Goals of the maple field trip

I wanted to introduce students to `maple`. My Math 251 students had run into difficulties with `maple`, and I wanted to see if a group visit to a computer lab with these less experienced students would have some value. I think it did.

My rather modest ambitions were to show students the program and to equip them with the ability to run a few simple commands and to work with the extensive `maple` "help" facilities. I wanted them to feel confident that the system would obey them. I wanted them to commit some of the simple errors that everyone makes when first using such a complex program, and to make these errors in what I hoped would be an environment which would be both emotionally and intellectually supportive. I feel that these goals were partly met.

I had prepared 4 sheets of instructions. Each sheet would be given to students after they had worked through the previous sheet. I encouraged students to work in pairs. I was surprised that most students were able to work through *all* of the sheets in one 80-minute period. I do not know how much was retained from this one exposure since I did not systematically require any further `maple`work from students. I did frequently refer to `maple`in my lectures, and sometimes told students how it could be used to help them with their homeowrk assignments (especially the workshop problems).

I wanted students to think of `maple` as an effective symbolic and graphical and numerical "calculator". I did *not* discuss `maple`'s capabilities for running user programs. There's some limit to what can be done in an hour or so!

Local Rutgers notes

I introduced students to `maple` because Rutgers has a site license for this program, and therefore it is available on a wide variety of "platforms" at Rutgers (Mac and PC and X-term). My students and I used an X-term equipped computer lab. Most students have accounts on the `eden` system. In order to effectively use `maple` with the `xmaple` interface students need to get *out* of the menu system which they have with their default `eden` login. To do this they need to find the command `revert` on their menu system, enable this command, and then logoff and logon again. They will then get a `unix` prompt and will be able to begin the sequence of exercises described here. Students who want the menu system back will need to remove the file `.nolush` and they'll then get the menu system at their next login.