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## On Grit and Exemplary Teaching in Three Versions of *De ratione studii*



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## Abstract

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Diligence, or 'grit', has during recent years gained attention in the fields of psychological and educational studies. Grit is the tenacious pursuit of success and superordinate goals. The present paper examines the concepts of diligence and exemplary teaching in Jan Amos Comenius' *Fortius redivivus*, a treaty he based on two versions of *De ratione studii* (*On the right method of study*) by two Dutch humanist scholars, Desiderius Erasmus and Joachim Sterck van Ringelbergh. Comenius wrote his treaty for a school in Hungary, challenged by idleness and discouragement. By using content analysis and the comparative method, this essay discusses, and argues, that the concepts of diligence and exemplary teaching differ, and that Comenius by incorporating his own philosophy on educational thought to *De ratione studii*, offered a more all-embracing view and solve to the challenges of discouraged students and teachers.

*Keywords: student and teacher diligence, exemplary teaching, treaty, De ratione studii, Fortius redivivus, on the right method of study, Comenius, Erasmus, Ringelbergh, humanism, educational teachings, Unity of Brethren, pansophy.*

*Svenska nyckelord: flit, lärande, undervisning, traktat, böhmiska brödernas församling, pansofisk skola.*

Voor mein ouders, Anja en Talat.

## Table of Content

|  |    |
|--|----|
| 1. Introduction .....  | 3  |
| 1.1 Jan Amos Comenius – a teacher ‘exemplar’ .....   | 3  |
| 1.2 Aim and Method of Research .....   | 4  |
| 1.3 Research Material and Case Limitations .....   | 5  |
| 2. The Beginnings of Comeniology .....   | 6  |
| 2.1 Comeniology .....  | 6  |
| 2.2 Notes on Comenius’ educational teachings .....   | 7  |
| 3. Cultural and Historical Roots of Comenius’ Pedagogy .....                                       | 7  |
| 3.1 Setting the Educational Scene .....  | 7  |
| 3.2 Moravian Precursors .....  | 9  |
| 3.3 The Reformation .....  | 10 |
| 3.4 Humanist Precursors .....  | 12 |
| 3.5 Realist precursors .....   | 16 |
| 4. The Authors of <i>De ratione studii</i> .....   | 17 |
| 4.1 Erasmus of Rotterdam .....   | 17 |
| 4.2 Joachim Sterck van Ringelbergh .....   | 18 |
| 5. Three Versions of <i>De ratione studii</i> .....  | 19 |
| 5.1 Erasmian Grit and Exemplary Teaching .....   | 19 |
| 5.2 Ringelberghian Grit and Exemplary Teaching .....   | 24 |
| 5.3 Comenian Grit and Exemplary Teaching .....   | 30 |
| 6. Discussion .....  | 38 |
| 6.1 On the concepts of grit and exemplary teaching in three works of <i>De ratione studii</i> .... | 38 |
| 7. Summary .....   | 40 |
| 8. Bibliography .....  | 41 |

# On Grit and Exemplary Teaching in Three Versions of *De Ratione Studii*

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Jan Amos Comenius – a teacher ‘exemplar’

The Czech philosopher, theologian, writer and great educational reformer John Amos Comenius (born Jan Amos Komenský in 1592, in Moravia; died 1670 in Amsterdam) left a lasting legacy in his methods of teaching, making him one of the creators of modern educational studies. Comenius favoured the learning of Latin, and he is mainly remembered for his methods of teaching languages. His book *The Gate of Tongues Unlocked* (1632) revolutionized the field, and was translated into 16 languages. Comenius was also the first innovator of pictorial textbooks, his *Orbis Pictus – The Visible World in Pictures* (1658) was written in the vernacular instead of Latin, and became one of the most widely circulated school textbooks, translated into 36 languages. Comenius foremost achievement was, however, his magnum opus *Didacta Magna* (*The Great Didactic*, 1632), in which he outlined an all-embracing school system in four stages, pre- and elementary school, secondary school, college and university, and a methodology for instructing arts and sciences.<sup>1</sup> Indications of his continuing relevance are found within ever growing Comeniological studies, and the European Union’s lending of his name for one of the educational reform programs.

Comenius was critical of the educational methods and practice of his days, considering it ineffective at best and cruel at worst. He argued for the equal opportunity of all to be educated – rich or poor, man or woman – regardless of race and religious creed. Comenius’ philosophy was both humanitarian and universalistic, and the aim of his teachings was *pansophia* – universal wisdom, that man should be educated to full humanity.

Forced by the circumstances of the Thirty Years’ War, and as a minister of a Protestant movement known as the Bohemian Brethren, Comenius travelled extensively from place to place – Germany, Poland, England, Sweden, Hungary, and the Netherlands, where he eventually settled down.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Burman 2014, p. 80–83.

<sup>2</sup> Sadler, 1998. Comenius. *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

## 1.2 Aim and Method of Research

Pedagogy has a long history – roughly 2 500 years. Within educational studies, one does stumble over a wide range of philosophies, providing food for thought as to the exchange of ideas. Although Comenius' contributions as an educational theorist are great, many of his ideas stemmed from his own experiences as a student and a teacher. Though his educational ideas in many respects were new, and often in conflict with the practices of his time, they were the product of a number of different influences, originating in diverse cultural and theoretical traditions, namely that of the Moravian Christian movement, the Reformation, and Humanist precursors. Like a sign of equality to his predecessor Erasmus of Rotterdam, scholarly research on Comenius is vast, not only from an educational point of view, but also from a confessional perspective. In researching this C-level paper, the author's attention fell on two treatises used by Comenius, when he was working as a teacher in Hungary in the early 1650s. Both treatises were referred to as *De ratione studii* – one by Desiderius Erasmus (c.1466–1536), and the other by the Flemish scholar, and contemporary of Erasmus – Joachim Sterck van Ringelbergh (c.1499–c.1531). Comenius wrote his own version of *De ratione studii*, often referred to as *Fortius Redivivus* (*Fortius revived*), based on these earlier treatises, in order to help and instruct teachers and students of a school in dire need of guidance.<sup>3</sup>

In today's teaching programs, more and more attention is given to the concept of student diligence, or 'grit'. Grit is the tenacious pursuit of a dominant super ordinate goal, despite difficulties and setbacks. It is the capacity to regulate attention, emotion, and behaviour, which – other than talent and opportunity – makes someone successful.<sup>4</sup> 'Grit' has during recent years gained a lot of attention in the fields of psychological and educational studies, not to mention the successful book by Angela Duckworth, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* (2016) a few years ago.

The aim of the present study is to distinguish the innate qualities of Comenius' concepts of grit and exemplary teaching in *Fortius Redivivus*, in comparison with its sources. The questions the author has raised are:

- How do the concepts of grit and exemplary teaching differ in *Fortius redivivus* in comparison to Erasmus' and Ringelbergh's *De ratione studii*?

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<sup>3</sup> Rood 1971, p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> Duckworth & Gross, 2014, p. 319.

- What are the innate qualities of Comenius' treatise in comparison with its sources?

The comparative method has been chosen for this study, as well as content analysis, used to identify, describe and explain the characteristics embedded in the texts. The author has searched for concepts of diligence and exemplary teaching, and used the method of content analysis, which allows for a qualitative analysis to be done. In general terms, difference is more interesting than likeness in comparative studies, and though it may be interesting to interpret and explain similar, or shared features, this study is more concerned with the singularities of the respective cases.<sup>5</sup> Both likeness and difference may require attention and explanation, and will hopefully be brought to light in the discussion.

### 1.3 Research Material and Case Limitations

The author has chosen to focus this study on three short treatises, including one that has not been subjected to much further study, Comenius' *Fortius Redivivus*. As already mentioned, Comenius based his treatise on two previous works *On the Method of Study* by Erasmus of Rotterdam (1512) and a version by the Flemish scholar, Joachim Sterck van Ringelbergh, whose work is commonly known as *The Celebrated Treatise of Joachim Fortius Ringelbergius* (1530). Both treatises have been subjected to translation, annotation, and study – Ringelbergh's treatise is still in print.

Virtually all of Comenius' major educational texts are available in English, and editions of his collected works are ever growing. The treatise chosen for this study is, however, to the best of the author's knowledge, still only found in Latin, German and Czech translations. This essay is therefore based on the Swedish rendition by a former teacher, Peter Freund, who translated the Czech text in 2001 for an academic paper. The author of this paper has in turn taken the liberty to translate parts of the Swedish text into English for pragmatic reasons.

The author has narrowed the outlook of this study, by restricting it within the limits of diligence and exemplary teaching mentioned in the treatises. The content analysis does not take into consideration stylistic elements, extensive contents pertaining to the recommended reading suggested by the three authors' on the classics and Scriptures – or the emphasis they lay on Latin or Greek – nor does it necessarily focus on religious themes, but on the simple notions of grit and exemplary teaching – so highly revered then, as it is today.

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<sup>5</sup> Nelson & Woods 2011, p. 109–110.

## 2. The Beginnings of Comeniology

### 2.1 Comeniology

The legacy of Jan Amos Komenský, more known as ‘Comenius’, to educational thought came into being in a period when religious conflicts as well as the beginning of a transition in European society. Comenius worked in a period of protracted economic crisis and ceaseless wars sweeping through the continent.<sup>6</sup> The work of Comenius touched on many contradictory and particular interests, as well as unusual formulas for solving problems of the time. Comenius did find during his lifetime find a few advocates for his ideas and proposals, especially in England, where his pansophic ideas were promoted. He also had adherents in Germany and other European countries, but from the second half of the seventeenth century Comenius’ opponents became increasingly vociferous; the rationalist from the ranks of Socinians and Cartesians viewed him as a dreamer, the church dogmatists saw him as an irresponsible rationalist who denied theological dogmas.<sup>7</sup> A full appreciation of Comenius’ work for universal reform took a long and winding road. After Leibnitz, Comenius’ ideas were taken up at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by German pietists, who emphasized the religious aspects of his work. The pietists gained a great deal of inspiration from Comenius’ universal reform, especially by the theologian and educator August Hermann Francke (1663–1727). This marked a Comenian renaissance by the beginning of the eighteenth century, which not only revived the ideas of the Czech thinker, but more importantly, helped to preserve his writings on universal reform. A true rediscovery of Comenius’ work did not, however, occur until the beginning of the nineteenth century. As interest in the Czech educator spread, so did the emergence of Comeniology in Europe. While Protestant historians and theologians became deeply involved in Comeniological studies, the research did not become a pronouncedly confessional field of study; on the contrary, new discoveries of Comenius’ key oeuvres, made by Czechoslovak and foreign scholars at for instance Halle, Saint Petersburg, Sheffield, and elsewhere have resulted in new prospects.<sup>8</sup> In the case of Comenius, academic work has been greatly assisted by the publication of several of his major works in English.<sup>9</sup> More recent biographies of Comenius available in English are Daniel Murphy, *Comenius: a Critical Reassessment of his Life and Work* (1995) and Jaroslav Pánek, *Comenius: Teacher of Nations*

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<sup>6</sup> Pánek 1991, p. 78.

<sup>7</sup> Pánek 1991, p. 68.

<sup>8</sup> Pánek 1991, p. 69–73.

<sup>9</sup> Murphy 1995, p. 5.

