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Title	Bunú Choláiste Chomhghaill, Béal Feirste 1905
Author(s)	Mac Congáil, Nollaig
Publication Date	2009
Publication Information	Mac Congáil, N. (2009) Bunú Choláiste Chomhghaill, Béal Feirste 1905 in Micheál Mac Craith & Pádraig Ó Héalaí (eag.), <i>Diasa Díograise. Aistí in Ómós do Mháirtín Ó Briain, Cló Iar-Chonnachta</i> 109-27.
Item record	http://hdl.handle.net/10379/1439

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CÚLRA BHUNÚ CHOLÁISTE GAEILGE BHÉAL FEIRSTE

COLÁISTE CHOMHGHAILL 1905

Nollaig Mac Congáil

Cuid lárnach de rath Chonradh na Gaeilge ó thús an chéid seo caite ar aghaidh a bhí sna Coláistí Gaeilge. D'aithin an Conradh tábhacht an chórais oideachais in Athbheochan na Gaeilge agus nár leor a bheith i

dtuilleamaí Rialtas an ama sin le beart cuí a dhéanamh ar an ócáid agus nár leor a bheith ag brath ar dhíograiseoirí Gaeilge mar a bhí go dtí sin leis an Ghaeilge a theagasc go héifeachtach:

The early teachers in the League were untrained voluntary workers, but among them were a few who appreciated the need for effective teaching methods, for teaching aids, and for qualified teachers.¹

Ar bhealach, d'fhéadfaí a rá go rabhthas ag teacht ar an tuiscint go mbeadh gá feasta le hoiliúint agus le gairmiúlacht i gcur chuige theagasc na Gaeilge:

Shan Ó Cuív² proposed in August 1903 that a special school be established to provide intensive training courses for the League's teachers, and particularly for the travelling teachers. The proposal was accepted and the first Irish College – Coláiste na Mumhan in Ballingearry – was opened the following July. In 1905 three similar colleges were established – one in Tourmakeady, one in Ring and one in Belfast, while two more were added the following year – one in Cloghaneely, the other in Dublin.

Cuireadh an chéad Choláiste Gaeilge nó Coláiste Múinteoireachta mar a thugtaí go minic orthu ar bun, mar atá, Coláiste na Mumhan i mBéal Átha an Ghaorthaidh, Co. Chorcaí, sa bhliain 1904. As sin a tháinig. Chuir sin tús ceart le Coláistí Gaeilge eile a bunaíodh thall is abhus ar fud na tíre ina dhiaidh sin agus a bheadh bunaithe cuid mhór ar a raibh á chur i gcrích i gColáiste na Mumhan. Rinne na Coláistí eile aithris ar Choláiste na Mumhan ar thrí chúis:

¹ Breandán S. Mac Aodha, 'Was This a Social Revolution?' in Seán Ó Tuama (eag.) *The Gaelic League Idea* (The Mercier Press, 1972) 21-2.

² 'Bhí baint mhór aige le bunú Choláiste na Mumhan i 1904. Ag Dáil na Mumhan i Lúnasa 1903 ba é a mhol go mbunófaí coláiste 'chun cainteoirí Gaeilge d'ullmhú i gcomhair múinteoireacht na teanga' in Diarmuid Breathnach agus Máire Ní Mhurchú, *1882-1982 Beathaisnéis a Dó* (An Clóchomhar 1990) 92.

- B'ionann cuspóir do na Coláistí Gaeilge ar fad go bunúsach
- B'ionann an curaclam agus an cur chuige agus an mhodheolaíocht a bhí i bhfeidhm iontu uilig
- Rinneadh cuid mhór den fhoireann teagaisc sna Coláistí Gaeilge a oiliúint ar chúrsaí Choláiste na Mumhan nó fuair siad oiliúint ó mhúinteoirí a d'fhreastail ar chúrsaí ansin.

