

TASK CENTRE PROJECT

CONSULTANTS' NEWSLETTER

NO. 4

OCTOBER 1994

Greetings from the 'nerve centre' of our Task Centre Project. The main purpose of this newsletter is to inform you of the inputs to, and outcomes of, the Consultants' Meeting held on September 19th. I think it was originally Pam Macklin's idea to try to get us together and I thank her for that, because it was a great opportunity for people to share their experiences and ideas. When the end of the day arrived, there was still more we could have talked about. Another meeting will have to happen. Perhaps to coincide with the visit of Michelle Selinger (our chief UK consultant) in April next year.

In addition to several Victorian consultants, Vin Sharkey was able to come down from NSW. Sue Davis was able to join us for the day to meet many of us for the first time, and Geoff Giles and Bet Sampson, our agents from the UK, were also present. Key CC office staff were able to drop in and expand their understanding of the growing web which is this project, and CC Curriculum Manager, Bruce Wilson, was also able to pay a visit.

It was rewarding to hear Bruce refer to the evolution of the Task Centre Project model as an *emblem* for possible CC developments in other areas.

The CC board has come to recognise that much of the vitality and validity of this project exists because it comes from teachers and is delivered to teachers through teachers such as yourselves. Thank you once again for your interest and involvement which has brought us to where we are. We look forward to further exploring this rich educational environment with you.

Some details of the meeting follow:

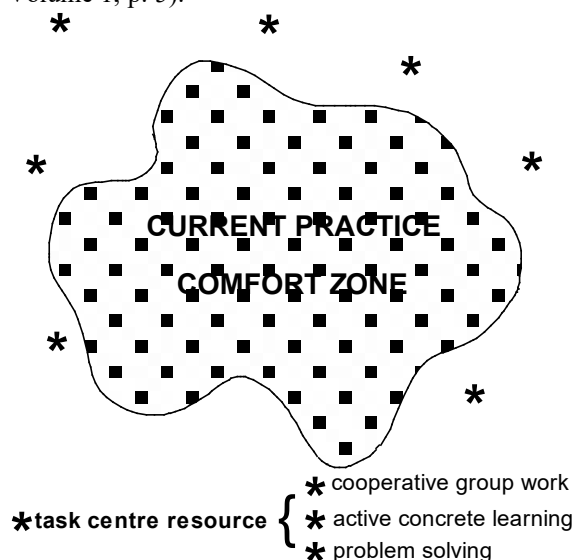
Introducing the Introductory Workshop

All consultants commented on how valuable it is to use a 'whole class' task in the first half hour of the day. Involving the participants by modelling what is possible with students seems to be a powerful way of focusing teachers' enthusiasm.

Lucy uses Tower Of Hanoi because it is so familiar to teachers and yet they are often unaware of its depth. David likes to use Eric The Sheep because the notes provided in the Workshop Leaders' Guide are so supportive. Charles' favourite of the moment is Crossing The River 1. I have used Garden Beds which is extensively annotated in your Sample Task Notes.

These latter three all lend themselves to acting out as part of the 'lesson', and the physical involvement of the teachers seems to be another important contributing factor to both 'breaking the ice' and helping teachers capture a vision of problem solving pedagogy. There are many tasks which both lend themselves to acting out and present the image of the task being the tip of the iceberg. As you gain more TC workshop experience, we would encourage you to try different ones from the kit.

Charles also made the point that it is valuable to link the TC to the 'big maths picture' in the first five minutes through a diagram like this (see MCTP, Volume 1, p. 5):



The Task Centre brings together three aspects that teachers are looking for: cooperative group work, concrete and active learning and problem solving.

All teachers operate within a current practice comfort zone which has fluid boundaries. Beyond that zone, there are a range of issues clamouring for inclusion. *One* of these is problem solving and *one* of the many approaches to problem solving is through the task centre resource. This workshop is designed to assist teachers to draw this form of teaching/learning into their comfort zone.

He also likes to link the task centre to the following aspects of school curriculum:

- ☐ Program / planning
- ☐ Teaching / learning
- ☐ Monitoring / assessment
- ☐ Reporting / accreditation

New Tasks

Charles presented a new one called Triangle Area which is now a better task than it was as a result of joint suggestion and discussion.

Geoff took us through his new publication *Algebra Through Geometry* which will be available in Australia by next year. We all wanted a copy. It is an elegant introduction to secondary school algebra through Tak Tiles, a product which Geoff first developed nearly twenty years ago as a spatial puzzle for young children. Geoff has given his blessing to designing tasks based on the concepts and material.

We have been continuing, albeit slowly, with the writing of extensive task notes. A sample was given out at the meeting and is included in this newsletter for your information.

Other Wisdom from the Day

- the task as a 'Tip Of An Iceberg' is a message to which teachers enthusiastically respond.
- some consultants have been in situations in which either the staff were not adequately briefed on the purpose of the day, or were not committed to staying in the workshop for the day due to other responsibilities. It was suggested that once a workshop is booked, Sue could send the enclosed discussion sheet to the coordinator. This will now be done.
- Tracey Swan's story, pages 4-11 of the Teachers' Handbook, offers many touchstones for teachers reaching out to a new pedagogy. You might consider copying it during the day and allowing a quiet period during the afternoon for reading it through.
- down play the importance of labelling the tasks easy/medium/hard if the discussion of this begins to get involved. The best way to make an assessment is to use the tasks with the students

for a while. The placement of stickers can always be changed.

- consider involving children in elements of the workshop, eg: helping to solve the tasks and presenting their favourite task.
- during a maths week children can make poster problems for the problem solving clinic.
- build up a solution book with the students' help.
- Who Owns The Monkey, which has recently been revised, was originally submitted to Lucy's task centre collection by a Year 7 student. That student is now sitting for Year 12.
- some tasks make great assessment tasks.

Participation Certificate

Some consultants have been in situations where the school has issued a Participation Certificate for the workshop and suggested that we might like to include one in the Workshop Leaders' kit. Consequently we have designed one which is included with this newsletter. It is suggested that you discuss its use with the coordinator on the day, and if they are in agreement, photocopy it and sign each one as Curriculum Corporation representative. The coordinator could enter the staff names at a later date.

Overseas Reports

Charles has been working closely with the Education Development Centre in Boston to obtain a grant from the National Science Foundation (which is the key educational funding organisation in the US) to use task centres to make significant systemic change in mathematics education. The preliminary application was well received and work has begun on the final submission which is due in by April 1995.

The objective is to obtain funding for pilot programs in three urban districts across the States.

The Task Centre Project Web

There was much discussion about the growing number of areas into which this project is expanding. The result was the enclosed Task Centre Project Web. It is an interesting metaphor. The project has never claimed to be a curriculum, or curriculum substitute. Its potential and value lie in the threads which issue from it to link and support many aspects of teaching and learning.

We are very interested in your comments, stories, experiences which will enrich any of these areas, or any new developments that occur to you.