

We Are Doing Okay, But There Is Room for Improvement!

W. George Cathcart
University of Alberta

Over one year ago, a questionnaire was included with each issue of *delta-K* to elicit reactions from MCATA members to the services the Council provides. The survey focused on *delta-K*, the monographs, and the annual conference. Members were also given an opportunity to comment on other areas of service. This article summarizes the responses to that survey and offers some interpretive comments. These comments are the sole responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the interpretation of the executive.

Background

Forty-three responses were received which is a response rate of close to 10 percent. The distribution of the responses is shown in the data following this article. The low response rate could be interpreted as a reflection of general satisfaction with the Council and its activities. Who knows?!

Six of the 43 responses were from members of the executive, and the distribution of these six responses is shown in the data following this article.

The following paragraphs provide some comment on the nature of the responses.

delta-K

About 35 percent of the respondents said they read almost everything in the journal. Another 58 percent said they read only those things that looked interesting to them. The senior high teachers seemed to be the most thorough readers while the junior high teachers appeared to read the least.

Over 50 percent of the teachers said they used some, but not all, of the activities published in the journal. This suggests that teachers are using some discretion in terms of what activities they can profitably use in their classroom. On the other hand, it was disturbing to learn that about 40 percent of the respondents did not use any of the activities. Why? Surely some of the activities were relevant! One teacher explained the problem this way:

Generally, only a small portion of the book lends itself to one level of teaching. The rest does me little good. Then, chances are, that portion is not what I am working on at that time. There are very good ideas, but in my planning day I just do not have time to leaf through all the material I have to find something applicable.

On the other hand, another teacher said, "The variety is good. I can use what applies, and I hand other information on to other teachers."

At the time the survey was sent out, eight "Problem Corners" had been published. Most elementary teachers said they did not make use of any of these problems in their class. This was expected since the problems were geared to the secondary student. However, over one-half of the senior high teachers said they did not use any of the problems. While senior high teachers seemed to read the most, their utilization was low.

In response to a question about the frequency of publication of *delta-K*, about 80 percent of the respondents said that the frequency (four issues per year) is about right. Written comments about *delta-K* tended to be positive. For example: "Over all, an excellent publication"; and "Excellent--the envy of all other Councils."

Negative comments were worded in the form of constructive criticisms. These criticisms pointed out weaknesses such as a lack of Alberta content and not enough material for elementary, especially primary, teachers, junior high teachers, and teachers of students with special needs. Another suggestion was that more information should be provided on executive meetings.

Canadian Mathematics Journal

The first experimental issue of the *Canadian Mathematics Journal* was included with the fall 1982 mailing of *delta-K*. Responses to the four questions on the survey to this experimental issue indicated a rather ambivalent attitude. Only 56 percent said they liked it, and only 51 percent said that it should be continued. If it was continued, only 40 percent agreed that it should replace one issue of *delta-K*. If it didn't replace an issue of *delta-K*, only 37 percent said they were willing to pay an extra fee for the *Canadian Mathematics Journal*.

Supervisors and teacher educators seemed more accepting of the experimental journal than the other groups. Written comments related to the *Canadian Mathematics Journal* tended to be positive and supportive.

The Math Monograph

The first question in this section of the survey asked respondents to check the monographs they had received. The titles went back to 1973. As expected, the majority of respondents checked the more recent publications. However, in each of the six categories, there were respondents who indicated they had received all of the monographs. The first monograph (1973) had been received by about 28 percent of the respondents. This suggests that a large proportion of the 43 respondents were long-standing and, therefore, probably fairly committed members of the Council.

About 37 percent considered the monographs to have been very worthwhile, and another 47 percent said they were okay. Five percent said the monographs were not at all worthwhile. Supervisors and teacher educators seemed to view the

monographs more favorably than the other groups. Four-fifths of the supervisors and teacher educators said the monographs had been very worthwhile. All the written comments were positive. Two examples are: "I am very pleased with them as they are. They make excellent reference sources for teachers, and they are complete." "I do like them. Since they are topical, they are easily accessed for quick information."

The idea of replacing the monograph with a monthly issue of a newsletter was viewed as a bad idea by 30 percent of the respondents; however, the newsletter is now being produced monthly. Another 44 percent said it should be tried on an experimental basis. Only five percent were prepared to accept the idea as a good one. Consistent with the results reported above, supervisors and teacher educators seemed least supportive of the change.

Written comments tended either to be negative or to suggest changes in content. The following comment is representative of the negative comments: "These tend to get filed in piles and forgotten."

