



# YOUTH AND OCEAN LITERACY IN CANADA: KEY FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

JUNE 2020

**AUTHOR: NOÉMIE ROY**

MASTER OF MARINE MANAGEMENT STUDENT, DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY;  
RESEARCH ASSISTANT AND MEOPAR INTERN, CANADIAN OCEAN LITERACY COALITION

**EDITORS:**

LISA (DIZ) GLITHERO AND JULIA OSTERTAG

## SUMMARY

During the data collection phase (September 2019 to March 2020) of the Canada-wide ocean literacy (OL) study, the Canadian Ocean Literacy Coalition (COLC) facilitated three workshops with Canadian youth. Participants were from across the country, though primarily based in Ontario and Quebec. In total, approximately 210 youth, ages 18 to 30, participated in one of the three workshops. Participants included:

- 1 140 students from an undergraduate course at the University of Ottawa (Appendix A)
- 2 30 students from the Student Conference on Ocean Sustainability at Queen's University (Appendix B)
- 3 40 participants from Ocean Wise's Ocean Bridge Program - Cohort 2, Urban Expedition that took place in Ottawa (Appendix C)

A key theme expressed by participants was that Canadians would benefit from strengthening their relationship with the ocean. To strengthen this relationship, youth recommended using education and social media to foster positive connections with the ocean across Canada, including inland and the Great Lakes region. More specifically, youth identified hands-on experiences that connected Canadians to their local watersheds as a key approach.

## KEY FINDINGS & COMMON THEMES

### ABOUT THE TERM 'OCEAN LITERACY'

Youth agreed that OL represents a reciprocal relationship with the ocean but believe that the term is narrow and confusing. Many of the youth expressed that the term caters to a coastal, Western science-educated audience and can be perceived as excluding inland and Indigenous people, as well as people outside science and academia.

Youth recommended that in addition to being more inclusive, the term should convey a sense of responsibility and action, and it should imply the existence of local nuances and differences.

Participants suggested "marine citizenship," "ocean ethic," and "ocean awareness" as alternatives to ocean literacy.

Youth recommended using social media as a way to spread the use and meaning of the term OL (or another new term) to a much broader audience.

### ABOUT YOUTH'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE OCEAN

Youth agreed with the importance of strengthening Canadians' relationship with the ocean. They argued that this relationship is a critical one for our environmental, cultural, and spiritual health. Strengthening this relationship, they argued, would allow Canadians to increase their "awareness of ocean injustices," "advance reconciliation with Indigenous people," and "become stewards of the ocean."

## WORKSHOP FORMAT

Workshops began with a brief introduction to COLC, OL, and why COLC was committed to engaging youth voices in the Canada-wide study. Following the introduction, students rotated through 5-6 stations set up around the room. At each station, students were provided with a question written on large chart paper, markers, and a clipboard. Questions were about:

- Youth perceptions of the term OL;
- Whether strengthening Canadians' relationship with the ocean is important; and
- Enablers (strengths), barriers, and meaningful ways for youth to take action to better understand, value, and care for the ocean.

In groups of 7-8, youth had 5 minutes at each station; each station had one person designated as note taker using the chart paper and clipboard to capture key points from each group discussion. Note takers stayed at the same station for all rotations – capturing the overall key points of that collective discussion. After the rotations, they shared key points with the large group, then followed an open discussion.

### ENABLERS OF YOUTH TAKING ACTION TO UNDERSTAND, VALUE & CARE FOR THE OCEAN

The main enablers identified by participants were educational opportunities (e.g., learning about the ocean in class, during field trips, by visiting aquariums, through program scholarships, and by reading children's books), followed by professional opportunities (e.g., volunteering, internships, mentoring, economic opportunities, leadership and training opportunities).

Building an emotional connection to the ocean & developing meaningful relationships through strong community & cultural engagement were also identified as powerful enablers of youth action.

