

## A Lesson Learned on the Journey

*Victor Chant, Vice-Principal, Math & Career Planning Teacher, Fraser Valley Adventist Academy, Aldergrove, BC*

Life is a journey. Teaching is also a journey. The memories of a journey many times are not what happens at our destination, but rather the experiences that happen along the way.

I started my journey as a teacher in Zambia in 1968 at a school of 640 high school students. There were four full-time math teachers in the school. We shared one pencil sharpener among the four rooms. Our curriculum guidelines (controlled by the University of Cambridge exams from England) dictated that the students be able to graph functions on 2-mm squared graph paper and give answers accurate to 2 decimal places. And guess what! No graph paper could be bought in the country. Back in those days we had Gestetner ink duplicators. For those who are old enough to remember, writing and drawing on those Gestetner stencils was not an easy task. I drew my own 2-mm squared graph paper, could make about 1000 copies and have to start all over again because the stencil would get too wet from the ink and tear. We had no textbooks for our classes most of the time. I had to develop my own exercises for every class every day for most of my ten years of teaching in Zambia. Math tables and slide rules were the means of doing more complicated calculations.

I can remember when we received our first calculator (early 1970's)-a gift from someone in the USA. How we guarded that one calculator among four teachers. It was a luxury only.

But progress was on its way. While teaching in Zimbabwe in the 1980's, we received our first photocopier. What excitement! And we actually started using scientific calculators in the classroom. This brought about an immediate change in classroom performance. Skills that required reasoning and manual calculations resulted in poorer performance among students. Answers that could be punched into the calculator improved performance on more difficult levels of problem solving.

Now computers have hit the classroom. How did we ever survive without a computer for the last century? We may wonder. We don't even buy graph paper anymore. We use graphing calculators and the calculator shows the student what the function looks like without any struggle, then they draw a sketch on paper. I even have the luxury of two pencil sharpeners in my classroom (one of them is even electric!). My teaching journey of just over 30 years has seen a lot of change in what happens in the classroom. Most students today have not even heard of math tables and slide rules. My prediction is that in a few years, computer technology will be antiquated, and once again we will wonder how our students managed to learn without the "modern" conveniences.

But I have learned something else during my years of teaching. It isn't the Gestetner duplicator, the calculators or the computers, or the lack thereof that makes the classroom. I probably had better quality work handed in during those years of lack of "modern" teaching conveniences.

While working on my MA at Andrews University, I had the privilege of being instructed by Dr. Thesba Johnston. One day, I shared with her that I had accepted a call to move to Zimbabwe. The country had been ravaged by years of terrorist warfare. I asked her how I should approach and help people who were torn apart by terrorism. She smiled and asked very simply, "Can you accept people?" My answer was "Yes." "Then you can help people", was her response.

Therein lies the power of teaching. It is not the technology, not the fancy gadgets, or the modern facility; the power of Christian teaching lies in the fact of being able to accept our students and guide them on a journey that has been laid out in the Bible. By our ability to accept each student on an individual basis as unique creations of God, we create for them one of the most powerful tools for learning that has ever been devised. Our influence helps each student to establish a life journey, which will hopefully lead each one to the Kingdom of God.