

RENAISSANCE AND HUMANISM: A NEW CULTURE AND NEW PEDAGOGY¹

Renascimento e humanismo: uma nova cultura e nova pedagogia

RODRIGUES, João Bartolomeu²; & PINTO, Inês³

Abstract

The Renaissance and Humanism represented a paradigmatic shift from the medieval theocentric worldview to anthropocentrism, promoting the individual as the center of knowledge and valuing human potential. These movements revolutionized art, science, and education, grounded in principles such as individualism, universalism, secularism, naturalism, and classicism. Inspired by classical, Christian, and Eastern sources, figures such as Leonardo da Vinci, Erasmus of Rotterdam, and Michelangelo left profound legacies. In the pedagogical field, key aspects included holistic education, the emphasis on the humanities, classical education, and the secularization of teaching. This article explores how these transformations shaped modern pedagogy, prioritizing critical thinking, the universality of knowledge, and freedom of expression, consolidating an educational model centered on the dignity and harmonious development of the human being.

Resumo

O Renascimento e o Humanismo representaram uma transição paradigmática da visão teocêntrica medieval para o antropocentrismo, promovendo o indivíduo como centro do saber e valorizando o potencial humano. Estes movimentos revolucionaram a arte, a ciência e a educação, alicerçados em princípios como o individualismo, universalismo, secularismo, naturalismo e classicismo. Inspirados por fontes clássicas, cristãs e orientais, figuras como Leonardo da Vinci, Erasmo de Roterdão e Miguel Ângelo deixaram legados fundamentais. No campo pedagógico, destacaram-se a formação integral, a valorização das humanidades, a educação clássica e a laicização do ensino. Este artigo explora como estas transformações moldaram a pedagogia moderna, priorizando o pensamento crítico, a universalidade do conhecimento e a liberdade de expressão, consolidando um modelo educacional centrado na dignidade e no desenvolvimento harmonioso do ser humano.

Key-words: *Renaissance; Humanism; Pedagogy; Classical Education; Anthropocentrism; Art and Science; Secular Education; Humanities.*

Palavras-chave: *Renascimento; Humanismo; Pedagogia; Educação clássica; Antropocentrismo; Arte e ciência; Educação secular; Humanidades.*

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² JOÃO BARTOLOMEU RODRIGUES–UTAD & Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade da Universidade do Minho, PORTUGAL. Email: jbarto@utad.pt

³ INÊS PINTO - UTAD, PORTUGAL. Email: al58595@alunos.utad.pt

INTRODUCTION

The Renaissance and Humanism are two movements that brought about many transformations in the history of Western civilization, characterizing the transition from the Middle Ages to the Modern Age, between the 15th and 16th centuries. These movements not only broke with medieval social and intellectual structures, but also inaugurated a new worldview in which the human being assumed a central role, due to a new empowerment stemming from their dignity, freedom, and creative capacity. While the Renaissance was the "stage" for the flourishing of arts, sciences, and culture, Humanism integrated this context, promoting a renewed interest in the humanities and human potential.

At the heart of these changes was the appreciation of a broad and comprehensive education, which prioritized both moral and intellectual development as well as preparing the individual for the challenges of practical life. This article explores the impact of these movements on pedagogy, highlighting their influence on the formation of a new educational approach that would shape modern pedagogical thought. Throughout this work, we will analyze the central characteristics of the Renaissance and Humanism, their main representatives, the sources that inspired them, and their significant contributions to education, with special attention to the role of the educator in promoting a humanist and critical education.

Through this analysis, we intend not only to understand the cultural and intellectual transformations promoted by the Renaissance and Humanism, but also to reflect on their lasting legacy in the educational field. Thus, it becomes evident how these movements established the foundations for a pedagogy that continues to value the universality of knowledge, critical thinking, and freedom of expression as essential pillars in the formation of the human being.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Renaissance Italians had a passion for Antiquity. They wanted to live, study, think, and write like the ancient Greeks and Romans. Professors, monks, officials, and merchants rivaled each other in the enthusiasm with which they collected and commented on ancient manuscripts. *Studia humanitatis*, the humanities, was the name they proudly gave to their scholarly activities. If in the Middle Ages ancient writers were read, it was primarily to seek in them elements that would strengthen Christian doctrine. The Renaissance, in contrast, generally studied ancient literature for its own sake. The enthusiasm that animated the propagators of humanist ideals makes this era fascinating.

