

Dubey, Eva M. 2008. *Ecological Education for Urban Youth: Promoting Environmental Literacy Through Place-Based Education*. Master's thesis in Plant Biology and Conservation, Northwestern University.

Abstract

Environmental education programs aim to instill environmental literacy. Environmental literacy is the understanding of the functions of natural systems and an awareness of environmental challenges concerning those systems as a precursor to effective conservation behavior. Place-based education can be used to address the goals of environmental education while focusing on local ecosystems as the topic of study. It was hypothesized that using a curriculum developed from a place-based philosophy with an ecological focus would improve environmental literacy in urban youth. More specifically, participants involved in place-based environmental education programs would show an improvement in ecological content knowledge, ability to use the scientific method, awareness of careers in environmental science, and improvement in attitude towards the environment. This project was accomplished by developing, implementing, and evaluating a place-based curriculum for College First, an apprenticeship offered at the Chicago Botanic Garden. This apprenticeship is offered to underserved high school students that are a part of the Chicago Public School system. The data from this research project specifically suggest that the students in the place-based program had a significant increase in ecological content knowledge, understanding of the scientific method, and ability to list environmental science careers. The results indicate that the place-based program did not significantly improve attitude towards the environment. The most likely explanation for this finding is that participants entered the program with a concern for the environment and there was not much opportunity for significant improvement. This study gives insight and suggestions into how to instill environmental literacy and connect youth with the environment in a modern urban context.