

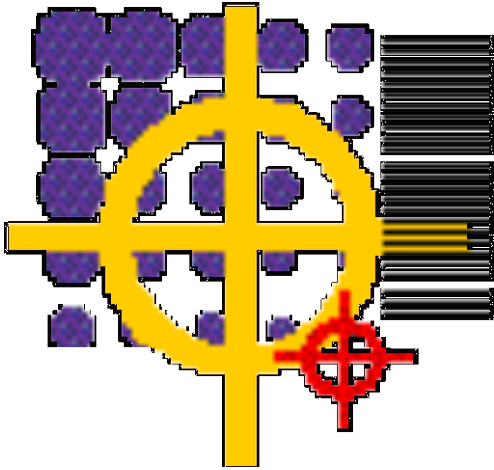
TASK CENTRE PROJECT

NEWSLETTER

NO. 3

APRIL 1996

It's All About Communication



Welcome. There have been many amazing changes and developments since our last newsletter in May 1995 and communication is at the base of them all.

More Regular News

Charles and I had hoped to produce this newsletter more frequently than the annual event it has developed into. Unfortunately, commitments to other aspects of the project have prevented that from becoming a reality. While our dissatisfaction with this aspect of our work was brewing in the back of our minds, we were also aware of, and have always promoted the value of, the Problem Solving Task Centre Network which has been established for over 10 years and is co-ordinated by Michael Richards.



Then an idea struck.

The PSTC Network already sends out regular newsletters each year. The objectives of the group are exactly consistent with our own - in fact, Michael's experience was one of the key ingredients which initiated this project, and his writings are key references in our Teachers' Handbook. Could we bring together these two strands of the evolving history of hands-on problem solving and develop a more effective communication channel for everyone?

Not only could we - we have!

From now on we will prepare paragraphs for the PSTC Newsletter, Michael will add more news from the broader picture, including new tasks, and the PSTC group will look after printing and distribution.

But ... to be part of this expanded communication you will have to join the PSTC Network.

There will be no further newsletters from the Curriculum Corporation Task Centre Project.

Consistent with our guiding principle that we are established to develop and share the best that teachers have to offer, we are supporting the growth of the teacher based Problem Solving Task Centre Network by:

1. Sharing our news through that network.
2. Encouraging you to join that network. It is extremely valuable to be part of this world wide network of like-minded educators *and* it is economical. Just \$10

within Australia (\$AUD15 beyond), is very reasonable.

An application for membership is attached to this newsletter. Please fill it out immediately, attach a cheque (bank draft if overseas) to PSTC Network and mail it today.

World-Wide Electronic Communication

In April 1995, after a trip to Scotland to set up demonstration school for the Task Centre Project, I wrote this in a newsletter to our consultants:



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

Well it has now happened, and, in a far more expansive way than I could imagine. Like all the best things in education, it has happened because a great teacher has done some great work.

The chain of events which led to it stand for me as one more testimony to the wonderful way life works out positively. Last October, Rosebud High School bought our Kit and Workshop package. I happened to be the consultant who did the workshop. Andy Wain, now the HoD, and I started talking after the session about the burgeoning Internet possibilities and he accepted the challenge of establishing a Problem Solving Task Centre Network on the Web.

At that stage Andy knew almost no more than how to connect a modem to a telephone line. So he followed up suggested contacts and, with the help of the Catherine Stebbing, the Mathematical Association of Victoria Internet Project Officer at Sunrise Research Laboratories, RMIT, he had the first draft of a Home Page up in about two weeks. Since then it has developed into one

of the most educationally exciting sites I have seen. Check it out for yourself at URL:

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

This site is for students and teachers. There is plenty to download to add to your task centre, and opportunity for you to upload and share information of your own or exchange discussions about particular tasks. Last time I checked the site there were people from Sweden, Norway and USA who had already listed themselves, as well as growing numbers of Australians.

