

# **SÁMUEL BRASSAI, THE LAST TRANSYLVANIAN POLYMATH**

## **His Life and Works**

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**Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to introduce Sámuel Brassai, the teacher, the outstanding scholar of the 19th century. He played a great role in the Reform era. His life, work and activity were inspired by thoughts that nowadays, a hundred years after his death, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are still valid. These thoughts are in the fields of education, economy, morality, research into the nation's prosperity. He was an excellent linguist, natural scientist, philosopher, critic, mathematician, musician, teacher, essay writer, university professor, and a regular member of the Academy of Sciences. At the centre of Brassai's life-work was his research into the methodological principles of teaching. His pedagogical system is the harmonious synthesis of his educational goals and methods. He was an encyclopaedic scholar, the great teacher of the nation who was continuously searching for the solution to the reform of education.

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## I. Introduction

In his long life Sámuel Brassai was engaged in the sciences; he was an excellent linguist, natural scientist, philosopher, critic, mathematician, musician, teacher and headmaster in the Unitarian College in Kolozsvár, essay writer, university professor, and a regular member of the Academy of Sciences. At the centre of Brassai's life-work was his research into the methodological principles of teaching.

Language as the representation of national consciousness and thinking was holy to Brassai. He fought for education in the Hungarian language eagerly and successfully. In this era in Hungary the struggle for the mother tongue was bound up with the question of foreign-language teaching. Sámuel Brassai was an outstanding character and a pioneer in this dual campaign.

He wrote about everything, taught everything and everybody, edited papers. He left us a heritage that deserves so much respect, that we must conserve and appreciate.

He is rightly called the last Transylvanian polymath and the great teacher of the nation.

*“He was a Polymath – in the opinion of the former president of the Academy he was the greatest. To everyone's knowledge he was the last” (Rászlai 1997: 31).*

*“One century! What a big career!...*

*You saw the pale face of Kazinczy  
and read his letters burning with holy flame.*

*You applauded the two Kisfaludys,  
and turned the pages of the new book of Himfi's loves.*

*The author of the 'Szózat' called you his brother.*

*You saw the Hungarian nation when as a gentleman.”*

*(Géza Gárdonyi: The rising alps  
A letter to Sámuel Brassai)*

If we want to learn more about Sámuel Brassai's life we need to go back to his homeland, Torockó and Torockószentgyörgy, to the places of his youth and adulthood, mainly to Kolozsvár. We need to know his family background, the events of his life, the era in which he lived, the aristocratic life of Erdély (Transylvania) which preserved its typical Hungarian culture and which lay stress on education and development of the mind. We need to know how Brassai moved on from the basics that he had from his family, by self-education. He lived in a wonderful period, the Reform era, at the time of the discussion of language reform and the war of independence of 1848–49. His life overlapped with the lives of the two Bolyais, Einstein, Darwin, Beethoven, Bartók, Goethe, Kazinczy, Jókai. And he was on friendly terms with Széchenyi, Petőfi, Arany, Ottó Herman, Ferenc Erkel, and Pál Gyulai.

## II. His Life

János Wellmess, Brassai's great grandfather was a joiner from Brassó, he settled down in Torockó at the beginning of the 18th century. The young tradesman was named “the joiner of Brassó” after his place of origin. His grandson, our Brassai's father was also named Sámuel. He, the father entered the Unitarian College in Kolozsvár in 1778. There were three main grammar schools in Kolozsvár at that time: the Unitarian, the Roman Catholic and the Protestant. The Unitarian was the oldest; indeed, for several years in the 16th century this had been the only college. Brassai was among the best students. He became a rector (priest) and a teacher in Torockó. The daughter of the Torockószentgyörgy priest, Krisztina, caught his fancy. In marrying, on 31 December 1794, the daughter of Gergely Koncz, the famous Unitarian priest and dean, he married into the greatly respected Koncz family from Kissolymos. His wife was a smart and educated woman. Beyond the housework, she helped

her husband at school. She spoke Latin very well and later learned German from her husband. She can be reckoned among the first female teachers of Hungary. The father Brassai was familiar with all the books and periodicals from all over the region. He was keen on books and collected together a beautiful library.

Sámuel Brassai was born into this respected clerical family. Besides his scholar father and mother, all his grandparents and aunts were highly educated. He lived in a beautiful region of Transylvania, lying under Székelykő in Torockó and Torockószentgyörgy. Brassai had weaker bonds to Torockó than to Torockószentgyörgy. He always thought of Szentgyörgy with pleasure. This is the place where he started to live, see, watch and think. The fields between the two Torockós pleased the playful child. The castle above the village also stimulated his imagination. He delighted in examining the plants and bugs on the top of Székelykő that guards Torockó. He wrote later: "My childhood was full of happiness". The child Brassai spent days reading. His first reading was Robinson. He grew up on Csokonai's poems and on Ludas Matyi. He was given a violin that he liked very much. Besides the love of flowers and music, he had religious feelings. His parents' and the family's honest religious belief and their God-fearing, pious lives had a good influence on his heart and soul. But he had an inborn predisposition to be religious and to be a believer. His parents and grandparents and aunts were very thoughtful people, so it was inevitable that he would be thoughtful, too. Until he was 13 years old he was taught by his father, His teaching methods were very individual and original. If for example he wanted to make him learn the rules of the Hungarian language he gave him a short grammar, and if he made mistakes in his writings, he made him find the appropriate rule. Brassai already showed a noticeable interest in foreign languages at the age of ten. He learned Latin along with his mother tongue and then German and French. Learning foreign languages awakened his talent as an observer and critic to such an extent that he started not only to understand the formation of words but the logic of sentences. At the age of 13 he entered the unitarian boarding school in Kolozsvár.

