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INTRODUCTION The 'Other Grand Challenge': Learning and Sharing in Archaeological Education and Pedagogy

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Abstract

This article serves as an introduction to a special issue titled “The ‘Other Grand Challenge’: Learning and Sharing in Archaeological Education and Pedagogy.” In this introductory article, I briefly discuss the history of university-level archaeological education in Canada, primarily in light of considerations of accessibility and ethics. I then introduce the focus of the conference session I co-organized—dealing with grand challenges for the future of archaeological education and pedagogy, which forms the foundation for this special issue—inspired by a personal existential crisis and the intriguing role of stories and storytelling in archaeological education. The resources presented in this special issue include a series of collaborative articles and resulting discussion, as well as videos of original conference presentations (link in this introduction), all of which relate experiential stories of archaeological education and pedagogy and the grand challenges to come.

Introduction

In November of 2017, the Chacmool Archaeology Association and the Department of Anthropology & Archaeology at the University of Calgary hosted a conference titled *Chacmool at 50: The Past, Present, and Future of Archaeology*. At that time, I had recently transitioned from teaching at a regular bricks-and-mortar university to teaching for Athabasca University (AU)—Canada’s open online university and one of Alberta’s four comprehensive academic and research universities.¹ As the sole archaeologist on faculty, I had spent much of my first couple of years at AU struggling with the current state of archaeological pedagogy and education; in fact, I might even admit that I was experiencing something of an existential crisis. In particular, my struggle related to issues of accessibility and ethical considerations in a digital world, and the future of archaeological education and pedagogy in this light (not surprising as I found myself dumped into an entirely new medium of instruction with which I was mostly unfamiliar). Archaeological education and pedagogy, at any level and through any medium, is complex—not only in how it actually plays out but also in the simple perception of the student experience. In this article, I briefly discuss the history of university-level archaeological education in Canada,² primarily in light of my considerations of accessibility and ethics. I then introduce the focus of the conference session I co-organized—dealing with grand challenges for the future of archaeological education and pedagogy, which forms the foundation for this special issue—inspired by my aforementioned existential crisis and the intriguing role of stories and storytelling in archaeological education. The resources presented in this special issue include a series

of collaborative articles and the resulting discussions, as well as videos of original conference presentations, all of which relate experiential stories of archaeological education and pedagogy and the grand challenges to come.

Canadian Academic Archaeology

Prior to 1967 (the start of the annual Chacmool Archaeology Conference and Canada's centennial year), any archaeological education that could be accessed at the university level in Canada (there were few offerings), was very much focused on the past as dead—i.e., not an active element in society today—and served primarily as a tool of colonialism (Kelley and Klimko 1998). Most teaching focused heavily on the great civilizations—in particular, examining elite culture, which reflected the predominantly elite, white, male student body—and supported many of the social-evolutionary perspectives that were in vogue at the time (Noble 1972; Noble et al. 2007). Learning actual techniques of the field typically involved going out on research projects with white male professors—an honor accorded but a few and primarily white men (Latta et al. 1998). Most public access to archaeology was through books, personal collections, and some of the first local and provincial museums, plus some early archaeological societies.

The late 1960s and 70s are considered by many to be the boom years in Canadian archaeological education, when we see the development and expansion of most university and museum programs and more public funding for archaeological research (Jalbert 2019). These new programs required more and more PhD-trained archaeologists—of which we had relatively few in Canada—so programs were built using primarily white Americans and Europeans (again, mostly men) or American-trained individuals, which is a trend that continues to some degree today (Forbis 1993; MacNeish 1998; Park 1998; Reese-Taylor 2012). Much of this big push in the development of archaeology programs and research funding was tied directly to the centennial celebrations; thus, the use of archaeology went from being a tool of colonialism to now more fully supporting a young nation-state on the verge of constructing its own multicultural narrative of identity (Day 2000; Kelley and Klimko 1998; Klimko 1998). These tensions of colonialism and nationalism continue to be felt in the discipline today and are the realities within which we operate as archaeologists and academics. It is in the 1970s that we also saw the greatest growth in the profession through provincial agencies charged with cultural resource management programs and commercial consulting firms (Ferris 1998); archaeology was now seen to require professional training for work beyond research (or, as my great-grandfather called the discipline, “glorified ditch digging”). This requirement for the training of professional archaeologists beyond the academe still exists, but has often faced significant criticism in traditional university programs (Aitchison 2004; Colley 2004; see Welch and

Corbishley, this issue). At this time, we also began to see a true shift from a culture historical to processual framework in the discipline, with more attention paid to the instruction of method (including new absolute dating techniques), theory, and even some early and explicit instruction on ethics (Trigger 1998). The old lecture-based, culture-history courses did not disappear; in fact, they represent the core of many programs to this day.

