Practical Application Essay

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Scenario

After completing the IDD&E master's program at Syracuse, I'll step into a space I know well: Soldiers, structure, and performance under pressure. But now, I'm walking in as more than a leader**,** I'm an instructional designer. My capstone project wasn't just about building a clean, polished learning unit. It was about solving a real performance issue that Soldiers deal with constantly: shaving time off their 2-mile run for the ACFT and doing it with intention. The Army's made major updates to how it measures physical readiness**,** but what hasn't caught up is the clarity on how to train for it smartly. Soldiers are still guessing, overtraining, under-recovering, or copying plans that weren't built for them. That's not a discipline problem**,** it's a design problem.

So**,** I built a unit from scratch. Two hours. Instructor-led. Real tools, real feedback, and real-world application. It trains Soldiers not just to run better, but to think like athletes. They leave with a 30-day program based on their metrics, their pace, and their zone-specific heart rate progression. No fluff. No one-size-fits-all templates. Just actionable design, guided by NSCA guidelines and grounded in the principles that help people improve performance**,** training residuals, aerobic system thresholds, and structured feedback.

Performance Problem

Let's be blunt: Soldiers know they need to run, but most don't know how to train with precision. The ACFT raised the stakes, but the gap in understanding training principles is wide.

Here's the pattern I've seen repeatedly:

1. Soldiers repeat the same runs at the same pace and expect improvement.
2. Few understand how to train using heart rate zones, progressive overload, or recovery cycles.
3. Peer plans often recycle bad information, what worked for one person is blindly copied by another.
4. Leaders don't always have time or expertise to coach Soldiers through efficient program design.

So**,** I built this unit to fix that. And I didn't guess. I used performance analysis methods from the program**,** front-end analysis, alignment with measurable learning objectives, Merrill's principles, and a storyboard structure that makes sense whether you're new to training science or deep in the NSCA manual. The unit begins with a primer video before the session ever starts. Soldiers walk in with a draft plan. Then it's guided lecture, peer review, redesign, and debrief**,** with a final output that's been built, tested, and stress-checked with actual feedback. The problem wasn't discipline. It was access to well-designed instruction that respected Soldiers' time and intelligence. That's what I built.

Application of IDD&E Competencies

This wasn't theory. Every part of this unit demanded I pull from the full range of competencies:

- Analysis: I identified the performance issue, not just academically, but from lived experience**,** time gaps on the 2-mile run and confusion around training plans.
- Design: I laid out the content hierarchy, built out each event from the ground up, and aligned them with real, observable learning outcomes.
- Development: I created facilitator and learner guides, embedded cognitive and reflective strategies, and ensured Soldiers Walk away with a complete, usable training plan.
- Implementation: The unit is built to be run by instructors who may not have an exercise science background but who can follow clear prompts, rubrics, and feedback mechanisms.
- Evaluation: Peer reviews, rubric-driven critiques, and instructor feedback are embedded throughout. Performance is visible, not assumed.

I also applied Merrill's five principles in real terms, not just to check boxes:

- Task-centered: Soldiers design their own running plan, not just take notes.
- Activation: They start by applying what they know (or think they know) about their run times.
- Demonstration: The video primer sets the tone.
- Application: Peer-to-peer critiques with structured rubrics.
- Integration: Reflection and redesign that ties back to personal ACFT goals.

Reflection

Before this program, my approach to instruction was tactical**,** based on experience, instincts, and NCO common sense. What this degree gave me was a framework to build smarter, faster, and more intentionally. It taught me that good instruction isn't just about what works**,** it's about knowing why it works, and being able to replicate it. What stuck with me the most was learning how to diagnose a performance issue without jumping straight to "more training." Sometimes what people need isn't more time**,** it's better design. That shift alone changed how I build everything. This capstone isn't a cap. It's a launch point. I'll use it as a template to redesign other ACFT-related units**,** and eventually, larger leadership development modules. My long-term goal is to blend my instructional design skills with my experience as a senior enlisted leader to build training that respects the learner and delivers results. Whether I stay in uniform or step into a civilian role, the mission stays the same: train people to perform, and design like it matters**,** because it does.

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