

Introduction to Special Volume

Teaching, learning and Australian archaeology

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This volume is based on papers and posters presented at the 2004 Australian Archaeological Association Annual Conference held at the University of New England, Armidale, plus some additional contributions. In a session called 'Learning Archaeology' organised by Wendy Beck, Martin Gibbs and one of us (SC) contributors were asked to address the following questions: How do we learn archaeology? What can we learn from archaeology? What are some links between learning, teaching, research and professional practice? Learning was defined not only as formalised teaching in the class or field, but included learning through practice, learning for ourselves, and learning and teaching through communicating our results and knowledge to others.

Papers which addressed the conference theme of 'Networks and Narratives' were especially welcome, however, any presentation relevant to the topic was encouraged. The only provisos were that papers must move beyond the purely anecdotal and descriptive, place teaching and learning into some broader theoretical framework and include analysis and discussion of some data or evidence to support their conclusions. Presenters were also asked to address issues of broad concern or interest to Australian archaeology.

Australian universities now usually require lecturers to obtain at least some basic training in teaching and learning. Achievements and publications in teaching and learning are now formally recognised by university promotions committees and performance management reviews, although they still attract lower ranking and funding than research. Such developments stem in part from managerial practices and philosophies linked to government funding policies which now dominate university business and consequently the way we view and talk about teaching and learning in Australia, the United Kingdom and beyond. Hamilakis (2004) argues that while such practices are presented as 'neutral' they are in fact highly politicised with wide implications for archaeological practice.

Cuts in government funding to higher education and changes in university management and organisational structures present significant challenges to archaeology teaching and learning, research and professional practice (Colley 2004). However, a positive outcome is that university lecturers in Australia are now encouraged to take a more focused research interest in their teaching. Universities recognise scholarship in teaching and learning as a legitimate activity, even if such work is still less valued than other types of research.

Hopefully this will result in the production of more high quality research and published articles of the kind presented

here. We also hope this work will interest the majority of archaeologists who don't normally 'teach' as part of their job and act to further break down existing perceptions that teaching is an unproblematic and mundane topic which only concerns a few university lecturers and those of us directly involved in public education. On the contrary we argue that teaching and learning are integral to archaeological practice and the production of archaeological knowledge. As professionals we are all involved in learning when we do archaeology and conduct research; as soon as we communicate about our work to others we are engaged in teaching. Papers in this volume demonstrate this point.

Public education, professional training and university teaching and learning have interested at least some Australian archaeologists for some years and the Australian Archaeological Association has provided key support here. In 1980 David Frankel edited a special section of *Australian Archaeology* on 'Education and training in prehistory and archaeology in Australia' which reported on a wide range of archaeology teaching and learning issues, including adult education, Indigenous engagement and the need to balance technical and broad conceptual skills as part of a broad curriculum. Since then *Australian Archaeology* has published regular contributions relevant to these topics including overviews and updates of the current status of teaching and research in university departments (e.g. Feary 1994; Fredericksen and Walters 2002; Hall 1982) as well as research articles (e.g. Colley 2003; Smith et al. 1992; Staniforth 2000).

In 2002 the first joint national Australian archaeology conference representing the three primary associations – the Australian Archaeological Association (AAA), Australasian Society for Historical Archaeology (ASHA) and Australasian Institute for Maritime Archaeology (AIMA) – was organised by James Cook University, Townsville. Public education, professional training and university teaching and learning were major plenary themes. An important outcome of the conference was the foundation of the AAA Teaching and Learning Subcommittee (now subsumed under the Australian Joint Interim Standing Committee on Archaeology Teaching and Learning) in collaboration with AIMA, ASHA and the Australian Association of Consulting Archaeologists Inc. (AACAI). In September 2003 the committee organised a National Archaeology Teaching and Learning Workshop held at Redfern in Sydney. This was attended by over 50 delegates including university lecturers, students, consultants, heritage managers, and public educators. The workshop helped define key challenges for teaching, learning and training given recent changes to the Australian university system. Probably because the workshop was co-sponsored and dominated by heritage-industry based archaeologists, most of the discussion focused on a perceived gap in professional and practical work skills training of university graduates intending to work in consultancy practice (Colley 2004).

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One result of the National Archaeology Teaching and Learning Workshop was agreement on the Redfern Archaeology Teaching (RAT) Charter which set out an agenda for future developments and activities to improve archaeology teaching and learning outcomes. The charter calls for gathering of reliable data on teaching, learning and training for benchmarking, using the United Kingdom experience as a starting point to develop models appropriate for Australia. It also calls for greater cooperation between universities, government and industry for teaching and learning, and coordination of vocational experience for students and new graduates.