(1991). The literature on Comenius contributions to educational thought is vast, but the author of the present study has found the work of Daniel Murphy (1995) and *The Theology of the Czech Brethren from Hus to Comenius* (2009) by Craig D. Atwood, beneficial.

## **2.2 Notes on Comenius' educational teachings**

Education, according to Comenius, was not only the training of a child at school or at home, it was a process affecting man's whole life, including the countless social adjustments he must make.<sup>10</sup> Comenius' educational teachings preindicated a dynamic and dialectical understanding of natural reality, emphasizing the organic link between individual phenomena, the inner quality of things, and historical development. For Comenius, creative human work – practical activity, rather than passive contemplation – was the decisive factor in the process of reforming human life, and thus society and the world. Man, endowed with will and free by nature was the key subject of history; this elevation of man to the stature of free creator, with the prospect of self-realization, forms Comenius' contribution to philosophy.<sup>11</sup> He deals thoroughly with the themes of moral education, or formation, in his works, often regarding it a principal aspect.<sup>12</sup> In his didactic works, Comenius combined indoctrination, socialization, and education in his teachings, stressing throughout his works that education must address the entire person, not just the intellect.<sup>13</sup>

## **3. Cultural and Historical Roots of Comenius' Pedagogy**

### **3.1 Setting the Educational Scene**

Comenius' entire life was devoted to the cause of education, as both a teacher and educational theorist. Many of his most innovative theories stemmed from Comenius' own experience as a teacher, and his innovations were in turn validated in the conditions of classroom experience. Comenius' ideas, remarkably new and deeply in conflict with the educational customs and

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<sup>10</sup> Piaget 1957, p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> Pánek 1991, p. 80.

<sup>12</sup> Hábl 2011, p. 142.

<sup>13</sup> Atwood 2009, p. 383.

practices of his time, were nevertheless the product of many different influences, with deep roots in several cultural and theoretical traditions.<sup>14</sup>

Daniel Murphy (1995) identifies four main strands of influence. The predominant influence on Comenius' work, as well as the source of all their major insights, was the Moravian Christian movement, emerging in Bohemia shortly after the Hussite Reformation in the early fifteenth century. It would remain the most important source of all Comenius' convictions, from his childhood to the end of his days. Secondly, the Lutheran and Calvinist movements had also led to significant reforms in education. Thirdly, the classical-humanist tradition was still a significant force in educational thought in the seventeenth century. Comenius incorporated much of the classical-humanist tradition in his writings, especially in the revised form, in which it had been reinterpreted by writers such as Erasmus, Vives, and Montaigne. The fourth influence was the new movement of scientific realism that Comenius encountered through Bacon, drawing much of his pedagogic theory from the writings of Ratke, Andrae, and Alsted.<sup>15</sup> These influential elements all merged into Comenius' liberal pedagogic philosophy, with its central feature of an effective blending of authority and freedom – in a way hitherto unprecedented in the history of educational thought.<sup>16</sup>

Pragmatist scholars have a tendency to see Comenius as the first in line of 'progressive' educators, the latest and most influential being the American writer John Dewey. Murphy argues that although there are affinities between Comenius and Dewey they are of a superficial kind and ultimately misleading. Both Comenius and Dewey stood for a learner-centred or heuristic pedagogy, stressing the importance of learning through individual inquiry and discovery, condemning coercive methods of enforcing classroom discipline, and stressing the need to make knowledge meaningful by relating it to individual experiences of the learner. Such similarities do however only conceal the essential differences that do exist between them. Profound differences, such as the priority to be accorded ethico-religious values in education, the nature of experience, its relation to the divine and the transcendental, the teacher's formative role, the design, structure and content of the school syllabus, the importance of literacy, and the function of arts and the sciences – with Comenius affirming the teachings of the Judaeo-Christian scriptural tradition and Dewey's dismissal of it.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Murphy 1995, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> Murphy 1995, p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> Murphy 1995, p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Murphy 1995, p. 2.

Murphy contends that not long after the time of Comenius two strands of educational thought emerged, both sharing a common commitment to the principles and ideals of learner-centred education. The first strand included, together with Comenius, educators such as Oberlin, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Novikov, Pirogov, Tolstoy, and Buber with origins in the cultural traditions of Christianity and Judaism. The second strand, beginning with Rousseau and reaching maturity with Dewey, advocates learner-centred ideals within the framework of philosophical thought predominantly secular in character. Comenius advocated a radical reconception of the meaning of the Judaeo-Christian heritage by underlining its inherent simplicity, its assertion of individual freedom in matters of conscience and faith, and radical teachings on justice and peace. According to Murphy, it was a remarkably pure version of scriptural Christianity, close to the teachings of the Apostles and early Fathers, yet not weighed down by dogmatic or rationalistic theology, but characterized by above all a spirit of tolerance and love.<sup>18</sup>

### **3.2 Moravian Precursors**

Comenius derived the main inspiration for all his writings from the Moravian Church, and its teachings constitute the seminal principles of his educational thought. The term ‘Moravian’, officially in use from the 1740s, identifies the part of the Kingdom in Bohemia, where the Church of the United Brethren emerged and grew in the middle of the fifteenth century. Initially the Unity of Brethren were a breakaway movement from the Hussite Church, growing after the trial and execution of Jan Hus in 1415. Hus had denounced the Roman Catholic clergy for their materialism and corruption, charging the Church with the encouragement of superstitious practices. Various sects emerged after the execution of Hus, and the members of the Moravian Church were among them. They had also pledged to carry on his struggle for reform, dedicating themselves to live in accordance with the literal teachings of the scriptures, and a return to the simplicity and poverty of the early Christians.<sup>19</sup> Though the Unity of Brethren was largely non-theological in inspiration, its emphasis lay on the simplicity of the Christian way of life, rather than a body of theological doctrine. The Unity of Brethren did, however, detach itself from the theological debates conducted by Lutherans and Calvinists throughout the sixteenth century, since their concern was the fostering of a simple Christian life, formed by the example of Christ and the Apostles. Their services were given over chiefly to Bible readings, during which the

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<sup>18</sup> Murphy 1995, p. 3–4.

<sup>19</sup> Murphy 1995, p. 45–46.

pastors and elders of the Church offered interpretations of the scripture. Parents were encouraged to teach their children how to read as early as possible; being able to read the scriptures on your own was considered important. The virtues of honesty and industriousness were praised and a strong emphasis was placed on equality and sharing of possessions; gambling and feasting were in general forbidden. During the second half of the sixteenth century, elementary schools were established by the Brethren in villages and towns throughout the countryside of Bohemia and Moravia, with classical gymnasia founded in larger towns. The end of the sixteenth century is regarded as the Golden Age of the Unity Church, a period of exceptional prosperity for Bohemia – in general and because its levels of popular education were unmatched throughout Europe. Jan Amos Komenský was born during this period, near Uhersky Brod in 1592.<sup>20</sup>

Although there were periods of religious toleration towards The Unity Church, the movement was to suffer almost continuous persecution, eventually leading to a number of mass departures of Brethren from Bohemia, seeking refuge in countries sympathetic to the Protestant cause. This continued until their final expulsion from the country, after the defeat of the Protestant forces at the Battle of the White Mountain, near Prague early in the Thirty Years' War.<sup>21</sup>

### **3.3 The Reformation**

The radically concrete methodology of Comenius' educational thought was significantly influenced by the simple, non-rationalist style of the writers of the Moravian tradition. It was, nevertheless, profoundly reinforced by developments that had been taking place in liberal educational thought throughout the sixteenth century, mainly through the inspiration and work of religious reformers such as Luther, Calvin and the Puritans. Although the Moravians and the later reformers differed in many respects, they shared the conflict to the Roman Catholic dogmatism, having matters such as the authority of scripture, the doctrine of justification by faith and the ethics of personal responsibility in common.<sup>22</sup> During Comenius' lifetime, Europe had been torn apart by religious conflict, culminating in the devastation of the Thirty Years' War. Comenius had himself witnessed the tragic confirmation of the reformers' failure to live up to the ideals originally inspiring the Protestant cause. While the teachings of the early

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<sup>20</sup> Murphy 1995, p. 50.

<sup>21</sup> Murphy 1995, p. 48–50.

<sup>22</sup> Murphy 1995, p. 54.

reformers may have been compromised by the sectarian conflicts sweeping through Europe in the middle of the sixteenth century, they were still honoured in the educational reform movements, in which they were all involved. Luther laid emphasis on private judgement and the authority of scripture, which necessitated the provision of universal access to education, since all men were to guide themselves in matters of faith by their own interpretations of Biblical texts. This was conceded by all the Reform Churches of the sixteenth century, as it had been by the leaders of the Moravian movement a century earlier. The ideals of religious reform and of universal access to education were inseparably intertwined in the teachings of Moravians, just as they would be in Luther's writings on education in the early years of the sixteenth century. As Comenius did in later years, Luther advocated passionately that schools should be open to children of all classes, and the need to reform harsh and inhumane practices. A school, Luther argued, should be a cheerful place where children enjoyed learning. Luther also spoke of pedagogic advances that would ease the extension of education to the masses that in the past had been denied its benefits. He saw the importance of giving all children access to a range of subject matters, favouring a broadening of the traditional classical curriculum.<sup>23</sup>

Philip Melancton, Luther's close associate, wrote extensively on issues regarding educational reform, urging a further extension of the syllabus to also include the newly emerging sciences, advocating a careful balancing of the humanities and sciences, since the contribution of both could offer a lot to the individual student. Comenius shared Luther's radically democratic vision of education, but some significant advances in educational theory and practice were made by other scholars, sharing many of the Reformer's beliefs and aspirations. These writers fell broadly within the reform movement initiated by Jean Calvin in Geneva in the 1530s. Although Calvin himself supplied the main inspiration for a harsh and repressive regime, he nevertheless initiated educational reforms that inspired a liberal movement of Puritan thinkers, a great deal more liberal than himself. In common with Luther, Calvin believed in the ideal of universal education, particularly emphasizing the importance of fostering basic literacy in the elementary school. Calvin, incredible as it may seem, insisted that teachers should be humane and sensitive in the treatment of their pupils.<sup>24</sup>

In the late sixteenth century similar liberal policies on education had also emerged in France under the Huguenots, who despite the hostility shown them during the reign of Francis I, persisted in their goal of funding schools in every parish in the country. In Holland, Arminian Protestantism took root under the leadership of Jacob Harmensz (Arminius) a Professor of

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<sup>23</sup> Murphy 1995, p. 56.

<sup>24</sup> Murphy 1995, p. 55–58.

