Climate change skeptics teach climate literacy? A content analysis of children’s books

Julie Thomas
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, julie.thomas@unl.edu

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Abstract for DBER Group Discussion on 2015-02-12

Presenter(s), Department(s):
Julie Thomas
Research Professor
Department of Teaching, Learning, and Teacher Education
College of Education and Human Sciences
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Title:
Climate change skeptics teach climate literacy? A content analysis of children’s books

Abstract:
This research focused on sceptical climate change literature designed for children and parents. The purpose of the research was to explore how these pseudo-educational materials convey a logic of non-problematicity about climate change (McCright & Dunlap, 2000). Using rhetorical analyses procedures developed from previous excavations in sceptical discourses, this study identified: (a) common forms of climate skepticism, (b) frames for climate change policy making, (c) areas of contested scientific knowledge, and (d) appeals for managing the uncertainty of climate change. The results suggest that the logic of non-problematicity about environmental problems is bolstered by contradictory forms of climate change skepticism and polarizing social-conflict frames. Dominant narratives of ecological modernization and appeals to independent decision-making are employed as brokering-devices to reinforce apathy and inaction in the public sphere. This research study contributes to environmental communication scholarship concerned with increasing climate denial media campaigns targeted for educational contexts.
Climate Skeptics Teach Climate Literacy?
A Content Analysis of Kids’ Books

Nicole Colston
Oklahoma State University
Julie Thomas
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Climate denial campaigns are moving into the schools

- Instigating “Teach the Controversy” legislation
- Funding Denial Curriculum (Heartland Memo)
- Widespread dissemination of “Skeptics Handbook”

Open Coding & Research Questions

I. Which climate **skepticism arguments** manifest in these children’s books?

II. What **frames for scientific controversy** are deployed in these books?

III. Which basic **climate science concepts** are **contested**?

IV. How are children asked to **manage the uncertainty** of climate change?
Deb & Seby’s Real Deal on Global Warming: The “Other Side” of the Man-Made Global Warming Issues

Author: Al Sonja Schmid

Self-published via Authorhouse

Shows kids the “Real Deal”, very hip
The Sky’s Not Falling: Why It’s OK to Chill about Global Warming

Author: Holly Fretwell

Also, authored “Help! Mom! There are Liberals Under My Bed”

Recommended by Senator Inhofe
We’re Not Scared Anymore Mr. Gore: A Climate Change Story for Little Skeptics

Author: Marc Hendrickx

Self-published

Narrated version available on YouTube
Q1. Skepticism Arguments

• Trend Skepticism
  – Consensus is not proof
  – Computer models are flawed

• Impact Skepticism
  – CO2 is good for agriculture
  – Warm weather is good for some people

• Attribution Skepticism
  – Increasing CO2 doesn’t cause global warming
  – Warming is natural

• Policy Skepticism
  – Doesn’t help environment
  – Hurts “third world” development
  – Threatens our lifestyle
Skepticism Arguments

- Trend Skepticism
Q2. Frames for Policy Action

- Social Progress
- Economic Development and competitiveness
- Morality and Ethics
- Scientific and Technical Uncertainty
- Pandora’s Box
- Public Accountability and Governance
- Middle Way/Alternative Path
- Conflict and Strategy
Framing Policy

• Tensions between Environmental Governance and Economic development frames
• Pandora’s Box
Q3. Contested Scientific Knowledge

- Ice Melt/Sea Level Rise
- Polar Bear and Habitats
- Solar and Space Phenomena
- Temperature and CO2 Records
- Nature of Extreme Weather Events
- History of Earth and Man
Contested Concepts

- Polar Bears

**POLAR BEARS CAN SWIM OVER 60 MILES!**

**THE REAL DEAL IS**, polar bears are known to be among earth's strongest swimmers. They hang out on glacier ice all the time.
Q4. Uncertainty Management Strategies

• Seek Information
  – Nature of science vs. forming a personal belief

• Tolerance
  – Climate change is only certainty

• Assimilation
  – Conflict framing

• Acceptance
  – Disassociate from problem

• Imagined Information Seeking
  – Contrarian Scientists
Strategies for Managing Uncertainty

- Information Seeking and Assimilation

**X-tremie Greenie Meanies** have fought long and hard to keep oil refineries or other energy sources from being built in the United States even though the population has grown and the U.S. really needs it.

They have fought super hard to prevent drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). In fact X-tremies have pretty much claimed the Alaskan area of ANWR off-limits, even though drilling there could do a lot of people a lot of good.

**THE REAL DEAL IS** -- Modern, efficient and less polluting refineries could be built, but environmentalists have been so successful in preventing oil refineries from being built not a single refinery has been built in the United States for 30 years.
Conclusion

- Variety (often contradictory) Forms of Scientific Skepticism and Science-based arguments
- Beyond Knowledge Deficit to Conceptual Change Theory
- Activating Student Agency
- Re-framing Science Controversies