Once again we are fortunate to have a collection of articles that complement one another in an appealing manner. Given the somewhat random nature of what arrives on my desk it is always surprising me that themes do occur. In this edition our opening article Learning from others – by Paul Andrews and Judy Sayers is an informative report on their European research project considering the teaching of equations. They chose to look specifically at equations where, the unknown, \( x \) appears on both sides of the equals sign and look at practice in three European countries which highlights the different approaches to this topic with learners. In his article entitled Modifying Tasks – Christopher Martin also takes as his starting point equations with \( x \) on both sides. In both articles there is a consideration of the ‘equals sign’. The notion and perception of equals is taken up in two further articles. The first piece is The equals sign: operations, relations and substitutions by Ian Jones, Mathew Inglis and Camilla Gilmore – in which the authors suggest some software to support the development of ideas associated with equality; the second is Two little lines by Victoria Tilley. Victoria reports on her school-based research within this topic and provides some revealing insights to pupil misconceptions. In addition, to sustain the theme, we have Inequalities by Alper Cihan Konyalioglu who identifies some reasons for student errors. This congruence of ideas never ceases to amaze me.

The front cover shows an intriguing picture which forms part of the article entitled Greetings from Poland by Krystyna Burczyk. There are undoubtedly some beautiful diagrams and models shown that will both engage, and challenge, any reader. Here Krystyna showcases her skills with something seemingly so simple as paper folding. Some people are lucky to have talents that enable them to be truly inspirational by example. Krystyna modestly describes herself as a teacher and origami artist. I think someone who can produce models and objects such as we see here can only be described as an artist.

A picture is worth a thousand exercises by Colin Foster gives us real cause to pause for thought – when was the last time that we used a graph, or picture, in such a creative way as part of our classroom teaching? Colin generously provides many pictures from his experience of working in this way with learners. Those pictures we were unable to include in this journal can be found at www.atm.org.uk/mt224. This article challenges us to consider which elements of our classroom practice are concerned with fostering the development of mathematical thinking – as opposed to teaching algorithms. This challenge has echoes within other articles we present here. Silent Starters, by Emma Morris, gives us the opportunity to share the experience of learners in her classroom when using what has become known as ‘silent starters’. Emma revisits the power and potential of this approach having been inspired by a session she attended at the ATM conference this year – 2011. When do you use silence – on the part of the teacher – as a stimulus to learning in your classroom? – have you tried this strategy? – let us know about your experiences by contributing to the various forums available to readers. Rupert Knight – in Using and applying mathematics – offers us insights into the primary classroom and how, through selecting approaches that focus on this process, pupils can be encouraged to be mathematicians. Rosemary Lister writes with some passion about Real tasks and developing mathematicians. Here Rosemary documents her experiences of returning to the classroom after a break, and the changes she experienced. In particular, she was unaware of, and maybe unprepared for, the impact her attendance at a Maths Education course would have on her classroom teaching.

Jayne Stansfield – having been given the job, two years ago, of ATM ‘Branch Champion’ – has written News from ATM for this issue. Jayne is able to report on a multitude of good things that are taking place regularly in local branches around the country. It makes you wish you could go to all of the branches and not just be limited to those in your locality. Maybe there is an opportunity to video meetings and provide edited highlights for some sort of ‘branches video archive’ – this is me just thinking aloud, but how do you respond to the idea? If you would like to start a branch with a group of friends, or are just at the thinking stage, go to the website for information and the chance to contact Jayne. I am sure you will be given every encouragement and support to realise the establishment of a new branch.

Bringing us up-to-date with what is happening in the secondary, and post 16 sectors, we have Functional Skills by Mark Pepper, in which he talks about this, and other initiatives, and suggests possible adaptations to the skills course. Alice Onion and Elnaz Javaheri document some innovative work currently being done in association with Bowland Mathematics that seeks to take advantage of the potential offered by Self and peer assessment of mathematical processes. Students clearly found the experience motivating and enjoyable. These features of a changed classroom dynamic also had an impact on student performance. Surely by any yardstick this must be regarded as a win-win.

Margaret Jones
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