



9-14-2015

Be Prepared!—and Other Valuable Lessons I Learned About Teaching From Being a Boy Scout

John Bird

Winthrop University, birdj@winthrop.edu

Teaching and Learning Center

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.winthrop.edu/weeklyreader>

Recommended Citation

Bird, John and Teaching and Learning Center, "Be Prepared!—and Other Valuable Lessons I Learned About Teaching From Being a Boy Scout" (2015). *The Weekly Reader*. 76.

<https://digitalcommons.winthrop.edu/weeklyreader/76>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Teaching and Learning Center (TLC) at Digital Commons @ Winthrop University. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Weekly Reader by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Winthrop University. For more information, please contact bramed@winthrop.edu.

September 14, 2015
Volume 7, Issue 4

The Weekly Reader

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

UpComing Sessions

Embracing
Collaboration
9/17
ADA Training
9/24
Identify and
Mentor
Students for
ONCA Awards
9/29
Alzheimer's
Disease 10/6
Recognizing
PTSD in your
Classroom
10/7
Blackboard
Training,
various topics
and times
Register at:
<http://www2.winthrop.edu/login/tl/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

Winthrop University

Be Prepared!—and Other Valuable Lessons I Learned About Teaching From Being a Boy Scout

Last week in his guest column, David Schary wrote about what he had learned about teaching from gardening. He concluded his column by asking what we had learned about teaching from our other pursuits. Coincidentally, I had been planning to write a column on what I had learned about teaching from being a Boy Scout. My experience as a Boy Scout in the 1960s was overwhelmingly positive, although it was also somewhat negative, and both aspects have had an effect on my teaching. Here is what comes to mind:

1. Be prepared. One of the first things I learned way back then, and it certainly has stuck with me. In Boy Scouts, “be prepared” meant packing wisely for a camping trip, including the essentials of food, shelter, and clothing, but also necessary tools, a first aid kit (came in handy more than once), a flashlight, and so on. As a teacher, being prepared is essential. We have to prepare for the content of

each class, of course, but we also have to be prepared for the unforeseen: a student’s question from left field; technology failing, always when we are counting on it; ice storms that disrupt the syllabus; and a thousand other problems that arise in the course of a semester. I did not know it back then, but scouting was preparing me for my career by teaching me the value of preparedness.

2. Leadership. As I progressed through the ranks of the Boy Scouts, from Tenderfoot to Second Class to First Class and beyond, I was amazed to find myself emerging as a leader. Gaining the trust of the adult leaders and my peers, being chosen as a patrol leader, was a crucial step in my emotional and intellectual development. When I declared as an English education major in college, I had the usual doubts about my ability to be a teacher, to be a leader in the classroom. The first moment I stood

up and took on that role, I drew on my confidence as a leader that came from Boy Scouts, even if I did not consciously realize it at the time.

3. Teamwork. One of the first lessons of scouting is that you are not just an individual, but a member of several larger groups: your patrol, your troop, the Boy Scouts overall. I remember competitions between patrols, like fire building. We had to work together as a team to gather tinder and wood, then to build the fire and start it. (The first team to build a fire that could boil water won; my dim memory says my patrol did.) Such teamwork drills made me realize the part I could play, the part others could play, and how we could all work together to succeed. I draw on those teamwork lessons as I organize group activities in class, as well as when I serve on or lead committees in my department and in the university.

4. Learning by doing. Central to the Boy Scout experience is education,

“I read The Boy Scout Handbook avidly, but I did not really learn until I actually tied a square knot, two half hitches, and a bowline; or until I did a mock rescue using the four-hand hold; or until I learned survival skills by swamping my canoe, then draining it and turning it upright, alone, for the Canoeing merit badge. Our leaders taught us, telling us how to do things, but we were not passive recipients of their knowledge; we learned by doing. Learning by doing is central to all of my classrooms.”



Continued from page 1

but education by doing. As an avid reader (and nerd), I read *The Boy Scout Handbook* avidly (I still remember the cover by Norman Rockwell from back then, with a Boy Scout on the front, holding *The Boy Scout Handbook*, which had on its cover that same boy, holding that same book, and on and on, to infinity), but I did not really learn until I actually tied a square knot, two half hitches, and a bowline; or until I did a mock rescue using the four-hand hold; or until I learned survival skills by swamping my canoe, then draining it and turning it upright, alone, for the Canoeing merit badge. Our leaders taught us, telling us how to do things, but we were not passive recipients of their knowledge; we learned by doing. Learning by doing is central to all of my classrooms.

