OCEAN GRATITUDE: Nourishing and restoring our relationship to the ocean as a solution to marine plastic pollution.

Linda J. Emerson, Wildbluesea, Inc. Jupiter, FL

INTRODUCTION

What do you think of when you think of the ocean?

There is a high probability that a feeling was associated with that thought. A cascade of neurotransmitters flowed through the brain: the release of oxytocin and serotonin, in your body and mind, and the memories of places and action, in your brain and actions.

How might each of these be used to help solve marine plastic pollution?

Current research highlighted in the book Blue Mind shows that being near (in, on, under) water increases positive neurochemical effects, such as in memory and decision making. The good experience. Doing good feels good. Doing good together, near water, fosters trust.

Ocean Gratitude was developed as an experience opposed to an event to inspire insight, restore our relationship to the ocean and each other and translate that into action. The program led to shared observations of both the issue and the beauty of the ocean.

Ocean Gratitude has been received with enthusiasm on all occasions and shows great promise. The program has created a framework for valuing positive emotions like empathy, love and awe within a science-based approach to ocean conservation.

METHODS

Traditional beach clean-ups and quantifying what has been picked up are increasing in popularity, but are they effective in raising the root of the problem? What happens after the event ends?

We propose a different way to bring people together as sites around the North Atlantic through regular common activity designed to elicit care for and enjoy the coasts with whom we will activate awareness leading to positive action towards reducing plastic pollution.

INTENTION

• Share outcome and images through a digital hub via Wildbluesea.org.
• Inspire each other.
• Cultivate ocean-friendly lifestyles, conscious consumers and ocean activism by meeting quarterly at hosted sites around the North Atlantic to support and align ourselves with the natural world.
• Introduce them to the state of being called Blue Mind: neuroscience shows that being near, in, on or under water creates a positive emotional effect on us. Altruism is also a “feel good” experience.
• Current research highlighted in the book Blue Mind shows that being near (in, on, under) water increases positive neurochemical effects, such as in memory and decision making.
• Make the proportion of single-use plastic and plastic in general that is picked up and become part of the solution to marine plastic pollution.

METHOD

• Conduct a pre and post conservation experience, not an event. Experience can be on different time spent together.
• Pool and review program at site around the North Atlantic to feed back in different latitudes, seasons, generations and cultures.
• Create and refine data cards and a pre/post survey to measure participant recognition of the marine plastic pollution problem and willingness to reevaluate their role in solving it.

DATACARD

Slow down and observe nature. Evaluate initial perception. Put up and record debris. Share observations and answer pre survey as a group. State intention to reduce plastic use.

PRE/POST SURVEY

Production single-use plastic and total plastic collected. Summer 2017 – Winter 2018 (5,000+ pieces)

Lizzy Head, North Carolina
• Beach clean-up and static position.
• Discarded single-use plastic found at beach clean-up.

Jupiter, FL
• Beach clean-up and static position.
• Discarded single-use plastic found at beach clean-up.

Pett Level, East Sussex
• Data collection
• Pre/post survey (answered together as a group).

Atlantic Ocean
• A single-use plastic bag, submitted by one of the beachcombers for marine debris.
• An Atlantic Ocean pre/post survey (answered together as a group) that included single-use plastic data.

FIELD TESTS: 3 countries, 7 sites, 150 participants

FIELD SITES

Table of field sites and data collection.

Proportion of single-use plastic and total plastic collected. Summer 2017 – Winter 2018 (5,000+ pieces)

Ocean Gratitude Wrightsville Beach, NC
• Jekyll Island, GA
• Jupiter, FL
• Nags Head, NC
• Wrightsville Beach, NC
• Jupiter, FL
• Nassau, Bahamas

CONCLUSION

What do you think of when you think of the ocean?

Historically, public education and awareness solutions have focused on explaining the issue of plastic pollution and providing insight into an individual’s relationship to the issue. Prior to recent discussions on the field of neuroscience, the scientific community shied away from using emotions. But, by releasing the emotional value of water in conservation programs, we engage germane with the natural world in a profound way.

Ocean Gratitude has created a framework for valuing positive emotions like empathy, love and awe within a science-based approach to ocean conservation.

LITERATURE CITED


ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The following individuals have generously dedicated their time and creativity as site hosts during this exploratory phase of program development: Andy Dزمink, Samae Laotn, Leslie Vogel, Dominique Williams and Dennis Mathis. In addition, Samantha Akery has been instrumental in noting field control and delivery. The Ocean Education Community for participating in our program and for recognizing the need for an emotional approach to solving the problem. We also thank Walasa J. Nichols for her collaborative spirit and insightful writing that has created a framework for solving positive emotions like empathy, love and awe using a science-based approach to ocean conservation.