At the age of 24 he finished his studies. He was a private tutor in various distinguished Transylvanian families.

Kolozsvár was a real literary centre at that time. Ferenc Szilágyi, Sándor Bölöni Farkas, the Telekis, Zsigmond Kemény, Sándor Kriza, Miklós Jósika were the leading lights of the cultural, literary life. In 1834 Brassai became the editor of the *Nemzeti Társalkodó (National Conversation)* and the *Vasárnapi Újság (Sunday Paper)*. He dealt with the national economy, wrote articles about policy, self-education, and culture, the roller- and steam-mill, the first steamer and railway, communication by telegraph, the assembly of social workers, the first jury, ballooning, natural phenomena, cholera, the economy of Britain, the misery of lower social classes, banks. In these articles, whose first objective was national and cultural development, he was deeply impressed by Széchenyi. In the first years of his activity as a writer, when he was an editor of the *Vasárnapi Újság (Sunday Paper)*, he took the view that the public must be educated, because an educated mind is a prerequisite of economic development. He devoted his newspaper to this idea.

In 1837 he expounds his views clearly on languages in his article *A nyelvtanulásról (On Language Learning)*. In this article he writes that climate and other natural conditions have a large effect on the development of language. Moreover, every language epitomises the whole history of the nation. He felt the deep truth in the proverb: The nation lives through its language. The wisdom of the nation is expressed in its language. Deeper examination of this notion led Brassai to the innermost core of the human spirit. The motto of his newspaper was a resounding one: Respect the language of our ancestors!

He was enthusiastic about 15th March, 1848. Everyone in Kolozsvár grabbed weapons and had faith in the future. Later Brassai also joined the army, at the age of 51 with grey hair and a beard. After Világos he fled to Pest, and found the government still there. Kossuth

appointed him the teacher of Ludovika, but he could not even start the lectures because the government fled to Debrecen. Brassai went back to Bem in Kolozsvár and stayed in his army. After the defeat of the war of independence he was hunted down as a revolutionary. They say he hid with shepherds for a while. He remained a believer in the ideas of the revolution till his death. Brassai urged the union of Hungary and Transylvania in the Sunday newspaper; this is what Count Bethlen János fought for in the parliament and what Transylvanian patriots struggled for. He was in Budapest in 1851. He worked for *Magyar Hírlap (Hungarian News)*, the newspaper of the government. The paper became *Budapesti Hírlap (Budapest News)* in 1853, of which Brassai remained co-editor, and the author of a column devoted to music criticism. In 1852 Gyulai Pál and Pákh Albert founded *Szépirodalmi Lapok (Literary Papers)*. Brassai worked on this paper as well. His primary task was to write reviews; but he also did translations.

In 1851 he started the periodical *Fiatalság Barátja (Friend of Youth)* in Kolozsvár. It ran to six volumes. Its primary goal was to foster the Hungarian language among families and young people, though the language was no longer officially used. This was the first Hungarian paper for young people.

On 30th August 1859 the Unitarian church appointed him once again to be a teacher of the Mathematics Faculty in the re-established college. On 1st September 1862 he gave up teaching as he was elected to the directorship of The Transylvanian Museum. He employed Ottó Herman, and offered him 300 forints to live on from his own 1000fts salary. He was a very generous person most of whose sacrifices were made for his school. His books were printed at his own expense as well, and until 1848 the *Vasárnapi Újság (Sunday Paper)* was published privately. He saved up money from his modest salary for spending on grand projects. He shared his income among poor pupils, discovered young, poor, talented students and supported them.

He spent most of his life as a teacher and his philosophy was most clearly expressed in his theory of education. His guiding principle was that only directly acquired notions are fully alive in our mind; those which are got from others remain vague.

In 1872 Kolozsvár University was established, and he was appointed to be teacher of Mathematics and an honorary doctor. He was the first pro-rector of the university, and between 1879 and 1880 the rector. He took up his rector's chair with a dissertation about teaching classical languages, in which he advanced the view that classical languages should not be obligatory in secondary schools. On the one hand they are not up-to-date: they are neither requisite for education nor do they meet the demands of the age. On the other hand it is wrong to overburden students, especially with difficult, dead languages, taught at the expense of the mother tongue. Finally, classical languages by their nature rather belong to expert knowledge, so they should be taught only at universities. In his inaugural lecture as a rector he recommended that universities be open to women as well. They should not be deprived of their right to knowledge and learning, which is everybody's, as knowledge is not a privilege and should not be available only to some.

In the *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténeti Lapok (Comparative History for Literary Paper)* in 1877 more of his dissertations were published. His method of comparative literary study became generally known; moreover, it is thanks to him that Petőfi's lyrical poetry became well-known "in the whole educated world", and came in for proper appreciation.

In 1883 he retired, and in retirement, studied the Sanskrit language, read, and took notes all day. He studied with devotion the wisdom of Buddhism and the works of its philosopher, Schopenhauer. These influences can be seen in his last philosophical work, *Igazi pozitív filozófia (True Positive Philosophy)*. Sometimes a musical company gathered at his house, and he enjoyed their performances with eyes closed. He was visited by his admirers and

argued happily with them. He liked the grace of Burns' poems, the mysterious and logical writings of Poe, the closeness of Dickens.

In the spring of 1897 he was taken to hospital where he had a room of his own. He had his plants brought there and he was able to work on his last study, Euclid's *XI<sup>th</sup> Axiom*. He could not finish this, though, but it was published in an incomplete form after his death in the *Akadémiai Értesítő (Academy Report)*.