The Renaissance originated in Italy because it was the school of thought in Europe during the 15th and 16th centuries.

It was Italy that gave us the most eminent mathematicians, from Luca Pacioli to Bombelli, including Tartaglia and Cardano, the leading physicist Benedetti, the first great anatomist, Leonardo da Vinci, the precursor of rational epidemiology, Fracastor, who wrote (in verse) an important treatise on syphilis. It was Italy that opened the first botanical gardens. Copernicus was Polish, but he visited the peninsula twice, spent nearly three years in Bologna, and taught mathematics in Rome. Vesalius, the most celebrated anatomist of the Renaissance after Leonardo, was Belgian, but he was a professor in Padua, Bologna, and Pisa, and it was in Italy that he prepared his great work *De humani corporis fabrica* (1543). Finally, it was Italy that gave birth to Galileo (Jean Delumeau, 1983, p.133).

Italy was undoubtedly the epicenter of the Renaissance and Humanism.

We can consider that the Renaissance had three periods. When we speak of the first period of the Italian Renaissance, we are referring to the "Quattrocento," the 15th century. Florence was the center, but there were other smaller artistic centers such as Padua, Rimini, Ferrara, Mantua, Urbino, and, during the second half of the century, Rome. At the end of the 15th century, the Renaissance reached opulent Venice. In the 16th century (the second period of the Renaissance and the beginning of the third), it was in Venice that the new spirit of the Renaissance lasted the longest. The second period begins in 1500 and encompasses the first two decades of the "Quinhento." The rest of the century was called the third period of the Renaissance. The artists of the first period gave the characteristic features of their themes in simple and austere forms; the forerunners of the second period, Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael, sought grandeur and the sublime. Some identify the difference between these three periods by stating that the first believed in character, the second in harmony, and the third (which begins with Michelangelo) in strength.

The study of the Renaissance has generated varied interpretations. In this sense, it appears to some historians as a

an ocean of contradictions, a sometimes strident concert of divergent aspirations, a difficult coexistence of the will to power and a still-nascent science, of the desire for beauty and an unhealthy appetite for the horrific, a mixture of simplicity and complications, of purity and sensuality, of charity and hatred” (Jean Delumeau, 1982, pp. 22-23).

In his book, **The Civilization of the Renaissance**, Jean Delumeau argues that the Renaissance had a taste for shady paths and that, in reality, the apparent return to the sources of beauty, knowledge, and religion had been merely a means of progress. He goes further in his observation, stating that...

The temples of Athens and Rome were gleefully plundered to adorn those of France, Spain, and England. From the 16th century onwards, Michelangelo was identified as the greatest artist of all time. Aristotle was demolished based on Plato and Archimedes. Columbus discovered the Antilles thanks to Ptolemy's miscalculations. Luther and Calvin, believing they were restoring the primitive Church, gave Christianity a new face. The Renaissance, which delighted in emblems and cryptograms, concealed its profound originality and its desire for novelty behind a hieroglyph that still causes deception: the false image of a return. "ao passado” (Jean Delumeau, 1983, p.22-23).

However, this author acknowledges that despite its contradictions, the Renaissance represented a leap forward. Never before had a civilization placed so much value on painting, music, high literature, and national languages. Never in humanity's past had so many inventions emerged in such a short time. He reaffirms that the Renaissance was, above all, about technical progress, giving Western man greater control over the world, which was becoming better known at the time. But the greatest characteristic of the Renaissance era was the beginning of the liberation of the individual, removing him from his medieval anonymity and beginning to free him from collective limitations. Delumeau further states that historiography has demonstrated that the Renaissance was also the discovery of the child, the family, marriage, and the wife. That Western civilization would become less anti-feminist, less hostile to love in the home, and more sensitive to the fragility and delicacy of the child.