Cuspóir na gColáistí Gaeilge

Cuimhnítear ar chuspóirí na gColáistí Gaeilge i gcoitinne óir b'ionann iad ó cheann go ceann:

*The object of the college will be to afford means by which teachers in Gaelic League branches and secondary and primary schools may obtain a thoroughly efficient training in the best methods of language teaching as applied to Irish. Special attention will be devoted to the requirements of teachers who are at present unacquainted with Irish.*³

Bhain teagasc na Gaeilge ag leibhéal éagsúla go lárnach leis an scéal ach bhí a thuilleadh i gceist fosta. Díríodh ar ghnéithe eile de stair agus de theanga agus de litríocht na Gaeilge gan trácht ar chultúr na Gaeilge i gcoitinne. Dá thairbhe sin, ba léir nach cúrsa feidhmeach i sealbhú agus i seachadadh theanga na Gaeilge amháin a bhí i gceist ach cúrsa a bhí ag cur go maith le cuspóirí éagsúla na hAthbheochana.

Bunaíodh na chéad Choláistí Gaeilge i gceantair Ghaeltachta, mar atá, Coláiste na Mumhan i mBéal Átha an Ghaorthaidh sa bhliain 1904 agus, an bhliain dár gcionn, Coláiste na Rinne, Co. Phort Láirge, agus Coláiste Chonnacht, Co. Mhaigh Eo. Bunaíodh Ard-Scoil Cholm Cille (Coláiste Uladh), Co. Dhún na nGall, sa bhliain 1906. Bhain eilimintí láidre

³ *The Irish Peasant*, 10.2.06.

éagsúla leis na Coláistí sin nár bhain leis na Coláistí Gaeilge a bunaíodh i mBéal Feirste (Coláiste Chomhghaill sa bhliain 1905) agus Coláiste Laighean (Baile Átha Cliath sa bhliain 1906). I gcomhthéacs idé-eolaíocht agus bholscaireacht Chonradh na Gaeilge ón tús, bhain tábhacht mhór leis na ceantair Ghaeltachta nó is ansin a bhí anam na nGael, is ansin a bhí oidhrí dlisteanacha an chine Gael ina gcónaí. B'ionann an Ghaeltacht agus tobar na Gaeilge, lárionad an dúchais agus an ceangal gan bhriseadh le chuile ghné d'oidhreacht na Gaeilge ón am fadó a bhí an tír seo ina lóchrann léinn is creidimh d'iarthar na Eorpa. Chuidigh an bholscaireacht sin ar son na Gaeltachta agus cúis eile, mar atá, go raibh na cúrsaí sin ar siúl i rith an tsamhraidh – aimsir saoire, aimsir mhaith, áilleacht na háite, siamsaíocht a bhain leis na cúrsaí, éalú ón chathair, caidreamh le héagsúlacht daoine idir fhir agus mhná – chuidigh na rudaí sin uilig le daoine a mhealladh ó achan chearn den tír agus den domhan, féadaim a rá, agus cha raibh na daoine sin fuar ná falsa ag déanamh bolscaireachta ar son na gColáistí sin.

Cúis thábhachtach eile a chuidigh le daoine a mhealladh ionsar na Coláistí Gaeilge sa Ghaeltacht, go raibh an Ghaeilge á labhairt ansin ó dhuine liath go leanbh agus gurbh fhéidir blaiseadh de thraidisiún na hamhránaíochta agus na scéalaíochta agus iad beo beathach i measc na ndaoine. Rud eile atá ar shlí a ráite faoi na Coláistí Gaeilge luatha amuigh faoin tír, is cainteoirí dúchais ó na Cúigí inar lonnaíodh na Coláistí na chéad mhúinteoirí den chuid is mó. I dTuar Mhic Éadaigh, bhí Micheál Breathnach, Pádraic Ó Domhnalláin agus Máire Ní Thuathail.⁴ I gColáiste na Mumhan bhí 'Feargus Finnbhéil,' an Dr.

⁴ *Coláiste Chonnacht: na Blianta Tosaigh i dTuar Mhic Éadaigh* (Coiste Oidhreachta Thuar Mhic Éadaigh, 2005) 159-64.

