



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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Mrs. Steinthal then asked MADEMOISELLE DURIAUX to read her paper on

THE PRINCIPLES INVOLVED IN LANGUAGE TEACHING.

(CONDENSED REPORT.)

MADEMOISELLE DURIAUX: Mrs. Steinthal, ladies and gentlemen, before beginning the real subject of my paper, I should like to thank the Committee of the P.N.E.U. for allowing me to bring before you this important subject.

The importance of acquiring languages is now a recognised fact. We come in contact with people from all parts of the world, and yet we cannot always make ourselves understood by them, not because we have not studied their language, but because we have not gone the right way to work in learning it. I often ask when giving a first lesson to teachers, "What do you mean by learning a new language?" The answer is very simple—"To learn to say everything in that language that you would wish to say in your own."

Teaching a language is not merely putting into the pupil's brain a string of verbs and grammar, but it should be an interchange of ideas between pupil and teacher, in fact a living thing.

Our best teacher and guide in this respect is a baby. How quickly it learns anything new. "Oh yes," you say, "but a baby is different from a child of five or six." Yet how easily a child of five or six will learn a foreign language from a nurse. In fact, a little child will profit more from the simple, living teaching of a nurse than from the tuition of the ablest professor. The child does not want grammatical rules, syntax, &c., and it is certainly a mistake to start by giving it anything but oral teaching, *i.e.*, conversation, which means, really, patient repetition. The teacher must proceed in the same way as a mother, who repeats the simple word "Mamma" a dozen times before her baby will imitate the spoken sound. The pupil must first understand, then imitate, and finally attain fluency or ability to repeat what has been heard. In teaching language infinite patience is required. We cannot learn a language in six lessons; and let me beg you to think

less about results, and to think a great deal more about ways and means of developing the little minds. As regards *method of teaching*, nothing has so far been done to surpass the work of M. Gouin. As you see, I strongly advocate oral teaching. When discussing the subject of how languages are taught at schools, I am often told that boys understand what is written, but can make nothing of the language when spoken. Is not this radically wrong? If you are abroad, or if you are speaking a foreign language, you have no time to think of the application of rules when you wish to make yourself understood.

About teachers. Choose good teachers. And no one should undertake to teach what he does not thoroughly know himself, either in language or in any other branch. The teacher should always prepare his lesson even for the very youngest children, and should not go to the lesson with a book at all. In fact, the best teachers should be given to the little ones. We often hear it said that English people are no linguists, and why? Because they have had no chance of becoming so. Boys are filled with the idea that it is *infra dig.* for an English boy to learn French or German, and they nurse the idea and trade on it. I have thought sometimes that the heads of English schools may have been to some extent somewhat to blame for this state of things; but they are certainly now beginning to give a more honourable place to the study of French or German, and in time their pupils may give up their preconceived ideas on this subject.

Not long ago I placed a gentleman as a teacher of French at a seaside school. He wrote that he found the boys terribly backward in French, but gave them two lessons and made them work hard. He added, "they seem to like it, however, for they have since elected me vice-president of their cricket club." That French teacher was evidently the right man in the right place.

The time given to French in our schools is most inadequate, scarcely ever more than two hours per week. I would plead for at least one more hour. Much might be done if parents would but protest against this state of things, and the demand for more time for modern languages would create the supply. A gentle hint from many parents would influence headmasters, and they in their turn would influence examiners,

for in that quarter also we must try to bring influence to bear so as to obtain a chance of an oral test as well as of a written one for our students.

[Mademoiselle Duriaux was here interrupted in her paper by a request that she would give a short specimen lesson. She replied that she was quite unprepared, but would gladly do so if the meeting wished it. This was decided by a show of hands, and Mademoiselle Duriaux continued.]

My teaching has been inspired by reading M. Gouin's *L'art d'enseigner et d'étudier les langues*. Gestures which are greatly used by foreigners should be helpful to the teacher.

A discussion followed, and in answer to the question whether it would not be easier to bring the actual objects into use, Mademoiselle Duriaux said that actions and objects should be *imagined*, as this was of itself of great educational value to the child.

MRS. FRANKLIN added that Mademoiselle Duriaux is always pleased to lecture to branches, to explain her method and illustrate it by a lesson.

N.B.—Instead of a report of Mademoiselle Duriaux's lesson, which of necessity was very short (two or three sentences only being taken), we would ask our readers to study carefully the preface of Mademoiselle Duriaux's book, "The Study of French" (Macmillan & Co.). She insisted particularly on the fact that the *ear* is to be the principal factor, the receptive organ in the study of languages; then, as a second point, that when the sounds are mastered, the words should be written on the board, so that the eye may come as a help to the ear and work in co-operation with it.

Condensed report of a paper read by MISS McMILLAN, a member of the Bradford School Board, on

MANUAL TRAINING.

MISS McMILLAN said that the subject of Manual Training was a very vast one, and could be studied from many stand-points. The masters of painting, drawing, Sloyd, wood-carving, metal work, or even of laundry work or cooking, might all come forward and give details of their methods, showing the utility of manual training, which, however, is only one side of the subject.

Carlyle told us that the epic of our age is no longer "Arms and the man," but "Tools and the man." If this is the epic of the age for adults, there has certainly been a corresponding change in education. We no longer say to a child "Know thyself," but "Try to find out what you will be able to work at."

There is little doubt that as our knowledge of the nervous system increases, the value of manual training as a means of development will be almost universally acknowledged. Nearly everyone experiences a certain kind of obstruction to the taking in of knowledge, though we do not observe this in normal persons, because they are always making semi-conscious efforts which veil much of this daily battle; but in feeble-minded children or in children of slow response we may study the difficulties or obstructions in receptivity of the nervous system.

One order of feeble-minded children is called "The order of children of slow response." Let us suppose that one of these hears an amusing remark. The meaning of the remark reaches the child slowly; after some pause, after considerable delay, perhaps, a smile breaks over the heavy features. Here we have an illustration of difficulty in transmission. Or take the echolalic type of child. This child answers no questions—never listens—resigns the task of dealing with a question, as it were, and falls back on repetition. In both cases we get a hint of real obstruction in the organism itself, a difficulty akin to that we ourselves experience when we rally our energies for some task too great for them.