On 15<sup>th</sup> June he was 100 years old. The first telegram of congratulation came from King I. Ferenc József. On 18<sup>th</sup> June there was a great celebration in Torockószentgyörgy. On his last day Brassai dictated notes since he would have liked to compose a hymn in honour of Queen Victoria and he gave the German translation of *Az igazi pozitív filozófia (True Positive Philosophy)* to Meltz Hugó in order for him to revise it.

He fell into his final sleep in the evening of the 23rd June and on the morning of the 24th he was found dead. He said himself: "*As a man can never reach the truth and has to be satisfied only with striving after it, one never reaches the all-knowing state, but the love of science compensates him for it*".

Of the hundreds of years of the Hungarian nation Brassai lived through the hundred most important ones. The chairman of the Academy said that he was 'the greatest Hungarian polymath.' Gárdonyi greeted him in a poem and many anecdotes have been collected about him. We can say: there were two Brassais: the one who wrote the books and the other, the legend who lived and still lives in people's minds.

But Brassai had a powerful and unquestionable weapon: the logic of his thinking which proceeded step by step and never failed. Arany named him "*the armed Goliath of science, wit and logic*". He never expressed in writing a single idea which wasn't rationally supported by previously expressed ideas.

Brassai was always there when a clever word, or clarification, or a questioning, reasoning, sharp mind was needed. His destiny was not to establish a grand *oeuvre* but to spread culture and enlightenment; to lead his nation through a troubled period, on the right road, and to protect it from the spiritual and moral destruction of fashionable ideas.

He was the great educator of the Hungarians in the XIX century: *praeceptor Hungariae*. "*The street which bears his name can be renamed, but he engraved his name and remembrance not just in the city but in Transylvania, moreover in the cultural history of Hungarianness.*"

### **III. Brassai, the teacher, the propagator of sciences**

#### **A) Brassai, the teacher**

His life, work and activity were inspired by concepts that nowadays, a hundred years after his death, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are still valid. These concepts are in the fields of education, economics, morality, research into the nation's prosperity. He contributed to all these fields not only by his methodological work but by his journalistic activity as well.

He was a pedagogue who wanted to reform public education not only with his theoretical activity but also with his practical methods.

In his childhood his narrower and wider environment inspired him to satisfy his thirst for knowledge and for serious thinking.

As an adult his main purpose was to educate and drive youth towards science as well as to cultivate the national culture and native language, because, as he said, youth is the ideal time for learning and acquiring valuable experience.

Brassai just like the famous teachers of pedagogy – Erasmus, Comenius, Apáczai – was a disciple of the pedagogy of kindness and fondness. He dealt with the teacher-student relationship in his several writings and he made it clear what it means to be a good teacher. In

most of his writings he laid stress on competent teaching and on persistent and patient work. He formulated the most desirable relationship in the teaching-learning process: “*the teacher’s role is giving incentives, giving a sign and suggesting something. It is directing and stimulating. The student’s part is forming and creating*”. In his lectures and writings he emphasised the most important features and tasks of a teacher:

- The teacher should not strive for new things in science, only for himself, but he should help the students with new discoveries to make a success in science.
  - The teacher must be respectable. His outstanding knowledge cannot compensate for moral poverty. A teacher’s prestige is very important in teaching. Besides knowledge morality is uppermost.
  - The teacher’s personality is very important in the teaching-learning process and a good teacher must have a spiritual vocation.
  - Future teachers need to acquire pedagogical and methodological understanding.
  - Teachers should not make children learn rules, dates and geographical names but they should make them get used to seeing the whole and the parts and the connections within it.
  - Teachers should take care to educate the talented and to teach students to see and create; they should enable students to take part actively in the learning process.
  - Students have to be given such knowledge at school that improves thinking; those who learn to think and judge well at school, will be able to make the right decisions and act correctly beyond the school gates.
  - Primary schools and grammar schools are not universities, so the teachers must teach knowledge and not sciences in these schools.
  - “*The method of teaching wisely: let us not imitate the cook or the farm-hand who feeds up her goose, nor the pigeon, who gives food to her nestlings from her own mouth, but let us imitate the brood hen, who makes her chickens walk on their own legs immediately, and gets them used to eating by themselves*” (Brassai 1868:45).
  - Learning should not be about swotting on the children’s part and teaching by giving knowledge neglectfully on the teachers’ part.
- In his articles he always emphasised that teaching is a complex process and that mental work, which is determined by logical standards and psychological laws, is strongly connected to ethics and aesthetics.

## **B) The populariser of sciences**

### **The ‘Vasárnapi Újság’ (Sunday Journal)**

He accepted editorship of the *Vasárnapi Újság (Sunday Journal)* in 1834 – at the invitation of the Kolozsvár Society (called Casino). He edited the *Vasárnapi Újság (Sunday Journal)* between 1834 and 1848.

Two kinds of ambition were noticeable in the *Vasárnapi Újság (Sunday Journal)* articles. One of them gave financial information to the reader, and the other had the purpose of public education.

Its aim was in tune with his personality and views. It informed the readers about the political situation, proclaimed the progressive ideas of the Reform Age, popularised the most recent achievements of contemporary science and techniques, gave modern economic knowledge and a foretaste of contemporary literature; and furthermore, it published pedagogical, scientific, musical, economic, philological articles on 16 pages every week. Besides the financial writings the paper often contained poems, short stories, and travelogues.

The *Vasárnapi Újság (Sunday Journal)* became widely read. Most of the articles, written in excellent, tasteful Hungarian language. Brassai was the author, the editor and the proof-reader in one person.

### **The 'Erdélyi Múzeum Évkönyvei' (Almanacs of the Transylvanian Museum)**

In the autumn of 1859 the Museum of the 'Erdélyi Múzeum Egylet' (Transylvanian Museum Association) was founded. Sámuel Brassai was appointed director and custodian of the collection of natural science.

