Propagating Collective Hope in the Midst of Environmental Doom and Gloom

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Abstract

Environmental educators recognize the importance of empowering children and adults, yet environmental education operates within a grand narrative of environmental gloom and doom. Growing evidence exists that children feel hopeless about the future of the planet. Given relationships between hope and agency, the question arises of how to propagate hope when environmental educators themselves are inundated by doom and gloom. This paper seeks insights from the research literature on palliative care, where questions of hope and hopelessness are more openly debated. It recognizes the value of alternative conceptions of hope and the capacity for emotions to be shared via hopeful social media campaigns, such as #OceanOptimism.

Résumé

Les éducateurs en environnement reconnaissent à quel point il est important pour les enfants comme les adultes de croire en leur capacité à changer les choses. Pourtant, l'éducation à l'environnement s'imbrique souvent dans une vaste trame pessimiste. Des signes de plus en plus nombreux montrent que les enfants se sentent impuissants quant à l'avenir de notre planète. Or, comme l'espoir est lié à l'action, on se demande comment transmettre ce sentiment d'espoir quand les éducateurs eux-mêmes baignent dans le pessimisme et la morosité. Le présent article explore diverses pistes issues de publications scientifiques portant sur les soins palliatifs, un domaine où les notions d'espoir et de désespoir sont assez ouvertement discutées. On y valorise différentes conceptions de l'espoir, de même que la possibilité de partager des émotions par l'entremise de campagnes porteuses d'optimisme sur les médias sociaux, comme celle de #OceanOptimism.

Keywords: hope, gloom, doom, emotional contagion, #OceanOptimism, resilience

Inundated by Doom and Gloom

In November 2014, I travelled to the Cairns Institute at James Cook University to work with Bob Stevenson in the Centre for Research and Innovation in Sustainability Education. Hilary Whitehouse, Bob's colleague at the university, joined us. Hilary is deeply enmeshed in environmental and science education, as well as actively involved with frog, fruit bat, and other conservation initiatives in the Queensland environmental community.

We met at an outdoor café on the beautiful James Cook University campus where the air was hot, humid, and alive with the sound of birds. Northern Queensland is one of the only places on Earth where a world heritage site for rainforest biodiversity touches a world heritage site for marine biodiversity—the Great Barrier Reef. Yet even within that idyllic setting, what quickly became apparent during those meetings was how besieged Hilary was with terrible news. We asked Hilary to keep track of all the environmental news she received on her personal devices in a 48-hour period, and here is a sample of what it looked like:

> Drought and high temperatures cause mass deaths of fruit bats; forecasts of seas boiling in 200 years; climate deniers on the front page of the Cairns paper; the biggest snow storm ever recorded in Buffalo, New York; drought in California; killer thunderstorms in Brisbane; news of climate change caused extreme weather events from many parts of the world… (H. Whitehouse, personal communication, November 25, 2014)

Hilary's worries about the state of the planet are reinforced on a moment-by-moment basis. Stories of urgent environmental problems and horrifying disasters greet her on her phone when she gets up in the morning. They leap across the screen of her computer at work and accompany her home on her laptop at the end of the day. "And this is only at one degree of global temperature change," Hilary said as she shared her list, underscoring her fear of what further horrors were yet to come.

The situation Hilary faces is so common to people working with environmental issues that it begs the question: How do we propagate hope when we ourselves are inundated by doom and gloom? It is a vital question, because it is not just environmental educators but the people we wish to engage—children and adults alike—who are bombarded with a litany of environmental bad news (Kelsey, 2012). And all of those worrisome reports influence not only how we feel, but according to researchers working with the concept of emotional contagion, the *feelings* of the people with whom we interact. Researchers have long been aware of the contagious nature of emotions (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994; Schoenewolf, 1990): being around a happy person can make you feel happier (Pugh, 2001) whereas interacting with a grump can bring you down (Barsade, 2002; Joiner & Katz, 1999). According to Cunningham (2004), hope and hopelessness can be caught from someone else.

