



Grzegorz Michalski\* 

---

## On Preserving the Historical Memory of the First Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Introduction to Considerations about the Past of Education

### Abstract

In the context of reflections on the breakthrough moments in the history of Poland in the first half of the 20th century, the content of the volume of the journal "Nauki o Wychowaniu. Studia Interdyscyplinarne" (Nowis. Interdisciplinary Studies) which testifies to the preservation of their historical memory, is discussed.

**Keywords:** breakthrough moments, 20th century, historical memory.

### O zachowaniu pamięci historycznej pierwszej połowy XX wieku. Wprowadzenie do rozważań o przeszłości oświaty

### Abstrakt

W kontekście rozważań o momentach przełomowych w dziejach Polski pierwszej połowy wieku XX omówiono zawartość tomu czasopisma „Nauki o Wychowaniu. Studia Interdyscyplinarne” będącego świadectwem zachowania o nich pamięci historycznej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** momenty przełomowe, wiek XX, pamięć historyczna.

The first fifty years of the twentieth century was a diverse period for Polish society – the struggle with the partitioning powers and the fight for a free Poland during the Great War, then stabilization and relatively calm functioning as an independent state, then participating in the defence of the country and concern for survival under

---

\* University of Lodz, Faculty of Educational Sciences, Department of the History of Education and Pedutology.

Article Received: June 8, 2020; Accepted: June 8, 2020.

Nazi occupation, and finally, the necessity of finding oneself in a state dependent on the decisions of the Soviet Union's authorities. It is worth noting that the lives of states and nations have always taken place in cycles determined by the internal situation and external conditions. In other words, times of *status quo* alternated with times of breakthrough. The established state of affairs never meant, for various reasons, full consent and acceptance of its existence by all social groups, which became the reason for the occurrence of "underground" currents, usually hardly visible, contesting the existing reality. In turn, times of breakthrough, mainly political, usually occurred as a consequence of the slow build-up of numerous, previously unnoticed or unresolved social issues, crossing a certain boundary leading to protests, manifestations of discontent, uprisings, revolutions, coups or wars.

It should be emphasized that the breakthrough is a neutral concept and indicates only the inevitable change that, depending on historical circumstances, may bring about the implementation of the expected new solutions by the given communities or contribute to the need to implement an imposed plan, not always accepted by the majority. In this context, for Polish society, the first half of the 20th century was marked by two great breakthrough moments – the First World War, as a result of which Poland was reborn as an independent country, and the Second World War, the end of which meant that it found itself in the sphere of influence of the Soviet state.

The beginning of the twentieth century did not herald the return of Poland to the maps of Europe. Polish lands were still under the rule of three powers, which defined the boundaries of all forms of social life, including education. In the Prussian partition, increasing oppression eliminated the last symbolic signs of Polishness from education by prohibiting the teaching of religion in the native language. In the Kingdom of Poland, there was a brief moment of political thaw that followed the 1905 revolution, opening up more opportunities for the development of the press, associations and the use of Polish in schools. The autonomy of Galicia, granted in the previous century by the Austrian authorities, guaranteed the inhabitants relatively extensive, compared to the other partitions, powers to create and organize their own everyday life in many areas. The arising of an independent Polish state in 1918, after 123 years of captivity, created favourable conditions for building and developing broadly understood education based on the native culture. Interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War, the rich development of educational literature, the functioning of numerous institutions as well as pedagogical and teaching societies could not be reproduced after 1945 in a similar form and character. Due to the political situation, models based on foreign ideals and values came to the fore.

Looking back at Polish education in the first half of the 20th century, it is possible to express a view of a more general nature that the events of political breakthrough played a specific role in giving it an ever-changing shape. During the Second Polish Republic, a number of innovative solutions were introduced in this area, but at the same time, the achievements from the time of partition were not

rejected. They were appealed to, developed and multiplied creatively. The situation was different after the Second World War, when there was a definite attempt to cut off from the achievements of the recent past, ultimately implementing solutions foreign to the world of Polish culture and tradition.