He soon started the *Erdélyi Múzeum Évkönyvei (Almanacs of the Transylvanian Museum)*, which ran to five issues. These were especially important, because on the one hand Transylvanian scientific works did not have the chance to reach the public, and on the other hand these effectively transmitted the scientific and technical literature of Brassai's age to succeeding generations.

### **The 'Fiatalok Barátja' (Friend of Youth)**

Brassai liked to be the first in everything. He was the first editor of a popular newspaper and he was the first to be editor of a juvenile magazine, too.

In 1851 Brassai started the journal entitled the *Fiatalok Barátja (Friend of Youth)* for the better service of youth education. He published plays for the young, historical and geographical articles, educational readings. Among other things he wrote about the International Exhibition in London; also he published Uncle Mór (Jókai)'s tales in the column entitled 'Téricsélő szoba' (*Chatroom*). The rich material in the magazine contributed much to national public education.

In this magazine Arany János and Gyulai Pál introduced themselves as children's poets.

## **IV. Sámuel Brassai's pedagogical principles**

### **1. General principles**

Sámuel Brassai was one of the first to speak up in connection with educational questions. The principle of his pedagogical work is that he considered schools to be educational institutes and the final goal of teaching was to form the educated mind. He gave preference to thoroughness over encyclopedic knowledge. His principle of teaching was: "little, well, slowly".

In his opinion this goal can only be reached if the school supplies the students with appropriate knowledge based on the requirements of the age and with the help of a well-chosen method.

According to his principles education has to be natural, in harmony with the natural inclination of man. He considers the senses, intelligence, memory, willpower and language to be very important for this. His educational principles spring from practical experience.

### **2. The content of education**

#### **a) Physical education**

He considered the students' physical education to be important. One of his most important principles was to train the mind and the body at the same time and to do it regularly. He believed that the good mental state depends on a healthy body. He was against overburdening children at school. He emphasised that youngsters should not be overburdened.

He wanted to introduce Physical Education but it became a compulsory subject only in 1871 but it did not become one of the main subjects.

#### **b) Mental education**

He also emphasised that students had to be given that knowledge at school which improves thinking and which was useful as well; those who learned to think and judge well at school, would be able to make the right decisions and act correctly in real life. He thought that thinking could be improved best by languages and Mathematics.

#### **c) Moral education**

His view of moral education was based on faith and unitarian religion. Unitarian faith believes only what it understands. It is believed that decent life can give us salvation not faith. But faith is the guide to a decent life, Brassai taught.

Life would be impossible without faith. Faith can give people a moral backbone. In his old age he often mentioned his conviction that there is a "little legislative power" which makes order not for a city or a country but for mankind and that is conscience.

d) **Emotional education**

Brassai emphasised national education and national feelings at school; in this view he followed Vörösmarty. He thought that education must help arouse national feelings and strengthen them.

He also said: it is the task of the school to make attachment to the country stronger – to foster patriotism – and to create national traditions, with the help of school subjects. He believed that one of the most important aids to emotional education is music and the teaching of music, and in this respect his view was quite modern. Teaching drawing serves the same purpose. It may enrich a child's soul.

### **3. Teaching methods**

*a.) Choosing the material*

First and most important is teaching the Hungarian language. The second is 'mathezis' (mathematics) which is called a 'mental gymnastics'. History is put in the third place, as it improves and strengthens memory and imagination. Natural sciences belong among secondary-school subjects partly because a more mature age is needed for these.

*b.) Being expressive*

He thinks it is important to use the senses to the maximum during the cognition process. The demonstrative lecture should draw and preoccupy students' attention in such a way that it will be helpful for independent thinking. Brassai particularly emphasises the importance of experiment and demonstration when teaching natural science.

*c.) Consciousness*

Instead of learning mechanically without understanding he put the emphasis on the attainment of ripe and digested knowledge.

*d.) Systematicity*

In Brassai's method the principle of organisation is very important which means the ability to systematise knowledge.

*e.) The principle of gradation*

Teachers should advance the students from well-known to unknown from simple to difficult and from inferior to superior ideas. It is an indispensable requirement not to use unknown material by way of example when teaching something new.

*f.) Consistency*

In each subject we have to follow only one principle. We should go through the materials as we began and try to avoid contradictions. It is necessary to repeat things expediently and to arrange them carefully.

Brassai pays attention to the age of the students when he lays down the presentation of the teaching material in detail. Beyond the characteristic of the age group he keeps the process of mental improvement in view. Every inconsistency and confusion should be avoided.

### **4. The teacher's function**

He based his methodological programme on the working of the brain and assumed competent teachers. In most of his writings he laid stress on competent teaching and on persistent and patient work.



## 5. Teacher training

Teaching is a complex process and mental work, which is determined by logical standards and psychological laws, is also firmly bound up with ethics and aesthetics. Thus teaching must be learnt, says Brassai in his writings.

A good teacher should learn his profession besides his vocation. He emphasises that schools should not be at the mercy of states and churches.

## 6. His school system

The reform question of the educational system in the Unitarian College of Kolozsvár was discussed after the Synod of Korond in 1841, which accepted the syllabus and the educational system and the arrangements necessary for the modernisation of educational affairs worked out by Sámuel Brassai.

According to his project the school should be divided into three faculties:

- He called the first faculty, which included the first three classes, 'the Hungarian school', where Latin was not taught and German appeared only in the third class. In the Hungarian school the one and only language of education was Hungarian.
- The second faculty, which he called 'the psychological class' was a five-year period and its main subject was education in Latin based on Hungarian. Besides Latin, Geometry, Physics, National and World Geography, Ancient history, Mythology and German were taught.
- The third faculty is 'the philosophical faculty'. Its main subjects were: Mathematics, Physics, Statistics, Philosophy, History of the homeland and the world. It gave a proper preparation for scientific studies.

