BRANCING OUT HAS SO MUCH TO OFFER

Joe Murray describes the renewal of the ATM branch network

A look back at MT 127 from June 1989 showed me that there were 30 ATM branches around the country. At that time I recall attending a flourishing Manchester branch at Didsbury College, now part of MMU, in Manchester. In January 2012, MT 226 tells us that there are just 10 branches with 3 others proposed. When one considers the messages and implications in Sue Pope’s article in MT 226 about the decline in membership and consequent impact on CPD for teachers of mathematics, we might be tempted to find a connection. Perhaps teachers have been used to CPD being provided regularly for them in recent years, often one-to-one and in their own schools, frequently with no direct charge. Those sources are now much reduced, and maybe they have not totally disappeared. Is there an opportunity now, if not an obligation, for the subject associations to step in to fill that void in CPD provision?

ATM branch meetings can offer teachers some face-to-face contact with colleagues from other schools, the chance to share successful practice from their own classrooms, an opportunity to be presented with ideas and different approaches to learning and teaching, as well as time to sample and evaluate new resources. Lastly, and a key function for me, is that branch meetings will enable teachers of mathematics and numeracy to engage with the Association more fully and encourage wider membership.

In recent months I have worked with others to establish some new, or revived, ATM branches. Our Greater Manchester branch, which I began with Rosa Archer, provides two meetings a term at Manchester University. These take place on a Saturday morning. We were delighted that the first meeting of our “new” branch was lead by Anne Haworth. Not only is Anne a former Mathematics PGCE course leader at Manchester, but she was also a member of that vibrant branch at Didsbury in the 1980’s; a very fitting piece of continuity!! We have a full programme of meetings to take us up to the summer and we hope to build up a regular membership, offering a chance to meet new friends in the mathematics community; primary, secondary, and beyond.

Anne’s workshop on “Beautiful Mathematics” offered a series of stimulating images using polygons, polyhedral, ATM MATs and an interactive power point by James Robinson from the recent MT226 on-line. Many were absorbed in a challenging activity, drawing shapes, classifying polygons by number of sides and lines symmetry, in a two-way table. The meeting continued with investigation of tessellations, Escher patterns and a fascinating video presentation of the “Wheel of Whitney” which provoked a great deal of discussion which was still happening as the meeting closed.

At the February meeting, members were given some “Maths Spring offers....buy one get some free”. The theme was two-fold; how much mathematics can you teach and learn using a two by two grid and how can you turn one problem into many? As well as the expected themes of grid multiplication and its extension to expanding brackets, the group engaged with a two by two Carroll diagram for sorting shapes and numbers, along with the idea of creating sets of criteria cards and bigger grids to generate a wide range of differentiated tasks. A significant interest was generated by the movement game “Cube moves”, starting on a two by two grid, moving to a three by three grid, then bigger squares generating patterns of number which led to a linear expression for the fewest moves needed on any grid. Some left the meeting thinking about rectangular grids! Sampling some place value games, “4-omino” shapes and a two by two version of the “Braille” problem, we then extended this investigation to real Braille!! which kept everyone busy. For more information and the power-point slides for this meeting, contact branches@atm.org.uk

In East Manchester the new branch at New Charter Academy in Tameside launched with a workshop on the use of games to support teaching in algebra. The presentation used material from the ATM booklet, “What Kind of Game is Algebra?”. The activities offered something for learners at every level. Quadratic dominioes will engage and enliven the revision sessions for working at higher tier GCSE while “Grab the formula”, using a dice to generate the first two numbers in a linear sequence and thence to add more terms and derive the nth term, is a delightful way to reinforce this in middle years and bring some fun to learning what is often a challenging task for teachers. In ways like this, branches can be a source of awareness-raising among communities of teachers, of publications provided by ATM, and the benefits that membership will bring in terms of discounted purchases.
In May, a new branch was launched at Sheffield Hallam University. We want this to offer support teachers in Sheffield and the surrounding areas of South Yorkshire and beyond. Hallam has a community of primary teachers on the MaST programme and we will offer ideas, resources, and a learning community for these teachers and others from primary, secondary and SEN settings. The focus will be on Key Stages 2 and 3, looking at ‘challenge and thinking in mathematics’ with a workshop using some themes from ATM publications. The aim is to offer a forum for teachers to talk and share good practice with colleagues across all phases. A new Swindon branch began in September. More details can be found on the ATM website, or contact branches@atm.org.uk. Come along and share an idea from your classroom with others; successful ones are good, but even work-in-progress can lead to new and un-thought-of avenues to pursue. Engaging teachers through such groups will help fill that void in CPD provision, but it may well go beyond that to the raising awareness of ATM, and subject associations generally, generating new membership, increasing sales of publications, and bringing to more classrooms those guiding principles and core values of the Association..... and it will bring you a whole lot of fun, and many challenges as you make new friends in your local mathematics community.

By branching out into new areas of the country and perhaps joining groups already there, the Association will offer more to teachers. If you have suggestions, or comments about new venues, times of meetings, themes and content, presenters or offers to present, etc... Or if you have any questions, do contact the Branches Secretary branches@atm.org.uk, or via the ATM website.

Why not start your own branch? It is not that difficult... and there is help – you just have to ask.

Joe Murray is a member of General Council

References
Sue Pope, The future for UK mathematics subject associations, Mathematics Teaching 226, January 2012
James Robinson, Dividing Hexagons, Mathematics Teaching 226, January 2012
What Kind of a Game is Algebra? ATM publications
Mathematical Journeys, ATM publications
Rich Task Maths1, ATM publications

ATM Annual Conference
Mathematics for Real
Tuesday, 2nd to Friday, 5th April 2013

To be held at the Royal Victoria Hotel, Station Road, Sheffield, S1 2AB (Sat Nav ref).

Opening Plenary - Geoff Faux. Pythagoras claimed the gods used the whole numbers to design the universe. What was his evidence?

Closing Plenary – Hilary Povey. ‘Real’ Maths = real maths: sometimes, always, never true?

What do we mean by ‘real’ maths? Is it ever real maths? What claims are made about ‘real’ maths and why? What are the pedagogical problems that ‘real’ maths is intended to solve? I shall touch on these questions alongside similar ones which I imagine will have been much debated during the conference. In the context of these discussions, I shall invite you to engage in some maths for real as a closing contribution to the conference.

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You will never have far to walk at this venue – your residential rooms are located in the same building and many of the workshops/sessions are on a circular route around the hotel. Each day dinner and lunch will take place in the Ballroom together with the exhibitor’s event on Wednesday and Thursday. I’m sure you will love the ambience of this wonderful venue, which has all the usual facilities, and feel of an ATM conference but with the luxury that comes with a hotel. All the hotel facilities are available to conference delegates, for example the Esperanto health suite and gym.

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- 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.
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- Special rates at the annual conference
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