Using Online Focus Groups to Reveal Teachers’ Perspectives on Climate Change Education

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What are the motivations and dispositions of teachers who are currently teaching climate change and how do they navigate controversy?

Focus groups:
• Qualitative
• Interactive groups
• Talking to each other

Empower teachers
Aspects of focus group research that resonated with this study:

• Social constructionist theory
• Co-construction of meaning
• Teacher empowerment
• A teacher perspective
Things to let go:

- Survey questions
- Large sample size
- Impartiality
Online

• Bring together a diverse group of teachers
• Convenience
• Easy and unobtrusive recording that captures more than voices
• Advantages of a physical meeting plus the ability to gather geographically separated participants
Growing Pains and Gains
Growing Pains and Gains

- Consent using online signatures
- “When is Good”
- Reminder emails
- Document covered all aspects of using Zoom
- Check-in to work out glitches and coordinate time zones
Growing Pains and Gains

- Reminder texts immediately prior to meeting
- Last minute attrition results in 50% participation rate among expected participants

*****Very large recruiting base using sizable listservs and snowball recruiting*****
SUCCESS!!!

“Share and Tell” Ice Breaker

You can make a difference! Eat fewer hamburgers (that means fewer cows and farts).
Can you share any insights or “aha moments” from this conversation that could help characterize effective climate change education?

- Using real data and have students coming to their own conclusions
- Enabling students to make sense of the data
- Acknowledge global nature - its different from place to place
- Talk about global fluctuations
- It’s an opportunity to talk about the predictive value of our data
- See all the different perspectives - science, politics, views of different countries, policy, examples (China) - how is that relevant to your classroom, state, etc.
- Netherlands, Venice, Marshall Islands
- Role play, game approach, theatrical
- “sister” classroom is the Netherlands
- How to argue based on evidence - critical skill, perfect opportunity
“One thing I’m hearing as a consensus, I think, is that using real data and having the students come to their own conclusions is important and that enabling students to make sense of that data is rather critical.”

- quote from participant
Lessons learned:

- Online focus groups bring together two erratic variables: technology and human behavior
- Recruit widely
- Become an expert with web conferencing
- Give explicit instructions to participants
- Provide plenty of reminders
- Develop methods to encourage co-construction
- Practice, practice, practice
Useful Resources:

1. **Focus Groups, A Practical Guide for Applied Research** by Richard A. Krueger and Mary Anne Casey (available through Amazon).
2. **Tuttas, Carol.** (2014). *Lessons Learned Using Web Conference Technology for Online Focus Group Interviews.* *Qualitative Health Research.*
3. **ZOOM web conferencing:** https://zoom.us