Raymond Bloch writes and questions, in the preface to the aforementioned book, that the

The Renaissance, linked by numerous threads to previous centuries, nevertheless shows, in the figures of its men and its works, traits and colors that astonishingly foreshadow the characteristics of our time. (...) Promotion of the individual, of the person, rehabilitation of women, reform of education – which is intended to be a true formation of man and no longer a useless burden on the spirit, crushed by a weight of knowledge – revaluation of the body and physical education, personal and free reflection on man, his nature and his religion, an enthusiastic impetus, finally, for literary and technical achievements and a passionate taste for glory that revives the most beautiful tendencies of Greece and Rome, for is it not true that all this, which truly belongs to the 16th century in Europe, appears to us at the same time as our own subject?" (Jean Delumeau, 1983, p. 16).

The Middle Ages, commonly nicknamed the "Dark Ages," were marked by feudalism, the centrality of the Catholic Church, and a theocentric worldview. Knowledge was restricted to monasteries and universities, where religious studies predominated. Among other functions, monks were responsible for teaching reading and writing, preserving and guarding books in libraries, and copying them (copyist monks). Libraries housed not only sacred books but also books forbidden by the Church, namely those containing teachings and reflections from Classical Antiquity that challenged Catholic dogma and the Christian faith. In Umberto Eco's film "The Name of the Rose," set in Italy, one can observe the crucial moment in humanity when medieval thought transitioned to Renaissance reasoning. The character William of Baskerville (a friar) represents humanism, logical thinking, new ideas, and the valuing of science and humanity. While monks symbolize the backward and mystical thinking that enveloped all of Europe during the medieval period.

Coming from the word rebirth, the movement refers to the resurgence of interest in classical culture. It arose in Italy due to the wealth accumulated through trade and the artistic patronage of powerful families, such as the Medici.

Humanism, as an intellectual component of the Renaissance, focused on the appreciation of man, his dignity, his freedom, and his capacity to create and transform reality. Humanism opposed medieval theocentrism, which placed God at the center of everything, and proposed anthropocentrism, which placed man as the center of interest and value.

Humanism also advocated the use of reason and criticism, the study of the humanities (such as Literature, History, Philosophy, and Languages), and the integral formation of the human being. Humanists sought to apply the ideas of antiquity to contemporary life, promoting a broad and secular education.

The Renaissance and Humanism valued humanity, reason, nature, art, and science, and influenced pedagogy, that is, the theory and practice of education.

FEATURES AND SOURCES

The Renaissance and Humanism presented the following characteristics:

- Individualism: the recognition of the uniqueness and importance of each individual, who has the right to their own opinion, expression, and fulfillment.
- Universalism: the pursuit of broad and diverse knowledge, encompassing all areas of knowledge and all cultures of the world.
- Secularism: the separation between the religious and temporal spheres, allowing greater autonomy and freedom for man to deal with earthly matters.
- Naturalism: the observation and faithful representation of nature, revealing the beauty, harmony, and laws that govern the universe.
- Classicism: the revival of the artistic and intellectual models of Classical Antiquity, which are considered standards of perfection and inspiration.

The Renaissance and Humanism were based on various sources that can be divided into three groups:

- Classical Sources: These are the works of Greek and Roman authors that were rediscovered, translated, and disseminated by humanists such as Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Virgil, Ovid, among others.

- **Christian Sources:** These are the works of Christian authors that were reinterpreted and harmonized with classical sources such as the Bible, Church Fathers, Saints, Councils, among others.
- **Eastern Sources:** These are the works of Eastern authors that were known and incorporated by Europeans, such as those of the Arabs, Persians, Indians, Chinese, among others.

REPRESENTATIVES

The Renaissance and Humanism had several representatives who stood out for their works and contributions to Art, Science, and Pedagogy.