A major issue for university lecturers is knowing how to accommodate the training demands of people who employ archaeology graduates. It is widely acknowledged that university education cannot provide students with every skill they need for archaeological employment. There is also significant disagreement about whether universities should aim to train graduates for such work when the majority of students are not interested in and never will work as archaeologists. However, if universities and the profession are to develop graduate training programmes it is essential to know which organisations in Australia employ archaeologists, how big the job market actually is, and what kinds of work potential archaeologists need training for. Until now we have had almost no data on the size and shape of the archaeology profession in Australia. Taking guidance from similar studies conducted in the United Kingdom by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (Aitchison and Edwards 2003) and the United States by the Society for American Archaeology (Zeder 1997), one of us (SU) with colleagues Stephen Nichols and Cameo Dalley (Ulm et al. 2005) developed a questionnaire survey which was widely circulated in 2005. Here they present results from the survey relevant to teaching, learning and professional training issues. While findings generally confirm those of previous surveys, the large sample size enables detailed characterisation of important aspects of the archaeological workplace. An analysis of skill sets and skill gaps demonstrates that the training of many professionals left significant gaps in several core skill and knowledge areas which are remarkably consistent across industry sectors. A major theme emerging from the survey is an urgent need to facilitate greater involvement of industry groups, the private, government and museum sectors and Indigenous groups in the archaeology teaching and learning design and management process. These findings can be used to inform curriculum development and the exploration of new archaeology teaching and learning models that are more attuned to the contemporary Australian archaeological workplace.

Much heat has been generated in discussions about graduate training. Martin Gibbs, David Roe and Denis Gojak (2005) tackle this topical and controversial subject in their paper on 'Useless graduates?' based on questionnaire data from the 2002 Townsville AAA/ASHA/AIMA conference and postings to the AUSARCH-L listserv. They suggest development of a list of core skills and standards for both student and professional training as the first step towards some solutions, but point to dangers in pursuing an overly specialised undergraduate curriculum.

Benchmarking is a process which Australian university managers are now starting to impose on universities. Wendy Beck and Jane Balme (2005) compare the content and

standards of archaeology honours degrees offered by different Australian universities. The honours degree is still seen by Australian archaeologists as the fundamental level of academic achievement required to gain entry to professional archaeology and to higher research degrees. Their paper shows that different universities have significant variations in honours degrees which students and employers need to be aware of, and that expectations and standards are poorly defined. They suggest that these variations need to be addressed through standardisation and benchmarking practices, similar to those implemented in British universities.

Despite dissatisfaction with the practical skill base of graduates, Australian university departments do still teach courses in archaeological practical skills. Two papers in this volume discuss fieldwork teaching and learning experiences. Clayton Fredericksen (2005) presents a case study of the Fannie Bay Gaol undergraduate field school at Charles Darwin University. He discusses reasons why, after initial enthusiasm and healthy enrolments, student interest in the field school declined over several years. He concludes that most undergraduates studying archaeology at university are not particularly interested in learning archaeological field principles but are rather seeking novel and interesting experiences. He argues that fieldwork training should be aimed at students further into their degree programmes who are more committed to becoming archaeologists.

Jay Hall, Susan O'Connor, Jonathan Prangnell and Tam Smith (2005) discuss problem-based learning of archaeological excavation methods on campus at the University of Queensland through the TARDIS, a simulated multi-component archaeological site. This approach provides students with a safe learning environment and exposure to a wide range of simulated fieldwork experiences and materials relevant to worldwide archaeology. It also circumvents ethical and practical problems which preclude large numbers of undergraduate students learning excavation on real Aboriginal sites. Reflecting on mistakes is part of the learning process as discussed here through analysis of data on student recording errors.

Another important component of the RAT charter is the promotion of the archaeological story to publics that own and relate to that archaeology. Australian archaeologists have been collaborating with Indigenous communities over fieldwork for some time now which has resulted in the development of new practices of community archaeology which increasingly also involve non-Indigenous sites (e.g. Greer et al. 2002). The Australian Archaeological Association has been active in public education and outreach programmes through its support for National Archaeology Week and the activities of its media officer, resulting in a wide range of initiatives, including press releases, public lectures, school liaison programmes etc. Archaeological research and consultancy projects commonly include public education activities and result in products aimed at the public (displays, videos, multi-media, television programmes) as well as technical reports and publications aimed at peers.

