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Editorial

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Editorial

IT will be seen that the greater part of this year's issue of "Symposium" is devoted to papers read at the First National Conference on Teaching Machines and Programmed Instruction held at the University of the Witwatersrand on April 22, 23, 24. It was felt immediately after the conference that a permanent record of the proceedings, the ideas expressed and the views propounded, coming as they did from various parts of the world, was desirable.

It may be confidently asserted that one of the reasons for being of "Symposium" was fulfilled by the organising of such a conference, namely that here was offered a platform for the intelligent and open discussion of matters affecting education. That platform was occupied, in the first instance, by some of the acknowledged experts in the field of programmed instruction from England, America and South Africa; on the floor were some 170 delegates representing groups with a vested interest in education and educational method—industry, commerce, military, university, training college, school and parents. That these delegates should spend three days hearing the evidence for and against, weighing up that evidence, and noting the successes and failures of others both in South Africa and in other countries, was indicative of the vital and urgent interest in educational topics that is still manifest in this country.

One of the many remarkable features of the conference was that so many people of diverse interests and backgrounds could and did come together to meet on common ground. A meeting of commerce and industry with formal education on an equal footing to discuss topics of mutual concern is all too rare—the intelligent and democratic partnership advocated in an article in last year's "Symposium" was in fact entered into at the conference. Even if nothing were to come of programmed instruction in this country, the conference would have been worth the effort on this score alone.

Another remarkable feature was the single-mindedness of delegates: this conference was above party politics. Religious, cultural and political differences were submerged in the search for truth. The truth showed that in an industrialised society such as ours, efficiency in educational techniques is of paramount importance if we are to survive, let alone progress.

One of the questions uppermost in the minds of delegates and organisers of the conference alike was: where do we go from here? Part of the answer to that has been provided by a return visit from Richard Goodman of the Brighton College of Technology, who has recently been conducting seminars in programming techniques, mainly for training officers in industry. Some 36 representatives of the larger firms, including mining houses, have spent a week learning how to write programmes for their particular requirements. It is hoped that these programmes will shortly be put into experimental use, and that within a short time data will be available that will be of interest and concern to others in the field.

Mr. Hayward's suggestion that "Symposium" act as a clearing-house for information on latest developments in programmed instruction has been taken up: it is hoped very shortly to publish a regular news bulletin containing details of experimental work, new developments and so on, not only in South Africa but in the Rhodesias and the Protectorates. The success of this will depend upon the energy of contributors—the editor of "Symposium" will welcome items of information concerning research projects, experiments, new machines, and details of actual or projected programmes.

The Johannesburg College of Education, under whose aegis this journal is published, is playing its part in the development of this new technique. The first language laboratory of any Transvaal Provincial institution will shortly be installed there, mainly for use in techniques of second language teaching; a two-day conference on teaching machines has been arranged for teachers for the end of August; plans are being formulated for the inclusion of programmed instruction in the courses for teachers-in-training.

The twelve months between last year's issue of "Symposium" and this year's have witnessed the beginnings of a revolution in educational technique, a revolution that, it is hoped, will bring about increased efficiency in the teaching-learning process which can only be of benefit to the country as a whole.