

13th International Congress on Mathematical Education
Hamburg, 24-31 July 2016

MATHEMATICS, EDUCATION & CULTURE: A CONTEMPORARY MORAL IMPERATIVE

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Ubiratan D'Ambrosio, in his plenary at ICME-5 in Adelaide in 1984, challenged us as mathematics educators to understand the relationship between mathematics, education and culture. He used the term 'ethnomathematics' to refer to the historical, political and cultural dimensions of mathematics and their relation to society. In subsequent writing he exposed humans' responsibility to build a just and beautiful world on the "dorsal spine" of mathematics.

I will reflect on the reverberations of his work in the wider mathematics education community, and express some opinions about how this sub-field might contribute to resolving the cross-cultural crises that pervade contemporary society. Most of all, I offer some practical suggestions on how each of us, as individuals and communities, might nurture a gentle, beautiful, and productive peacock on the dorsal spine of mathematics, rather than an amoral monster that tramples much beneath it while leading the technological charge into the future.