

# TASK CENTRE PROJECT

## CONSULTANTS' NEWSLETTER

NO. 5

APRIL 1995



## YOU'RE INVITED ...

... to join your Task Centre Project colleagues at:

1. A Task Centre Tour on Thursday May 4th
2. A Task Centre Consultants' meeting on Friday May 5th

... please ring Sue Davis by April 28th to reply.

### The Invitation

Michelle Selinger, our chief UK consultant is visiting Australia in April and May. We want her to see some of our Task Centres in operation and we want her to meet *you*.

*Our tour* will take in task centres being used at all levels from infants to middle secondary school. We will begin in Blackburn around 9:00am and finish in Sunshine around 3:30pm. *Thursday May 4th*.

*Our meeting* will begin around 10:00am and finish around 3:30pm. Michelle is keen to pick up your feel for our project and Charles will be full of ideas resulting from his USA trip which, by then, will have only just been completed. There will also be time to discuss your issues. *Friday May 5th*.

The meeting will be at Curriculum Corporation, 141 Rathdowne Street, Carlton. A light lunch will be provided, but unfortunately we are unable to give any financial assistance to your attendance.

We realise that many of you are normally in schools or otherwise engaged, but if you can possibly make either or both events we would be really pleased to see you. A similar tour and meeting last year proved to be very fruitful in many ways.

*Please ring Sue on 03-808-2610 to reply Yay or Nay and to add items to the meeting agenda.*

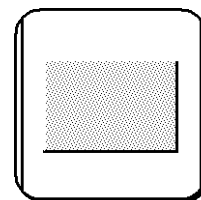
### Parking At CC

Curriculum Corporation does not have its own parking area, consequently all options for parking involve a cost. There is meter parking in Rathdowne and surrounding streets, underground parking beneath the CC block, enter from Pelham Street, and parking in the grounds of the Exhibition Buildings opposite CC.

### Mailing Labels

Most of my problem solving is done at the computer these days, and I have just worked out how to make Word produce address labels from a database. Your labels are a practice run for the next client newsletter. Please let me know if there is anything about your mailing label which is incorrect. We fixa for you.

## New Slides



The new slides which are included with this letter result from our task centre tour last year. Except for number 5, which is a replacement, they slot in as their decimal numbers indicate. I have rewritten the

slide script and a copy is included to guide you in using them.

Please note that I have changed some of the script for the slides you already had, so the whole document is worth a read.

### Slide Focus Headings

I have included these in case you want to use them during the slide show in the workshop. The headings flag issues which will be important in making best use of the resource. I hand them out at random and ask those who receive them to note anything in the commentary which relates to that heading. These scribes keep the sheet until the afternoon and continue to annotate as discussion touches on their heading. At the end of the day, the sheets remain as a record of the staff's conversations.

### New Brochures

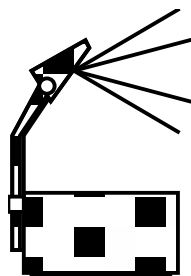
Australian prices (only) changed slightly on January 1st. It has taken longer than it should have to reprint brochures to show the new price. However, if you are an Australian consultant, they are now finally with you. Please destroy any earlier ones you may still have. Also please contact me if you need more.

If you are working for a Department of Education district as a TC consultant, the price to your schools is \$950 for materials plus the \$80 licence fee which allows you to use our workshop product.

We would be very happy for any consultant (there are now 32 of you throughout Australia) to use the brochures and other parts of your package to actively promote the Task Centre Project. If you are attending other meetings, the slides are often sufficient to generate interest. It is also appropriate for you to ask schools contacted in this way to name you as the preferred consultant when they decide to order.

When Charles returns from his current USA trip, we will be working on a new brochure which is likely to include additional information about the outgrowths of the project.

## More Workshop Material



The following single sheets have been included because I have found them very useful in workshops. You may wish to make your own transparencies from them.

### 1. Curriculum Corporation/MCTP

I find some groups are not aware of the background to Curriculum Corporation or the TC connection with MCTP. This OHT seems to fill that gap. Teachers are usually very appreciative of the philosophy behind the MCTP Principle.

