

Evaluation Report

Speaking 4 the Planet



Report 2018

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submit my report on the *Speaking 4 the Planet* and *Kids 4 the Planet* competitions held across number of venues in Sydney rural NSW in 2018.

The report is based on responses from teachers, students and community members who attended these events. Interviews were held during the day of each competition, bullseye evaluations were conducted, and a feedback questionnaire was sent to teachers after the event.

The responses show that the 2018 *Speaking 4 the Planet* and *Kids 4 the Planet* competitions continue to be successful. They also provide advice for enhancing the quality and usefulness of future competitive events.

If necessary, I would be happy to discuss these findings.

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Syd Smith is a private education consultant who has taught in primary and secondary schools, served as a curriculum consultant with the NSW Department of Education and in 1990 was promoted to a director's position on the NSW's Central Coast. He worked closely with Resource NSW to establish the NSW Sustainable Schools Program, and was instrumental in shaping the Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative. He now specialises in developing Sustainability Education programs and their evaluation.



I will be back next year.
Student from Lakemba Public School



REPORT ON *SPEAKING 4 THE PLANET AND KIDS 4 THE PLANET* 2018

BACKGROUND

Speaking 4 the Planet is a secondary schools Arts-based competition that focuses each year on a UN World Environment Day theme. In 2018, a *Kids 4 the Planet* event was also held for primary school students. The WED theme for 2018 was **Beat Plastic Pollution**. The competitions involved students participating in different categories: public speaking (prepared and impromptu), drama (impromptu) and visual arts. This year's competitions also included a pilot video category for the first time: schools participating in the *Kids 4 the Planet* event were invited to submit a 2-minute video related to the 2018 World Environment Day theme.

Before each of the five events took place, resource packages were prepared for, and distributed to students and teachers. These were sent approximately 2 months prior to the meetings in each district. The packages contained: background information on the 2018 World Environment Day theme and the *Speaking 4 the Planet* competition; links to relevant resources and initiatives; teaching/learning ideas; judging criteria; and tips for public speaking.

Speaking 4 the Planet is now six years old. Each year, the program has been thoroughly evaluated to ensure continuous improvement. The evaluations have also suggested different approaches. Areas sought for responses include opinions on how the program supports the Australian Curriculum, how it might be of benefit to those

schools participating, suggestions for improvement, whether the day was well organised, whether the school might embark on any follow-up activities and how students might have seen the benefits of the day to them. In 2018, the students were invited to evaluate their day by placing dots onto three different bullseyes. A feedback questionnaire was sent by email to teachers after the event.

This report summarises the responses from both the secondary and primary school programs, each presented as separate sections. Overall surveys confirm that both programs are highly valued by teachers and students. Teachers appreciated the opportunity for the program to develop collaborative and organisational skills in their students, for students to gain empowerment in resolving environmental and sustainability challenges and for them to meet their peers from other schools – all of which raised their confidence and increased their knowledge.



EVENTS HELD IN 2018

In 2018, four *Speaking 4 the Planet* events were held: Armidale, South West Sydney, The Hills and Sutherland. The South West Sydney competition attracted high schools from the Liverpool, Campbelltown and Camden local government areas. One of these events was held in the local council chambers while others used schools or community venues.

The *Kids 4 the Planet* competition was held at Lakemba Public School, in the Canterbury-Bankstown local government area.

Government and non-government schools participated together over a whole day for each event. The prepared video by students was an initiative introduced for the first time. It was pleasing to note that all of the schools participating in 2018 had returned from previous years to compete again.

Besides teachers completing a set of feedback questions after the event, another assessment method was introduced. A target image was presented for students to indicate how useful and relevant a particular aspect of the competition was. Placing a dot in the centre of the bullseyes, for example would indicate a high approval for the activity while dots further out from the centre indicated less enthusiasm. Here is an example from one of the day's activities indicating how much students thought they had learned.



FINDINGS FROM *SPEAKING 4 THE PLANET* EVENTS

Curriculum Support

All teachers recognised the value of the program in supporting a number of learning areas developed for the Australian Curriculum. Those noted included English (Listening and Speaking), Geography (with its documented environmental topics), Drama, Visual Arts, Science, Human Society and its Environment (Stage 5) and the Cross Curriculum Priorities (e.g. Sustainability). A number of competencies and skills were also mentioned including speech writing, debating, oration, collaborating, interactive skills and developing a global perspective to major human and environmental issues.

Benefits to Students and Schools

There was a wide range of comments by teachers in how they saw the benefits to students and their schools, particularly in terms of their learning and its support for their school's total curriculum offerings. Other than enhancing drama and public speaking skills in an environment outside their traditional school experiences, students were able to hear different perspectives from their peers and learn through exploration and research. They learned they had some empowerment to make a difference in terms of resolving plastics pollution; they were also able to develop further skills in preparation, brainstorming, composing drafts, rehearsing against different prompts, drawing on the strengths of their group, gaining confidence in public speaking and establishing a potential network with other schools. By exploring new ideas in a fun, creative way they had the potential to understand how a single message can be transformative and adapted to a range of modes.