More recent studies demonstrate that emotional contagion occurs even without direct contact or interaction between people. In 2014 Kramer, Guillory, and Hancock published the findings of a massive-scale study involving nearly 700,000 participants on Facebook. The study determined that emotions spread among users of online social networks. Exposure to a friend expressing an emotion on social media, in the complete absence of nonverbal cues, is sufficient for positive or negative emotions to spread. According to the authors, "Online messages influence our experience of emotions, which may affect a variety of offline behaviors" (Kramer, Guillory, & Hancock, 2014, p. 8790).

I have been working on the issue of hope and the environment for the past decade, and what is clear is that worries about the environment affect every aspect of our personal lives (Zeyer & Kelsey, 2013). Environmental issues elicit feelings of grief and despair about the state of the planet. "I don't want to live under the thumb of despair anymore," a man wrote to me after hearing me speak at the World Environmental Education Congress in Brisbane, Australia in 2011. "Not only is it a terrible way to live, it's not productive and results in disengagement and total loss of agency."

According to Turner (2007), emotional reactions to the ecological crisis are expressed as alarm, horror, outrage and fear. Or to become numb as Henttonen (2014) reveals:

> Faced with a countless number of risks and challenges in our daily lives, people have developed what social psychologists have named the finite pool of worry, simply meaning that there are limits to the amount of concerns we are able to deal with at once. Over-burdening that capacity by showering people with doom and gloom will make the pool flood and lead to emotional numbing. (para. 12)

One in five people on Earth have an active Facebook account (Halleck, 2015). Environmental news is overwhelmingly reported as "bad news" (McCluskey, Swinnen, & Vandemoortele, 2015; Project for Improved Environmental Coverage, 2015). Together, these trends produce the perfect storm for rapidly disseminating environmental doom and gloom.

Hope is Missing from the Environmental Education Research Literature

We rarely acknowledge all of this emotion. A decade ago, Rick Kool and I (Kool & Kelsey, 2006) looked at the prevalence of emotion-focused research in our professional journals and found the following:

> The environmental education literature is strangely silent about dealing with the emotional implications of the environmental crisis. Words like hope, grief, mourning, sadness, despair or anger rarely appear in our writings: there is virtually nothing in our literature addressing appropriate ways to deal with the emotions associated with environmental degradation. The seminal work of Joanna Macy and David Sobel raised this issue in past decades (Macy, 1983; Sobel, 1996), yet the word "hope," for example, appears once in a title in *Environmental Education Research* (EER) and not at all in the last ten years of the *Journal of Environmental Education* (JEE) (Hicks, 1998; Orr, 2004; Sobel, 1996). Furthermore, "hope" shows up in about 60 articles/book reviews, less than 1% of the articles and book reviews in those publications. Similarly, the word "despair" has appeared only five times in the past ten years of JEE publications, and not once in EER since 2000. (p. 54)

Fast-forward to 2016, and this special issue of the *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education* places a much-needed emphasis on the exploration

of emotions with respect to environmental education. Words such as "hope," "optimism," or even "emotion" are still rarely encountered in environmental education research literature. The underrepresentation of hope in the literature is surprising, in light of insights emerging in the field of psychology regarding how hope functions, spreads, and can be intentionally facilitated, as well as the necessity for hope to motivate us to act in ways that help bring about the possibility of a better future (Eliott, 2005; Jacobs, 2005; McGeer, 2004, 2008; Seligman, 2003; Snyder, 1995; Stotland, 1969).

Hope as a Belief in the Possibility of a Better Future

Perhaps part of the challenge of focusing on hope is the contested nature of the term. Little consensus exists about what hope actually *is*. For some scholars, hope is seen as being intimately linked to a belief in the *possibility* of a better future. Miller (1986, 2000) describes hope as an anticipation of a future that is good or better than the present. She emphasizes the importance of belief, suggesting that hope is far more than a mere desire. Lazarus (1999) suggests that it is this aspect of possibility that distinguishes hope from motivation. Amsler (2008) echoes that perspective in her description of hope in the *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*: "Hope most generally refers to a desire for positive futures that are considered possible, either theoretically or in practice, but not guaranteed" (para. 1).