In the 1980s/90s, along with critical theoretical developments, instruction and public engagement began to focus on what has been termed the “excluded past” or “people without history”—attempting to bring into focus those who were missing from traditional archaeological narratives, such as commoners, women, and oral-history based societies (see Kristensen et al., this issue). Unfortunately, just as the purview of archaeology was expanding, including the development of more field school and public experiential learning opportunities (see Zutter and Grekul, this issue), the downsizing of programs and public funding support was initiated—a trend we live with to this day (Lea and Smardz 2000). At this time, we started to witness greater involvement of Indigenous communities within archaeological research consultation, and a general expansion of considerations of ethics and legislation within the broader Canadian archaeological community (Burley 1994; Rosenswig 1997; Wylie 1997). Such elements took a less direct route within the realm of education and pedagogy itself, related directly to the colonial structure in which the discipline and its instruction is situated, and the often negative sentiments regarding archaeology and the broader field of anthropology within Indigenous communities (Watkins 2005; see Supernant, this issue).

At the start of the 21st century, the period in which I formally entered the educational world of archaeology as a university student, we continued to expand on our explorations and theorizing of the excluded past, with a renewed focus on the decolonizing of the discipline around the world (Hamilakis 2004; King 2016; McNiven and Russell 2005), particularly following Canada’s 150th anniversary in 2017—including introducing greater consideration for issues of accessibility and technology-enabled learning (see Peuramaki-Brown et al., this issue); expanding the foci of acceptable research parameters to include a greater promotion of oral history and traditional ecological knowledge, and general collaboration and consultation beyond our discipline; experiential learning opportunities that include descendant communities and other previously marginalized groups; communication and outreach that acknowledge the importance of public access to the results of publicly funded archaeology; the ethical considerations of the discipline; and a renewed consideration of the structure of archaeological education/pedagogy and associated resources. A focus on these topics and a critical consideration of the stories of our discipline’s history will likely continue in an even more vociferous fashion over the next 50 years in Canada and throughout the world.

Stories and Storytelling in Archaeology: The Idea for a Session

As part of my contemplation of the history of academic archaeological education and pedagogy in Canada, I found myself learning more about (and recognizing the power of) stories and storytelling, and how it could be (and has been) leveraged as a powerful tool when used responsibly in our discipline (e.g. Clarke 2004; Gibb 2000; Livingstone et al. 2016; Praetzellis 1998, 2014; Rockman and Maase 2017). Stories are important, whether oral or written, both to who we are as individual researchers/ teachers as well as to our learners in their understanding of the past in general and its place in our world today (Gibb 2000). Our ability to tell our own stories is as important, if not more so, as the ability and privilege of telling or retelling the stories of others. Stories serve to disarm the listener, and even the storyteller, and help to create an experience of trust and respect (King 2003; Lowenthal and Dunlap 2010).

The concept of storytelling (and resulting storywork) is best demonstrated in the Indigenous teaching of “Hands Back, Hands Forward,” from the late Musqueam elder Dr. Vincent Stogan, which has been extensively shared through the works of Dr. Jo-ann Archibald (1999, 2008) of the Department of Educational Studies, University of British Columbia. Archibald relates the gatherings she attended with Dr. Stogan, in which he would have participants form a circle in order to share good words and thoughts to establish a comfortable environment before beginning their work. In the circle, they would extend the left palm upwards, to symbolize reaching back to receive teachings (knowledge and values) from the Ancestors and those who travelled before them. They were then given the challenge and opportunity to put these teachings into their everyday lives. They then had the responsibility to pass those teachings on to others, which is visualized with the right palm downwards. I find this teaching to be inspiring and extremely relevant in the field of archaeology where we are constantly reaching into the past (into the ground) to receive the clues or cues for the stories of our ancestors (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) and their worlds—or in many cases, listening and talking with Elders to hear their stories of the past—and then sharing with those around us and teaching our students to do the same.

As a result of this new-found appreciation for stories and my struggles with contemplating the future of archaeological education and pedagogy (and my position within it), I decided to co-organize an invited session for the conference, along with my friend and colleague C. Mathew Saunders who is a high school teacher in the US with a background in archaeology. We invited friends and colleagues who have long traveled within the discipline or whose travels were just beginning, originating from both academic and non-academic circles, to come and share their archaeological stories as they pertained to their own honest (both the good and the bad) experiences in archaeological education and pedagogy. Our session was entitled “The ‘Other Grand Challenge’: Archaeological Education & Pedagogy in the Next 50 Years,” which was

given financial support from the AU Office of the VP Research, the Calgary Finlandia Cultural Association, and American Foreign Academic Research, to bring in speakers from around the world, including 17 presenters—seven women and ten men—from Canada (Yukon, British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario), USA, England, and Finland.

