

CHAPTER 3

An exemplary view of informal infant
education between ± 500 A.D.
and ± 1650 A.D.

Elsa G. Kruger

CONTENTS

3.1	Introductory remarks	70
3.2	The informal education of infants in Western Europe during the Middle Ages, Renaissance-Humanism and the first Protestant Church Reformation	70
3.2.1	Introduction	70
3.2.2	Infant education during the Middle Ages ($\pm 500 - \pm 1500$)	71
3.2.2.1	Orientating remarks	71
3.2.2.2	Home education	72
3.2.2.3	Infant schools	73
3.2.2.4	A few Medieval views (theories) on infant education	74
3.2.3	Infant education from a Renaissance-humanistic perspective ($\pm 1320 - \pm 1600$)	75
3.2.3.1	Orientating remarks	75
3.2.3.2	Home education	76
3.2.3.3	Infant schools	76
3.2.3.4	A few Renaissance-humanistic views on infant education	77
	(a) <i>Vittorino da Feltre (1378-1446)</i>	77
	(b) <i>Mapheus Vegius (1406-1458)</i>	78
	(c) <i>Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536)</i>	79
	(d) <i>Juan Luis Vives (1492-1540)</i>	80
	(e) <i>Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592)</i>	82
3.2.4	Infant education from the perspective of the first Protestant Church Reformation ($\pm 1500 - \pm 1650$)	83
3.2.4.1	Orientating remarks	83
3.2.4.2	Home education	84

3.2.4.3	Infant schools	85
3.2.4.4	A few views of Protestant Church Reformers on infant education ..	86
	(a) <i>Martin Luther (1483-1546)</i>	86
	(b) <i>John Calvin (1509-1564)</i>	87
3.3	The significance of views on infant education subscribed to during Medieval and Renaissance periods for the present and the future	89
	Bibliography	90

3.1 Introductory remarks

It is obvious that in the human progression towards adulthood there has always been the period known as infancy during which the human being is in need of protective guidance and education. As may be gathered from the previous chapter, the views concerning the child were not always founded on his uniqueness and being different as particular modes of being human (thus as a child and not as an adult or an old person) but on other more political, economic, social and religious grounds.

In this chapter an attempt will be made to determine to what extent the life and world-view, as well as the environmental circumstances of particular periods, affected the theory and practice of infant education, and how the infant was, during this period of approximately thirteen centuries, considered to be, and treated as if he were a rather inferior replica of the adult (a miniature adult).

3.2 The informal education of infants in Western Europe during the Middle Ages, Renaissance-Humanism and the first Protestant Church Reformation

3.2.1 Introduction

When referring to Western Europe in this section the reference is to the area which includes, among others, Italy, the Netherlands, France, the German-speaking countries and Great Britain.

One of the characteristics of the period under discussion ($\pm 500 - \pm 1650$) is the rise of the Roman Catholic Church as the authority on

spiritual as well as secular matters and the vast influence of this institution on everyday life and in particular on educational theory and educative practice.

Another feature of this period, however, is the growing revolt against the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. This culminated in a reaffirmation of the "rights" of the individual as seen from the point of view of the Renaissance-humanism on the one hand and on the other of the Protestant Reformation. It goes without saying that this did not leave the informal education of the child unaffected. Whereas the home (with or without state control) had borne the responsibility for infant education during classical times, the period now under discussion shows signs of the beginning of institutionalized (i.e. "school") care/education and instruction of the infant.

3.2.2 *Infant education during the Middle Ages* **(± 500 – ± 1500)**

3.2.2.1 Orientating remarks

The Roman Empire, the world power of the Latin peoples, came to a fall around the year 476 A.D. A new era in the history of Western civilization, namely the Middle Ages, which would last for nearly a thousand years, came into being.

Divergent opinions exist concerning the character and importance of this period of civilization. Some scholars refer to this period as the "dark ages" because of the demise of earlier glory, the great confusion in national life and the anarchy which prevailed. Others see it as an epoch of progress particularly in the sphere of the church. For example, by the thirteenth century the former heathen Germanic hordes of Western Europe, who were responsible for the fall of the mighty Roman Empire, had already been converted to Christianity and they became the bearers of and were responsible for the spread of Western culture. It thus depends solely on what is considered of importance and what criteria are used to judge the Middle Ages. If one were to look for scientific progress and technological achievement, the Middle Ages would not rate very highly. Yet, the Middle Ages were certainly not devoid of merit in the fields of art, culture and education.

The Roman Catholic Church had more or less complete control of education throughout the Middle Ages and exercised a beneficial, binding influence on many facets of society.

During the Middle Ages education and teaching, among others, were subjected to religious control and not state control as was the case during the classical period. The encompassing educative aim was of a

moral and religious nature; by living a virtuous life man was to be assisted in reaching his eternal destination in the hereafter. Education was thus a means to the end of achieving Christian virtue and eternal life and not an aim in itself. Towards achieving this goal the Roman Catholic Church fulfilled a very important role and soon became the most important force in the education of the child.

3.2.2.2 Home education

The medieval child was mainly left to the care of his mother (and nurses, particularly in wealthy homes) for the first seven years of his life. Although the status of a woman (mother) left much to be desired – she was to all intents and purposes a chattel of her husband and totally subservient to his will – she nevertheless played an important role in respect of family education. In most instances the father was perpetually away from home due to military expeditions, plundering forays, crusades and so forth. The father was in fact too busy to pay much attention to the education of the child.