Yet there is still concern that Australians are more interested in archaeology overseas than in Australia. This perception is supported by data discussed by Balme and Wilson (2004) which demonstrate basic misunderstandings

of and lack of interest in Australian archaeology among a sample of educated young people in Western Australia.

Public attitudes and understandings are important to university teaching and learning, not least because potential students are members of the public viewed as ‘consumers’ to whom universities now ‘sell’ degree courses under current funding models. If more students prefer to buy courses on archaeology in ancient Egypt and Pompeii, for example, rather than Indigenous Australian and historical archaeology, this threatens the viability of teaching departments offering Australian content and exacerbates ‘professional training’ issues. This issue is also relevant to the profession because some archaeology students who don’t eventually work in the discipline may in future become influential members of the public so their understanding of and attitude towards Australian archaeology is also important.

Here one of us (Colley 2005) presents results from a qualitative questionnaire survey of University of Sydney undergraduates which asked what had attracted them to archaeology in the first place and how their attitudes had changed since university. The results support Balme and Wilson’s (2004) conclusions that young people know more about overseas than Australian archaeology. This is partly due to education in schools which primarily teaches archaeology relevant to Old World ancient history and classical civilisations. Even though most students study archaeology for general interest, the survey revealed significant changes in attitude towards the subject following introductory courses, including some increased interest in Australian and other areas of archaeological practice.

Getting more Australian archaeology into schools should be an important priority for our profession. Tim Owen and Jody Steele (2005) report on a successful public archaeology programme at the Fern Avenue site (an early nineteenth century jam factory) in Adelaide. The primary school component of the programme involved students and teachers in both ‘hands-on’ and classroom-based activities. Owen and Steele report on the teaching and learning process and also use data collected from the students to comment on understanding and perceptions of archaeology in general, and Australian archaeology in particular, among this important group of the future adult public.

Changing the school syllabus requirements in each state to include more archaeology relevant to Australia would support and build on the educational impact of individual schools programmes. Stephen Nichols, Jonathan Prangnell and Michael Haslam (2005) analyse the current Queensland Education Studies of Society and Environment syllabus and show opportunities where Australian archaeology could be usefully incorporated in the curricula of both primary and secondary schools. They propose a public outreach strategy for engaging the Queensland school curriculum which they tested via school programmes at the historic Toowong Cemetery in Brisbane and the site of an historic sawmill at Mill Point in southeast Queensland’s Sunshine Coast region.

The role of narratives in archaeological interpretation is a topical area of archaeological theory internationally (e.g. Pluciennik 1999; Praetzellis 1998) and more locally (e.g. Torrence and Clarke 2000). ‘Better storytelling’ is offered as one solution to engaging more of the Australian public with local archaeology (e.g. Mackay and Karskens 1999). The ‘Networks and Narratives’ theme of the 2004 AAA

Annual Conference reflected this interest. Drawing on theories of narrative from areas of literary theory, history and educational studies as well as archaeology Catherine Clarke’s (2005) paper discusses the central role of narratives in both learning and in presenting Australian archaeology to the wider public. Clarke argues that narratives allow a more reflective archaeology and create spaces for different perspectives of the past.

In 1980 Isabel McBryde published a paper the title of which referred to ‘mechanick trades in the ivory tower’. This was written from a university perspective, which at the time represented a majority view, in response to issues of training raised by a small but growing body of consulting and professional archaeologists whose jobs had been created by the successive introduction of heritage legislation from the 1960s. For a long time ‘cultural heritage management’ archaeologists and their concerns were relegated to the margins of an academic discipline dominated by university and museum-based ‘research’ archaeologists who sometimes had differing and strong views on the ‘proper’ aims of Australian archaeology (e.g. Bowdler 1986). So much has changed since then. In particular ‘cultural heritage management’ archaeologists now make up the majority of the Australian archaeology profession with university and museum-based archaeologists being the minority. Sharp boundaries between ‘ivory tower’ academic research, university teaching and the wider profession no longer make sense. As papers presented in this volume show, different stakeholders in Australian archaeology including ‘academics’, ‘professionals’ and various ‘publics’ share common interests in a range of disciplinary practices of which teaching and learning are core components. Given the very public nature of contemporary archaeology in Australia and elsewhere (Merriman 2004), it is no surprise that different groups have different and often contradictory perspectives on teaching and learning. If such differences of opinion stimulate further discussion, more educational activities and high quality research in areas of archaeological teaching and learning, this can only be a good thing.

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