Among them, to mention the most relevant:

- **Leonardo da Vinci:** was one of the greatest geniuses in history, who dedicated himself to painting, sculpture, architecture, engineering, anatomy, mathematics, physics, chemistry, botany, music, among other areas. His most famous works are the Mona Lisa, the Last Supper, and the Vitruvian Man.
- **Michelangelo:** was one of the greatest artists in history, who dedicated himself to painting, sculpture, architecture, and poetry. His most famous works are David, Pietà, Moses, the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, and St. Peter's Basilica.
- **Erasmus of Rotterdam:** was one of the greatest humanists in history, who dedicated himself to philosophy, theology, literature, and education. His most famous works are *The Praise of Folly*, *Familiar Colloquies*, and *The Handbook of a Christian Knight*.
- **Nicolaus Copernicus:** was one of the greatest astronomers in history, who proposed the heliocentric theory, which states that the Sun is the center of the solar system and that the Earth revolves around it. His most famous work is *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres*.
- **Thomas More:** was one of the greatest political thinkers in history, who defended freedom of conscience, religious tolerance, and social reform. His most famous work is *Utopia*, which describes an ideal society based on reason, justice, and happiness.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO MODERN PEDAGOGY

The Renaissance and Humanism had a great impact on Pedagogy, that is, on the theory and practice of education. Their contribution was:

- Promotion and appreciation of education as a means of forming the whole person, who develops their physical, intellectual, moral, and spiritual potential.
- Proposal for a humanist education, which aims to cultivate the humanities, that is, the disciplines that relate to humankind and its culture, such as Literature, History, Philosophy, and Languages.
- Definition of a classical education, which takes as its model the authors and works of Classical Antiquity, which are considered sources of wisdom and beauty.
- Encouragement of a universal education, which aims for broad and diverse knowledge, encompassing all areas of knowledge and all cultures of the world.
- Stimulation of a critical education, which uses reason and analysis as its method, allowing individuals to question, investigate, and create their own knowledge.
- Possibility of a secular education, which is based on the principle of separation between the religious and temporal spheres, guaranteeing freedom of thought and expression.
- Orientation towards mathematics and quantitative science.

The most striking “footprint” of the Renaissance was undoubtedly left by men like Rabelais, Montaigne, and Rousseau, for they modeled pedagogy on human nature and clearly defined the fundamental objective of all education: not to mutilate man, but to develop him harmoniously in his totality. As for instruction itself, Montaigne's principles are as valid today as they were five centuries ago. Developing the capacity for judgment, avoiding overloading the memory with a jumble of knowledge, so often useless, are rules that we all accept to this day, but which, even today, are difficult to put into practice.

If the Renaissance brought about a quantitative revolution in the field of instruction, Humanism made instruction the principal means of education. It resolutely placed itself on the moral plane, and this attitude, situated at the heart of the radical transformations of the Renaissance, had incalculable consequences. It was one of the great creative choices of the modern world. Vittorino da Feltre, in his treatises on education, stated:

Not everyone is called to be a lawyer, physicist, or philosopher and to live in the foreground of the stage. Not everyone has been endowed by nature with exceptional qualities, but all of us, as we are, were created to live in society and for the duties that this life implies. We are all responsible for the personal influence we exert” (Jean Delumeau, 1983, pp. 83-84).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Renaissance and Humanism represent:

The Transition from a Theocentric to an Anthropocentric View

The opposition to medieval theocentrism, placing man at the center of knowledge and the universe, was a paradigm shift that had a profound impact not only on religion and philosophy but also on education. The fact that man came to be seen as the center of knowledge implied that education ceased to be an exclusive tool for religious salvation and began to focus on the full development of the person. This change in perspective influenced the role of the educator, who, instead of being an intermediary between God and the student, became a facilitator of learning and human development.

The Appreciation of the Humanities

Humanism championed the importance of the humanities (Literature, Philosophy, History, Linguistics), disciplines that help us understand human beings and their place in the world. This emphasis on the humanities had a significant impact on the educational curriculum of the time and is still visible in many modern schools and universities. This emphasis on the humanities contributed to a more holistic education, not limited to technical or religious instruction, but also focused on the character and morals of the student.

Classical Education as a Model

Education based on the classics of Classical Antiquity (Greeks and Romans) was a central element of humanist pedagogy. Besides being a source of intellectual inspiration, the classics offered models of virtue, wisdom, and aesthetics that shaped the character and thought of individuals. Classical education was important for the formation of the individual, and the educational methods of that era can be applied to contemporary teaching. The integration of the classics with modern knowledge contributes to a more holistic and integrated view of education.