Home education was generally speaking concerned with subjecting the child to authority so that the eventual morally religious educative aim of a virtuous Christian life on earth and in the hereafter could be attained. Enforcing authority often included corporal punishment and was sometimes strict, sometimes harsh and cruel; the child was taught to fear and respect his parents and to obey them unconditionally. This strict enforcement of authority might have been influenced by two divergent views concerning the soul of the child which were prevalent at the time, namely that:

- the soul of the child was inherently evil: according to *A Godly Form of Household Government* (1621) (quoted in Osborn 1980:24) the child has "a wrong-doing heart and is inclined to evil" and is thus destined for hell and damnation – only strict education could change him for the better;
- the soul of the child was a *tabula rasa* (blank sheet) "unscrawled with observations . . . and he knows no evil" (Earle, *Microcosmography*, 1628 as quoted in: Osborn, 1980:24).

By means of strict education it would be possible to protect the innocent child against the corruption of sin.

Respect for the individuality and personal freedom of the child was generally non-existent. He was not valued highly seeing that it was highly probable that he might die young owing to poor hygienic conditions

and gynecological practices, children's diseases (such as diphtheria, smallpox, typhoid and measles) for which no known preventatives existed at the time, water pollution resulting from poor sanitation, poor housing and so forth. The high infant mortality rate most probably forced the church to adopt the practice of christening babies immediately following their birth in order to prevent their souls from being eternally lost in the hereafter.

As was remarked earlier, the church in time intervened in an attempt to improve the lot of the small child.

3.2.2.3 Infant schools

With the founding of "play schools" or "care schools" in the eleventh century in France, Germany and Switzerland, the convents were beginning to act as educative and care centres for small children. With loving care the nuns tried to alleviate the circumstances of the neglected infants which attended these infant schools.

In the larger cities of the Netherlands, for instance, institutions known as "*begijnhowe*" (beginners' centres) where "*begijntjes*" (beginners), as a service of love, undertook the education of infants (little girls in particular). (The *begijntje* was a virtuous, elderly spinster who as a member of a religious women's society lived in the *begijnhof*, which adjoined the church. Unlike the nuns the *begijntjes* had not made their vows to the church to commit their lives to convents.) Another type of infant school for girls which originated in the Netherlands was the so-called *matresschool*. These small schools were founded by a group of women with a calling who were worried about the education of girls. Some of these women often had a most beneficial influence on the infants entrusted to their care. Even later, towards the end of the fourteenth century, the so-called *klopjes* schools for small boys were founded. Initially they were instructed in these schools until their tenth year, but during the fifteenth century this age limit was lowered to seven years. *Klopjes* were also virtuous women who devoted their lives to religion, meditation and teaching; they did not, however, live in "isolation" (such as in a convent or *begijnhof*).

The emphasis on the eternal destination of man as educative aim and the view that man was by nature a sinful being, contributed to the lack of insight into the special nature and desires of the small child in these medieval infant schools. The methods of instruction were consequently having the Paternoster, the Ave Maria, the Credo and the Penitential Psalms read aloud to them and repeating (memorizing) these. Thus were the cultivation of godliness and the inculcation of a virtuous, moral Christian way of life to be realized.

3.2.2.4 A few Medieval views (theories) on infant education

The daily sermons of the Roman Catholic Church made pronouncements concerning the education of the infant. Berthold von Regensburg (1220-1272), one of the best known and most important of the German national preachers, for instance, in his sermons expressed a plea for attention to the physical health of the unborn child. He admonished expectant mothers to practise moderation in all respects.

In conjunction with the physical nourishment and care of the child, the Roman Catholic priests emphasized the importance of the spiritual salvation of infants. They insisted that the child should be christened as soon as possible and thus become part of the Church's spiritual sphere of influence. Parents who failed to have their infants christened were depriving them, they maintained, of a "great honour and blessedness" (Barow-Bernstorff *et al.*, 1971:27). From the child's earliest years parents were expected to accept responsibility for his education as they owed this to the child if they wanted to guide him towards the kingdom of heaven. According to Berthold von Regensburg it was therefore necessary for the parents to educate their children piously and also to teach them the Our Father and the Ave Maria. The infant who had a good example to follow, so he maintained, would also strive to emulate what is good.

The views of the Medieval priests, in particular, thus emphasized the example of the parents in word and deed, as well as the pedagogic significance of first impressions for the cultivation of good habits. According to the priests example and habit-formation were the most important means of education; in fact, Berthold von Regensburg expressed the opinion that habit-formation was stronger than nature and remarked as follows: when parents swear and use unsavoury language and encourage the imitation of this habit by their children by laughing out loud when this occurs . . . it would have been better if such parents had never had children. His views on infant education were aimed at protecting the children of the nation against corruption and accustoming them to a moderate and simple way of life, because that which children become used to, will always stay with them and they will "cling" to it.

It would thus appear as if at least some of the spiritual leaders of Medieval times evinced a degree of concern about the education of the infant, but that the spirit of the times and associated views on the nature of the child and his soul cast a dark shadow on the happiness and the joyous carefree existence of the infants.

3.2.3 *Infant education from a Renaissance-humanistic perspective (± 1320 – ± 1600)*

3.2.3.1 **Orientating remarks**

The Renaissance marked the revival, "awakening" or "rebirth" of classical Greco-Roman striving and hankering after ever more spectacular achievements in the intellectual, spiritual, cultural and aesthetic spheres. It started developing in Italy, to the south of Western Europe, in the fourteenth century. During the fifteenth century this "revived" hankering after the lost glory of the past split into two streams, namely that of Renaissance-humanism which was chiefly aimed at the aesthetic and intellectual sphere and that of Church Reformation which represented a rebirth in the area of the church and religion. (The significance of the latter stream is discussed in section 3.2.4.)