Although the past is a time gone by and seems completely invisible, it does not mean that it does not exist. On the one hand, it commonly functions in various forms of individual and social memory (Szacka 2000: 14), on the other, it has securely located itself in the form of documents and notes, as well as products of publishing activity in places such as archives, museums and libraries (Borowiec 2013: 181). Questions about the past are crucial for the development of educational sciences. Leaving aside potential accusations from those who do not notice, or even deny the historicity of the determinants of phenomena and the course of educational processes, one can formulate the easily justified view that reaching in educational research into the broadly defined educational past is not only maintaining memory of "times lost", but it is a methodological imperative, because – as Czesław Majorek pointed out – every contemporary phenomenon or pedagogical event has its specific antecedents in past years and requires the identification of its sources and genesis (Majorek 1995: 60). Agreeing with this perspective on creating knowledge, Romuald Grzybowski wrote:

Just as the memory of cultural and spiritual heritage shapes national consciousness, so the memory of educational heritage shapes the identity of educators and pedagogy itself. Without knowledge of educational heritage, it is also difficult to create other varieties of "new education" or to dream of "up to date education" (Grzybowski 2011: 26).

In turn, while thinking about the problem of the relationship between history and pedagogy, Szulakiewicz presents the view that the category that brings together and combines both disciplines is primarily the concept of memory. Calling them, graphically, a bridge, he states:

Even a cursory analysis of pedagogical historiography shows that we can list at least three levels of relationships between memory and pedagogy, and these are:

- memory of historical and pedagogical sources,
- historical sources as a medium of memory about various areas of pedagogy,
- memory of creators, ideas and institutions deposited in historical sources (Szulakiewicz 2016: 10–11).

It should be noted that, unlike historical research in the strict sense, projects of historical questioning in pedagogy definitely go beyond goals of knowledge, because retrospective studies on various areas of the past educational reality are

the answer to currently important pedagogical challenges. One can place the essays and articles in this issue in the perspective of this way of thinking about the role of research in the history of education as one of the pedagogical sub-disciplines. Each of them reproduces and analyses a small fragment of unknown or not fully discovered manifestations of social life in the first half of the 20th century. Thus, confirming the principle of traces of historical memory that cannot be erased from pedagogy, which has been permanently recorded in various types of literature and archival documents.

The 'Studies and Essays' section contains texts discussing several issues in chronological order. Based on an analysis of the literature of the Warsaw Hygiene Society from the beginning of the 20th century, Aneta Bołdyrew shows the specificity of the approach of doctors and hygienists to the important life problems of the young people of that time. Matters related to girls' education at that time are discussed by two authors. Iwonna Michalska shows that the periodical "Świat Kobiety" (Women's World) published in 1905–1906 attached great importance not only to the literacy of young females, but also to their further, formally organized education, while Małgorzata Krakowiak, after analysing Warsaw women's magazines from 1907–1918, concludes that the distinctness of their ideological profiles – from conservative to progressive – clearly influenced the diverse messages addressed to readers, not only about the place of women in society, but also about the extent and degree of education of girls. Renata Bednarz-Grzybek deals with a different problem, carefully describing the forms of active recreation of patients in their time free from therapeutic treatments, recommended in 'Nasz Zdrojów' (Our Spas) (1910–1914). Grzegorz Michalski examines the pedagogical magazines of teachers' organizations published during the Great War in the context of their contribution to the development of native, and the dissemination of international, educational concepts, and the design of solutions for the future educational system of the country. In turn, Wiesław Jamrożek, in a highly synthesized form, recalls the achievements of Polish pedagogical thought and educational practice of the interwar period. Joanna Sosnowska, after extensive studies of Polish literature from 1918–1939, presents the scope of interest at that time in Maria Montessori's theory of pedagogy and its reception in preschool education. On the one hand, Eleonora Sapia-Drewniak shows the beginnings of the andragogical periodical in the last years of the nineteenth century, and on the other – characterizes all nationwide periodicals of this type published in the Second Polish Republic. Katarzyna Dormus recalls the circumstances of the establishment and the activities of the Pedagogical College of the Jagiellonian University, which initiated the establishment of an influential academic research centre in the field of pedagogy in Krakow.