## 7. His syllabus

The syllabus constructed by Brassai, accepted and introduced in 1842 and 1843, was in use until the 1900s. It has some characteristic features, which differ from the customary projects of that time. One of these features is that every class has a main subject, which is taught in more lessons than the others.

The other feature is that the teaching of foreign languages begins with German instead of Latin. The aim is the speaking of the language, not only understanding or writing.

His reform had two outstanding results: One of them was that in the lower and upper classes of the college, Hungarian became the language of education instead of Latin. The other one was that, instead of a class system, a faculty system was introduced.

He was of the firm opinion that the university must be open for women, as well, and it is very important, because this idea was published for the first time by Brassai.

### *His schoolbook-writing activity*

Brassai set forth his pedagogical views and methodological principles in his school-books. In Brassai's time students learned from notes; they had only some school-books. Brassai wrote school-books of his own and started his series named *Kék Könyvtár (Blue Library)*. He explained his methodological principles in the books of the *Kék Könyvtár (Blue Library)*:

*A kisdetek számvetése angol mintára (Calculation for infants in English fashion 1842)*

*Bankismeret (Business studies 1842)*

*Rajzminták fiatal gyermekek számára (Drawing copy for young children 1842)*

*Számító Socrates (Socrates, the Calculator 1842)*

*Okszerű vezér a német nyelv tanulásában I. rész (A Rational Guide to German Language Learning. Part 1. 1845)*

*Német olvasókönyv (German reader 1847)*

*Okszerű vezér a német nyelv tanulásában II. rész (A Rational Guide to German Language Learning. Part 2. 1847)*

*Ingyen tanító francia nyelvmester (Free French Language-Master Part 1. 1863) (No further volumes were published.)*

*Hogyan kelljen a latin hajtogatást egyszerűen, gyorsan és sikeresen tanítani (Teaching Latin Conjugation Simply, Quickly and Successfully 1872)*

It is the same in German:

*Neue Unterrichtsmethode der lateinischen Coniugation mit Tafel und Katechetik von Dr. Samuel Brassai. (1880)*

*Elméleti és gyakorlati német nyelvtan (Theoretical and practical German grammar. A Rational Guide to German Language Learning. Parts 1-2 in one volume. 1896)*

His textbooks spoke to everybody, they related to sciences such as Mathematics, Geography and Agriculture. He wrote them in Hungarian; furthermore he taught only in Hungarian.

In *Számító Socrates (Socrates, the Calculator)* he elaborated the methodology of teaching Mathematics at elementary level and emphasised the importance of mental arithmetic.

In *Okszerű vezér a német nyelv tanulásában (A Rational Guide to German Language Learning)* – the fruit of 25 years' study and experience – to make language learning easier. With this course book he started his language teaching reformation. Brassai focused on speaking exercises and on sentences. He formed sentences with the words, because he thought that the sentence was the basic unit of a language, not the word. In his books Brassai set a great example of consistently applying his linguistic views in practice. This book served as a model for the *Ingyen tanító francia nyelvmester (Free French Language-Master)* which includes his following language teaching principles: 1. Each word is taught in a sentence to the students. 2. The simplest sentences are followed by more and more difficult ones. 3. Each sentence contains only one new element of knowledge.

The publications of the *Kék Könyvtár (Blue Library)* provided the primary and high schools with first-class textbooks for sixty years.

His books, besides his series of books, were:

*Bévezetés a Világ, Föld és Statusok Esmeretébe (Introduction to the knowledge of the Globe, Earth and Status 1834)*

*A fiatal kereskedők arany ábéczéje (The gold alphabet of a young merchant 1847)*

*Algebrai gyakorlatok és kulcsok (Algebraic practices and keys. Two parts 1853)*

*A mezőgazdaság kézikönyve (Agricultural handbook 1856)*

*Új Magyar Fűvészkönyv (New Hungarian herbal manual 1858)*

*A föld egyes részeinek földirati ismertetése (Geography of a section of the Earth 1862)*

*Euklides elemei (Elements of Euclid. XV book 1865)*

*Laelius, hogyan kell és hogyan nem kell magyarázni az iskolában a latin auctorokat.*

*(According to Laelius how we can or cannot explain the Latin authors 1870)*

*Számítan a népiskolában (Arithmetic in public school. For teachers of first and second classes. Guidebook and exercises 1872)*

*Számvetés a népiskolában (Calculation in public school. 1872)*

*Algebrai gyakorlatok. Algebraic practices 1883-84) (It was passed as a textbook by the cabinet.)*

*A növénynevek leírása (Plant identification handbook 1888)*

He wrote his school-books in Hungarian; furthermore he taught only in Hungarian.

## V. Brassai's theory of method

### A) His universal principles of methodology

Brassai was engaged in researching the principles of methodology all his life. He was particularly occupied with this issue in one of his main works titled *A módszerről (Of Method, 1867)*. “*I didn't find a worthier subject to which I might apply philosophy than methodology, or to give its European name: methodus, not only now, but throughout my life*” – he wrote in the introduction.

According to his definition, methodology is an empirical, inductive idea that he used literally and in its wider meaning, too. In the narrow sense it means the method of teaching whose purpose is to stress some main features of the idea, to advance those means by which success might be achieved, and to consider processes. He expressed the view that we should undertake lifelong study, in his own words: “*the life of an educated man is unbroken learning*” (6).

