



Education and Research: Testing Hypotheses

Inspiring Intergenerational Climate Activism

Summary

This lesson describes a 90 minutes session for adult learners participating in a multi-week, parent-child curriculum. This lesson contributes to the following, overall curricular objectives: 1) increase awareness and basic understanding of the fundamental, evidence-based realities of climate change and global warming; and 2) inspire participants to develop a practice of nurturing and sustaining their own sense of hope and empowered, effective activism in the face of daunting barriers to such action. This particular lesson asks the learner to reflect and reframe how s/he is emotionally impacted when confronted with information about how anthropomorphic climate change is impacting the ocean, marine life and coastal communities. It then engages adults in a practice of acknowledging and reframing their emotional responses to climate change as a way to fuel and sustain hopeful action. This lesson draws heavily from the [Active Hope](#) methodology pioneered by Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone in the UK; as well as on contemporary positive psychology concepts championed by Martin Seligman, and an array mindfulness, neuroscience and leadership research.

This lesson is focused on parents as the learners. Children of these parents will participate in a separate activity designed by Kelsey Armenia. The joint conclusion of our lessons will culminate in an exercise that gathers the parents and children together for a collective reflection session.

Tags: active hope, positive psychology, world ocean assessment, neuroscience of mindful leadership

Key Concepts

- Pre-session reading: Summary of the **United Nations First World Ocean Assessment, 2016 - [WOA Summary](#)**
- Thematic Concepts, general:
 - The overall state of the world's ocean is being drastically and negatively impacted by human activities and human-induced climate change
 - Myriad marine ecosystems are in decline
 - Humans depend on the ocean for life, health and economic value
- Pedagogical Concepts, providing context for the lesson: Underpinning this entire lesson is the need to work *with* our neurobiology to increase our ability and capacity for collective, positive action to combat and adapt to climate change:
 1. We must acknowledge and harness the enormous power of the emotional, unconscious system of our neurobiology over the relatively less influential

rational, conscious system if we are to succeed at collective, collaborative action meeting the challenge of climate change.

2. Our own behavior and motivation is influenced heavily through witnessing others' actions. In the case of children, there may be a particular benefit:
 - a. *Just as mindlessness is the rigid reliance on old categories, mindfulness means the continual creation of new ones. Categorizing and recategorizing, labelling and relabeling as one masters the world are processes natural to children. As adults, however, we become reluctant to create new categories.* (Langer, 1989: 63–4)
 3. A growing body of psychological research shows that conscious, deliberative decision-making is far more limited than assumed. “In fact, the vast preponderance of human actions – at least 90% by some measures – including thinking, feeling, judging and acting are driven by non-conscious automated processes” (Hunter and Chaskalson, 2013 and Wilson, 2004).
 4. Our inborn tendency to automate our behavior produces fixed categories of understanding (Langer, 1989) limiting how we perceive the world.
 5. Fixed schemas become the unseen fundamental assumptions about how the world is, resulting in a diminished perception of possibilities and rigid responses.
 6. *Reactive emotions (such as anger, fear and rage) are characterized by routine default patterns of action that are narrow in scope, limiting the palette of potential responses. Furthermore, reactive emotions consume large amounts of energy and deplete personal resources, alienate others and over time rigidify potential responses.* (Fredrickson, 1998) Such reactions are non-conscious.
- Experiential Learning Concepts:
 1. Active Hope is a *practice* – a skill that can be developed and improved upon over time – not a characteristic or a possession. We all can nurture “active hope” to inspire us to become climate justice activists.
 2. The “Spiral of the Work that Reconnects” is a framework for renewing our capacity to act effectively, collectively and in a way that inspires other to act similarly.
 3. The neurobiology of children is an asset that we can honor and harness to inspire continued action for the benefit of the world.

Objectives

- Adult learners will be able to identify and summarize 5 impacts of climate change on the world's ocean, marine life and coastal communities.

