

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
University of Massachusetts
Amherst

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Department of Mathematics and Statistics

Dear Mrs. Rasmussen

I am very sorry to hear that you have been suffering with a back ailment. My youngest daughter has had a terrible experience of a similar nature that has kept her partially bed-ridden for about $1\frac{3}{4}$ years. I trust that you have escaped anything of that sort and are now rapidly recovering. I am glad that you indeed feel well enough to make plans for the trip to South America.

My committee has funds that will enable us to pay approximately half your return airfare New York-Buenos Aires (economy class – 45 day tours with 29 days minimum stay). I am trying various schemes for getting the other half. I believe that the Argentine Ministry of Education should take of the local expenses.

One of my schemes has to do with a US AID project run by the University of New Mexico in Ecuador. The University has for some time maintained a team working in the Ministry of Education on the preparation of elementary school texts (all subjects math included). We have asked one of the Ecuadorean collaborators Sr. Viteri, to come to Bahia Blanca. If the project can and will pay his way, that will release funds that we might be able to apply on you air passage. I am waiting to hear about this possibility as some one at U of NM has just been in Quito looking over the situation and will write me upon his return.

The Ecuadorean project had already produced and put in use a first grade mathematics text, printed by the Ministry of Education's own press. I suppose the second grade text may have been brought out in the meantime. The printing job was attractive and impressive, I haven't had time to examine the contents properly, but I believe it to be along the lines of most of the U.S. efforts at producing "new math" elementary school courses and texts. I wonder how well this sort of thing goes down in schools in the Andes and in the montaña where the teachers are ill prepared and the children know hardly any Spanish.

I think it would be extremely useful for you to stay off in Quito and confer with the team there, I shall try to arrange this in my further correspondence with U of N.M. It would help me to know when you might in able to stop there and for how long.

I am greatly in sympathy with your view of what we need to do in teaching mathematics to young children. I believe that you also have developed ways in which appropriate pedagogical methods can be introduced from an OAS grant, and “institutionalized” in our elementary schools Latin American countries are going to make a serious effect in the next decade to establish universal elementary education. They have a choice and an opportunity namely, they can choose between “modern” math taught in pretty much the traditional way and “more modern” math taught in a new way. I am hoping that the Bahia Blanca conference will delineate the opportunity offered for drastically reorientating elementary school mathematics and the manner of its teaching, and will persuade some of the influential people present to work for the proper exploitation of this opportunity at home. Of course it is impossible to build up a whole school system based on these modern conceptions of what elementary education should be without “institutionalizing” the preparation and in-school activity of teachers. As I recall what you were doing when we first met, you were working on this problem and had some excellent ideas as to how it could be solved without out killing the spirit behind the whole enterprise. From what I have read the English have begun rather recently to convert from traditional mathematics and mathematical pedagogy in the elementary schools to newer ways in a fairly drastic fashion. Miss Biggs, who apparently played a pretty big part in the change-over in mathematics expects to be present at Bahia Blanca for the last half of the conference (at considerable inconvenience to herself, I must add). She can certainly shed light on the problem of incorporating a wholly novel approach to instruction in a large, functioning school system. On the non theoretical side we have been less fortunate, as we have not been able so far to secure the presence of either Prof. Frenes or M^{me} Frédérique Papy. However, there will be some Latin Americans present who have worked with the Papis and are using some of their ideas in experimental classes.

At Bahia Blanca we expect to have as a speaker Dr. Mario Leighton (I am not sure of the spelling) who directs the institute for the Improvement (Perfeccionamiento, in Spanish) of Teaching in Chile. This Institute is very active in curriculum reform and in-service teacher training and is very open to new ideas and very energetic in experimenting with them. You showed arrange to visit it (on the outskirts of Santiago) when you are in Chile (Incidentally, some of my Chilean friends tell me that the creation of the Institute was inspired in part by one of two earlier conferences, as Dr. Juan Gomez Villas, who asked to come to speak as Chile’s Minister of Education at the Lima Conference, was persuaded by the published reports and the oral accounts of Chileans present to starts some real reforms).

As for your own speech at Bahia Blanca, I think you should prepare and deliver it in the way most natural to you as that would surely be the most effective way.

Cordially

Marshall Stone