He based his principles of methodology on speculation and experience, or more precisely on deduction and induction. He laid emphasis on the teacher-pupil relationship as one of the most important factors, pointing out, that the primary-school teacher is the ‘signaller’ in this relationship, whose role it is to ‘inspire, direct, and stimulate’, and the student's is to ‘perform’; it is for the student to be the ‘creator’, the executor. The main feature of the primary-school teacher is cleverness, whilst that of the student is attention – but it is best if the will and willingness are involved. The main and essential characteristic of study is that it is a natural activity, but teaching is artificial. He stressed, “*impatience is never very useful, but perhaps it is most harmful in the case of teaching*” (26), for the educated person must mature, and it requires time.

Time is needed if an anchor is to hold firm. Teachers have to teach soundly and slowly, to the same rhythm as the speed of the children's learning. This principle is adhered to in the pedagogy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but it shows how modern Brassai's views were that he had already advanced them in the 1830's. “*The wise method of teaching is not to imitate the woman cook who crams her goose, nor the pigeon who gives food to her nestling from her own mouth; it is to imitate the brood hen who makes her chickens walk on their own legs immediately, and she gets them used to eating by themselves*” (1861:15).

### 1. What to teach?

What is the principle that enables the method to be successful? The main principle, he says, is to choose the subject that arouses the intellectual ability of the student, leads his attention in a certain direction and controls it. He declares that the ancestor of any kind of teaching is language. Language teaching is the model of the “perfection of method” which exercises the memory and occupies the human brain for all time. That language is the mother tongue.

### 2. How to teach?

In the second part of the book he tries to find the answer to the question: “how?”, that had been such a problem in education because it had been treated so theoretically. To answer the question: What method should be used?, he lays down clear principles:

a.) *Only one thing at a time*

b.) *Explaining*

c.) *Gradual teaching*

– The teacher should proceed from unknown material to the known.

– New concepts should be taught step by step.

– During the teaching process the teacher should go from the simple to the complex, from the inferior to the superior.

d.) *The role of age*

He regarded the age factor as one of the most significant, and he was keen that it should be taken account of; it cannot be ignored by using any artificial tricks or stratagems. "...you do not expect more knowledge from a child than his cognitive development allows;...but you do not despise a young person, you do not lay waste his potential but latent ability" (1867:102). He warns parents also: "Parents, who want the best for your children, do not urge them unthinkingly!" (1867: 99).

e.) *Teaching the truth*

The teacher should not teach just true issues, claims Brassai, but should teach the whole truth so that facts and statements cohere. The application should be congruent with the theory.

f.) *The role of demonstration*

g.) *Motivation*

h.) *The importance of autonomous learning*

i.) *Practical repetition*

j.) *Avoiding overloading*

## **B) His basic principles regarding language teaching**

### **1. Summary of the history of methodology**

Brassai pays attention to the different aspects of language teaching,

He dedicates the *Okszerű vezér a német nyelv tanulásában (A Rational Guide to German Language Learning. Part I.* published in Kolozsvár in 1845) to Mihály Vörösmarty. He explains that there is a great need for a new method, which will make language acquisition faster, so that there would be enough time for learning practical knowledge. He admits that the mournful situation of language teaching forces him to write, and he explains the need for a faster language acquisition method. According to him his method is built "*not on fancy or sloppy facts, but it originates from nature and is based on 25 years of experience*" (1867:7).

In his three presentations entitled *A módszer és némi alkalmazásai (Methodology and Its Use)* held at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1867 he introduces his general principles of methodology;

He comprehensively expounds his views about language teaching in his book, which was written in German and was published in Kolozsvár in 1881, entitled *Die Reform des Sprachunterrichts in Europa - Ein Beitrag zur Sprachwissenschaft*. He was convinced of the correctness of his principles; Kaiblinger translated and published this work in Hungarian entitling it: *Brassai Sámuel nyelvtanítási reformja* in 1910, and adding his own commentary to it. Kaiblinger quotes, summarises and appreciates the principles and writings of Brassai about language teaching and, at the same time, he reviews the history of art, briefly, to justify the language teaching reform of Sámuel Brassai. The author writes about an initiative that started in Germany in 1882 whose representatives complain that language-teaching methods are "*worn-out, completely abortive*". They emphasise that grammatical rules do not have to be taught, but acquaintance with words and the forms of grammar should be got from live speech, as well as pronunciation and speech exercises. Posterity associates the devising and advertising of these reforming thoughts with the German writer Wilhelm Viëtor, who also calls his own work, the *Der Sprachunterricht muss umkehren* published in 1882, the launching of reform. He is considered the hypothetical founder of the new Direct Method. Viëtor mentions Brassai, quotes him and also refers to him in his book. He also gives the source in the note in which Brassai's quoted thoughts can be found: *Die Reform des Sprachunterrichts (Kolozsvár 1881!)*. The author claims that words are taught without using books; however, language does not consist of words but of sentences. Brassai had made this claim twenty years prior to Viëtor.

Brassai in this work – which, despite sharp academic criticism of the available methods of the time, lays emphasis on practising words and on the inductive teaching of words and grammar from sentences – only summarises for foreign readers what he had previously expounded several times in Hungarian, in various articles and books, and what he had put into practice successfully in the teaching of German and French. He claims the reign of grammar in language teaching had lasted for centuries.

He also gives a critical review of the methods of language learning that were used up to that time, which began with Donatus and ended with Gouin. Francois Gouin's work entitled *Exposé d'une nouvelle méthode linguistique (The art of language teaching and learning)* was published in 1880. The author's main principle is the demonstration and imitation of the acquisition of the first language: that is the language gets into the brain soonest through the ears. This book gave Brassai the opportunity to make foreign countries acquainted with his thoughts, too. It hurt his feelings that Gouin's principles caused a general sensation whilst his views were buried in his grammar books. Brassai explains that he is trying to give an account as well as he can of the main features of the 'new grammatical method', which is not an easy task from his point of view because it is not a fully worked out system, "so I was forced to collect everything from his wordy but defective, self-advertising book. The method was not tried in a school; the successes propagated in the book were conceived only in the author's dreams" – he writes (19).

