

IMPRESSIONS FROM THE 43RD ANNUAL MEETING OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF
TEACHERS OF MATHEMATICS

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Editors' Note: Mrs. Kirkpatrick, the writer of this article, is a Division II teacher-consultant in the Edmonton Public Schools. She is the elementary representative on the MCATA executive this year.

I attended the NCTM Annual Meeting as a representative of the Department of Elementary Education, Edmonton Public School Board. Because this was the first such meeting I have ever attended, my first impression was of the size of it all. Imagine 4,200 educators from all parts of Canada and the United States all talking mathematics! Cobo Hall, Detroit's convention centre, is magnificent. Large as the meeting was, we only used about one-third of this enormous building. Much of the space (and any spare time I had) was devoted to the exhibit area. Very large and comprehensive, this included a school exhibit as well as the commercial exhibits. Each major publishing company had its mathematics materials on display, and it was most interesting to examine the various materials - particularly when the representative had just heard a competitor extolling the virtues of his materials to you, in the booth next door!

I attended sessions only in the elementary area - two general sessions and nine section meetings. Although the meeting had no central theme, the emphasis in the elementary sections was on geometry. If I came home with one major impression, this would be it: geometry is becoming a much more important part of the elementary school mathematics program. The geometry being introduced in the new texts is the nonmetric geometry of space; it deals with such ideas as points, lines, planes and space, all organized in terms of sets. The presentation of these ideas is informal, intuitive and descriptive. They are developed in such a way that later understanding of precise mathematical ideas will be facilitated. An examination of some of the newest elementary texts indicates this new stress on geometry; and it was stated that the new texts will devote 25 per cent of their coverage to geometry. (A further report on this topic will appear in the MCATA Annual). Five of the elementary sessions

were devoted to geometry. Space does not permit discussing all the sessions and I have chosen two.

Patrick Suppes spoke on "Intuition and Logical Inference in Elementary School Mathematics". He stated that discovery is the result of intuition and inference - both of which should be completely intertwined in the mathematics curriculum.

One of the most enjoyable sessions, a panel made up of Adeline Hartung, Myron Roszkopf and Herbert Spitzer, was moderated by Henry Van Engen. Their topic was "Sense and Nonsense in the Elementary Classroom" and their purpose was to discuss some of the things that were usually discussed informally at meetings such as this - over dinner, or in the evening but not at a scheduled session. Each participant spoke and time was allowed for questions and discussion by the audience. It was delightfully informal! The panel concluded by pointing out the extreme danger of trying to teach abstractions to young children. These abstractions begin with the physical. Teachers must not neglect this first, most important stage.

One of the things I enjoyed most was the variety of people one meets at a conference such as this. I was lucky enough to meet many of the "names" in mathematics - people we read about in journals and some authors of textbooks. However, the most satisfying impression I returned with is that we in Alberta need take second place to no one in the field of elementary mathematics. Certainly at isolated spots, both in Canada and the United States, there are some exciting experiments being tried but as far as a "total" program is concerned we are among the best.

In conclusion, I urge any of you who can to attend the Vancouver meeting of the NCTM. You will all receive programs and a look at the program participants should convince you there will be many worthwhile sessions. The experience of attending a meeting such as this is hard to describe (it has certainly been a highlight of my year!) so why not try it and see for yourself? Of course, there is our own annual meeting of the MCATA to attend also! See you in Vancouver!