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Family education in the light of Mieczysław Brzeziński (1858-1911) writings

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Abstract: Mieczysław Brzeziński (1858-1911), pedagogue and socialworker by avocation, initiated and co-organized many cultural, educational and scientific undertakings in the Kingdom of Poland. He wrote many studies in the broadly understood area of pedagogy and education: hundreds of articles and several dozen books. Brzeziński adopted the Judeo-Christian conception of man and the organicist conception of society, which had an impact on his conception of education/upbringing. He understood education as an art of conscious educational influence upon man, in which the main role is played by the family home. As regards physical education and health of children, especially children from rural areas, pedagogue distinguished seven issues: nutrition, housing, clothes, cleanliness of the body, developing power and agility, labour, play and sleep, accidents with the participation of children and common child age illnesses. Out of the values vital for moral upbringing, Brzeziński favoured: sobriety, honesty, respect for women, premarital and marital purity, concern for children and teenagers, diligence, consent, cooperation, friendship, justice, piety, responsibility, goodness, modesty, mildness, generosity. He could not imagine moral formation without Christ, whom he regarded as the ultimate example of moral excellence. He believed that patriotic upbringing is not only connected with pursuing knowledge, forming emotions and enriching imagination, but also with forming the will. He appreciated the exceptional value of intellectual and religious upbringing in the family.

Key-words: Brzeziński, pedagogue, socialworker, education, family.

Brzeziński was interested in educational issues already in his youth [Chętnik 1930]. His views on education were formed on one hand by a Christian worldview, on the other – his own thoughts, observations and studies and the influence of the positivist ideology of Warsaw. All this resulted in a unique conception of man, society and education related to positivist values such as: usability perfection

and happiness, whose ultimate and guiding point, however, is God – the highest value. Brzeziński adopted the Judeo-Christian vision of man and the organicist conception of society, which had an impact on his conception of upbringing. He understood education as an art of conscious educational influence upon man, in which the main role is played by the family home. Intellectual education was important. Moral, patriotic and religious education but also physical and health education played a significant role in his conception of the teacher.

1. Mieczysław Brzeziński. Pedagogue – socialworker

Mieczysław Brzeziński was born in Warsaw on 6 October 1858 in the declassified noble family as the son of Romuald and Maria nee Miśkiewicz. He had four siblings: brothers, Rafał and Zygmunt and sisters, Aleksandra and Maria¹. He spent his childhood in Wronów and Bełżyce in the Lublin region, where he often spent time with his parents – here he got to know country life².

His initial education started at home, under the supervision of his parents. Next, in about 1870, he began studying at a junior secondary school in Warsaw (specializing in science), which he graduated from in 1876. Since parents could not provide full maintenance for him, he started giving private lessons at the age of 15. This way he was even able to help his younger siblings. He worked as a tutor in the boarding house led by Adolf Dygasiński [Brzeziński 1902].

In 1876 he began studying at the University of Warsaw enrolling in the Department of Mathematics and Physics. At that time, he was involved in patriotic activity in the Society of National Education (Towarzystwo Oświaty Narodowej), an illegal student organization established by Konrad Prószyński. Within the Society Brzeziński was involved in propagating education amongst country dwellers. As a result of his anti-government activity Brzeziński was tried and imprisoned in the Warsaw Citadel. Later he was placed in the Brest-Litovsk Fortress. The years of his confinement (1878-1881) were later described by Brzeziński as the years of illness, suffering and humiliation³. After being released from prison, he remained subject to special supervision of Russian authorities⁴. Repeatedly he interrupted his studies. He did not graduate until 1884.

Studies at the University of Warsaw and the prevailing patriotic atmosphere there strongly influenced the personality of Brzeziński and defined the main directions of his thinking and acting in the future. After having a university degree, he took the required teaching examinations, however he was not allowed to

¹ National Archive in Kraków, *Akta C.K. Dyrekcji Policji w Krakowie (1849-1919) dotyczące Mieczysława Brzezińskiego*, ref. 29/247/874, p. 45.

² He commemorated his youthful experiences in the widely-read booklet *Moje wakacje na wsi* (the third edition, Warsaw 1910).

³ State Archives in Kraków, ref. 29/247/874, p. 27, 45.