## **2. His own principles of language teaching**

He summarizes his main ideas as follows:

1. To teach language and to teach grammar are two completely different things. Grammar contains rules and the learning of them concerns only the learner's memory.
2. The right language teaching provides the facts of the language for students; they thus learn the specific features of the language.
3. The sentences are the real, live 'persons' in every language.
4. The words and sentence forms should never be shown in isolation and one by one, but always in complete, round sentences.
5. The order of the forms is determined by the principle that the most relevant and the simplest precede the less relevant and more complicated.
6. The verb is the most relevant member (or element) of the sentence. So teaching has to begin with the simplest and most independent forms of the verb.
7. All the other co-ordinate members of the sentence concern the verb and their order of teaching is determined by their closer or looser relationship to the verb. So the sentence consists of the verb and the words which modify this; they are called in the wider sense of the word the 'complement'.

Brassai explains that these principles are not sudden inventions, but they have been employed in two grammar books assigned by him. Kaiblinger states "...if the Hungarian language teachers want to do their best to use the correct method, I cannot offer a better work than that of our own Brassai.... We Hungarians could lead in the matter of language teaching, if we appreciated our masters better" (1910:41).

## **3. Pronunciation**

In the field of teaching pronunciation, one of the most important innovations of Brassai's method is that he considers the sound to be more important than the letter, and emphasized the strict distinction between them. In his French course book, in the *Ingyen tanító francia nyelvmester (Free French Language-Master Part I)*, published in 1862, he gives detailed reading and pronunciation rules to help students to learn the right pronunciation.

## 5. Teaching vocabulary

In his French grammar book, in the *Ingyen tanító francia nyelvmester (Free French Language-Master Part I.* published in 1862) he describes his new way of teaching words, where the main point is that every word must be applied in a sentence to be learnt, and so the knowledge of the word is not only about learning its meaning or meanings, but also its usage, because "holding on" to words learnt in meaningful sentences is a lot easier and more certain.

Brassai was not only ahead of his time in regard to his methodological principle of learning vocabulary, but he described that used in 20th century modern-language learning. He held that words must be learnt in the course of lessons, and for this purpose a wealth of resources can help the teacher, especially if this is illustrative material. Brassai's word-learning principles are the opposite of the ruling grammar translation method which flourished at that time, with its word-studying/word-learning techniques, and in which the mode of inculcation was little more than cramming and mnemonic tricks.

## 6. Teaching grammar

His most daring innovation was to put the learning of grammar on an inductive basis. The use of the inductive principle in the learning of grammar means that the teacher provides plenty of examples of occurrences of the grammar point for an extended period; then, thanks to the examples, the students establish the grammatical rule for themselves. So this way leads from rich examples through exercises to an understanding of the rules and the grammar point in question.

## 7. Speech Practice

The development of speaking skills and the application of speech exercises “*are the precious supports of the Direct Method which were mentioned first and foremost, and in a systematic and conscious way, in Brassai’s book*” (Kaiblinger 1910:44).

*Brassai was the first person who introduced a system even into the conduct of conversations*” (Kaiblinger 1910:45).

# VI. Brassai’s linguistic work

## A) Overview

Brassai’s most permanent achievement falls in the field of linguistics. The most interesting questions and problems of Hungarian syntax lead us back to him even today. His linguistic work is wide-ranging and complex.

## B) The theory of the Hungarian sentence

Brassai received most acknowledgement for his linguistic works. Lajos Edélyi says that our modern syntactic literature begins with Brassai. Emil Kicska’s opinion is that: “*Brassai saw much deeper into the structure of a sentence than any other famous scholar, Gabelentz, Kern, Wegener, etc. along with Steinthal*” (1890:44). Many people think that Brassai’s idea of the central position of the verb is one of the most valuable.

Brassai’s ideas about syntax were in his time, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, completely new. According to Katalin É. Kiss the real importance of Brassai in linguistics was that he was the first in the world to describe the actual structure of the communicative sentence; in other words, he was the first who had the idea that a sentence can be broken into a topic and a comment. He created the first and up to now the only sentence model that was capable of generating and describing endless numbers of Hungarian sentences.

Brassai first published this theory about syntax in 1852. He summarises the essence of his theory: “The sentence is the person of the language. Words are only necessary members of the sentence”.

Researching the universal features of the sentence he concludes with the statement that the Hungarian sentence is not based on the dualism of the subject-predicate. He deals with this topic in one of his academic dissertations: *A mondat dualizmusa (The dualism of the sentence, 1885)*.

### **C) Stress**

As Brassai examined the principles of stress, he realised that before every Hungarian sentence there is an unstressed introductory segment. His theory is reliable even nowadays. He emphasises that only the contemporary spoken language can be the basis of a description of the language.

### **D) About translation**

His opinion was that it is not words that are important, but sentences. When translating, do not match word for word, but match sentence for sentence; the content is more important and the translation must focus on the thought pattern and the emotional and spiritual content of the writing. ‘There is only one absolute commandment for me: respect the ancient mother tongue!’ he says. He carefully safeguards the purity and correctness of the Hungarian language with regard to translations. But at the same time he also puts strong emphasis on the ‘loyalty’ of the translated text to the original.

