unquestionable: this enables us to operate in a logic of selection and classification of what does or does not enter the school.

But let us focus on the chapter.

Comenius begins it by arguing that for there to be truly Christian schools that avoid professing Christ in name alone while delighting in authors such as Terence, Plautus, and Cicero, “the crowd of Pagan writers must be removed from them” (Comenius, 2011, p. 289). “Therefore the true Church and the true worshippers,” he continues, “of God have sought for no teaching other than the Word of God, from which they have drawn the true and heavenly wisdom” (Comenius, 2011, p. 292). Thus, if true wisdom rests in the divine word, all that fails to correspond to it is necessarily non-wisdom, a lie, or, in the author’s own words, “occasions

for temptations and errors.” Truth reflects God: it is unique, unquestionable. Comenius (2011, p. 165) writes that:

For the mouth of God is the fountain from which all the streams of wisdom flow ; the countenance of God is the torch from which the rays of true light are scattered ; the Word of God is the root from which spring the shoots of true wisdom. Happy are they, therefore, who look on the face of God, listen to His words, and receive His sayings in their hearts. For this is the only true and infallible way to attain the true and eternal wisdom.

This passage explicitly shows that the pedagogical reflections Comenius elaborated are grounded on the belief in a truth that avoids interpretation or possibility. On the contrary, it desires itself to be unique and absolute. This characteristic also implies that what fails to converge to it automatically becomes part of the field of lies, of illusion. This division, however, does not seem obvious to Comenius’ contemporaries since he is indignant at schools including works other than that which bears the word of God. Regarding this, he states the following:

[...] as the heathen entered the Church in numbers, and the ardour that existed at first grew cold, pagan books were read, at first in private and then in public, and the result was a great confusion of doctrine. The key of knowledge was lost by the very men who boasted that they alone possessed it, and from that time opinions without number were substituted for the articles of faith. Then did strife arise, whose end is not yet visible ; charity grew cold, and piety disappeared. And thus, under the name of Christendom, paganism came into existence again, and still reigns supreme. (Comenius, 2011, p. 293)

Comenius directly points out what puts the divine word at risk: the diversity of authors and works circulating in a place in which the word once circulated alone. Following such “mixture, confusion, and disorder,” and “disagreements and disputes” from which we infer (as the author had already warned us) that contradiction and controversy have no place in what refers to God and, therefore, with what must be learned in school. School and Church, in this context, are not distant from each other, quite the opposite. “If the Church is to be purified from uncleanness,” Comenius claims (2011, p. 294), “there is only one way, and that is to put aside all the seductive teaching of man and return to the pure springs of Israel.”

This inferred pedagogical posture configures a position that separates what is true and what is false in the face of a diversity of interpretations, opinions, and worldviews. For this, it is necessary, first of all, to establish what truth is: Comenius identifies it to the name of God. In

other contexts, perhaps it would go by the name of some political ideology, Science, or “customs”— what matters, rather than the name, is a certain way of believing it unique. Such selection condemns what opposes it: Comenius, thus, taking Ephesians as an example, is quite categorical in stating that “as soon as the light of divine wisdom shone upon them, burnt all their curious books, since these were henceforth useless to them as Christians” (Comenius, 2011, p. 298). The absence of these threats orders pedagogical activities and enable them to be carried out under an atmosphere of tranquility, as evinced in one of his analogies: “It is safest to sleep on clover, for it is said that no serpents lurk in it, and on the same principle we should confine ourselves to those books in which no poison is to be feared” (Comenius, 2011, p. 304).

Faced with a scenario of uncertainty and risk — after all, young people’s minds and hearts could be seduced by dangerous ideas — Comenius’ didactic solution is to neutralize “mixture, confusion, and disorder.” To this end, he closes the doors of his school to everything that fails to mirror his Truth. There, in a “purified” and controlled environment, he can effectively teach.

But this may not constitute only one possible reaction to this textual profusion.

