Working group report

BSRLM and BERA: Maximising the opportunities for our affiliation

Alison Clark-Wilson
Institute of Education, University of London

The BSRLM affiliation with BERA, through which the BERA special interest group (SIG) 'Mathematics in education' is convened, brings with it the opportunity to share research and project outcomes that are regularly seen at BSRLM day conferences with the wider education community. Although ensuring the mathematics education community's presence at the annual BERA conference is an important part of this affiliation, the BERA SIG also has a small budget with which to convene other activities, events and publications. This Working Group was convened to explore how BSRLM might strengthen its affiliation with BERA through future activities, publications and events.

Background information

The BSRLM-BERA SIG convenor's main role is to support the presentation of mathematics education research at the annual BERA conferences by:

- encouraging and helping to coordinate symposia submissions;
- supporting Early Career Researchers;
- organising the papers within the mathematics education strand;
- attending and supporting the conference;
- convening the Mathematics Education SIG Forum meeting during the conference.

In addition, the SIG convenor (currently Alison Clark-Wilson) is encouraged to organise joint events with other SIGs, initiate BSRLM-BERA publications and propose other activities that promote mathematics education research to a wider audience.

Recent BSRLM-BERA activities

In recent years, the BERA SIG Convenor in post has organised day conferences in collaboration with the *BERA Socio-cultural and Cultural-historical Activity Theory SIG* (2011), the *BERA Language and Literacy* and *Social Justice SIGs* (July 2012) and the *BERA Practitioner Research SIG* (July 2014). These events have been well-attended and evaluated very positively by the participants. They serve both to widen activity within the BERA SIG and to publicise the existence of both BERA and BSRLM to a wider educational research community.

The mathematics education strand at the BERA conference

The Working Group discussed the attendances at mathematics education sessions at the most recent BERA conference, which had been poor and, on the whole, comprised regular attendees at BSRLM day conferences. It was agreed that if the main purpose

for presenting mathematics education research at the BERA conference was to reach a wider audience beyond the BSRLM community, then it might be necessary to rethink the location of mathematics education papers within the BERA conference programme. Whilst the input of the mathematics education SIG members as reviewers of paper submissions was essential, one possibility would be for papers to be reviewed by a member of a second SIG, which was also strongly aligned with the theme of the paper. This way the mathematics education papers could be distributed across a range of SIG themes at the conference, an approach that the science education SIG has adopted. This is the current approach for subject areas that do not have their own SIG (e.g. English education, geography education).

It was agreed the BERA SIG coordinator would raise the issue, and the proposed solution with the Executive Director of BERA and its Events Coordinator, who oversee the annual conference.

Proposals for symposia on themes relating to mathematics education strand at future BERA conferences

Given the current high profile of mathematics education within both national policy and the media it was agreed that the BSRLM membership should be proposing symposia for BERA 2014 on themes that are receiving much attention. These could include:

- Comparative studies in mathematics education (The Shanghai mathematics teacher exchange).
- School-led professional development in mathematics education ('Maths Hubs', Schools Direct).
- Teaching mathematics for conceptual understanding ('Mastery', Text books for primary mathematics).
- Baseline assessment of mathematics in the foundation stage.

Similarly, other important themes that are receiving less attention or are considered to be out of favour might also be appropriate, such as the role of dynamic technologies in the teaching of important mathematical concepts.

Proposals for future BERA/BSRLM events in collaboration with other BERA SIGs

A joint BERA SIG event between Mathematics Education and Practitioner Research (PRiME) is already planned for Saturday 4 July 2015 at Sheffield Hallam University. This will adopt a similar format to the event held in July 2014 at which twelve practitioners (all teachers) from primary, secondary and post-16 settings made presentations on their own research within a programme that included a plenary session and workshops on research methods in mathematics education. The Working Group discussed how the outcomes of such events might be captured and shared with a wider audience.

Supporting the newly established DfE funded 'Maths Hubs'

The Working Group discussed the remit for the new DfE funded 'Maths Hubs' and their role in the professional development of teachers. This led to a much broader discussion of the perceived ways in which the BSRLM membership could make the

outcomes of relevant research more visible to the 'Maths Hubs' and how the outcomes of practitioner research might be shared with a wider audience. The following suggestions were made:

- Invite practitioners who present at the PRiME Day Conferences to both attend and present at future BSRLM day conferences.
- Nurture a group of practitioner researchers to establish a BSRLM Working Group to develop their own activities and outcomes.
- Explore ways for the artefacts of practitioner research to be communicated and made available to a wider audience.
- Make a short video about the next PRiME event to promote this community.
- Consider ways to support the post-event discussion through webinars and asynchronous online activities.
- Offer regular workshops on research skills for practitioners.
- Consider developing a BERA/BSRLM publication of recent research in mathematics education – in the style of Askew and Wiliam, (1995).

Next steps

This report summarises the discussion of the Working Group. We welcome any thoughts, suggestions or offers for action. Please contact Alison Clark-Wilson (a.clark-wilson@ioe.ac.uk) in the first instance.

References

Askew, M., & Wiliam, D. (1995). Recent Research in Mathematics Education 5-16. London: Ofsted/HMSO.