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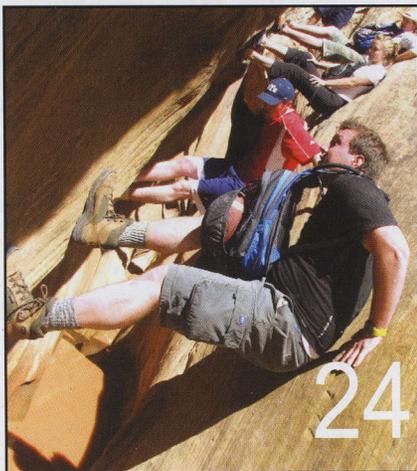
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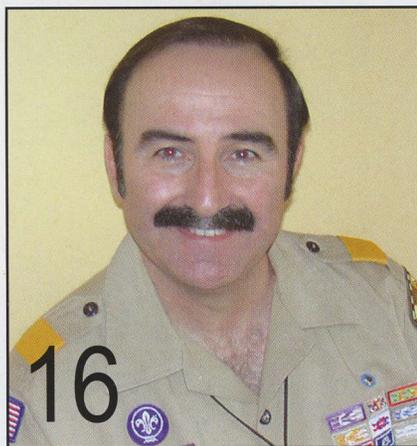
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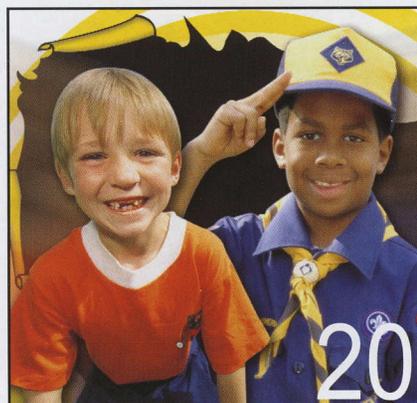
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# Are we really achieving the aims of Scouting?

**By Nathan A. Schaumleffel,  
Ph.D., CPRP & Scott Salmon**

With the 100th anniversary of the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) rapidly approaching, Scouts and Scouters, both young and old, are examining the organization's history and searching for ways to improve our beloved dynamic and ever-evolving youth development movement. As many of you know, the BSA's mission "is to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Law" (Boy Scouts of America [BSA], 2007a), while the aims of Scouting are character development, citizenship training, and personal fitness (BSA, 2007b). James E. West, as cited in Macleod, illustrated the main function of typical Scouting activities when he said, "this program holds the interest of the boy and makes possible the accomplishment of the real objective of scouting, which is character development and training for citizenship" (1983, p. 175).

In order to continue Scouting's evolution as a relevant and useful tool for youth development, it might be time to scientifically examine how well the mission and aims of Scouting are being met and how the BSA is training new and experienced adult leaders to use typical Scouting activities (e.g., camping, hiking, community service) to achieve the mission and aims. While scientific studies are commonplace in the recreation and youth leadership field, the Scouting community and researchers need

to scientifically document whether or not the developmental outcomes that Scouting claims to teach boys REALLY carries over to young, middle, and older adulthood. Does the youth development process magically take place through the process of participating in the average Scout troop or do Scouters need to intentionally facilitate typical Scouting activities to achieve the mission and aims of Scouting? Does a Scout remember how to tie a bowline at age 20, still attend church at age 30, remain active in his community at age 40, and remain physically fit when he reaches 65? In actuality, researchers have not scientifically answered this question yet.

The problem is that the BSA, or for that matter any other youth development organization, has not conducted any longitudinal research over a span of 10, 20, 30 or even 40 years or more. What is the difference between a 45 year old Eagle Scout, a 45 year old First-Class Scout, and a 45 year old who never was a Boy Scout in terms of character development, citizenship training, and personal fitness? In fact it might be impossible to evaluate the effect a few years of Scouting can have on the lifetime of an individual even with a well planned longitudinal study. Based on anecdotal evidence and our subjective observations, on average, there is little difference in the quality of character, level of civic engagement, or personal fitness of individuals who are Eagle Scouts, individuals who participated in Scouting, or individuals who never were in Scouting. Despite this, it is also our opinion that every boy and leader who participates in Scouting takes away something positive from the experience, and is a better person because of their experiences in the program. Our essential question is: how can we con-

tinue to improve Scouting so that the masses of boys who participate at any level, at any intensity, for any duration, become better in terms of character, civic engagement, and personal fitness than a boy who was never in Scouting?

