Reflections on editing

**MT 2005-2008**

Colin Foster found that editing *MT* influenced his classroom practice.

Since September, I have been back on a full timetable at school. This follows three years during which I have enjoyed an afternoon per week funded by ATM to edit *MT* (along with Helen Williams and Robin Stewart). It has been a wonderful experience, if rather all-consuming at times! With a journal to get out every other month, copy arrives from authors at a fairly steady rate, so there is always something new to read and think about. This sits alongside ongoing email conversations regarding pieces currently being worked on. Through editing *MT*, I have got to know many people in ATM much better and met many new and interesting folk I might not have encountered otherwise.

As an editor you have the privilege of seeing many articles that never make it into the pages of *MT*. Often this is because they are mainly focused on mathematical details rather than on learners’ experiences of learning mathematics, and such pieces frequently appear eventually in other more suitable publications. So a great deal of very interesting material passes across your computer screen, and I only wish there were time to engage with it all as deeply as I would like. As a practising teacher, I have always been keen to try out article ideas on my classes at school, sometimes telling them that this is what I am doing. I have been particularly impressed with my students’ ability not to be overawed by flashy bells-and-whistles ICT presentations when the ideas behind them are weak.

Some parts of *MT* are perfect for immediately lifting into your own setting. A great many of the problems from the Puzzle Pages quickly made it into our school *Fortnightly Mathematical Problems*. (Weekly seems to be too often for busy pupils and teachers to have a real think – and monthly is too infrequent.) The puzzles go out in registers at the start of each fortnight and are pinned up in form rooms. Many form tutors promote the idea or even allow time in spare tutor sessions to work on it. Good puzzles often reward perseverance and careful thinking more than prior knowledge, so the best solutions sometimes come from learners who do not always excel in the classroom. Many staff get involved too, another feature of good puzzles being that they often can be generalised or extended in more challenging ways.

However, for me the most enjoyable, and ‘distinctively ATM’ parts of *MT* are those articles that are not ready-to-use lessons. Publications such as the *Times Educational Supplement Magazine* focus on lesson ideas that can be more or less instantly applied in the classroom with a minimum of thought or fuss, and *MT* contains such pieces as well. But, within the spectrum of *MT* are also reflective accounts of mathematics learning, which provoke comparisons with incidents in your own classroom and cause you to tinker with your own practice. These are harder to find elsewhere, as they are not always to everyone’s taste. There was a debate recently on the *TES* mathematics discussion board (http://community.tes.co.uk/forums/25.aspx) regarding the value of belonging to associations such as ATM or MA. The majority of respondents were very positive about the benefits, but there were also some critical remarks. One was that the contents of some journal articles are not immediately transferable to the classroom and that some articles were too ‘abstract’ for the practical teacher.

I think there are many teachers who would share these sentiments. Consequently, mainstream publishers seem to want to produce books of ‘ready-to-go’ lesson plans that require little thought or input from the teacher in their ‘delivery’ [and heads of department buy these books in their thousands]. When a postman ‘delivers’ letters, he is not supposed to interfere with the contents of the envelopes – that is not his business. Similarly, books or journals of ready-made lesson plans, though popular, can end up leaving teachers ‘out of the loop’. This situation somehow posits that the profession is now full of teachers so busy, or so lacking in confidence or skills, that any deep thinking about pedagogy and planning needs to be done by others. Clearly this can be self-perpetuating. In the same way that learners who are spoon-fed in school end up expecting high levels of teacher direction, teachers who are not permitted or encouraged to exercise their professional judgment and discretion in their teaching will become deskilled and dependent on others, who may not have the same high-minded motives possessed by most teachers. In fact, it is tempting to conjecture that teachers who are highly dependent on and subservient to the producers of their resources will find it hard to encourage their learners to develop an independent spirit towards their thinking and take responsibility for their learning. It is rather like a head chef who is employed to heat up ready-made meals. He will lose his enthusiasm for his vocation and forget how to design a menu or make a soufflé – and eventually he will be replaced with somebody cheaper who is just as good at using a microwave. Much more importantly, the food being served is far less interesting and nutritious.

Colin Foster is second in the mathematics department at King Henry VIII School, Coventry.
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

Academic copyright permission does NOT extend to publishing on Internet or similar system. Provide link ONLY