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# Editorial

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# EDITORIAL

THE Johannesburg College of Education has recently been celebrating its diamond jubilee. During 1959, the year of the College's golden jubilee, a journal of education for Southern Africa was conceived to commemorate that jubilee. That journal first saw the light of day in 1960 and was christened SYMPOSIUM. Now that the lusty young offspring is about to celebrate its tenth birthday, it seems appropriate to stand back and have a look at the youngster, to evaluate what it has achieved in a decade and to suggest some of the effects it has had on its educational environment and the educational environment on it.

Firstly it should be said that, although it was conceived, born and christened, it has no persona (although we hope it has a personality). Those responsible for its birth were associated in various ways with the Johannesburg College of Education, and some of its guardians still are. Who then is SYMPOSIUM? SYMPOSIUM is, in fact, the host of contributors, advertisers, proof readers, reviewers, envelope addressers, members of the editorial board: people, in short, who, many of them unknown to one another, have by their energy and support been responsible for the ferment, re-thinking and renewal in various aspects of education and training in this country. The pages of print that have gone to make up the issues of SYMPOSIUM over the past decade are the concrete and tangible form of a movement — an idée fixe, one might almost term it — that has as its mainspring the desire to keep South African education up-to-date, or even ahead of its time, to open up and maintain lines of communication with the outside world at a time when contact is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain in other spheres; a movement of people desirous of making a sober examination of problems both peculiar to the South African situation and of general application, desirous of discussing, applying and evaluating new techniques and theories which might provide some of the answers to the problems of an industrial society with its bewildering rate of change brought about by explosion of knowledge and population and by the continual need to adjust to a changing world.

SYMPOSIUM is the embodiment of an ideal: to provide a platform for the intelligent discussion and evaluation of any aspect of education and training that will lead to increased efficiency. SYMPOSIUM is non-partisan and has no particular political or pedagogic axe to grind. It tries to encourage opposing points of view in the belief that friction of opinion is the most stimulating climate for educational progress.

We may be forgiven at this point for calling to mind certain events in the history of SYMPOSIUM which undoubtedly have affected and are affecting the course of South African education, directly or indirectly. Articles on the accreditation system ('no-matric'), centralisation of control in education, functional literacy in business and commerce, television in higher education and other facets of the newly emerging educational technology, appeared in early issues, thus drawing attention to these new phenomena. Before 1963 very few educationists in South Africa had heard of or experimented with programmed learning. It was in that year that SYMPOSIUM organized the First National Conference on Programmed Learning and Teaching Machines. It required a good measure of courage and faith on the part of the organizers to mount such a conference on what was at that time a way-out topic. The financial risk involved was great — flying out three speakers from overseas could not be done on a shoe-string.

The 1963 issue of SYMPOSIUM also contained articles on the language laboratory, a newcomer to South Africa, that was to be followed in the ensuing seven years by many of its kind.

The year 1964 saw a conference on "Arithmetic and Mathematics for Today" which started an avalanche of new thinking, discussion and practice in the teaching of mathematics throughout the country. It was Harold Fletcher, one of the three leaders of the conference, who suggested study groups as a follow-up to the conference, a suggestion that has borne fruit in most provinces in the form of study committees, not only in mathematics, but in most other subject areas.

The teaching of reading received critical attention in 1966, when three acknowledged experts from overseas made teachers from all over Southern Africa aware of and enthusiastic about reading efficiency at all levels of education.

It is no idle boast, therefore, to say that SYMPOSIUM, through its articles, workshops and conferences has had a profound influence on educational thought and practice throughout the ten years of its existence. SYMPOSIUM does not seek publicity nor does it thrive on sensation. Although its language medium is English, it seeks to serve all the people of Southern Africa.