⁴ State Archives in Warszawa, *Cesarski Uniwersytet Warszawski*, ref. 536, c. 110.

work in the government education. Since he had already known teaching methods well, having gained experience when working in cooperation with Dygasiński, Brzeziński became a popular private tutor amongst merchant and industrial families of Warsaw [Tatarkiewiczowie 1979]. Moreover, he organised clandestine classes, where he had lectures on botany (Duninówna, 1961). He also prepared pupils of private schools for continuing their education at state junior secondary schools. Here he directed his attention to the role of upbringing in the life of the nation and in the development of its culture.

His lectures on nature were inspiring and met with approval [Arct 1962]. He was perceived as a humanitarian noble and charming man of high moral standards and honesty [Krzywicky 1957].

In 1882 Brzeziński established the Circle of Folk Education (Koło Oświaty Ludowej) in Warsaw. He was a vice-chairman and head of the school department in Polish Education Society (Polska Macierz Szkolna) as well as acted as the chairman of Polish Teachers Association (Stowarzyszenie Nauczycielstwa Polskiego) and the editor of the Association's periodical called „Szkoła Polska”, later „Sprawy szkolne”, and then „Wychowanie w Domu i Szkole”. Between 1905 and 1906 he also took active part in establishing schools and cultural and scientific institutions: Affiliating Literacy Courses for Adults (Stowarzyszenie Kursów dla Analfabetów Dorosłych), Polish Tourist Company (Polskie Towarzystwo Krajoznawcze), Folk University (Uniwersytet Ludowy), Seminar for Folk Teachers (Seminarium dla Nauczycielek Ludowych), Urania [Sosnowski 1930; Stemler 1935].

In 1901 he purchased an estate in Piotrowice near Nałęczów, where he stayed with his family in summer months. However, he lived permanently in Warsaw. Together with the wife Róża (nee Morzycka) he raised three children: Kazimierz, Wanda and Stanisław.

He published hundreds of articles on natural science, education, sociology and pedagogy in various journals. Only in „Zorza” he published over 300 of them. Since 1886 he wrote articles and dissertations on education, sociology and pedagogy, which appeared in „Głos”⁶.

He was also the author of nearly 40 popular science works on natural science. Some of them were treated as an introduction to a widely comprehended patriotic education of the reader, in which the natural resources of the country and financial and spiritual possessions of the Polish nation played an important role. A lot of his works became textbooks for initial education pupils as well as teaching aids for teachers of nature and geography. The most popular were: *Podarunek dla młodzieży*

⁵ „Zorza” was an illustrated Sunday magazine devoted to common people from urban and rural areas (Lesicz, Drapińska, Olszewski, Marciniak, 1998).

⁶ „Głos” was a literary-sociopolitical weekly. In 1905 the latter was liquidated by Tsarist authorities. A year later it was re-established as „Przegląd Społeczny” (Stokowa, 1955). Brzeziński issued over 50 articles and other texts concerning the above mentioned subject matter.

[Warsaw 1885] – 17 editions [final – in 1920], *Krótką nauka o ciałach przyrody martwej* [Warsaw 1906] – 10 editions, *Z dziedziny przyrody i przemysłu* [Warsaw 1892] – 8, *Pogadanki o wnętrzu ziemi* [Warsaw 1894] – 7, *Jak zbudowane jest ciało człowieka i do czego różne części ciała ludzkiego służą?* [Warsaw 1892] – 6, *Owady i ich znaczenie dla człowieka* [Warsaw 1902] – 4, *Nasi przyjaciele i wrogowie wśród ptaków* (1892) – 4 [Jurczyszyn 1990].

Brzeziński died on 25 January 1911 in Warsaw. His funeral turned into a national demonstration in which a few thousand people participated. He was buried on the Powązki Cemetery. On the monument erected according to the project of Leopold Wasilkowski, which exists up till today, one can see a figure of a country boy holding a book and a fine-looking bouquet of cereal grass. These symbols correspond well with the entire life of the teacher. Apart from that a telling inscription was put on this gravestone: „Lived to love and work for country people and the Homeland” [Jurczyszyn 2012].

