Chapter 28
Partnering With LGBTQ+ Communities:
The Issues

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ABSTRACT

What issues and considerations are involved in developing and facilitating service-learning projects with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) communities? This chapter presents results of examining the limited scholarship on service-learning projects conducted with these communities. The author proposes possible reasons for the lack of scholarship and offers suggestions for pre-, during-, and post-project considerations. These suggestions include identifying and surveying potential collaborators, preparing students for engaging with the communities, facilitating reflection during the project, and debriefing students afterward, along with analyzing results in order to improve future collaboration efforts.

INTRODUCTION

What unique considerations apply to service-learning initiatives that work with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) partners? What should educators and other collaborators be aware of before engaging in such projects? What mediation and/or supports do participants need before, during, and after these collaborations? The author's intention for this chapter was to examine existing research that involves service-learning with LGBTQ communities: synthesizing it and providing an overview for those who wish to engage in similar collaborations. However, there are few studies available, the reasons for which the author will speculate on. By widening the search to include service-learning that involves other populations that require a degree of confidentiality, the author provides suggestions for preparing participants before beginning, along with in-project and post-project mediation approaches educators may use for effective outcomes for all parties involved.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTER

First, the author presents reasons why a lack of scholarship exists about service-learning with LGBTQ communities. Next, the author offers planning suggestions and preparation approaches for educators and project developers. Then, the author discusses strategies useful for supporting participants and mediating their experiences as they engage in the project. After, the author analyzes post-project follow-up and approaches useful for helping participants to reflect on and internalize the project and their part in it. The chapter concludes with a call for increased efforts to engage with LGBTQ communities through service-learning.

DEFINING LGBTQ

As Mayo (2007) notes, the terms lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer are contested terms. For the purposes of this chapter, the author follows Renn's (2010) approach of grouping sexual orientation categories (lesbian, gay, bisexual) with gender identity (transgender) and including the term queer, which for some people acts as "an identity category including sexualities and gender identities that are outside heterosexual and binary gender categories" (p. 132). It is important to note that Renn (2010) acknowledges that the combination of sexuality and gender is also contested, as people's experiences within and across these categories and designations may vary greatly.

THE SCHOLARSHIP GAP

The call for proposals for this book resulted in only a single chapter on service-learning with LGBTQ communities. Further, a search of journal databases and service-learning texts by the author and a graduate assistant revealed few service-learning projects with LGBTQ communities. It was also troubling to note that the few published papers focused on projects that worked with these constituents contained little discussion of how to prepare participants for the project or how to process and reflect on the experience.

There are multiple reasons for a dearth of scholarship about service-learning with LGBTQ communities. First, the LGBTQ community is a small part of the overall population, and it is also an invisible minority. Service-learning projects are collaborations with community-based partners, and organizations that support the LGBTQ community tend to be rare except in larger cities. For example, Chicago, a city of more than 2.7 million people, has only one LGBTQ community center. Although it is true that many colleges and universities have LGBTQ groups and centers, the author's own included, they tend to serve the university community and not the surrounding area. Second, a lack of awareness of potential sites may hamper outreach efforts. Maccio (2010) notes, "The paucity of LGBT service-learning projects may be the result of any number of factors, not the least of which may be service-learning administrators and instructors simply not knowing how to find, engage, and serve the LGBT community" (p. 85). Third, existing LGBTQ service-learning scholarship tends to emerge from the health professions, namely medicine and counseling. Such a narrow focus necessarily limits the number of publications available for inclusion in this chapter. Fourth, even within the health professions, because of confidentiality issues present when working with LGBTQ populations, the logistics of engaging in service-learning may be too daunting for instructors who wish to. Also, university instructors who ask students to engage in

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