

# Instructional Methods for Scouts

## Introduction

There is a magic moment when an instructor, counselor, teacher, scoutmaster connects with their pupil, camper, student, Scout in a way that real learning takes place. This kind of eureka moment is not just a chance occurrence; it is a result of applying effective methods.

Remember that Scouting is a unique instructional situation. We can adapt methods from other disciplines like teaching and coaching but they should serve the goals of instruction laid out by Scouting's founder Baden Powell:

When it is applied with understanding and consideration the advancement program fosters encouragement and ambition regardless of an individual boy's abilities.

It is for this reason that the standard of proficiency is purposely left undefined.

Our standard is not the attainment of a certain level of quality of knowledge or skill, but the amount of effort the boy has put into acquiring such knowledge or skill. This brings the most inept to an equal footing with his more capable brother.

Evaluation for Badges is not competitive. The Scoutmaster judge each individual case on its merits, and discriminating where to be generous and where to tighten up. Some are inclined to insist that their Scouts should be expert before they can get a Badge. That is very right, in theory; you get a few boys pretty proficient in this way but our object is to get all the boys interested. The Scoutmaster who rewards effort as opposed to expertise develops confidence and enthusiasm, whereas a demanding standard of performance makes boys reluctant and hesitant.

The other extreme is almost giving away the Badges on very slight knowledge of the subjects. Scoutmasters should use their sense and discretion, keeping the main aim in view. There is always the danger of Badge-hunting supplanting Badge-earning. Our aim is to encourage initiative and self confidence, instead of showy, self-indulgence. The Scoutmaster must be on the alert to check Badge-hunting and to realize which is the Badge-hunter is and which is the eager and earnest worker. The success of the Advancement Program depends very largely on the Scoutmaster himself and his individual handling of it.

Scout aged boys are inquisitive, investigative and eager to learn when their natural curiosity is stimulated. Conversely they become lifeless, unresponsive stones when they are compelled, rather than inspired, to learn or advance.

IT IS, IN FACT, NOTHING short of a miracle that the modern methods of education have not yet entirely strangled the holy curiosity of inquiry; for this delicate little plant, aside from stimulation, stands mainly in need of freedom; without this it goes to wrack and ruin without fail. It is a very grave mistake to think that the enjoyment of seeing and searching can be promoted by means of coercion and a sense of duty. To the contrary, I believe that it would be possible to rob even a healthy beast of prey of its voraciousness, if it were possible, with the aid of a whip, to force the beast to devour continuously, even when not hungry, especially if the food, handed out under such coercion, were to be selected accordingly. -- Albert Einstein

True learning happens when we inspire and nurture the "holy curiosity of inquiry" by applying basic principles to our methods;

- Scouts are eager to learn.
- Instructional methods must be tailored to match a pupil's age and ability.
- Active discovery beats passive learning.
- Good learning requires freedom of inquiry.
- Scouts thrive on challenge.

Most of us default to 'classroom' methods of teaching and evaluating; methods where the teacher is active and the pupils are passive. Lecture style instruction is never as effective or compelling as a process of guided discovery. These situations are more likely to result in frustration rather than learning.

Once again Baden Powell gets at the spirit of the subject:

If once we make Scouting into a formal scheme of serious instruction and efficiency, we miss the whole point and value of Scout training, and imitate the work of schools without the trained experts for carrying it out.

We want to get all our boys along through affirmative self-development from within and not through the imposition of formal instruction from without. The advancement program stimulates enthusiasm on the part of any boy to do things that can be helpful in forming his character or developing his skill.

Effective methods of instructing Scouts are not simply classroom methods disguised by renaming them; they are actually different methods. It may be useful to eliminate some classroom methods from the outset;

- No lectures lasting more than about 2 minutes (a lecture, for our purposes, is defined as pupils passively listening to an instructor speak)
- No preprinted written tests or evaluations
- No handouts over 1 page long (back and front)
- No extensive note taking
- No 'homework'

Now that we have eliminated most of the methods of instructing common in Scout Troops and Camp we can examine methods (in the next several postings to this blog) that inspire the spirit of inquiry and active learning that is the goal of Scouting.