Conceptualizing hope in terms of a belief in a positive future is problematic in the context of environmental gloom and doom. Lovelock, the scientist and inventor of the Gaia thesis, set a hopeless tone back in December 1999 with his now-famous assertion that we have already passed the Earth's ecological tipping point and the damage is irreversible: "It's like you are on a steep hill in a car and your brakes fail. You've got to do something and at least you can take your foot off the accelerator. But you're going to crash anyway" (Bennett, 2001, para. 10). More recently, Kingsnorth took up the lament of being "past the point of no return," crafting it into the *Dark Mountain Manifesto*. On his website he describes the personal awakening that led him to conclude that we are all pretending that the things we do to improve the environmental situation could work:

> It was around 2008 that I began to accept, reluctantly, that much of what I had (probably naively) imagined could be done was not possible. We weren't going to stop climate change. We couldn't prevent the onward march of the human economy, with much of its associated destruction. Instead, we seemed to be committed to a denuded future in a much poorer world. It wasn't a cheery message, but it seemed to me—it still does—to be an honest one. (Kingsnorth, n.d., para. 2-3)

Kingsnorth's (2012) claims to *honesty* underscore his conviction that believing we can enact a positive future is propagating false hope:

> [You have] an obligation to be honest about where you are in history's great cycle, and what you have the power to do and what you don't. If you think you can magic us out of the progress trap with new ideas or new technologies, you are wasting your time. If you think that the usual "campaigning" behavior is going to work today where it didn't work yesterday, you will be wasting your time. If you think the machine can be reformed, tamed, or defanged, you will be wasting your time. If you draw up a great big plan for a better world based on science and rational argument, you will be wasting your time. If you try to live in the past, you will be wasting your time. If you romanticize hunting and gathering or send bombs to computer storeowners, you will be wasting your time. (para. 68)

Whether or not we concur with the dystopian visions of Lovelock and Kingsnorth, few question the enormity and complexity of environmental concerns. Levin, Cashore, Bernstein, and Auld (2012) label climate change and other global environmental issues as "super wicked problems" (p. 123). As such, they share the following common features: They are urgent. They are prone to claims of denial. They lack a central authority to address them. And, often the perpetrators of the issue are required to be part of the solution (Riedy, 2013).

These dire forecasts drive an unrelenting sense of urgency around environmental issues and fuel the environmental narrative of doom and gloom. Environmental educators thus find themselves in the position of trying to engage people with deeply worrying content. For some, this leads to concerns that focusing on hope might actually be spreading false hope, or as Downman (2008) labels it, "unrealistic hope." This creates an ethical tension where the beneficent desire to engage children in environmental action through sustaining hope appears to be in conflict with an autonomy-based requirement not to deceive them about the dire threats the planet faces. Many would find it ethically unacceptable to deliberately deceive a child on such an alarming topic. Better, says Catton (1982), to let them know that life on a damaged planet is inevitable. The job of environmental educators, according to this rationale, would thus be to teach them to face the future wisely, and to expect the worst from it.

A Legacy of Fear

By placing environmental educators and other trusted adults in the role of telling kids just how wrecked the world is, we may inadvertently be perpetuating a legacy of fear. We have media ratings to protect children from sex and violence in movies, but environmental educators often find themselves (or a scientist or representative of an environmental organization that they invited) in an elementary school classroom describing the horrifying impacts of plastic pollution or climate change. Without a hopeful framing around these dire issues, hopelessness emerges as a profound threat.

Fear is quite often the disabling factor in people who feel hopeless (Charlesworth, 2012). According to Tucci, Mitchell, and Goddard (2007), " A quarter of

[Australian] children are so troubled about the state of the world that they honestly believe it will come to an end before they get older" (p. 7). The emotional toll of worries about climate change are chronicled in a number of studies cited in the UNICEF UK climate change 2008 report that states: "Children themselves exhibit a high level of awareness and concern about climate change. This in turn affects their visions of—and anxieties about—their own future and that of the world in general" (Back & Cameron, 2008, p. 28).

Adhering to a narrative of doom and gloom that leaves its most vulnerable constituents frightened and disempowered clearly needs to change. And the narrative needs to be changed in a way that does not create ethical tensions around the issue of raising false hope. A search for a solution to this dilemma led me to explore how the issue of "false hope" is approached in fields where life-and-death decisions are commonplace: the fields of palliative care, cancer treatment, and nursing. An online search quickly produced a range of papers with titles such as, "Facilitating Hopefulness: The Determinants of Hope" (Bunston, Mings, Mackie, & Jones, 1996), "Linking Concepts of Enduring, Uncertainty, Suffering, and Hope" (Morse & Penrod, 1999), and "Hope and Terminal Illness: False Hope Versus Absolute Hope" (Garrard & Wrigley, 2009).