The Renaissance was the age of discovery (gunpowder), practical inventions and technological achievements (compass, printing), voyages and discovery of unknown lands and artistic achievements of virtually unknown scope and quality. Man, his essence and origin were viewed totally differently and the view of life underwent a complete change from that which had prevailed during the Middle Ages.

The emphasis in the life view and the view of man shifted from the medieval *theocentrism* (where God and the hereafter were the focal points and goals of all things) to *humanism* (where man, like during the classical period, was the focal point and goal of everything). Man was again to become a harmoniously formed human being with his own dignity, freedom and rights, who could live according to his own choice. The Renaissance-humanists in the South (Italy, Portugal and Spain) were largely unaffected by Christian religion. In the North (France, Germany and the Netherlands) the Christian core, also as far as education and teaching were concerned, remained intact, despite its admiration of the classical and heathen spirit of the times and their achievements. This so-called Christian humanism was nevertheless more concerned with forming man than with educating the Christian. In this way the individual came to the fore at the cost of the community.

The Biblical teaching of inherent sinfulness was rejected by most Renaissance-humanists who believed with Socrates in the natural goodness of man, and from this stemmed their demand that man should be given the opportunity to develop freely, free of the bonds of the church and Christian tradition. This implies that the Renaissance-humanist started to realize that he was not totally at the mercy of circumstances beyond his control, but that he could share in forming his own life on earth and that he, in fact, could achieve his own freedom.

Renaissance-humanism was in essence also a secular attack on the Roman Catholic Church, an attempt to escape from the dominance of the Church and from religious truths which could not be proved nor explained by the mind (reason).

These changing views of life and of man later led to a better understanding of the child in thoughts on education, and to a "natural" approach to teaching and educative matters, to more human and kinder discipline and to a greater awareness of the value of the example of the adult (educator). In spite of this new interest in the development of all aspects of the child's humanness (intellectual, physical, aesthetic, moral and religious aspects, as well as the development of his inherent abilities) the Renaissance-humanists still did not fully grasp the child's being a child. Over and above this the small child was in everyday life still looked upon and treated as a miniature adult, in a way as if his childlike being was in essence not very different from that of the adult. Children were still considered to have reached "adulthood" as soon as they could speak intelligibly and coherently at the age of approximately four to five years.

It should be noted that the Renaissance-humanistic thoughts on education and the child were only concerned with the aristocracy; the education of the population's children in general was not taken into consideration.

3.2.3.2 Home education

Education by the family in the home underwent only very slight changes during the Renaissance period. The aristocracy followed the trend of sending the child to another home to be cared for, brought up and educated for a number of years (which could vary from two to twelve years or even longer). Babies often moved from one nurse to another, a practice which could only have had a detrimental effect on the mind of the small child. The responsibility for the early care and education of the children of the masses fell chiefly on the shoulders of the mother, even when a nurse was employed.

3.2.3.3 Infant schools

The provision of infant schools also underwent very little change during the Renaissance. The existing "play schools" or "care centres" or schools under the guidance of *begijntjes*, *klopjes* or *matresse* did however gradually increase in number.

3.2.3.4 A few Renaissance-humanistic views on infant education

A number of the Renaissance-humanists expressed views on the education of the child in their works. Not all of them, however, paid special attention to the education of very small children (within the family circle). The better known and even lesser known learned men of the Renaissance period, whose views will be discussed briefly, did nevertheless emphasize either the general pedagogical principles and demands and/or they formulated specific points of departure in respect of infant education and family education which were of particular significance for educative thoughts and practices in the ensuing centuries and even for the present.

The first Renaissance-humanist whose thoughts on education may be considered of particular significance, was an Italian who was born in the little scenic Italian village of Feltre. His proper name was Victor, but being short of stature he was called Vittorino (little Victor).

(a) *Vittorino da Feltre (1378 - 1446)*

This humanist educator, the first modern school teacher, unfortunately left no written records. Fortunately his wisdom on education was recorded by thankful former pupils, acquaintances and friends.

After a period of twenty-five years (at first as student and later as lecturer) at the famous University of Padua, he became the private tutor of the children of the Duke of Mantua. In a house on the duke's property – which Vittorino called *La Gioiosa* (Home of Happiness) – he applied his educational theories in practice. Although the very tiny children were not accommodated in this school, Vittorino's views on education are nevertheless of great significance for the education of infants. Some of his ideas, which were subsequently recorded by his pupils, are summarized below:

- The goal of education is the harmonious development of the psychical, physical and intellectual abilities of each pupil, and in particular also obedience to God and being of service to the church and state.
- There should be a happy, personal relationship between educator and educand and the school should not be a place of terror but rather a place for joyful communion.
- The level of teaching should be geared to the abilities and possibilities of each child to ensure that each lesson is a pleasant experience for the child in which he can play an active part.
- The interest of the educand should be awakened by means of lively,

interesting methods (eg. variation to prevent boredom, using visual aids in a pleasant environment) – which will also result in eliminating many disciplinary problems.

