Final Synthesis Paper-Option 3

Amy Dean

Purdue University

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***Introduction***

When working with volunteers in a non-profit setting, it can be quite challenging for them to complete optional trainings. One situation we have in Girl Scouting is girls are not allowed to go on overnight camping trips without at least one adult in attendance who has completed the proper outdoor training with our council. The training is currently a three hour, in-class session along with a full Friday through Sunday weekend session. In addition, it was evident the amount of information taught during the course became too much for the volunteer to learn in a short amount of time. Volunteers who did complete the training were having issues recalling safety techniques, and other outdoor skills while working with their girls on a camping trip. Since it is a challenge for these volunteers to complete the optional training, I have created a shortened version of the course which will include an online portion, a shorter in-class session, and a day session at camp to practice the outdoor skills. It would benefit the volunteers if the training provided more time to rehearse the new skills as well as a better encoding process. Furthermore, motivation also seems to be a serious problem in this training. The volunteers are not motivated to complete the course, and I do not feel the course itself gives them the opportunity to create their own personal goals.

***Literature Review***

Stevenson notes individuals often volunteer with an organization so they can make an impact on their local community. However; sometimes the volunteer organization can fail to keep that feeling alive due to the need to require dull tasks (Stevenson, 16). In another resource, Stevenson notes the importance of showing volunteers the big picture in their volunteer role, as this will also support the motivational goal (Stevenson, 17). Since volunteers were struggling with remembering the outdoor skills, proper rehearsal and encoding would be a smart way to help them move that information into their long term memory. “Mnemonics and mediation” (Matlin, 1983) are a few other notable ways for encoding.

***Application***

In order for this training to be exciting and successful for volunteers, I am going to start with an interactive online training. The online portion will cover what to wear, what to pack, what to do when arriving to the campsite, the proper steps to storing supplies, setting up camp, some basic activities, fire safety and protocol for the leaving the site. Online training has been shown to give students a certain flexibility, and a “better level of knowledge, skills, and competencies”, (Mouzakitis, 4). The intent of providing the first portion of this course in an online format is to motivate volunteers, and encourage them to complete a good portion of the training in their own time and select a location convenient to them.

Within the online training session, the opportunity will be given for volunteers to identify the learning objectives for the course, so they understand the necessary knowledge and skill base they will take away by the end of the course. Reed identifies two reasons learning objectives are created for trainings. In essence, it gives the instructor their own “road map” which will keep them on point when creating and facilitating instruction, (Reed, 16-17). In addition, it will also show the student what is expected of them during the training as well as what to expect from the facilitator. These objectives will in turn motivate the volunteer during the online training since the training will give them specific questions after each objective is covered. The questions will reiterate the critical takeaways from the course.

Since the first session is online, it will include visuals to support the volunteer’s encoding process. For example, when discussing fire building, I will relate the building of a fire to various formations the volunteer is already aware of, such as a Tee Pee structure, or a log cabin structure. Since the volunteer likely understands what these concepts look like prior to the training, it will be easier for them to relate it to the process of building a fire.

Second, the training will cover what to wear and pack for the camping trip. This is a great opportunity for the training to include some fun, interactive games where the volunteers can “pack a bag” or “dress themselves” by dragging and dropping the correct items from a pile of random items into their virtual bag. Then, they will be given the weather for a trip, and be asked to select the proper attire to wear for the trip. Each time the student adds a piece of clothing on to the virtual model, it will emphasize whether the outfit was the right piece for the trip, or share why it was not the best option due to the selected weather. During this online learning scenario, they will be able to practice or rehearse this process several times. While this learning objective might be a basic one, it is often overlooked. When camping, it is imperative for the volunteers to understand what to wear in the outdoors so they can then share that specific information with the girls in the troop. This imagery activity will allow volunteers to connect what to pack and wear with the corresponding weather.

The online training session would move forward by covering the remaining objectives such as setting up camp, facilitating some basic activities, and the proper steps when exiting the camp with the girls on the final day of the trip. During this portion of the training, some quick thirty second videos from girls sharing their favorite activities at camp might motivate volunteers and encourage them to try the suggested activities with their own girls. Furthermore, showing some real life pictures of the actual camp sites from our council would make volunteers feel more comfortable when arriving to camp as some might not know what to expect when arriving to the campsite.

