

by a vote of international participants and their teachers.

Last year's topics were sports medicine, E-commerce, nanotechnology and DNA identification – not standard curricular fare for most schools.

Students begin with research. They investigate science, technology, data, issues and trends related to a topic. Next, students use the six-step Creative Problem Solving Process to:

- 1) identify the challenges in a "Future Scene" – a situation set in the future in a chosen topic area;
- 2) select an underlying challenge for creative attack;
- 3) generate solution ideas;
- 4) develop criteria to evaluate the solution ideas. Students use generating strategies such as brainstorming and focusing tools such as "AloU" (Advantages/Limitations to Overcome/Unique Potential);
- 5) select a best solution idea and;
- 6) elaborate a best solution idea.

Students who participate in Community Problem Solving use the same process to identify and address a challenge in the community, which can be as small as the classroom or as large as the global village.

Scenario writers study the topics and use the process and writing skills to create images of possible future outcomes. The Scenario Writing component strives to enlarge, enrich and make the students' perspective of the future more accurate.

The Action-Based Component (AbPS) is designed specifically for use in regular classrooms. AbPS engages students in learning, constructing meaning, and applying the creative problem-solving process to real life situations. It introduces teachers and students to creative problem solving and higher-level thinking in a hands-on manner. It is designed to guide students into community action.

Why do students participate in Future Problem Solving? Why do they stay after school to research and discuss topics and issues that reach far beyond the regular curriculum and oftentimes is far removed from their regular experience? Why do they practice creative and critical thinking skills that are not required for school?

Consider these comments Torrance recently received from a group of children:

"It helps us think better and more quickly."

"It has helped me to develop my deeper thinking skills and to realize that I can make a

difference in the world."

"It's fun!"

"It brings out the best in me and the friends I have made through your brainchild (FPSP)."

"It helps me think in new ways."

"Thank you for giving me a chance to use my talents for something that is actually a challenge."

"It could even help us actually solve real problems in the future."

"If kids are the future, then you helped to better prepare the future."

Research on the creative and cognitive outcomes of the program continues.

Gwynn Powell, an assistant professor in recreation and leisure studies in the college, is seeking a grant to research FPSP as a recreational (afterschool) activity and to study its impact on cognitive processes.

Powell's own participation in FPSP as a teenager led to her interest in exploring the program's impact. She remembers the exhilaration and active nature of the program and wants to explore its effect on the development of higher level thinking skills.

Coaches who have worked with the program often comment on the physical, "electric" nature of teams who are engaged in the creative problem-solving process.

Education students in the honors program at the University of Connecticut who participated in a six-week FPSP training course earlier this year reported a higher sense of self-efficacy. Surely, this could be a galvanizing characteristic for novice teachers!

Jerry Rogers, a retired Clarke County schoolteacher, FPSP coach and curriculum coordinator, has continued to remain active in FPSP mentoring, training and sharing of his FPSP experience with teachers around the state.

Rogers is currently co-president of the Northeast Georgia district of the Georgia Reading Council. He recently wrote an article in the Georgia Journal of Reading touting the use of FPSP student-written scenarios as a tool in the classroom.

Rogers is not alone. Many who have retired from teaching remain active in their FPSP coaching careers, effectively contributing to their former schools and communities through their involvement. In speaking with an FPSP student, coach or former participant, one

gets the sense that there may be no better way to prepare young people for a positive and productive future.

Bill Chittick, professor of political science at UGA, uses the structure and process skills of FPSP each year to prepare honors practicum students for participation in the Model UN Team Competition. He first recognized the benefits of the systematic teaching of the Creative Problem-Solving Process when his daughter participated in FPSP as a student.

Laura Adang, a first-year student in the MD/PhD program at the University of Virginia, reflects on her experience with the FPSP as a young Georgia schoolchild.

"It was one of the most important programs of my pre-college education. It shaped the way I examine and analyze situations everyday. Through the thought processes encouraged by the program, many problems of a global scale can be transformed into a personally attainable goal," she says. "It taught me to focus my attention on fixing the smaller, more manageable issues that are part of the overall problem. Future Problem Solving, more than anything else in my life, honed my creativity and ability to concretely state my abstract ideas. It was not just a recreational club; it was my outlet for creativity that honestly helped to shape the way I view the world."

Creative Problem-Solving is a required part of Georgia's gifted curriculum. For this reason, or perhaps because gifted program coordinators often have more freedom to design and to implement innovative curriculum, FPSP is often perceived as a program only for "gifted students." However, the content, skills and process offered by FPSP are appropriate and important for all students! Yearly topics and process skills integrate well into science, social studies, and language arts.

In Georgia, the program takes many formats from small, competitive teams to whole content-area classroom study and even after-school enrichment programs. It is flexible and inexpensive to implement – but not easy.

Teachers who choose to implement FPSP in order to explore unusual ideas, challenges and possibilities with students are not ordinary. They are energetic, creative and dedicated. They offer students the critical and creative tools to construct positive futures. If you are lucky enough to have one of them in your school system, give them a hand and a hug. You will be supporting the possibility of many bright futures for Georgia's young people. ■

Lee Pilgrim is co-coordinator for the Georgia Future Problem Solving Program and can be contacted at lpilgrim@coe.uga.edu.

For more about Georgia's Future Problem Solving Program visit:

www.coe.uga.edu/fpsp/



Members of Alps Road Elementary School's Future Problem Solving team in Clarke County debate issue

PHOTOS BY WINGATE DOWNS