

Getting the sustainability message across: the power of emotive imagery

Abstract

In our technology driven society, which is saturated with a blend of trivial and essential information and messages, it is increasingly difficult for young people to connect with critical humanitarian issues such as climate change, war and social injustice. While advertisers are finding a way through the information clutter and are successful in changing people's (consuming) behaviours through clever campaigns that utilise carefully selected imagery, in education the tendency remains to try to convince with facts.

The internet generation, the current student cohort, has discovered long time ago how to use mobile devices and the internet to get engaging powerful messages across. This is evident, for example, in the enormous popularity of You-tube and image driven social websites.

Two recent examples of the persuasive power of images that had a big impact on society:

- In 2005 the abuse of Iraqi prisoners in the Abu Ghraib jail came to light because the digital files of the photographs were accidentally passed on to a colleague who blew the whistle on the abuse. The images were more powerful than any verbal or written description of the abuse and send a wave of protest around the world
- In May 2007, Rebecca Hosking, a filmmaker from Modbury (Devon), persuaded local village shopkeepers to agree to a 6 month plastic bag free trial. The shopkeepers were not so much convinced by the facts about plastic waste, they were convinced by the film footage of the destructive environmental impact that plastic has on sea creatures and decided to support the campaign.

This workshop will explore the power of emotive imagery and how we could use these visual imprints to engage students with sustainability.