- The relationship of authority, as it also existed between Vittorino and his pupils, must be based on mutual love and respect; disciplinary measures other than corporal punishment usually have more satisfactory results and corporal punishment should only be applied as a last resort before the pupil is banned from the school.
- Children differ from each other in nature and must be allowed to progress naturally; they must not be forced willy-nilly to make choices against their own wishes. His pupils recorded that he spent much time "to gain that intimate knowledge of the tastes, capacity and industry of each scholar, which with his readiness to adapt thereto his choice both of subject and of treatment, secured the unique success for which his school was celebrated." (*in*: Cole, 1950:210)

(b) *Mapheus Vegius (1406 - 1458)*

The work of Mapheus Vegius, one of the most important Italian authors on education during the fifteenth century, typifies the Renaissance-humanistic views on the education of infants within the family circle.

In the first part of the work *De educatione liberorum* (About the education of children) by Vegius, he expresses his views on the duties of parents towards their small children. He admonishes them to lead a decent life so that they will not do anything which would negate virtue and sound morals in the eyes of their children. By setting a good example for the children more would be achieved than by any amount of correction and admonition when they have acted unacceptably due to not knowing any better. The moral education of children could be enhanced by keeping them away from harmful environmental influences. It is also of equal importance that infants should not hear "immoral" conversations and unsavoury stories, see "indecent" paintings or attend immoral plays. If these things are not avoided, it could lead to moral confusion in the child's mind. Children of the rural aristocracy ought also not to come into contact with children of the lower classes because in these circles they would only be exposed to examples of lack of character, irresolution, love of pleasure and greed.

Vegius managed, for his time, to make some statements which were reasonably scientifically correct about the physical development of the child and his education during the prenatal stage: He emphasized that the pregnant woman should ensure the intake of enough nourishing food, avoid harsh or acidic foods and bad wine, exercise gently and should shun a lifestyle of laziness as well as too much excitement or tiring labour; she should at all times strive to retain a calm and happy mood.

He also insisted that mothers should care for and breastfeed their own babies and not feed them rich foods. To ensure good health Vegius advocated inuring them to cold and ample sleep. He also gave many practical hints for mothers which are valid to this day: no implement which may be used for stabbing or cutting should be handled by infants and they should be protected against anything which may inflict serious injury such as fire, water, untrained horses, vicious dogs and so forth.

As far as the implementation of authority is concerned Vegius suggested that parents should be "thoughtful and exercise tact" and should keep the balance between mild and strict disciplinary measures to suit the time and circumstances. He made the following suggestions in this connection:

A person should occasionally praise a child's correct actions or overlook minor contraventions and try find the happy medium between praise and admonishment. According to the dictates of circumstances a person should be completely serious or lovingly humorous and the child's heart should even at times be gladdened with a small gift – an excellent means of keeping him on the right track.

(Vegius as quoted in: Barow-Bernstorff 1971:38,
author's translation)

(c) *Desiderius Erasmus (1466 - 1536)*

Erasmus was one of the most prominent literary men and educationists in the Netherlands in the early sixteenth century. His many works on education clearly indicate that he was greatly influenced by Quintilian and believed as did Quintilian in the omnipotence of education. He also pleaded for interesting teaching methods and emphasized the individual differences between pupils in respect of capabilities and interest.

Erasmus described the aim of education as follows:

The first principal function is that the tender spirit may drink in the seeds of piety, the next that he may love and learn thoroughly the liberal studies, the third is that he may be informed concerning the duties of life, the fourth is that from the earliest childhood he may be habituated in courteous manners.

(Erasmus, quoted in: Woodward 1904:73)

One of his most important educational works: *Libellus novus et elegans de pueris instituendis* (The first liberal (free) education of children, 1529) deals with the education of the infant. In this work Erasmus recognizes the possible influences of heredity, unconscious imitation and early impressions on particularly the aesthetic and moral moulding of the child.

Although he did not have a very high regard for the mother as educator (probably due to the low level of teaching of the women of his time), he nevertheless considered her role in home education as of utmost importance. She had to assume responsibility for such matters as the health of the child, habit-formation, introduction to the Christian belief and regular church attendance. She was also responsible for the moral moulding of the infant, physical fitness, civilized language usage, and his reading, writing and arithmetic. Owing to these responsibilities which rested on the mother, Erasmus encouraged girls to study in order that they might eventually be able to educate their own children and share in the intellectual lives of their husbands. The father also has an important function in home education and for this reason he should not distantiate himself from the infant and only start taking an interest in his moulding at too late a stage in the child's life.

Erasmus contended that the use of natural objects such as animals, garden plants and furniture as well as day-to-day family activities provided sufficient scope for enlarging the vocabulary and for instructional conversation. Infants would soon learn to understand and accept a moral Christian way of life through good examples, loving discipline and direct instruction. In particular the child also had to learn to curb his temper, to suppress maliciousness and to abhor lies.

Threats, compulsion and lack of self-control when disciplining a child was denounced by Erasmus (as by other humanists before him) and only with great caution was corporal punishment to be administered.

(d) **Juan Luis Vives (1492 - 1540)**

Vives, who was of Spanish extraction, studied in Paris and lived and worked in Bruges (Flanders) and Oxford (England). In Bruges he came into contact with the humanistic ideas on education of Erasmus. As early as 1523 his first important pedagogical work, *De institutione feminae Christianae* (The instruction of the Christian woman) was published. It contains particularly valuable references to the education of infants. The book starts off with an exposition on the education of a small girl and ends with a comprehensive description of how a young mother should care for and educate her infants. This work was dedicated to Cathrine of Aragon (1485-1536), first wife of Henry VIII of England (Erasmus was the tutor of their daughter, Princess Mary).

Vives believed that the mother should bear the responsibility for the initial education and instruction of the child in respect of writing, reading of devotional literature and moral moulding. The father's responsibility was of a supervisory nature; he had to make a concerted effort to

remain in touch with everything which might influence the health and activities of the young boy.