What of the next ten years? The majority of articles in this issue concern themselves with the age-old questions: what are the aims of education, and how best or most effectively can these aims be achieved? But these articles point in no uncertain way to the future. Educational technology and a technology of education (which both Dr. Hawkridge and Mr. Unwin are at pains to define and differentiate) can supply some answers to these questions and suggest the shape of things to come. In broad outline the answers may be the same as those suggested by educational thinkers from Plato to Alfred North Whitehead, but the details must of necessity differ. Teachers at all levels must re-examine their aims and must concern themselves with increased efficiency in the teaching/learning process. Even if every teaching machine in the world were consigned to the dust-bin and every programmed text were burned, the effort, time and money involved in their production would have been worth the trouble, if only for the reason that programmed learning has forced teachers and instructors to state their aims and goals, and to adopt the most efficient ways to achieve those goals. The vague ,ill-defined terms used by many teachers in the expression of their aims are no longer valid; objectives must be stated in precise unequivocal terms.

It was the late Richard Goodman who said at the 1963 conference: "Probably one of the greatest contributions which programmed learning will make to our educational system is to strip from the human teacher that mystique behind which he can dissemble and evade his duties." We may add that other aspects of educational technology will also force the teacher to emerge from behind his mystique: closed-circuit television, for example, demands an "open door" approach, where it is impossible to dissemble, because one's teaching is visually available to anyone who happens to be passing by the receiver. In the language laboratory every single word of one's lesson material is available for auditory inspection from anyone who happens to switch on the tape recorder. In other words, the teacher must throw open his classroom and his teaching techniques to the close scrutiny of his colleagues and even of the general public. In a world of educational technology a teacher can no longer function behind closed doors.

Dr. Hawkridge's advocacy of a systems approach to education provides a new approach to the question of aims and objectives in education. In a slightly different way, this is also the approach of Bloom and his associates with their "Taxonomy of Educational Objectives". It has taken them many years of deliberation to reach their present findings, which they themselves are the first to admit are tentative, but it is interesting to note the remarks made by Sir Brynmor Jones, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hull, in his presidential address to the Association of Programmed Learning in April 1969 entitled "Educational Technology in Tomorrow's World". "An important milestone" (in educational technology), he says, "was, of course, Bloom's 'Taxonomy of Educational Objectives' . . . . still regarded by many as a model for the selection of criteria for the construction of entire learning systems designed to achieve specified objectives."

No discussion of educational aims and efficiency is complete these days without an examination of the economics of education. The book edited by Professor Turner, "Educational Development in Predominantly Rural Countries", reviewed in this issue, gives a sober account of the problem of the economics of education in countries such as Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. Many of those concerned in education refuse to see education as a business undertaking, in contrast to the views expressed by educational economists. Granted that, apart from matriculation results and inspectors' reports, teachers do not have to present a yearly balance sheet or a Chairman's Annual Report, but we do have shareholders in education — the children whom we teach and their parents. And however difficult it may be to establish criteria for efficiency, we owe it to these shareholders to be concerned with and about efficiency, from nursery school to university. The majority of contributors to this issue claim that educational technology can contribute to greater efficiency in respect of clarity of objectives and the most effective means of achieving these aims.

Educational technology demands a new approach to the organisation of learning situations. Organization — time-tables, age of school entry, homogeneous groups of pupils, school years, the size of classes, the design of school buildings — tends to be a sacred cow, as strong an agent of reaction as the mystique of the teacher. What, for example, is so sacrosanct about an academic

year? Is it applied merely for the sake of administrative convenience? Apart from aspects of maturation, why should all children of whatever ability be expected to progress from one standard to another at the end of a calendar year? Some children can cover in six months the ground that other children will cover in sixteen months. Why should all children in a group of thirty-five always be expected to be doing the same thing at the same time?

The term "functional literacy" has been gaining currency in recent years, and Dr. Downing, world-renowned for his work on i.t.a., defines this term and discusses its importance to our modern society. The need for increasing reading efficiency at all levels of education is self-evident, and educational technology may have something to contribute in this field.

All in all, the contributors to this issue of SYMPOSIUM have grasped the twin nettles of the aims of education and efficiency in education, and in so doing have pointed the way ahead for the coming decade.


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