2. Upbringing in the family

a) Conception of upbringing

In the second half of the 19th century, among Catholics and others, bringing up was understood as a long-lasting concern about all that is essential for an appropriate development of the physical, spiritual and moral sphere of a child in order to prepare him/her for living in society [Walewander 1994]. These were often linked but not identified with the process of intellectual education.

Religious upbringing was also commonly understood, as an effort the purpose of which was to develop all abilities of the child granted to him by God. The foundation of religious upbringing was making a man aware of the original sin as well as finding and granting corrective and redemptive measures brought to this world by Jesus Christ. In this sense, knowledge and learning as well as the acquired skills should contribute to flourishing of God's love and provide a healthy insight into life. They should also induce a feeling of obligation towards God, the nation and oneself. Finally, they should prepare a person for future profession in such a way that they will be „fine for themselves and for the society” [Walewander 1994, p. 94].

Such understanding of upbringing which brings the secular and religious perspective into one was close to Brzeziński. In his writings he always underlined the notion of usefulness. Hence, to him and to the entire generation of positivists, in accordance with the utilitarian pedagogy of Herbert Spencer, forming skills and efficiency which could be applied in their life was of utmost importance. On the other hand, contrary to positivism, Brzeziński recognised God as the highest value. Therefore according to him upbringing is an art of forming a child to become a healthy, righteous, sensible man who will be pleasing to God and people

and useful for himself, the family and the society [Brzeziński 1902; Dygasiński 1957].

Parents, above all, have an exceptional influence on youngsters. Having a long-term educational influence on their children, parents are responsible to God, people and present and future generations for their upbringing. The role of parents is to introduce a young person to social life and to hand patriotic, religious and family traditions over [Brzeziński 1910]⁷.

Wise and unlimited love for the child must be the basis of any significant educational influence [Brzeziński 1908]. Brzeziński criticised the phenomenon of sending a child to school to get „a bit” of knowledge, without paying attention to upbringing [Brzeziński 1910]. Parents’ special calling is to raise their young ones in a righteous and honest way. Brzeziński emphasised the individual, public and spiritual aspect of education. He also enumerated the conditions which should be fulfilled for a family to function well, perform its calling and be happy. All adults who have had any educational influence on young people, but especially family members, hold responsibility to the society. These deliberations lead to a conclusion that bringing up in any home environment can be effective, if a reference to God exists.

The value of a man to himself and to other people is measured by his physical health and by whether he is judicious, righteous and brave. Therefore upbringing should embrace: a) forming of the healthy, strong and agile body, b) enriching the mind with messages essential to living and working and „preparing the mind to subsequent development”, c) „developing good, noble, social emotions and eradicating the bad ones”, d) „developing the willpower to be resilient, indomitable, able to act in a useful and fair way, but resistant to all evil” [Brzeziński 1901, p. 773].

According to the ideology of positivism Brzeziński believes that bringing a man up and developing his morality depends on both social and natural environment he lives in. Like Spencer, Brzeziński appreciated health in physical education [Spencer 1960]. Because of this he advised people on nutrition, hygiene, rest and physical exercises, which were useful not only in home education.

b) Physical and pro-health education

According to the teacher, education and a suitable environment is vital for proper upbringing. It comprises: home – parents, siblings, peer circle, neighbours etc. From health perspective housing conditions, material status and whether a child is well-looked after are important factors. Childhood experiences, bad or good, influence, to a smaller or higher extent, one’s future life. Brzeziński was well aware of that when he wrote a booklet *„Jak wychowywać dzieci na zdrowych i*

⁷ In the issue of the family Stanisław Staszic expressed similar views regarding family as the first civil school shaping a sense of duty, the avocation for the work, but, above all, patriotism (Staszic, 1956, p. 232): „A pupil in state schools takes the moral learning the most theoretically; family home, where parents are, is a practical morality school for him” – Staszic stressed.

silnych ludzi?" [1902]. He regarded the birth of a child as God's blessing. He never mentions the mere possibility of terminating or preventing pregnancy.

As regards physical education and health of children, especially children from rural areas, Brzeziński distinguished seven issues: child nutrition, housing, clothes, cleanliness of the body, developing power and agility, child labour, play and sleep, accidents with the participation of children and common child age illnesses. He briefly characterised and critically judged dietary customs of country dwellers from surroundings of Nałęczów. In his view, they did not pay much attention to different forms of feeding. Drinking tea, coffee, chocolate, eating poultry, rolls and white bread etc. Daily were considered „whims” [Brzeziński 1888]. Brzeziński severely forbade to serve alcohol to children.

