

# Freudenthal *cursief*

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## HF – an inspiration in the search for truth

My personal connection with Hans Freudenthal was of course through 'Educational Studies in Mathematics', and although we met at various conferences and meetings to discuss issues of academic interest, it was our shared concern for the journal, and later the book series, which brought us closely together. It was in this context that we discussed so much of significance not just about the business of producing a journal, but about the whole purpose of publications like ESM, what they should be publicising, what criteria should be applied to any research publication, and of course what criteria should be applied to any research.

In the letter which he wrote to me asking me to take over the editorship he said: 'I am not yet content with the level of ESM. A large number, maybe two-thirds, of the papers submitted, are declined and I would decline even more if the flow of good papers would be larger.

You see the first requirement a Chief Editor would be obliged to fulfill is to be very critical. It is incredible, the kind of stuff we receive. Mathematical nonsense, educational nonsense, statistical nonsense, and nonsense as opposed to common sense. Statistics is in particular dangerous. At a certain moment I caught suspicion. From that moment onwards, when I got a so-called empirical research, I have asked the author for full evidence – tests, technical details on the research, and the bulk of the statistical material, and after this measure I have only accepted a small part of this kind of papers, and even these only after fundamental changes – you cannot imagine the mountains of mistakes in this kind of papers. I am still not happy about the papers I accepted because I may have overlooked more than I noticed.'

He was an inspiration to me, as I suspect he was to many of us in the field of mathematics education, as a tireless searcher for truth and wisdom. (I don't think he would like to be remembered as a re-searcher!) He was a tough critic and someone who did not shirk his responsibilities in helping a knowledge field to develop. He undoubtedly believed that those of us who are genuinely concerned

with the development of knowledge are not as critical of ideas, methods and practices as we ought to be. His first inspiration to me therefore was as a critic.

However, this critical stance regarding knowledge did not necessarily mean that he was also critical of the person. He was, to my eyes, a very supportive and sympathetic colleague, and he saw another of his major responsibilities as being that of helping people.

Later on in that letter to me he said, 'A few months ago I asked colleague-editors in education about their policy. One of them wrote that they decline about 9/10 of the submitted papers. At ESM it is much less because I try to *save* as many papers as possible. So the second requirement for a Chief Editor of ESM would be to be not so critical but lenient.'

Indeed one of the major aspects of my ESM work, as it was with him, was helping authors improve their papers to enable their important ideas to be as accessible to as many readers as possible. Freudenthal was remarkable in his ability to see the worth of an idea and to encourage its wider acceptability. He was also personally supportive to colleagues through his formal examining and refereeing activities and in the informal context of academic conferences. I was always most impressed with the way he liked to attend a PME-conference (say) as just an ordinary member (even though he was an Honorary Member), sitting in on every plenary talk and diligently attending research reports and working group sessions. There were of course many other aspects which endeared him to me – his *creative* uses of English and of other languages, his enjoyment of humour and subtlety, his childlike *chuckle* of pleasure, his liking of a certain balance between formality and informality (he always wrote to me as 'Dear Bishop'), his personal humility and lack of *show* and of course his bow-ties!

But the two essential qualities I shall always associate with his memory are the constant and critical search for truth and the personal support and encouragement needing to be given to other searchers. If we all only remember and develop these qualities in ourselves, the academic world, and indeed the whole world, will be a better place, thanks to HF's inspiring example.