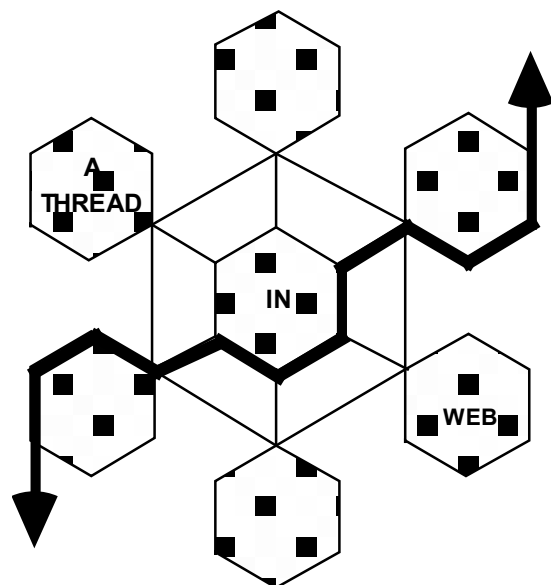
You will also find lots of information from our own project.

If you want to experiment with the potential of the web, this is a great place to begin.

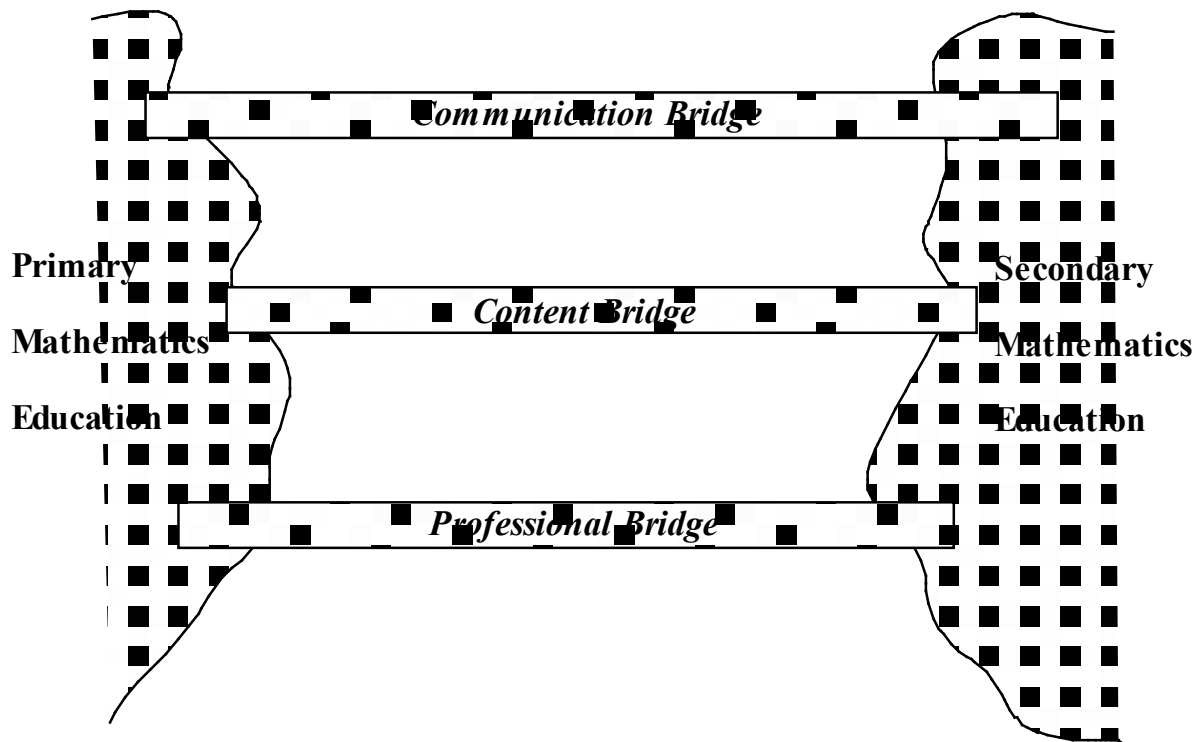
If you are not yet connected to the web, save this address. You *will be* connected before long!