Besides the Boy Scouts, numerous researchers affiliated with universities, foundations, other nonprofit organizations, and government agencies are asking if their youth development programs have a lasting effect on youth as they progress into and through adulthood. It is our opinion that the BSA and other youth organizations are not having as prolonged of a positive effect on youth as we would like to think we are having on the average boy who participates in Scouting for an average amount of time at an average intensity level. It is clear that Scouting does have a positive effect on a percentage of youth who participate, but the question remains: what percentage of youth does Scouting positively effect and for how long does that positive effect last into adulthood? If our opinion holds true, that is that Scouting can increase the positive effect on boys into adulthood, then the BSA needs to find and implement tangible strategies to increase the prolonged effect. The key to cognitively connecting typical Scouting activities to the BSA's developmental aims and mission to life outside of Scouting and into older adulthood is for adult leaders to integrate intentional transfer of learning strategies.

The appropriate and effective use of transfer of learning skills takes educated, talented, and experienced Scouters who are in constant direct contact with youth. Unfortunately, the adult leaders with the most contact time with Scouts are not necessarily the veteran Scouters and Wood Badgers who are more likely to have some understanding of transfer of learning, but

the parent of a Tenderfoot Scout who somewhat unwillingly agreed to serve as an adult leader so that the boys could participate. These new and inexperienced leaders are the most uninvested and least trained, and they most likely have the most contact with the most Scouts, on average, across the United States.

Currently, the BSA does an excellent job of training Scouters in technical skills (e.g., lighting a camp stove, tying knots) and risk management (e.g., youth protection, safe swim defense). However, the BSA does not adequately train adult leaders, especially new adult leaders, in transfer of learning skills. Improving adult leaders' skills in transfer of learning should improve Scouting's ability to make the average 45 year old former Scout's character development, citizenship training, and personal fitness significantly more positive than a 45 year old man who was never a Scout.

### What is Transfer of Learning?

Transfer of learning, a cornerstone of experiential education, refers to the ability to apply what one learns in different contexts and recognize and extend that learning to new situations (Haskell, 2001). In other words, can a Scout transfer the process of decision making on where to set up camp to making a decision on whether or not to use drugs, alcohol, or have premarital sex later in life? The youth development movement has moved the skill of learning transfer to the forefront of critical skills for effective Scout leaders. The long-term goal for learning transfer is to make the positive outcomes or benefits of youth development programs (i.e. the aims of Scouting) last beyond the completion of the program (Haas & Sibthorp, 2004). By making the benefits last, the goal is long-term behavioral change and skill development of youth as they progress toward and through adulthood.

There are three types of learning transfer where previously learned concepts are applied to new settings: near, far, and metaphoric (Haas & Sibthorp, 2004). Near learning transfer is when the context of application is similar to where the skill was developed, while far learning transfer is when the context of application is very different from the original learning context (Haas & Sibthorp, 2004). The third type of learning transfer is metaphoric or analogical (Gass & Priest, 1993; Haas & Sibthorp,

2004; Haskell, 2001). Metaphoric learning transfer strives to achieve learning transfer through the use of metaphors or analogies (Bernardo, 2001; Gass & Priest, 1993; Haas & Sibthorp, 2004; Thompson, Gentner, & Loewenstein, 2000). "The use of metaphors or analogies is one technique that seems to assist participants in making these cognitive connections and understanding parallels that are less obvious" (Haas & Sibthorp, 2004, p. 29).

Without a transfer of learning element, experiences are completed and then easily forgotten. Transfer of learning turns a stand alone activity into one which will be remembered and reflected upon in a future situation with similar attributes. Transfer of learning cannot be expected to simply just occur by going camping or advancing in rank, but it must be intentionally integrated as part of the Scouting experience. As an adult leader, successfully transferring learning is difficult, but with effective training it can be taught and implemented to increase the positive effect of Scouting and make the positive effect last longer into adulthood.

### Strategies to Transfer Learning

Veteran Scout leaders might recognize transfer of learning as an element crucial to the COPE program found at many summer camps, as well as many high adventure activities Scouts participate in each year. It is vital to understand that transfer of learning is effective not only in high adventure and other older Scout programs, but also at mainstream weekly troop and patrol meetings, hikes, campouts, service projects, and other events. Despite the fact that deliberate transfer of learning is not currently a fully integrated component of Scouting (especially in adult leader training), several of the traditional elements of Scouting serve to allow a certain amount of reflection and application of lessons learned at Scouting activities. Moreover, new adult leaders need to be educated as to how typical Scouting activities can be connected to achieving the mission and aims of Scouting. Knapp (1999) organized experiential education activities into different strategies to transfer learning. For example, instructional methods include thinking and discussion (e.g., problem posing), solo reflection (e.g., providing quotes for reflection), writing to connect (e.g., journaling), observance and ceremonies (e.g., Order of the Arrow), codes of ethics (e.g., Scout Oath and Law), mentors (e.g., Assistant Scoutmasters),

