

The Task

We had to plant trees and attach messages to them as a compulsory task. The messages were initiated with:

"My deepest hope for the future and the world in 18 words or less..."

- May lead to inaccuracies – according to Martin's results from the Environmental Attitudes Questionnaire, people put themselves, their families and the Nation before the environment.
- Forced to think of an answer on the spot about a previously unconsidered topic.
- Aim of this question is to get people to think about the future of the environment, their priorities and responsibilities?

Environmental Awareness!

Reflections on "My Deepest Hope"

Us to know our place!

Will the task change anything?

- Participation in outdoor recreation promotes environmental awareness simply by exposing people to environmental issues and concerns (Tarrant and Green, 1999) – Therefore if people enjoyed the task, awareness was raised. The fact the task was forced may result in less environmental awareness.
- Individuals have to understand consequences and take responsibility. (Stern; Dietz; Kalof, 2005). Forcing people to take part by attaching course marks to the task gives the individual less choice, potentially having a negative effect on the desire to act.



Why attach messages to the trees?

- A gesture to future generations – we are leaving our answers for them. Makes the task personal.
- Attaching the messages to the trees links the message and the trees themselves, making answers biased towards the environmental issues. If we had been asked to help aids orphans instead of plant trees, our answers would be different.
- Encourage action: attempts to make the task personal; highlights personal values; encourages us to think about threats, and ways we can mitigate against threats. This process helps people to engage with their issues (Stern; Guagnano; Kalof, 1999).

Possible solutions to problems with the task

- Undertake interviews to avoid simplifying the data and look for reasons for given answers. (Gillham, 2000)
- Reproduce the study with students on modules other than The Ethical Geographer to look for context impact.
- Remove the impact on academic grades, which may be responsible for some answers.
- Repeat after task to validate results and look for changes.

Money...
A nice house...
A sports car...

Midas Gordon-Farleigh

Possible Reasons for the Answers

- Context of The Ethical Geographer module and tree planting - focused answers on the environment.
- If the task was important to the individual (Stern; Guagnano; Kalof, 1999)
- If the task was enjoyed or had been done before. We engage more with tasks we enjoy (Tarrant and Green, 1999).
- Conflict activates our values (Schwartz, 1996). There may have been no value conflict, and values might not have been activated.
- Conforming to assumed expectations of the lecturer.
- Attitudes to members of staff.
- Personality factors.
- Plagiarised answers.

Getting tree-eating sheep culled

To summarize...

- This task asked for deepest hopes for the future and the world.
- The contextual association meant that answers were linked to the environment. It was too complex a question to be answered in 18 words – the research method is inadequate (Gillham, 2000).
- This task was taken seriously by some, but not by others.
- Regardless of limitations or criticism, if this inspires people to act in a pro-environmental manner then it is a worthwhile task.

References

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