

In Memory of Prof. Pearla Nesher (1930–2026)

Pearla passed away in her home. Survived by her daughters, Shlomit and Michal, their spouses, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, she left with sharp clarity of mind and remarkable serenity—inspiring in her life and in her death.

Condolences may be sent to:

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Pearla Nesher was born in 1930 in Tel Aviv. As a member of Kibbutz Nirim for over 20 years, she experienced life as a farmer, while excelling in pioneering educational work as a teacher and as the founder and principal of the regional school “Ma’aleh HaBesor” in the western Negev. Later on, in 1972, she completed her doctoral studies at Harvard University on the topic *From ordinary language to arithmetic language in the primary grades*, supervised by Prof. Marion Walter. Worldwide recognition of the importance of her work led to the design, development, and implementation of mathematics curricula by teams in the Ministry of Education and at the Center for Educational Technology (CET), which she established and accompanied over many years. She established the “Arithmetic Laboratory” at the University of Haifa, which became a model for the establishment of additional mathematics teachers' centers in Israel.

As a faculty member at the School of Education at the University of Haifa, and as Head of the School of Education from 1983 to 1988, her work focused primarily on the relationship between language and mathematics. The research areas in which she, together with her students, brought innovative and meaningful insights included number sense, alternatives in education, individualized instruction, and the relationship between natural language and mathematical language, with particular emphasis on word problems. From 1987 to 1989 she served as President of PME.

Because she did not believe in theory alone, it was important to her—alongside her academic work—to be involved in change within the educational field, and she therefore took on various public roles. From 1992 to 1996 she served as Chief Scientist of the Israeli Ministry of Education and Culture, and was the first Chief Scientist to come from the field of mathematics education research. She led reforms while advancing an egalitarian approach aimed at supporting disadvantaged populations.

With her clear-eyed and direct perspective, Pearla left us an important lesson, drawn from her memoir, *A Drop of My Own to the Great Sea* (Nesher, 2017):

“One can say that my pursuits unfolded almost on their own. They chose me more than I chose them. I loved learning something new every day, and this continued until these very days of my life. The number of ‘studies’ I conducted for my own pleasure and did not publish papers about is almost equal to the number of studies I did publish. One of my greatest pleasures was to sit with raw empirical material and search within it for regularities arising from certain hypotheses. I especially loved it when the hypotheses did not hold true..... I look back with satisfaction. ”

Pearla was a creative scientist, revolutionary and humble at the same time.

"I entered what used to be my Arithmetic lab at the University of Haifa and no one recognizes me. I call CET (the Center for Educational Technology) and the secretary asks me to spell my name..... In none of these cases was I offended. I was happy and proud at heart that my initiatives are 'alive and breathing'—there are things more important than our 'ego'."

From her we learned, and inspired by her, we shaped our own paths.

May her memory be a blessing.

Michal Yerushalmey, Jan 2026