

[An Adventure in Academia. III](#)

June 21st, 2009

Summary of Past Episodes: We left me after I had submitted an “expression of interest” in providing a chapter “*dealing with two important agendas for mathematics education in societies around the world, namely quality and equity*” after which common sense had prevailed and I had forgotten all about it.

A couple of months later, though, and to my great surprise, I was advised that “*your proposal was Conditionally Accepted by the group of Editors and [that] you are asked to develop the full first draft of the chapter by 30 July, 2009.*”

That it was “*conditional*” of course immediately turned me off: Without knowing the conditions, I surely had neither the time nor the patience to write a chapter, a lot of work, to find it later rejected in the old MAA Monthly manner mentioned at the outset of this adventure in academia. Sure, I would have liked to advertise my views in a “scholarly” book that might impress administrators, but the price was likely much too steep. Nevertheless, I kept on reading.

However, if I hadn’t already been essentially turned off, the next paragraph alone would have done it: it read in part: “*We are particularly pleased that the list of authors includes both some highly accomplished authors with wide experience and international reputation and some newer researchers.*” Gone was the “authorship [being] requested from”, inter alia, “mathematics teachers” of the Call for Chapter Proposals. It now looked like we were back to the usual: pure, useless mutual educando in which at least half of any paper consists in quoting other papers.

But, since the message continued with “some comments on your chapter”, I got curious and read on. I am quoting the two paragraphs that followed in full:

Some comments on your chapters were: This is an interesting proposal that is potentially related to the theme of the book. It promises to discuss quality as an alternative to rigor within mathematics or the utilitarian use of mathematics. Two comments are suggested to the author. One is that the focus of the book is on the interaction of the quality and equity agendas. Hence the expectation is that every chapter need to address each concept. In this case, what is the implication of basing quality on reason and common sense on equity issues? Secondly, the author may need to define reason and common sense that posit them as outside cultural and social influences – or is he arguing that the quality of mathematics education is geographically and temporally determined?

and

This proposal explores a proposal for the betterment of the teaching of mathematics at university level. It seems that the author only takes on the issue of quality and assumes that equity comes as a result of the first. It is not clear to me how this proposal is a contribution to the concerns of the book.

The comments in the first paragraph were not entirely untrue. For instance, I could see why the reviewer would ask the first question, “*what is the implication of basing quality on reason and common sense on equity issues?*“. In a way, I had not made my position clear: I had only said that the reason there was no equity in the current situation was that mathematics education was based on memorization and I had not spelled out why this would automatically work against the “disadvantaged”. But the second question got me more than a little bit worried: Did the reviewer really think that a mathematician would not hold that “reason [...] is outside cultural and social influences”?

The comment in the second paragraph on the other hand jarred me as, indeed, I had “only tak[en] on the issue of quality and assume[d] that equity comes as a result of the first.”

So, I sat down at my Mac and in the course of five days wrote [Chapter Thirteen](#) which I dispatched attached to the following:

Upon reading that my proposal was only “Conditionally Accepted by the group of Editors” you will not be overly surprised that I was getting ready to decline ... until I read one of the comments which caused me to sit down at my desk and stay put until the attached stuff was done. Which took me a bit longer than I had counted on.

The stuff is coming at, er ... 7130 words [*the maximum had been set at 6000*], but then, after all, we are talking magnum opus, radical departure much apt to be misunderstood, etc. Besides, there should have been a chapter 0 analyzing all that was wrong with the current non-education that I could have referred to instead of spending over half my allowance doing just that. Oh well!

Anyway, under the GNU Free Documentation License that this was written under, and should they happen to be at all interested by this piece of truly an-academic writing, the editors have complete latitude to do whatever rewriting/editing/academising/cutting/digesting/expanding/translating/whatevering they may wish. In other words, if I am ready to put the stuff in whatever reasonable format the editors wish and, of course, do a little bit of polishing here and there, e.g. references, as far as I am concerned the chapter is written.

What happened is that I had long felt the need to carefully delineate and explain what I am trying to accomplish with the magnum opus and that I had already made numerous unsuccessful attempts, e.g. in in the Preface to Reasonable Basic Algebra and in my Notes From the Mathematical Underground. See freemathtexts.org. Somehow, I never felt I was really describing what I was trying to do and why. It was only reading that one sentence from the reviewer that suddenly gave me the key to what I had missed all that time and that caused

everything finally to fall in ... one long place.

But now, after having already spent too much time writing this manifesto, I need to return to the magnum opus and must leave it entirely to the group of Editors to decide whether “reasonable” mathematics as a political act is an idea worth pursuing.

But please, no matter what the decision, keep in mind that this will have been more than worth it to me and that I am very grateful both to you and to the anonymous reviewer.

Best regards—apologetic should events require it.
–Schremmer

Within 24 hours, I got the following unsurprising response:

I [...] read chapter 13.

I am afraid it is not in a style or content that we are interested in in this publication.

It perhaps fits in more into a separate book on your views of mathematics education but it does not have sufficient material on issues of quality and equity.

Please let me know if you are interested in trying for another contribution to the book to be written in the standard academic style.

to which I responded:

I wrote what I thought was relevant to quality and equity but when the book comes out I will be interested in taking a look, so could you let me know? I will get my school to buy it.

In any case, I am totally unable to write in the standard academic style.

And, as I already said, I am glad this made me write something I had long wanted to.

Best luck
–Schremmer

And thus ended the dream: A lesson to anyone with still any hope in academia.

This entry was posted on Sunday, June 21st, 2009 at 12:41 am and is filed under [Uncategorized](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed. You can skip to the end and leave a response. Pinging is currently not allowed.

Leave a Reply

You must be [logged in](#) to post a comment.