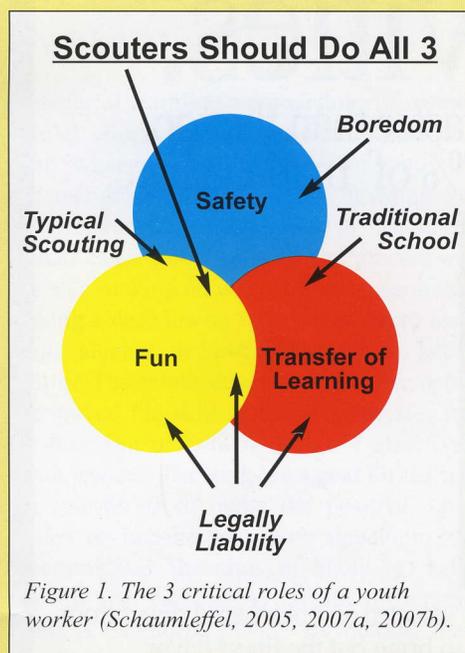
action projects (e.g., service and Eagle Scout Projects), creating beauty (e.g., creating litter sculptures), literature springboards (e.g., writing stories), and games and simulations (e.g., inventing games that highlights the target issue) (Knapp, 1999). Other strategies to transfer learning include questioning, goal setting, teachable moments, visualization, feedback, and self monitoring.

Most adult leaders are probably familiar with at least one common form of transfer of learning known as debriefing. Many Scouters have experienced debriefing while on a Philmont trek when the Ranger leads Thorns and Roses, a reflective group discussion, at the end of each day on the trail. It is a process where the group leader asks open-ended questions to the group about the successes and failures of the day with the goal of transferring learning to other situations. While debriefing is widely utilized in experiential education, it is not the only learning transfer strategy the BSA should strive to implement. In fact, recent research by Brown (2004) suggests that debriefing can give the leader too much control and can prevent Scouts from benefiting fully from an experience, because leaders often frame an experience from their own perspective instead of the participants'. For example, if a patrol of Scouts just completed cooking a meal in which they burned the cooking surface, an adult leader might scold the patrol members for ruining equipment instead of asking open-ended questions regarding what went wrong from the patrol's point of view. The point of view of the leader often has more of an impact on the processing session than the experiences of the participants. Therefore, when integrating transfer of learning into Scouting, steps must be taken to use a multitude of learning transfer techniques, not solely debriefing.

### Integrating Transfer of Learning into Scouting

The model below (Figure 1) illustrates the three key roles of Scout leaders: 1) maintaining physical and emotional safety, 2) fostering fun, and 3) using transfer of learning strategies to achieve developmental outcomes (i.e., the mission and aims of Scouting) (Schaumleffel, 2005, 2007a, 2007b). Each circle represents one of these vital areas (safety, fun, and transfer of learning). Research has found that youth program leaders can do a fair to excellent job of

maintaining safety and fostering fun concurrently, but a typically poor job of simultaneously maintaining safety, fostering fun, and achieving developmental outcomes (Schaumleffel, 2005). Programs without a safety element, both physical and emotional, open themselves up to legal liability. Programs that are just safe tend to result in participants leaving because they are not being engaged or having fun (i.e. boredom). A combination of safety and fun serves as low cost babysitting, which is fine if Scouting was not an outcome-based program. However, Scouting claims to achieve youth development outcomes and if programs are only safe and fun, then we have failed as an organization. For Scouting to be an effective tool to develop character and citizenship, and improve personal fitness in youth, Scouters must simultaneously lead programs that are safe, fun, and developmentally beneficial (Schaumleffel, 2005, 2007a, 2007b).