The size, airiness and cleanliness of flats and economic buildings were important. To Brzeziński, small and low houses, where a few beds and cribs were in one room, and where animals were bred, were unacceptable. Children who spent time in such rooms were pale, weak and sickly [Brzeziński 1902; Cieszkowski 1922]. Adequate temperature and light were also significant. Brzeziński thought that appropriate lighting supported child's development and health.

Attention should be focused on clothes and cleanliness. One should accustom older children to washing. The author also encouraged youngsters to keep dental hygiene. An appropriately fed child, living in a clean and neat house is usually strong and healthy.

Brzeziński also propagated *slöjd*. He gave the example of Sweden, where at country schools children trained finger dexterity and agility by wood carving, modelling clay, gluing boxes and the like. Girls learnt sewing, wicker weaving and embroidering. Older children learnt the craft: carpentry, iron-working, basket-making, weaving. The teacher encouraged to implement similar educational actions in national education. In the meantime, before this could happen, he proposed that parents make sure that in free time their children “gain dexterity by doing some manual work” [Brzeziński 1902, p. 28].

Additionally, he recommended practising various sports, e.g. horse riding, swimming, shooting, running, marches, races with a lit candle or with a sack on the head, playing blind man's bluff, singing and dancing. He laid special emphasis on singing [Brzeziński 1902, p. 34]. He also proposed that, where it was needed, a book by Zygmunt Gloger „Zabawy, gry i zagadki” should be used in order to popularise different forms of games in the country: football, stick-ball and the like, which were rather unpopular in this environment.

Christmas parties organised every year were a chance to play and had educational elements. Children played, danced and were indulged with small gifts which had been prepared for them. It is worth adding that Christmas customs were meticulously maintained at Brzeziński's home⁸.

⁸ Cf. National Archive in Lublin, *Spuścizna po b. senatorze Kazimierzu Brzezińskim*, part 638, c. 1, p. 15.

Brzeziński's instructions concerning sleep hygiene and mental health were rather fundamental. He warned parents against sleeping with older children in one bed. „It would be good, if every child had his or her own bed, however it is not always possible. At least let boys and girls sleep separately” [Brzeziński 1902, p. 38]. In summer, older boys could sleep away from the house, e.g. in the barn or in the attic.

The above mentioned words were a sign of deep wisdom, great courage and responsible concern for teenagers living in rural areas, for their physical and spiritual health. Brzeziński knew the rural environment and its problems very well. He particularly tried to save the younger generation, showing appropriate directions for upbringing.

He encouraged parents to take special care of ill children. He popularised vaccinations against smallpox. In „Gospodarz” calendar for 1902, he briefly characterised child age most important illnesses and described preventive measures⁹.

When discussing blindness and deafness he stated that children born blind and deaf should undergo treatment at an early age, which was a novelty for the contemporary special pedagogy. “Such deafness –he wrote –can be cured if you start treatment early” [Brzeziński 1902, p. 47; Sękowska 2001].

Brzeziński warned not to use services of charlatans or healers etc. in treating children. He encouraged to ask a doctor for help if necessary, and in this respect, set himself as an example. “I, the person who is writing this, am not a doctor, nor anyone in my family is. But I am a father - I have three children. Although they have suffered from different illnesses, sometimes serious ones, they have been cured by no healer, but - with God's help –a real learned doctor “ [Brzeziński 1902, p. 48].

He even attached a template of an agreement with a commune doctor as well as made cost estimates of founding a clinic or hospital in the parish village. A doctor would arrive, having agreed with the residents, every Sunday, after mass. For a charge of 15 kopecks everyone could take advantage of specialist advice and help. He also proposed to economise 300 roubles annually to pay for a permanent doctor and a woman who would deal with running the village pharmacy. It would improve the medical condition of the community.

He proposed to get the sum of 300 roubles e.g. from the lease of shared commune areas or from an annual contribution made by every resident. He finally pointed out to the possibility of obtaining a consent of the Russian civil service to use the communal fund stopay for social initiatives. Medical assistance was certainly one of them (Brzeziński, 1897).