Vives was also convinced that the child should be initiated into the adult world by means of playing games. He did, nevertheless, stipulate that girls and boys should play separately as he believed that by keeping a girl aloof from the male sex before her marriage, it would be possible to prepare her more adequately morally and religiously so that she may better fulfil her duties at the side of her husband. She was not to play with dolls which could promote vanity and ostentation, but should instead play with little pieces of furniture and kitchen utensils made of metal, in preparation for her task as housewife.

Vives maintained that in infancy, that period when the child is not yet able to distinguish between good and evil, the child should definitely not be taught that such a thing as evil exists. The young mind should be filled only with good impressions, in other words, Vives was thoroughly aware of the influence of first impressions and environmental influences on the moral moulding of the child.

In conjunction with this he also emphasized the influence of the adult's example on the total progression of the child to adulthood. At his mother's knee the child is for the first time introduced to language. His first images are formed and his initial character moulding takes place in terms of what he sees and hears from his mother. From the example of the adult the child should learn that a desire for wealth, power, glory, fame, nobility and beauty is vain and foolish and that only righteousness, piousness, bravery, virtuousness, gentleness, compassion and love of his neighbour are admirable Christian virtues which he should strive for. (Vives as quoted in: Kreckler 1971:26-29.)

In a subsequent work, *De trahendis disciplinis* (Concerning teaching subjects) published in 1531, he set out the following supplementary educational principles:

- The cardinal matter in teaching is the child and his natural aptitude, not subject content.
- The senses are the initial "teachers" and instruction should be based on visual presentation and self-activity.
- The child's individuality should be kept in mind.
- The pupil's interest must be aroused and force should not be used to gain (or retain) his attention.

These opinions were totally novel at the beginning of the sixteenth century and would only be generally accepted into educational thought and educative practice much later, and still remain of great consequence today.

(e) Michel de Montaigne (1533 - 1592)

Montaigne, a French humanist, also expressed opinions of a typically Renaissance nature on the education of the infant.

These opinions are set forth in some of his *Essays* (1580) (e.g. *On the schoolmaster, On the education of children, The love of parents for their children and How children take after their parents*).

Montaigne's pedagogical thoughts and principles in respect of infant education may be summarized as follows (cf. Barow-Bernstorff 1871:38-40, and Krecker 1971:29-31):

- All character flaws may be traced to habit-formation during infancy; the child should therefore be made aware of right and wrong from his earliest years in order that he may denounce evil on the basis of his own inner convictions.
- The child's education should start from his very first years, while he is still young and malleable like clay. From the start the lessons of philosophy (which in Montaigne's views included the moral and religious) had to be learnt in a simplified, practical form. Montaigne quite rightly averred that the mind of the child is more receptive to such lessons than to reading and writing.
- Montaigne was totally against any "display of force" in education. He believed that force and severity bordered on enslavement. A drubbing achieves nothing more than scaring the child and making him feel embarrassed, unnerved, cowardly, cross and stubborn. Sensible, prudent persuasion and friendly encouragement are useful means in morally acceptable education. There should thus be a friendly, mutual relationship of trust between parent and child. What cannot be achieved by common sense, by being prudent and maintaining good order, will also not be achieved by force, for instance corporal punishment.
- Success in education can be achieved by careful observation and making pedagogic use of the child's inherent nature and desires (i.e. recognition of the individuality of the child), by prudent guidance of the divergent independent actions and meaning attributions and by the educator applying himself without reserve to the educative task.
- Apart from emphasizing that physical and moral education were essential for infants, Montaigne said very little about the "learning content" to which the child of pre-school age could be introduced.

The significance of the Renaissance-humanistic pedagogical thought is situated in the important points of view it subscribed to in respect of good care and education of pre-schoolers and infants. Of particular importance are the suggestions concerning the physical development of the

child, taking into consideration the individual nature of each child, and the important effect of sound adult example. Renaissance-humanism contributed much towards more "humane" behaviour towards the child in education and to allowing the child to occupy his rightful position as co-participant in the educative event.

There can be no doubt that the Renaissance, as a particular spiritual approach, also had a far-reaching effect on matters concerning the church and religion and that this eventually led to the Reformation of the Church, especially in the north of Western Europe (Germany, Prussia, Switzerland, the northern parts of the Netherlands, France and England).

3.2.4 Infant education from the perspective of the first Protestant Church Reformation (± 1500 – ± 1650)

3.2.4.1 Orientating remarks

The Protestant Church Reformation was, as one of the streams or branches of the Renaissance, particularly of a religious nature. It was opposed to the irregularities and malpractices within the Roman Catholic church. The Reformers wanted to cast back to the true nature and essence of Christianity when the Word of God and not the Church and the Pope, had authority over man and life; when man's salvation was attributed to the grace and act of atonement of Jesus Christ and not to loyalty or penance to the Church or Pope. It was also a reaction against the humanism of the times which tended more and more to make human reason and human caprice and whims the criteria for everything, instead of recognizing God and His Word as the focus and criteria of human life.

Unlike the Renaissance-humanists the reformers considered man to be inherently sinful and this sinful being could only be brought to salvation believing in Christ. The reformers also emphasized human freedom, but then as a freedom towards personal responsibility before God and as freedom from sin through a belief in Jesus Christ and His grace.