Risteárd Ó Dálaigh agus Áine Ní Raghallaigh.⁵ Canúint Chonallach ó chainteoirí dúchais as Tír Chonaill i gcás thromlach na múinteoirí a bhí i bhfeidhm i gColáiste Uladh. Éistear, mar shampla, leis an bholscaireacht seo faoi Choláiste Uladh:

*As is already known the object of this College is to help in the revival of the Northern dialect of Irish. The great object of placing the College in Cloghaneely is that here the pupils can gain proficiency in a colloquial knowledge of the language. Nowhere could they have greater advantages. For twenty miles round they will hear Irish spoken. 'Irish in the home, the school, the church.' And no better opportunity could be found in the North by those anxious to obtain certificates for teaching Irish in the schools by the new and direct method. Irish is not a dead language in Cloghaneely, but very much alive, and its people are a great example to the rest of Ulster. In spite of going to England and America for a livelihood, they still uphold their own language, and the children talk it far more freely than the tongue of the foreigner which has, alas! so successfully invaded almost every other part of Ulster.*⁶

Bhí cuid mhór de na heilimintí tábhachtacha sin ar iarraidh maidir leis na Coláistí Gaeilge a lonnaíodh i mBéal Feirste agus i mBaile Átha Cliath. Rinneadh iad a reáchtáil i gcathracha móra gallda a bhí lán toite agus tormáin i ndúláíocht an gheimhridh istigh faoi dhíon. Ní raibh rud ar bith rómánsach ná draíochtúil ag baint leis na gnoithe ach cúis dháiríre fhoghlaím na Gaeilge i measc daoine aosacha a chónaigh in abhantrach na gColáistí sin. Rud eile atá ar shlí a ráite anseo maidir le Coláiste Chomhghaill de, níor chuidigh sé le canúint Chúige Uladh ag an tús:

*It is an anomaly that Munster Irish should be taught in Belfast.*⁷

⁵ An tAthair Gearóid Ó Nualláin, *Beatha Dhuine a Thoil* (Oifig an tSoláthair, 1950) 49.

⁶ *The Irish Peasant*, 11.8.06, 3.

⁷ *The Irish Peasant*, 11.8.06, 3. Mar leigheas éigin ar an scéal sin, tuairiscíodh ar *The Derry Journal* (3.10.10, 2): '[that] Mr. Sharkey had been appointed professor at St. Comgall's Irish College, Belfast.'

Is léir mar sin má bhí pointí láidre gaoil idir na Coláistí geimhridh sa ghalltacht agus na Coláistí samhraidh sa Ghaeltacht, bhí difríochtaí ollmhóra eatarthu chomh maith.

B'fhéidir, áfach, nach miste pointe tábhachtach maidir le bunú coláistí Gaeilge i gcathracha na Galltacha a lua anseo. Luadh na buanna a bhain lena mbunú i dtimpeallacht na Gaeltachta ach bhí an méid seo a leanas le rá ag an Athair Pádraig Ó Duinnín i mBéal Feirste:

The problem of the Irish districts closely concerns the entire island. The attitude towards the Irish language displayed by the people in every corner of the island has a powerful and direct influence on that problem. But it is especially from the large and important centres of population like Belfast, Dublin, Cork, Derry, Waterford, Limerick, that we may expect the greatest help or the most obstructing hindrance in the solution of this problem. These cities, if they be affected towards the Irish language as they ought, will be like the sheltering woods that protect our garden from the biting North wind in the winter. If Irish is held in honour in Belfast, it will be held in honour in Gweedore...⁸

Curaclam Choláiste Chomhghaill

Caithfear cuimhneamh nach i bhfolús ná *in vacuo* a bunaíodh Coláiste Chomhghaill. Cuid de phlean chuimsitheach náisiúnta a bhí ann ar cuireadh tús leis le bunú na gcoláistí samhraidh. Is léir go raibh aontas maidir le haidhm, cuspóir agus cur chuige eatarthu uilig nó, mar rud amháin, bhíodh comhdháil ag na ‘Coláistí Gaelacha’ seo anois is arís le ceisteanna áirithe a bhain leo féin ach go sonrath a phlé. Mar shampla, tionóladh cruinniú de theachtairí ó na Coláistí seo ar 8.6.07 in Áras Choláiste Laighean, Baile Átha Cliath agus ag an chomhdháil sin phléigh siad An Bord Náisiúnta, An Clár Dátheangach, Scrúduithe sna Coláistí,

⁸ *Sinn Féin*, 6.10.06, 1.

Príomhtheastais sna Coláistí, Táillí srl. Ar ócáid eile chuir siad liosta comónta téarmaíochta le chéile a bheadh in úsáid sna Coláistí ar fad.