Wankel and Blessinger note some important characteristics of a “quality” online training which include opportunities for critical thinking, problem solving and completing real world tasks to name a few (Wankel, C. & Blessinger, P., 35). This online training portion is critical as it is setting the foundation for the remaining course. The design I created will provide these key aspects and more as volunteers will also need to be critical thinking and problem solving while camping with girls. This real life application will support situations when it is pouring down rain upon arrival to the site, and when some of their food does not cook as fast as expected around the fire. Once a volunteer completes the online course, top board members, the Chief Executive Officer, other leaders, and girls could give a short video saying thank you to the volunteer for their time and efforts. The video could also include the excitement volunteers will experience during the in-class and outdoor training portions. This quick video will motivate volunteers, and help them see the big picture of the training course.

During the next phase of the training, the in-class portion, volunteers will be asked to coordinate supplies and efforts for their upcoming camp session. A small group of four to six individuals will discuss the meals to prepare, what supplies will be required, and what tasks will need to be completed in order for each meal to be carried out by the group. This critical thinking task will challenge the volunteers to work together in a group setting, and fully understand what will be expected of their own troop when preparing for a similar camping trip. Volunteers will hopefully be motivated by this task as they can try their hand at crafting recipes in the outdoors, and sampling their hard work. Driscoll notes in the text that students gain confidence in their work when they try their hand at a challenging task, and then succeed (Driscoll, 336). This ties directly to the self-efficacy theory as it also speaks to the importance of an individual trusting their own aptitudes, despite the difficult task in front of them (Driscoll, 316).

Finally, volunteers will venture into the wild when they head out to the camp portion of the training. Here, volunteers will take their foundation of information gained through the online training and in-class portion, and start applying it through fire building, tying knots, and cooking in the outdoors. It has been noted, “In general, mental practice is more effective than no practice, but not as effective as physical practice”, (Papadelis, C., Kourtidou-Papadeli, C., Bamidis, P. & Albani, M., 75).

Volunteers will work with their smaller group of peers from the in-class session throughout the day, while practicing knots, building fires, and cooking delicious recipes. The camp portion is an opportunity for volunteers to rehearse some of the basic skills within their small group such as tying knots, and practicing fire building. Since the majority of the day will be spent around the fire working, it might be nice for them to enjoy some quick breaks while at their site.

One way to motivate volunteers during the camp session would be to find a girl camping with her own troop during the camp session, and ask her to come speak to the group of volunteers on her enjoyment of camping, and how thankful she is her leaders took time to complete the training (Stevenson, 17). Again, this will allow the volunteers to see the big picture of them completing the camp training, and how the completion of the course will benefit the lives of each girl within the troop. As a result, the volunteer will feel he or she is a part of something bigger, and believe they are making a difference in their local community.

Another way for volunteers to feel the importance of the given training would be to invite a fire professional to the camp training site. The professional could share how critical the volunteer’s role is in fire safety for the girls. In addition, the volunteers could hear some basic safety steps they could utilize while camping with their own troop. This should make volunteers feel the value of their time and efforts with the council, and sense the importance of the training itself.

Once all the fires have been properly extinguished, and the supplies have been stored away, this is the opportune time to reflect on where the volunteers will go from this training, and complete a short post assessment of their time during the course. The intent is for their own personal knowledge to grow, as well as the ability to then facilitate these new skills to the girls within their own troop. Volunteers will then share with their girls how to safely build fires, cook in various methods and understand the purpose of different knots. If a leader is working with younger girls who might not be ready to build their own real fire, they could use food to simulate the experience. The girls could use pretzels for the fire wood, red hots for heat, etc. While the girls might not mentally and physically be ready to complete such a task, they can begin to formulate their own idea of how the event occurs.

***Conclusion***

In conclusion, the creation of any training must be strong in its intent and provide opportunities for student growth. For this training, it was all about finding ways to motivate volunteers by providing new ways for them to complete certain pieces of the training, while giving them challenging tasks where they felt supported and guided. Since the training is not required, volunteers must feel motivated and understand the big picture of the course. In addition, since the training covers a vast amount of information, it was imperative to give time for the repetition of tasks in a small group setting. Even if the volunteer was not physically completing the task every time, they were seeing the task being carried out over and over again. This rehearsal activity engaged the volunteer, and since each group member practiced the same skills together, volunteers could see different ways the task could be completed. Furthermore, it is critical during training development and facilitation to always develop and showcase training goals, as well as establish strong motivational techniques for participants. They must be challenged and engaged throughout the training, as well as hungry for more once it is complete.

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