

TEACHING ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE: HOPE AND GRIEF

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*A response to Implications for the secondary geography classroom arising from 'Hope and Grief in the Geography classroom' by Dr Natascha Klocker **

Stephanie's response was prepared for the GTANSW & ACT 2022 STEM Symposium in which Dr Klocker presented about her paper 'Hope and Grief in the Geography Classroom'.

How does Dr Klocker's (et al) work relate to the secondary geography classroom?

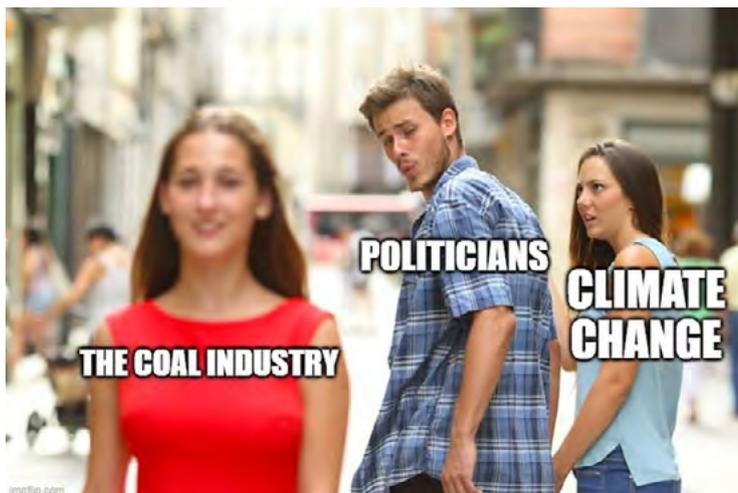
- The study by Dr Klocker et al focused on university level human geography students. Whilst there are similarities between these students and ours, there are significant differences too. Geography in secondary school is mandated until the end of Stage 5 and we have many students in our classes that potentially don't want to be there (they didn't choose to study geography). Many students may also have an 'out of subject area' teacher.
- Acknowledge that a lot of what we are mandated to teach can be emotionally difficult for students (and teachers). This is particularly true for Stage 5 Mandatory Geography with the topics of Sustainable Biomes (food scarcity and security), Human Wellbeing (inequalities) and Environmental Change and Management (climate change plus other environmental issues).
- Be aware that 'ecological grief' is real and can impact students differently depending on their personal situation. Consider your students' contexts e.g are they Indigenous? Have they been affected by bushfires or floods?
- In a post pandemic/ lockdown world, we need to acknowledge that our students may be 'at capacity' emotionally and that adding extra concerns about poor human wellbeing or environmental challenges can be very confronting and 'too much'.

How can secondary geography teachers use Dr Klocker's (et al) work in the classroom when addressing climate change?

- Of significant importance is ensuring that teacher-student relationships are positive and secure before teaching emotionally difficult content. Consider NOT teaching this kind of content first up.
- Consider the reason for teaching it (it's in the syllabus) and what are the best materials to use. The point is not to 'shock' students, but to emotionally engage them. Be selective with images to ensure they're not too confronting.
- Acknowledge that the topic/ lesson may be emotionally difficult before teaching it and explicitly identify some of the emotions students may feel. It can be useful to state your own emotions e.g. anger, despair.
- Considering the reasons behind particular emotions can be helpful - this quote is from a year 10 student: *"I feel angry because I think that climate change is unjust. People who are the most affected by climate change have little say in how it's managed. I feel despair because I see lots of politicians still fighting over whether human induced climate change is real instead of just getting on with dealing with it. I feel hope because I know there are lots of clever people all over the world who care about climate change and are working on mitigating strategies"*
- Include 'climate justice' as a concept (instead of only facts, facts and more facts) and consider the use of humour (Mayes and Centre 2022). Find funny memes or ask students to make their own – <https://imgflip.com/memegenerator>

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- Alternate emotional content with other work. Have back up ideas if it becomes too much. Programs like 'Fight for Planet A' by Craig Reucassel (on ABC iview) deal with grief using humour and show hope with practical solutions.
- Find a way to constructively use anger and sadness- e.g. activism, joining community groups, educating others (like parents or siblings)
- Include a 'buffer' between emotionally challenging content and moving on to another lesson or recess - to enable students and teacher to discuss/ reconcile information and emotions
- Debrief with peers and consider different perspectives (can be linked to worldviews)
- Consider implications of how students manage emotionally difficult content from home (online learning)
- Consider the support available within and beyond your classroom e.g. peer debriefing/ school counselor.
- Look to solutions. Try 'good news week' style activities where students work in pairs to find an example of organisations or individuals who are making a positive difference. Allocate a set amount of time e.g. 20 minutes to find information and then collate as a class e.g. on a google jam board or each pair adds a slide to a presentation. Set up criteria as a class to determine whose 'climate hero' is the best. For example, 'most innovative, widest impact, lowest cost with highest return, easiest to implement'.
- Consider introducing guest speakers – from local councils, a parent body, former students who are usually happy to talk about practical, small-scale measures they are taking e.g. on waste reduction. Zoom can be a way to do this without a lot of paperwork.
- Assessment tasks can be solution oriented such as providing advice on how to deal with a climate change denier or researching cutting edge technology being used to reduce emissions.



Left & below: Both memes created by Rachel, Year 10.



Meme by anonymous, Year 10