Seo a leanas, mar shampla, an cúrsa a bhí i bhfeidhm sa *Munster Training College* sa bhliain 1904:

1. *Linguistic, comprising phonetics, grammar and prose composition, poetry, reading, recitation and story-telling.*
2. *Methods of teaching, including lectures on methods, demonstration of methods, and practice in same.*
3. *History of literature.*
4. *History of Ireland.*
5. *Vocal music.*
6. *Dancing.*
7. *Lectures on miscellaneous subjects.*
8. *Games and amusements.*⁹

Tá fhios againn go raibh an curaclam a bhí i bhfeidhm i gColáiste Chonnacht agus i gColáiste Uladh gar go maith do cheann Choláiste na Mumhan.

Cuid lárnach de chláir teagaisc na gColáistí Gaeilge an cúram a rinneadh de mhodh teagaisc na Gaeilge nó chuige sin go bunúsach a cuireadh na Coláistí ar bun an chéad lá riamh. Is eol dúinn go raibh *An Modh Réidh* nó *Díreach* in úsáid agus is modh é sin a bhí bunaithe ar an lámhleabhar teagaisc de réir an Mhodha Dhírigh darbh ainm *An Modh Réidh leis an nGaedhilge do Mhúnadh* a scríobh Pádraic Mac an Fhailghe.¹⁰ Ba mhór

⁹ *The United Irishman*, 4.6.04, 1.

¹⁰ Baile Átha Cliath, An Cló-Chumann, g.d. Tá cuntas fada ar an ábhar seo tugtha ag Seán Ó Catháin ar ‘Modern Language Teaching’ ar *An Claidheamh Soluis* (11.9.09, 11).

an dul chun cinn a bhí sa chóras teagaisc seo ar a raibh ann roimhe sin agus is cinnte gur chuir idir lucht teagaisc agus lucht foghlama fáilte is fiche roimhe. Rud inspéise eile, léirigh sé go raibh fonn ar lucht an Chonartha san am an *modus operandi* ab éifeachtaí agus ba nua-aimseartha a bhí ar fáil san am le teagasc na Gaeilge a aimsiú agus a chur in úsáid. Is cinnte gur chuidigh an córas nua seo le hoiliúint ghairmiúil a chur ar na múinteoirí ó thaobh an teagaisc de.

Is breá gur fhág Seaghán Ó Catháin cuntas ar an mhodh teagaisc a chuir sé féin i bhfeidhm ar Choláiste Chomhghaill óir ba mhúinteoir é a chreid: *‘If Irish is not taught efficiently on oral, rational, up to date methods, it is almost as well not to trouble about teaching it at all:’*¹¹

*Direct Method lessons in Irish conversation, including a lesson from **Cainnt**¹² each night, chiefly occupies us during this first hour. Rarely, if ever, is any English used, all the instruction being visualised and noted (?) and a number of devices introduced which render English unnecessary. The students enter into the spirit of the work with great animation. They appear to enjoy it, in fact the ‘practising class’ I mentioned above sails along as gaily as the others. This part of the work is also made to serve as a Demonstration Lesson in Method for here, as in most things, example is much better than precept and theory. These latter have their uses too.*

Conversation and Home Work

This lecture is followed by conversational lessons of an advanced nature and on methodical lines. English is here rigidly tabooed.

¹¹ ‘John O’Keane on the Irish Training School, Belfast’ ar *The Irish Peasant* (30.12.05, 3).

¹² Seaghán Ó Catháin, Browne & Nolan, Dublin, 1905. Luaitear ar *The Leader* (16.9.05, 50) faoin údar go raibh sé ina ‘Lecturer in Method at the Munster Training College.’ Scríobh Pádraig Ó h-Ógáin cuntas ar an leabhar seo agus foilsíodh é ar *The Irish Peasant*, 16.12.05. Scríobh sé mar seo a leanas faoi: ‘*Cainnt* is a book which no teacher or learner of our native language can afford to do without. It embodies a method of teaching a language hitherto scarcely dreamt of, a method, which, as applied to Irish, has proved that the last word has not been uttered on the subject of the easiest manner of acquiring a language.’

