Schooling and Delight

What We Can Learn from Comenius About Why We Educate

David I. Smith | December 2025

Key Points

- This paper explores the purpose of education as understood by John Amos Comenius, a seventeenth-century reformer, educator, and scholar more widely known as the father of numerous features of modern education.
- Comenius's philosophy of education was inextricable from his theology and leads to key ideas about who should be educated, for what purpose, and why and how schools serve that purpose.
    - Education should be universal because of the value God places on humanity. Not only are humans created in God's image, but God himself became human in Christ; therefore, how can we not commit to developing human gifts?
    - An educated person is someone who can wisely navigate and integrate these three fundamental human needs: to think well, to use power well, and to delight in the right things.
    - What we do with our reason and our power is rooted in what we do with our heart. What we delight in shapes how we love. Reason, power, and delight are therefore inseparable in their roots and effects.
    - Delight has a structure. It involves glimpsing a call to goodness in the beauty of the world, learning to order the self toward justice, and becoming suffused with God's mercy, which in turn is worked out through transformed human agents in active care for the world.
- Schooling cannot help being rooted in beliefs and fostering implicit and explicit choices about how to delight. Schooling is inherently particular and traditioned, inherently rooted in faith, even as it is necessarily directed toward the flourishing of all. Schools, therefore, are for the learner's intellectual, moral, and spiritual formation and for the common good.

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