The reformation was also characterized by compassion for the ordinary human being, and concern for his conversion and social upliftment. This was the force behind the insistence of the reformers on education for everyone (people's education), for state controlled teaching and a democratic society which would enable everybody to become adequately equipped for not only a meaningful earthly existence but also a life hereafter in heaven. The principle that every person should be able to read the Bible in his mother tongue and that education, specifically for this reason, should be accessible to all, provided the impetus for the modern practice of mother tongue education and compulsory instruction.

The educational ideal of the reformers was of a religious nature and was intended to bring about complete devotion, true virtue, childlike belief and fear of and service to God. This educative ideal demanded that every Christian had to be properly prepared to strive, work and live for the honour and glorification of the Lord.

3.2.4.2 Home education

The reformer regarded every child as a child of the covenant and considered all children of equal dignity before God. Because everyone is in a direct and personal relationship with God, every child had to be guided to live to the honour of God and to attach meaning to his life through his obedience to God. In this guidance of the child towards adulthood, the family as educative establishment was given high priority. Not only the mother but the father as well had to contribute their share towards the child's education. Home education was emphasized for this reason and parents were instructed in the responsibilities of parenthood.

Old opinions and usages are not easily changed and the reformers had to accept that the child was still considered a miniature adult, that extremely severe discipline still prevailed and that the rod was not spared. Due to the conflict over religious freedom and the attendant confusion and disillusionment, many parents tended to have a negative attitude towards the education (and religious moulding in particular) of their children. Luther (1483-1546) observed and criticized this state of affairs.

He wrote a *Letter to the mayors and aldermen of all the cities in behalf of Christian Schools* (1524) in which he stated the chief causes why parents were either neglecting or indifferent to their educative duties within the family circle:

- Parents were loathe to give their children religious instruction as they would no longer become priests, monks and nuns and earn their living in this way. He contended that if these parents were really interested in the religious education of their children their reasoning should have been: if it is true that a position in the church may hold dangers for our children, teach us some other way in which they may be pleasing to God and truly blessed, because we do not only want to make provision for their physical development, but also for their spiritual moulding.
- There are some parents who are so totally lacking in piety and sincerity that they are not able to educate their children even if they wanted to; they would more readily become callous towards their own children and do nothing for them.
- The majority of parents are unaware of the high demands made on

them by family education and they have no insight into how children should be taught and educated.

- Even if parents were capable enough to undertake the education of their children themselves, they would, owing to their other commitments and domestic duties, not have the time to do so.

Bearing these views in mind it becomes easy to understand why the reformers were so insistent on the establishment of schools – and also infant schools.

3.2.4.3 Infant schools

The Protestant churches deemed it their duty to provide the children of their members with a religious Protestant education. Together with this task, opinions (of Luther, amongst others) claiming that the poor condition of Christianity was due to the fact that nobody cared about the guidance of children, led to more emphasis being given to an early start on the moral and religious education of the child. This meant that as soon as the child was able to walk he was sent to a small Protestant *matres* school. These little Protestant *matres* schools could not, however, compete with the standard and quality of the Roman Catholic *matres* schools of the time (cf. par. 3.2.2.3). Anybody could open a *matres* school and the ability and suitability of the *matresse* was never put to the test. There was also no supervision of these women (*matresse*), their methods of teaching and education, their conduct, age or the suitability of the school buildings or rooms. According to S. Coronel in *De Bewaarschool* (1863), these women were as a rule old and not of good standing and, under the pretense of educating these small children in the Christian belief, they set about teaching these tender waifs by pedagogically unacceptable means and, through exhausting and soul destroying memorizing, they turned them into pious hypocrites.

These schools did not cater for any games or natural expression of movement: religious teaching (i.e. memorizing and repetition of the Lord's Prayer, the Twelve Articles of Faith, morning and evening prayers, grace at table, texts and proverbs) was considered the most important daily task. Of true childlike expectations there was not the faintest notion; there were also no suitable intellectual challenges and physical education. Even the school rooms were dark, damp cellars or rooms with stone floors or small cramped spaces where children spent the entire day. In these rooms the *matresse* usually also washed, cooked, slept and lived. Harsh discipline was often accompanied by swearwords and the cane was much in evidence. The many opinions regarding infant education of, amongst others, Luther and Calvin were apparently not heeded. Notwithstanding these parents entrusted even their youngest infants to these "care centres".

Matres schools proliferated all over Western Europe and continued into the twentieth century (even as late as 1881) in the larger cities.

3.2.4.4 A few views of Protestant Church Reformers on infant education

(a) *Martin Luther (1483 - 1546)*

Luther, the initiator of Church Reformation in Germany, was well-versed in theology and he expressed himself particularly strongly on man's redemption through belief and not through doing good deeds. In his so-called "95 theses" which he nailed to the door of the Wittenburg church in October 1517, he lashed out at misuses and malpractices in the Roman Catholic church and demanded individual freedom in religious matters. In 1520 Luther (a fully trained Roman Catholic priest) completely severed his ties with the Roman Catholic church.

Luther looked upon education as a continuous event which starts at birth and ends at the grave. He thus recognized the family as an essential component of the entire education system and perpetually reminded the German nation that even Moses commanded parents to have their children instructed. He also emphasized that the laziness of parents who neglected their educative duties towards their children would cause the towns to be "contaminated" with ill-mannered children and would lead to the decline of civilization.

