▼ POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

A practical application of math

SCHOOL'S IN

Jane Muskens

Way back in the 1960s when I was in elementary school, I remember struggling over long division.

We were learning what was called the new math and we had to show how we got our answer.

One day our teacher was sick and we had the principal filling in for the day.

He was a crusty old man who often chewed on a cigar and looked like Groucho Marx.

Obviously not keen on the new math, he showed us a simple way to compute long division.

Finally, it all made sense and most of the class including myself managed to learn long division that day.

Later on in the early '70s my brother used a slide rule as he made his way through engineering at the University of Alberta.

Shortly before he graduated, he bought a calculator. This machine weighed more than a laptop and was as large as a brick.

When I was in university I took one course where we had to show our work and calculators were forbidden.

So in the early 2000s I was a little shocked when my son, who was in Grade 8, was allowed to use a calculator for his math class.

In fact, I think he got his first calculator in Grade 6—times have changed.

From what I can gather, math curriculum and how you approach it all depends on the outcome.

For example, at Okanagan College students who want to enter our trades programs must complete a Math ABLE test.

This test requires them to complete math problems without the use of a calculator. Why?

Because those who work in the trades are required to compute mathematical equations in their head on the job site—they don't usually carry calculators.

So this is where the new math comes in, which will be launched at all high schools across the province this September.

Principles of Math, Applications of Math and Essentials of Math will be replaced with other math options which are expected to provide students with the math they need to enter post-secondary or the workforce.

The first new math course is called Apprenticeship and Workplace Mathematics 10, 11 and 12. This course is designed for students going into the trades or planning not to enter an academic post-secondary program.

The second is Foundations of Mathematics and Pre-Calculus—a Grade 10 course. This course will be required by all Grade 10 students planning to move into Grade 11 and 12 academic math courses.

Foundations of Mathematics 11 or 12 is an academic math course designed for students who plan to enter post-secondary but not a program that requires theoretical calculus. This math course would probably apply to students entering the humanities, social sciences, some business degrees, and most health programs.

The highest calibre of math courses for high school students is now called Pre-Calculus 11 or 12. These are the courses for students planning to enter any college or university program which would require the completion of a first-year calculus course. This would apply to engineering, science, and most computing and high-tech programs.

Even though math isn't my forté, the old math, the new math, and the revised math sound to me just like that old Billy Joel song from the 1970s where he sings that "it's still Rock and Roll to me." It's still math, and in one way, shape or form, we're all going to need it as we move through lives and careers.

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