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Editorial

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1965
Johannesburg College of Education
https://hdl.handle.net/10539/27325
Rose, B.W. (1965). Editorial. Symposium: A Journal of Education for Southern Africa, pp. 5-6.

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EDITORIAL

PART of this year's issue of *Symposium* is devoted to papers delivered at two important conferences held at the Johannesburg College of Education, under whose aegis this *Journal* is published—the vacation course "Arithmetic and Mathematics for Today" held in July, 1964, and "The Language Laboratory and Language Learning" held in September, 1964. One of the aims of this *Journal* is the intelligent and open discussion of educational matters, especially new developments in curriculum, content and method. The editorial board felt, therefore, that a permanent record of the proceedings of these two occasions should be provided in this issue.

Change and development are natural in every phase of human activity: this is no less true of education. But the speed of change is bewildering many of those who are concerned with educational practice. Teachers in schools of all types are hard put to to keep pace with the expanding horizons of educational thought and practice. Specialization in one particular field of education, or even within one subject area is becoming more common. Most ordinary teachers simply have not the time to devote to reading about and to making direct contact with new developments, burdened as they are with preparation of lessons, extra-mural activities and the drudgery of ordinary day-to-day classroom administration.

The re-training of teachers has therefore become one of the most urgent requirements of present-day education. Various provincial and national Education Departments, University Departments of Education and Colleges of Education have recognised and accepted this challenge by organising in-training schemes and refresher courses in many subject areas. It is widely recognised that the content, techniques and methods of teaching of a few decades ago are no longer sufficient to meet the demands of the mid-twentieth century. A more efficient use of public money and classroom time is essential, especially in a country like South Africa, where education has tended to be conservative.

But no matter how many overseas guests are imported to give their thoughts, opinions and experience, no matter how many refresher courses are organised, the responsibility for the most effective application of new ideas and practices, the responsibility for seeing that the most good comes from the act of change is, in the final resort, the teachers'. Smugness and complacency, self-satisfaction and an unwillingness to adapt must have no part in the make-up of the teacher of today. The efficient teacher is the one who is never satisfied with his work, who continually seeks, by his own endeavours and the help of others, to refine and perfect his techniques, his knowledge, in fact himself.

More than this—there must be a willingness to share experience and ideas. Teachers in the past have perhaps been too prone to a self-conscious shrinking from criticism, to a squirrel-like desire to hoard their knowledge and experience and not to share it with colleagues, or as often happens, with students in training who arrive on teaching practice. One of the most important aspects of the new team-teaching is that one's teaching is constantly under scrutiny from one's colleagues who are sharing the lesson. In one training college in England fellow-lecturers are invited to be present at lectures — on such occasions the lecturer naturally gives of his best.

It is this urgent need to share experiences, opinions and experiments that has led to the formation of study groups in England, as Mr. Harold Fletcher described in his remarks at the closing session of the vacation course. Such study groups are necessary as a follow-up to any large conference. Without any follow-up of this kind, the conference can be said in some measure to have failed. The formation of the Language Teaching Study Group, as a follow-up to the Language Laboratory Conference in September, is an example of what can be done. A small group of lecturers and teachers, who are immediately concerned with language laboratory techniques and their application, meet every few months to discuss and assess critically the work that they are doing in the classroom or lecture room.

In 1947 a group of German writers and poets met at an informal meeting in Bannwaldsee to discuss one another's work. Those present included a large number of the outstanding writers of present-day German literature. This group came to be known as the GRUPPE 47, and they have met regularly ever since. Each meeting is conducted by a chairman, and on a seat next to him, known as the "electric chair" sits a writer or poet who reads a new work from manuscript—a chapter from a new novel, a new poem or an extract from a new drama. The audience listen in silence, and then after the reading, the discussion begins.

An inviolable rule of the GRUPPE 47 is that the reader must not take part in the discussion, but must listen in silence to the critics, without defending his work.

This is the kind of procedure that study groups might like to adopt—a member gives an account of the way in which he has applied in his own classroom or lecture room some of the new developments that he has seen fit to try out. The rest of the group will then discuss and criticize, and some of them may like to go back to their classrooms and try out some of these methods with, probably, some modification and adaptation to suit their own needs or those of their pupils.

There is at the moment a world-wide ferment in education. New techniques, new aids, new media are clamouring for attention and recognition. No teacher can afford to ignore them: they must be accepted or rejected. But indifference to them can only mean the halting of any advance towards the educational ideals which every teacher should have at heart.

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