Baden-Powell intuitively understood the concept of experiential education when he created the Scouting program. For example, B-P asserted that “the Object of a camp is (a) to meet the boy’s desire for the open-air life of the scout, and (b) to put him completely in the hands of his Scoutmaster for a definite period for individual training in character and initiative and in physical and moral development” (Baden-Powell, 1979, p. 9). The boys’ desire for the “open-air life” is represented in the Fun circle of the diagram, while the Scoutmaster ensures the safety of the Scout, and just as importantly facilitates physical, moral, and citizenship development. The BSA does an excellent

job at training adult leaders in the fun and safety aspects of this model, but currently there is no training for adult leaders, even in the highly respected Wood Badge curriculum, in transfer of learning as a core component of everyday Scouting. Baden-Powell imagined a program where the developmental aims fit seamlessly with the outdoor aspects of Scouting. B-P wrote, “many Scoutmasters who value the moral side of our training are almost inclined to undervalue the importance of the camp, but the camp is everything to the boys. We have to appeal to their enthusiasm and tastes in the first place, if we are ever going to do any good in educating them” (Baden-Powell, 1979, p. 21). The only BSA program which includes training on intentionally transferring learning is the COPE program, which is essentially an experiential education course placed within the BSA, and at some of the high adventure programs (e.g., Philmont). We are proposing a nationwide integration at the troop level, where Scout leaders will utilize transfer of learning strategies each and every time they interact with Scouts of all ages to increase the level of citizenship, character, and personal fitness.

There are several places that exist in the Scouting program that seem tailor-made to have a transfer of learning strategy infused into the activity. Although we cannot fully describe how to do transfer of learning in this article, we will provide a few examples. For example, Scoutmaster conferences are a perfect setting to apply the principles of learning transfer. Scoutmasters could have Scouts up for rank advancement journal about their most significant experiences at their current rank, and how they can apply those experiences or avoid those same mistakes in the future. Leadership styles and skills can be analyzed by both boy and adult, and the Scoutmaster can feel more comfortable sending a Scout to a board of review if they have shown their ability to grow and integrate the principles of Scouting into their lifestyles and daily choices.

Another area for learning transfer to be integrated into is the patrol method. Patrols are of appropriate size and composition to serve as the base group to implement a variety of transfer of learning strategies, because most traditional Scouting activities are designed around the patrol method and each unit has an adult leader (typically an Assistant Scoutmaster) who advises the group. It is our recommendation that the patrol advi-

sor’s role be expanded to implement regular, appropriate, and intentional transfer of learning techniques to assist Scouts in cognitively connecting activities to the aims of Scouting. Patrol advisors should be willing to complete an online training session on transfer of learning theory and participate in local training opportunities. The combination of on-line and local training on transfer of learning skills could also be an elective option for the Adult Leader Training Award. A pilot program and research project could be launched through a partnership between Indiana State University and a local council to measure the effect of integrating transfer of learning skills into adult leader training and the effectiveness of using transfer of learning skills in achieving the three primary aims of Scouting.

The goal of this article is not to criticize Scouting, but to get paid and volunteer Scouters to critically think about the issue of REALLY making the benefits of Scouting last into young, middle, and older adulthood. We know Scouting can develop youth, but the question remains: Is Scouting having a lasting effect on, not only Eagle Scouts, but on the hundreds of thousands of youth who join and participate for only a few years? We cannot assume that youth are connecting the tools of camping, service, advancement, and other activities to learning something new and apply it to life outside of Scouting now or 40 years in the future. We also cannot assume that the cognitive connection is embedded in participating in Scouting activities.

The BSA needs to more effectively train volunteer leaders and camp staff members on how to intentionally process and facilitate Scouting activities, so that we actually achieve the mission and aims of the Scouting movement. To better train adult leaders in the complex skill of learning transfer, the National Council needs to convene a committee of experiential education experts to develop a strategy to integrate transfer of learning into all Scouting programs, activities, and trainings. Moreover, we challenge the BSA to comprehensively integrate transfer of learning strategies into all adult leader training, by beginning with training modules for Assistant Scoutmasters assigned to be patrol advisors. Furthermore, we encourage Scouting to reconnect more fully with the youth development movement, in practice, program, and research, outside of the Scouting tradition to not only learn from other agencies, but to contribute

to the modern youth development movement. Scouting could benefit by having a more integrated relationship with the American Camp Association, the Association for Experiential Education, the Association for Outdoor Recreation and Education, and other youth development and experiential education agencies. The early leaders of Scouting believed in using the outdoors as a context to achieve developmental outcomes 100 years ago. The Boy Scouts of America has the opportunity to improve itself in the spirit of these visionaries by beginning the conversation on transfer of learning now.

### Resources for Scouters to Learn More About Transfer of Learning and Youth Development

American Camp Association: <http://www.acacamps.org/>  
 Association for Experiential Education: <http://www.aee.org/>  
 Association for Outdoor Recreation and Education: <http://www.aore.org/>  
 In Accord with Nature by Dr. Clifford Knapp: <http://eric.ed.gov/> (Available in Full-Text)

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