Planeetzee@work, how to survive a day of students in your marine lab

Copejans Evy, Nancy Fockedey, Karen Rappé, and Jan Seys

Flanders Marine Institute VLIZ, InnovOcean site, Wandelaarkaai 7, B-8400 Oostende, Belgium
E-mail: evy.copejans@vliz.be

Outreach is increasingly gaining importance when you are a scientist. Next to organising experiments, make observations, write publications and perform administrative duties, a scientist nowadays has to ensure the results are noticed and understood by policy and the press, and is now encouraged to interact more with the public at large. Recently, there is a consensus in Europe amongst ocean researchers, educators and policy that improving citizen awareness and education contributes to more informed decisions and to a better governance of the ocean (Rome Declaration 2014). Without an 'ocean literate' society, it is believed that the most critical ocean resource management issues won't be resolved. The ocean is consistently overlooked in education. As a result, students - and also teachers- have a low level of knowledge and awareness of the concepts and issues pertaining to ocean ecosystems, ocean-atmosphere interrelationships, and the connections between the ocean and human beings and their activities. As the ocean and seas are at risk from an increased use, marine environmental issues have to be explained to the next generations.

The new Flemish Action Plan on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) requests more involvement of professionals in education. Partnerships between scientists and teachers have been emerging as to upgrade scientific literacy in general. To improve the level of ocean science literacy amongst young students, we are certain that marine scientists can provide valuable and unforgettable learning opportunities.

But where do scientists find the time to engage and communicate with young students about scientific issues? How do you find a suitable group of students or a science project to participate in? And how do you handle a class of youngsters in your lab? Moreover, what content should the program contain to keep students and teachers interested and motivated for a couple of hours? Explaining ocean science to a young audience can be quite challenging!

Therefore VLIZ proposes a new project called 'Planeetzee@work'. In this project marine scientists welcome a group of students between 16 and 19 years old in their lab to work around a central research question. Enquiry-based and hands-on learning has proven to be the best pedagogy strategy to develop scientific competences. While the students conduct experiments, they learn about the scientific method, the daily routines of a scientist and the societal importance. As a coordinator, VLIZ promotes the labs in schools, organises the selection procedure and prepares the scientists with guidelines and survival skills.

VLIZ is now enrolling marine scientists who are willing to take up the challenge for the next edition 2015-2016. Please read more about the previous edition www.planeetzee.be/wedstrijd and contact us to sign up!

References

The Rome Declaration on 'Delivering impact, global leadership and sustainable blue growth for Europe'. EUROCEAN conference 2014. http://eurocean2014.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Rome-Declaration_FINAL.pdf

Actieplan voor het stimuleren van loopbanen in wiskunde, exacte wetenschappen en techniek. http://www.ewi-vlaanderen.be/sites/default/files/documents/STEM_actieplan_def.pdf