## Round Robins

Round robins are active and teach small groups rather than a large group all at once. Every ten or fifteen minutes the instructor and the subject changes - a practice that is much more likely to hold the attention and interest of Scouts.

Small groups, 10-15 minutes of instruction at each station, lots of activity.

Example -

Instructing Tote'n Chip (axe, knife, saw) skills. Three stations are set up, one each for knife, saw and axe. Three groups of five rotate through the stations at ten or fifteen minute intervals where they are shown the equipment and led through the demonstration of the associated skills.

## Guided Discovery

Guiding Scouts to discover skills or knowledge on their own is an active and engaging method. Keeping with our example of tote'n chip skills here is an example of a guided discovery-

The instructor has all of the gear required to practice the skills associated with safely handling and maintaining a pocket knife. When the scouts arrive he begins asking questions;

What are the different things I have in front of me on this table?

How are they used?

Where can you find out how they are used?

Why is it important that we learn to use these tools correctly?

The instructor guides the scouts through a process of discovery as they teach the skills to themselves.

In answer to the question 'Where can you find out how they are used?' someone is sure to mention the Scout handbook. Then another line of discovery is pursued;

What part of the Scout handbook?

Can you find the right section in the index?

Who will read the first paragraph in about sharpening out loud?

As you can readily see this method embraces the principal that Scouts learn best when they are in control of the process, their natural inquisitiveness is inspired and that they are challenged to work things out for themselves.

Predictably if the scouts approached this situation to be met with a lecture/demonstration they may become impatient and distracted rather than engaged and interested.

Here is a "cheat sheet" of questions for instructors using the guided discovery method; (with thanks to Richard Paul, NCECT)

### Clarification Questions

- What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?
- How does \_\_\_\_ relate to \_\_\_\_?
- Could you put that another way?
- Let me see if I understand you; do you mean \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_?
- Could you give me an example?
- Would this be an example: \_\_\_\_\_?
- Could you explain that further?
- Could you expand upon that?
- What are you assuming?
- You seem to be assuming \_\_\_\_\_. Do I understand you correctly?
- Is it always the case?

### Probing for reason or evidence;

- What would be an example?
- How do you know?
- Why do you think that is true?

- Do you have any evidence for that?
- What difference does that make?
- What are your reasons for saying that?
- What other information do we need?
- Why did you say that?
- What led you to that belief?
- How does that apply to this case?
- How could we find out whether that is true?

Probing for possible results:

- But if that happened, what else would happen as a result? Why?
- What effect would that have?
- Would that necessarily happen or only probably happen?
- What is an alternative?

## Coach - Pupil

Developing the leadership skill of training or instructing others is an important goal of Scouting. Using the coach-pupil method has the twofold result of perfecting a specific skill and developing teacher/leaders.

1. Scouts are paired up into coach-pupil teams.
2. The instructor first guides all the teams through the basic components of the skill as a group.
3. For a set period of time one Scout coaches and one practices the skill. At first the coach should walk the pupil through each specific component, then drill the whole skill and then observe as the scout demonstrates the skill on his own.
4. Once the time period ends the roles reverse and the coach becomes the pupil.
5. The instructor can observe each group in turn and offer assistance were needed.

Once the coach/pupil session has ended a game or competition featuring the new skill cements it in the minds of the Scouts.

It is important to stick to brief coach/pupil sessions so that the roles reverse often. It is surprising how quickly Scouts learn even complex skills when they coach another Scout.

## Kim's Game

Rudyard Kipling's book for boy's "Kim" is the story of the orphan son of an Irish soldier in India who was trained for government intelligence work by showing him a tray of precious stones for a minute's observation, then covering it, and asking Kim how many stones and what kind they were.