The importance he attached to family education is clearly indicated in the summary of his thoughts which follows:

- God created three institutions, namely the state, the church and the family – the latter being the foundation of the other two; the vitality of a nation is situated in parental education.
- Parental education is a God-given task; parents who neglect this duty will invite God's displeasure, no matter how virtuous and pious they may be in all other respects.
- The fifth commandment proves that God attaches great importance to the obedience of children to their parents; where this is absent, good manners and a good government will also be absent; governing within the family is the foundation of all other types of government.
- Family education is of vital importance in the same way as it would be futile to search for a healthy tree or sound fruit if the root system is rotten.
- God has elevated the calling of being a parent above all others; He thus expects children not only to love their parents but also to honour them.
- Parents should be aware at all times of the responsibility which rests

on them to educate their children for the community (occupational education) and for the church (religious education), i.e. to promote social usefulness and piety.

- As most social evils result from inadequate education, or lack of education in the home, nobody should consider becoming a father if he is not capable of instructing his children in the Ten Commandments and the Gospels.
- As head of the family the father should question his children at least once a week on the Ten Commandments, the Confession of Faith and the Lord's Prayer. The father was also responsible for moral education and as textbook for this purpose he had to make use of *Aesop's Fables*.
- Upon rising in the morning and upon retiring at night the children had to repeat the basic Christian principles and they were not to receive any breakfast before they had fulfilled this important duty.

In Luther's views on family education the mother had to fulfil a specific function. It was her duty to ensure that her children experienced a Christian way of life. Through purposive intervention she was expected to teach her children Christian usages and behaviour. In one of his sermons, based on Exodus 20:12, he explained that every *father* of a family was a bishop in his own home and *his wife* was a female bishop. He entreated parents to continue and extend the activities and message of the church in their homes. Luther considered family education, based on Protestant Christian beliefs, principles and discipline, to be an essential precondition for the establishment of a Christian social structure.

(b) John Calvin (1509 - 1564)

Calvin, a Frenchman, after leaving the Roman Catholic Church, carried on his life task as religious reformer outside of France in the Protestant Swiss city of Geneva. The city council of Geneva offered him a post as teacher of Holy Scripture and he stayed on there in order to govern that city according to a theocratic model.

Calvin was a born organizer: As a trained and religious jurist who had to assist in the management of a city, he made a plea for a system in which God and the secular government could "amalgamate" to educate men, women and children towards a code of behaviour which would promote their salvation. After he had designed this system, he started enforcing it methodically upon the citizens. He showed no accommodation to those who opposed him. His relentlessness was based on the assumption that if he were totally true to God's word, any opposition to his plans would constitute a refusal to obey God's commands, because God was all and man nought.

Calvin was convinced of the logic of this point of view and thus main-

tained that accommodation in negotiations concerning deviant behaviour could not be tolerated.

Calvin's ethical opinions evolved from the point of departure that human nature was fundamentally sinful. He blamed man's corruption and depravity on original sin which had contaminated everything and from which man could only escape through the grace of God (Calvin 1960:229). According to Eby (1952:118) Calvin's "moral pessimism" also affected his opinions about the essential nature of the child; Calvin considered the child to be "inherently bad; his depravity is total; all elements in his nature, emotions, reason, and will are like perverted; all his natural childish inclinations, appetites, and interests lead him astray".

Although Calvin did appear to have realized that the child is different, he attributed this difference to immaturity, something which had to be remedied immediately by means of strict education. The solution for man's depraved nature was thus to be sought for in the unification of all systems of education: the home, school and church, under protection and guidance of a single authority, namely the theocratic government consisting chiefly of the elders of the church. Man was not capable of saving himself and only the inter-dependence of all the educative institutions under the direction and guidance of a government based on God's will, could assist and lead man from corruption to redemption.

Although family education was given high priority in Calvin's system of education, it was not the usual type of family education. It may be better understood if the significance of the elder's supervision within the context of the theocracy of Geneva is grasped.

The following rather lengthy quotation gives an idea of the nature of the work the elders were supposed to carry out:

(T)he office of the elders consists in having surveillance over the life of every individual . . . (they) must specially watch over and examine carefully the entire life within and without the Church, in general and in particular. Nothing must escape their attention. . . . The home of every citizen, the most prominent as well as the least, stands open at all times for the members of the consistorium (the governing body of the church) in order that they may be able to make a visitation when it is considered advisable At least once a year every residence in the city must be visited, in order to gain information through questions, examinations, observations in regard to the religious training and moral behaviour of individual families and members of families.

(Quoted *in*: Eby 1971:250)

All family members, even infants, were included in this "system of inspection". In the interest of a moral and religious life, all desires and

interests which could be detrimental to the child had to be suppressed for the sake of good habits and pious thoughts. For this reason the elders questioned every member of the family – male and female, old and young – to test their knowledge of Christian doctrine (which is summarized in Calvin's *Religious Catechism of the Church of Geneva* (1536). The examination consisted of specific questions with set answers. The father as head of the family had to accept responsibility for every person in his family's knowledge of the Christian doctrine.

An important aspect of Calvin's views on family education is his emphasis on religious guidance and the cultivation of virtue in the child. By moral and religious education in the family the child was led to love God and his fellowman and his character was moulded.

The most significant effect which the Protestant Church Reformation had on infant education was that the family was recognized as primary educative institution and that there was an insistence on universal education in the vernacular instead of Latin.

3.3 The significance of views on infant education subscribed to during Medieval and Renaissance periods for the present and the future

During the Middle Ages (± 500 – ±1500) and also during the Renaissance (±1320 – ±1650 including the Renaissance-Humanism and the first Protestant Reformation) the child's being an individual in his own right was generally misunderstood. The child was looked upon as an "incomplete" miniature adult and was thus not separated and protected from the vicissitudes of the adult life-world with which his young, innocent mind was not ready to cope. A tendency thus existed for the young person to be made part of the adult world from his very infancy.