Theology in Leyden. The Arminians offered a more liberal and benign kind of Calvinism. Comenius would in later years establish close relations with the Arminian movement through friends at the University of Leyden.<sup>25</sup>

One of the most influential Puritan educators in England was John Brinsley, whose works anticipated Comenius in his recommendation that colleges should be founded specifically for training teachers in harmony with the principles of enlightened pedagogical reform, making him an early advocate in teacher training. The Scottish theologian and educationalist John Dury, educated in Leyden in the early 1600s, and a passionate advocate of religious tolerance, is largely responsible for introducing Comenius to the traditions of liberal English Protestantism. Much like Comenius and the Moravians, Dury saw the aim of education as the fostering of the community spirit in harmony with the principles of scriptural Christianity.<sup>26</sup>

The provision of *all* children with an educational foundation, ensuring their growth and formation, was the common purpose that inspired all the movements described. The kind of education the Reformers proposed was, however, still formed in accordance with the traditional humanist model that had spread throughout Europe in the middle of the fifteenth century. What the Reformers taught was a reformed and thoroughly Christianized humanism. The work of Comenius is best described as the convergence of two streams – the humanist and the religious.<sup>27</sup>

### **3.4 Humanist Precursors**

Humanism was one of the most important intellectual and cultural movements of the early modern period. During the Renaissance, a society of scholars emerged whom primarily focused on the Greek and Latin classics, including the church fathers, although their main interest was human society and virtue.<sup>28</sup> Comenius was greatly indebted to the humanist tradition of classical learning, specifically on matters of pedagogic and curricular reform. During the Renaissance, schools and academies of Western Europe underwent a great liberation; the mediaeval sterile methods of teaching had to give way to both a revitalised pedagogy and to a new curriculum, renewed “through its assimilation of the newly discovered literary-classical heritage.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Murphy 1995, p. 60.

<sup>26</sup> Murphy 1995, p. 61.

<sup>27</sup> Murphy 1995, p. 61–62.

<sup>28</sup> Atwood 2009, p. 297.

<sup>29</sup> Murphy 1995, p. 62–63.

The humanist tradition was already undergoing a major transformation when Comenius encountered it. The French priest-writer François Rabelais had for instance satirised scholastic institutions in his *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (published between 1532– 1564). Rabelais identified through the medium of satire some of the major deficiencies of the scholastic tradition, which subsequent scholars such as Erasmus, Montaigne and Comenius sought to rectify through their reforms.<sup>30</sup>

The primary shortcomings of the medieval schools lay in the methods for the teaching of Latin, effectively the lingua franca of Europe at the time. The chief means of communication between educated citizens were in Latin, as well as all forms of academic advancement and learned professions. This was also the case of all instruction in school. The greater part of a student's work in elementary school depended on the mastering of a vast number of rules and constructions. The study of Latin authors did generally not begin until secondary school, when it was combined with studies in history and logic. These studies were conducted to enhance eloquence in the spoken language, as well as encouraging appropriate styles for letters, treatises and disputations. The authors taught were generally Horace, Virgil and Cicero, with regard to their ornate style of writing.<sup>31</sup> The humanists and the Unity of Brethren shared mutual interest in pedagogy, since both worked on the assumption that faith and ethics could be taught and learned. Their contexts were, however, different, since the humanists educated the children of the aristocracy and bourgeoisie; the Brethren were teachers and pastors, educating the children of farmers, craftsmen and laypeople.<sup>32</sup>

The most significant change in the teaching of Latin came with the acceptance of the vernacular, through which a second language was to be acquired. With the Reformation, the exclusiveness of Latin was also being challenged. The challenged practices in the teaching of Latin coincided with a general broadening of the medieval curriculum. Educators expressed wide concern at the low status of mathematics and science; in medieval times arithmetic was, e.g., not seen as a discipline deserving the same attention that was given to Latin and the humanities. The significant changes in pedagogic and curricular practice that took place, did so within a cultural framework that remained firmly within the classical-humanist tradition, exemplified through the writings of three of the most influential educators in the humanist tradition, all anticipating the reforms of Comenius in several respects: Desiderius Erasmus, Michel de Montaigne and Juan Luis Vives. The most significant of the humanists, from an

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<sup>30</sup> Murphy 1995, p. 63.

<sup>31</sup> Murphy 1995, p. 63.

<sup>32</sup> Atwood 2009, p. 301.

educational perspective was the Dutch priest and scholar, Desiderius Erasmus, also known as Erasmus of Rotterdam. There are numerous references to Erasmus' work in Comenius' writings, and he clearly foreshadowed many educational advances that Comenius developed and refined.<sup>33</sup>

The similarities between Erasmus and Comenius are striking; like Comenius, Erasmus lost his parents in early childhood, and his education was also entrusted to guardians. Both men suffered great cruelty in early years of schooling, and were priests.<sup>34</sup> Erasmus was ordained into priesthood in 1492.<sup>35</sup> Although he never formally left the Roman Catholic Church, Erasmus was nevertheless profoundly committed to religious reform. Both Erasmus and Comenius shared a deep reverence for the scriptures, and were committed to asserting their authority in matters of morals and faith. Erasmus's edition of the New Testament, published in 1516, was read all over Europe and used for vernacular translations of the Bible, by for instance Luther in 1519, Lefèvre in 1520 and Tyndall in 1525.<sup>36</sup>

Erasmus condemned violence, as did Comenius, and regarded war as incompatible with the teachings of Christ, and would set out his arguments for the promotion of peace in his *Complaint of Peace* (1517). Erasmus would in the Prefaces to his translations of the Biblical text, criticize the corruptions of the institutional Church, with the same compassion of Christian concern, as Comenius did a century later in his own religious writings.<sup>37</sup>

Erasmus's Christian-humanist vision of education was essentially a synthesis of three complementary objectives: the fostering of piety, morality and learning. The Platonist ideal of a liberal education is thus absorbed in a primarily religious vision, and conceived specifically within the traditions of scriptural Christianity.<sup>38</sup> This was also the essential characteristic of Comenian liberal education, a vision revering the priorities of the humanist tradition – with its emphasis on the nurturing of intelligence, reason and imagination – within the all-encompassing framework of religious faith. Erasmus fully endorsed the merits of the humanist curriculum in *The Order of Learning*, in which he stressed the value of the great classics in the formation of a young mind, whilst advocating its integration with the traditions of the Christian faith. Like Comenius, Erasmus believed in the universality of all culture; he saw the Latin language and

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<sup>33</sup> Murphy 1995, p. 65–66.

<sup>34</sup> Murphy 1995, p. 66.

<sup>35</sup> McConica 1991, p. 9.

<sup>36</sup> Murphy 1995, p. 66.

<sup>37</sup> Murphy 1995, p. 66.

<sup>38</sup> Murphy continues that the term 'liberal' is used in its original classical connotation – the releasing of individual potentiality.

the traditions of classical learning as a shared heritage, potentially giving all men access to its riches.<sup>39</sup>

Erasmus would anticipate Comenius in the specific reforms he endorsed in the sphere of school pedagogy, partly due to the conditions they both witnessed in English schools, and their educational writings were deeply affected by what they had seen. Like his successor, Erasmus ardently denounced the inhuman methods of enforcing discipline. In *The Liberal Education of Children* Erasmus wrote: ‘Teaching by beating is not a liberal education [...] Let us watch, let us encourage, let us press and yet again press, that by learning, by repeating, by diligent listening, the boy may feel himself carried onward towards his goal [...] These are your instruments of discipline my Christian teacher, worthy of your calling and of your flock.’<sup>40</sup> Erasmus set forth a view of elementary education that was based on the graded, or developmental conception of individual maturation, comparable to that which Comenius later elaborated in his *Great Didactic*. Learning, Erasmus wrote, was to be guided through its natural stages, with an emphasis on allowing learning to occur spontaneously, under the formative guidance of the teacher: ‘He [the teacher] will follow in his first instruction the methods of the mother in the earliest training of her nurseling, [...] so will the master act in things of the mind.’<sup>41</sup>

Comenius was further inspired by the holistic conception of the learning process put forward by Michel de Montaigne, in his essays, ‘Of Pedantry’ and ‘Of the Upbringing of Children’. Montaigne’s interest in education also stemmed from the horror and brutality he witnessed in contemporary schools. While reaffirming the value of classical studies, Montaigne asserted that education should ultimately be concerned with the whole man – with all his needs and potentialities. Teachers should strive to educate the pupil’s understanding and encourage them to think independently. True wisdom, he wrote, came with self-knowledge. Montaigne’s emphasis on learning through experience was further developed by another Christian-humanist, to whom Comenius was also indebted, namely the Spanish philosopher Juan Luis Vives. Vives, being both a traditionalist and innovator, anticipated Comenius in his integration of Christian and classical-humanist ideals, as well as the commitment to social reform and innovative approaches to school pedagogy. Vives was deeply influenced by Erasmus, whom happened to be one of his professors in Louvain. In his *De Institutione Feminae Christianae* Vives strongly advocated the education of women – an immensely popular work, eventually passing forty editions. From an educational perspective, Vives most significant reform was his reconception

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<sup>39</sup> Murphy 1995, p. 66–67.

<sup>40</sup> Cited in Murphy 1995, p. 67.

<sup>41</sup> Cited in Murphy 1995, p. 67.

of humanist ideals to accommodate emerging insights from the natural sciences. The broadly conceived Christian-humanist notion of education had a profound bearing on the writings of Comenius a century later.<sup>42</sup> The most significant explanation is the way Erasmus, Montaigne and Vives accommodated Christian traditions, together with the only just emerging spirit of scientific realism, which they saw as enriching those traditions, by virtue of the new insights it brought into the mysteries and complexities of the created world.<sup>43</sup>

### 3.5 Realist precursors

To foster great scientific scholarship and enquiry entailed a number of corresponding reforms in education. Not only was a broadening of the traditional school curriculum required, so as to accommodate studies in natural phenomena, but also more fundamental reforms in the way that learning was insured. The traditional classical pedagogy had hitherto been overwhelmingly didactic – despite the ancient traditions of heuristic learning, advocated by Socrates and his successors – which meant that schools still predominantly focused on the concentrated study of texts, under the close and often authoritarian direction of the teacher. But with the emergence of science a new emphasis surfaced regarding self-initiated learning, a process that was given powerful impetus by the writings of Francis Bacon. Bacon had condemned medieval scholars for their lack of knowledge regarding nature and time, for spinning cobwebs of learning with no substance or profit. The medieval institutions were also attacked for their almost exclusive concentration on Latin, grammar and logic – and Bacon called on the new schools to devote their energies to the study of nature and the wonders of God’s creations.<sup>44</sup>

In *The Advancement of Learning* Bacon foreshadowed the Comenian concept of pansophic knowledge, the necessity of progression, generating and propagating of sciences, and not only for transitory use. In *New Atlantis* Bacon also raised the ideal of encyclopaedic knowledge as the goal of all learning, pointing forward to the pansophic principles, and foundation, of all Comenius’ educational thought.<sup>45</sup>

With regard to later educators whose works anticipated the pedagogic ideas of Comenius, it is worth mentioning that the methodological principles formed by Bacon, were refined in the work of the German educator Wolfgang Ratke. Ratke was profoundly influenced by the new

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<sup>42</sup> Murphy 1995, p. 68–69.

<sup>43</sup> Murphy 1995, p. 70.

<sup>44</sup> Murphy 1995, p. 71.