At first Kim could remember only a few, soon he was able not only to say exactly how many, but to describe the stones. Then he practiced with other articles, and ultimately was able to glance to see all sorts of details of items that were of value in tracing and dealing with criminals.

Commonly the game is played with 24 articles of different kinds are placed on a table and covered with a cloth. The cloth is removed for exactly one minute; the player looks and, after the cloth is replaced, writes down as many articles they can remember.

Kim's game can be a terrific instructional method, here's an example of how it can be used to aid in identifying and memorizing trees, tracks, first aid skills etc.

Plant identification:

- A number of plant specimens, or pictures, are displayed with an equal number of blank name tags.
- The instructor asks if scouts can identify any of the specimens using the Scout handbook or other references.
- Once all the specimens are identified and the names written on name tags.
- The specimens are now covered with a cloth.
- The Scouts are asked to name all the specimens they identified while they remain covered.
- The specimens are revealed for one minute and recovered.
- The Scouts are asked to individually write down all the names of specimens they observed.
- Each Scout in turn reads his list.
- The name tags are then removed and the specimens are revealed again for one minute.
- Once again the Scouts are asked to list what they see after the specimens are covered.

Variations;

- Scouts are asked to draw outlines of the specimens without writing the names and then tell the name as they read their list.
- Scouts are asked to list one or two visual clues to each specimen (size, shape, characteristics) without writing the name and then tell the name as they read their list.

This basic model can be used with;

- Animal tracks
- Animal pictures
- Knot boards
- First Aid Supplies (Scouts must tell how they are used as well as what they are.)

Endless variations readily present themselves, the Scouts themselves will come up with interesting ideas. This method is engaging, active and challenging but it can also be overdone. Recall that the goal is leading the Scouts to successfully comprehending the material, not frustrating them.

## Circle Up!

It may seem a fine point but the physical position and posture of the instructor and the Scouts is an important distinction between Scout instruction and other forms of instruction:

Neither the Scouts nor the instructor should be seated unless absolutely necessary. Keeping everyone on their feet in a circle, has several important advantages

- Standing requires more alertness than sitting.
- Scouts all have the same perspective when they are standing in a circle.
- Instructors can see all the Scouts faces, and the Scouts can see the instructor.
- Distractions are limited and easily dealt with if they arise.

- Long-winded instructors are less likely to be long-winded if they have to stand.

Once a Troop gets into the habit of instruction in a standing circle Scouts will automatically understand that the call to 'circle up!' means it is time to pay attention and, more importantly, actively participate in what is going on.

## **Preparation**

Good Scout instruction is based on the good preparation by the instructor. Instructors should begin with a clear goal, a thorough understanding of the subject and the resolve to keep the session active, focused and brief.

An instructor with a plan can always adjust to discoveries made during the session. Without a plan we are likely to digress, drift, yield to distractions and generally lose our way towards the goal of the session. A plan is not really a plan unless it is expressed in writing and the plan must include a list of all the gear required for instructing the particular skill.

Once an instructor has mastered some of these methods they should be able to prepare in minutes and present the subject by means of guided discovery, sometimes learning as much as the Scouts do.

On a personal note; if you tend towards long-winded rambling (as I do) a plan is even more important. One aid to keeping me focused is to hand one of the Scouts a stopwatch and tell them that I have exactly two minutes to talk. As you may imagine they enjoy having some control. They know that given unlimited time I can talk the legs off an iron pot.

## **Who Instructs?**

If adults are doing all the instruction they are denying their Scouts the opportunity to develop some important skills.

Our role is to empower our youth leadership to instruct by training them in the methods of Scout instruction. All of the skills and methods discussed here can be applied to instructing the methods themselves.

Gather your youth leadership together and use these methods to train them in Scout Instruction. Give them a lot of support and encouragement the first few times they instruct and they will quickly develop into an effective team. Once they have some mastery of the skills and intentions make it a practice to instruct only when invited to do so by your youth leadership.