Montaigne: the great book of the world

Montaigne’s (2002) 26th essay is “On the Education of Children”. The author wrote it between the end of 1579 and the beginning of 1580, addressing the Countess of Gurson, who, at the time, was pregnant with her first child. The philosopher says that, after reading his “On pedantry” (which appears just before this essay on education), a friend suggested he delve into the subject and make some more proper pedagogical reflections. Taking advantage of the imminent birth of the countess’ son, Montaigne begins writing. The theme, however, is not entirely comfortable to him, leading him to state, in the first paragraphs, that his ideas and judgments “merely grope their way forward, faltering, tripping, and stumbling;” (Montaigne, 2002, p. 218). Thus, he leaves no doubt as to what he proposes: “I only quote others to make myself more explicit” (Montaigne, 2002, p. 221) and, therefore, “I give them out as my own beliefs, not as what I expect others to believe” (Montaigne, 2002, p. 221), before offering a brief notion about himself: “My sole aim is to reveal myself; and I may be different tomorrow if some new lesson changes me.” (Montaigne, 2002, p. 221-2).

This anchoring of his reflections in himself is a constant practice throughout his essays. Agnes Heller (1982, p. 198), for example, writes that, in Montaigne, “the external is filtered through the internal, but the content of the ideas is the external internalized.” In the same vein, Moura (2014, p. 1178) states that Montaigne’s style of writing is marked by what “in hermeneutics, we call a situation, in which the place from which one speaks greatly marks what one says, and one does not intend to hide this place.” Since the beginning of the text, this places us in a different posture from that of Comenius: while the latter imbued himself with a grandiose task, Montaigne seems to have more modest (more grounded in himself) objectives. A possible explanation for this difference lies in how these authors understand Truth and God. While Comenius takes one as synonymous with the other and transforms this relation into a parameter for his pedagogical considerations, Montaigne, although also a Christian, remains unconvinced of the human capacity to reach divine truth. In his “Apology to Raymond Sebond,” he writes that “Christians are to blame to repose upon human reasons their belief” (Montaigne, 2006, p. 163), that it is presumptuous and vain to believe ourselves capable of taking what we understand as a reflection of what God understands— “the plague of man,” he says, “is the opinion of wisdom” (Montaigne, 2006, p. 233). Montaigne is provocative about this presumption:

Is it not a ridiculous attempt [...] to forge for those [human and natural things] another body, and to lend a false form of our own invention; as is manifest in this motion of the planets; to which, seeing our wits cannot possibly arrive, nor conceive their natural conduct, we lend them material, heavy, and substantial springs of our own by which to move [...]

These are all dreams and fanatic follies. Why will not nature please for once to lay open her bosom to us, and plainly discover to us the means and conduct of her movements, and prepare our eyes to see them? Good God, what abuse, what mistakes should we discover in our poor science! [...]

(Montaigne, 2006, p. 304-5)

Montaigne skeptically distrusts the works of the human intellect and its ability to tell what reality is, what Truth is from itself. For the author, “philosophy presents us not that which really is, or what she really believes, but what she has contrived with the greatest and most plausible likelihood of truth, and the quaintest invention” (Montaigne, 2006, p. 306). A little later, he also writes that “philosophical inquisitions and contemplations serve for no other use but to increase our curiosity.” (Montaigne, 2006, p. 435). In addition to the aforementioned

difference between what they believe to be the capacity of reason, we must highlight another important point distinguishing the ways in which Comenius and Montaigne organize their philosophical presuppositions: for Comenius, knowing has to do with identifying, classifying, and designating; Montaigne, on the other hand, places the creations of the intellect as nurturing inventions. Now, the more varied a diet, the stronger the body becomes; the more varied the ideas with which one comes into contact, the broader the mind. This kind of “digestive” metaphor about knowledge will set the tone of Montaigne’s pedagogical directions in his essay on the subject. It seems we can now return to it.

In “On the Education of Children,” Montaigne has in view the education of a young nobleman, rather than the formulation of parameters to develop schools in general. However, we are interested in observing how he organizes his considerations, especially regarding diversity of opinions and ways of seeing. Note that the author criticizes the educational institutions of his time because, according to him, they aim “with one and the same lesson, and the same measure of direction, to instruct several boys of differing and unequal capacities” (Montaigne, 2002, p. 225): this one and the same lesson, based on a contempt for the variety of learners and knowledge itself, are unacceptable.

