

PREFACE

We face many highly complex scientific, academic and educational tasks in the next millennium in a world much different from the one that emerged from the Second World War. Each day that we live we find ourselves in a process of constant redefinition. Some things, however, appear to be clear to everyone: among them, the predominant role of the mathematical, natural, as well as social sciences, and various technologies in leading us to foresee a future full of change or, in other words, a future in which change is the daily norm.

Those of us who have made mathematics and its teaching one of our principal activities in this century which is soon to end, can do no more than celebrate the advent of an historical order in which our discipline has been called to occupy an even more transcendental role in social and human progress. With a view to the future, which for quite some time has been part of the present, we cannot fail to recognize that to chart the best course into the future we must also have the best possible understanding of the past. Thus the task of examining what has been the history of mathematics education provides us with valuable knowledge with which to begin building a bright tomorrow for that vital discipline. In that sense a history of what have been the Interamerican Conferences on Mathematics Education is not only a tribute to an academic tradition in this region that has received a part of the best that the world mathematics community has to offer, but also a reference for plans that the new historical context requires.

For the academicians who have assumed the responsibility of producing this historical review of IACME, it has been a special honor that has permitted us to take a close look at the diverse and concurrent processes that have surrounded these Conferences, such as the development of two distinct scientific communities in Latin America: that of university mathematicians and that of mathematics educators. Much can be said about the philosophical premises of the so-called "modern mathematics", which generated the birth of the Interamerican Committee on Mathematics Education, but it is indisputable that the Committee has played a role of the first order in the development of both those academic communities. It should be emphasized as a matter of particular relevance that the reform and IACME attained a substantial strengthening of the contacts of academics in Latin America with those in the USA, Canada and Europe. The bridges of initiatives, contacts, and interchanges that have been developed were, during many years, the best international organizational mechanism for the progress of mathematics education in Latin America.

I was approached in 1995 by IACME's Executive Committee with the idea of writing this book. Professor Hugo Barrantes, my friend, colleague and collaborator during many years of intellectual initiatives, agreed to accompany me in this new challenge in which we set an ambitious timeline for ourselves. Our strategy in writing the book is expressed in the resulting structure. The first chapter sets the sociohistorical and ideological context that leads us to an understanding of what generated the Conferences and the creation of the Committee. Since those early efforts set the stage for later developments, it was important

to dedicate a long chapter to the first two Conferences. The third chapter, also long, describes the rest of the Conferences, and the fourth chapter describes the topics and, especially the protagonists who have made the Conferences possible during the last 35 years. A chapter on perspectives closes the book with reflections that take another look at the international evolution of the modern mathematics reform and outline some possible future directions. We followed this strategy carefully and were able to count on the valuable collaboration of Eduardo Luna who during all this time asked fellow members of IACME to contribute documents, photocopies and anything that could help us in our task. Eduardo Luna, Claude Gaulin, Fidel Oteiza, Ubiratan D'Ambrosio, Patrick Scott and many others helped us to make sure that our work was enriched with a very rich source of documents. The observations and information that we present are those that could be backed up with written documentation. (Therefore we could not go into the depth we would have liked for the Conferences in Guadalajara and Campinas.) To all those colleagues and friends we wish to express our gratitude. We also wish to thank the Program of Meta-Mathematics Research of the University of Costa Rica, Barry University in Florida, the International Commission on Mathematical Instruction (ICMI) for making this publication possible and the Academia Colombiana de Ciencias Exactas, Físicas y Naturales for making this publication possible.

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February, 1998