### 2. Working Mathematically

This OHT captures the pedagogical background to the use of the task centre resource and can provide a focus for overall curriculum replanning. I use it as a summary after the whole group (Eric The Sheep) task. I also review the problem solving section in more depth as part of the poster problem clinic in the afternoon.

I found it very interesting explaining this overhead to a journalist recently. She stopped me before I had finished with a comment like:

*I understand this because it is the same way I write my stories. I go out to a context where I gather data. I come back to the office and organise it to look for a theme. That's like looking for a pattern isn't it? Sometimes I offer a theory to explain the data and ....*

It seems that Working Mathematically and Working Journalistically have a lot in common.

Teachers seem to sense that the process described not only offers a *raison d'être* for mathematics, which they are seeking, but can be the basis of discussion across disciplines.

### 3. The Farmer's Puzzle

You might like to use this as your poster problem. It provides opportunity for some teachers to realise that algebra doesn't solve everything, because the common result of an algebraic approach to it is 2 equations with 3 unknowns. It usually also provides opportunity to value 'trial and improve' as not only legitimate, but the most common process used in engineering, business, finance ... ie: the real world. Further, there are conditions to discover which are not actually stated, but which simplify the trial and improve process.

Remember the object of the poster problem session is not necessarily to solve the problem but rather to model the process which can be used with children.

#### 4. Working Mathematically Curriculum Focus

This is a larger version of the information in the *draft* additional sample unit plans. It speaks for itself.

##### **More Sample Unit Plans (Draft)**

During my recent UK visit, I had the pleasure of returning to the two demonstration schools I set up last year. Each has developed in its own way unique to its background and conditions. These drafts capture much of the development and discussion that has taken place in each school and has much to offer elsewhere as we build up the ethos of encouraging schools to 'tell their story'. Teachers learn so much from the experiences of other teachers.

These are draft in the sense that we haven't decided where to include them. They are not exactly unit plans in the sense of the current documentation, so we may broaden that manuscript to embrace curriculum planning and make sample unit plans a part of that.

In its current form this is information for you. It is important to retell the experiences of other schools, so make use of it orally. The chart page and the two Working Mathematically OHTs above help tell the stories.

##### **Demonstration School - Scotland**

We now have a task centre operating in the stark beauty of the Scottish Highlands, thanks to the forward thinking of Margaret Robertson, the adviser for Argyll and Bute, and the staff and administration of Lochgilphead High School. The workshop day was very exciting, and was capped off for me by driving through a snow storm at dusk over the Rest And Be Thankful pass beside Ben Lomond.

LHS has a small staff and the task of working through all 100 problems would have been difficult without the assistance of visiting staff from primary and secondary schools, parents and four Year 7 (Secondary 1) students. The young people stayed all day (despite being given opportunity to leave during the discussion time) and participated with insight. They made sensible suggestions about how the material could be used and maintained.

Margaret was trained as a consultant (welcome to the team Margaret - any chance of seeing you on May 4 and 5!?) and is looking forward to encouraging other schools in the region to come on board.

#### **Networking**

We are all aware that networking is a powerful way for teachers to enthuse and support teachers about the task centre resource. Sharing the insights that staff and students make about the tasks saves everyone work and enhances the potential of the resource to improve teaching and learning. Well we could all learn a lot from Margaret's region. Schools are physically separated by mountains, valleys and lochs, but are all linked electronically using a program called FirstClass in a project sponsored by British Telecom. They exchange worksheets, conference on line and pass on student records in a way that I have not seen so extensively here. As more of Margaret's schools adapt the Task Centre Project, they will build their own Electronic Task Centre Network.



Perhaps we should think about a Task Centre Internet Bulletin Board.

#### **More From Scotland**

At last year's consultants' meeting, some of you were able to meet Geoff Giles and Bet Sampson whose company, D.I.M.E. Projects, is our UK agent. Geoff became so excited with what he saw here that he began writing tasks and making materials for our collection. These are being phased into production at this moment. Check the latest catalogue, included with this mailing, against your current one to find out more detail about our improving collection.