Hope as Sense of a Meaningful Life

Garrard and Wrigley (2009) argue that it is possible for health care professionals to foster hope in terminally ill patients without deceiving them about their condition. Hope in this context is *not* conceptualized in terms of the promise of a better future; it is grounded in a sense of a meaningful present. Bunston et al. (1996) share this emphasis on choosing to hope regardless of future circumstances. They see hope as an important source of motivation and coping.

Conceptualizing hope in terms of "finding meaning," rather than believing in the possibility of a better future, is reflected in Frankl's theory of Logotherapy/Existential Analysis. Frankl (1984) states: "We must never forget that we may also find meaning in life even when confronted with a hopeless situation" (p. 135). Even when one is dying, palliative care specialists tell us, one is not without hope (Sulmasy, 2002). One hopes for one's life to have had meaning. It is not up to our doctors or the people who love us to worry about whether to offer false hope because hope is not theirs to give. Hope and meaning are already present, according to Sulmasy. Garrard and Wrigley (2009) write that practitioners "therefore do not need to shy away from using the language of hope in the palliative setting, as on this understanding of hope it can be used in a way that promotes patient welfare and respects patient autonomy" (p. 38). Instead, the focus should rest on respecting the dignity of the dying person, and to express our own hopes that meaning will transcend death (Baider & Surbone, 2010).

Farran, Herth, and Popovich (1995) echo this sentiment. They claim that the very notion of false hope is faulty. It is based on an assumption that hope,

authentic or false, is something that can be given. This, they say, is never the case. One might try to provide support through which hope might flourish, but hope, they say, is not externally produced. It is intimately tied to one's personal sense of meaning.

Hope and Emotional Learning Can be Taught

Allaying fears about raising false hopes is important for environmental educators. Fear of handling emotional responses when we are not trained to facilitate or support such feelings prevents some environmental educators from acknowledging the anger, fear, worry, and other emotions their students might be experiencing, as well as sharing their own feelings about the environment. Yet hope can be taught (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009). Recognizing this, and the importance of hope to environmental engagement, places environmental educators in a position to tailor effective practices for emotional learning to environmental education contexts.

A plethora of resources emerging from the field of Social and Emotional Learning is available to draw upon. Emotional intelligence is defined by Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2000) as "the ability to perceive and express emotion, assimilate emotion in thought, understand and reason with emotion, and regulate emotion in self and others" (p. 396). The Social and Emotional Learning research literature and practitioner communities comprise a wide range of specialized learning contexts and perspectives. Stanford University, for example, offers online, video-based courses for teachers that include learning theories and practical advice on emotions and learning. Additionally, the Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education at the Stanford School of Medicine is just one of many research institutions offering a rich array of courses, blogs, online videos, and research articles on emotional learning.

Hope and Agency

It is difficult to speak about hope without someone raising concerns about complacency. Yet hope does not make us complacent. On the contrary, hope serves as an important motivator. Agency, or the capacity to act, is intimately tied to hope (McGeer, 2004; Snyder, 2000). According to Drahos (2004), spreading hope provides the emotional and motivational effects necessary for positive action to occur. As McGeer (2004) puts it:

> To hope well is thus to do more than focus on hoped-for ends; it is crucial to take a reflective and developmental stance toward our own capacities as agents—hence, it is to experience ourselves as agents of potential as well as agents in fact. (p. 105)

We give up our agency and feel hopeless when we do not believe any action

we take will make a difference (Lueck, 2007). Hopelessness is a self-fulfilling prophecy (Wilkinson, 2005). If people believe their life has no meaning, or that the future can only have negative outcomes, then they are likely to act according to those expectations and thus create the conditions in which those expectations are realized.

