



topics education
strategies for education impactSM

Issue: Getting Kids Active & Outdoors

In the 1960s only 4% of children in the US were considered overweight compared with nearly 20% today. As a result of the increase in structured activities for children, they spend less time in free play outdoors than they did twenty years ago. Yet, research shows that unstructured free play outside brings a host of benefits to children, including being smarter, more cooperative, healthier, and happier.

The Outdoor Foundation’s Challenge

The Outdoor Foundation’s driving goal is to inspire and grow future generations of outdoor enthusiasts. To accomplish this mission, they rely heavily on volunteer mentors to lead youth in outdoor activities. They found that their volunteers have the technical expertise to paddle, climb, and camp, yet don’t have as much experience and confidence in leading and managing groups of youths and teenagers. In an effort to strengthen the mentors’ “soft” skills and enhance their interactions with youth, they looked to Topics Education to create an engaging, online curriculum, that would help the volunteer mentors feel more confident, comfortable, and effective in communicating their knowledge and leading their groups.

Topics Education’s Solution

Starting with the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) curriculum as the framework for our questions, we interviewed current and former NOLS and other wilderness education staff, traditional educators, and Teens Outside program mentors in an effort to collect stories that reflect Best Practices for mentors in the field with teenagers. These stories addressed six NOLS core activities with a focus on outdoor leadership, effective activities for teens, and planning outings. We took these stories and turned them into compelling video clips, audio clips, and transcripts that convey the stories, activities, and lessons learned of the veteran wilderness education staff, with the goal of passing on their experience and helping the volunteer mentors to become stronger outdoor leaders.

Our Results

The curriculum was well received by the Foundation’s staff and board. They used the resources in conjunction with their Summer of Service campaign which encourages adults to take more youth outside. The modules were also incorporated into Backpacker.com for their series, *How To Raise An Outdoor Kid*.

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“We chose Topics Education for their instructional design expertise and their creative approach to developing and delivering the content. We were very pleased with their planning, management, and execution of the project, and the volunteer mentor curriculum has been very well received. Their team is great to work with — I welcome the opportunity to work with them again, and I highly recommend them.” - Christine Fanning, Executive Director, The Outdoor Foundation



**20% of Youth
in America are
Considered
Overweight**

**Inspiring and Growing
Future Generations of
Outdoor Enthusiasts**

**Bringing the
Experience
and Wisdom of
Experienced Outdoor
Leaders to Volunteer
Mentors**