Today the possibility again exists that the child may become part of the adult life-world sooner than what is good for him or right, owing to changes in family stability, the absence of the emancipated woman from the household and the assault of the media on the mind of the child. Serious consideration will have to be given to how family education can be placed on a footing which would allow the young child to experience his being a child in safety and security. Perhaps a more profound realization of the destructive effects of family disintegration on the infant mind will force prospective marriage partners and prospective parents to take stock of their reasons for getting married. If the marriage is only a means to achieving personal esteem, sexual gratification or acquiring material effects, it may be wise to reconsider the matter very seriously.

When considering having children, prospective parents should real-

ize that it is often (always?) expected of parents to set aside many of their own personal ambitions, desires, needs and wants temporarily, or even give them up permanently, for the sake of the happiness and well-being of their child.

Parents will have to realize anew, in terms of experiences in the past, what an important role normative examples of how a person should live a decent life has in the education of infants and what destructive effects harmful environmental influences can have on the spirit of the child. They will have to learn to understand the child's "being different" and to realize that the child is not their equal and cannot be treated as such; that pedagogically accountable choices will have to be made for and with the child, that a system of norms will have to be developed by the child and that positive maintenance of authority does not constitute a threat to the freedom of the child. If this does not occur, the child's education will suffer and the mistakes of the past will be perpetuated because the lesson of wisdom from the past was ignored.

Bibliography

- Ariés, P. 1962. *Centuries of childhood*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Barow-Bernstoff, E. et al. 1971. *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Vorschulerziehung*. Berlin: Volk & Wissen Volkseigenen Verlag.
- Bowen, J. 1981. *A history of Western education*. vol. III. London: Methuen.
- Braun, S.J. 1972. *History and theory of early childhood education*. Ohio: Charles A. Jones.
- Broman, B.L. 1982. *The early years in childhood education*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Brubacher, J.S. 1966. *A history of the problems of education*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Calvin, J. 1960. *Institutes of the Christian religion*, vol. 1. Translated by J. Allen. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.
- Cleverly, J. & Phillips, D.C. 1986. *Visions of childhood*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Coetzee, J.C. 1958. *'n Inleiding tot die Historiese Opvoedkunde*. Johannesburg: Voortrekkerpers.
- Cohen, S. & Rae, G. 1949. *Growing up with children*. New York: Holt.
- Cole, L. 1950 *A history of education*. New York: Holt.
- Eby, F. 1952. *The development of modern education*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Eby, F. 1971. *Early Protestant educators*. New York: AMS Press.
- Eby, F & Arrowood, C.F. 1949. *The history and philosophy of education ancient and medieval*. New York: Prentice-Hall.

- Forest, I. 1927. *Preschool education* New York: Macmillan.
- Goodsell, W. 1934. *A history of marriage and the family*. New York: Macmillan.
- Greenleaf, B.K. 1978. *Children through the ages*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Grobler, L.C. 1971. "Die geskiedenis van die kleuter en sy skool in pedagogiese perspektief." Unpublished M.Ed. dissertation. Pretoria: University of Pretoria.
- Harmse, H.J. & Kirstein, P.P. 1979. *Pedagogiek deel I*. Durban: Butterworth.
- Jansen, J. & Visser, S. 1970. *Van Plato tot Decroly*. Purmerend: J. Muusses N.V.
- Krecker, M. 1971. *Quellen zur Geschichte der Vorschulerziehung*. Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag.
- Laurie, S.S. 1968. *Studies in the history of educational opinion from the Renaissance*. London: Frank Cass.
- Luther, M. 1889. "Letter to the mayors and aldermen of all the cities in behalf of Christian Schools" in: F.V.N. Painter, *Luther on education*. Philadelphia: Luthern Publication Society.
- Luther, M. 1966. "Sermons I" in: *Luther's works*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.
- Meyer, A.E. 1975. *Grandmasters of educational thought*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Monroe, P. 1970. *A text-book in the history of education*. New York: AMS Press.
- Morrison, G.S. 1984. *Early childhood education today*. Ohio: Charles E. Merrill.
- Nijkamp, W.M. 1970. *Van begijneschool naar kleuterschool*. Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff N.V.
- Osborn, D.K. 1980. *Early childhood education in historical perspective*. Athens: Education Associates.
- Painter, F.V.N. 1972. *A history of education*. New York: AMS Press.
- Pistorius, P. 1976. *Kind in ons midde*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.
- Range, D.C. et al. 1980. *Aspects of early childhood education*. New York: Academic Press.
- Raymont, T. 1937. *A history of the education of young children*. London: Longmans Green.
- Rusk, R.R. 1967. *A history of infant education*. London: University of London Press.
- Sommerville, C.J. 1982. *The rise and fall of childhood*. Beverley Hills: Sage Publications.
- Spodek, B. 1973. *Early childhood education*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Verster, T.L. 1977. "Die veranderende mens- en kindbeeld in die Westerse wêreld en die betekenis daarvan vir die opvoedingsdenke en -praktyk." Unpublished D. Ed. thesis. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- Weber, E. 1984. *Ideas influencing early childhood education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Wilds, H. & Lottich, V. 1970. *The foundations of modern education*. New York: Holt.
- Winn, M. 1983. *Children without childhood*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Woodward, W.H. 1904. *Erasmus concerning education*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Woodward, W.H. 1965. *Studies in education during the age of the Renaissance*. New York: Russel.