

TASK CENTRE PROJECT

CONSULTANTS' NEWSLETTER

NO. 11

NOVEMBER 1997

Greetings to all our consultants. Believe it or not, we're back. We would like to communicate with you about every 6 months, but, since the last newsletter was in March, it certainly has been longer than that this time. Hopefully when you read of all the new work you will understand why development has taken a little priority over communication.

New Products

Our production of new products has been, as always, driven by the requests of teachers. Schools experienced in using Task Centre resources and approaches are always seeking practices which will integrate the use of the hands-on tasks into the day to day unfolding curriculum. Further, there has been a growing desire to integrate the use of technology into the curriculum and we have participated in many conversations asking how this could be done "with the tasks".

Over the past twelve months we have considered these questions; constructed and reconstructed possible responses; and finally trialed, modified and published:

- Task Centre Computer Lessons Disk 1
- Points Of View (Mixed Media Unit 1)
- Task Centre Flexi-Pack
- Task Centre Project For Aboriginal & Islander Students (Queensland)

Task Centre Computer Lessons Disk 1

TCCL1 contains 6 purpose built programs which extend 5 tasks from the Task Centre Collection. The sixth program extends a task called Problem Dice which is itself a variation on Dice Differences. The product is available in Mac or Windows and it is

vital that clients *specify which platform they require*. The software is supported by an extensive manual which contains worksheets to extend the hands-on tasks through simulated investigations. The worksheets are themselves fully supported by teachers' notes. The software is sold with a campus licence - meaning it can be used on any number of computers on the site which purchased the material.

There is a double sided flier included with this newsletter. Eventually Disks 2, 3, 4, ... will become available.

Points Of View

This package integrates ten specific hands-on tasks from the collection with third party software, class lessons and worksheets to provide experiences in the content of Representing 3D Objects in 2D. It is a specific example of a model which can be applied to other collections of tasks and software. For example the model can readily be applied to the software in TCCL1 and the tasks it relates to. Again a two sided flier is included and again further examples of the model are expected to be developed in the future.

Task Centre Flexi-Pack

This package is **ONLY** available with a professional development day. We looked back over five years of project development and looked at 'beginning again' on the assumption that the starting point was what is now available. The result is an extensive, balanced package which aims to support teachers in addressing many of the issues involved in the mathematics reform debate.

There is a double sided flier for this package and also a detailed guide for running a Flexi-Pack day. We would appreciate you reading this through. It will background you both in the resource side of the kit and how the whole and its components have been dovetailed to achieve the professional development aims of the Task Centre Project. At about the time you receive this letter Charles will be running the first school based session for this pack.

Task Centre Project For Aboriginal & Islander Students

This project has been about developing a set of tasks which have 'proven themselves' in the hands of teachers of Aboriginal and Islander students in Queensland. The prime mover for the project was Rhonda Eggerling, one of our Brisbane consultants. She obtained support and funding from the National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Education Program and administrative support from the Metropolitan East Region of the Queensland Department of Education. A team of teachers and district consultants then worked with students to adapt, modify and extend the work of the Northern Territory teachers who developed the first kit for Aboriginal students in 1993.

The result is excellent. The chosen tasks are very rich; the artwork supplied by the students (who were guided by an Aboriginal artist) is delightful; and the stories it has to tell are uplifting. The focal story will soon appear on our web page in the new section for the Task Centre Project for Aboriginal Students.

The product costs \$650 for fifty tasks on laminated A4 card and an extensive manual of teachers notes and solutions. The tasks are packed in press-seal bags.

In truth, if I was setting up a task centre on a budget, I would start with this kit because of the content; the support notes;

the presentation; the packing; and the coincidence that the project advisers happen to have chosen all the tasks which are needed to be able to also use Task Centre Computer Lessons Disk 1.

Other Update Material

A small amount of detail has changed on the Extra Information sheet in your Consultants' Kit, so a new version is included. (Overseas consultants please ignore this page). The latest task catalogue list is also included. This is also on the web so you can keep in touch that way. You will note that L Game, Task 140, is not currently available. It may be some time before it becomes available again.

Also Curriculum Corporation's telephone number (BUT NOT FAX NUMBER) has changed to +61-3-9207-9600 to make use of one of those new switchboards which allows individuals within the organisation to be direct dialled by assigning them a particular pair of digits to replace the 00.

A Change In Britain

Michelle Selinger, who was our Chief Consultant in UK, withdrew from that position earlier in the year due to a change of professional position which brought with it major changes in work responsibilities. Michelle was personally responsible for the establishment of the first task centre schools in UK and remains a passionate believer in the potential of the project. Charles and I wish to publicly repeat the thanks we have already offered her in private for the work she has done. Michelle will remain available as a consultant when time permits.

The Task Centre Project Officer in Britain is now Andy Martin, Head of Department at Thorne Grammar School, Doncaster. Michelle ran the workshop which established the project at Thorne. It was the blend of Andy's youthful vigour and mature, clear headed planning and communication skills which encouraged us

to offer him this new role on behalf of the project. We were delighted that he accepted.