5. Mentorship. I had mentors in the troop leaders, who were patient but also demanding with a rambunctious group of young pre-teens. I remember our Scoutmaster, who was a master teacher of everything from knots to astronomy to fishing to outdoor cooking. I recall the mentorship of older peers who showed a Tenderfoot the ropes (sometimes literally), and I

realize that I became a mentor to younger scouts as I progressed. I am a teacher because of teacher/mentors over the years, and now I am a mentor to students and to other teachers. Little did I know that those seeds were planted back then in those days of Troop 231.

I mentioned the negative in the beginning. That factors in too, because we learn from everything, even from what we see as bad experiences.

I was in two Boy Scout troops. The first was organized by the church we belonged to, St. Andrews Methodist. That first troop is where I had most of my positive experiences. The leaders, especially the Scoutmaster, were excellent leaders and teachers, even if they did not enforce strictest disciplines at all times. Admittedly, we were a pretty rag-tag bunch; we called ourselves “F Troop,” after a TV show of the time.

That changed when our troop merged with the troop at a neighboring church, St. Giles Presbyterian. I am not sure why this happened, but it meant that we had new Scoutmasters, that we were merged into

existing patrols with existing leaders. I had earned the rank of Star, then Life, one below Eagle, but I lost my leadership position to a younger guy. The troop leaders had been in the military, and we spent about 75% of our time doing close order drill, which was not very appealing to a 15-year-old guy used to having fun while learning. Their rules eventually got too restrictive, and their militaristic stance was rubbing me the wrong way in 1969, the height of the Vietnam War, and the beginnings of my questioning of authority.

I vividly recall the night we were marching, over and over, when I turned to my brother Jimmy and asked, “Are you having fun?” He wasn’t either, so we just turned out of the ranks and started walking home. “Birds! Where the hell are you going?” the Scoutmaster bellowed. We were going home, quitting. I think I was one or two merit badges away from the top, but there was no looking back. That taught me a lesson, too—about bad teaching, harmful teaching. And the ability to resist it. I do not regret that decision, but I highly value the positive lessons I learned—even if I did not fully understand them at that time, so long ago.

Thanks For Helping Make the Teaching and Learning Center Work!

Winthrop's Teaching and Learning Center offers a wide variety of sessions each year for faculty and staff, on teaching, technology, professional development, and personal development. From leading class discussion to mastering the Smart podium to tenure and promotion to cooking soufflés, the TLC tries to make sure that all faculty and staff receive

the kinds of professional and personal development that will make them better teachers, administrators, and employees.

To offer this programming, the TLC depends on the talent, expertise, and generosity of our faculty and staff. We do not have a big budget to bring in outside speakers and experts. Even so, we are able to offer engaging,

timely, and valuable sessions every year on a variety of topics. We thank those who have offered their time and talent in past years.

If you have a request for a session you would like to see, please email me and I will try to arrange it. And if you have a session you would like to present, please email me. We will set something up as soon as we can!

A Service From the TLC: Teaching Consultation

The TLC for several years has been offering a 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 (803) 323-3679 or birdj@winthrop.edu.

Go2Knowledge—Learning On Demand!

Go2Knowledge is a website that offers a variety of video presentations on faculty and staff professional development. You will find presentations by nationally-known experts in seven categories: At-Risk Populations, Campus Safety, Organizational Development, Student Success, Teaching and Learning, Technology,

and Open Educational Resources. Within each category, you will find a number of excellent and informative videos. The Office of Academic Affairs has provided us a one-year subscription to this service.

People often tell the TLC that they would like to go to sessions, but they don't have the time or they can't

at the times sessions are offered. With Go2Knowledge, you can attend sessions on demand, anywhere, 24/7. The TLC will also have frequent Go2Knowledge Groups, where we meet to discuss a presentation. Log in here: <http://www.go2knowledge.org/winthrop> See you there!

Register for a TLC Session
At

www.winthrop.edu/tlc

The 3rd Annual Winthrop Conference on Teaching and Learning

Save the date! Saturday, February 6, 2016 we will have our 3rd Annual Winthrop Conference on Teaching and Learning. The call for papers and sessions will be issued soon. Stay tuned, and mark that date on your calendar!

Thought For the Week

"We think boys are rude, unsentive animals but it is not so in all cases. Each boy has one or two sensitive spots, and if you can find out where they are located you have only to touch them and you can scorch him as with fire."
--Mark Twain