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TO IRISH THROUGH IRISH.

IV.—THE DIRECT METHOD.

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IN teaching by the *Modh Direach* or Direct Method, our main purpose is to connect with ideas from the very beginning new words and new forms of expression, so that the pupil learns to think in the new language. Between the new word and the new idea nothing must be interposed. The idea and the new word arise together in the mind, or rather the idea may be said to be clothed in the new word. Later, the ideas shape themselves into sentences in the moulds of the new language. And thus does the pupil acquire that language instinct, the linguist's most striking characteristic, which comes, not from a mere translating of one language into another, but from continuous thought in the new language.

Our work with the Phrase Method has been a preparation for this stage. We have, let us hope, created in our class-room a thoroughly Gaelic atmosphere. We have accustomed the ears of our pupils to all the sounds of the Irish language. Within the limits set by our own degree of proficiency they have become fluent speakers of a simple Gaelic. Many groups of words, possessing rhyme or rhythm or assonance, have been memorised—and our sentences and phrases have been carefully chosen not alone in relation to the present life and experience of the child, but with regard to the work we have yet to do. Without reference at all to grammatical principles or usages, placing no tax whatever on the reasoning powers of the child, we have given him sure command of the chief forms in which all utterance

in his native language must be cast. His many phrases are diverse moulds for speech—his chief need is now a larger vocabulary, and, somewhat later, a working literary knowledge of idiom and of grammatical “rules.” But as to grammar, have no fear of difficulties: infant though he is, the child possesses in his rhymes, songs, and phrases material which is amply illustrative of every rule of grammar and of many of the idioms, which he shall need in his studies at a primary school and later.

The Phrase Method has prepared the way for the Direct Method (nor has it ignored the Phonetic aspect of the language). And the Direct Method leads at once to what, for lack of a better term, we may call the Grammatical Method, though it includes much more than treatment of grammar, which is, after all, but the mechanics of a language. We wish to attain to the soul of the language; to appreciate its beauty; to realise its amazing flexibility, and how applicable it is to the practical affairs of our every-day life. Toward this we have been striving with the Phrase Method. And yet more enthusiastically must we now strive. We are generously equipped for the effort; our pupils ready to respond to it.

We must now begin to invest words—new words, and those we already know—with an intensity of meaning. We must follow nature. We must impel or inspire our pupils to find words for a self-expression which we render imperative. And we must be systematic, practising economy of time as well as of effort; for our pupils are not always with us.

In our teaching now we shall use a multitude of actual objects. We shall use an abundance of charts, pictures and sketches. A great diversity of action will be involved. Dramatisation of a simple kind will be a common feature of the lessons. Blackboard work should be plentiful—striking and possibly artistic work that will arrest the attention and satisfy the eye—for we must now appeal to the eye as well as to the ear. In our blackboard work, and in the lettering on charts and

pictures, we have the introduction to reading and to writing. Learning to read words and sentences by what we call the "look-and-say" method may be as yet only incidental to our oral work with objects and actions, but it will be variously effective—we shall not ask the pupils to read, but the words are there; the sentences; the names of objects, places, colours, acts; descriptive phrases; and they cannot but make an impression. Pupils may with benefit be encouraged to copy a word or two, even to make a single letter finely, or to transcribe a phrase they know in imitation of the teacher's writing. But formal lessons in reading and writing may be yet deferred. Systematic oral work is still our principal concern, and should be for at least a year in this junior class.

In teaching by the Direct Method it is inevitable that the children's ideas about things will be woven into some sort of grammatical or linguistic fabric whose texture will be markedly influenced by the phrases already learnt. It would be well, therefore, that each lesson should have in view a definite end, and that this end should be a mastery—unconscious perhaps—of some grammatical construction or rule. When we say this, we do not imply that the sequence of any text book in grammar should be followed. We mean that those features of grammar should be first introduced which are simplest and most easily illustrated, and then those which follow most naturally from the first. The same principle applied to the phrases and rhymes, framed by ourselves, or chosen for us by others, which we have already taught; and it has also guided most of the authors whose texts we have recommended.

Preference should always be given to the most useful or the most frequently recurring forms of speech. Part one of *Fios Feasa*, an admirable modern series by Séamus Ó Searcaigh, M.A., Ph.D., occurs to mind as an ideal book for use by the teacher at this stage. You cannot afford to hamper your pupil with a vocabulary which he cannot manipulate. A form which occurs fifty times in ordinary Gaelic

speech for once that another form occurs is fifty times more serviceable than the latter; and is, therefore, to have precedence in the teaching.