<sup>45</sup> Murphy 1995, p. 72–73.

realist pedagogy, and his greatest contribution is his elaboration of pedagogic methodology for the elementary school. For whereas Bacon's pedagogic reforms were mainly directed towards the education of adolescents and young adults, Ratke focused on the years of early childhood. Like a number of the educators accounted for, Ratke was also opposed to compulsion in the classroom, and he condemned methods of enforcing discipline that relied on fear and coercion. The pupil should not fear the teacher, but hold him in love and reverence, he argued. For if a teacher exercised his office rightly this would not fail but result in fondness for the teacher and a love for studies. Comenius may have encountered Ratke's ideas while a student at Herborn.<sup>46</sup>

## 4. The Authors of *De ratione studii*

### 4.1 Erasmus of Rotterdam

Desiderius Erasmus would in his life make a substantial living from writing. He was, however, at times compelled to take pupils to support his studies.<sup>47</sup> The 'germination' of Erasmus' educational programme, which found its mature expression in *De ratione studii* can be traced to Erasmus letters of the years 1496–8, when he lived in Paris. There, he was obliged to earn his living by tutoring Christian and Heinrich Northoff, the sons of a merchant from Lübeck, as well as two Englishmen by the names of Thomas Grey and Robert Fisher. Several of the instructions and writers recommended to teacher and pupil in *De ratione studii*, make their first appearance in these letters<sup>48</sup>, and one of these, *Erasmus of Rotterdam to his friend William Thale* (Ep 66, Paris 1497), was first printed as the preface to the book, originally composed for Thomas Grey.<sup>49</sup> Thale had his friend's treatise *De ratione studii ac legendi interpretandique auctores liber* printed, most likely without Erasmus' consent, in an abridged form by G. Biermans at Paris for Jean Granjon in 1511, and replaced Grey's name with his own. When the editions of 1512 were published by Josse Bade in Paris and later that same year by Thierry Martens in Louvain, Erasmus replaced Thale's name with that of Pierre Vitré, a close friend of

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<sup>46</sup> Murphy 1995, p. 73–75.

<sup>47</sup> Pettigree 2010, p. 82.; McConica 1991, p. 18–19.

<sup>48</sup> McGregor 1978, p. 662.

<sup>49</sup> McGregor 1978, p. 665.

Thomas Grey, whom may have succeeded Erasmus as his tutor.<sup>50</sup> It is Pierre Vitre (in Latinized form, Viterius) whom Erasmus addresses in his *On the Method of Study*.<sup>51</sup>

The style of Erasmus' *De ratione studii*, like that of his other educational treatises, is characteristically straightforward. The content, as well as the style, is heavily indebted to the *Institutio oratoria* of Quintilian, although Erasmus, unlike his predecessor, is confronted by a rather crucial issue: the relation of Christian to classical culture. Erasmus stood by the humanist objective of re-creating the past in its totality, at least as far as the ravages of time permitted; seeing the past as it really was, absorbing its categories of thought and appreciating its artistic canons required the closest critical attentions to its literary and material remains.<sup>52</sup> Erasmus corresponded with Czechs, and during his lifetime nearly all of his works were translated and published by Czech humanists. Many Dutch tradesmen actually worked in Bohemia.<sup>53</sup>

*De Ratione Studii* often accompanied reprints of Erasmus' *De copia*. Erasmus describes in *De Ratione Studii*, since the pupils he has in mind are older, that they are ready for studies in grammar. The reader learns which grammarians are esteemed,<sup>54</sup> what the levels and difficulties of reading and are, what good teaching instruction is and what it does. He prescribes sustained work in wisely chosen texts, although he at times emphasizes coverage over 'quality'.<sup>55</sup>

## 4.2 Joachim Sterck van Ringelbergh

Very little is known about the early life and parentage of Joachim Sterck van Ringelbergh, beyond the fact that he was born in Antwerp, probably in 1499. As a youth, Ringelbergh may have been in service at the court of the Emperor Maximilian. At the age of sixteen or seventeen he went to Louvain to study the classics and philosophy, remaining from this time and onwards, closely concerned with education, becoming a lifelong student, teacher and writer of educational treatises. Ringelbergh's desire to communicate his ideas would from about 1528, until his death (about 1536 but probably earlier) take him on continuing travels in Germany, the Low Countries and France – giving lectures on a variety of subjects. He also wrote continuously on his voluminous works.<sup>56</sup> Ringelbergh was one of the most enthusiastic, if not

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<sup>50</sup> McGregor 1978, p. 662, 665.

<sup>51</sup> Erasmus 1512, pp. 691.

<sup>52</sup> McGregor 1978, p. 662–663.

<sup>53</sup> Rood 1971, p. 20.

<sup>54</sup> Erasmus 1512, pp. 667–670.

<sup>55</sup> Bushnell 1996, p. 122–123.

<sup>56</sup> Francis 1968, p. 122.

the most successful, of textbook authors of the sixteenth century. He is remembered for many reasons, but perhaps most for his madcap energy and naive enthusiasm, that inspired his writings.<sup>57</sup> In 1528 – or 1529 – Ringelbergh had the opportunity of putting into practice one of his favourite ideas: that only by actually teaching a subject can one get to know it really well, and that scholars never should fail in attracting an audience of patient listeners, or waste the opportunity of speaking in public. Ringelbergh himself had the gift of clear description both in speech and in writing, maybe due to the fact that his frequent moves meant having to discard his books, only keeping pages with marginal notes. He did nevertheless enjoy considerable popularity<sup>58</sup> and was held in high esteem, even by the most eminent scholars of that time, including Erasmus of Rotterdam. Ringelbergh is known to have lectured in Paris towards the end of 1529. From this point and onwards, Joachim Sterck van Ringelbergh disappears from the historical record.<sup>59</sup>

Ringelbergh's passionate attachment to learning as well as his concern not to waste time on profitless pursuits, are characteristic for his generation of scholars. Ringelbergh's work is of interest due to the light it sheds upon his own methods of study, some of which extremely rigorous, rather than any value it may have to educational theory. Though very few of Ringelbergh's treatises have more than an antiquarian interest for the modern reader, the titles show the versatility of the author. A large number deal with Latin composition, grammar, and usage. These works can still be admired for their mastery of the Latin language, as well as for the elegance of their composition. To his contemporaries and writers on scientific subjects throughout the sixteenth century, Sterck van Ringelbergh's reputation as a mathematician and astronomer was, at the very least, as great as his recognition as a writer on pedagogical subjects.<sup>60</sup>

## **5. Three Versions of *De ratione studii***

### **5.1 Erasmian Grit and Exemplary Teaching**

Erasmus' *On the Method of Study* is the shortest of all three texts. Erasmus addresses the student directly in the beginning of his treatise, instructing them to make the most of their studies, that

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<sup>57</sup> Grafton 2008, p. 11.

<sup>58</sup> Francis 1968, p. 122; Blair 2010, p. 227.

<sup>59</sup> Francis 1968, p. 122.

<sup>60</sup> Francis 1968, p. 123–125.

they should learn accordingly the best in each category and, moreover, from the best teachers.<sup>61</sup>

Erasmus writes:

For what could be more foolish than to learn at great effort something that you are subsequently compelled to ‘unlearn’ at even greater? Nothing to be sure is acquired more easily than what is right and true. But once bad habits get a grip on a character, it is remarkable how they cannot be eradicated.<sup>62</sup>

The reader is then advised to acquire a fuller enrichment from writers and grammarians by diligent study, though Erasmus does not wish them to follow every precept slavishly in everything. He urges the student to: “memorize the rules of poetry and all its patterns; have at your fingertips the chief points of rhetoric, namely propositions, the grounds of proof, figures of speech, amplifications, and the rules governing transitions”.<sup>63</sup> The student must bear in mind, Erasmus writes, that “the best master of style is the pen and you must therefore give it plenty of practice in poetry, prose, and every sort of literary material”.<sup>64</sup>

[...] by all this you will carefully observe when reading writers whether any striking word occurs, if diction is archaic or novel, if some argument shows brilliant invention or has been skilfully adapted from elsewhere, if there is any brilliance in the style, if there is any adage, historical parallel, or maxim worth committing to memory. Such a passage should be indicated by some appropriate mark. For not only must a variety of marks be employed but appropriate ones at that, so that they will immediately indicate their purpose.<sup>65</sup>

Memory, the storehouse of all our reading, should not be neglected Erasmus continues, although he does not deny that it is aided by ‘places’ and ‘images’; the best memory is based on three things above all: understanding, system, and care, since memory largely consists of having thoroughly understood something. The management of this system enables the student to recall, by any act of recovery, even that which was forgotten. Erasmus considers *care* of the highest importance – not only in studies but in all things. If it is present, the student must “repeatedly re-read very carefully what you want to remember”.<sup>66</sup> Erasmus suggests a wide range of memorization techniques:

It will be of considerable help if you take things which it is necessary but rather difficult to remember – place-names in geography for instance, metrical feet, grammatical figures, genealogies, and so forth – and have them written as briefly and attractively as possible on charts and hung up on the walls of a

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<sup>61</sup> Erasmus 1512, pp. 666–667.

<sup>62</sup> Erasmus 1512, pp. 666.

<sup>63</sup> Erasmus 1512, pp. 669–670.

<sup>64</sup> Erasmus 1512, pp. 671.

<sup>65</sup> Erasmus 1512, pp. 670.

<sup>66</sup> Erasmus 1512, pp. 671.

room where they are generally conspicuous even to those engaged on something else. In the same way you write some brief but pithy sayings such as aphorisms, proverbs, and maxims at the beginning and at the end of your books; others you will inscribe on rings or drinking cups; others you will paint on doors and walls – or even in the glass of a window so that what may aid learning is constantly before the eye. For, although these measures seem trivial in themselves when taken singly, yet taken together they make a profitable addition to the treasury of knowledge – a factor not to be passed over by someone striving to be enriched by these resources.<sup>67</sup>

The skill of memorization, the best system of note taking may seem trivial but nonetheless important for ensuring success on method of study. Erasmus also encourages students, in order to improve their learning, to teach others as well: “[...] that will lead not only to one of our objectives, but to all of them at once. For there is no better means of grasping what you understand and what you do not. Sometimes new ideas occur to one in preparing a lesson, and everything is more firmly fixed in the mind when teaching”.<sup>68</sup>

The second part of Erasmus’ treatise regards the method of teaching pupils. He addresses one of the intended readers, Pierre Vitre, for though much on this subject has been treated thoroughly by Quintilian, he will give his observations.<sup>69</sup> Erasmus places a great deal of emphasis on the requirements of a diligent and well-informed teacher. Such a person should be of moderate ability but also modest, and not object to seeking help and support from someone more learned.<sup>70</sup>

[...] he who wishes to instruct someone will be careful from the beginning to teach only the best, but he who is to teach what is best most correctly must, it follows, be omniscient; or, since this is denied to human understanding, he should at least know the fundamentals of each discipline. In this I shall not be content with the usual ten or twelve authors but will demand the proverbial ‘encyclopaedia’ so that even someone who is preparing to teach a very little is very widely read. He must, therefore, range through the entire spectrum of writers so that he reads, in particular, all the best, but does not fail to sample any author, no matter how pedestrian.<sup>71</sup>

Erasmus instructs the teacher to speak as correctly as possible, whether conversing with several boys or with one alone. He should explain things in passing, encouraging and complimenting them when they express themselves particularly well, or correct them when they go wrong. For this will produce the habit of speaking with greater care and precision, and a more attentive regard for the teacher when he is speaking.<sup>72</sup> In correcting, Erasmus argues, the teacher should

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<sup>67</sup> Erasmus 1512, pp. 671–671.

