Video Assessment: A High Tech Approach to Teaching Leadership Skills in Recreation

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Abstract

Gaining leadership skills is an important yet daunting challenge for undergraduates since many have not had the opportunity to either lead participants in activities or examine leadership methods in an academic setting. In the classroom, students learn about the three phases of recreation leadership—preparation, priming the group, and delivery (Jordan, 2007). Oftentimes students then apply these principles in the classroom by leading activities for their peers. To increase learning, this leadership exercise is video-recorded, allowing students to assess their leadership skills using a pre-determined rubric. The result of the video assessment gives the instructor a lucid picture of the individual leader; permits the student-leader the opportunity to examine their leadership skills after the activity is completed; and provides future professionals with a better understanding of the three phases of recreation leadership.

KEYWORDS: Recreation leadership, video assessment, leadership methods rubric

The Use of Video Assessment to Teach Leadership Skills

The importance of recreation leadership is evident by the national accreditation standards attached to this particular skill. As such, many universities require a leadership class as part of their curriculum, and place such courses early in the degree program. Early experiences in a leadership course are offered to provide the student with skills needed in the subsequent programming courses. Teaching undergraduate students activity leadership skills is a foundational stepping stone to becoming a recreation professional (Jordan, 2007).

Conceptual Foundations

At Illinois State University, the leadership methods class uses a developmental approach, with students first completing peer-leadership tasks in a lab setting under the guidance of the university professor. Students then progress to leadership opportunities with pre-determined agencies/programs and their clients, through the completion of 10 field-based practicum hours.

Upon completion of leading peers in a controlled environment, written feedback is given by the professor on the student's leadership skills. While written feedback is important and necessary for professional growth, the student's ability to self-observe and critique their strengths and weaknesses as a leader is imperative. Incorporating a video assessment component into the course provides such opportunities for self-reflection and evaluation.

Angelo and Cross (1993) suggested the use of videotaped protocols as a means for faculty and students to assess how these future professionals solve problems and acquire leadership skills. The authors assert that such abilities "allows faculty to assess how students understand their problem solving processes and how to explain those processes to themselves" (p. 226). Video assessment is an analytical tool that brings concrete examples to the student, allowing for better reflection on their skill development (Loughran, 2002). Reflection is an integral element of the teaching and learning process (Brookfield, 2005) and a necessary professional skill. Video assessments have long been recommended by physical education researchers as a means to improve performance of pre-service teachers (Lund, 1997; Boyce, 2000). Corno and Mandinach (1983) further argued that videotaping teaching is a means to identify deficits in skills, and Garrahy (2008) stated that "feedback about student performance provides the learner with the motivation to repeat their motor performance or to make necessary changes for skill improvement" (p. 24). Two recent studies advocate for video analysis in education. Harford and MacRuaic (2008) used peer video assessment in student teaching and found it to be an effective catalyst for developing reflection skills, while Rich and Hannafin (2008) examined pre-service teachers' use of video analysis. They found it beneficial, but most effective when the analysis was coupled with feedback from their cooperating teacher. Although teaching and leadership encompass different qualities, there are enough similarities to make video assessment a vital learning tool in the preparation of recreation professionals.

Learning Activity

In designing a developmental leadership experience for students, small group opportunities (i.e. 3-4 per group) are less daunting. Students are required to lead activities with their peers twice throughout the semester, with the first experience focusing on an activity type such as children's games, ice breakers, or team building activities for 30 minutes. Each person in the group is required to take the lead on at least one activity while receiving assistance from their group members for minor tasks such as placing equipment in appropriate areas or helping the leader demonstrate the activity. The second experience allows the group to choose a special event theme such as a carnival, Mardi Gras, or game shows that moves the students towards the programming concept that they learn in their programming class the following semester.

Because students are nervous during their first leadership experience, they rarely have a realistic view of how they performed the basic leadership skills discussed in class. As such, the first leadership exercise is recorded and reviewed by each student. To do this the leader wears a microphone that feeds directly into the video camera providing evidence of leader-participant interactions and any aspect of leadership that can be recorded.

When establishing criteria to be analyzed during the leadership experience, a three phase recreation activity leadership process is followed (Jordan, 2007). This process is the impetus of the entire course, and includes the following steps.

1. Preparation: Understanding group composition, activity planning, knowledge and awareness of risk management and safety situations, manipulating the environment through music, location, and spatial arrangement, and developing goals and objectives.

2. Priming the group: Getting the attention of the group, dividing participants into appropriate group sizes, and leader/participant interaction.

3. Delivery of activities: Introduction of activities, giving directions properly, developing activity transitions, and concluding or de-briefing activities.

At the end of the video-recorded experience, each student is provided with a rubric that is developed from the model and completed by the instructor during the leadership exercise (Table 1). However, instructor feedback is not given to the student until after they complete their own video assessment, so as not to influence the student's reflection and assessment process.

