

HOPEFUL GEOGRAPHY

AN INTRODUCTION TO HOPEFUL GEOGRAPHY

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This edition of the Geography Bulletin contains a collection of new and republished articles and blogs that fall under the banner of Hopeful Geography.

Geography teachers often refer to the dilemma they face when discussing environmental and social issues and the 'gloom', 'doom' and eco-anxiety tags often associated with the subject.

There is a fine balance between moving students beyond feelings of anxiety and despair to giving them hope for the future, but not to the extent that they become complacent and believe that 'everything will be OK' without significant action. There is also a need to identify and address the range of emotions that surface when difficult content is being taught. The concept of 'hope' is about providing a belief that change is possible, achievements can and have been made and students can play an active role in creating or planning a more positive future.



'The scale and extent of current problems can easily seem overwhelming and learning about them is potentially traumatic. Hope offers an antidote to despair and the possibility of constructing a better future.'

Stephen Scoffham – Hope in a time of crisis.

HOPEFUL GEOGRAPHY: INTRODUCTION

The articles in this edition suggest ways to develop 'hope' in the geography classroom.

Suggestions include:

- Carefully examining facts and identifying trends and progress over time (Factfulness)
- Adopting the notion of 'alternative futures' such as using timelines that split into 'probable' and 'preferable' futures
- Using activities that promote critical thinking, problem solving and creativity to address global and local issues.
- Promoting student engagement and action at a personal or local scale
- Engaging with student emotions and providing time for reflection and debriefing
- Managing our misconceptions about the state of the world
- Critically analysing media reports and writing for purpose, accuracy, reliability, and bias.

'Rather than focusing on a long list of seemingly intractable environmental problems, the hopeful geography teacher will present them as challenges to which we can seek solutions. Pupils can be encouraged to consider the kind of future that they would like, focusing on what they think is preferable, what they think is possible and what they think is probable. This is one way of initiating a process that will move pupils from being passive observers of events to more active agents who feel they can influence what is happening around them'

'Education in the 21st Century should be about preparing for an unpredictable future with realism, hope and optimism'

Stephen Scoffham: Hope in a time of crisis.

'We can instil the importance of fact-checking throughout a child's education, we can pick up on misconceptions, and we can pick up on students who quote inaccurate information.'

David Alcock: Educating for hope - how can educators overcome the Perils of Perception?

FACTFULNESS

Factfulness does not negate the significance of environmental and social issues studied in geography. It does provide one strategy for dealing with the overwhelming negativity of many media reports that portray a 'worst picture' scenario, rather than an accurate portrayal of a situation or an event provided in the context of factual information.

The 'Factfulness' posters from the Gapminder website illustrate how we often misinterpret information and how we can control our reactions.

- **Dramatic Instincts** help us to recognise how different story types often make us misinterpret facts and see them as more dramatic than they are. <https://www.gapminder.org/factfulness/instincts/>
- **Rules of Thumb** – are strategies to control our dramatic instincts by making it a habit to always question the stories that trigger our dramatic instincts.

Learn about Factfulness 10 rules of thumb

<https://www.gapminder.org/factfulness/instincts/>

Learn about your Dramatic Instincts

<https://www.gapminder.org/factfulness/>

Learn about Gapminder's Misconception studies here

<https://www.gapminder.org/factfulness/>

Factfulness is also a tool to illustrate how the world has made progress in addressing many global issues, particularly those related to human wellbeing. Facts and positive news stories can remove some of the anxiety students might be feeling. *'The world is awful, The world is much better, The world can be better'* from Max Roser at Our World in Data (in this edition), uses facts to show progress over time. A more recent article *'9 astonishing ways that living standards have improved around the world'* uses the same approach. Read here. <https://bigthink.com/the-present/9-ways-living-standards-improved-world/>

POSITIVE STORIES

Various websites report on positive news and successful action for change across the globe. One such website, Future Crunch, publishes a weekly report of good news from global media sources. The latest Good News report can be found at <https://futurecrun.ch/goodnews> and a podcast titled *Optimised* at <https://futurecrun.ch/podcast>. Using a good news story to begin or end each geography lesson, irrespective of the topic being studied, can assist in inspiring hope.

Two examples from October 2022

'After being hunted to extinction 400 years ago, Eurasian beavers have been declared a protected species in England, making it illegal to capture, kill, injure, or disturb them. Wildlife organisations have praised the move, saying beavers' dams help keep water clean and prevent flooding and drought.'

BBC

HOPEFUL GEOGRAPHY: INTRODUCTION

'20 years ago, Indonesia's Raja Ampat archipelago was in trouble due to unsustainable fishing practices. In 2004 authorities incorporated it into a network of over 20,000 km² of protected areas, and today fish populations have rebounded, coral is recovering and livelihoods for local communities have improved. Earlier this year it was given a Blue Parks Award.