<sup>68</sup> Erasmus 1512, pp. 672.

<sup>69</sup> Erasmus 1512, pp. 672.

<sup>70</sup> Erasmus 1512, pp. 678.

<sup>71</sup> Erasmus 1512, pp. 672.

<sup>72</sup> Erasmus 1512, pp. 675.

praise “any felicity of invention, treatment, or imitation, and will censure any omission, misplacement, excess or slackness, obscurity, or even an infelicity of expression”.<sup>73</sup> The teacher must, in particular, stimulate the pupils’ spirits, by starting with comparison among them, resulting in a state of mutual rivalry.<sup>74</sup>

In addition, the industrious, learned, and acute teacher will not shun collecting all the instructions of the grammarians, selecting the simplest and briefest as far as possible, and arranging them in the most suitable order, preparing the pupils for more advanced studies. Erasmus advises the teacher to avoid, above all, the common mistake of having topics vacuous in content or dull in form: “they should have a certain point or charm which is not too remote from youthful capabilities, so that while they are concentrating on something else, they will learn material relevant to higher studies”.<sup>75</sup> Accordingly, Erasmus continues, it is desirable that the pupils receive the most frequent and careful training. If the exercises seem difficult, it will become easier through practice, and the wit and application of the teacher will remove a good part of the burden from the pupils, by supplying what he considers to be beyond their capacity.<sup>76</sup> Erasmus’ sentiments on exemplary teaching do resemble the expected diligence of the pupil. The tenor is nevertheless much harsher, for Erasmus writes that he has never agreed with the common run of teachers who hold boys back for several years.<sup>77</sup> He advises the tutor not to follow the practice of today’s teachers who, through some perverse ambition, treat every passage of a text as though it were a dissertation. The tutor should narrow it down to relevant points – unless an occasional intellectual wandering off – would enhance the pupils’ enjoyment, in order to win over his audience.<sup>78</sup> The learned teacher should diligently encourage the students to strive, to discover for themselves, once the bare bones of an argument have been set out, by his own efforts what will be appropriate to the treatment, adornment, and enrichment of a theme.<sup>79</sup> In view of that, the teacher should not shirk from pointing out the merits, or even the faults, of particular authors in order that “the young may become accustomed, even at so early an age, to employing what is, in everything, of paramount importance – judgment”.<sup>80</sup>

Erasmus points out the importance of explaining the pleasures and benefits to be derived from materials and subjects under study. He exemplifies this with the explaining of a comedy

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<sup>73</sup> Erasmus 1512, pp. 682.

<sup>74</sup> Erasmus 1512, pp. 682.

<sup>75</sup> Erasmus 1512, pp. 676.

<sup>76</sup> Erasmus 1512, pp. 679.

<sup>77</sup> Erasmus 1512, pp. 667.

<sup>78</sup> Erasmus 1512, pp. 682.

<sup>79</sup> Erasmus 1512, pp. 680.

<sup>80</sup> Erasmus 1512, pp. 689–690.

by Terence: the teacher should mention how much enjoyment and instruction may be had from reading comedy, the significance of that form of literature, its origins, the number of types of comedy, and its laws. And so it will come about – Erasmus argues – assuming mental agility on the teacher’s part, that if some passage is encountered which may corrupt the young, that it won’t harm their morals, but may in fact present some benefit, namely by concentrating their attention, “partly on annotation of the passage, partly on loftier thoughts”.<sup>81</sup> The significance of the tutor’s aptitude is also clear when Erasmus gives his remarks on the usefulness of geography in history lessons, especially of the use of vernacular words for mountains, rivers, regions, and cities corresponding to the ancient, and likewise for the name of trees, plants, animals, tools, clothes, and precious stones, by concluding: “of which, incredible as it sounds, the common run of teachers knows absolutely nothing”.<sup>82</sup>

Erasmus does towards the end of his treatise reflect on the presumed criticism the reader might have on their part: “Truly, you say, you place an immense burden on a mere elementary teacher. Agreed, but I place it on one person so as to remove it from as many as possible. I would have one man read it all, rather than have everyone read everything”.<sup>83</sup> He nevertheless argues that he wants pupils to have a learned teacher, one trained by long experience. For if young learners are given such a person, they will acquire such knowledge easily. Although his programme may prove rather arduous in the beginning, progress and practice will make it easier. The teacher’s capability and responsibilities is a heavy burden, “but is most useful to his pupils”.<sup>84</sup>

Erasmus ends his treatise by stressing the weight he assigns to the correct method of teaching, so much so that, provided that the teacher is conscientious and learned, that he would not hesitate to hazard this promise:

[...] given youths who are not totally incompetent intellectually, I would with less trouble, and within fewer years, bring to a creditable degree of eloquence in each language than those notorious instructors who force their charges into their own stammering form, or rather lack, of expression.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Erasmus 1512, pp. 682–683.

<sup>82</sup> Erasmus 1512, pp. 673–674.

<sup>83</sup> Erasmus 1512, pp. 675.

<sup>84</sup> Erasmus 1512, pp. 690.

<sup>85</sup> Erasmus 1512, pp. 691.

In the end Erasmus deduces that a boy, having received a thorough grounding in primary school, may then with confidence turn his attention to higher studies, and he will readily demonstrate how important it was that he received his first instructions, from the best of teachers.<sup>86</sup>

## 5.2 Ringelberghian Grit and Exemplary Teaching

*The Celebrated Treatise* of Joachim Fortius Ringelbergh is an extensive work divided into twenty chapters. The first chapter begins with the author's advice to student readers to first of all, by careful and impartial estimation of their abilities, ascertain to what academic height they may reasonably hope to aspire, then to make every effort to attain it. Only the student's energy and effort of mind will result in distinction in arts and sciences. Ringelbergh continues that though it may seem like madness to attempt to surpass the works of the ancients, they too were men of like capacities, thus making it reasonable to suppose that we should be able to at least equal them in merit, for they, being for example Plato, Aristotle and Cicero, "did but make the best use of their talents, and it is in the power of all to do the same".<sup>87</sup> Ringelbergh writes: "To this end, then, let us always continue to labor without intermission, even though our labours be productive of no fruit, no glory, no praise. [...] and in my opinion, where the industry and perseverance of man but equal to his capacity, there is nothing upon earth beyond the power of the human mind to accomplish".<sup>88</sup> Ringelbergh declares that mankind seem to imagine that the chief thing to be studied is how to live voluptuously, continually pandering their vile passions and appetites, without once considering that we each possess a beautiful mind, which if cultivated with care and adorned with learning, "is the most glorious of all the works which have emanated from the great Creator – a transcript of himself".<sup>89</sup> In order to rouse the sons of genius from their state of torpidity, Ringelbergh forcefully implores the reader to triumph – since we know well that life is short. We are told to secure immortality, by building ourselves a name which time itself cannot efface.<sup>90</sup>

Therefore, whoever thou art, whose breast glows with the desire of acquiring knowledge; whose mind is fired with the love of glory; banish far from thee all effeminacy, levity, indifference, voluptuousness, and whatever may tend to extinguish the ardour of thy soul. The path we tread is truly a rugged one. [...] If there be anything in the world more formidable than ordinary, let us immediately attack it, with a

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<sup>86</sup> Erasmus 1512, pp. 691.

<sup>87</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 12–16, 78.

<sup>88</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 15–16.

<sup>89</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 17.

<sup>90</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 17–18.

determination to conquer: for the bolder the attempt the greater will be the glory. Should we even fail in the attempt many places or refuge are open to those who have been vanquished in a honourable cause, and that is our country, which virtue and fortitude have chosen as the place of their habitation. But there is no danger of defeat if our courage and perseverance are only equal to our strength. Fortune herself has pointed out the path to victory, and it is our own fault if we suffer the favorable opportunity to pass disregarded.<sup>91</sup>

Ringelbergh solemnly declares that they, who desire to enlist under the banners of learning, must cheerfully submit to labor, by night as by day. The student must flee from luxury, wantonness, and all other things which render the mind effeminate, as he would from a serpent. Yet students must take care of their bodily health, and regularly exercise, for all of this strengthens the body and vigour to the mind; one's abilities increases with severe study, and decreases without it. Ringelbergh says the student must consider all things, the more immediate object of which is pleasure, in the sensual acceptation of the word, as the greatest enemies to themselves and their pursuits, and as such studiously avoid them:<sup>92</sup>

For so it was ordained by the great Author of nature himself, that we should not attain to excellence without the greatest diligence on our own parts".<sup>93</sup> If any one think that knowledge is to be attained without labor, let him not unite himself with our forces. For in this our warfare, a greater degree of ardour and stricter discipline are necessary, than the armies of other generals are accustomed to exercise. [...] for they contend only for the sovereignty of some particular country [...] but we grasp at the universe.<sup>94</sup>

Ringelbergh encourages the student never to despair in their studies. For should the learners not find their efforts crowned with success as soon as they wished for, or if difficulties proved greater than expected, the students must not be deterred. For if, "in our ascent, we should fall headlong a thousand times, we must begin to climb again every time more ardently, and fly to the summit with recruited vigor".<sup>95</sup> Let us rather adopt this as our maxim, Ringelbergh writes, that whatever the mind has commanded itself to do, it is usually sure of obtaining its purpose.<sup>96</sup>

The student is advised to think lightly of riches, since poverty too often is the companion of academic work. Ringelbergh reasons that there is nothing better and more necessary to a student's distinction than a moderate fortune; it is the source of art and inventions promoting

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<sup>91</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 21–22.

<sup>92</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 19.

<sup>93</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 20.

<sup>94</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 20–21.

<sup>95</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 25.

<sup>96</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 26.

the happiness of mankind, since necessity is the mother of invention.<sup>97</sup> There is more honour in raising oneself from dust to eminence, than to let pieces of metal blunt the desire of study. The student is nevertheless told that a moderate income is necessary for the support of their existence, although Ringelbergh in his opinion finds it more or less contradictory that a man could be both learned and rich. The student is also cautioned against the expectations of parents, or friends, since they at times would rather have their children guilty of perjury or murder, than incapable of hoarding a fortune.<sup>98</sup> Clearly, Ringelbergh's thoughts on parental guidance are not positive. For though he knows that many students suffer from disadvantages associated with early education, he considers the misguided indulgence of parents during the student's adolescent years, infinitely worse. These adolescents and students did not receive a stimulus to exertion, which so eminently distinguishes youth educated in industrious habits.<sup>99</sup>

A desire of praise is another important chapter in Ringelbergh's treatise, for the student must be desirous of it. For he who has ambition must be passionately fond of glory, and it is a great and certain sign of future excellence:

He, therefore, who aspires to lofty things must be passionately fond of glory. And indeed, the most profound erudition, without a love of applause, will be able to effect but little; and in like manner the love of applause without erudition, will be found even worse than useless.<sup>100</sup>

Ringelbergh devotes several chapters to different ways of attaining knowledge. Solitary study is for instance the method Ringelbergh finds the least profitable. He instead advises the student to select a most competent companion, with whose aid, you can fearlessly encounter academic difficulties, which will lead both to victory and glory.<sup>101</sup> Ringelbergh does not find it sufficient enough to only attend daily lectures, unless the student takes care and rehearses what he has learned. For setting aside the carelessness too frequently observed in students when attending the lectures of a professor, he asks:

what memory can retain the whole of the discourse delivered by him, in so perfect a manner, as to enable a young man, (should he be so inclined), to treasure it up in his mind, so as to preclude the possibility of its being forgotten. For young men (at all times too prone to inaction and dissipation), would spend

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<sup>97</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 27.

