

Memories of Ubi D'Ambrosio

Monica Mesquita, Sal Restivo, and Tania Cabral

It is with great regret that we announce to all of you the passing of Professor Ubiratan D'Ambrosio, our friend Ubi, on the morning of the 12th of May, 2021. Ubi has suffered serious health problems for some time now, and his health has been declining in recent months. Ubi died in his beloved São Paulo, Brazil.

This is a moment of profound sadness for all of those who knew Ubi as a comrade and from afar in the communities of people from all classes and lifestyles his life and works touched. His legacy will live on, a legacy of championing peace in all its many senses and dimensions: inner peace, peace with our friends and neighbours, peace with nature, and world peace. That is, he was a champion of peace in all the contexts our lives and values are embedded in naturally.

This was Ubi's quest. What he achieved in this quest he owes to a profound capacity for recognizing where the ties that bind us have become knotted, a knowledge of how to untie those knots, and how to reconstruct them in ways that created a new life praxis dedicated to social justice, equity, and affectionateness. Collective reconstruction and the courage to act were his goals as a mathematics educator and pioneer in ethnomathematics. But he made mathematics education a completely human and social endeavor.

In Brazil, Ubi was a great pillar for the constitution of a community of mathematics educators, encouraging and influencing new researchers with his ideas on transdisciplinarity and transculturalism.

There remains, therefore, the sincere and deep feelings of condolence to all colleagues in this community, in which Ubi held the first opening conference in Nottingham, in 1998, and to family members, especially his beloved wife Maria José and his son Alexandre.

In his greatness and light, Ubi lives on in all of us, empowering our never-ending struggles for justice, equality, and humanity for all peoples, all generations, and the very earth that sustains us. Nosso abraço fraterno,

Eva Norén

I remember first listening to you in Copenhagen, ICME 2004. Your talk came right into my heart. Two years later, I and a group of teachers, school leaders and Bengt Johansson from the National Centre for Mathematics Education went to Auckland and the third Ethnomathematics Conference. 2007 you, and your wife came to Stockholm, to visit schools in suburban areas, to have a symposium at KTH and to meet us, your Swedish friends, also visiting my home, on a boat. Bengt Johansson arranged an audience with the Queen of Sweden, Silvia, who was his student in Brazil when she was a little girl. The audience was supposed to 15 minutes, but Ubi and Bengt stayed for an hour, she admitted she still counted in Portuguese. I will always carry the memory of you in the cold and snowy Stockholm together with the heart of your wisdom.

Dave Wagner

I am saddened by the news of Ubi's death. He has been so very important to our community of scholars that acknowledges and addresses the social, cultural and political aspects of mathematics education. I personally feel a strong attachment to Ubi because he was one of my "first loves". In my 9th year of being a math teacher I realized the cultural nature of mathematics education, and so left teaching to study this reality. When I started reading the literature of mathematics education, Ubi's publications were the first ones I loved because he wrote and spoke directly to the things that led me to research.

Thomas Gilsdorf, Central Michigan University

I wish to express my sadness upon hearing of the loss of Ubi. There are few people in this world who can create the foundation of a new discipline, and lead it to success, all the while with a sense of kindness and inclusion. Ubi was one of those people. Now, people around the world are beginning to understand the crucial importance of race, gender, ethnicity, and culture, if humans are to live in peace and cooperation. Even some traditional mathematicians are beginning to realize that mathematics is not "cultureless". Ubi was ahead of his time. To Professor Ubiratan D'Ambrosio, may you rest in peace.

Memories of Ubi D'Ambrosio

Pamela Hagen, Port Moody, BC

It was with great sadness that I received the message from the MES community of Ubi's passing. I had the pleasure to attend one of his presentations at either a conference of the NCTM, or perhaps at something linked up to the CMESG, please excuse me I cannot remember which. What impressed me right away was how he made time to speak to trainee teachers and give them some of his pearls of wisdom that he had garnered through his career as they moved further towards and into a career involving mathematics education. It seemed to me that he was obviously thinking of the next generation of teachers of mathematics.