CNN

FUTURING AND DEALING WITH EMOTIONS

The two academic papers referred to below investigate the teaching of university students confronted by challenging and distressing environmental and social issues in geography. The ideas they report are equally relevant to the school geography classroom.

Those wanting to investigate alternative ways of discussing and addressing 'wicked problems' in

geography might like to read the full open access article, *A futuring approach to teaching wicked problems* by Jesse Hoffman et al at <https://doi.org/10.1080/03098265.2020.1869923>.

In *Hope and grief in the human geography classroom* Natascha Klocker examines the emotional responses of students confronted by negative content. Students reflecting on their emotional reactions suggest strategies to reduce the impact of grief in the classroom.

1. A futuring approach to teaching wicked problems

Jesse Hoffman, Peter Pelzer, Loes Albert, Tine Béneker, Maarten Hajer & Astrid Mangnus (2021) *A futuring approach to teaching wicked problems, Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 45:4, 576–593, DOI: 10.1080/03098265.2020.1869923
LINK <https://doi.org/10.1080/03098265.2020.1869923> (Open access)

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates how the teaching and learning about “wicked” environmental problems may be fostered through an educational approach premised on futuring – the active imagination of the future. The growing academic interest in possible and desirable futures provides a promising starting point for restructuring education as coupling knowledge to imagination and teaching to policy practice can open up new, experiential ways of learning. Empirically, this paper draws upon research on an experimental futuring course employing a “mixed classroom” formula in which students and policy makers learn together about sustainability challenges. Drawing on the notion of inquiry, this course is set up with the aim to foster a critical engagement with the ways futures are imagined in political debates and decision-making. Through complementary activities, the students were pushed to imagine possible futures around a central theme, the transition to a circular economy, in interaction with the policy makers and other practitioners. This culminated in a “Museum of the Future”. From our action-research-based investigation of the learning experiences in the course, we conclude that a futuring approach to teaching wicked problems results in a more active attitude of students towards the space in which wicked problems and solutions are collectively imagined and deliberated.

Key terms used throughout the paper include: futuring; design education; transdisciplinary education; wicked problems; Museum of the Future; experiential making; sustainability.

SELECTED QUOTES

'The purpose of this paper is to investigate how an educational practice focused on a reflective engagement with the way in which the future is imagined in society can contribute to learning about wicked problems. To do so we will share insights from a course that we organised in the winter of 2019–2020, "Techniques of Futuring: A Mixed Classroom with Policy-Makers".

'.....futuring starts from the recognition that there is more than one possible future. The fact

that the future is multiple means that it is possible to conceive a wide range of "futures" that are likely, possible, or desirable. ... Rather than looking at "likely" futures, the course centres on the aim to expand our understanding of what is possible and what can be desired.'

'... the main take-away from this paper is that a futuring approach to education indeed contributes to an enhanced sense of agency among students in dealing with wicked problems.'

HOPEFUL GEOGRAPHY: INTRODUCTION

2. Hope and grief in the human geography classroom

Natascha Klocker, Charles Gillon, Leah Gibbs, Jennifer Atchison & Gordon Waitt (2021) Hope and grief in the human geography classroom, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, DOI: 10.1080/03098265.2021.1977915. Readers can watch Natascha's webinar on this topic that was presented at Macquarie University here <https://groundworkgeop.wordpress.com/2021/09/07/recording-of-associate-professor-natascha-klockers-seminar-today-available-now/>

ABSTRACT

Human geographers engage students in learning about a world characterised by environmental and social disarray. It follows that our students are exposed to deeply confronting topics: climate change, global inequality, food insecurity, and racism, to name a few. Prompted by research on the painful emotions elicited by climate change communication, we asked human geography students at the University of Wollongong about their experiences of our teaching. We invited them to consider which emotions 'belong' in our classrooms and how difficult emotions might be managed to minimise harm. Students explained that they expect to feel distress while studying human geography and found being confronted a productive experience. They considered the responsibility for managing difficult course-related emotions to be distributed and identified a range of strategies to prevent painful emotions from corroding their wellbeing. Some of these strategies, particularly making room for difficult emotions – by acknowledging, holding onto, and working through them in our classrooms – will be challenging as more universities turn to online teaching during the pandemic and beyond.

Key words: emotion; teaching; climate change; social justice; trauma

SELECTED QUOTES (Names and academic references have been removed here)

'..... environmental educators have a responsibility to propagate hope because "telling kids just how wrecked the world is" risks perpetuating fear and engendering disempowerment. Positive emotions, like hope, offer respite and the strength needed to face threats.'

'..... anxiety and worry also contribute to climate change education: difficult emotions encourage reflection and critical thinking; they can be productive and motivating.'