There is no necessity for it and its introduction would only distract the students, would in every respect indeed be a serious mistake linguistically. Dent's large language charts of the seasons serve as a basis for conversation, and by their aid one can make the work as varied and as interesting as is necessary. A short piece of excellent Irish prose is also made to serve as a centre of instruction in conversation and grammar and so on. There is, however, no teaching of grammar as such, the subject being taught inductively. Similarly, in regard to the home work, there are no translation and grammar exercises, the students' minds being concerned only with the Irish language itself during the whole work of the school. Practically every lesson is given as a model or demonstration lesson and it is very satisfactory to be able to add that a large number of the teachers who attend have already begun to follow, in their own teaching of Irish, the method of this Training School.¹³

Bhí an-tóir go deo sna Coláistí Gaeilge ar an fhoghraíocht maidir le teagasc teanga, a bhuíochas sin do thionchar na scoláirí Eorpacha agus a gcuid oibre sa réimse seo. Charbh eisceacht ar bith é Coláiste Chomhghaill sa chás seo. Seo a leanas Seaghán Ó Catháin ag cur síos ar an ábhar:

'The Fascination of Phonetics. A lecture on Irish Phonetics, usually lasting about twenty minutes, is the next item in our evening's work. I understand there were some amusing conjectures as to this same Phonetics course before we started. Some could think of it only in connection with Pitman's shorthand, or the O'Growney Keywords! There were others whose aesthetic sense revolted at what they thought would be 'a phonetic rendering' similar to what Irish singers occasionally treat us. Fortunately, a few of the students were already good Irish phoneticians, having sat at the Rev. Dr. O'Daly's feet during two summer courses at Ballingeary. I believe these reassured some of the other students. Now that they understand something of this science, and witness its application in the correct teaching of Irish sounds, I think they agree that a knowledge of Phonetics is as necessary to the teacher of Irish (or of any living language) as a knowledge of musical notes is to the teacher of music. When one gets beyond the preliminary stages, too,

¹³ 'John O'Keane on the Irish Training School, Belfast' ar *The Irish Peasant* (30.12.05, 3).

*the study of Irish Phonetics is a most fascinating one. A lecture on Phonetics need never be without its humorous side, which is a blessing.*¹⁴

An Dr. Risteárd Ó Dálaigh a chuir tús leis an réimse léinn seo sna Coláistí Gaeilge nuair a rinne sé cúrsa foghraíochta a theagasc i gColáiste na Mumhan ón bhliain 1904 ar aghaidh. Cuimhníonn an Dr. Gearóid Ó Nualláin ar an chúrsa chéanna sin:

Bhí taighde cruinn beacht déanta aige ar fhoghráidheacht na Gaoluinne, agus muna mbeadh é, ar éigin a bheadh puinn trácht' ar an bhfoghráidheacht i gColáistíbh na Gaoluinne indiu. Bhí obair chruaidh roimis amach nuair a chrom sé ar a chur i dtuisgint do'n phobal Gaedhealach nárbh' ealadha dhóibh bheith ad' iarraidh an Ghaoluinn d'aithbheochaint muna gcuirfidís suim i bhfoghráidheacht na teangan. Adhbhar tur titim ab' eadh an fhoghráidheacht – do'n choitchiantacht. Ach ní de'n choitchiantacht do'n Dochtúir Ó Dálaigh.¹⁵

Gan amhras, thóg Séamus Ó Searcaigh (a d'fhreastail ar Choláiste na Mumhan sa chéad bhliain) galar na foghraíochta agus chuaigh sé chomh mór i bhfeidhm air gur scríobh sé *Foghráidheacht Ghaedhilge an Tuaiscirt* blianta ina dhiaidh sin.¹⁶ Seo a leanas é ag trácht ar an ábhar sin maidir le hArd-Scoil Cholm Cille (Coláiste Uladh):

Ealadha na Fogharachta a bhí ag Éamonn [Ó Tuathail] dá cur thríd a chéile. Mhol sé go mór an Dr. Ó Dálaigh as a bhfuil déanta aige ar son na hEaladhan so i nÉirinn. Measaim-se gurab é Risteárd de Heneberg, sagart, atá i nDéisibh Mumhan an chéad fhear a sgríobh leabhar fa dtaobh de fhogharacht na Gaedhilge. Acht 'sé an Dr. Ó Dálaigh a chuir sinn uilig a smaointiughadh uirthi.

