

# 1908 - 2008 : One hundred years the International Commission on Mathematical Instruction

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ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION  
ON MATHEMATICAL INSTRUCTION

SYMPOSIUM IN ROME: 5–8 MARCH 2008

The International Commission on the Teaching of Mathematics (Commission Internationale de l'Enseignement Mathématique, Internationale mathematische Unterrichtskommission, Commissione Internazionale dell'insegnamento matematico) was created in 1908, during the Fourth International Congress of Mathematicians, which took place in Rome from 6 to 11 April. The first to formulate a proposal for the institution of an organisation of this type was David Eugene Smith, a professor at Teachers College in New York who was profoundly interested in education and in the history of mathematics. The first president was Felix Klein, eminent mathematician and promoter of significant reforms in the teaching of mathematics in Germany. Klein was an unflagging and enthusiastic promoter of the commission during its early period.

The initial goal of the commission was to “promote an inquiry and publish a general report on current trends in mathematics teaching in the various countries”. From that time, the Commission, which since 1954 has been known as the “International Commission on Mathematical Instruction” (ICMI), went through successive periods of more or less intense activity (connected with the dramatic events of the first half of the twentieth century). At the end of the 1960s, it experienced a veritable renaissance based on new aims and work methodologies. In the last quarter of the century its activities and the lines of research broadened and diversified, to the point of creating a new discipline, research in the teaching of mathematics.

To celebrate the Centennial of the founding of ICMI, an international symposium, entitled “The First Century of the International Commission on Mathematical Instruction: Reflecting and Shaping the World of Mathematics Education”, was held in Rome, from 5 to 8 March 2008 (<http://www.unige.ch/math/EnsMath/Rome2008/>). The International Programme Committee (IPC) was composed of sixteen members, with Ferdinando Arzarello as its president, while Marta Menghini represented the Organising Committee within the IPC. Palazzo Corsini, home of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, and Palazzo Mattei di Paganica, home of the Enciclopedia Italiana, were the splendid venues for the symposium.

Taking as a point of departure the themes connected to ICMI activities over the course of its one-hundred year history (reforms in the teaching of the sciences, teacher training, relationship between mathematicians and researchers in teaching, etc.), the symposium sought to identify the future directions of research in didactics and possible initiatives for improving the level of mathematical culture in the various countries.

The symposium was subdivided into ten plenary talks, eight talks in parallel, five working groups, and an afternoon reserved for Italian teachers, with lectures by scholars from Italy and abroad. The talks on the “Italian afternoon” were broadcast via videoconference to fifty schools throughout Italy.

The talks dealt with a wide variety of topics: the origins of ICMI and the roles played by Klein and by Smith; ICMI's renaissance at the end of the 1960s and the emergence of a new field of research; the dialectic between rigour and intuition in the teaching of mathematics; the relationship between pure and applied mathematics and the emphasis that should be given to modelling in the teaching and learning of mathematics; the interactions between research and practice; the relationship between centres and peripheries in the world; teacher training; the connections between mathematics and

teaching of mathematics; and the relationship of mathematics education to technology, society, and the other disciplines.

Some 200 participants from 43 countries the world over took part in the congress. The symposium ended with an excursion which, like a hundred years ago, took participants to visit Villa d'Este at Tivoli and Villa Adriana, both rich in historical memories.

On the occasion of the congress a website dedicated to the history of ICMI was created under the direction of Fulvia Furinghetti and Livia Giacardi (<http://www.icmihistory.unito.it/>). It portrays the most significant events and key figures through documents, images and interviews. The site is divided into six sections: Timeline; Portrait Gallery; Documents; The Affiliated Study Groups; The International Congresses on Mathematical Education; Interviews and Film Clips. The Timeline section marks the most important moments in the history of ICMI, and each fact is documented with references to the original sources. The Portrait Gallery provides the list of members of the various executive committees with biographic cameos, in order to emphasize their roles within ICMI, their contributions to the study of problems inherent to mathematics teaching, and those of their publications that are concerned with this subject.

The symposium proceedings will be published by the *Enciclopedia Italiana*, in the book series *Scienze e Filosofia* (contents and order form available at <http://www.unige.ch/math/EnsMath/Rome2008/AnnProc08.pdf>). The talks of the Italian afternoon have appeared in the journal *Progetto Alice*.

## LE CENTENAIRE DE LA COMMISSION INTERNATIONALE DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT MATHÉMATIQUE

SYMPOSIUM À ROME: 5–8 MARS 2008

La Commission Internationale de l'Enseignement Mathématique (International Commission on the Teaching of Mathematics, Internationale mathematische Unterrichtskommission, Commissione Internazionale dell'insegnamento matematico) fut créée lors du 4<sup>e</sup> Congrès International des Mathématiciens qui eut lieu à Rome du 6 au 11 avril 1908. Toutefois la proposition de fonder un organisme international de ce type avait déjà été formulée par David Eugene Smith, professeur au Teachers College de New York, qui nourrissait un fort intérêt pour l'éducation et l'histoire des mathématiques. Felix Klein, éminent mathématicien et promoteur d'une importante réforme de l'enseignement des mathématiques en Allemagne, en fut le premier président.

L'objectif initial de la commission était de "faire une enquête et publier un rapport général sur les tendances actuelles de l'enseignement mathématique dans les divers pays". Dès lors, la Commission, appelée depuis 1954 International Commission on Mathematical Instruction (ICMI), a traversé des périodes de stagnation (liées aux événements dramatiques de la première moitié du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle), puis de reprise, pour arriver à la fin des années Soixante à une véritable renaissance sur la base de nouvelles finalités et méthodologies de travail. Pendant le dernier quart de siècle, ses activités et les courants de recherche se sont élargis et diversifiés et ont contribué à la naissance d'une nouvelle discipline, la "recherche en didactique des mathématiques".