I was also impressed how he gently and oh so carefully put his beliefs in social justice and equity into the teaching of mathematics, which is not easy to do without making it seem false and as another add on. to Ubi it was an essential and natural element, most definitely not forced or a flash add on.

His gentle and authentic and powerful approach to the teaching and learning of mathematics obviously seeped into my own approach and that that I am every grateful. Thank you. Thoughts and prayers to the family

Marilyn Frankenstein

I think one of the most profound statements you have made, getting at the soul of what ethnomathematics means, and can accomplish, is:

The mission of bringing Western civilization to the planet has been the essence of conquest and of the colonial enterprise. Now we are at a crossroads. The human species and the planet itself are threatened...

The only possibility for survival depends on a better understanding of the entire set of possible explanations and views of the individual, of society, of nature, of the cosmos. Western mathematics, the most perfect embodiment of Western civilization, cannot be immune from the search for this deeper understanding. We can benefit much from understanding the workings of different systems of knowledge, the same way a stranger can tell us much about ourselves. (p. 15) There is no future in denying some successes in the science and technology developed following the Greek style. We will surely not be able to build faster jets and more powerful missiles using the male and female triangles of the Xingu ethnomathematics. But maybe the male and female triangles could help us not build the missiles and the jets carrying the bombs. (p. 17) (D'Ambrosio, U. (1997). "Where does Ethnomathematics Stand Nowadays?" For the Learning of Mathematics. 17(2): 13-17)

These thoughts have influenced all my work in critical mathematical literacy education, particularly the importance of respecting students' knowledge, and challenging the taken-for-granted about whose knowledge counts, and what counts as knowledge. But, in addition to your intellectual contribution to my work, to my life, circumstances brought you into

my life at a time when you saved my spirit. In 1986, when my life seemed to be closing down, after surgery for a cancer with a difficult prognosis, and having a desire to see the world before it was too late, out of the blue, I got a letter from you, from Brazil, asking if you could translate my article into Portuguese in order to publish it for a Brazilian audience. That started a process of opening my life up in new directions, connecting me with many mathematics education scholars around the world, and being invited to travel some of the world, giving talks in Brazil, South Africa, Mozambique, England, Canada, Norway, Denmark, Australia, New Zealand, and Greece.

Peter Gates

I remember attending the PME20 conference in Valencia in 1996 with my colleague Tony Cotton, and us feeling all was not right for those of us who saw social justice and equity as key drivers for achievement in mathematics and for a safer world. In a bar one night we hatched a plan for a new organisation that would focus on mathematics education and society. We just needed a keynote speaker. At the end of PME20 we

drove to Seville for ICME8, and found ourselves sitting in a presentation by Ubi D'Ambrosio. We looked at each other and almost simultaneously said "that's who we need", though we thought you would be out of our orbit. We came up to talk to you at the end about our ideas and to invite you to take part and open a conference that up to then had only been a conversation in a bar. You were so positive and encouraging, it spurred us on and you agreed to be our keynote opening plenary at what became MES1 in Nottingham 1998. MES is now planning its 11th conference nearly 25 years later. Since then, you have been a huge supporter of MES, attending to give another keynote in MES8 in Portland in 2015. It has been clear that to very many in the MES community, you have been an inspiration. I feel privileged to have met you and feel privileged also to have a signed copy of your book "Socio-Cultural Bases for Mathematics Education".

Paul Ernest

I was so very sorry to hear of the passing of Ubi. I have known Ubi for over 30 years and always found him, warm, humble, innovative and with great knowledge and wisdom. He never talked down to people, always found time for them and was endlessly encouraging. On 12 April I made a posting celebrating his great contribution:

<https://www.facebook.com/Philosophy-of-Mathematics-Education-109224187647578>

Celebrating the contributions of UBI D'AMBROSIO, a founding figure in the philosophy of mathematics education. Winner of the 2005 Felix Klein Medal, Ubiratan D'Ambrosio played a pioneering role in the development of research perspectives which are sensitive to the characteristics of social, cultural, and historical contexts in which the teaching and learning of mathematics take place, as well as his insistence on providing quality mathematics education to all, not just to a privileged segment of society. In particular, he founded and has provided the underlying philosophy of the ethnomathematics movement. Ubi remains an essentially modest man with an undying curiosity and a pandisciplinary vision that links mathematics, history and culture, dignity and social justice for all from his base in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

