

Subject updates

The long view: living with climate change

David Hicks was formerly Professor in the School of Education at Bath Spa University and has a particular interest in issues of sustainability and climate change. His website is at www.teaching4abetterworld.co.uk. Here he outlines the importance of teaching and learning about climate change.

'If you do not change your direction, you may end up where you're heading' – Lao Tzu

'There's nothing you can do about it', said my 15-year old grandson, when I asked what he'd learnt about climate change at school. So, what should we be telling young people about changing climate? And more broadly what should be the role of education in these troubled times? This must surely be to prepare young generations for a future that will be very different from today. Not to do so would be an educational crime. Of all of the contemporary issues relevant to geography, climate change has to be the most important for its lasting consequences. The terrible impact of Hurricane Harvey in the United States and disastrous floods in south ia are part of the 'new normal', not caused by climate change but accentuated by it. Storms, rising sea-levels, forest fires, drought and flooding may be natural disasters but they have been accentuated by a long history of man-made carbon emissions. When distant events these may well be ignored, but when they are local or in the UK we too find ourselves on the front line.

Yet talking about climate change and its serious implications seems little discussed by our politicians or in our communities on an everyday basis. The 'silence' over this is not just a personal matter as it is also socially constructed. This is because climate change raises all sorts of uncomfortable feelings, from shock, fear and paralysis, to disbelief, incomprehension and denial. Whether these feelings are conscious or unconscious, they inform our everyday behaviour. People instinctively know when it's OK or not to bring up a specific topic in conversation. Given that

on-going climate change can lead to feelings of despair in some people it is no wonder we often choose to avoid such discussion. As a friend said, 'It's just not something people talk about much.' But if adults do not think, discuss and plan ahead, then we do our children a grave disservice.

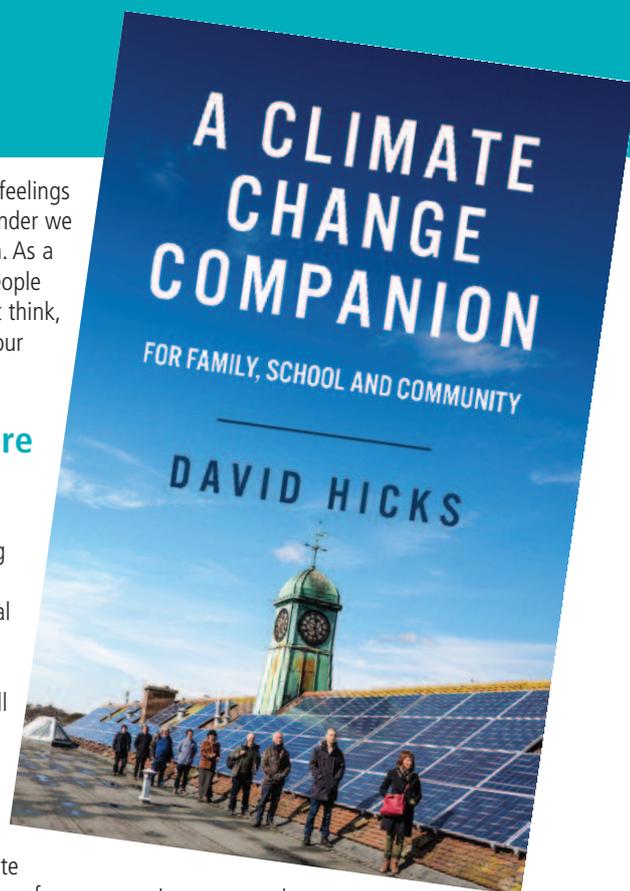
Climate change, in more unconventional ways

Educating for Hope in Troubled Times suggests a four-fold model of learning which embraces: Knowing, Feeling, Choosing and Acting or, in educational terms, the cognitive and affective domains, decision-making skills and developing a sense of agency. In small discussion groups the following questions and responses should then be explored.

1. **KNOWING:** What do we know/think we know about climate change? What are the main causes of climate change? What are the various consequences of climate change?
2. **FEELING:** What do I/we feel about climate change?
What are the concerns we wish to share? What are the hopes that we have?
3. **CHOOSING:** What are the options that appear to be facing us? What do I/we want to see happening? What should this school decide to work towards?
4. **ACTING:** What do I/we therefore need to do? What are others doing: at home, in school, in the community, elsewhere? Who can support us in what we want to do?
This is not a didactic model of learning but one in which students learn to share their hopes and concerns, listen to others respectfully, and work cooperatively with others towards chosen goals (see: www.teaching4abetterworld.co.uk/docs/DiscussNotes.pdf for more information).

A Climate Change Companion

This book was written, in part, as a response to my grandson's initial comment. It is intended to support not only teachers, but also families and communities who want to get to grips with these issues. It is not written as a contribution to academic debate but rather for the general reader who wants to know more but is not sure where to begin or what to do. Climate change will affect every aspect of our lives. In particular, the book explores competing cultural stories underlying our views of energy – the old high-



carbon story and a new low-carbon story. It also sets out the value for learners of developing a sense of agency through working for positive change with others. It is this 'making a difference' which brings students alive. It gives practical examples of both *adaptation* to climate change (floods, storms, droughts) and *mitigation* of climate change (reducing our carbon footprint in school, home and community). From such understanding and engagement can come positive steps for change in school and community.

NB: A review of this book can be found in *Teaching Geography* (Summer 2017).

Useful sources

- Ashden Awards for Sustainable Energy (2017) at www.ashden.org/ashden_awards
- Hicks, D. (2017) *A Climate Change Companion: For family, school and community*, Teaching4abetterworld, eBook & p/b, ISBN: 978 1-5440-7021-6
- Hicks, D. (2014) *Educating for Hope in Troubled Times: Climate change and the transition to a post-carbon future*, London: Institute of Education Press
- Randall, R. and Brown, A. (2015) *In Time for tomorrow? The carbon conversations handbook*, the Surefoot Effect Community Interest Company
- Teaching for a Better World (2017) at www.teaching4abetterworld.co.uk