Local Networks

Many districts are finding the Task Centre Project resources and education principles are a rewarding focus for a local network.



A specific example is the mathematics transition network centred on Mt. Lilydale College, Victoria. The work of the network is built around the following image:



Communication Bridge

- communication between students, parents and teachers
- valuing what students already know
- accepting and valuing differences (in teachers and students)
- accepting and valuing mathematical conventions and communication formats
- reviewing current transition forms
- other methods of communicating learning information:
 - Mathematics Resource Book?
 - disk records?
- communicating beyond the network schools

Content Bridge

- a content bank which assures teachers of what has been/will be taught
- build out from this to integrate with/review established curriculum at each level
- rich resources
- concrete, active learning
- Working Mathematically

Professional Bridge

- regular, purposeful network meetings
- workshops designed to develop pedagogy (the art of teaching) while focusing on particular content areas
- writing sessions to add to/refine the content bank
- swap teaching between schools
- investigate transition successes in other districts
- reconsidering the place of formal transition testing. To what extent is it a valid indicator?

This network chose to use tasks from our project to begin its Content Bank and these colleagues have a success story to tell which has not been without its struggles. Contact Judi Todd, Principal, St. Peter Julian Eymard School, Mooroolbark, Victoria to find out more.

Build Your Own Local Network

We cannot emphasise enough that good task centres become better ones through communication with others who also believe in their educational value. Other teachers who are part of the same daily struggle to improve mathematics education. If you would like to know the schools in your district which are clients of the Task Centre Project simply fax a list of postcodes to my home office on [03] 9726 8316 and I will fax back that information as soon as possible.

New Tasks

Our catalogue is now up to 177 tasks on its way to an intended maximum of 200. Recent additions are Fay's Nines (54) and Arithmagons 1 & 2 (188 & 194).

You Asked For It

In the previous newsletter we tested interest in:

... packages of about 20 tasks related to particular strands. These would come with integrated teaching notes. Perhaps a computation package, an algebra package, a space package and so on.

As a result of the positive response, a writing team met in July last to develop the concept. By October, the first manuals for a *Pattern & Algebra Replacement Unit* were ready for Upper Primary and Lower Secondary schools, in November they were upgraded and in January upgraded again with vital information from trial schools. In the very short time this unit has been available, the response has been extensive. Read more about the concept in the flyer attached to this newsletter.

Some previous clients purchase the whole package so that they don't have to 'raid' their task centre to apply the unit. Others ask for the manual and additional tasks in the unit which aren't in their task centre. If this latter is also your choice, the manuals cost \$55 each (including postage) or \$90 if you want both levels. The tasks are \$10 ea.

(If you are reading this outside Australia please contact us for prices.)

The draft of a Computation unit for both levels has already begun and both this unit and a Chance & Data unit will be completed by the end of 1996 - is it a wonder that it is hard to find the time to write this newsletter.

If you were interested in a Language and Logic unit, could we suggest you purchase the Library Kit for Home Lending and build on this to create your own unit. A flyer for this product is also included.

Clients beyond Australia please contact us for local prices for any of the above items.

We Asked For It

Also in the previous newsletter we asked for feedback about how you were using the task centre resource. Thank you to the many who answered. I have long since replied to some of you individually, but now is an opportunity to share some of these responses publicly as they were intended.

From Grovedale West- May 1995

The teachers thoroughly enjoyed (the curriculum day) and response and use of our room has been terrific. While 'trialing' the tasks (on the day) a 'report' was written on each task as to the solution etc. and these are kept in folders ... for the teachers' use. (Have been invaluable). Each child has their own book, also, where they write a report on each task they do. We have a grid at the front to mark off each task with a cross when it is completed. At the rear of the book they write a report on the Poster Problem that is done at the beginning of the lesson. (Each teacher made a Poster Problem for the centre.) If a child does not complete a task they only put one line through the number on the grid so that the next time they can continue with that task.