Many of our efforts as environmental educators over the past decades have been focused on the capacity of *individuals* to act, and to change their behaviour in more environmentally friendly ways. This emphasis on individuals is encapsulated in the definition of environmental education provided by the United States Environmental Protection Agency:

> Environmental education is a process that allows individuals to explore environmental issues, engage in problem solving, and take action to improve the environment. As a result, individuals develop a deeper understanding of environmental issues and have the skills to make informed and responsible decisions. (n.d., para. 1)

The North American Association for Environmental Education, one of our professional associations, places a similar emphasis on targeting individuals: "Environmental education (EE) provides the skills necessary for people of all ages to make intelligent, informed decisions about the environment and how they can take care of it" (NAAEE, n.d., para. 1). Yet the scale of most environmental issues is beyond the scale of individual human influence making individual efforts feel like hopeless undertakings (Kretz, 2013). This has led to a new interest in environmental education within the United States at a collective level, often at the scale of community (Ardoin, Clark, & Kelsey, 2012). This shift echoes the conceptualization of, and research in, environmental education, in terms of collective action that has been the focus of Australian, Canadian, and much of the European research since the early 1990s (see, for example, Stevenson & Evans (2011) for an analysis of articles published in the *Australian Journal of Environmental Education* during the 1990s).

The Importance of Others in Inspiring Collective Hope

In 2013 I interviewed policy makers, scientists, and resource managers at the 3rd International Marine Protected Areas congress in France. I spontaneously approached people from a variety of different countries with a video camera and asked them to tell me where they found hope. I had expected that some of the biologists and ecologists, in particular, might choose the impressive recoveries of marine animals associated with the increase in the establishment of marine protected areas, but 21 of the 22 individuals I interviewed chose specific things other people had done as their source of hope. Similarly, in *Is This How You Feel,* an online exhibit of personal letters posted by climate scientists, several scientists attribute the source of their hope to the actions and ingenuity

of other people. "I know where there is humanity, there is always hope," wrote Mark Maslin, Professor of Climatology, University College London. "Humans are incredibly smart," wrote Michael Raupach of the ANU Climate Change Institute. "We have the capabilities to repair climate and to lighten our footprints to what the planet can sustain" (Is This How You Feel, n.d.).

In her international study of how teens use social media, and their conceptions of environmental activism, Field (2017) says teens infused hope into their online activism. They frequently put hopeful, inspirational quote memes into their status updates. They share them, like them, and comment on them.

These findings illustrate how individual hopes are often dependent upon wider circles of action by others (Bennett, 2015; Courville & Piper, 2004; Drahos 2004). Being involved in collective hope helps to sustain individual hope. People are less likely to feel hopeless or to slide into despair (McGeer, 2004).

Hope arises when people recognize their agency (McGeer, 2004). Collective hope allows for more individuals to set goals, circumvent potential problems, and establish plans to reach their goals, even in the midst of what might feel like insurmountable odds (Lueck, 2007).

The Need for Environmental Disciplines to Embrace Hope

Doom and gloom has become the *de facto* environmental narrative, not only for the ways in which we communicate environmental issues but also for the ways a range of environmental disciplines frame their fields of study. As Nancy Knowlton of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC and Jackson of Scripps Institution of Oceanography in California put it: "An entire generation of scientists has now been trained to describe, in ever greater and more dismal detail, the death of the ocean" (Knowlton & Jackson, 2011, para. 1).

A range of other environmental disciplines share this focus on doom and gloom. Sheppard (2004), for example, describes his battle with pessimism in the environmental ethics classroom. Lueck (2007) argues that the field of environmental sociology must become aware of the pessimism it engenders. Kretz (2013) traces the limited presence of hope in ecological philosophy and outlines reasons why environmental hopelessness is such a threat. By leaning so heavily toward environmental problem analysis rather than solutions generation, it appears that academics in a variety of important environmental disciplines are perpetuating a system of research inquiry that manufactures hopelessness.

Institutionalize a Culture of Self-Care

The need for self-care is increasingly recognized within oncology, nursing, and palliative care professions. The research journals from these fields include articles with titles such as "Practical Self-Care and Stress Management for

Oncology Nurses" (Grafton & Coyne, 2012) and "Oncology Nurse as Wounded Healer: Developing a Compassion Identity" (Corso, 2012). No such titles existed in the environmental education literature until recently, when Lloro-Bidart and Semenko (2017) championed a feminist ethic of self-care for environmental educators. For environmental educators (many of whom carry the additional stressors of working in a field where even highly skilled professionals are often precariously employed), the personal cost of working with such emotionally and psychologically charged issues in the context of widespread doom and gloom is rarely recognized, acknowledged, or addressed. Beauchamp (2009) found a significant lack of inquiry into personal health and sustainability in the environmental community. "In order to be effective as communicators and educators," she says, "we must also be healthy as individuals, and in order to build hope and happiness, I believe, we must also build health" (p. 94).