The next section 'Research Reports' consists of 9 mini-monographs, which are the result of inquiries into the content of various publications and the exploration of archival resources. Joanna Falkowska writes in her study on the forms of

education propagated in the countryside in the socio-cultural magazines of the Kingdom of Poland from 1905–1918. From her discussion, one can learn that the authors of these magazines first of all drew attention to the need to establish libraries and various types of schools, to educate folk school teachers, and for youth associations and women's education. On the other hand, Ryszard Ślęczka writes about encouraging interwar teachers to deviate from traditional teaching and education methods on the basis of "Ruch Pedagogiczny" (Pedagogical Movement), discussing the conceptions of modern education of, among others, John Dewey, Georg Kerschensteiner, Helena Parkhurst, Ovid J. Decroly and Rudolf Steiner. In turn, from the carefully conducted archival research on the activities of the 'Szkoła Powszechna' (General School) in Łopienno in 1918–1939, Katarzyna Kabacińska-Łuczak draws a picture of the idea of new education in the socio-cultural activity of this small rural school for the local area. The texts of Elżbieta Dolata and Elżbieta Magiera maintains the same trend of propagating pedagogical reform. The first author familiarizes readers with the innovative methods and forms of educational work proposed by "Wychowanie Przedszkolne" (Pre-school Education) ensuring free development for every child, the second presents the inter-war *Komisję Kół Krajoznawczych Młodzieży Szkolnej* (Commission of School Youth Touring Associations): the circumstances of the establishment of this organization, the basis for its functioning and directions of activity. Stefania Walasek provides information on how the practice of state and civic school education was organized in the conditions of implementation of the Education Act of 1932, obtained from preserved documents of the Adam Mickiewicz State Men's Gymnasium in Vilnius. The subject of interest of the last two studies is the issue of vocational education. In the first, Danuta Kocurek presents the contents of the monthly 'Szkoła Zawodowa' (Vocational School) (1926–1935), focusing mainly on providing information on the activities of vocational schools in Poland and abroad, vocational training programmes, textbooks and training courses, in the second, Kamila Cybulska outlines the history of the Radom Society of Technical Courses (1927–1939), a private educational institution dealing with the vocational training of adults, which became a unique place in this city for the exchange of knowledge and practical skills between educational institutions and industrial enterprises.

The "Discussions/Polemics" section is filled by Aneta Bołdyrew's text, which is a substantive analysis and assessment of Sylwia Kuźma-Markowska's book *Children, Family and Gender Roles in American Humanitarian and Philanthropic Initiatives in Interwar Poland*, published by the University of Warsaw Publishing House.

This issue, published as a volume of the journal "Nowis. Interdisciplinary studies" is concluded with a sketch about the achievements of the Białystok education history centre and the scientific conference on the occasion of its 40th anniversary on "The child in history – between dignity and slavery".

## References

Borowiec P. (2013) *Czas polityczny po rewolucji. Czas w polskim dyskursie politycznym po 1989 roku*, Kraków, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego.

Grzybowski R. (2011) *Dziedzictwo edukacyjne przeszłości: balast czy skarbnica wiedzy?* in: *Przełomy edukacyjne. Dziedzictwo polskiej teorii i praktyki*.

*Dziedzictwo polskiej teorii i praktyki*, W. Szulakiewicz (ed.), Toruń, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek: 21–33.

Majorek Cz. (1995) *Warsztat badawczy historyka wychowania dziejów najnowszych* in: *Stan i perspektywy historii wychowania*, W. Jamrożek (ed.), Poznań, Wydawnictwo "Eruditus": 55–70.

Szacka B. (2000) *Pamięć zbiorowa i wojna*, "Przegląd Socjologiczny", 2 (49): 11–28.

Szulakiewicz W. (2016) *Przedmowa. Pamięć i przeszłość* in: *Umieszczeni w przeszłości. Pamięć w naukach pedagogicznych*, W. Szulakiewicz (ed.), Toruń, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika: 7–11.