In addition to the sharing of stories, the session was also inspired by the now well-known (and well-cited) “Grand Challenges for Archaeology” article by Kintigh and colleagues (2014), which was based on a crowdsourced survey of archaeologists regarding their views on the next great challenges facing our discipline. Two major groups of issues were identified: 1) targeted scientific questions and 2) methodological issues and needs. The article focused on the former, with the ‘Other Grand Challenge’ consisting of issues such as deficiencies in training and the need for more public education. Participants in our session were asked to ponder the future of archaeological education and pedagogy, and the fact that one of the most important capacities of any discipline is the ability to adapt to relevant forces: internal forces such as emerging skills, visions, conflicts, resources, etc., and external forces such as changing demographics, societal values, new technologies, etc. Being responsive to the critical issues of our day in ways that bring prehistory and history into a vital relationship with the present while actively engaging citizens, helps to justify the public funding of archaeology and its teachings. What could the future of archaeological education and pedagogy be like and what will it be like? These were recognized as two important avenues of consideration, both in need of exploration.

Following our two-part (six-hour) session, participants met for a three-hour working group session—briefly naming ourselves the ECHO (Education Communication Heritage Outreach) Archaeology Group. During our working group session, we discussed our presentations and a possible way of further sharing our stories, experiences, and ideas with others. Because all of the session presentations, save one, were to be recorded and made available openly via YouTube,³ we decided that our further work would be to understand where our presentations overlapped and how we could work together in teams to produce an additional, open-access resource addressing the aforementioned challenge questions. This led to the formation of five teams producing five new articles, each dealing with a specific grand challenge area, and a sixth article discussing and framing the outcomes of both the session and the article collaborations.

The working group led us to outline a series of grand challenges and associated questions to guide our explorations, which became the foundation for each of the main articles in this special issue:

- Grand Challenge No. 1: Truth and Reconciliation
 - Guiding question: How should the recommendations of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions impact and transform archaeological education and pedagogy?
 - Kisha Supernant “Archaeological Pedagogy, Indigenous Histories, and Reconciliation in Canada.”
- Grand Challenge No. 2: Experiential Learning
 - Guiding question: How do we maintain and enhance the hands-on and learning-from-place elements within archaeological education and leverage such elements to bridge the divide between archaeology and the public?
 - Cynthia Zutter and Christie Grekul “Public Archaeology Internships and Partnerships: The Value of Experiential Education.”
- Grand Challenge No. 3: Digital Archaeology
 - Guiding question: How do we navigate the increasing pressure for technology-enabled distance/remote learning in archaeology?
 - Meaghan M. Peuramaki-Brown, Shawn G. Morton, Oula Seitsonen, Chris Sims, and Dave Blaine “Technology-Enabled Learning in Archaeology.”
- Grand Challenge No. 4: Curriculum Design
 - Guiding question: Where do undergraduate and graduate training currently stand when so little is available for academic careers in archaeology, and how do we adapt our curricula to train students who can help create solutions to many of our world’s problems?
 - John R. Welch and Michael Corbishley “Curriculum Matters: Case Studies from Canada and the UK.”
- Grand Challenge No. 5: Communication
 - Guiding question: What are the roles and responsibilities of academics, professional archaeologists, museum curators, and science journalists in archaeology communication?
 - Todd Kristensen, Meigan Henry, Kevin Brownlee, Adrian Praetzellis, and Myra Sitchon “Communicating Archaeology: Outreach and Narratives in Professional Practice.”
- DISCUSSION
 - A model for Archaeology Education emerged, which integrated accessibility, collaboration, and engagement by focusing on communication.
 - Joanne Lea “Meeting the Challenge with an Integrated Model for Archaeology Education.”

To this end, I invite you to consider our ECHO Archaeology stories of experimentation with archaeological education and pedagogy—both through the online videos of individual presentations (see link in endnotes) as well as the collaborative articles of this issue—some of which have been demonstrably successful and others more anecdotal at this point, as well as some of the acknowledged failures of such experiments. It is through sharing of such learned lessons (stories) that we hope the future—in particular, the next 50 years—of archaeological education and pedagogy will prove to be respectful, engaging, and accessible to all.

Endnotes

- 1 <http://www.athabascau.ca/>
- 2 In no way is this an exhaustive review of Canadian archaeology. For such a review, I direct the reader to the excellent volume edited by Smith and Mitchell (1998).
- 3 Fifteen of the sixteen original presentations were recorded for viewing: http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLP8XGTKIG_vwtV-OJ7QH0ZqSnOK4mcHXa

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