### BARRIERS TO YOUTH TAKING ACTION TO UNDERSTAND, VALUE & CARE FOR THE OCEAN

The main barriers identified were all about access: access to financial resources, physical access to the ocean, access to information and knowledge, and access to ocean jobs. Lack of time was also a significant barrier for accessing the ocean.

Youth indicated that they lack the support of a network of like-minded peers and political support.

They felt that their voices, especially the voices of Indigenous youth, were not taken seriously and that the professional opportunities that do exist and have been given to them are often superficial and did not allow for deep engagement.

Moreover, they expressed a feeling of "going against the current." To take action to protect the ocean, they would have to go against intergenerational differences in values, corporate interests, and general societal ignorance of science. This opposition can discourage youth action.



PHOTO CREDIT: OCEAN WISE

## HOW TO STRENGTHEN YOUTH'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE OCEAN

- By using education and social media to create a physical and emotional connection with the ocean and encourage action.
- By helping people to understand and experience their connection to the ocean through local waterways and watersheds.
- By creating local, positive connections with the ocean across Canada, including inland and the Great Lakes region.

## HOW TO ADVANCE OCEAN LITERACY EXEMPLIFIED BY CONCRETE YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS

### EDUCATION

“Mandatory courses on the ocean and the environment in school”

“Make information more accessible for people of all education levels.”

“Educate Canadians on Indigenous cultural connections to the ocean.”

### ACTION PLANS

“Create action plans for people who want to get involved.”

“Encourage people to set weekly goals.”

“Incorporate the ocean (ocean issues and stories) into classrooms/ media/target families.”

“Encourage the impact that one person can have.”

### AWARENESS

“Everyone should go to the ocean & realize how we depend on it.”

“The ocean should be a part of Canadian identity through ocean literacy. How? Raise awareness through workshops like this one.”

“Raise awareness through social media (app for Canadians).”



PHOTO CREDIT: STUDIO Q PHOTOGRAPHER ELISA CACCIOLA

In the second part of the Ocean Bridge workshop, participants were given a choice between two discussion themes: “Building an OL youth-led social media campaign for Ocean Week Canada” and “Engaging Canadian youth in the upcoming UN Ocean Decade.” Under each theme, youth self-divided into three discussion groups of 3-8 participants each and came up with an idea for youth engagement.

## THEME 1

### BUILDING AN OL YOUTH-LED SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN FOR OCEAN WEEK CANADA

#### IDEA 1 PROMOTING POSITIVE OUTDOOR EXPERIENCES TO REINFORCE OUR CONNECTION TO NATURE

This group recommended creating a social media campaign following a national relay of extreme sports. The athletes would travel similar distances across different watersheds.

The athletes would be travelling through communities and following watersheds, from “mountain to ocean,” to explore the interconnectedness of watersheds. It would also be an opportunity to discuss the needs specific to each community.

#### IDEA 2 THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUTH UNDERSTANDING THE DIVERSITY OF JOBS THAT CAN SUPPORT OCEAN HEALTH AND PROSPERITY

This group suggested creating a social media campaign with the goal of “showcasing how some jobs related to the ocean do not need technical/high level ocean training.”

The campaign would promote and be complemented by a “bring your kid to the ocean day (vs bring your kid to work day)”. By partnering with ocean industries, children/youth could experience and be exposed to a variety of ocean-related jobs.

#### IDEA 3 SOCIAL MEDIA OCEAN WEEK INTERACTIVE MAP

These participants had the idea to create an online interactive map allowing youth to share stories about their relationship with the ocean. The map could present:

- Shoreline clean-up days: Local clean-ups could be realized through schools to show how stewardship is fun.
- Ocean art: The map could become an online exhibit for youth artwork. This exhibit could be promoted by an open call to the public and school art classes.
- Dance for the ocean: People on beaches from across the country could be doing a simple choreographed dance routine.

## THEME 2

### ENGAGING CANADIAN YOUTH IN THE UPCOMING UN DECADE OF OCEAN SCIENCE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

#### IDEA 1 SPECIAL VENTURE COMPETITION

Participants suggested creating an “entrepreneurship + scientific venture contest” for young businesses in industries related to the ocean. This contest could be in the format of a game show similar to Shark Tank. It would engage people in a multidisciplinary way and foster interest from the public.