<https://www.facebook.com/ubiratan.dambrosio.5> <https://www.facebook.com/ubiratan.dambrosio>

<https://ciaem-redumate.org/.../Scott,%20mesa%20...>

We had just been exchanging emails and he sent me something to publish which will come out in the next issue of the journal He sent me: **An Essay on Philosophy of Mathematics and Culture**. He wrote (on about 10 April before I posted the above - indeed inspiring me to post the above)

Dear Paul

Many thanks for your interesting Facebooks. I remember you sending recently (in March) an e-mail about the journal. You said you like my writings (this made me happy) and suggested that I submit a paper even if it was published before. I cannot locate this e-mail of you. Do you think I can do it? I have a paper, published in a Brazilian journal of difficult access. I have improved it in some ways. Do you encourage me to send it to you? All my best, Ubi

I accepted with alacrity. He sent it, I have it, the rest is history. Yours in sadness. Paul

Hugh Burkhardt

Ubi D'Ambrosio was an important, singular figure in the world of mathematics education. A professional mathematician, he is also a philosopher. He played a leading role in encouraging the development of research and development in mathematics education in Brazil and throughout Latin America. Above all he is recognized for bringing the significance of ethnomathematics to the attention of the field. Ethnomathematics seeks to understand the roles of mathematics in different groups and nations: people on market stalls; designers of fabrics or buildings; researchers in economics, engineering, physics or mathematicians.

In his work, he synthesizes these diverse elements into a broad overview of the roles mathematics plays in diverse cultures and their importance for mathematics education. His broad agenda includes, for example, the creative aspects of doing mathematics and the ethical implications for the design of curricula. In doing

Memories of Ubi D'Ambrosio

this, he also offers an antidote to the disconnect between the world in which students live and what happens in mathematics classrooms – a major reason that students give for their negative attitude to mathematics.

He shows us this is an issue of equity – of respect for diverse backgrounds. It affects all societies, including the mainstream in prosperous countries. There, while middle class kids from well-educated and supportive homes are helped to tolerate the delayed gratification that pervades mathematics education, those from less advantaged homes are more likely to neglect a to-them-pointless activity.

Ubi was a good friend over many years.

Yasmine Abtahi

Once a good friend of mine and I were walking. We saw a giant tree, with huge branches and a million leaves. My friend said: “did you know that this tree is a home to thousands of different species”. And I thought: *“what a caring and giving living being”*.

In person, in his writings, and in the traces of his thoughts and values in many of our owns, Ubi reminds me of that giving tree.

Bill Atweh

It is with the greatest sadness that me and thousands of followers of Ubi's writings have heard the news of his passing. He was a great source of inspirations to me personally, not only in the humanity of his writings but also in the humility and genuine care that he has shown to the subjects of his writings and his audience. Naturally, our loss of a figurative father of a great movement in mathematics education is only surpassed by your own loss of a husband and father. I Join you in your sadness but also in celebration of his rich and giving life. May Ubi rest in peace and may we all try to maintain his spirit and teachings alive

Jennifer Godfrey Anderson

This past weekend, I watched Ubi's Opening Address at MES 2015 again. As I listened to him in Portland, I remember thinking how remarkable he was as he cut through all of the noise of academia to the essence of our role as educators and researchers. He inspired me then and he continues to inspire my education students who read his Address at the beginning of each term. His gentle wisdom lives on in this next generation. My sincerest condolences to his family, friends, colleagues, and students.

Prof. Jyoti Sharma

It is a great loss for the education community of scholars, researchers and for all those common people who have been influenced by the seminal work of Prof. Ubiratan. He was the voice of people who were the victims of inequality and deprived educational opportunities not just in Brazil but all across the world. He will be fondly remembered to make Math a humanistic and social discipline. My thoughts and prayers are with the wife and son of Prof. Ubiratan to bear this pain.

