

# BACKGROUND

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## INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

«One Hundred Years of *L'Enseignement Mathématique*:  
Moments of Mathematics Education in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century»

*organized jointly by the University of Geneva  
and the International Commission on Mathematical Instruction*

Geneva, 20–22 October 2000

### BACKGROUND

The well-known international journal *L'Enseignement Mathématique* was established in Geneva in 1899. The first prefaces show that its founders, Henri FEHR (Geneva) and Charles-Ange LAISANT (Paris), wanted to associate the world of teaching to the “*great movement of scientific solidarity*” which was emerging at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, notably through the organization of international meetings such as the first International Congress of Mathematicians held in Zurich in 1897.

The journal immediately obtained important successes, as is testified by the gold medal at the World Fair of Brussels in 1905. An original characteristic of the beginnings is a series of articles on the teaching of mathematics in different countries.

The idea of internationalism in mathematics education led a few years later to the creation of the International Commission on Mathematical Instruction during the 1908 International Congress of Mathematicians in Rome, with Felix Klein as President and Henri Fehr as Secretary General. Fehr was the Editor-in-Chief of the journal until his death in 1954, publishing the 40 volumes of the first series. The second series started in 1955 under the impulsion of ICMI, which had just been reconstituted as an official commission of the International Mathematical Union, IMU.

During these one hundred years, mathematics education has undergone profound changes marked by decisive developments in the evolution of mathematics and in the organization and structure of the school systems throughout the world.

*L'Enseignement Mathématique* has been the official organ of ICMI ever since the inception of the Commission in 1908. This is why, on the occasion of the centennial of the journal, ICMI and the editors of the journal wanted to reaffirm their ties by organizing jointly a symposium on the history of mathematics education under the theme

**«One Hundred Years of *L'Enseignement Mathématique* :  
Moments of Mathematics Education in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century»**

PRESENTATION OF THE SYMPOSIUM

Organized by ICMI and the University of Geneva as a contribution to the celebration of *World Mathematical Year 2000*, this symposium will take place in Geneva, the home of the journal since its birth, from Friday October 20 to Sunday October 22, 2000.

The programme of the symposium is based on a series of invited talks. The Programme Committee has identified three main themes to be discussed – geometry, analysis, and applications of mathematics – and three different periods at which these themes will be considered: 1900, 1950 (*i.e.* the period leading to the “new maths”), and 2000. Ample time will be devoted during the symposium to collective discussions on the themes presented in the talks. In this connection some participants have been invited to play the role of “reactors”. They will have the responsibility, in each session, of launching the discussion partly by giving a synthesis of the presentations but more importantly by outlining the major trends and issues about the theme, both in the light of the past century and as seen from today’s perspective. Reactors will thus be invited to add structure to the discussion, in particular by considering changes and transformations in the aims of reforms and in the curricula concepts. Such a perspective might for instance allow one to consider the emergence and/or failure of new trends or the birth of new sub-disciplines.

The symposium thus aims at looking at the evolution of mathematics education over the last century and identifying some guidelines and trends for the future, taking into account, among other sources, the documents, debates and related papers having appeared in *L'Enseignement Mathématique*. The emphasis of the symposium is on secondary education (students in the age range of about 12 to 18 or 19 years) and also includes the education of teachers.

In addition to proposing a reflection on the history of mathematics education and the evolution of mathematics and its teaching and learning in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the symposium gives the opportunity of a gathering of some of the main actors, during the last decades, in mathematics education as considered from an international perspective. The symposium should thus be seen as an international meeting of all those interested in mathematics education and its evolution.