A few weeks ago a neighbour who works his socks off to sustain the firm his grandfather founded said to me, “In business you have to re-invent yourself every ten years”. To give some background to this remark, his Grandfather started a tractor manufacturing firm. Who can make tractors in Cumbria in a global economy? So they developed and diversified. They now supply and service a great deal of farm machinery, including tractors, but also animal feed, seed and fertilisers to farmers. Life has been tough since foot and mouth. What do you do when your customers have emigrated, in droves, to the B & B trade, set aside or organic? What has that chance remark got to do with ATM currently? Maybe more than we want to acknowledge.

In the sixties many of us were going to change the world, or that was our belief, our hope. Ten years earlier a group had broken away from the Mathematical Association, moribund at the time, and set up ATAM (the Association of Teaching Aids in Mathematics). At this distance we can only speculate why they broke away rather than ‘re-inventing’ MA. Asking those still around from either side of the split only elicits partial truths. By the time I was on the committee, in the mid seventies, ATM was in need of being re-invented or it would surely have died. Most of us did not see the need but we did feel the goading from Bill Brookes, who had returned to committee after ten year’s absence. He saw the need. ATM did re-invent itself but in doing so became almost part of the establishment, more respectable. Committee weekends were concerned in responding to outside/political agendas; a change some of us neither expected or, with hindsight, wanted.

Successful secondary education is a subversive activity. Working with adolescents is tough. To be a successful subversive you have to be seen to be doing something quite different. ATM was a wonderful cover. What could be more respectable that a professional association of people concerned with mathematics education? Lacan remarked that if you declare your real reasons when undertaking a task you won’t achieve your aims. ATM has been enormously successful as a teacher support organisation. Dick Tahta put it succinctly in Reflections in MT195 ‘Reading between the lines…’. Quite so Dick. ATM weekend working groups sustained me to ‘work with the strength of all who had been there’ when I returned to my day job in a much less people-friendly environment. I can, and did, resign from the Labour party over Iraq, but it could have been PFI, not sacking Chris Woodhead the day after they were elected in 1997, privatising air traffic control, moving school cleaning to Capita so the cleaners no longer had a pension – but you can only resign once! I resigned from MA when their president said that the low standards in mathematics were due to bad inspection advice to primary schools in the sixties. But I can’t resign from ATM. Why is that? ATM is just too much part of the support that has sustained me throughout my teaching career. It may sound odd but ATM to me is family. You can’t resign from your family. But you can look at your family and ask if it needs a bit of dragging into the twenty-first century. So I read through this issue and asked myself, is it time for ATM to reinvent itself?

On page 27 Anne Watson writes about clearing out a cupboard. Is she asking the same question?

I looked at how English-based teachers start their articles. Examples include: ‘I wanted to find ways to help them with their SATs but...’. ‘This was the task set as part of...’. ‘As a secondary strategy consultant I was asked to train...’. I can hear, in my inner ear, Brenda Crowe saying quietly ‘Training is for dogs and roses’. More importantly I read into these starts a feeling that the agenda in these teachers’ classrooms is somehow not their agenda. What I read is a reporting that, not all, but perhaps too much, energy is being expended on other people’s agendas.

I moved to look at how people working in other parts of the world start their articles. They seem to me to start with less of a load on their shoulders. To take two starts: ‘Many artists throughout the centuries have used mathematics in creating...’. ‘At a workshop I attended recently participants engaged in a lively discussion...’. So how does ATM get rid of some of this luggage and re-invent itself as a support structure, by and for teachers?

Geoff Faux lives in Cumbria and walks the hills but he can’t quite give up sticking his oar into maths education.

Notes
2 Brenda Crowe was a National Adviser to the PreSchool Playgroups Association in the seventies. She spoke at an Easter conference in South London in about 1975. In those days there was a middle plenary where a non-member was invited to speak to conference. Opening and closing plenaries were reserved for members. She talked about the importance of play in learning. Not in early learning, but in any learning. I remember that a lot of people were very cross at the end of her session. I found it hard to see why all the heat was being generated.
The attached document has been downloaded or otherwise acquired from the website of the Association of Teachers of Mathematics (ATM) at www.atm.org.uk. Legitimate uses of this document include printing of one copy for personal use, reasonable duplication for academic and educational purposes. It may not be used for any other purpose in any way that may be deleterious to the work, aims, principles or ends of ATM.

Neither the original electronic or digital version nor this paper version, no matter by whom or in what form it is reproduced, may be re-published, transmitted electronically or digitally, projected or otherwise used outside the above standard copyright permissions. The electronic or digital version may not be uploaded to a website or other server. In addition to the evident watermark the files are digitally watermarked such that they can be found on the Internet wherever they may be posted.

Any copies of this document MUST be accompanied by a copy of this page in its entirety.

If you want to reproduce this document beyond the restricted permissions here, then application MUST be made for EXPRESS permission to copyright@atm.org.uk.

The work that went into the research, production and preparation of this document has to be supported somehow. ATM receives its financing from only two principle sources: membership subscriptions and sales of books, software and other resources.

Membership of the ATM will help you through

- Six issues per year of a professional journal, which focus on the learning and teaching of maths. Ideas for the classroom, personal experiences and shared thoughts about developing learners’ understanding.
- Professional development courses tailored to your needs. Agree the content with us and we do the rest.
- Easter conference, which brings together teachers interested in learning and teaching mathematics, with excellent speakers and workshops and seminars led by experienced facilitators.
- Regular e-newsletters keeping you up to date with developments in the learning and teaching of mathematics.
- Generous discounts on a wide range of publications and software.
- A network of mathematics educators around the United Kingdom to share good practice or ask advice.
- Active campaigning. The ATM campaigns at all levels towards: encouraging increased understanding and enjoyment of mathematics; encouraging increased understanding of how people learn mathematics; encouraging the sharing and evaluation of teaching and learning strategies and practices; promoting the exploration of new ideas and possibilities and initiating and contributing to discussion of and developments in mathematics education at all levels.
- Representation on national bodies helping to formulate policy in mathematics education.
- Software demonstrations by arrangement.

Personal members get the following additional benefits:

- Access to a members only part of the popular ATM website giving you access to sample materials and up to date information.
- Advice on resources, curriculum development and current research relating to mathematics education.
- Optional membership of a working group being inspired by working with other colleagues on a specific project.
- Special rates at the annual conference
- Information about current legislation relating to your job.
- Tax deductible personal subscription, making it even better value

Additional benefits

The ATM is constantly looking to improve the benefits for members. Please visit www.atm.org.uk regularly for new details.

LINK: www.atm.org.uk/join/index.html