<sup>98</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 28–29.

<sup>99</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 66.

<sup>100</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 30.

<sup>101</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 34.

the remainder of the day in luxury, sleep, idle lounging, or the rehearsal of empty and fabulous stories, to the exclusion of that serious meditation which ought to characterize a candidate for literary honors.<sup>102</sup>

Would not the monarch, asks Ringelbergh, as well as posterity, have considered a person advising Alexander the Great upon first conquering a city to lay aside all thought of future conquest, a madman? Why should anyone be considered less mad, Ringelbergh asks, who persuade youthful literary adventurers to be satisfied with insignificant acquisition, and to waste his life in false and pernicious pleasures. Let the student be assured, that conduct like this will never raise him to eminence, for this is not the way learned men have arrived at knowledge.<sup>103</sup> No, the student should spurn advice so destructive, and instead adopt this precept —“That, whatever by diligence and hard study, thou may’st have acquired, that freely impart to others; and so shalt thou establish thyself upon a sure foundation, and become a blessing to those around thee”.<sup>104</sup>

A student, Ringelbergh continues, should not to be timid, or afraid, to ask the teacher for help or an explanation. For by suffering a false sense of modesty to get the better of their resolution, they waste not only hours, or days, or weeks, but the most valuable part of their whole lives, since it is inconsistent with sound sense that a student should possess all that knowledge intuitively. The student comes to the university for the express purpose of gaining that said knowledge, and consequently, there is no disgrace, but the mark of an inquiring mind, to ask of another what they do not understand. “Let me therefore exhort young men”, Ringelbergh writes, “not to waste a moment over any difficulty which may impede their progress; but let them rather freely apply for the assistance of their tutor, which, if he be a liberal and enlightened man will be as freely given”.<sup>105</sup> Ringelbergh does, nevertheless, add that it does not entail students continually embarrassing the teacher with frivolous and unmeaning questions, since this a hindrance to men of learning to be thus interrupted.<sup>106</sup>

One chapter characterizes the signs and different gradations of those whom are likely to rise to literary eminence or not.<sup>107</sup> Ringelbergh describes that there are in all men certain indications, as well of conduct as of ability, by which we are able to form a pretty correct judgment as to the proficiency they are likely to make in the acquisition of learning. The lowest class consists

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<sup>102</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 35.

<sup>103</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 35–36.

<sup>104</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 36–37.

<sup>105</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 38–39.

<sup>106</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 39.

<sup>107</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 47.

of those, who are attached to their studies, but who lay a considerable portion of their time to the pleasures of the table, the ballroom, the theatre, or any other gratification or amusement. Ringelbergh calls this class lovers of learning and lovers of pleasure. The next class consists of those who are so devoted to literature, that to prevail them to quit their darling studies, is difficult even for the sole purpose of satisfying the cravings of nature, empty amusements, or vain and unprofitable conversations. Ringelbergh call them ardent lovers of literature, and contemners of whatever may have a tendency to lessen their ardour.<sup>108</sup> The remaining class consists of men who despise the length and ruggedness of the way, rise with the sun to prosecute their journey with renewed vigour. They do not rest from their labours till nature and the midnight bell tells them otherwise. These men are called downright enthusiasts.<sup>109</sup> Before Ringelbergh concludes this lengthy chapter, he recommends the young student to enrol himself in the second of the above-mentioned classes, since it is most likely to raise him to eminence. For, he continues, “the first contents itself with such exertion only as is calculated to raise its members to a kind of mediocrity; and whilst the third, by the exercise of an injudicious zeal, defeats its own intentions; the second will be found to maintain a rational medium between both; uniting in itself the vigor of the first, without its unjustifiable waste of time, and the zeal of the third without its enthusiastic indiscretion”.<sup>110</sup>

Ringelbergh’s thoughts on the fine art of managing time is one important aspect of a student’s diligence, for regardless of talent it is impossible to reach set goals without the ability to manage the hours of the day, including those devoted to sleep, and the best hours for study and recreation. A good alarm clock, Ringelbergh informs, is highly serviceable.<sup>111</sup>

Ringelbergh has no regard for idleness, for nothing can compensate the student for time thus wasted. Slothfulness is truly a vice to him, and he is surprised that rational beings should addict themselves to it, since it confers “no pleasure, neither is it productive of benefit, which are the main springs of human action. [...] and almost as invariably brings on a ruinous state of circumstances which at length plunges him who yields himself up to it, into the depths of poverty”.<sup>112</sup>

When Ringelbergh describes his notions on teaching, he begins by explaining the three modes of study: hearing, teaching and writing. Ringelbergh explains that it is a good and easy method to hear, though it is better and easier to teach, but the best and easiest is simply to write.

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<sup>108</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 44.

<sup>109</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 45.

<sup>110</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 47.

<sup>111</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 50–58.

<sup>112</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 64.

He informs us that he does not hesitate in stating that the first of these methods is the most difficult: “For to me there is nothing more disagreeable than to sit and hear a dull lecture, though it last but for an hour; and the cause of this weariness is, that it is tedious to confine the liberty of thought to the voice of the reader; but when we teach and write, the very exercise itself precludes all tedium”.<sup>113</sup> Yet, what's even more important according to Ringelbergh, is how young men often are frightened by difficult and uninteresting labours imposed by teachers, to no point and purpose. Students naturally conclude that if the outset of their literary career will be this harsh and unpleasing, their progress will be infinitely more rugged and intolerable. And so, Ringelbergh observes, they give up their studies altogether.<sup>114</sup> Ringelbergh concludes this line of thought by stating:

It is therefore the duty of tutors to admonish their pupils that difficulties only occur at their outset in learning; and that when they have once overcome these, the remainder of their path will be found smooth and delightful.<sup>115</sup>

He does, indeed, show a certain disdain for “talkers”:

There are some men who value themselves so much upon their talent of speaking extempore, that they disdain to commit their ideas to writing for the purpose of previous study. But examples of this kind are rather to be avoided than imitated. For let the substance of an unpremeditated, long-winded speech of two or three hours duration be reduced to writing and then be subjected to the test of criticism; whatever may have been the applause bestowed upon the speaker by an illiterate audience, the man of learning will be induced to smile at his ignorance and want of method. Should the young student be gifted by nature with a ready flow of language, let him not think for a moment of risking his literary reputation upon this unstable foundation.<sup>116</sup> [...] I am not here going to insinuate that it is not valuable attainment to be able to express ourselves happily and becomingly. On the contrary, I should be the first to pay the warmest tribute of admiration to eloquence, when united with learning and sound judgment. My object is to guard the student against the example of those men who are so ardently devoted to the gratification of their darling passion [...].<sup>117</sup>

The importance of diligently and faithfully taking notes during one's literary career, and to think and reason upon any subject in writing, rather than giving long speeches, is stressed by Ringelbergh.<sup>118</sup>

True to his calling, Ringelbergh reflects on the apparent harshness of his precepts, whom critics surely would find sufficient in deterring anyone from the path of learning. His reply to the “indolent and unthinking” is that he confesses his precepts might appear disagreeable, but:

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<sup>113</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 31.

<sup>114</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 31.

<sup>115</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 32.

<sup>116</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 41.

<sup>117</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 42.

<sup>118</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 40.

[...] to him whose aim is glory, I trust it will prove an additional excitement: for the greater the difficulty of obtaining the prize, the sweeter the enjoyment when in possession of it. Let the young student bear in mind, that although prosperity may make him happy, adversity alone can render him truly great.<sup>119</sup>

In the final chapter of his treatise, Ringelbergh recapitulates the most important of his instructions, and that our only hope is exertion. Whatever our conduct may be in this respect one thing is certain, that without diligence we will “perish, without having left a record behind us to inform posterity that we ever existed.”<sup>120</sup> It is thus evident, Ringelbergh concludes, that he, whom aspires to the character of a man of learning, has taken upon himself the performance of no common task. The path to eminence is not only long, but arduous; and how can anyone rationally hope to arrive at its termination, unless he use diligence proportional to its difficulties.<sup>121</sup>

### 5.3 Comenian Grit and Exemplary Teaching

Comenius’ treatise, *Fortius revived, or How to drive away idleness from school* was first and foremost dedicated to the school and teachers of Blatny Potok (Sárospatak). In the introduction to his pamphlet, Comenius addresses the teachers and the pupils, with the intention to do be of service, since he has found the school in question suffering from a condition of idleness, and wishes to seize the opportunity to present a remedy. He writes that mayhem provides incentive to order, and wayward habits the call for rules. He observes that we usually leave things run as they are, believing that we have done our part, and yet we complain. And when we are caught in this mire of confusion, we remain there though we know better, since we are not determined or willing, to put our shoulder to the wheel. This is the reason, he writes, why our shortcomings once they have afflicted us endure, and poor conditions make them hard to break. Comenius considers it his task to battle the decease of idleness, since a colleague recently enlightened him of it. He trusts that the degeneracy to some extent will be driven away with the necessary fire provided by new methods, but he raises the question whether the light of fire will help, if mankind does not wish to see?

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<sup>119</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 22.

<sup>120</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 84.

<sup>121</sup> Ringelbergius 1530, p. 84.

Comenius recalls in his treatise the belief of a very perceptive man: that method or instruction is studied in vain, if idleness is not banished from the classroom. This idea seemed an appropriate advice, declared as it was in Joachim Fortius' *De Ratione Studii*, a treatise igniting fire and love of learning in the hearts of teachers and students, Comenius writes. He procured a copy of this work, since many had praised this great author's recommendations, but it merely resulted in silence. He does not know whether the reason was a lack of care or understanding, other than his obligation to bring this about, since one should pity those who do not know their own good, or venture without knowing the way. Unfortunate are the ones who are suffering, ignorant of the remedy, especially he who does not know his own good, and who despises guidance. Comenius' advice is to proceed with the intention to follow the example of God; helping those who oppose, wishing them well and that they, God willingly, will succeed. This is his own reason for writing this treatise, which he gave the title *Fortius redivivus*, with the intention to once again bring it to light, since it was forgot in its earlier rendition, and more comprehensibly explained to accommodate present conditions. Comenius recapitulates his introduction by calling for the need to do away with idleness, the impediment to all good intentions and rules. In order to banish this foul creature from the garden of wisdom he presents these solutions, setting a diligent example, to the members of his school and anyone who wishes to listen. This, under the pretext, they should read it, for books are written for people – not bookworms, Comenius writes. He urges the pupils and teachers to study the pamphlet unhurriedly, and with due consideration, advising them to deliberate on the subject matters.<sup>122</sup>

The treatise is composed of 72 precepts in which Comenius declares how to dispose of idleness, who's undertaking it really is, how a school should regain its vigour as a place of learning, the making of exemplary teachers and headmasters, the expectations on exemplary students, the importance of perseverance and dedication, on the school's curriculum, on study and recreation, the value of non-coercive methods of discipline, and parental encouragement in the process of learning. Comenius believes parental care to be of vital importance. He compares this correlation with that of indolence removed from Church and State; one cannot be done without the other. If idleness is not removed from domestic life, how is this to be done in school? The process of learning begins in the cradle and throughout childhood, preparing children for educational life. Comenius makes it a point that if schools were to receive children and students thus ready for further studies, how straightforward the groundwork of teaching would be<sup>123</sup>:

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<sup>122</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 1.