Bengt Johanson

When I was reached by the sad news of Ubiratàn D'Ambrosio's passing away, my thoughts went straight to the unlikely meeting with Ubiratàn and the Swedish Queen Silvia at the Royal Castle in Stockholm, February 2007. The background to the meeting was Ubiratan's reaction to my invitation in 2006 to visit Sweden and his direct answer: *"Yes, I would very much like to come, but only if you can arrange a meeting with Queen Silvia – I was her math teacher when she lived in São Paulo"*.

After initial difficulties in setting up the meeting via contacts with Ladies-in-Waiting, I went directly to the First Lady of the Court, the Baroness Kristine von Blixen-Finecke. The Baroness spontaneously responded to my question: *"The Queen will love it!"*. After "standing in line" for about six months, we, Ubiratàn, his wife and me, were welcomed to the Royal Castle and the meeting with Queen Silvia. We were guided by a Lady-in-Waiting who strongly emphasized that the Queen was very busy and that we should expect a short visit.

When Queen Silvia entered the room where we met, an intense conversation immediately took place between the Queen and Ubiratàn - in Portuguese! - which lasted for at least 10 minutes, after which the Queen turned to me and apologized for speaking Portuguese. Hereafter the conversation continued in English. so that I also could follow the conversation. Ubiratàn brought a beautiful book as a gift to Queen Silvia with many pictures of São Paulo, which led to a long conversation about their shared memories and experiences from the Queen's time in Brazil. I asked if we could immortalize the visit photographically. Queen Silvia immediately called in her Lady-in-Waiting who helped us with my camera - see attached picture.

During our meeting, I asked Queen Silvia: How was Ubiratàn really as a math teacher? The Queen's reply came very quickly: *"After over fifty years, I am still counting in Portuguese!"*. This was later confirmed in contacts I had with the First Lady of the Court.

The meeting, which was expected to be short in time approached close to an hour before it ended. While we were waiting for a taxi in the courtyard, Queen Silvia came dressed to go home to the Drottningholm Castle in her car. Farther away we saw a person by the car waiting for the Queen, it was the Crown Princess Victoria!

The story of the meeting with the Queen does not stop there. When I received a prize from the Crown Princess Victoria at Stockholm City Hall two years later, my wife and I had the opportunity to mingle with the Crown Princess. During our conversation, the Princess said that she would probably have done better in math at school if she had had me as her maths teacher. My reaction came spontaneously *"Yes, it cannot have been easy to get support at home with a mother who was counting in Portuguese"*. The Crown Princess looked like she was wondering, how can he know that?

Many of us have Ubiratàn to thank for much!

Stephen Lerman

I encountered Ubi for the first time when he gave his ground-breaking plenary address at ICME4 in Adelaide, in 1984. PME in Sydney and that ICME were my first international research conferences, after many years as a schoolteacher. It seemed to me then that he had a huge impact on his audience, and certainly on me. His ideas changed the direction of my studies and research; he gave legitimacy to focusing on learners and on how disadvantage is understood. We met again at the first MES conference, called then MEAS, in 1998 where we both gave plenary talks. We met again several times over the years at conferences and a couple of times in Brazil. He was always warm, generous, and interested in others. He has inspired so many people who will continue his work.

Diana Lambdin and Frank Lester

Dear Maria Jose' and Alexandre, Our sincerest condolences to you at this sad time. Ubi was a kind, compassionate man. His life was and is an inspiration to us and countless others. We have many very fond memories of times we spent with him over the years, beginning when he brought Beatriz to Bloomington to study at IU and continuing thereafter. He undoubtedly leaves a professional legacy that the education community will be challenged to continue. But the most lasting memories for us are ones that tell a story of a strong, kind, compassionate man who loved his family very much. Although he may have physically departed from us, he has not really left us because he is still alive in our hearts and minds. Through us, he lives on. Indeed, we are richer for having had Ubi in our lives. Our fond best wishes to you and our families.