¹⁴ 'John O'Keane on the Irish Training School, Belfast' ar *The Irish Peasant* (30.12.05, 3).

¹⁵ An tAthair Gearóid Ó Nualláin, *Beatha Dhuine a Thoil* (Oifig an tSoláthair, 1950) 50.

¹⁶ Brún agus Ó Nualláin, *Béal Feirste*, 1925.

B'fhéidir go sílfidhe as a bhfuil ráidhte agam annso gur beag a ghnítheas ag Fogharacht an bealach so. Caithtear uair gach lá ag gabháil di ar an Choláiste i gCloich Cheann Fhaolaidh. Ghnítheas dhá rang de na sgoiláiribh. Cuirtear duine i gcionn ranga aca a theagasc na healadhan dóbhtha i nGaedhilg.¹⁷

Bhí an cúrsa foghraíochta *de rigueur* sna Coláistí Gaeilge ar fad ón tús agus meas mór ar an ealaín chéanna.¹⁸

Thar aon rud eile, bhí na Coláistí Gaeilge dírithe ar dhaoine a bheadh ag teagasc na Gaeilge, mar atá, múinteoirí den chuid is mó. Seo a leanas tuairim Sheagháin Uí Chatháin ar an téad seo:

The teachers of Irish should, he maintained, be the real leaders of the Irish Language movement. All other phases of Gaelic League energy – the propagandist, the literary, the social – all aimed, or naturally should aim, at developing, extending, improving, and, of course, obtaining facilities for the teaching of Irish. The teacher of Irish was the centre of the Gaelic League system, and the branch or committee of the League in which his counsel was not properly regarded was in an unhealthy condition, from the Gaelic point of view. He held the key to the situation, but this very responsibility should only make him all the more careful to equip himself properly for his important work and position, and to see that the legitimate objects of the Gaelic League were ever put before all other considerations. As the teacher of Irish did his work, so would the organization, of which he was the life and light. It behoved the teacher of Irish, therefore, to be a master in these three respects – to be a master, especially an oral master, of the Irish language; to be a master of the method of teaching it, and to be a master of his class. Irish teachers, take your rightful place in the life of the nation.¹⁹

Bunú Choláiste Chomhghail

¹⁷ *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 14.7.09, 4-5.

¹⁸ Féach, mar shampla, Pádraig Ua Duinnín, 'Irish Phonetics' ar *The Leader*, 9.9.05, 40-1.

¹⁹ *The Irish School Weekly*, 7.10.05, 208.

Cuireadh tús le Coláiste Chomhghaill i mBéal Feirste ar 13 Mí Dheireadh Fómhair, 1905. Ní miste a rá anseo, dála an scéil, nach Coláiste Chomhghaill a bhí ar an choláiste seo sna chéad bhlianta. Tugadh ‘An Scoil Ghaelach, Béal Feirste’ air nó, as Béarla, ‘The Belfast Training College for Irish’ nó ‘The Belfast Irish Training School’ nó ‘Irish Training School,’ óir ba mhinic an teideal ag athrú ó fhoinse go foinse nuair a bhítí ag cur síos air sna nuachtáin. Ag deireadh na bliana 1907 a athraíodh an t-ainm a bhí air go dtí Coláiste Chomhghaill:

As if to signify the great extension in the scope of the College, and to set a high ideal before all associated with it, its name has been changed from ‘An Sgoil Ghaedhealach’ to ‘Coláiste N. Comhghaill,’ after St. Comghall, the founder of the celebrated school at Bangor in the golden age of Irish learning. Under the former name the College has been widely and favourably known since its foundation in October, 1905.²⁰

Ní miste a mheabhúrú daoibh anseo fosta go raibh Coláiste Oiliúna de chuid an Rialtais ag feidhmiú ag an am chéanna i mBéal Feirste, mar atá, Naomh Muire – ach sin scéal eile agus lá eile dúinn á phlé sin.

D’iarr Seosamh Cuipéir, Rúnaí Choiste Ceantair Bhéal Feirste ar Sheaghán Ó Catháin a bhí fostaithe mar oifigeach custaim agus máil i mBéal Feirste agus a raibh baint aige roimhe sin le Coláiste na Mumhan, d’iarr sé ar Sheaghán²¹ ‘*whether I would not arrange to do something on the Ballingearry lines in Belfast.*’²² Foilsíodh an cuntas seo a leanas faoi:

An important step and one sure to be productive of beneficial and far-reaching results, has been taken by the Belfast Coisde Ceanntair in the establishment of a class for advanced pupils and teachers in that district. This class, though of course on a much less pretentious scale than the training Colleges of Ballingearry and Partry, will do

²⁰ *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 28.9.07, 9.