A variety of suggestions was made as to content and format. Some suggested a newsletter needed to be "short, frequent, and 'newsy'." Some said that each issue should be thematic, others wanted worksheets that could be photocopied, and still others wanted advice on implementing curriculum changes.

Annual Conference and Business Meeting

The survey asked five questions about the annual conference and business meeting. Of the 43 respondents, 40 percent did and 58 percent did not attend the 1981 conference in Lethbridge. Almost 20 percent had attended five or six conferences in the last six years, another 33 percent had attended three or four conferences, and another 26 percent had attended one or two. Only 19 percent said they had not attended a conference in the last six years.

Lethbridge was not a central location, yet respondents with opinions were evenly split (40 percent and 40 percent) as to the acceptability of Lethbridge as a meeting site. Senior high teachers were least satisfied, and supervisors and teacher educators were the most satisfied.

About 53 percent of the respondents favored changing location for the conference each year, and 28 percent said it should be in one central location each year. Changing geographic regions was favored by all groups except supervisors and teacher educators who were more inclined to favor one central location each year.

About 47 percent of the respondents said they would attend future meetings regardless of where they would be held, but 35 percent said they would attend only if the meeting was in their area. Junior high teachers, administrators, and supervisors and teacher educators were most inclined to say they would attend no matter where the conference were held.

Written comments were positive. Regarding location, one respondent suggested holding the conference "every other year central (Red Deer); alternate years in

various locations throughout the province." Another recommended that the business meeting "should not be held while another session is going on. It should be held in the morning as a breakfast meeting."

Other Services

The following suggestions were made about services MCATA should provide: "In-service on the high school curriculum, on areas of the curriculum that need supplementing, and on statistics, geometry, and so on"; "More questions (challenging type) re Alberta Math Curriculum courses"; "Test item bank should be developed"; "Recommendations for good CAI computer programs"; "Offer a variety of teaching methods which could be used for particular concepts"; and "Perhaps more activities pertaining to individual grade levels and skill areas."

Summary

The following quote from one respondent can serve as a summary:

I personally feel that MCATA has done a good job for math teachers and math education in Alberta. I have found annual conferences "about right" and more or less on a par with most NCTM sessions. I suppose the biggest problem is time, particularly time for teachers. For example, I feel it would be a major contribution to problem solving in the 1980s if teachers could find time to keep active in problem solving. Perhaps "Problems for Teachers" could be a feature in *delta-K*.

Activities for Gifted Students

Help is available for educators concerned with gifted students Grades 2 through 8 as a result of a project supported by the Mathematics Education Trust. This 36-page booklet, entitled *Mathematics Curriculum Outline and Sample Activities for Gifted Students, Grades 2-8*, is available for \$3 from the NCTM Headquarters Office, 1906 Association Drive, Reston, Virginia 22091.

Project coordinator for this booklet was Alexander Tobin, Director of Mathematics Education for the Philadelphia School District. Contributing authors were Alan Barson, Robert Murphey, and Donald Scheuer who are also of the Philadelphia School District.

The Mathematics Education Trust was established by the NCTM Board of Directors in September 1976. The Trust is independent of the NCTM operating budget and is dependent upon gifts from interested persons, organizations, and companies for the support of special projects.

MCATA Survey Data Table

The following table reports the frequency of responses to different items, broken down by group.

Key: Elem = elementary teachers
 JrHi = junior high teachers
 Jr/Sr = junior and senior high teachers
 SrHi = senior high teachers
 S/TE = supervisors and teacher educators
 Admin = administrators

Distribution

	Elem	JrHi	Jr/Sr	SrHi	S/TE	Admin
Total of 43 responses	9	9*	7**	9	1/4	4
Six executive responses	2	0	1	1	1	1

delta-K

1. How much of delta-K do you read?

	Elem	JrHi	Jr/Sr	SrHi	S/TE	Admin
a) almost everything	3	2	1	5	2	2
b) only those items which look interesting	6	4	4	4	3	2
c) hardly any	0	3	0	0	0	0

2. To what extent do you use the activities in each issue with your students?

	Elem	JrHi	Jr/Sr	SrHi	S/TE	Admin
a) I use all the activities suitable to my grade level.	0	0	0	0	0	1
b) I use some of the activities at my grade level.	5	5	5	5	2	0
c) I rarely use any of the activities.	4	4	2	4	3	0
No response	0	0	0	0	0	3

3. Eight problems ("Problem Corner") have been published in the last eight issues. How many of these have you given to your students?

