

**Supporting All Youth: Developing a Training Curriculum for Youth Development
Organizations to Better Connect with LGBTQ+ Youth**

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Introduction

The subjects of gender and sexuality have dominated recent conversations surrounding policy, education, and culture (Orr, 2016). Youth development organizations are uniquely situated as community educators to address these conversations with research-based knowledge; however, ensuring organization personnel and volunteers understand the concepts of gender identity and sexuality is critical in maintaining welcoming and inclusive environments. Additionally, organization personnel and volunteers are often assigned to work at overnight camps and events. These overnight events provide opportunities for youth to learn how to be strong leaders, develop life skills, and explore who they are as individuals. They can also provide ample number of opportunities for transgender or gender nonconforming students to experience discrimination and bullying (Orr, 2016; American Psychological Association). Therefore, it is necessary for youth development organization personnel and volunteers who work closely with youth to undergo training focused on gender identity and sexuality to better understand how to work with youth who are members of the LGBTQ+ community to create a welcoming environment where differences are not only accepted but valued.

How It Works

Development of the training curriculum was a culmination of a graduate student capstone project within the Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communications at the University of Tennessee Herbert College of Agriculture. Research and development were conducted over the course of a student's enrollment in tandem with his graduate committee and advisors.

The curriculum development process began by researching various pedagogical models and theories for adult learners (Driscoll, 2000; Lewis and Thompson, 2010; Jones, 2014), including ways ensure participant interactions allow for the safe processing of personal and sensitive topics (Curseau, et. al., 2018; Marana Unified School District). Findings indicated the importance of group discussions for program participants to discuss viewpoints and personal experiences regarding the topics of gender and sexuality. Additional research was conducted on best practices of working with LGBTQ+ youth. Research suggested a strong focus on emotional identification and regulation (Torre et al., 2018) and the importance of communication and listening skills to address youth who may be experiencing difficulties within their gender identity formation and sexuality (Wiseman, 1996).

Finally, a review of research literature was conducted to identify best practices in working with LGBTQ+ youth. These include the use of inclusive practices to ensure youth physical and emotional safety (American Psychological Association; Orr, 2016; CSBA), and the need for supporting youth in their gender identity and sexuality to provide a safe and welcoming environment for all youth (Orr, 2016). Existing research was examined for current LGBTQ+ terminology and concepts (Rogow; Orr, 2016). Collectively, this research provided the theoretical and foundational base of curriculum development. An expert panel was utilized through an iterative design process where drafts were presented to the expert panel for feedback and editing. This panel consisted of faculty and staff at UTIA with expertise in diversity, equity, and inclusion; LGBTQ+ studies; adolescent development; and crisis communications.

Results

A curriculum suite was developed to address the desired outcomes of:

This curriculum suite includes a six hour in-person workshop curriculum, a forty-five-minute curriculum to be utilized during guest speaking and/or conference breakout sessions, and a self-paced online curriculum utilizing the Nearpod software. The topics covered in the six-hour workshop curriculum include basic gender and sexuality terms, misconceptions of gender and sexuality, how best to create welcoming environments for youth who identify as gender nonconforming and LGBTQ+, and a concluding discussion based upon Allyship. Woven with the curriculum are personal check-ins for workshop participants to have personal space and time to reflect on the material discussed. The self-pace online presentation allows for all subject areas to be included. The forty-five-minute curriculum decreases subjects covered due to time constraints. This curriculum focuses upon the basics of gender and sex, working with parents of youth, best practices of working with LGBTQ+ in overnight settings, and concludes with a scenario prompt and group discussion.

There was a tangible need for this curriculum, as it provides youth development organization personnel and volunteers attending with the knowledge, skills and disposition to effectively create an environment of inclusivity and authenticity at youth events. Organizations must have the knowledge and ability to create a welcoming environment for LGBTQ+ youth, which is the purpose and motivation for the development of this curriculum.

Future Plans

The curriculum is currently in the publication and peer-review process. Once completed, the curriculum will be disseminated and utilized for intended use within youth development organizations across multiple states. Evaluation to establish the efficacy of the program will be conducted and the curriculum suite will be continuously updated to ensure current best practices and research-based knowledge is reflected within the program.

Costs and Resources Needed

Costs for the program to be implemented will include costs associated with the publication process, along with printing of materials and development of additional resources. Materials include notebooks, pens, and prizes. Printed materials include handouts, term cards, definition cards, and the written assessment. The greatest resource needed is human capital to review, learn, and implement the curriculum program within their (or other) organizations.

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