Students were also able to take their skills and messages back to their schools and share them with their peers, often at assemblies or through discussion in class.

The package of resources was very useful for me as a teacher and for my students.
Teacher, South West Sydney event

The General Organisation of each Event

Without fail all respondents agreed that the day's organisation both prior to and during the event was excellent. Words like "well organised", "fantastic" and "structure was good" were common responses. Some noted the day ran smoothly, the pre-reading documents sent to the school were transparent, thorough, specific, highly appreciated and helpful, particularly in helping students' understanding of the topic. The day had a warm, welcoming tone, catered for variations and evolved smoothly.



Ideas for Improvement

Participants were invited to make suggestions for improvement to each day's event. A number of them were happy with the management of the day and said it was fine as it was. Others offered suggestions for improvements. These included: a student panel to judge the video competition; more time for students to reflect on the WED's environmental theme and then take it back to their schools; greater efforts to ensure the drama is genuinely impromptu and not prepared before the event. Some suggested a multi-media component for 2019; others asked if more students could attend as an audience and if a venue closer to a transport node could be used. One teacher raised the possibility of inviting an expert to come and give an inspirational talk prior to the day's program start.

Suggestions for Follow-up Activities

There are endless opportunities for schools to follow-up on the day's event but due to schools' other priorities and curriculum responsibilities it is often easier said than done. Some teachers proposed a school environmental action group might be formed or for schools to even develop a partnership with their local council. The drama presentations could be duplicated and presented again to a full school assembly and schools could begin selecting their participating students now for the 2019 *Speaking 4 the Planet* events. Some teachers mentioned they will take some of the ideas presented on the day back to their teaching plans on their return to school.

Student Feedback

All student comments were positive. They all enjoyed the experience, learned a lot and agreed with the award decisions on the day. Some expressed a reluctance to go on the day at first but once they arrived they were fully engaged. Some were critical of their parents using plastic wrapping; all were keen to attend again in 2019. A few said they gained confidence in talking to a different audience and learned how to get a message out in different ways.



FINDINGS FROM *KIDS 4 THE PLANET*

BACKGROUND

Lakemba Public School was the venue for the 2018 *Kids 4 the Planet* event (as it was for 2017). The WED theme was the stimulus for competitions in speech, drama, visual arts and – for the first time – video. This event also had a one-off logo category: schools were invited to submit ideas for a logo for the Kids 4 the Planet competition. The resulting logo, put together by a graphic designer, was a combination of two submissions.



Like their secondary colleagues, the primary school teachers at this event recognised the curriculum areas the theme supported and saw the day as a vehicle for developing skills in public speaking (prepared and impromptu), drama (impromptu) and art and video/technology. They valued the program's support for the implementation of a wide cross section of curriculum areas and a number of competencies identified in the Australian Curriculum. Additional to the secondary responses were comments on developing skills in critical and creative thinking, delivering persuasive speeches and developing knowledge of current affairs.

Benefits to schools and Students

Teachers noted that students were able to see the effects on the planet due to human negligence and understand that impacts can be diminished when humans take action. The teachers also appreciated a multi-modal method of displaying learning and raising awareness of the severity of environmental problems. Kids 4 the Planet provided students with an opportunity for authentic engagement with the plastics pollution issue; it also enabled them to choose their own learning style and express themselves in their chosen medium.

Organisation of the Day

Teachers felt the day was well organised, gave it high approval and felt the event was an excellent preparation for students to enter high school and share their skills with peers from other schools. Teachers were also able to share their skills and learn from each other. They also commented on the excellent preparation by Phil Smith before the day and the idea of having the community attending.

Possible Improvements

Only a few suggestions were noted including introducing a **prepared** drama category and for the schools to have a teacher to judge the activities. Some seemed to be unaware of the rules defining the difference between prepared and impromptu activities.

Suggestions for Follow-up

A few teachers indicated they would use the day as a starting point for introducing environmental activities in their school and spreading the topic more holistically across classrooms. Another suggestion was to develop a year 6 environmental team and develop a role play on plastics back at their school.

Students

Students liked the idea of presenting to a larger audience and expressed enthusiasm to participate again in 2019.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The program is highly endorsed and accepted enthusiastically by teachers and students. The following recommendations are made in order to support continuous improvement:

- Continue using the current management and operational structures for organising these competitive events. This applies to both the primary, *Kids 4 the Planet* and the secondary, *Speaking 4 the Planet*.
- Assess the efficiency of timing for all the activities and the effectiveness of their sequencing.
- Consider new activities for 2019 as suggested by teachers and students, provided they do not replace existing activities that are already strongly endorsed.
- Consider the use of new technologies, if appropriate, especially in the preparations for each event.
- Conduct evaluation surveys on the actual day when opinions are fresh in participants' minds, rather than depending on follow-up requests after teachers have returned to their schools. However, it is still useful to maintain the offer to teachers to add additional comments after the event and when they have had time to reflect.
- Emphasise again the rules for the judging of speeches and drama presentations and reiterate them when awarding winners.
- Consider the value of allowing a panel of students to judge the video submissions but develop a set of judging criteria first.
- Consider the transport options when deciding on venues.