Brzeziński desired children to leave their family home with what he believed was best for their future life: self-confidence, optimism, being prepared to overcome problems, hope for a better future. Undoubtedly, health-preventive awareness

⁹ He distinguished 17 different diseases (Brzeziński, 1901).

of their parents affected it.

c) Moral upbringing

Out of the values vital for educational process, Brzeziński favoured: sobriety and honesty, respect for women, premarital and marital purity, concern for children and teenagers, diligence, consent, cooperation and friendship, justice and piety, sense of responsibility for oneself and others, goodness, modesty and mildness, as well as generosity [Jurczyszyn 2012].

Brzeziński was particularly sensitive to issues associated with moral upbringing of young people from rural areas. The beginning of every spring was, at the same time, the beginning of a period called „*pasionki*” (grazing cows), which, to many youngsters, was the beginning of a six-month “slavery” of millions of children grazing cattle. He firmly stated that such work was harmful to the health and moral development of children, because it was too hard for such small children (12 year-old and under). It took up the valuable time which otherwise could be spent learning. It also accustomed children to idleness. „The biggest effect, however, - he added - of constant communing of children and adolescents with cattle, away from the village and the watchful eyes of adults - is their becoming wild and morally contaminated. That is what *pasionka* leads to [Brzeziński 1902, p. 315]. What he meant were: smoking, vulgar curses, thefts, fighting, abuse of animals. Let us quote our teacher: „They trip over, get dirty, get so filthy that one gets shivers when watching them, particularly, if boys are grazing with girls [Brzeziński 1902, p. 316]. Moral devastation often lasted throughout their entire lives.

Mieczysław Brzeziński emphasised that grazing livestock for several hours was not harmful if it took place close to home. However, he thought that for grazing cattle on country pastures herdsmen should be hired. He also proposed, as a compromise, to send, along with children, an honest and experienced adult herdsman who would protect good manners and would not allow “any villainies” [Brzeziński 1902, p. 316]. Apart from that he asked the adults responsible for this state of affairs what was more important to them: physical and spiritual health of their children, or the “satisfaction” of their cows.

Incestuous sins, sodomy, sexual harassment in the family and amongst siblings appeared not only in contemporary times, but also earlier. Brzeziński was concerned with the moral development of children and teenagers and advised parents and other adults who had contact with the younger generation to pay attention even to such matters like daily routines and hygiene, sleeping at home or away from home, relations among siblings and other children, the type and character of entertainment and games played in the “street” etc. [Brzeziński 1901]. In his view, not only knowledge and learning (understood as preventive awareness of parents) should be appreciated but also the role of the Church must not be underestimated.

ted. The Church, by using its own methods, mainly spreading the Gospel, helped parents and other class tutors solve the above mentioned problems concerning psychophysical moral and spiritual development of children and teenagers.

d) Patriotic upbringing

According to Brzeziński, patriotism is not only a matter of emotion, but becomes apparent in practical activity and personal commitment to the good of the nation. Thus, he encouraged creative work for the family, the region and the homeland [Brzeziński 1908].

He believed that it was important to teach children to love their homeland by teaching them about the grand and glorious moments of its history and culture, that is, by getting to know its magnificence [Brzeziński 1909]. Over the course of time, the history of Poland became an aspect of patriotic education of the nation (particularly country dwellers) which was more and more often emphasised by him. He emphasised its educational benefits [Brzeziński 1908; 1909].

Denying the past and neglecting one's future aims were perceived as a major threat to human personality and the nation. This thought gains special significance, if we remind the fact that Russians effectively blocked historical education of the younger generation of Poles. Reading patriotic masterpieces of Polish literature, like the works of Mickiewicz, was forbidden. Therefore, young people and adults organised secret self-learning groups which constituted counterbalance towards the destructive influence of Russian school [Galek 2011].

According to Brzeziński patriotic upbringing is not only connected with pursuing knowledge, forming emotions and enriching imagination, but also, and above all, with forming the will. Primary emphasis in such an upbringing should be placed on practising the virtue of patriotism, on fulfilling specific duties to the homeland.

e) Intellectual upbringing

He appreciated the exceptional value of learning the function of which, in his view, was „preparing a man for practical life full of judicious, inspiring work for the society and oneself [Brzeziński 1907, p. 112; Spencer 1997]. Education was not only a practical preparation for life, but also satisfied inborn curiosity of man, inclined him to do mental work, explained incomprehensible phenomena. It was beneficial and, at the same time, provided entertainment.

