TASK CENTRE PROJECT

CONSULTANTS' NEWSLETTER

NO. 1 APRIL 1993

Hi folks, I thought this might be the most efficient way of updating you with developments in this project. The concept seems to be going from strength to strength, so you may well receive another of these missives some time in the future as even more developments occur.

Overseas Interest

Charles is in the States at the moment (Silly man. Fancy leaving me in charge of this thing!). He left with ten task centre orders and has recently run a Sunday workshop for the schools in the South Carolina district which ordered them. A great success I believe and, through Annette, I have been told that he expects more orders from that part of the world.

Questacon

The National Science and Technology Centre has established Questacon at Nunawading Primary School, Victoria, for Term 2. This travelling maths show uses all the tasks from the former Canberra Maths Centre and takes them around Australia, setting up in a state for a term. It has been to NSW and will move to Queensland for Term 3. All Victorian schools should have received invitations to bring their children and staff to the centre to experience the task centre approach. My most recent contact with Questacon indicates that they are already one third booked for Term 2. The appropriate telephone number is: 018-486-382.

Since we answer the most frequently asked question at Questacon, i.e., "How do we start our own Task Centre?" I have arranged for a Task Centre Project display to accompany Questacon on its travels.

New Brochure

As part of the display I have prepared the new brochure which accompanies this letter. If you need more, ring in.

New Prices

Please note the new costing. Materials cost has increased and that has forced the change in price. Also note that the cost of boxes is not included. We are moving away from arranging the boxes and are encouraging schools to make their own decisions and arrangements. However we are prepared to consult on the appropriate solution for the school and, if pressed, will make arrangements.

We are definitely encouraging every client to purchase the full package and have indicated this with a fifty dollar discount for doing so. In other words, we so strongly believe in the need for the PD side of the package, that we are prepared to wear a $50 drop in income to encourage schools to purchase the total. However, for various reasons, some schools are only purchasing the materials.

New Consultant

Ron Stalenberg has joined the team to represent us in Sydney. Ron is a former consultant for the NSW education department and is currently head of maths at Blacktown Girls' High School. Ron's staff were 'workshopped' last year, after they were stimulated by a visit to Questacon, and are now establishing their own task centre. As they say in all the best businesses, "Welcome to the team Ron."

Delivery Of Tasks

The new price structure includes delivery of the carton of tasks directly to the school from Edmath Curriculum Services, which is responsible for the packaging. Included with each order is an envelope containing:

• a sample timetable for the day (which has a typo at the moment which indicates that nothing happens between 9:30 and 10:00)

• the booklet "Problem Solving: The Task Centre Approach"

• master worksheets

• copies of photographs of poster problems and a list of our tasks by name and number

All necessary stickers are also included.

Stickers

We now include six colours of sticker dot. Schools which wish to classify tasks according to the National Statement strands, and most do when given the choice, use black for the Algebra strand. [Mind you, most staff seem to think that if the task doesn't have an x or y in it, it is not algebra.]

Slides

You have already received, or will receive with this mailing, a copy of all the information a client receives. You will also have your own set of slide images for use in the workshop. Please orient and number the slides yourself. The commentary I use with the slides runs something like this:

Intro: I am going to show you some slide images of task centres. The slides are likely to raise thoughts and issues which you haven't considered before. Take note of whatever occurs to you and we will discuss these things in more depth this afternoon.

1: One of the first decisions you will have to make is whether your centre will be portable or fixed place. This slide shows a portable arrangement using trolleys. Would that work in your school, or is your school built on too many levels?

2: One advantage of a fixed place centre is that the room can become a maths focus in the school with the addition of posters, children's work and so on.

3: Whichever decision you make, organisation of the physical resources will be essential.

4: Good organisation means minimum time wasted getting started and maximum, potential time on task.

5: This centre has its tasks organised by strand rather than number.