<sup>123</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 7. Precept 56.

Pious [...] sensible parents are on the whole conducive in the removal of idleness from schools, if they at first were not to allow room for it the household, seeing that they themselves are not idle, but on the contrary living industriously, without allowing for foolish inactivity in children and servants; all with hands and legs should be in constant movement and doing good deeds. For young boys, whose tender age do not allow for serious employment, let their work be play, but never idle inactivity.<sup>124</sup> [...] but asked as to what they have done in school and how they are thriving; it is unfeasible that school work shouldn't become more enjoyable then. They can, at the very least, between the midday meal and supper (in order not to waste time since the spirit needs conversation to flourish) enquire as to what they have gone through that day. And notwithstanding their answer, there is no lack in good use, since the purpose is to also awaken the spirit with daily conversation.<sup>125</sup>

The Church is also obliged to keep the schools sound, though rather as a set example, since the Church alone does not possess the vigour necessary to cultivate the adolescent, but should attend to those who foster – parents, wet nurses, educators and headmasters.<sup>126</sup>

Comenius describes how activity and energetic zeal – diligence – should be reminiscent of life itself, without pause, by the mustering of vigour and persistence, without dawdle and delay, or the resting of one's eyes on tilled land, but on what is left to be done, and to achieve your goals.<sup>127</sup> Do we encounter such joy and rapture in these establishments of learning? Comenius begs to differ, for had this been the case, it would have been observed.<sup>128</sup> Instead, a treacherous caged beast – idleness – has spread its infection. Comenius embarks on his mission by asking and answering, three questions: 1. What is idleness? 2. How infested is its possession? 3. And how injurious? He thereby answers these questions: idleness is the loathing of labour, joined with indifference. From that follows 1. The flight or falling away, 2. the executing of tedious, superficial and careless work, and at length 3. the onset of indolence and resignation.<sup>129</sup>

Yet, do we not notice these concerns in all schools? Comenius asks. Do they not sooner run from thence, rather than enter, with the exception of they who are compelled to seek their livelihood? Do we not notice the lazy who squander away precious time in frivolous pursuits, and how they during lectures carry out their work heavy-eyed, imperceptibly, slowly and solely to kill time? And do they in the end not run, as from a mill, without having attained the objective of education?<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 7. Precept 57.

<sup>125</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 7. Precept 58.

<sup>126</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 7. Precept 59.

<sup>127</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 4. Precept 19.

<sup>128</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 4. Precept 20.

<sup>129</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 4. Precept 21.

<sup>130</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 4. Precept 21–22.

What is to be said about the students of the school? Is it not evident that most of them are surrounded by the bitter foe that is idleness? They are above all so low-spirited by a kind of haziness in heart and soul, that the light of true and full learning does not shine through. Therefore they do not have any longing, being content with painted writing, genuine slaves of modest schooling, resembling an awkward and indolent prisoner, whom by destroying his shackles could free himself from his dark incarceration, yet does not care, and prefers to spend life in filth and darkness.<sup>131</sup>

Their ears are weighed down by indolence when they listen to their tutor, and when they can with disdain. They are students for many years, and will always remain so. Blinded by idleness, they read books with aversion; their tongues are generally bound, hardly ever enquiring, giving dry answers lacking eloquence. Their minds are indifferent and they have no hunger for knowledge, they have no wish to commit to memory their daily lectures or fuel their own thinking. The hands of many are slow and do not jot, caring not for a treasury of annotations, from which to draw enlightenment. They surrender to student life, forgetful of their studies through food, drink and too much sleep, with leisure ruining their most delightful years – their youth.<sup>132</sup>

Comenius' remedy is to change the course the school is heading. For instance, to learn should be considered a vocation, making the school its field of practice. For teaching is laborious, since it involves knowing how to lead the uneducated to illumination.<sup>133</sup> Comenius writes that schools often are referred to as the workshops of mankind, where the young and inexperienced may acquire righteous qualities. And in the same way a craftsman cannot tolerate idleness, and whose workshop seethes from activity, so should a school aspire.<sup>134</sup> For is the art of fostering the soul not as serious and strenuous? Are play and idleness sufficient? Comenius asks.<sup>135</sup> The school may house the muses, yet it assembles an army of chosen youth, whom struggle against mankind's natural idleness. But whom, Comenius asks, has ever witnessed a battle without hardships? You are not faced with grace, but with uncertainties and exhaustion, until the battle is over, and the soldier returns to his leader, proud and celebrating.<sup>136</sup>

So who is to vanquish this caged beast called idleness? Comenius considers it a collective responsibility of society: "If, amidst us, a wolf injures the herd, then noblemen, burghers and

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<sup>131</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 4–5. Precept 26.

<sup>132</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 5. Precept 27–33.

<sup>133</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 2. Precept 5.

<sup>134</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 2. Precept 8.

<sup>135</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 3. Precept 14.

<sup>136</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 3. Precept 14.

peasants from all directions gather to aid their flock. If, in the end, the enemy draws closer to the heart of the motherland, none forgets to arm themselves. Would not all assemble here, where a much greater ruin threatens the state, church, the flock of Christ, the youth, then if a fierce beast were to become the most gruesome of enemies?”<sup>137</sup>

Comenius’ notions of student diligence is one that answers to his name, desirous of knowledge and who does not keep away from any exertion that will improve learning. The labour of learning will feed the student’s noble chest, and they will not shun the exertion, but inquire about it and not dread the sweat of their brow. Going on, Comenius informs the reader that such a student set their mind on the highest of achievements, not half measures, constantly searching for something new to learn, until they reach the moment when they realize their teachers have taught them everything they can, and they instead become their disciples, a champion amongst friends, with a wish of becoming their educators equal and surpassing them in understanding. This student will accordingly become a good example of God’s image, reminiscent of fresh air longing to receive the light, like a building site, skilfully constructed and demanded of beauty, like sheep longing for pasture and spiritual nourishment, a plant yearning to become a thickly wooded tree in Paradise, as a capable soldier, longing for victory, as Comenius sums up, loyal to his master.<sup>138</sup>

In order to dispose of idleness, Comenius advises the headmaster to act upon six school amendments. First and foremost, they must provide the adolescent with exemplary teachers, i.e. educated, pious, philanthropic and hardworking individuals. That they should be cultivated is of great consequence, since they who know but little, teach accordingly. That they ought to be pious, for the reason that their enduring promise is to thrive (Psalm 1 and 3). Philanthropists, since they long to receive and convey the light of God, constantly educating themselves without reserve, tutoring others without resentment; diligent individuals believing their school to be a place of workmanship.<sup>139</sup>

An exemplary teacher is a teacher without a mask; someone who does not seek to flee from his profession, whom instead hurriedly seeks his task, for the careful and ever ongoing benefit of his students. Comenius continues this line of thought by adding that an exemplary teacher asks himself whom, what and how to teach, without coercive discipline, for it is without spite learning will pervade the learner, resembling a master sculptor attempting to carve the creations made in God’s image, like a shepherd to his flock – ever present and protective – a watchful

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<sup>137</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 5. Precept 38.

<sup>138</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 3–4. Precept 17.

<sup>139</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 7. Precept 54.

gardener attending plants entrusted to him, a responsible parent, whom in consideration of the one giving birth, wishes for a happier and easier relinquish of its fruits, and finally as a determined leader, sent to ward off cruelty and godlessness. Comenius ends this tenet by saying how fortunate schools are, with such teachers!<sup>140</sup>

If we were to proceed to details and observe teachers, as to why idleness has caught their interest, it becomes clear they neither take care in acquiring the light of accurate lore for themselves, since they do even less in executing the necessary work to attain it. In order to comprehend, I put up, as if it were a mirror, Erasmus's excerpts, which are found in *Fortius*, with the following words: 'He who wishes to teach someone [...] make an effort to become the best of lecturers. In order to fully lecture the best, it is important to know all; or, when this is impossible for the human spirit, at the very least the fundamentals of the subjects [...] and not restricting it to 10 or 12 authors [...]. Still, how many among teachers take heed in educating themselves foremost, so that they like a living library and radiant sun enlighten their surroundings.'<sup>141</sup>

It thereby goes that an educator lacking proficiency makes an inadequate teacher, incapable of extending student progress. Comenius also questions whether this is a priority of the headmasters, since he raises the question which authors are read throughout the year – ten or twelve? Comenius hereby makes a reference to Erasmus, whom would not have found this sufficient. He also reflects on by which means of diligence these authors are studied and analysed. Are there any 'Fortia', i.e. Ringelbergh, whom among themselves can say they have taught, in order to learn, on subjects daily for twelve hours?<sup>142</sup>

Comenius has observed that the majority of complaints involve the schoolteachers, and they in turn blame their students. He, on the other hand, reasons that fault is found on both sides, for just as teachers refuse to instruct in a hale and hearty way, so are students idle in their learning. Indeed, both parties have been inflicted by idleness, though teachers are most at fault, since they are the cause of detriment.<sup>143</sup> Teachers should dispose of idleness from their students as well as from themselves<sup>144</sup>: "by contemplating the meaning of their profession [...] And behold, the school emanates from the foundations of church and state. You are then the representatives of the adolescent, cultivators of both Paradises, the celestial one and the one on earth. What could be more glorious [...]?"<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 3. Precept 16.

<sup>141</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 4. Precept 23.

<sup>142</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 4. Precept 24–25.

<sup>143</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 5. Precept 39.

<sup>144</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 5. Precept 41.

<sup>145</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 5. Precept 42.

Comenius reproaches the ignorant teacher's attempt to educate, the idle leader's attempt to lead, for he sees them as nothing more than a shadow without matter, a cloud without rain, a well without water, a lantern without light. They should be ashamed of themselves, Comenius proceeds, for if they receive a salary they should strive to excel and lay away the teacher's mask.<sup>146</sup> An exemplary teacher should:

A careful teacher drives away idleness from his students in three ways: chiefly by being a constant diligent, vigorous and patient example of hard work, set before their eyes. And how this takes effect! Given that a live coal thrown among dead ones, sets all on fire, if there is a draught. The one and only Alexander, who threw himself into deep snow or whirling waters, or into enemy lines, was followed by all soldiers and triumphed with them. So banish your own idleness, faithful teacher, and you shall soon see how it among your students, will cease to exist. A certain courageous Fortius, whom did not refuse to instruct for four, six, eight or even ten hours on a daily basis, felt there was no lack in those who enthusiastically follow, and with excellent results.<sup>147</sup>

Comenius explains that an exemplary teacher cares for his students, treats them gently and with a kind hand. Such a teacher does not make them tremble as if he were a tyrant, for the teacher can be assured – fear misleads understanding. The students ought to love their teacher as if he were a father. Admittedly, Comenius recollects how he has entered seats of learning, becoming painfully aware of instruction lacking proficiency. For there he saw how some based their authority on walking back and forth in the classroom, resembling taciturn pillars pitching assignments, as if it were bones to a dog to be gnawed on. What else could extinguish a natural ache to learn, or curb exertion, Comenius observes.<sup>148</sup>

Through their work, students are obliged to contribute in the mission of expelling idleness. But the path of this endeavour cannot be paved, with the exception of prudent leadership. The teacher must first evoke love of knowledge, then sweeten their arduous work in gaining it, and only then, if they are dawdling, ask for obedience.<sup>149</sup> In Comenius' opinion, most educators rather encourage youth not to be active, not to speak, or to think for themselves; such teachers do not wish to broaden their horizons.<sup>150</sup>

Comenius urges the teachers to become wisdom personified, so that the love and strive for it among students, make them drunk, and not conscious of the hardships of gaining insight. For what is it to be wise? Comenius defines it as the capacity to distinguish the state of things, to

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<sup>146</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 6. Precept 44.