#### **Library Project**

Interest in the tasks in Little Rock Arkansas has generated what Charles is now calling the Library Project. This district has asked for 20 tasks to be placed in each primary and secondary school library for home borrowing - Maths Around The Kitchen Table. As a result, Charles has chosen specific tasks and prepared Parent Guidance Cards to be included with the normal task. This is a very exciting outgrowth and one which will become a part of the service offered worldwide.

#### **Follow -Up Workshops**

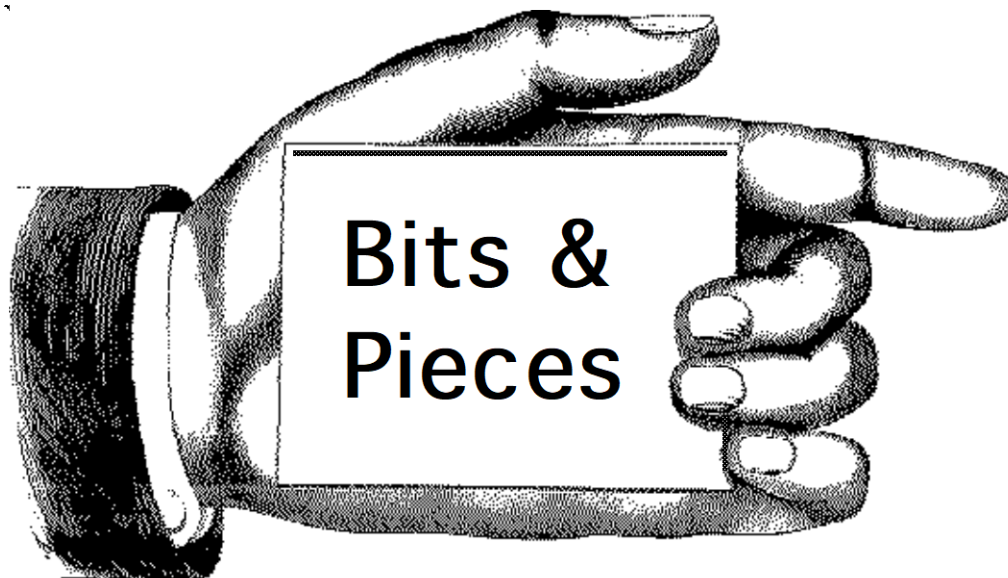
In the previous newsletter I mentioned that we were offering additional workshops to support a school's continuing task centre development. These are

tailored to suit the school's needs, but it is interesting that the few inquiries we have had to date tend to start:

*We bought your task centre a year ago. The kids love using it. But the staff feel they need more*

*guidance on how you assess changes in students' mathematical thinking.*

The maturation implied by this type of challenge is another stimulating development. Designing a companion workshop to help staff find their answer to it will be part of the agenda at our May 5th meeting.



- I have included the current sales records document for your interest. It is updated monthly.
- All the sales record figures are interesting, but the sales of Task Centre Kits for Aboriginal Students are very pleasing. You will remember that this adaptation was commissioned by the Ministry of the Northern Territory. Thanks to the continued efforts of Helen Southam and Matt Skoss, respectively the North and South Mathematics Project Officers, and their teams, this material is finding a warm reception in the bush schools for which it was intended. This whole outgrowth is an example of the teacher change and student learning benefits which can result from a partnership between our project and a system.

The side benefits are that schools outside the Territory are beginning to look at this material as part of their efforts to upgrade Aboriginal student participation in mathematics learning.

- It has been reported that in some places Woolworths are selling the exact box supplied by Payless Plastics for the same price of \$3.10. If they can be bought locally the school saves the necessary Payless delivery charge.
- Note that replacement parts for tasks can be purchased, although we have had very little demand for that service. See the catalogue.
- Questacon, the travelling Maths Task Centre which contains the tasks from the original Canberra Maths Centre will be based at Darwin High School during Term 2. Geoff Crane, the manager, can be contacted on 018-486-382.
- At time of writing, we have 5 workshops booked for April and 8 booked for May, including one in WA.

Best wishes,