Brzeziński was alarmed with high percentage of illiterates in the population of the Kingdom. In 1908 the problem of illiteracy concerned 70% of adult members of the society of the Kingdom of Poland. He thought that the invention of self-teaching was an effective measure to fight illiteracy in the country: „I don't know whether you've ever thought about it, but it would be hard to do a greater favour to man, but to teach him how to read, to give him the possibility of drawing from

the treasures that knowledgeable people hid in books [Brzeziński 1897, p. 7]. *Podarunek dla samouków, chcących uczyć się czytać i pisać* written by Brzeziński was of great help to self-taught country dwellers [Brzeziński 1903]. It used a pictorial method in which learning to read was connected with learning about things. Connecting the sound with writing method was a proof of the author's deliberation. The pictures of things and objects were associated with the environment of the self-taught person (different cereal crops, tools of the trade, fruit, domestic animals) or with his system of values (religious pictures: boy kneeling under the cross, Mother of God of Częstochowa, the Holy Family). Punctuation marks and a list of digits were on the back cover of the primer.

For improving one's reading skills the author recommended *Obrazkowa nauka czytania i pisania* by Kazimierz Promyk, *Mały elementarz*, *Pierwsze czytanki* and *Snopek, czyli książeczka do czytania i nauki dla dzieci* Róża Brzezińska and his own work *Podarunek dla młodzieży*. For exercises in writing he suggested copying independently chosen texts from different books and writing exercises from a book *Nauka pisania i wprawa w czytanie pisanego* by Maria Pisarzewska [Brzeziński 1903].

Brzeziński himself placed great emphasis on the art of neat and legible and writing. Applying the principle of grading the degree of difficulty readers interested in the topic were provided with 37 templates of correct letter shapes [Brzeziński 1903]. Brzeziński believed that mastering them provided a good basis for writing neatly and legibly.

Russian government prohibited establishing schools without permission, but one could learn to read and write independently. The law did not forbid teaching reading and writing to the closest family - e.g. brother, sister, cousin etc. – Brzeziński convinced [Brzeziński 1908, No. 43]. The art of reading enabled further education.

f) Religious upbringing

Brzeziński was conscious of the exceptional role religious upbringing in the family played. He stressed it repeatedly. It was religion that protected moral truths, which were „spread and guarded by its authority” [Brzeziński 1910, p. 579]. Naturally, the Roman Catholic Church served the role of a protector of historical traditions, culture, patriotism and national identity. Religious life was both a need and a distinctive feature of the nation which „became apparent in its spiritual life” [Brzeziński 1899]. It became apparent particularly in deepening the sensitivity of the conscience, in relations with other people, in the celebration of church holidays and national anniversaries. For Brzeziński the Church's teachings were holy and constituted a benchmark for all his thoughts and actions he took, especially in the field of education.

He underlined the perpetual right of every member of the nation to the free-

dom of conscience and faith. „Only in half-wild or half-human communities—he stated - religious persecution can happen [Brzeziński 1907, p. 113].

Practicing faith added motivation and spiritual power to fulfil everyday duties towards the family, the society and the homeland [Brzeziński, 1897, No. 29; 1902, No. 1; 1903, No. 36]. No wonder that forming a man with a worldview rooted in the Gospel was regarded by Brzeziński as a major task for the family and society.

Conclusion

Brzeziński's views on upbringing in the family, particularly one living in the country, often have negative overtones. He pointed at negligence. An important positive feature of his writing was making the reader's conscience sensible to his own, social and national goods. Thorough knowledge about oneself, the world and God was regarded by Brzeziński as the basis of upbringing and self-education. He was convinced that education had exceptional influence on the moral development of man. Christian moral upbringing was essential, for he could not imagine moral formation without Christ, whom he regarded as the ultimate example of moral excellence [Brzeziński 1906]. Bringing a person up in a peasant family was a complex process, which involved active assistance in the development of a child in the health and physical, intellectual, moral, public and religious aspect.

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