Initiatives to address this deficit are slowly emerging in the Canadian context. The Canadian Education Association featured an article on self-care, dealing specifically with compassion fatigue, in its March 2013 newsletter, entitled "Caring without Tiring: Dealing with Compassion Fatigue Burnout in Teaching" (CEA, 2013), and at the time of this publication, an experiment in hosting self-care workshops for individuals engaged in social change initiatives living in Vancouver, British Columbia was being piloted through <selfcareproject.org>. The British Columbia Association of Social Workers calls self-care an "ethical imperative" (Monk, 2011), positioning self-care as a top priority for both individuals and the profession at large. I believe the same statement should apply to environmental educators and the broader field of environmental education. Self-care needs to be recognized as part and parcel of nurturing a global culture of collective hope.

Recognize that Gloom and Doom is a Narrative, and it's Time to Change the Story

As environmental educators we need to recognize the power of narratives, and help the children and communities we engage with to recognize them too. Carson, the environmental scientist who wrote *Silent Sprint* (Carson, Darling, & Darling, 1962), shifted the environmental narrative of her time (Griswold, 2012). Through her book she reframed the story of pesticides from one of technological progress to one of nature's vulnerability to human intervention. Similarly, Louv (2005) re-storied children's engagement with nature as a health issue by labeling the impacts on kids of not going outside as nature-deficit disorder, thus garnering the attention and support of the public health lobby.

The stories we tell ourselves shape how we live and what we believe to be possible. Environmental issues are real and horrifying, but we need to disentangle the urgent status of the issues themselves from the frightening stories we

construct to engage people with them. We need to recognize the power of narrative to shape responses and experiences. By shoehorning the environment into a monolithic story of doom and gloom we have lost the nuance and specificity of environmental issues and contexts. Our adherence to generalized slogans, such as "Save the whales," for example, prevents us from recognizing the global recovery of different whale populations and species (Kintisch, 2014).

Nancy Knowlton, from the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC, challenged that narrative. She started hosting what she called "Beyond the Obituaries" sessions at major international scientific conferences. Scientists were invited to come and share only conservation success stories. She thought they might get a few people showing up, but an overwhelming number of scientists gathered to share solutions emerging from their work.

Look for Hopeful, Solutions-Oriented Environmental Content

Given the privileged position of scientific expertise in environmental problem-solving (Keller, 2009, O'Riodan, 2014), I believe a critical piece in shifting the dominant environmental narrative beyond doom and gloom is connecting people with authentic, scientific examples of successful conservation outcomes. Understanding that species and ecosystems can and do rebound, and seeing proof of conservation solutions, fuels hope. And the more I look for conservation successes the more I find, particularly in the marine environment where the growing incidence of establishing marine protected areas and the ensuing positive impact on size, abundance, and diversity of fish and other species is starting to show how resilient ocean ecosystems can be (Claudet et al., 2008, Lester et al., 2009).

I wrote the scientific brief for a Global Ocean Legacy campaign that resulted in former President Bush declaring the Mariana Trench Marine National Monument in 2009 (Kelsey, 2008). At the time, this was the largest act of marine conservation in history—the combined reserves spanned 195,000 square miles (Cappiello, 2009). I am pleased that the Mariana Marine Protected Area has been dwarfed in size by more recent marine-protected area designations (Kelsey, 2016b). According to Sala (2016), the amount of ocean under protection has more than doubled in just the last few years. One can now chart the rise of ecosystem-scaled marine protected areas online through the Atlas of Marine Protection at <www.mpatlas.org/>.

The rapid establishment of marine-protected areas is just one example of conservation solutions that are having a positive impact on biodiversity, climate change, and sustainable fisheries (Di Franco et al., 2016; Lester et al., 2009). The challenge is finding easy ways for people to access these successes when mainstream media is weighted so heavily toward publishing doom and gloom.

