

An Evaluation of Volunteerism in Project Learning Tree and Project WILD in Texas

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Overall goal of the study was to evaluate the implementation, utilization, and training process of PLT and WILD in Texas.

Active volunteers had high achievement and altruistic values, identified with program goals, and had a high interest in the environment.

The two most important reasons for attending facilitator training were a professional interest in the environment and to have access to PLT or WILD materials in order to share them with others.

The most important reasons for educators to attend a training workshop were an interest in environmental issues and to receive additional natural resource materials.

The most often given reason for educators not using Project WILD materials was a lack of time to fit them into the curriculum.

Environmental education programs which use volunteers as part of their implementation system need to identify and recruit people who have high achievement and altruistic values, identify with program goals, and have a high interest in and concern for the environment. To receive and maintain a high intensity of volunteerism, communication and support must be provided to those facilitators who have high achievement values and are involved in environmental action.

To identify potentially active participants, environmental education coordinators could have all potential volunteers complete applications with personal values and environmental interest assessments before acceptance into the program. Then volunteers with the proper characteristics or motivation could be chosen for participation in the program.

Active facilitators had significantly more background in life science and active educators had significantly more credits in earth science than inactives. Study indicated that life and/or earth science training, not science in general, was an important indicator of active facilitators and educators.

The majority of facilitators wanted follow-up training and both active and inactive volunteers desired more information and reinforcement.

Proper training of facilitators is essential and should stress that environmental education is a multidisciplinary curriculum. Pairing new facilitators with previously trained proved valuable. Continued training for facilitators enhances training. Strong communication is essential. Pair resource personnel with professional educators. Provide for formalized feedback between facilitators and agency. Monetary compensation is also a viable option to increase implementation of workshops.

2/Greene -- December, 1992

Lack of time was the most important reason for not conducting a workshop or using the materials.

Provide periodic advanced training workshops for both facilitators and educators

Most frequently used activities: Animal Charades; Quick Frozen Critters; Animal Poetry; What Did your lunch Cost Wildlife?, Oh Deer!; Stormy Weather.

Reasons specific activities were chosen:

1. Completes an environmental education curriculum objective.
2. Takes little time to plan.
3. Familiar with activity because of training workshop.

59% of active Project WILD educators either greatly or somewhat increased the amount of time spent on natural resource education after attending training workshops.

In comparing the 6-hr. (one-day) workshop to longer ones (2 days, 1 week, university credit, length of the workshop and use of materials were not significantly related.

The success of Project WILD implementation in Texas and elsewhere is dependent upon the continued training of incoming educators by facilitators, use of materials after training workshops, and use over time.

Compensation of facilitators may be a good method to increase effectiveness of educational programs administered by state organizations. When facilitators are "hired" as in Idaho, it is possible to choose people with similar values and goals of the agency. Communication can be focused on fewer people and can give the facilitators greater feelings of commitment to the programs and agency. Workshops may also be organized by the agency so the facilitators do not have to deal with many of the logistics of the workshop. In those states where monetary compensation is not an option, state directors may want to target people who are not true volunteers and have environmental education training as part of their job description and increase the effort on follow-up.