

Creating Student Agency as Global Citizens through the Future Problem-Solving Program

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Today, the world is interconnected in a myriad of ways, for we have moved beyond nation borders. Globalisation can be a force for good when groups of peoples from around the world join to proactively aid the world and its people, embracing their responsibility to act for their fellow human being's benefit and acting as global citizens. We see this through internationally united campaigns to combat poverty, support the ethical treatment of workers in all countries, or to promote sustainable living. However, offshoots of our global world, such as social media, can open up problems, such the influence of Facebook on election campaigns or cyberbullying. Sometimes, the global network can seem overwhelming for our youth as they face their future as global citizens. However, as teachers, we don't want our students to be overwhelmed by the enormity of problems faced in the world. Instead, we want them to embrace a creative problem solving mindset and develop agency as collaborators who can suggest innovative futuristic solutions.

Such twenty-first century mindset skills are ones the Future Problem Solving Program encompasses, a program in which Loreto Kirribilli in Sydney, Australia, has engaged in the last few years. This program was created by Dr E. Paul Torrence in 1974, one aimed at gifted and talented students, and it is a part of the extra-curricular Gifted and Talented program offered at Loreto Kirribilli.

There are many components of the Future Problem Solving Program, and one in which our students have been involved is Global Issues Problem Solving. Each year, the FPSP Organisation examines our global world and chooses topics relevant to the current time, ones which impact the world today and will continue to do so in the future. This year, seven teams of high ability students explored a range of topics, including educational disparities, genetic engineering, medical technology and identity theft. In training sessions, students researched all of these topics and knowledge in a range of areas expanded. This included student understanding of the ways in which education may alter dramatically with new technologies, or how genetic engineering of food may be a solution to our growing population. They discovered medical technology may encompass 3-D printing of organs in the future, and that identity theft is highly prevalent today and is expected to rise, and biometric methods of identification may become the norm.

The Global Issues Problem Solving program is not only about considering global issues in the present, though. Students need to think critically and creatively about how they will be impacted as global citizens at least twenty years in the future. Students learn a six step creative problem solving scaffold, which involves moving from identifying problems and challenges, providing solutions to an underlying problem of the topic, evaluating which solution will solve their underlying problem, and then creating an action plan for their identified solution. High ability students work collaboratively in teams of four to solve the problem, something developing their communication and collaboration skills, completing all this in only two hours. One reason this program is targeted at high ability students is due to the time limit, but there is the option of implementing it as a whole class learning activity, as these skills are ones all students can cultivate as they recognise their role as global citizens. Providing belief in student agency to change the world is integral to this program, and one of its significant benefits.