5-1-1998

Death, Trial and Life

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In Mathematics, the value of attempt is often under-estimated by students. In almost all cases, struggling to find the solution is as significant as finding the solution itself. Indeed, in many cases, the student's solution turns out to be better than the solution given either by the instructor or the textbook. The following anecdote is meant to illustrate this point.

During Fall 1965 semester, a graduate student at Western Reserve University (now Case Western Reserve University), was taking a course in real analysis. The mid-term exam - indeed the first in the course - consisted of four problems carrying twenty-five points each, and the last problem, presumably difficult, had a hint provided. But deciphering the hint seemed to be as difficult as the problem itself. Being unable to give even an attempt for the problem, "death" seemed to be certain for the student for this course. Missing one problem completely out of four? Besides, a student cannot be sure to have got all other problems completely right.

With trials, made independent of the hint, the student got an idea for another approach for the solution. But having spent time on trying along the lines of the hint, the remaining time allowed the student to provide only a sketch - an overview to be exact - of the solution that he had in mind,

However, the instructor, Dr. Lazer, accepted the sketch as a complete solution. Later, Dr. Lazer filled up the details and handed out the (mimeographed) solution with the note "Idea due to XYZ" in the next class. It got life in the student and brought home the importance of one's own effort. To a beginning international student, it WAS a 'pat on the back.'

Incidentally Dr. Lazer, being both a great teacher and a successful research mathematician, was a counterexample to the usual notion "teaching or research." He seemed to believe in "teaching AND research."

TESSELLATIONS

Tesselations are quite neat
They always stick together like gum on your feet
They have no gaps or spaces
They're always on the floor
(Whether tile or wood, maybe you can think of more)
When you get a chance
You can tap dance and clap galore

They're always flat-planed surfaces
As anyone can see
Finding tessellations is as easy as one-two-three

Now that you know this information you can go across the nation in search of tessellations!

Zan Jabara

MR. TRAPEZOID'S WALK

He walked on a diagonal
Straight through the park
As he looked up through the sky
A rainbow seemed to be making an arc
It ended at the public square
Where a circle of children were playing there
At a popcorn stand people were standing in line
Above them was a huge rectangular sign
The trees on Octagon Avenue cast a shadow most profound
It looked just like a triangle as it reflected on the ground

Michael Pillar