	Elem	JrHi	Jr/Sr	SrHi	S/TE	Admin
a) 7-8	0	0	0	0	0	0
b) 5-6	0	1	0	0	0	0
c) 3-4	0	1	1	1	0	1
d) 1-2	3	3	2	1	0	0
e) none	6	4	3	5	4	0
No response	0	0	1	2	1	3

* Including one elementary-junior high teacher

** Including one junior high, senior high, and supervisor

Elem JrHi Jr/Sr SrHi S/TE Admin

4. The frequency of delta-K (currently 4 issues per year)

	Elem	JrHi	Jr/Sr	SrHi	S/TE	Admin
a) should be increased	0	1	0	3	0	0
b) is about right	6	7	7	6	4	4
c) should be reduced	1	0	0	0	0	0
d) should be reduced to zero	0	0	0	0	1	0
No response	2	1	0	0	0	0

5. The June 1982 issue of delta-K was replaced with a special issue of the Canadian Mathematics Journal. Did you like this journal?

	Elem	JrHi	Jr/Sr	SrHi	S/TE	Admin
a) yes	4	5	6	4	3	2
b) no	1	0	0	0	1	0
c) didn't look at it	2	2	0	1	0	1
no response	2	1	0	1	1	1
didn't receive it	0	1	1	3	0	0

6. Should the concept of the Canadian Mathematics Journal be continued?

	Elem	JrHi	Jr/Sr	SrHi	S/TE	Admin
a) yes	3	5	5	5	2	2
b) no	1	0	0	0	1	0
c) not sure	1	1	1	2	2	1
no response	2	3	1	2	0	1

7. If the Canadian Mathematics Journal is continued, it should

	Elem	JrHi	Jr/Sr	SrHi	S/TE	Admin
a) replace one issue of <u>delta-K</u>	1	5	3	1	5	2
b) not replace one issue of <u>delta-K</u>	4	2	3	4	0	1
no response	4	2	1	4	0	1

8. Would you be willing to pay an extra fee for the Canadian Mathematics Journal if it did not replace one issue of delta-K?

	Elem	JrHi	Jr/Sr	SrHi	S/TE	Admin
a) yes	1	2	2	6	3	2
b) no	3	4	1	0	1	1
c) not sure	4	2	3	3	1	0
no response	1	1	1	0	0	1

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	Elem	JrHi	Jr/Sr	SrHi	S/TE	Admin		Elem	JrHi	Jr/Sr	SrHi	S/TE	Admin
<u>Math Monograph</u>													
2. The monographs have been							2. How many MCATA conferences have you attended in the last six years?						
a) very worthwhile	2	4	1	3	4	2	a) 5-6	1	2	2	1	1	1
b) okay	4	4	6	5	1	0	b) 3-4	2	3	1	2	3	1
c) not at all worthwhile	1	1	0	0	0	0	c) 1-2	3	2	3	2	1	0
no response	2	0	0	1	0	2	d) none	3	0	1	3	0	1
							no response	0	0	0	1	0	1
3. The monograph should be replaced with a 2-4 page newsletter which would be published more frequently, perhaps 10 times a year. This							3. Were you satisfied with the choice of location (Lethbridge) for the 1981 conference?						
a) is an excellent idea	0	1	1	0	0	0	a) yes	3	4	3	2	3	2
b) should be tried on a short-term experimental basis	5	4	4	5	0	1	b) no	4	4	3	3	1	0
c) is a bad idea	3	2	2	2	3	1	c) didn't care	0	1	1	1	1	0
no response	1	2	0	2	2	2	no response	2	0	0	1	0	2
							4. The MCATA Annual Conference should be						
							a) held in different geographic areas each year	5	5	5	4	1	3
							b) held in a central location each year	2	4	0	4	2	0
							c) other	1	0	0	0	1	0
							no response	1	0	2	1	1	1
							5. I would attend an MCATA Annual Conference						
							a) no matter where it was held.	4	6	1	3	3	3
							b) only if it was held in my geographic area.	4	2	4	4	1	0
							c) I wouldn't attend under any circumstances.	0	0	0	0	0	0
							no response	1	1	2	2	1	1
<u>Annual Conference</u>													
1. Did you attend the 1981 conference in Lethbridge?													
a) yes	3	6	1	3	2	2							
b) no	6	3	6	3	3	2							
no response	0	0	0	1	0	0							