## **VII. Conclusion**

He was an outstanding figure fighting for the teaching in the Hungarian language and modern language teaching pedagogy, and also a textbook-writer of European stature,

He was one of the first who recognized the hardships of education, the lack of proper methodology, the poor state of schools, but not just recognized but did for their improvement. He also educated the people with his newspaper, *The Sunday Paper*. He was the first to publish newspaper for the general public and the first as the publisher of journal for the young. He also stated that universities should be opened for women, too.

He was one of the first who made his voice heard in connection with education matters. His appearance meant change and reform in the life of the Unitarian College. He introduced a new syllabus, his most important issue was that the whole youth should study and should be taught to be self-supporting. The main objective of his school concept was using the Hungarian language in education. He wrote his schoolbooks in Hungarian and also held his lectures in Hungarian. He stated that the personality of the teacher has fundamental role in the teaching-learning process, also emphasized the need for competent teaching and declared that the pedagogical and methodological issues should be acquired.

Brassai’s most permanent achievement is in the field of linguistic science. His theories of the Hungarian sentence remain relevant to this day.

The *Okszerű vezér a német nyelv tanulásában (1847) (The Rational Guide of Teaching German)* - published ten times – was written to make language learning easier. its main concept is emphasizing the importance of speaking and sentences as basic units of language. He stated the primacy of sentences over words. With his concept of teaching vocabulary he preceded not only his age but his theories were concordant with the principles of 20<sup>th</sup> century language teaching.

One of the most important theories of his language teaching methodology is that he used for the first time and published in his course books in the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> century the

importance of developing speaking skills and with these ideas he preceded the direct method that formulated at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He gave instructions on the one hand how to apply the question-answer exercise making the grammar sense stronger, on the other hand how to develop speaking skills.

The practical use of language learning gets a central role emphasizing teaching speaking and pronunciation and using different types of exercises.

The original thinking is shown by stating that second language learning should be taught on the basis of the first language.

He emphasized the importance of pronunciation for the first time and the role of stress. He discovered sentence stress.

His modern thinking is shown that his concepts are expressed in the holistic communicative language learning. According to it during the learning process the whole personality, his ability, knowledge is being developed and made complete through exercises involving senses and emotions.

He emphasizes that in the learning process students have to have an active role and the importance of context and content based tasks that is one of the principles of CLL.

Considering the principle of grading he emphasizes that the teacher has to choose the material, the method in accordance with the different level of the development of the students.

He found the role of age important, this principle also shows his modern mind. The role of emotions and previous knowledge is a kind of new requirement in the process of ..

He could be the predecessor of life long learning of our age, his whole life is the example for this.

Affective Factors play a great role in the interpersonal communication as it greatly influences the teaching-learning relationship. He recognizes it and also emphasizes the student-centered teaching and that the students individual features should be considered during the teaching-learning process.

Brassai's most permanent achievement is in the field of linguistic science. His theory of the dualism of the Hungarian sentence, and of the accent in Hungarian remain relevant to this day. He is rightly called the 'last Transylvanian polymath' and the great teacher of the nation, the first methodologist of our country, and a textbook writer of European stature.

Brassai regarded language as the most real expression of mind and the mother tongue as the embodied national mind. A nation exists not only in conventions but primarily in language, he stated. Nobody has done so much for the maintenance and irreproachable clarity of the typical features of the nation as he did in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nobody fought against a dilution of Hungarianness as readily as he did. There were others, too, who were grieved to see the deterioration of our language and its saturation with outlandish expressions and unhungarian sequences of sentences. But it was Brassai who not only observed these things but also struggled against them like an "armed Goliath".

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Sámuel Brassai (June 15, 1800 – June 24, 1897) was a linguist and teacher sometimes called "The Last Transylvanian Polymath." In addition to being a linguist and pedagogue he was also a natural scientist, mathematician, musician, philosopher, essay writer, and a regular member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He is perhaps best known for teaching methods. Notes. Brassai Sámuel -a început studiile în casa părintească, în anturajul părintelui său, care era cunoscut drept un pedagog desăvârșit, continuând apoi în școlile de la Rimetea, Turda în Colegiul Unitarian din Cluj. Nu a urmat studii universitare. Începând cu anul 1818 a fost angajat în învățământ particular pentru copiii unor familii de nobili, predând discipline de științe ale naturii, limbi străine și muzică. He was one of the founders of the National Museum of Transylvanian History in Cluj, where he held the position of director for a decade (1963-1973). Between May 1949 - May 1973 Daicoviciu also held the position of director of the Institute of History and Archeology of Cluj, a scientific structure subordinated to the Romanian Academy. last rays. Explore gato-gato-gato's photos on Flickr. gato-gato-gato has uploaded 5266 photos to Flickr. View, deduce, imagine. Paris Photographers: Brassai, The Transylvanian Eye | Bonjour Paris. Brassai, born Gyula Halász in 1899, was a Hungarian-French sculptor, writer, filmmaker and photographer who rose to international fame in France during the 20th century. Brassai en el bellas artes de bsas. Brassai aux infinis talents Sámuel Brassai was a Hungarian linguist and teacher sometimes called "The Last Transylvanian Polymath." In addition to being a linguist and pedagogue he was also a natural scientist, mathematician, musician, philosopher, essay writer, and a regular member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He is perhaps best known for teaching methods.[3]. See more of Brassai Sámuel Elméleti Lásceum on Facebook. Log In. or. Create New Account. See more of Brassai Sámuel Elméleti Lásceum on Facebook. Log In. Forgot account? Online Ballagás a Brassai Sámuel Elméleti Lásceumban, Kolozsvár, 2020. This premiere video has ended. May 30 at 2:00 AM. Online Ballagás a Brassai Sámuel Elméleti Lásceumban, Kolozsvár, 2020. This video is now available to watch. Watch Now.