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Communicating ocean acidification across barriers: Stories and strategies from a year around the world

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Communicating ocean acidification around the world: Stories and strategies of using narratives to communicate across barriers

Alexis Valauri-Orton
Global Ocean Health
One year to discover: How will OA affect people around the world?

Norway
Hong Kong
Thailand
New Zealand
The Cook Islands
Peru
Before I could ask research questions...

- No one had heard of OA!
- I had to communicate the science of OA across
  - Language barriers
  - Cultural barriers
  - Education barriers
- To some of the communities that will be most affected by OA
Understand your audience

- What do they care about?
- What resources do they work closely with or value highly?
- What is their scientific background?
- What cultural, social or religious beliefs do they hold?

Teach about OA through a cohesive, personalized narrative
The Whiskey Creek/PNW Narrative

Explains the chemistry, physiology and economics of OA in a narrative structure:

- Problem: Larval die offs
- Investigation: Scientists team up with hatchery managers, discover that OA is causing die offs
- Human link: Economies in WA are dependent upon shellfish, OA is affecting these economies
- Political action: Stakeholders come together to address the problem
- Resolution: Mitigation/adaptation strategies

Tell it like a story!
My audience:
Deeply religious, deeply suspicious

- History of colonization
- Suspicious of “outsider” views
- Deeply Christian
  - Dominant faiths adhere to old testament views, many believe in the destruction of this Earth for the creation of a Second Earth
- Poor science education
- Poor marine management
By talking to islanders I learned their stories about:

- Shellfish as a threatened, cultural and food icon
  - Giant clams (Pau’a) – the story of their collapse
- Reef tourism as the main source of income
- Vulnerability to cyclones
- Worry over changing climate, changing planting seasons

What is their story? What are their loves and fears?
Framed it around something identifiable:
  “How do we affect coral, and how does coral affect us?”

Used local examples and asked the audience questions to involve them in conversation

At the church – used biblical quotes to help audience see ties between faith, OA and conservation

Used the WA oyster story as a real life example of the problem and its effects on people
How do these things affect each other?

- CO₂ from another country
- Cyclones
- Fishermen
- Climate Change
- Aitutaki’s Economy
- Tourists
- Chemicals
- Coral Reefs
- Hotels
- Garbage/Septic Tanks
- Food from the Lagoon
- Sand Mining
- Beaches/Shoreline
Finding and forming your own narratives

* Listen!
  * Stakeholders (and students) are everywhere - learn their stories
* Find your protagonists
  * Witnesses are powerful storytellers – use their words
* Tie it all together
  * Show how stakeholders are connected to the issue
  * Draw in data and stories from other sources
There are a LOT of ways to address OA – find an angle that works with your audience

- Land-based action
  - Farmers (nutrient management)
- Technology
  - Industry members (hatcheries, etc)
- Civic Engagement
  - Students, community members (raising awareness, PR campaigns, carbon footprint, etc)
- Political action
  - Blue Ribbon Panel serves as a narrative for one type of political action

Make SOLUTIONS part of your narrative
Many people nod and say yes when they don’t understand!

- Ask your audience to help define the problem with you, don’t just explain it

- It takes just a little bit of jargon to turn off an audience

- Many people have a poor understanding of the global carbon cycle, ocean circulation and the interactions between land and sea

- A few short videos help get key science concepts across with minimal teaching time
Thanks!
Further questions comments? E-mail me at alexis@globaloceanhealth.org