In choosing objects, materials, etc., for employment in our "Modh Direach" instruction, let us prudently choose some that are associated with the teaching of other subjects of the programme: Geography, Nature Study, Arithmetic, History, Drawing, Manual Training. At first we need choose but few. More can be gradually introduced.

At the infant stage we do scarcely more than suggest this. But we deem it most important that it should be kept in mind—for two good educational reasons. It enables you to make the Direct Method, as we have said, more truly *direct* by presenting to the child many things of which he need acquire *only the Irish name*. And it begins a perfectly reliable, but almost insensible, approach to the teaching of other subjects through the medium of the Gaelic.

Our chief aim is to impart to children between the ages of four and eight a vernacular command of the language. But we desire also to enable pupils to make an adequate response to our teaching, later, of other subjects. We wish to have them prepared to assimilate whatever instruction they may receive in these subjects through the medium of Irish. Their requirements in order to benefit by such instruction—or our own, to impart it—are not to be, as they sometimes are, greatly magnified. A vocabulary of twenty words peculiar to the teaching of Arithmetic, or of Geography, or of History, will take us a very long way indeed. Experienced teachers—highly efficient teachers—will bear us out in this. It is all a question of method, and of an appreciation of our own and our pupils' resources, as well as of the wonderful versatility of words.

Those other subjects, we may remark in passing, do not make upon us, or upon our pupils, the demands which at an earlier time even we ourselves were inclined to describe as excessive. History, as we all know, demands of a verb only its past tense; and Geography

only its present, as a rule. For the rest, these subjects are but a matter of phrase and of proper names. Arithmetic involves numbers chiefly, and a limited use of the imperative and conditional moods. Drawing is a restricted series of actions. And so on. From the very first lesson we may be truly said to be preparing to teach *any* subject through the medium of Irish, and preparing our pupils to respond to our teaching. As to the actual technique involved, every trained teacher has it, or ought to have it, from his training college and his post-graduate reading and experience.

Let us now summarise briefly the most important points to be considered in connection with our *Modh Direach* method of teaching:—

1. The pupils should have already acquired abundance and diversity of phrase.
 2. The lessons should follow a grammatical, or, rather, a logical, sequence, one feature of grammar, which is a science as well as an art, being concentrated upon at a time, and the most useful or recurrent having precedence always. Avoid the artificial. Work out a story or dialogue in a perfectly natural way, craftsmanship ensuring the definite result you have planned.
 3. In choosing objects, etc., with which to teach or to illustrate the teaching, do not fail to include—
 - (a) common objects the sound or the spelling of whose names approximates to the English;
 - (b) objects which are *not* familiar to the pupils, and whose English names are unknown;
 - (c) objects and topics associated with other subjects of the curriculum.
 4. Be enthusiastic in creating an Irish atmosphere in the class, and insist that, as far as possible, only the Gaelic speech be used.
 5. Let the work be entirely conversational. Formal reading and writing will come later.
 6. Do not ask questions which you cannot expect your pupils to answer; or give any direction impossible for them to understand.
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7. As with the Phrase Method, permit much simultaneous answering, but see to it that individual response is satisfactory, especially to questions whose answers require thought.
8. Make plentiful use of the blackboard, and have a good supply of pictures, charts, etc., as well as of common objects.
9. Draft your scheme of lessons well in advance and amend it when necessary.
10. Remember always what your ultimate aim is: preparation of yourself and your pupils for instruction through the medium of Irish—but note that the Ministry's demands are scarcely demands at all: the programme recognises our difficulties and makes allowance for them.
11. Read *The Teacher's Guide to Irish Teaching of Children* (Dundalgan Press, Dundalk), and write the same publishers for specimen copies of *The Cuchulainn Modh Direach Readers*. We can strongly recommend them. See also what can be done with the *Éarlamh Éireann* series of An tAthair Pádraig Ua Duinnín, and the *Fios Feasa* books already mentioned. (Both published by Messrs. Browne & Nolan).
12. Select once in a while a suitable little song. Deal in a language lesson with its "naming words" and "action words." At a music lesson teach the young people the air of the song. When they can confidently lilt the tune, sing the words for them twice or thrice yourself, and invite them then to join in the singing. (In the absence of piano or harmonium, a fiddle does splendidly—an orchestra of four or five strings is possible in most schools.)

Reading and writing must next claim our attention, and from these we shall proceed to the more advanced work, to certain points in Grammar teaching, and to a consideration of other requirements of the Ministry's Programme.

(To be continued.)