- Adult learners will practice a method of conscious awareness of and connection to their emotional responses to evidence-based climate change information.
- Over time, adult learners will begin to develop “generativity” – a practice of consciously creating new possibilities by overriding automatic, non-conscious responses to stressful or new information.
- Adult learners will observe their children demonstrating a practice of generativity.
- Adult learners will identify one concrete action towards protecting the world’s ocean, marine life and/or coastal communities that they will take within the next seven days.

Materials

- <http://www.worldoceanassessment.org/> - Students will come to class having watched the overview video and following pre-reading:
 - http://www.un.org/Depts/los/global_reporting/WOA_RPROC/Summary.pdf
- Students will use a worksheet with the following questions to discuss highlights from the pre-reading:
 - What is the overall state of the world’s oceans and seas?
 - Are marine ecosystems around the world improving or declining?
 - What benefits do we get from the world’s oceans and seas, and how are they distributed?
 - How can we measure the state of the oceans and seas? And what threatens them?
- Students will view the following websites during class:
 - <http://ocean.si.edu/ocean-news/how-you-can-help-ocean>
 - ACCCRN - <https://www.acccrn.net/>
- Students will receive a copy of the book Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy by Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone, New World Library.

Procedure

1. Adults will sit in a circle – approximately 15 participants and one facilitator
2. Facilitator will hand out the Ocean Assessment Summary worksheet (described above) and lead an introductory exercise for 15 minutes. Each student will be asked to state his or her name and to give one example or data point in response to one of the questions on

the worksheet. Each new student will be asked to provide an example or fact that has not been offered.

3. Facilitator will introduce the first component of the Spiral of the Work that Reconnects from the Active Hope methodology:
 - a. ***Coming from Gratitude***... Each participant will be invited to complete the following sentence: *"I give thanks to ____ for supporting human life."*
 - b. ***Honoring our Pain for the World***... The facilitator will ask each participant to participate in a timed writing exercise. For exactly 5 minutes, individual participants will write fluidly and without stopping, completing the following statement: *"Looking at the future, the concerns I have include ____"*
 - c. At the end of the 5 minutes, the facilitator will then invite participants to close their eyes and breathe through their nose, if possible. They will be invited to tune into any sensations they are experiencing in their bodies. Particularly where a sensation seems to hold some emotional content, participants will be asked to move closer towards that sensation and, without labeling or evaluating the sensation, will attempt to feel the core of that emotional / physical sensation. After 5-8 more minutes of silence, the facilitator will guide participants to bring their awareness to the places where their bodies are in contact with the chair and the floor, gradually having them place their palms over their eyes, and then opening their eyes.
 - d. The facilitator will suggest that participants volunteer to share part of their timed writing or to share their experience during the deepening meditation. After 4 or 5 people have shared, the facilitator will move to the next part of the Spiral:
 - e. ***Seeing with New Eyes / Reframing***... Participants will volunteer to complete the following sentence: *"Something that inspires me is..."*
 - f. ***Going Forth***... *"Something that I would LOVE to do to make a difference is ____"* Before asking participants to complete this sentence, the facilitator will show the ACCRN site: Connecting People to Build Inclusive Urban Climate Change Resilience as an example of communities and individuals taking action.
 - g. ***Moving to Concrete Action***... *"A step that I will make towards this vision in the next seven days is ____"* Learners will have 5 minutes to draft an action plan for the next step they will take towards contributing to their vision for the world.

Assessment

- **Performance**—Learners will engage in discussion to demonstrate understanding of the science concepts and, also, to begin practicing the active hope methodology.
- **Product**—Learners will write out a clear action step statement at the end of the session. They will also give to their children their worksheets listing their selected facts about ocean and climate change.

Additional Resources

References:

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Davidson, R.J., Kabat-Zinn, J., Schumacher, J., et al. (2003) “Alterations in brain and immune function produced by mindfulness meditation”. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 65, 564–570.

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