

Week ending 4.12.10

Time has suddenly accelerated again, as it did when Dale visited – this time Mum and Mandy seem to have been the catalyst. Sunday's prime objective was to skype Dale for our monthly chat; it was strange to ring off suggesting we might not speak again this year if we don't make a special arrangement for a pre- Christmas call. It doesn't feel like Christmas is around the corner as the temperature is so hot and the days are no shorter and full of sunshine.

On Monday I arrived at the workshop that had been proposed some months ago for a previous week. The purpose of the assembly was for the 'Maths Teachers Association of the Gambia' to create a training manual to promote the use of materials and resources in the lowest three grades of the school system – but I hadn't received much 'pre-course' material and had only seen a letter where my name was last on the list so hadn't felt I had an important role to play. I had made an enquiry as to whether a fellow volunteer, with a penchant for primary maths, could drop in to learn a bit for his role; I was advised he would be welcome but would not be entitled to any of the 'benefits'. He has ended up as scribe of the manual and its near completion would have been highly unlikely had I not encouraged his inclusion- I really do not know how we would have achieved a quarter of what has been done without him; I could not have achieved his secretarial role as I found myself in the role of chief architect leading the process. I have not had such an intense week of supplying knowledge and skills in such a focussed environment, and having encountered the wider community of 'aware' mathematicians realised their need for me here. I felt as though I started as an 'extra' but was promoted to lead role within 24 hours such was the situation; there is still work to be done but I hope it is a start for a lasting impact in future teaching. One aside as semi facilitator was that we were usually last to leave and turn the lights out (simple switch) and the fan = untangle the exposed wires!

At the conclusion, the organiser was discussing the validation and ratification process, and despite the fact that we, as volunteers, had tried to encourage the ownership back to the other group members these successive dates of the process were arranged around our availability – I explained that I was away in Senegal over Christmas and VSO required us to attend a conference before then. There is a window of 4 days (one being a Sunday) when I am 'available'; they have opted for three of them such is their recognition of our value. I am so glad to have had the opportunity to contribute at such a level (while Denise was suggesting I should take holiday to accommodate Mum's visit) but feel guilty that I have set a precedent for future volunteers with regards to commitment as there are 200 students that have gone untaught this week. They will also be without me the week after next again when I am involved with the validation process. I hope they don't view me as being uncommitted, like so many of their West African lecturers. A last point on the workshop; it was more focussed than many I have attended – I only hid one newspaper (while owner was out answering his mobile) that was being read in 'work' time – so apart from delayed starts I can't complain too much about the week's work; I didn't have to commute.

We have found further places to show Mum on her 3rd visit here. The kids are pleased with the visitors; Abi especially so as she has a sudden influx of craft materials-long awaited pipe cleaners and tissue paper have really 'ticked boxes'. Bradley has the new challenge of some workbooks and 'Western wonders' of a *Ben Ten* comic.

On Saturday we hit the beach at Sanyang- a favourite haunt with the last batch of volunteers. We remembered why as soon as we got into the sea and wished we had been sooner to recharge the batteries away from the hustle of the commercial beaches close to home. There were some developments in the form of some unwanted attention for Mum; a sad sign for the future of a beautiful bay.