Working with Systems

As well as the school unit or faculty being the primary 'client', we have had some success recently where a regional district or cluster has been the focus. The district authorities, with their own agendas to fill, often see our material and workshop structures as assisting that agenda. (Little Rock, Arkansas is one case in point - see below.)

Locally, one cluster of 50 schools in a district, where there is a policy emphasis on learning to make effective use of computers, assisted all schools to purchase the Task Centre Computer Lessons Disk 1, and then surrounded this with appropriate inservice.

Another example, is where a cluster of schools all obtained one of the Replacement Units for every school as part of a focussed district-wide professional development strategy.

In the these scenarios, when the schools came along to an in-service, they received the materials as part of their attendance. This made the workshops more focussed and provided teachers with something very practical to take away in a ready-to-use-in-the-classroom format. It also fulfilled the district's professional development and policy agendas.

The examples above have been very satisfying professionally and represent a direction we believe is worth pursuing.

Telling Stories

Stories continue to be an illuminating way to exchange information about the way the resources of the project are being used to support and extend learning. We are thankful to be able to share below a balance of stories from both our Australian

and our overseas consultants. You might also be interested to know that this year we have seen several kits go to Brunei, and the latest interesting overseas sale is to the Young Astronauts Korea organisation.

Ian Harrison - New South Wales

The workshops and tasks are excellent devices for initiating schools into problem solving and investigations. We also need to encourage the movement towards more efficient technologies in handling the 'paper work' and possible developments of the task centre. To that end I have developed two databases that I will be trialing in my interactions with schools in the near future. The two data bases use Claris File Maker Pro 3.0. The first allows production of data forms for workshops and tracking fields for other purposes. The second assists development and writing of new tasks and investigations.

[A fuller explanation of Ian's plans is appended. He would welcome contact and discussion. If you also perceive potential for this relational database software in this context, then you may wish to provide additional trialing opportunities.]

Sue-Ellen Carleton - Queensland

Sue and her team in and around Cairns have cross-referenced the project tasks to the requirements of the Queensland mathematics curriculum document.

This has been an extensive and useful exercise to support teachers who don't have the time make similar cross-references themselves. A sample of the material is included with this newsletter. With it are contact details for Sue-Ellen, who is willing to share this information with others.

Little Rock - Arkansas

After several months of working on the project, which followed a week long PD program for all 43 elementary and junior high schools in the district, one of the

questions raised by the teachers was "How do these tasks relate to Little Rock district curriculum documents?"

So, when we returned in April to continue the professional development program, we arranged for each teacher to work on the alignment of at least one task to the district requirements. In a session of just over one hour, each group worked on one well known task together to establish the principles and then each pair of teachers worked on another task. This work was recorded on a proforma and immediately transferred into a word process so the text was 'live'. In that way modifications can be made as classroom experience indicates appropriateness or otherwise of initial judgements. The document also allowed for growing pedagogical knowledge about the tasks to be added and the collection of files became a 'first pass' dossier of the educational value of each task.

An example page is included with this newsletter.

Michael Ymer In Little Rock

In April of this year I had the good fortune to accompany Charles and Doug on a working visit to Little Rock. My job was to offer teachers some of the ideas I have used in the management of a Task Centre session. I provided copies of my own proformas and addressed classroom organisation issues such as recording progress, assessment ideas, storage, timetabling, arrangement of working groups in the classroom and pairing students.

I also led the teachers through a typical lesson, from the clinic to the rotating groups, to the lesson reflection. The idea of presenting a clinic that is open ended received an excellent response as it gave the teachers some ideas for dealing with students of mixed abilities. I think it was important for these teachers to see me as a teacher, just like them, using the Task

Centre approach as an integral part of my mathematics program and having success with it. I thoroughly enjoyed my sessions which proved to be a worthwhile ingredient of the Task Centre package. As one teacher mentioned: "It's great having these wonderful ideas and materials but they're of little use if I can't manage and organise them in my classroom."

I also had the opportunity to teach Year 4, 5 & 6 children at three different schools. The format of each session was a whole class clinic followed by the opportunity for the children and their teachers to get into the task boxes. Although some of the teachers initially viewed the tasks as 'games', they soon saw the benefits and excitement generated by the activities. At one school the staff members were amazed to see one of their 'behaviour problem' students persevering with 'Tower Of Hanoi' ... and were even more impressed when they were struggling with the problem themselves and were helped through it by the students whom they thought would mess around during the lesson.

All in all many great highlights, from drinking fine wine on the banks of the Mississippi river and being served biggggg meals to listening to Little Rock's answer to Dolly Parton in our hotel lounge. Must do it again some time.

Thorne Grammar School - England

On the other side of the world the first school in the Doncaster district to establish a Task Centre was tackling a similar problem in a similar way. I had met Andy Martin, HOD, at a promotional workshop a couple of years ago which led to him purchasing tasks and inviting Michelle to run our workshop in March 1996. Since I was visiting England in March this year, I dropped in to work with Andy's staff and see how things were developing. He greeted me warmly with the comment: "Since the day of the workshop my staff have been talking to each other professionally. I am delighted."

