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## Back to the Future: Some Weekly Reader Updates

John Bird

Winthrop University, [birdj@winthrop.edu](mailto:birdj@winthrop.edu)

Teaching and Learning Center

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# The Weekly Reader

Teaching and Learning Center, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC

## UpComing Sessions

Podium Week  
Sept. 24-28

Using Smart  
Phones in the  
Classroom  
Sept. 27

Becoming a LIFE  
Scholarship  
Saver  
Oct. 2

Think Globally, Act  
Locally (help in  
integrating the  
GLI into  
curriculum)  
Oct. 4

register at:  
<http://www2.winthrop.edu/tlc/TrainingCalendar/default.asp>

Dr. John Bird  
Professor,  
Department of  
English  
Bancroft Hall 260  
(803) 323-3679

Director, Teaching &  
Learning Center  
Dinkins Hall 233  
(803) 323-2447

EMAIL:  
[birdj@winthrop.edu](mailto:birdj@winthrop.edu)

Winthrop University  
Rock Hill, SC

## Back To The Future: Some Weekly Reader Updates

I hope you notice the new look of *The Weekly Reader*, courtesy of Dana Bruneau, TLC Program Coordinator, who just wanted to play around a bit this weekend with the design of our newsletter—and then she played around to the point of converting all of this year's issues to this elegant new look. My glance back at these recent issues made me want to provide some updates.

After last week's "Righteous Anger in the Classroom," recounting my reaction to a non-functioning group in my *Lord of the Rings* class, I am sure you will not be surprised that the next class meeting was awesome! The students seemed to have regained focus, and when they broke into groups to do some work, they went right to task, and stayed on task—even the balky Wizards. I know that might not last, but I have hopes that it will. I am sure you have had similar experiences. Isn't it interesting how each class

develops its own personality? I stay the same, the course content stays mostly the same, but with the change of students comes radical change. Hmm, that might be a good topic to pursue in the future...

A couple of weeks ago, I referenced a video that predicted the end of higher education as we know it and its replacement with online instruction. Since then, I stumbled upon a website and video many of you may already have seen, since it apparently has caused quite a buzz in our world. EPIC 2020 audaciously predicts that universities like Winthrop will cease to exist by the year 2020, replaced by free online resources. As I wrote before, I am skeptical of such predictions: I think the physical university can provide experiences that a virtual university never can. I also suspect that this prediction is greatly exaggerated merely to startle—hard to imagine such a sweeping

paradigm shift coming to pass in just a bit over seven years. All that said, I think the videos are worth viewing, and they might even be useful in some classes—the students should find this glimpse at a possible near future thought-provoking. Here is the link: <http://epic2020.org/2012/05/01/hello-world/>

Finally, I started the semester on a bit of a pessimistic note when I wrote about our students' lack of critical reading skills. I hated to start out with such a negative warning, but that reflected my thoughts and feelings at the time. After a month or so with a new bunch of students, I feel somewhat more encouraged. I see them marking their texts, and they tell me that doing so is helping with my classes, as well as with their other classes. I have been to my colleague Amanda Hiner's ENGL 291 class twice, the first time to talk to our new English majors about the importance of critical reading, and the second,

*“After a month or so with a new bunch of students, I feel somewhat more encouraged. I see them marking their texts, and they tell me that doing so is helping with my classes, as well as with their other classes.”*

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last week, to talk about reading poetry and understanding metaphor. They were eager to tell me how critical reading—underlining key sentences and writing key ideas in the margins—had helped them in classes from

English to anthropology to math. I was also heartened at the number of colleagues who asked for my two-page handout, “How To Read Critically,” which is available under “Resources” on the TLC website. And in the works,

an instructional video on how to teach students to read critically. Nearly a third of the semester gone, and I feel ready to go again. As the first *Weekly Reader* said (not to mention Mick and Keith), “Start me up!”

## Academic Responsibility – Professional Development



Last spring, we adopted new guidelines that grew out of the Faculty Roles and Rewards Taskforce, a document entitled “Faculty Roles”; I would like to take this space for a few weeks to start a discussion about some aspects of one part of that document, academic responsibility. I wrote previously about final exams, office hours, faculty governance, and FERPA. This week: professional development.

The Faculty Roles document cites “professional development that supports improvements in practice (e.g., participation in peer

observations, attendance at professional conferences to explore current research, engaging in sessions through the Teaching and Learning Center).” We all have a responsibility to keep ourselves current as teachers, in our disciplines and our pedagogy. I know that professional conferences always invigorate my teaching, but those experiences can only come a few times a year, and they are certainly expensive.

Engaging in peer observations takes time, but it is certainly rewarding. That leaves among the examples TLC

sessions. I know that classes take up the bulk of our time, as they should, and that departmental and committee meetings take up a good bit of what is left. But we should all take advantage of as many of the offerings of the TLC as we can. Our faculty and staff provide almost all of the content of the programs, and together we offer a vast array of topics, with a breathtaking demonstration of expertise. As hectic as your schedule is, I think you find that a TLC session can be just as invigorating as a conference, without leaving campus.

## XXITE 2.0 ----- The Virtual Gathering Place for WU (The Reboot!)

Jo Koster and I invite you to join XXITE (Twenty-first Century Teaching Excellence)—or if you have already joined, to check it out again as it grows and develops. Maybe you have not been there in a long time—if not, you will see many changes in look and content. For example, XXITE now has groups dedicated to HMXP and CRTW, with

those of us who teach those courses sharing ideas and materials. Talk to Jo about setting up your own interest group. Jo is particularly interested in recruiting a few people to blog regularly about their teaching.

Jo set up this interactive site to give Winthrop faculty a virtual gathering space to share ideas about teaching and

technology. You'll find blogs and discussion forums on various topics—and we urge you to add your own ideas. Visit again at <http://wuxxite.ning.com/> Or email Jo Koster for an invitation to join: [kosterj@winthrop.edu](mailto:kosterj@winthrop.edu). The TLC website also has links to navigate your way there or to join: <http://www2.winthrop.edu/tlc/>

Join XXITE 2.0 or  
Register for a TLC  
Session

At

[www.winthrop.edu/tlc](http://www.winthrop.edu/tlc)

## A New Service From the TLC: Teaching Consultation

The Teaching and Learning Center is offering a new service: teaching consultation. At the instructor's request, I (or another agreed-upon person) will visit your class to observe and consult with you afterwards about your successes and challenges. This consultation has nothing to do with the tenure and

promotion process, and no reports will be made to department chairs or deans (unless you so request). The invitation to the consultant can only come from the instructor, not from a dean or chair or any other person. All conversations will be private and confidential. If you don't want me to visit your class and observe your teaching, we could

just meet and talk about your teaching. If I am not available to visit your class because of my schedule, I will find a qualified person to do the consulting. So please let me know if you would like to invite me into your class or for a consultation. Call or email me at (803) 323-3679 or [birdj@winthrop.edu](mailto:birdj@winthrop.edu).

## Thought for The Week

“Learning softeneth the heart and breedeth gentleness and charity.”  
--Mark Twain