<sup>147</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 6. Precept 47.

<sup>148</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 6. Precept 49.

<sup>149</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 6. Precept 50.

<sup>150</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 8. Precept 69.

be the bearer of good judgement, readiness, resourcefulness, eloquence, principles and piety; someone favoured by the gods, with a will to educate all whilst being blissfully content in this life.<sup>151</sup>

Comenius does not only convey his precepts to the teachers, for the headmaster is addressed as well – and in a harsher tone: an exemplary headmaster puts great effort into the prosperity of the school, and should not feel well in spirit, if his school does not exceedingly so. He should consider the school his Sparta, to which he has been invited to fortify with every possible means. He should therefore act as a capable leader with an army, tending able commanders and officers, set eyes on brave soldiers, or raise them so with instruction and strict order.<sup>152</sup>

The road to excellence, Comenius continues, is precipitous and one cannot gain distinction without the sweat of one's brow; the Lord has provided mankind his gifts through our labour, making any vocation more enjoyable than idleness:

And he who has made up his mind to achieve the highest of goals, must also accept necessary pains and labour, avoid depravity, diversions and everything that weakens the spirit; the young Alexander seized without hesitation half of the world's hemisphere; the world of arts and sciences can be seized if you each day, and without indecision, never cease to improve yourself. Idleness is unsightly and awfully wrong, making man – a creature resembling angels – a wilted stump.<sup>153</sup>

Towards the end of his treatise, Comenius addresses the readers, i.e. the teachers and students, by imploring them not refuse the suggested amendments, given their purpose of making the school a more agreeable place. For should anyone frown, Comenius adds, they do not recognize the might of love, a force whose hands would never hesitate to draw you from the flames by your hair, or out of a whirlpool, even if this act of kindness momentarily lacks appreciation.<sup>154</sup> Do not lose faith he says, should it take time, for even the peasant awaiting his crops knows he has to be patient.<sup>155</sup> This has been done, Comenius concludes, not only in words, but with examples in order to inspire and encourage educational diligence:

I deem it fair if we were to take turns in this competition, created to stir activity, not only by words, but with examples; not only by examples but also with words. For the young, racing to the finish line, the words of the poet are pertinent: May the last one get the scabies! Let us all do so in the even more serious competition of gaining wisdom, both young and old! For one thing is certain, the one who refuses to run

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<sup>151</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 6. Precept 51.

<sup>152</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 4. Precept 18.

<sup>153</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 6–7. Precept 52.

<sup>154</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 8. Precept 70.

<sup>155</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 8. Precept 72.

will get the scabies of idleness. If it's not to their liking, well then. We will talk and converse with the energetic ones, they will engage us and we will engage them.<sup>156</sup>

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1 On the concepts of grit and exemplary teaching in three works of *De ratione studii*

The questions raised in the beginning of this paper was *how do the concepts of grit and exemplary teaching differ in Fortius redivivus, in comparison to Erasmus' and Ringelbergh's De ratione studii?* and *what are the innate qualities of Comenius's treatise in comparison with its sources?* In view of the Dutch humanist influences on the works of Comenius – already established in chapter 3 – this discussion does not intend to trace or identify the beginnings of a line of thought, but rather the ways it is being discussed and used in order to instruct, conveying the notions of the writers in question.

The concepts of grit, generally referred to as diligence in the treatises, and exemplary teaching are themes widely discussed in texts such as these. For it raises the question of expectations on both student and teacher. Although Comenius based his precepts on the treatises of Erasmus and Ringelbergh, they do differ a great deal in some respects, concerning who is primarily addressed, the reasons for it, and the use and meaning of diligence in students and teachers.

Desiderius Erasmus, one of the most influential educators of his time, wrote his *De ratione studii*, when the primary limitations of the medieval school lay in the methods of teaching Latin, which underwent significant change with the acceptance of the vernacular, and a general broadening of the medieval curriculum, within the cultural framework of a classic-humanist tradition, here exemplified by Erasmus. His *De ratione studii* was written for the adolescent student and teacher, most likely a private tutor, of Latin and Greek, history and science, and it thereby follows that his version, in its entirety, has an emphasis on the rudiments of languages, which grammarians, authors, and Scriptures to be used. However, as stated in the first chapter of this paper, this study does not intend to linger on those topics.

Erasmus emphasizes the need for instruction to be more suited to the pupil's abilities and spontaneity, yet still under the formative guidance of an exemplary teacher. Erasmus gives the

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<sup>156</sup> Comenius 1652, p. 8. Precept 71.

reader resolute and practical advice on how to become diligent, with ways of memorizing facts and rules, the importance of practice and progression, whilst urging both pupil and tutor to diligently study the best in each category, and to employ good judgement. One could argue that diligence, or grit, in Erasmus' text, is the *care* for good methods of learning and teaching, which cannot be done properly without an exemplary teacher of moderate ability and modest personality. Erasmus' exemplary teacher encourages and compliments his students, but should above all stimulate their spirits; by knowing good methods of instruction the exemplary tutor can avoid teaching matters vacuous in content and dull in form. For a well-read and apt teacher conveys both pleasures and benefits held by study, and students who are taught by such a teacher will readily demonstrate so. Erasmus does indeed place a heavy burden on the extraordinary teacher, as he himself observes, for he places this burden on one person, removing it from as many as possible – he would sooner have one man read everything, rather, than have everyone read everything.

Sterck van Ringelbergh's treatise presents in its entirety, and wholeheartedly, the mindset, method, and way of life needed in order to succeed in academic studies. The text is almost exclusively addressed to the student, who is instructed to always submit to labour, to flee from wantonness and luxury, and everything that renders the mind soft. For if the industry and perseverance of mankind equalled our capacity, Ringelbergh says, - there is nothing the mind cannot accomplish. Although he provides practical advice concerning the best methods of study, the emphasis is on motivational aspects of student life, and less so on exemplary teaching, or the diligence the latter requires. In referencing instruction, for instance, the disadvantages many students suffer from, as he refers to early education, and parental failure, he does not convey any solve to the matter, or underlying issues. Diligence, in Ringelbergh's treatise, is the *ambition* and desire of *victory* and *glory*. It is the ability to raise oneself from dust to eminence, in other words, he puts an emphasis on *self-fulfilment*. Ringelbergh urges the student to consider every aspect of it in their endeavour: their ambition, talent, labour, time management, perseverance, self-confidence, judgement, and rational; for the path of learning is long and arduous – and without a finish line – unless you use diligence proportional to the difficulties.

Comenius' advice to the hardships of learning and teaching take a slightly different approach. For he realises in the beginning that in order to stir diligence and exemplary teaching, he must first identify a prevailing condition, i.e. idleness, in order to inspire both care and self-fulfilment. Comenius' reasons for writing his treatise – as a remedy for a school in decay – offer a great deal of thought on his concepts of diligence and exemplary teaching. For though he had procured the treatises of Erasmus and Ringelbergh, neither student nor teacher took their

instruction to heart. Understandably, since neither treatise propose a comprehensive view or solve, to a school already challenged by idleness and discouragement, in both students and teachers. One could argue that Erasmus rather discourages young and inexperienced teachers, considering his opinions on the common run of them, with his bleak, but seemingly, outlook. And though Ringelbergh's treatise is meant to ignite the fire of ambition in students, his notions of diligence and exemplary teaching offer little or no advice, as to how to incorporate society. Reasonably, Comenius prunes the treatises by *conceptualizing* the notion of diligence – in student, teacher, parents, the school, and society as a whole – with moral examples; idleness becomes the embodiment of everything wrong in society. Comenius turns diligence into an adversary, a remedy and a goal against indolence. This sets *Fortius redivivus* apart from the earlier versions of *De ratione studii*, since it more or less becomes a life philosophy. Comenius takes the whole picture into consideration, i.e. society, and not merely its players. For it is the undertaking of society – not the student or teacher alone – to inspire diligence. If diligence is not enforced on life itself, without pause in the workshop of man, rearing the soul, than idleness will prevail. For diligence and exemplary teaching in *Fortius redivivus*, are examples of creative human work – the practical activity rather than the passive contemplation, as means of approaching life itself.

## 7. Summary

The Czech educational reformer, Jan Amos Comenius (1592–1670), was one of the creators of modern educational thought, famed for his methodology of instructing arts and sciences. He revolutionized the methods of teaching languages, and was the innovator of pictorial textbooks in the vernacular. Comenius philosophy was both humanitarian and universalistic, the aim of his educational teachings being *pansophia* – universal wisdom. Mankind should, according to Comenius, be educated to full humanity, seeking learned piety by leading a life according to correct principles, both in science and morality, since man participates in God's creation and preservation.

Forced by the Thirty Years' War, and as a member and minister of the Unity of Brethren, he travelled extensively throughout Europe, including Sweden. Although many of Comenius' educational ideas were new, they were the product of a number of different influences,

originating in earlier cultural and theoretical traditions, i.e. the Moravian Christian movement, the Reformation, and humanism.

The undertaken study has focused on a short treatise by Comenius, *Fortius redivivus* (*Fortius revived*), written in 1652, when he was working as a teacher in Hungary. There, he was faced with the challenge of a school in a state of decline, where both students and teachers suffered from the conditions of idleness and discouragement. Comenius based his own treaty on two earlier versions of *De ratione studii* (*On the right method of study*) by the Dutch humanist Desiderius Erasmus (c.1466–1536) and Flemish scholar, Joachim Sterck van Ringelbergh (c.1499–c.1531). By writing his treaty Comenius sought a remedy for idleness, by instruction of diligence and exemplary teaching. This essay has focused on how the concepts of diligence – ‘grit’ – and exemplary teaching are described and differ, in the three versions of *De ratione studii*. Through content analysis and the method of comparison, the author of this paper argues that Comenius’ concepts of diligence and exemplary teaching differs from the earlier versions. By incorporating his educational thoughts of universal wisdom in the pruning of the versions of *De ratione studii*, his notions of diligence and exemplary teaching offer a more comprehensive and all-embracing view and solve to the challenges of idleness and discouragement, in both students, teachers, and the school as a whole, since it is God’s workshop of humanity. Diligence becomes a means of approaching life itself, a life achievement.

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## **Front cover**

Verelst, Pieter. *The schoolmaster and his pupils* [panel]. c. 1650. The Kremer Collection [online]. [www.thekremercollection.com/pieter-verelst/](http://www.thekremercollection.com/pieter-verelst/).