When I enquired further I realised that a good part of the credit for that goes to Andy himself. He struck a deal with the staff which provided a wonderful structure for using and learning about the tasks. The plan was simple:

1. Learn for yourself and use with your class one task per half term. It could be used as a class lesson or stationed at the back of the room for the groups to rotate through.
2. Write notes for your colleagues about the tasks in line with our agreed headings.
3. Hand them in to the Head of Department who will word process them into a standard form and distribute them to the staff.
4. Start a new task the next half term.

And what makes this so brilliant? Well with 8 teachers on the maths staff, each teacher who works on *one* task receives notes for *seven* more tasks in return. So, when I visited a year after the Task Centre Project workshop, the faculty dossier contained first drafts of notes for almost 50 tasks which had been *tried with their kids by their teachers*. No-one felt stressed by the effort and everyone retained their enthusiasm and interest.

A double page from the Thorne Dossier is included, complete with the obvious annotations which illustrate that this is a document that lives through the continuing experience of the staff with the kids. (And in this case we couldn't help adding a couple of annotations of our own to keep the thought processes rolling along.)

Tony Harries - England

Tony, who is one of our consultants, works at the Bath College of Higher Education. Tony's vision for the use of the tasks from within the college is as a lighthouse for the

district and beyond through the undergraduate and professional courses the college runs.

An illustration of the vision is enclosed. Tony has purchased the tasks in the last few months, so we look forward to seeing how the plans play out in future years.

Tim Touzel - South Carolina

Tim is in an equivalent position to Tony at Coastal Carolina University in Conway. He bought tasks in May and in August I received this email:

The Task Centre materials have come in very handy and, yes, I do feel much more comfortable with the problems.

My students have created about 30 problems, some of them quite good, although I did let them adapt existing problems, as long as they cited a source. It turned out to be the best graduate class I've ever taught. We did lots of problems. The class doesn't want it to stop. Two in the class were very excited in particular about the TC problems and wanted to do the workshop and buy them for their school, but they couldn't get approval for the funding. Well, I'm continuing the dialogue with them.

The bottom line was a very enjoyable experience, in which I learned in addition to my students.

I warned Tim that he was likely to see his story told in this newsletter and the next email was:

Since you said you wanted to put something in the next newsletter about my class, let me add the best story I could imagine. Coastal's Master's Degree is new and therefore rather small. Because of the paucity of course offerings for secondary majors, I had a secondary biology major and a music major in my course designed for "Problem Solving for the Elementary Grades (K-8)" They both said that the intellectual stimulation and professional

growth was so positive and useful that my course should be required (not just suggested) for secondary majors. Moreover, the music teacher was so impressed that she talked her school's curriculum coordinator into inviting me to speak to the whole faculty, not just the math faculty, about problem solving in general. Wow.

Ulla Öberg - Sweden

It seems that wherever the Task Centre Project is explored by teachers the response is that here is something with true practical classroom value which supports both teachers and students in their learning. In Sweden Ulla has enlisted the support of the teachers' association, the Sveriges Matematiklärarförening, which applied for and received government funding for professional development. Part of that was used to bring me to Sweden for the annual Sommarkurs, and part was used to purchase tasks which were sorted into sets for the participating schools to borrow from SMaL after the course and trial in their schools. Ulla arranges for the trial sets to move on to new schools as interest develops.

In addition, SMaL wanted to establish a home page and include on it all the information about its involvement with the project. So, after the course, and in between snacking on herring and picking wild poppies for the midsummer celebrations, we wrote the outline of the page. It is bi-lingual and most certainly worth a look. You can find it listed at the first index level of the Problem Solving Task Centre parent page at:

<http://www.srl.rmit.edu.au/mav/PSTC/index.html>

The exciting thing is that in establishing the page we didn't have to re-invent wheels. Where it was relevant, we simply linked to the parent page, just like the parent page now links to its offspring. So, a Swede interested in SMaL's task centre activities will first enter a server in Malmö, but as

they explore will seamlessly move in and out of the parent server in Melbourne. Equally, enter the page through the parent and the links work seamlessly the other way.

I look forward to the spawning of other offspring pages in other countries.

The End

So, there it ends for this issue my friends. Keep those cards and letters coming in - you never know when they might be a story which inspires a colleague.

Charles and I wish you well in all your endeavours. A special mention to many of our Queensland colleagues who will have the opportunity in 1998 to make use of the task centre concepts and materials in their own classrooms. We wish you well for the change in role. We want you to continue to see yourself as part of the team. To ensure that occurs, if this newsletter has not reached you at home, then you best communicate those contact details.

Best wishes,

Enclosures:

- Flier: Task Centre Computer Lessons Disk 1
- Flier: Points Of View
- Flier: Flexi-Pack
- Catalogue pages (2)
- Ian Harrison's database plans
- Sue-Ellen Carleton's grid
- Little Rock curriculum alignment sample
- BCHE Lighthouse
- Thorne dossier sample pages (2)
- Extra Information Sheet
- Flexi-Pack workshop notes with its own collection of class lesson notes and overhead masters

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