'..... we asked students to pinpoint areas they found emotionally challenging. They identified: food scarcity, climate change, future studies, plastic pollution, Indigenous geographies, refugees and asylum seeking, global inequality, and animal culling. The students discussed feeling devastated, depressed, guilty, hopeless, helpless, frustrated, horrified, shocked, confronted, freaked out, scared, numb, sad, pessimistic, angry, upset, and powerless.'

'... recalled watching a confronting film. When it finished, the lecturer "turned the lights on and said, "Okay. See you later everyone". I just kind of sat there ... "Am I supposed to just go outside now? ... Can we talk about this? ... This is just too much ... how can I just

walk away and carry on with my life having just been confronted with this content? This memory prompted ... to suggest that "buffer" time be incorporated towards the end of classes, to facilitate debriefing for those who need it.'

'..... "scary" topics become "less confronting" when teachers unpack an issue, discuss ways of mitigating it and identify actions underway'. This approach "dampens" debilitating emotions ...'

'For ... , solution-focused classroom conversations leave her feeling "buoyant": ... concurred ... It gives you an optimistic sense ... we might fix this!

Note: Natascha Klocker presented at the GTA NSW & ACT STEM Symposium in May 2022. Her ideas became the inspiration for responses from Amy Freshwater's– 'Solutions-based teaching for hope in geography' and Stephanie Bowden's 'Hope and climate change' in this issue.

The STEM package of presentations such as Natascha's 'Hope and Grief in the Geography Classroom' with a discussion by Amy and Stephanie is available as an anytime e-learning course accessible on the GTA website.

FACTFULNESS

Dramatic Instincts

Learn to recognize the ten common story types that often make us misinterpret facts and see them as more dramatic than they are.

1 The gap instinct



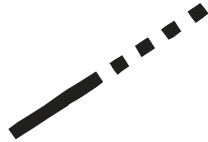
Look at the gap!

2 The Negativity Instinct



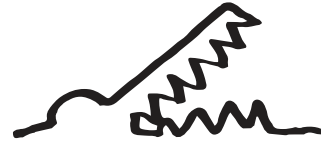
It's getting worse!

3 The Straight Line Instinct



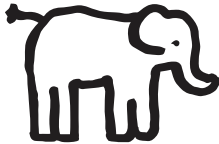
It just continues!

4 The Fear Instinct



It's scary!

5 The Size Instinct



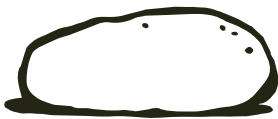
It's big!

6 The Generalization Instinct



They are all the same!

7 The Destiny Instinct



It never changes!

8 The Single Perspective Instinct



This is the solution!

9 The Blame Instinct



That's the bad guy!

10 The Urgency Instinct



It's now or never!

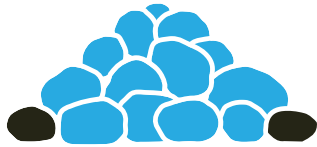
www.gapminder.org/factfulness

FACTFULNESS

Rules of Thumb

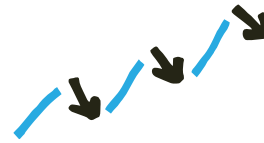
Control your dramatic instincts by making it a habit to always question dramatic stories that trigger your dramatic instincts.

- 1 TO CONTROL THE GAP INSTINCT
Locate the majority



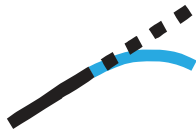
Is there really a gap?

- 2 TO CONTROL THE NEGATIVITY INSTINCT
Expect negative news



Would improvement get attention?

- 3 TO CONTROL THE STRAIGHT LINE INSTINCT
Imagine bending lines



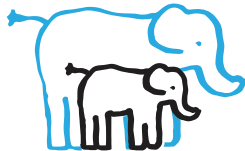
Why would this line not bend?

- 4 TO CONTROL THE FEAR INSTINCT
Calculate the risk



Is it really dangerous?

- 5 TO CONTROL THE SIZE INSTINCT
Check the proportions



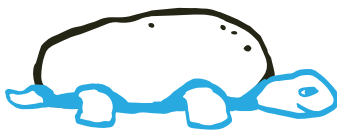
Is it big in comparison?

- 6 TO CONTROL THE GENERALIZATION INSTINCT
Question your categories



How are they different?

- 7 TO CONTROL THE DESTINY INSTINCT
Notice slow changes



Isn't it always changing slowly?

- 8 TO CONTROL THE SINGLE PERSPECTIVE INSTINCT
Use multiple tools



What other solutions exist?

- 9 TO CONTROL THE BLAME INSTINCT
Resist pointing finger



What system made this possible?

- 10 TO CONTROL THE URGENCY INSTINCT
Take small steps



Can we make decisions as we go?

www.gapminder.org/factfulness