Montaigne, then, begins his suggestions toward abandoning beliefs that arrogate to themselves the post of unequivocal truths by their authority. The education the philosopher proposes is an education that sets “intelligence in motion.” “Let him make him examine and thoroughly sift everything he reads, and lodge nothing in his fancy upon simple authority and upon trust” (Montaigne, 2002, p. 226), instructing how knowledge should be presented to learner, and, soon after, is categorical: “let this diversity of opinions be propounded to, and laid before him; he will himself choose, if he be able; if not, he will remain in doubt. I love to doubt, as well as to know” (Montaigne, 2002, p. 226). To be in motion, intelligence must avoid the saturation of a single truth — saturation forbids displacement. The diversity of worldviews, then, in Montaigne, rather than constituting something to be suppressed or neutralized, configures the very condition for him to claim his pedagogical aspirations.

To this end, Montaigne gives ample examples of what can serve as an object to diversify voices: “whatsoever presents itself before us is book sufficient” (Montaigne, 2002, p. 228), he says, before listing “a roguish trick of a page, a sottish mistake of a servant, a jest at the table” as occasions in which this variety can manifest itself and produce learning. Then, he lists the

importance of the “commerce of men,” i.e., “travel into foreign countries” and not only to visit those who are contemporary to us: “in this conversing with men,” he writes a little later, “I mean also, and principally, those who only live in the records of history” (Montaigne, 2002, p. 233). For Montaigne, the diversity to which learners must be exposed fails to restrict itself to the ordinary experiences of life. It also involves experimenting with the great classics. He ignores, however, the ostentatious, pedantic acquisition of this knowledge; learners knowing how to identify things and “only labour to stuff the memory and leave the conscience and the understanding unfurnished and void,” as he claims in “Of Pedantry” (Montaigne, 2002, p. 203). What interests him is that such knowledge acts in the formation of a subject, expanding learners’ possibilities and giving them a fairer awareness of themselves. Let them work, he writes, “that a man’s own brain must be crowded and squeezed together into a less compass, to make room for the others” (Montaigne, 2002, p. 229).

Contrary to what Comenius suggested, variety is the basis of Montaigne’s didactic strategies. The security of those who can educate as one who sleeps on clover disappears: the world is vast and often fails to rhyme and bring soothing solutions. Educating is examining. Montaigne provides us with the first and fundamental lesson from this (Montaigne, 2002, p. 235):

Human understanding is marvellously enlightened by daily conversation with men, for we are, otherwise, compressed and heaped up in ourselves, and have our sight limited to the length of our own noses. [...] But whoever shall represent to his fancy, as in a picture, that great image of our mother nature, in her full majesty and lustre, whoever in her face shall read so general and so constant a variety, whoever shall observe himself in that figure, and not himself but a whole kingdom, no bigger than the least touch or prick of a pencil in comparison of the whole, that man alone is able to value things according to their true estimate and grandeur.

This great world which some do yet multiply as several species under one genus, is the mirror wherein we are to behold ourselves, to be able to know ourselves as we ought to do in the true bias. [...] So many humours, so many sects, so many judgments, opinions, laws, and customs, teach us to judge aright of our own, and inform our understanding to discover its imperfection and natural infirmity, which is no trivial speculation. [...]

The book of the world, for Montaigne, is a library, not a Bible. The important teaching that derives from this is the recognition that our judgments are imperfect and incapable of accounting for the whole, for a supposedly absolute truth. This is the first lesson drawn from frequenting the world. Regardless of others' customs and beliefs, they inform, first of all, that what is taken as unequivocal by habit is not so: if this lesson is well learned, rather than trivial, the author claims, it teaches us that we are not masters of the truth and that, therefore, it is insufficient to insist on showing it, on evincing it to those who do not believe in it. Rather than meaning the inexistence of the real, of truth, it means that what is at stake are interpretations and it is important to track how our own arise.

Thus, variety of opinions is a foundation. An education that proposes to be based on it is aware that it is useless to protect itself from what opposes its fundamental truths. It must be put at risk. But what does that mean?