Harness the Power of Social Networks to Propagate Collective Hope

In 2013, I responded to the challenge by reaching out to Nancy Knowlton, Heather Koldewey of the Zoological Society of London, and Cynthia Vernon of the Monterey Bay Aquarium. A year later, we were joined by Elisabeth Whitebread, a global marine community organizer, and in May 2014, we co-hosted a two-day workshop with small group of scientists, journalists, and environmentalists just outside London, England. Our goal was to co-create a social change project that would shift the environmental narrative beyond doom and gloom by crowd-sourcing marine conservation successes. Our work was predicated on the theory of emotional contagion and the finding that people are more likely to share hopeful, positive stories by social media than they are through mainstream press. Good news spreads faster on social media (Berger & Milkman, 2012).

We focused on World Oceans Day 2014, an international event that would occur just two weeks after the workshop. We invented a #OceanOptimism hashtag and encouraged others to use Twitter to share ocean conservation successes from around the world (Kelsey, 2016a). Since its inception in June 2014, #OceanOptimism has reached more than 80 million Twitter accounts and continues to gain momentum. In the three years since we co-launched that social media campaign, sister campaigns, summits, and workshops focused on Conservation Optimism and Earth Optimism have emerged, spearheading a global conservation movement based on championing hope.

Feeling and expressing hope begets hopeful action that in turn creates more reasons to be hopeful. According to Kretz (2013):

> Hope, on my account, is substantive, motivates action, can be taught, is catchy, has a multitude of beneficial outcomes, empowers, and is epistemically and socially responsive. Moreover it is a self-fulfilling prophecy given the causally efficacious enabling function of hope when, through placing oneself in a state of hope, one begins a process that brings to realization desired states of the world. The future is shaped, in part, by our current attitudes, methods of framing, and attendant actions. Hope bridges the gulf between the beliefs and actions of today and possibilities for tomorrow. (p. 926)

Log on to #OceanOptimism or the website or Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook accounts that others have created using the OceanOptimism name and you will witness a stream of current, hopeful stories about ocean conservation successes and solutions. The vast scope and scale of the #OceanOptimism network embodies the self-perpetuating, catchy, empowering, action-motivating, beneficial to multiple outcomes, socially responsive qualities of collective hope that Kretz describes. It epitomizes what Lueck (2007) describes as a perpetuating cycle for positive social change:

> Collective hope is a stimulus for social change. By turning individual hopes into group hopes the possibility of success in achieving the desired goals is increased…

> Hope as an agentic power leads to the organization of social movement groups in the first place. Hope then not only provides a stimulus for agency, but the agency enforced is one that can affect the structure of society. In this manner, hope is spread from the group to outside individuals increasing the group's power, which in turn increases the hope for the desired outcome: a perpetuating cycle as the group increases the probability of successful social change. (p. 253)

Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that environmental educators and the children and adults they seek to engage are inundated by environmental gloom and doom. Studies and surveys from a number of countries suggest that many children feel hopeless about the future. Yet hope and other emotions are all but missing from the environmental education research literature. I reveal that hope can be taught and that the connections between hope and agency make it an essential component for environmental educators to include in their programming. But rather than targeting individuals, I champion a focus on creating and nurturing communities, both face to face and through online social networks as sites of collective hope.

Hope is often characterized as a belief in the possibility of a better future. This characterization poses problems within the dead-end narrative of environmental doom and gloom. I draw upon the research literature of palliative care, nursing, and oncology to demonstrate how professionals working in these fields contend with concerns around raising false hopes in the face of death. This introduces alternative conceptions of hope that privilege "finding meaning." I highlight resources available in the field of social and emotional learning that may assist environmental educators in framing environmental education in more hopeful terms. I briefly discuss the need to institutionalize a culture of self-care for environmental educators, a subject I will explore in more depth in another paper.

Hope is underrepresented in the fields of conservation science, ecological philosophy, environmental sociology, and environmental ethics. I argue that these fields need to recognize and question their pessimistic stance, and along with the field of environmental education, recognize that gloom and doom is a narrative that needs to be changed.

Emotions are contagious. They can be passed from one person to another. The recent finding that emotions can be spread through online networks raises additional concerns about the rise of hopelessness in the face of environmental doom and gloom. But the "catchy" quality of emotions also creates opportunities for hope. Good news travels faster than bad on social media. The viral spread of #OceanOptimism is an example of a self-perpetuating network for collective hope.

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