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ABSTRACT

**CIVIC EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THEODORE
BRAMELD'S SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTIONISM.
IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION.**

Doctoral dissertation prepared under the supervision of

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It deserves to be noted that while the question of civic education is becoming increasingly addressed by pedagogues, social reconstructionism is not a concept commonly applied in Polish pedagogy. Neither is the study of Theodore Brameld's thought being developed on a wider scale in the academic world today. The general aim of the research undertaken and described here is to provide an insight into the concept of social reconstructionism as a tool for the development of civic education. The presented reflections on civic education, as viewed from the perspective of social reconstructionism, concern – on the one hand – the extent to which the themes inherent in Brameld's thought have already indirectly made their way into the core curriculum of Polish schools, and – on the other hand – how the integration of further themes would enhance the teaching and learning of citizenship education.

In order to answer these two questions, first of all, four crucial categories analysed by Brameld were identified: democracy, culture, values and education. Next, selected secondary school core curricula were analysed insofar as these concerned subjects in which content specific to civic or citizenship education appeared. It should be noted here that such content is found not only within history, history and the present, or civic education, but also within such subjects as Polish and geography. The following step consisted in considering which of the four categories referred to above were present in the content and how the themes were addressed. The aim was to realise become aware of what kind of implications for the contemporary teaching of civic education in Poland could result from a more conscious and determined introduction of the sensibility characteristic of social reconstructionism into Polish core curricula.

This dissertation is essentially situated in the stream of philosophy of education. This is primarily due to the definition of social reconstruction as being one of the fundamental philosophies of education, which is also how Brameld viewed the concept himself. Aspects of this philosophy are used to analyse a particular fragment of education: selected core curricula for five subjects in which four concepts appear that are typical of social reconstructionism. These concepts were analysed from a philosophical and pedagogical point of view, and an attempt was made to answer the question to what extent they make reconstructionist sense and to what extent they do not. The pedagogical assumption was that civic education based on the four Brameldian concepts would carry greater potential for positive change (or reconstruction) of society. Applying the assumptions of this philosophy to core curricula comprising themes of civic education carries not only a clear philosophical trait, but also a practical one.

The key research procedure used in this discussion is the analysis of selected core curriculum content. The baseline is here a selection of core curricula for five subjects and a subsequent filtering out of content that deals with the teaching of civic education. The core curricula subject to analysis were designed for schools of secondary education. The applied research procedure was limited to Polish curricula, because the aim of this dissertation was to refer to the assumptions of social reconstructionism related to civic education in Poland only. The procedure was deemed relevant and necessary in the light of the reformed law on school education effective from 2017. It was assumed that the enforcement of the new core curricula left a cognitive gap in the area of civic education and that it was worth exploring this issue in the context of social reconstructionism. The analysis of the core curricula enabled an insight into how civic education is approached in Poland and what content it carries. Developing these curricula also allowed tackling the issue of the possible implications of the assumptions of social reconstructionism for the contemporary approach to the teaching and learning of citizenship education. It was decided that such a research procedure would offer an opportunity to identify innovative and creative aspects in the results.

The other research procedure applied in this dissertation was a positive reconstruction of social reconstructionism, including a comparative approach at the level of comparing this philosophy with perennialism, essentialism and progressivism. Positive reconstruction also takes place here by invoking social reconstructionism and presenting its main premises. Positive reconstruction was applied in order to gain a deeper understanding of the premises of reconstructionism, the goals it sets and the means and direction of efforts to achieve the goals. Thus, the assumptions of Brameldian social reconstructionism could be concisely juxtaposed with those of other educational philosophies. The use of this method was necessary in order to highlight the key importance of the concepts of democracy, values and education in the discussed philosophy of education. This part of research did not focus on a comprehensive analysis of the whole concept of social reconstructionism, but only on the issue mentioned above. To this end, original texts by Theodore Brameld and secondary literature were both used.

The main object of research were five core curricula of selected secondary school subjects, in which the four categories identified by Brameld were present. The understanding of these categories by the authors of the core curricula was analysed and an attempt was made to find out to what extent – if at all – these categories carry a message characteristic of social reconstructionism. Where no such references were found, suggestions were made as to what

civic education would gain if they did appear there. It could be argued that social reconstructionism functioned here as a tool to reconsider the core curricula of the selected subjects and to ask a question about the reconstructionist potential of these curricula, and – consequently – about the potential of Polish civic education.

The theoretical aim of the conducted research was to determine to what extent the selected Polish core curricula were reconstructionist and how they could be made more so.

From this theoretical aim of the research the following specific questions were derived:

1. Which conceptual categories of Theodore Brameld's social reconstructionism form the basis of a reconstructionist concept of civic education?
2. In what context do the conceptual categories mentioned in question 1 occur at the same time in the Polish core curricula for the subjects of: civic education, history and history and the present, Polish language and geography after the educational reform of 2017?
3. To what extent are the categories addressed in a reconstructionist manner by the authors of the curricula and what benefits would a more reconstructionist approach bring?

The following four chapters of this dissertation present: first, the concept of civic education in pedagogical terms; second, the main stages of Theodore Brameld's life and the principal assumptions of his philosophy of social reconstructionism; third, the meaning of the four Brameldian concepts forming the basis of reconstructionist civic education: democracy, culture, values and education, as understood by selected Polish social scientists (mainly pedagogues); and fourth, an analysis of the core curricula of the five secondary school subjects, in which civic education content is taught: civic education, history and the present, history, Polish language and geography – from the point of view of their reconstructionist potential.

Having completed the tasks set in the individual chapters, it may be concluded that at the end of the journey a picture of reconstructionist civic education emerged along with some reconstructionist themes present in contemporary Polish core curricula for the five secondary school subjects insofar as these subjects provide civic education content.

The discussion contained in the subsequent chapters often invokes the term 'world civilization' since a pursuit of such a civilization nourished Theodore Brameld's thinking throughout his scientific career. A model of reconstructionist civic education should be understood as a tool for civilizational unity.

The time when the fourth – and last – chapter of this dissertation was written coincided with the continued military conflict in Ukraine that started when Russia, driven by socialist inclinations, invaded a free and sovereign state. It can be claimed that since 1989, the year of profound change taking place in the Polish society and in Europe as a whole, we had never strayed so far from the vision of a global union and unanimous perception of human problems and dilemmas. Undoubtedly, Brameld would have viewed these facts as a manifestation of the failure of humanity, unable to cope with building a new civilization of unity and peace. However, the idea of such a civilization must not be erased from our minds by this failure.

It can be stated that Polish education as far as citizen attitudes are concerned is far from reconstructionism. Polish teaching would be more aligned with this philosophy if students were more encouraged to discuss and analyse contemporary problems of humanity on their own. Yet is there enough awareness, maturity and openness in Polish adolescents to be willing to express their own opinions? Is there enough courage in Polish students to criticize the present state and to want to make a difference? These are just rhetorical questions now, to which answers could be found by pursuing separate research.