Didactics amidst profusion

After praising the advantages of “world frequentation,” Montaigne offers a warning. He writes that, observing it, he often witnessed the same vice: “instead of gathering observations from others, we make it our whole business to lay ourselves open to them” (Montaigne, 2002, p. 230), which, according to the author, is added to “unbecoming rudeness” of opposing “everything that is not agreeable to our own palate” (Montaigne, 2002, p. 231). Such characteristics, although from the scenario the philosopher observed in the 16th century, sound rather familiar to a contemporaneity used to making a spectacle of the “I” (Sibila, 2016), to limit itself to the function of algorithms that feed subjects to themselves, rendering them ever more unable to deal with difference (Pariser, 2012) and feeding a growing narcissism (Lipovetsky, 2005; Han, 2017). Regarding this, in fact, the differentiation Han (2017, p. 9-10) establishes between the narcissistic subject and the self-loving subject is intriguing. For this author, while the latter clearly establishes what they and others are, opting for what characterizes themselves, narcissistic subjects are unable to establish these limits, surrounding themselves in habit and convenience, rather than in a choice arising from the experimentation of otherness, from the confrontation with it. For self-love, then, this encounter with the other is necessary, or, in Montaigne's terms (2002, p. 230), “the commerce of men.”

It is in this sense that the French essayist recommends “silence and modesty” as “very advantageous qualities in conversation” (Montaigne, 2002, p. 230). This posture enables subjects to place themselves amidst otherness and what lies beyond their control and experience the things, knowledge, ideas, and affections of the world as someone who wants to reaffirm what they have defined, rather than as someone who seeks something already known. On the contrary, it is a posture that, as Jorge Larrosa (2014, p. 25) writes, resembles “a territory of passage, something like a sensitive surface that what happens affects in some way;” the subject of the experience, the Spanish professor continues, “is defined not by his activity, but by his passivity, by his receptivity” (Larrosa, 2014, p. 25). Being willing to avoid taking their own knowledge as unequivocal, learners, Montaigne claims (2002, p. 231), know “acquiesce and submit to truth so soon as ever he shall discover it, whether in his opponent’s argument, or upon better consideration.” They will also know:

[...] understand, that to acknowledge the error he shall discover in his own argument, though only found out by himself, is an effect of judgment and sincerity, which are the principal things he is to seek after; that obstinacy and contention are common qualities, most appearing in mean souls; that to revise and correct himself, to forsake an unjust argument in the height and heat of dispute, are rare, great, and philosophical qualities. (Montaigne, 2002, p. 231)

It is important not to lose sight of the fact that, for Montaigne, the divided truth and the recognized “error,” rather than unequivocal and absolute, configure constructions. What is at stake is being able to observe how our reasoning leads to one or the other place and how it is constructed. In this observation lies perhaps the greatest difference of the foundations of an educational practice such as that by Comenius and that by Montaigne: whereas the former takes an interpretation of the world as a definitive and finished truth, the latter has it as its construction.

A Comenian didactic, then, can be concerned with forming “man as man” (Comenius, 2011, p. 98): man, after all, is “a creature which is the image and the joy of its Creator.” (Comenius, 2011, p. 53). To do so, it suffices to know what this God is or what he wants — or what the Truth is and what it wants — and to seek identification with him. Educating, in this sense, is to make oneself in the image of something that is no longer in doubt. Likewise, Lipovetsky and Serroy (2011, p. 81) suggest the need to define the methods of orientation amidst

“undifferentiated overbilling.” The compass for this orientation fails to question the pole to which its magnetism makes it point.

The Montaignian hypothesis, on the other hand, is unable to rely on a fixed organizing pole. Montaigne recognizes that his writings are always groping and can speak only of what, at the given moment in which he expresses himself, is. In the next instant, he reminds us, it may be the case that a new learning changes him (Montaigne, 2002, p. 222). This realization that his certainties are contingent prevents him from prescribing a supposedly definitive, unchanging truth. Thus, he may be unable to offer us, as Comenius does, a ready-made and finished “Didactics.” However, some of his points seem to set the tone of what could be a teaching process thought from the French philosopher’s reflections:

