

**MARTHA DANTAS (1923-2011):  
mathematics teaching, pedagogical experiments and teacher's training**

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Martha Dantas was teacher of Didactics of Mathematics at the Faculty of Philosophy of Bahia from 1952 to 1968. Her contributions for Mathematics Education in Brazil are recognized since she was honoured as President of the First National Meeting of Mathematics Education, held in São Paulo (1987), when the Brazilian Mathematics Education Society was founded. Indeed, she was a very active promoter of key events in mathematics education in Brazil. She organized the First National Congress of Secondary Mathematics Teaching (Salvador, 1955), a pioneer professional meeting of the area in Brazil and Latin America. Some years later, from 1965 to 1968, she coordinated the Section of Mathematics of the Centre for Teaching of Sciences of Bahia, which conducted experiments on geometry teaching using geometric transformations and published two collections of mathematics textbooks for primary and secondary education.

Martha Dantas was born from a typical aristocratic family of landowners with active participation in oligarchic power relations that ruled Bahia along many time. Almost always studying in private religious schools, she finished Normal Course of Ursulines School for girls and obtained a Primary Teacher degree in 1941. In 1942, she was approved on the official public exam and was appointed Teacher of a Public State Primary School. The following three years, while teaching, she continued studying tonight in State Secondary School of Bahia, because it was necessary doing a scientific preparatory course to submit for Faculty of Philosophy, where she planned to study mathematics. In fact, she was admitted in 1945 and obtained a bachelor degree in 1947, after doing courses of calculus, algebra, geometry, mechanics and physics, the same offered at Polytechnic School, because her teachers were engineers. One year later, in 1948, after doing courses on didactics (sociology of education, cognitive psychology, biological foundations of education, general didactic, education management, and applied didactics of mathematics), she obtained a licence degree and became able to teach mathematics in secondary schools. So, in 1949, she was approved on the official exam and was appointed Mathematics teacher of the same Public State Secondary School she has studied three years before. This same year, Isaías Alves, head of the Faculty of Philosophy, invited her to be the principal of Faculty's School of Application, and three years later, 1952, he made another invitation for her becoming Faculty's professor of didactics of mathematics.

Martha Dantas was fluent in French, Germany and English. She received publications on Mathematics teaching from Europe, so that she was up to date with the international news of the area. In 1953, she visited Belgium, England and France educational institutions, including the Centre International d'Études Pédagogiques de Sèvres, where she interacted with Lucienne Félix e Marceline Dionot. The activities promoted by the Association des Professeurs de Mathématiques de l'Enseignement Secondaire Public (APMESP) and the activities carried on by the teachers of the Nouvelles Classes introduced by Gustave Monod's Reform greatly impressed her.

As soon as she returned from Europe, Martha Dantas organized the National Congress on Secondary Teaching of Mathematics, held in Salvador, Bahia, in 1955. This was the first of five congresses held until 1966, when the sequence was interrupted because of the dictatorship. Martha Dantas attended all of them and attended the

Second Interamerican Conference of Mathematics Education held in Lima, 1966, when she presented a report on mathematics teacher's training in Brazil.

At last, but not at least, during the sixties, Martha Dantas took a very important part on the founding of Institute of Mathematics of University of Bahia, where were offered the first courses on modern mathematics for secondary teacher in Bahia. In 1965, she became coordinator of Scientific Section of Mathematics of the new Centre of Teaching of Sciences of the University of Bahia, which she conducted experiments on geometry teaching using geometric transformations and also in service training for mathematics teachers. This the end of this period, she published two collections of mathematics textbooks for two different levels of secondary education.

After the University Reform Law of 1968, Martha Dantas became Titular Professor of the Faculty of Education of Federal University of Bahia, successor of the University of Bahia, where she continued doing didactics experiments on mathematics teachings and teaching courses for mathematics teachers training. After retiring, at the end of seventies or beginning of the eighties, she continued active attending professional meetings and coordinating pedagogical experiments until the end of the century, when she was arriving. After her eighty years birthday, in 2003, her healthy conditions were not the same and she stopped almost completely her professional activities.

**Figure 1** – Martha Dantas. Opening the First Congress session, 1955.



**Figure 2** – From right to left: Osvaldo Sangiorgi, Martha Dantas, Martha Blauth and Jairo Bezerra (the last on the left), that took part of all congresses from 1955 to 1962.