Timetabling has been a breeze. We have computer sessions for grades 3 to 6 . Half

the class go at one time so the other half of the class go to the task centre with their teacher and then they change over.

The fact that we have a 'special' room and the tasks do not leave that room has been terrific. To this stage NO equipment has been lost.

From Kelso - May 1995

- Still in our early days - I have written some extra units/questions.
- Staff still unsure of how to use - this year has been unsettled with an acting Head Teacher and only half the staff the same as last year when we did the in-service. Have 'stagnated' a bit.

From Maramba - June 1995

Our task centre has only been in operation since Term 2 1995. At the moment we are experiencing more difficulties than successes. Some of the difficulties have been:

1. Slow start on using the centre
2. Using the tasks in the classroom.
3. Record keeping.

A sharing of ideas and problems is scheduled for the end of Term 2 and this should give a better idea of how things are going. Also visits to existing school's task centres may be of benefit.

From Sacred Heart Diamond Creek - September 1995

Our Task Centre began operating in 1993. Grades 3 - 6 are timetabled once a week for task sessions. We are in the process of developing tasks for Prep - 2. We have been greatly encouraged by the growth in the children's problem solving skills and the increase in their enjoyment of maths.

Teachers have incorporated many of the strategies/components used in the tasks into their classroom maths teaching. Teachers are encouraged to vary their task lessons,

follow up ideas generated from task sessions, to integrate task session with classroom focus and to have tasks in their classroom. This varies according to teacher interest.

This year I have been released one day per week to teach grades in the task centre (each grade has approximately 10 lessons). The class teacher also attends these sessions which are designed to demonstrate problem solving strategies and to develop teacher's ability to use the tasks to their potential as well as to vary task sessions. Recording of problem solving is also modelled. The value of these sessions has been enormous in terms of professional development.

Our most difficult job has been to maintain the tasks - even to solve some.

From Lochgilphead Scotland - January 1996

Our position at the moment is that we have integrated most of the tasks into our S1-S2 (S=secondary) Mathematics Course at levels we felt would be appropriate for each task. This gave us about 6 tasks per Programme of Study.

The tasks are used once every two weeks with the children working in groups of 2, 3 or 4. They really enjoy the practical nature of the tasks and most tasks have been successful.

Obviously we will have placed some tasks at an inappropriate level but these will be adjusted when we review the scheme in June.

From a conversation with Andy Wain - February 1996

Garden Beds is my favourite problem at the moment. I have one year 8 student who typically gets 2 out of 20 in class tests. However in the task centre, with a little intervention from me, this girl was able to generalise the problem for n plants in r rows. She wouldn't leave the problem alone.

I got more work from her than I ever would in class and I learnt more about her true abilities.

K... O... C...

As I said in the beginning, the theme of this newsletter has been communication. Communication between organisations, communication between colleagues, communication between schools, communication between teachers and learners, communication between learners.

Keep On Communicating,

Doug Williams & Charles Lovitt

WHY IS THE TASK CENTRE PROJECT TIMELY?



It brings active, hands-on problem solving into mainstream learning with a balanced approach to:

- programming & planning
- teaching & learning
- assessment strategies



It has evolved from over twenty years of good classroom practice.



It is fed by, and responds to, the needs of current practice.



It is driven by a Professional Development focus.

- teacher growth not materials focus
- consistent with current system emphases
- consistent with prevailing learning theory
- respects teachers' time constraints and involves teachers intelligently
- flexible enough to allow for a teacher's current comfort zone
- multiple levels of success for both students and teachers
- significant mathematical depth

PROBLEM SOLVING TASK CENTRE NETWORK

Annual Subscription

Please complete and return to:

PSTC Network, c/- Michael Richards

Mordialloc-Chelsea S.C., 1 Station Street, Mordialloc, Victoria, 3195, Australia

Name: _____

Institution: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

Please enclose a cheque for \$10 made out to PSTC Network.

If joining from beyond Australia, please enclose a *bank draft* for \$AUD15.

To confirm your membership for *two years* simply send *double* the amount.