- a) First, Montaigne teaches us that silence and modesty are important qualities for delving into the “commerce of men.” How can we develop such characteristics, however, in a world that seems to encourage the opposite? Perhaps, relying on his ideas, we could suggest that one thing is unable to come without the other: one’s certainties must be put at stake in the world so they gain more modest contours and be seen more fairly. As teachers, we can propose activities either by telling learners the stories from which the knowledge we offer them comes from; by bringing different forms of thought, for example, that provide such a scenario or by listening to what learners bring from what they hear at home, from what they read on the internet. The estrangement of what is familiar from the familiarization with what is strange — as Anthropology proposes (Velho, 1978) — seems, in this sense, fundamental to educational actions that, amidst a diversity of ideas and opinions, avoid seeking a neutrality that may not be nonexistent but is increasingly indifferent.
- b) Secondly, Montaignian didactics seems to include a displacement of questions: instead of “what is it?” and “how did it come to be?,” “why is it so and not otherwise?” When the essayist teaches us to submit to truth, he writes about turning to the structures of our reasoning, investigating and questioning them. This movement implies reconstructing what is known and, therefore, enables the constant revision of what is thought, of the foundations on which we rely, of the processes that lead us to one or another result, to one or another belief. The tendency, in this dynamic, is a more intimate relationship with knowledge as a

construction, rather than as a ready and finished object to be taken and possessed. Knowledge (“as food,” to recover Montaigne’s metaphor) forms what the subject is, gives them energy and body; knowledge is more what the subject is than what the subject has.

This, which is not configured as a pedagogical program or as a didactic theory, can serve to characterize a willingness to deal with the profusion of interpretations in the classroom in a way that avoids depending on the definition of what is the absolute truth, and, rather than because it fails to exist, because it ceased to be the issue: in the face of the variety incessantly multiplied by the growing number of screens, perhaps it — the truth one wants absolute — loses its ground. Instead of affirming it at all costs, Montaigne teaches us another strategy: to tie ourselves entirely to what we talk about in our classrooms to the point where we can justify what we do point by point. Philippe Meirieu (2010) associates such a posture with the very act of teaching. According to him: “teaching is always exposing in an orderly way what is discovered more or less randomly” (Meirieu, 2010, p. 76). In these reconstructions, he continues, “I reconstitute a rationality combining the multiple encounters, inscribed in them investigations made precisely for this occasion, connecting all this with examples and experiences that I take from my own history” (Meirieu, 2010, p. 76).

The risk of walking on such scarcely solid ground is great. Everything changes with each new learning and, amidst diversity, it is important that we have clear paths that led us to one or the other place. Learning, however, to walk with the light steps that it demands, together with Montaigne, is definitely not “trivial speculation.”

Final considerations

Throughout this study, we sought to describe two didactic conceptions assumed in the face of the variety of ideas and opinions produced by the social insertion and diffusion of technologies that multiplied the number of texts in circulation: the Gutenberg movable-type press and the Internet. The first of these analyzed didactic conceptions was developed by Comenius, in 1657, in his “The great didactic,” with special emphasis on chapter 25 of this work. Comenius, starting from a belief in the unquestionability of what he took as the truth (the divine word), uses it as a criterion to define what is and what is not appropriate in the education

of “real men.” In this sense, the act of irrevocably defining what truth is implies a teaching attitude that *identifies* what is and what is not school knowledge; that *selects* what enters or does not enter the school; and, finally, that understands training as the *fulfillment* of what has already been defined from this truth.

On the other hand, we also showed the didactics resulting from Michel de Montaigne’s bet. In his essays, the author distrusts the ability of human reason to define the truth of God. Therefore, he is unable to rely on it to organize his pedagogical propositions. Frequenting the world, Montaigne notes that the immense variety of customs, ideas, and ways of living fails to entail its neutralization, standardization into a unique form: this variety, first of all, if it is unable to tell us of an unquestionable truth, informs us, in turn, about our own size, giving us contours and constituting the foundational learning of his educational thought. To this end, even if they fail to provide us with any program on what to do, their ideas lead to a didactic that assumes diversity as a condition, rather than a problem; which, by assuming it, *puts to the test* what is known, creating space for doubt and openness without pretensions of closure, i.e., for an unfinished state of our knowledge and ourselves; and that finally demands a *genealogy* of what is learned, of what is taken for granted, which is constantly revised as “crowd and squeeze” it with what is not.

Thus, we believe that the didactic dispositions triggered by Montaigne’s thought configure an original and perhaps more effective strategy for action in a school crossed by increasingly varied discourses and, therefore, less capable of establishing unquestionable truths. Variety assumed, rather than controlled, is what may promote an engagement of another order in relation to school knowledge; no longer because of a consensual authority or because they circulate alone and without counterpoints but because of a desire, a hunger in relation to their flavors.

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