6: A previous slide showed secondary children working in a task centre. This one shows primary children enjoying the same experience. They are obviously working on a commercial puzzle. This is one way of extending your task collection. You only need to buy one of the puzzles to add a task to your collection. However, choose wisely. It is important that tasks don't have superficial mathematical content, so that children don't see them just as 'fun stuff'.

7: When you extend your collection, it is not necessary that all the cards are computer laid out as ours are. Hand prepared material has a certain friendliness and certainly allows for colour, which we can't provide with the computer.

8: These children are getting started on a task. The numbering on the table is one subtlety which can avoid the time wasting "Where are we gonna sit?".

9: Here the boys have reached a double line drawn across a card. It is a routine in most task centres that when you reach the double line you must ask the teacher to check your work.

10: One of the problems with task centres is that if children always work in pairs, they don't have the opportunity to share and value the strategies of the whole group. To overcome this, most task centres begin a session with whole class problem solving which focuses on a poster problem. The session only lasts for a few minutes. We will look at this concept more closely in the workshop this afternoon.

11: This is one example of a poster problem. There are more examples in the envelope you received with the tasks.

12: When you run the whole class session, the focus is on building awareness of strategies. You can do this by using commercially available material, or building up a set of strategies from the children's efforts over a period of time. Which model do you prefer?

12A: The commercial products look glossy. What degree of ownership do the children have of them?

13: The bottom right hand corner of this slide shows a method of solving the storage problem related to bigger items which you are likely to develop as you extend your collection.

14: This is another method of storing the plastic hang bags.

15: The bags can also be used for storing complete tasks. They can be labelled with stickers in just the same way as the boxes.

16: Another issue associated with task centres is that nowhere in the real world does a problem come with all the materials necessary for solving it carefully packaged with the problem. In this task centre the emphasis is on selecting from this self serve shelving the materials which help solve the problem. Cards for this centre don't need a materials list. They simply ask the children to select the materials which will best help them solve the problem.

17: All task centres also need a supply of bits and pieces. For example we have not listed materials such as pencil and paper and calculators on our cards, because we assume that these are available in all classrooms.

18: If you have a fixed task centre, one corner can also be used as a maths library and reading area. This another way of stimulating interest in mathematics.

19: The adult here is a parent. Parents enjoy involving themselves in task centres because they don't have to be familiar with masses of curriculum to be useful. They need only be familiar with a small subset of tasks to be useful teachers' aids. They can also be useful in keeping stocklists and making and maintaining tasks.

NB

(a) Considering some of the machinery I have been offered at some schools, I have wondered whether it would be worth taking my own slide projector. You might think on that yourself.

(b) I find it more useful to show the slides after morning tea. By this time the staff have a better idea of what a task centre is and the show provides a break from the routine of task making.

Teachers' Notes

They are coming, but we are no longer mentioning them as part of the package. I have included a draft of notes for one task. The vision at this point is to include, say, six of these with the package as a model for teachers' notes and to work towards a stand-alone book set out like this which will contain, perhaps, 100 tasks.

Infant Tasks

Many primary schools ask about resources to extend their collection to the infant classes. We have come across two sources which schools may find useful. This is *not* a recommendation to include all the tasks which these publications offer.

Nicole Ryan
Pyramid Hill College
Kelly St.
Pyramid Hill 3575
Tel: 054-557-377
$33 [includes postage]

Loreto Brady
St. Thomas The Apostle School
57 Central Rd.
Blackburn 3130
Tel: 03-878-8268
$17 [includes postage]

Video

I have a video of a portable task centre being introduced to a Year 2 class for the first time. It contains sequences showing a poster problem, distribution of tasks, children working, and the close of the lesson. It should not be shown as a whole, but if you would like to preview it with a view to trying some of the sequences in your workshops, let me know.

Mistakes

We are still making them. Let us know if you find any. The latest to come to my attention, and it has taken three workshops to figure out what is wrong, is Symmetric Tiles, 164. The last part of the card can't work with 10 circle/cross tiles as indicated. It needs 12 to make the six pointed star which is required. [Two triangles crossing over make the six lines of four referred to.]

Best wishes,