A comment which seems to be frequently made by teachers is that they do not have enough time to engage in ‘nice’ explanations or activities with pupils because of the current pressure of exam syllabuses. Added to this are the pressures of OfSTED surveillance, league tables, and the Framework. I recognize that these pressures might have different motivations, but after a while a pressure is a pressure and differentiating between them can become problematic.

I think that our job as teachers is to manage these pressures so that we give both pupils and ourselves time to think about learning, their courses, to reflect on mathematical principles, indeed to take time ‘to stand and stare’. This might require a bold decision in the face of the ‘pressure’, but I think that time taken to think about teaching, and pupils taking some time to think about their mathematics will be beneficial in terms of engagement and probably even in terms of national testing.

The ATM exists because teachers have taken the time to think about their teaching, engaging their pupils in mathematical activity, arguing about what might constitute ‘good practice’ and developing their own collections of activities and strategies for teaching mathematics. The discussion and debate takes place at the annual conference, through the pages of Mathematics Teaching and in local Branches. Whereas Conference occurs only once a year and reading MT might be an individual affair the opportunity to discuss ideas with other teachers, to look at ideas which have worked for us or others, to consider the mish-mash of state interventions in education over the last decade or so, can be elaborated in meetings with other teachers in local branches. ATM branches can provide at least some space in which to ‘stand and stare’, to revise one’s view of teaching approaches, to restock one’s ‘armoury’ of activities.

I have been struck by how many of the writers, in this issue of Mathematics Teaching, have taken the time to consider their teaching and pupils’ learning. Richard Barwell looks at pupils making up their own word problems, and Rachel New suggests pupils should construct imaginary dialogues to support their engagement with mathematical argument. James Robinson asks his pupils to give a number a ‘personality’. In these articles pupils are being asked to think through writing in a different way about their mathematics.

Thinking about pupils’ learning will also lead to consideration about teaching and vice versa. This is demonstrated by John Hancock’s problem of the vulture and the mouse which poses questions for pupils and teachers. Ian Thompson’s review of teaching ordinality using 0-99 or 1-100 square challenges his own view, he changed his mind in the process of reflecting on the two resources Claire Palmer questions her spreadsheet activity and looks at the advantages and disadvantages of using Excel. Kate Collinson considers lesson starters but says that in the process she learned a great deal about pupils’ approaches to problem-solving. Of course, making sense of what have become rather recent orthodoxies is part of what the ATM should facilitate and Lucy Whitehouse opens up a discussion about potential plenary parts of a lesson.

These discussions can be developed from the articles here and continued in staffrooms and more widely between teachers from a range of institutions in a locality at an ATM branch meeting. Justin Coad reflects on how some sessions at conference have led to his own development and as a consequence how this might affect his classroom practice and similarly sharing these ideas with teachers locally would help a process of review and consideration about teaching approaches and pupils’ engagement.

Thomas O’Brien and Judy Barnett’s very interesting article reports on one activity which seemed to engage all the pupils involved without predetermined attributes of mathematical ability getting in the way and Paula McLoughlin challenges pupils’ mathematics in a referral unit through Logo and curve stitching.

On a different tack Kathleen Grant mathematizes travel, Siobhan Skeffington describes children’s games as mathematical and Marjorie Gorman mathematizes nursery rhymes.

Finally, Kimie Markarian writes about the Soroban.

Clearly one will not agree with everything written, including these reflections, but opening up discussions and continued review and consideration about what we teach, and how, will make the whole enterprise more interesting and possibly more successful in terms of current accountability measures. The ATM provides an opportunity for supporting this discussion, and branches can develop this locally. Why not call your branch today to find out about its next meeting, and if there isn’t a branch near you, then set one up and take some time ‘to stare’.

Jeremy Burke is a lecturer in mathematics education at King’s College London and is currently the Branches Officer on ATM general council.
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