Secular and Secular Education

Humanism and the Renaissance established a more secular educational model, distancing themselves from the religious institutions and dogmas that dominated the Middle Ages. The separation between the religious and temporal spheres guaranteed greater space for freedom of thought and scientific investigation. This separation influenced the autonomy of both educator and student, and academic freedom became a precious value in the educational environment.

The Holistic Development of the Human Being

The concept of "holistic education" (intellectual, moral, physical, and spiritual) was a fundamental principle in humanist pedagogy. Education should cultivate not only the mind, but also the body and spirit. This holistic vision is important for the development of the student as a complete being, capable of critical and creative thinking.

Universal Education

The idea of a universal education, encompassing all areas of knowledge, all cultures, and all individuals, was one of the most innovative contributions of the Renaissance and Humanism. The pursuit of knowledge was not limited to the religious field or the European worldview, but expanded to other cultures and areas of knowledge. The pursuit of a universal education can be applied in the current context, in an increasingly globalized and multicultural world.

The Role of the Educator

The role of the educator in the Renaissance and Humanism evolved from a simple transmitter of knowledge to a guide and facilitator of learning, promoting the development of critical thinking and the student's own pursuit of knowledge. It is necessary to foster learning environments where students can actively explore, question, and construct knowledge.

CONCLUSION

The Renaissance and Humanism were, undeniably, movements that revolutionized pedagogy by introducing new concepts, values, and methods into education. They represented a paradigm shift from medieval theocentrism to modern anthropocentrism. They influenced the pedagogy of various thinkers and educators, such as Comenius, Montaigne, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, among others.

Este interesse renovado pelo mundo greco-latino possibilitou a superação das limitações impostas pela autoridade religiosa e levou a um relativo enfraquecimento do poder da Igreja Católica que, mais tarde, teve de enfrentar o ataque da Reforma Protestante (a partir do século XVI). O pensamento científico, iniciado pela chamada Revolução

The consequences of Humanism were extremely important for Western culture. The break with the medieval model of society resulted in a freer, more tolerant society, and a separation between Church and State.

This renewed interest in the Greco-Latin world made it possible to overcome the limitations imposed by religious authority and led to a relative weakening of the power of the Catholic Church, which later had to face the attack of the Protestant Reformation (from the 16th century onwards). Scientific thought, initiated by the so-called Scientific Revolution of the 16th and 17th centuries, forever changed the paradigm of understanding and studying the natural world and humankind. In this way, the foundations were laid for different philosophical, political, and social currents, such as the Enlightenment and Rationalism, which, in some cases, influenced historical episodes such as the French Revolution of 1789 and the fall of the Old Regime.

The Renaissance and Humanism marked one of the most significant turning points in the cultural, intellectual, and educational landscape of history. Breaking with theocentrism and the limitations imposed by the medieval worldview, these movements brought to light a new way of understanding life, knowledge, and the role of human beings in society. The rediscovery of Classical Antiquity, coupled with the appreciation of reason, observation, and critical thinking, not only transformed the arts, science, and politics, but also inaugurated a new pedagogy centered on the individual and their potential.

The impact of the Renaissance and Humanism on education was profound and lasting. By promoting a humanistic and critical view of learning, they emphasized the importance of a comprehensive education encompassing both the humanities and the sciences. The emphasis on freedom of thought, dialogue, and investigation shaped curricula and teaching methods that still inspire educators and institutions. Figures such as Leonardo da Vinci, Erasmus of Rotterdam, and Thomas More exemplify the spirit of this period, integrating art, science, and ethics into a cohesive vision of what it means to be human. Finally, the pedagogical legacy of the Renaissance and Humanism transcends the boundaries of their time, leaving valuable lessons for contemporary educational challenges. The defense of an education that values the diversity of knowledge, freedom of expression, and the integral development of the individual remains an ideal to be pursued. This article reaffirms the relevance of these movements not only as historical milestones, but also as sources of inspiration for a more humanistic, inclusive, and transformative education in today's world.

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