

Tying Community Science and Social Justice Together in an Urban Biology Class to Foster  
Environmental Responsibility

by

Sarah E. Graham

A capstone thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Masters of Teaching.

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

May 2023

Capstone Project Facilitator: Trish Harvey

Content Reviewer: Sarah Hick

Peer Reviewers: Katie Shealy, Christopher Cudnowski, Isaiah Ripley

## **Research Question**

The question that guided my project design was: *How can community science and social justice be tied together in an urban biology classroom to foster environmental responsibility?*

## **Project Summary**

Research shows that students who are involved in projects within their communities feel more sense of belonging and connection to their space. This is also true when discussing environmental justice. Students who have been historically marginalized can feel more comfort within navigating science. The unit plan designed for this project addressed the research question: *How can community science and social justice be tied together in an urban biology classroom to foster environmental responsibility?* The unit plan combined the knowledge of community science which focuses on sense of place with social justice within science or critical pedagogy in order to support the teaching framework of Critical Pedagogy of Place. The unit plan focused on explicitly teaching students about community science first followed by social justice in science before having the students research and design a project themselves within the community. The goal of the project was to foster a sense of environmental responsibility within students.

This project is a unit plan that combines social justice and community science into a semester-long project that helps to foster environmental responsibility within students. The intent of this project is to show students the power that they have within their community and also to bring awareness to environmental needs that are present within their neighborhoods. The project is designed as a semester-long project, but can be adjusted to be a year-long project as well.

I used the theoretical construct of critical pedagogy of place (CPP) (Gruenewald, 2003) as a basis for my project because it combines both culturally relevant pedagogy and community

science, both of which are main topics within my research question. Gruenewald (2003), the originator of CPP, discusses the need for place-based pedagogy for students so that they are able to have a positive impact on the surrounding environment both environmentally and socially. This framework was something that I found really important but, unfortunately, lacking within urban high schools in particular. CPP unites a sociological perspective with an ecological focus while removing the school walls, allowing students to experience both of these things outside of the classroom (Gruenewald, 2003). The overarching purpose of this unit plan is to move students in an urban setting out of the classroom and into the neighborhood where they experience their daily lives.

This unit design has three components: social justice, community science, and then the combination of the two into a CPP model where the students complete a project within the community. I wanted to begin the project with separating and explicitly teaching the concepts of social justice within science and community science because this may be the first exposure that students have to both topics. I wanted them to have a clear understanding of both frameworks before moving into their research portion of the project. This highlights the part of the research question that talks about tying community science and social justice together in an urban biology classroom. For the unit plan design, I used a template format that was created by Hamline University to create the individual lesson plans. Additionally, I used the NGSS standards HS-LS2-7, which is to “design, evaluate, and refine a solution for reducing the impacts of human activities on the environment and biodiversity” (pg. 6, para. 1) and HS-LS4-6, which is to “create or revise a simulation to test a solution to mitigate adverse impacts of human activity on biodiversity” (*High School Life Sciences*, 2013, pg. 6, para. 1).

The intended audience for this unit plan is teachers who teach anywhere from 9th to 12th grade. The project is targeted for teachers in a science classroom; biology, environmental science, earth science, etc. The teachers are not limited to Minnesota, they can be located anywhere. Because the project is student-driven, the climate is not a deciding factor on if a teacher can use this unit plan or not; the students are able to adjust their project according to the climate. This is also designed for high school teachers in a variety of high schools. They could be at a traditional public school, a private school, or a charter school. While the plan is best implemented at a project-based learning school, it could still fit in any setting.

The project is laid out in the following order:

1. Unit At a Glance (Unit plan overview)
2. Daily lesson plans (Lessons 1-20)
3. Daily Slides
4. Lesson Materials

The link for all of the unit plan resources is [CPP Unit Plan](#). Here are examples of what the daily slides look like from each section of the project (Environmental justice, Community science, CPP project details):



Capstone Lesson 5

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**1**

## Intro to Community Science

Lesson 5

**2**

### Daily Schedule

01 Introduction 02 Questions of the Day 03 Meet 04 Exit Quiz

**3**

### Question of the Day

What is your role within your neighborhood?

**4**

### Vocabulary

Write down these terms and draw 4 key questions between each term.

- Community
- Citizen
- Community Science/Citizen Science
- Environmental Stewardship

**5**

### Daily Objectives

- Define and explain what community science is.
- List examples of community science projects.

**6**

### What is a community?

COMMUNITY

**7**

### Turn and Talk

What is a citizen? What is the responsibility of a citizen?

**US CITIZEN**

**8**

### Community Science

- Can also be called "Citizen Science"
- Community members (scientific background is not required) who volunteer their time to help scientists in the community work on projects
- People with different skill sets working on a common goal within a community

**9**

### Community Science

Introduction to Community Science

**10**

### Community Science Examples

- Community Science for Food & Health
- Community Science: University of Arizona Biodiversity Institute
- Community Science: University of California, San Diego at Scripps Institution of Oceanography
- Community Science by University of Florida Center for Conservation & The Science Institute
- Community Science: University of Michigan
- Community Science: University of Minnesota
- Community Science: University of North Carolina
- Community Science: University of Wisconsin-Madison
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**11**

### Community Science Examples Worksheet

Using the list provided on the Flip Side (see [Community Science](#)), create 10-15 brief, different examples of community science projects that are happening around the world.

Make sure to include:

- The name of the project
- A 1-2 sentence overview of what the project is (in your own words, not copied)
- Why the project was started

**12**

### Exit Quiz

Remember to write your name and class period on the top of your paper

Capstone Lesson 9

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**1**

## Project Design

Lesson 9

**2**

### Daily Schedule

01 Introduction 02 Questions of the Day 03 Meet 04 Exit Quiz

**3**

### Question of the Day

What makes someone a change-maker?

**4**

### Daily Objectives

- Explain the social justice/community science project requirements

**5**

### Combining Environmental Justice and Community Science

Your Project

Environmental Justice | Community Science

**6**

### How can you use the information you learned?

- You will be combining all of the information you learned about environmental justice and community science from the last 8 lessons and putting it into one project.
- The project will be done in groups of 2-4 people.
- The project will be worth 100 points total.

**7**

### Project Details

**Step 1:** With your group, research and select an environmental justice issue that you will address in your project.

**Step 2:** Develop a research question, problem, issue or need that the project will address. Write down the question, problem, issue or need in your notebook.

**Step 3:** With your group, formulate a strong question to guide your data collection.

**Step 4:** Respond to all of your specific issues.

**8**

### Project Details

**Step 5:** Use the information to collect data and work with community members.

**Step 6:** Prepare to present your data with feedback from your project.

**Step 7:** Present your project to the community.

**Step 8:** Complete your project self-reflection.

**9**

### Project Rubric

Project Design Rubric

**10**

### Questions? Comments? Concerns?

**11**

### Meet with group

Introductions (if necessary)

Any project ideas?

Initial thoughts/feelings

**12**

### Exit Quiz

Remember to write your name and class period on the top of your paper

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