²¹ Tá cuntas air in Diarmuid Breathnach agus Máire Ní Mhurchú, *1882-1982 Beathaisnéis a hAon* (An Clóchomhar 1986) 55-6.

²² ‘John O’Keane on the Irish Training School, Belfast’ ar *The Irish Peasant* (30.12.06, 3).

*for the Belfast teachers and students what those colleges have done for their respective provinces.*²³

*An important step and one sure to be productive of beneficial and lasting results has just been taken by the Belfast Coiste Ceantair in the establishment of a class for advanced pupils and teachers of Irish. This class will aim at doing for the Belfast teachers and students what the Training Colleges at Ballingearry and Partry have done for the teachers of Munster and Connacht respectively. A programme of work has been arranged to suit the varying requirements of the members of the class. Conversational lessons from language pictures and objects and from reading lessons will be the outstanding feature of the programme. Incidentally the lessons will be of value to teachers who desire to teach on similar lines. Arrangements will in addition be made, either before or after the conversational lessons, by which direct assistance in the method of teaching the language will be given. A course of Irish phonetics, which will be useful alike to teachers and students, will also be included. A course of home work will also be arranged and a composition exercise set weekly. This latter exercise will be suited to the capabilities of each student individually. The class programme will therefore suit the student who is only 'fairly advanced' as well as the advanced student, by the graduated lessons on conversation which will train each one to use his Irish vocabulary orally. It will be particularly helpful to the teacher of Irish; whilst the student who intends presenting himself at Irish language examinations should find the work of the greatest assistance. It is hoped teachers preparing for the Irish Certificate of the National Board will attend the conversational lessons, and indeed every portion of the programme should benefit them. The class will be conducted by Seaghán Ó Catháin, in the League Rooms, Avenue Hall, on Friday evenings, from 8 to 9.30. The first meeting will be held on Friday, 13th inst., when every intending student should endeavour to be present.*²⁴

Nuair a bhí cúpla seachtain curtha de ag an Choláiste, tugadh cuntas ar ar tharla go dtí sin. (Tugtar fá dear gur as Béarla chomh minic lena athrach a thráchtáí ar imeachtaí na gColáistí Gaeilge sna nuachtáin agus fiú

²³ *The Irish News and Belfast Morning News*, 3.10.05, 3.

²⁴ *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 7.10.05, 9.

amháin ar *An Claidheamh Soluis*. Bhain an nós sin le cúrsaí bolscaireachta ar son na Gaeilge ach bhain sé fosta le staid litearthachta na Gaeilge ag an am.)

The class recently established in Belfast for teachers and prospective teachers of Irish has now held two meetings. The attendance has been very satisfactory, over thirty students (including many college professors – clerical and lay – national teachers, Gaelic League teachers, etc.), some coming from a long distance, being present at each meeting. The greater part of the class time has been devoted to conversational exercises, which, in turn, are made to serve as demonstration lessons in the method of teaching Irish. Language pictures, short reading selections (a few lines of idiomatic Irish being written on the blackboard), and other devices, are made a basis for conversation work, which, however, is always connected and methodical. A short lecture on Phonetics, illustrated by diagrams, was given at each meeting. The value of phonetics, alike to the student and teacher of Irish was emphasized in these lectures. To the teacher of Irish in particular such a knowledge of the science as would enable him to teach Irish sounds thoroughly was, it was pointed out, as absolutely necessary as a knowledge of musical notes to the teacher of music. It was also explained that the province of the teacher of phonetics, as such, was more to suggest, to stimulate, to awaken the ‘phonetic sense’ of his pupils than merely to tell things which every intelligent person could, with a little guidance, observe for himself. As some students of the class have not quite such a ready oral command of the language as others, it has been arranged to hold, between 7 and 8 p.m., a preparatory class, of which (as in all the other work) Seaghán Ó Catháin will be in charge. All students are, however, at liberty to attend during the whole class time, viz. 7 p.m. to 9.30 p.m. on Fridays, in the Gaelic League Rooms, Avenue Hall, Belfast.²⁵