Outside of class, students watch the DVD and analyze their leadership skills by completing the grading rubric sheet. Students are expected to write comments on each element assessing strengths and weaknesses based on their viewing of the DVD. They then submit their assessment for review by the instructor. The student is then given their self-assessment and the instructor's assessment for comparison. In most instances the student is far more critical than the instructor. The result of the instructor's and student's assessments is to assist the student in establishing goals and objectives for improving their second leadership experience and for transitioning into their 10 practicum hours in the field.

TABLE 1
Leadership Grading Rubric

Rating: 1= Not evident; 2=Attempted; 3=Satisfactory; 4=Good

Preparation	Rating	Comments
1. The chosen activities took into consideration the composition of the group & adapted to their abilities. They considered playing ability & gender differences in activity preferences.		
2. Activity plans were appropriate & on time		
3. Activities chosen maximized participation		
4. All safety precautions were taken in order to minimize risk & unnecessary equipment was placed out of the way during activities		
5. Equipment was ordered on time & set-up prior to start of leadership		
6. Good atmosphere for event. Equipment was used properly. Leaders were dressed appropriately		
Total points (24 maximum)		

Priming the Group	Rating	Comments
1. The leader/group was organized		
2. The leader demonstrated enthusiasm		
3. The leader demonstrated confidence		
4. The leader adequately got the group's attention		
5. The leader adequately divided the students into groups		
6. The leader used names of students		
Total points (24 maximum)		

TABLE 1 (CONTINUED)

Delivery	Rating	Comments
1. The leaders identified themselves to the group		
2. The leader identified the activity		
3. Group was brought together to give directions		
4. Activity directions were clear & positive		
5. Leaders used positive reinforcement & gave feedback to the group		
6. Transitions were adequately built into the activities		
7. Activities were changed or adapted as needed based on group response		
8. Leaders were involved in the activities/moved among participants		
9. Voices used were appropriate – projection, tone, free of slang, "guys"		
10. Conclusions to activities were well planned & executed		
11. Order of activities was adequate.		
12. The leaders worked together as a group, not as individuals		
13. Creativity in activity choices		
Total points (52 maximum)		

Outcomes

The outcomes of this learning tool are threefold. First, the instructor wears a headset and can hear the conversations of the group. As many students forget they are wearing a microphone, it is often times easy to detect an unprepared group or leader, a nervous student, someone who is not fulfilling their responsibilities to the group, and the problem-solving abilities of the group. Prior to implementing the video assessment exercise, it was difficult to ascertain this sort of information.

A second outcome is that many students tend to forget what actually happened throughout the exercise. The video assessment assignment allows them to go back and review different aspects of their leadership as many times as they wish. Students have indicated they learned a lot about themselves from watching the

DVDs, and get an opportunity to accurately reflect on the aspects of their performance that were good or in need of improvement.

Lastly, students seem to have a better grasp of the recreation activity leadership process (Jordan 2007) because of the video assessment assignment. Prior to leading their peers, students are only exposed to leadership concepts through assigned readings, class discussions, and leadership modeling done by the instructor. Incorporating peer-leadership opportunities and video assessment provides students with the foundation that they will need to build on in their professional practice. While practicing their skills is quite beneficial, students tend to learn more about their leadership proficiencies by analyzing their performance after the fact. Including a rubric clearly identifying each pertinent leadership element and a DVD as proof of their performance, allows future professionals to examine elements in depth and has proven to be invaluable. Such reflection gives students the opportunity to examine topics like how well activities flowed, how methods used to divide participants into groups worked, or how the leaders moved around the group.

Recommendations

At first this assignment might seem to be labor intensive or require expensive equipment. If the department does not have DVD/video cameras, investigate other departments on campus, especially physical education-teacher education programs. Most of these programs have equipment they are willing to share. Learning how to use the equipment can be an issue for some who are not technologically savvy. However, most AV equipment available for use on college campuses is standard and comes with easy-to-follow directions. Finally, as the DVDs are viewable on any computer equipped with a CD/DVD player and do not require the camera for review, this makes it especially easy for students to review and assess their performance in their free time. Furthermore, there are some newer cameras on the market that record onto a memory card and some that download directly onto the computer using a USB device.

One difficulty first encountered with this assignment was the instructor becoming proficient in recording the leadership exercise while simultaneously completing the rubric sheet. If necessary the instructor could review the DVDs after class, rather than grading the students live. This doubles the time spent on this class assignment, but is a way to give more in-depth feedback in the initial stage of this technique. However, after a few groups have been recorded, both tasks become quite manageable.

A last issue with this assignment is the need for students to buy DVDs. The DVDs cost about $3 each, with the cost divided among the group members, as only one DVD per group is required. Thus, the cost is minimal for each student group.

The video assessment assignment has been a valuable addition to the leadership course. Students are spending more time learning and applying the three phases of leadership, and are examining their own behaviors leading to objectives for improvement in the future.

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