#### IDEA 2 RAISING COMMUNITY AWARENESS

This group suggested creating a “presentation that can be sent to everyone in the UN Ocean Decade with the support of engaged youth.” This presentation would clearly communicate “what the UN Ocean Decade is, why it is important to youth, and how it involves everyone.”

#### IDEA 3 LAND-BASED LEARNING

This group had the idea of connecting high school-aged youth to the ocean through educational kayaking and canoeing trips on local water bodies. These trips could take many formats:

- An expedition with educational stops in communities along the way
- A race between schools, or a kayak and canoe version of the Terry Fox run
- A canoe-making competition
- A canoeing or kayaking trash clean up

These kayak and canoe trips would be an opportunity for experiential and Indigenous learning as was done by the Great Canoe Journey, a project that engaged youth with Indigenous worldviews and reconciliation.

## APPENDIX A UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA WORKSHOP

This 60-minute workshop included approximately 140 students ranging in age from 18 to 25 who were enrolled in an undergraduate environmental course at the University of Ottawa. The workshop took place on October 30, 2019 and was facilitated by Diz Glithero and Julia Ostertag.

- 1 What role does the ocean play in your personal life? Think of things such as food, employment, recreational activities, cultural practices, and so on.
- 2 Is OL a familiar term to you? How would you define/describe it? Is it a useful term to you?
- 3 What matters to you about the ocean?
- 4 Is cultivating/strengthening Canadians' relationship with the ocean and building civic engagement with the ocean important? If yes, how is this best done/achieved?
- 5 What is the relationship between ocean health, ocean economies, and social equity?
- 6 What lifestyle changes/actions would you be willing to take to support ocean health?

## APPENDIX B QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY WORKSHOP

This 60-minute workshop included approximately 30 participants from the student-led Conference for Ocean Sustainability that took place at Queen's University on November 23, 2019. Participants were largely students from Queen's University who were from different provinces/territories, and ranged in age from 18 to 30. The workshop was facilitated by Julia Ostertag.

- 1 Is OL a useful term to you? Does it resonate? How would you define/describe it in order to maximize its reach and relevance?
- 2 In your opinion, is cultivating or strengthening Canadians' relationship with the ocean important? If yes, why? If not, why not? Be specific.
- 3 What are the enablers for you/youth taking action to improve ocean health?
- 4 What are barriers for you/youth taking action to improve ocean health?
- 5 What are meaningful ways to actively engage Canadians – inland and coastal – to better understand, value, and care for the ocean?

## APPENDIX C OCEAN BRIDGE WORKSHOP

This 90-minute workshop included 40 participants ranging in age from 18 to 30 who were part of Ocean Wise's Ocean Bridge (OB) youth program. This group represented cohort 2 of the OB program, and took place during their "Urban Expedition" in Ottawa in January 2020. The workshop took place at the Canadian Museum of Nature on January 24th, and was facilitated by Diz Glithero and Sarah MacNeil.

The first part of the workshop followed the same format as the above two workshops (i.e., University of Ottawa and Queen's University). Similarly, participants were asked the

- 1 Is OL a useful term for you? Does it resonate? How would you define/describe it to maximize its reach and relevance?
- 2 Is strengthening Canadians' – both coastal and non-coastal – relationship with the ocean important? Why or why not? Be specific.
- 3 What are the enablers for you/youth taking action to understand, value, and care for the ocean?
- 4 What are the barriers for you/youth taking action to understand, value, and care for the ocean?
- 5 What are meaningful ways to actively engage the 27+ million inland Canadians to better understand, value, and care for the ocean?

In the second part of this workshop, participants took part in a discussion under one of two themes: "Building and OL youth-led social media campaign for Ocean Week Canada" and "Engaging Canadian youth in the upcoming UN Ocean Decade." Under each theme, participants formed three discussion groups of 3-8 participants each, and developed an idea for youth engagement.