Moladh Seaghán Ó Catháin as a fheabhas mar mhúinteoir:

*Nobody who is not just now enjoying the pleasure of sitting every Friday evening at Mr. O’Kane’s feet in his class in Belfast for teachers of Irish, can estimate the value of **Cainnt** as a factor in the*

²⁵ Cogarnach na gCraobh – Cúige Uladh (*An Claidheamh Soluis*, 28.10.05, 10). Tá an cuntas céanna i gcló ar *The Freeman’s Journal* (25.10.05, 8).

*speedy acquirement of an idiomatic speaking knowledge of the language. It is safe to say that the author's application of his methods is both illuminating and engrossingly interesting.*²⁶

Chuir Seaghán síos ar na daoine a rinne freastal ar an chúrsa.

*Another healthy sign of the institution is that our membership roll now numbers fifty and, better still, that practically all this number attend every night. Ninety-five per cent of these have not missed a single lesson since they started. Gaelic League teachers and National School teachers comprise the majority of the students, but there are also seven college professors. The roll includes five clergymen, three or four B.As and an M.A. (Cambridge). In every respect there is therefore a good opportunity for making the principles and practices of rational teaching of Irish better known. These principles are being, more and more put into practice and one of the best means of doing so is the establishment of Training Schools in all the large centres of Irish teaching. Efficiency will soon be the motto of the Gaelic League, in every department of its activity, le cúnamh Dé.*²⁷

Cosúil leis an nós a bhí i bhfeidhm i gcoláistí Gaeilge eile, ba ghnách le scoláirí móra aoiléachtaí poiblí a thabhairt ar na cúrsaí, rud a chuir go mór le gradam agus le léann na gcúrsaí gan trácht ar chúrsaí bolscaireachta i gcoitinne. Mar shampla, sa bhliain 1913, tugadh liosta de na léachtóirí seo: Lord Ashbourne, Sir Henry Bellingham, Mrs. Alice Stopford Green, F.J. Bigger, MRJA, Rev. Canon F.W. O'Connell, QUB, Prof. Savory, J.J. Doyle, Carl Hardebeck etc.²⁸ Castar na daoine céanna seo orainn arís agus arís eile ó Choláiste Gaeilge go Coláiste Gaeilge – léachtóirí taistil an teideal atá tuillte acu ar an ócáid.

²⁶ *The Irish Peasant*, 16.12.05.

²⁷ *The Irish Peasant* (30.12.06, 3).

²⁸ *The Derry Journal* (15.9.13, 2).

Chan sclábhaíocht ná obair chrua na foghlama amháin a bhí ar siúl i gColáiste Chomhghaill. Bhí deis ann don ghreann, don chuideachta, do rudaí eile seachas cúrsaí faoghama, go háirid ag deireadh an chúrsa. Is maith gur fágadh corrléid faoi seo thall is abhus:

That the Sgoraidheacht then began in real earnest,

That the ladies sang exquisitely, and

That some of them weren't afraid to sport the new fashions.

*That the 'people' in Limerick are droll, to ask if these new dresses are of
Irish manufacture!*

That sure the questions made us all laugh but

That Luimneach na blathaighe was always quare.

That the cailin ar cuaird o Lunnduin was a great favourite.

That 'himself' said she reminded him of old times, but

That 'herself' being present, he said it only in a cogar...²⁹

Bhí an dúshraith leagtha agus tús curtha le deis léinn agus chultúir a chuirfeadh go mór le leas na Gaeilge ó thuaidh go ceann na mblianta fada ina dhiaidh sin. Ba cheart comóradh ceart a dhéanamh ar stair iomlán agus ar éifeacht an choláiste seo chomh luath is is féidir ó tharla go bhfuil comóradh á dhéanamh ar na coláistí Gaeilge eile.

[Foilsíodh an t-alt seo in Micheál Mac Craith & Pádraig Ó Héalaí (eag.), *Diasa Díograise. Aistí in Ómós do Mháirtín Ó Briain* (Cló Iar-Chonnachta, 2009) 109-27.]

²⁹ *The Irish Peasant* (2.6.06).