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The sixth annual Teaching and Learning in Archaeology

Birkbeck College, London, 1st and 2nd July 2009.

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Introduction

The sixth annual conference on Teaching and Learning in Archaeology was held in the Clore Management Centre, Birkbeck College London, on the 1st and 2nd July 2009. The event was organised by the Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology.[*]

The colloquium attracted nearly eighty delegates from across the UK and abroad. Papers were presented on a wide range of topics such as teaching theory in archaeology, e-learning in archaeology, the current state of continuing education in Britain, working with employers, and more.

The summit was arranged around six sessions scheduled over the two days. Each paper and session was followed by a vigorous discussion and debate.

Wednesday 1st July

After a warm welcome by Anthony Sinclair [Director of HCA Subject Centre] we proceeded to the first speaker of the day, Nick Brodie [University of Tasmania], who discussed tertiary archaeology in Tasmania. It was indeed challenging to see the 'View From Down Under' from the Australian perspective.

The next session covered 'Teaching Theory in Archaeology' and was

presented by three speakers: First, Matthew Johnson [University of Southampton] examined 'The Last Ten Years in Archaeological Theory' emphasising how important the empiricist appeal is in the teaching of archaeological theory. Anthony Sinclair [University of Liverpool], in his paper titled ' Dissolving Theory into Concepts', raised a list of questions such as: are we clear about what students need to know? Do we need to think of a curriculum of archaeological theory, and if yes, what would this curriculum look like? Last, Imogen Wood [University of Exeter] deliberated upon 'A Phenomenological Approach to Learning Archaeological Theory'.

The third session of the day focused on e-learning in archaeology (part one – note that part two followed on the second day of the conference). First, Sian Jones and Kostas Arvanitis [University of Manchester] examined 'Mash-up Archaeology: Ideas and Issues in Aggregating Online Archaeological Heritage Content for Teaching and Learning' discussing how the developmental of Web 2.0 has encouraged new approaches to teaching, learning and assessing archaeology. Kevin Kuykendal and Lorraine Seymour [University of Sheffield] referred to how e-learning can be used for dissertation assistance in a paper titled 'Critical Reflections on the Use of e-learning to Support Undergraduate Dissertations in Archaeology'. Stuart Jeffrey [Archaeological Data Service, York University] talked about 'The Link between Monumental Inventories and Archives, their Web Exposure and Use as a Teaching and Research Tool'. Mel Giles and Hannah Cobb [University of Manchester] presented a paper titled ' The Virtual Past for Future Archaeologists' in which they discussed the applications of webCT, Blackboard and GLO in undergraduate Archaeological education. They were followed by Janet Tatlock [University of Manchester] and her report on 'Encountering and Valuing Objects in Virtual Worlds', in which she examined the virtual way students select to work with particular gallery/museum objects and gather information about them. Next, Graham McElearney [University of Sheffield] investigated 'The Use of Mobile Devices in Undergraduate Fieldwork Training', displaying how technology can be used to enhance students' fieldwork experience.

The last session of the day was presented by Richard Lee [CBA] who talked about the current state of Lifelong Learning in Britain and, later, Gina Muskett [University of Liverpool], who manifested the view of Continuing Education from the Liverpool perceptive.

Thursday 2nd July

The second day of the conference opened with another session on e-learning (part two). Lorna Richardson [Thames Discovery] exhibited the Thames Discovery website and emphasised the importance of social media in informal archaeology training and learning. Later, Aarón Alzola [Open University] raised the question: 'Can We Buy Ourselves out of the Digital Divide in Higher Education?' The speaker attempted to solve this query via the examination of an Open University case study in which the involved students were divided into groups of those with and those without computer and internet facilities, to investigate how IT technology affected their academic performance. Next in the panel, Eleonor OKell [Durham University, HCA (Classics)] demonstrated the simple procedure one can undertake in order to create a tutorial with GLO Maker software; furthermore, she suggested ideas on how to assist students with multiple interpretations in the VLE. To follow, Alan Greaves [University of Liverpool] reported on the use of audio podcasts for the purposes of archaeological teaching, fieldwork and artefact-based learning, either independent or not.

The final panel of the day focused on 'Working with Employers'. Rhianedd Smith [University of Reading] stressed the need of archaeology students to volunteer in the museum environment should they wish to pursue a career in the museum field. Last speaker of the day was John Sode-Woodhead [IFA Scottish Group] who stressed how important it is for academics and educational institutions to join the IFA and mentioned the plans of the organisation to establish an academic interest group.

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Addendum

The majority of the conference delegates agreed that a balance is required between e-learning and face-to-face learning activities. E-learning is commonly based on individual methods whereas face-to-face learning provides immediacy between tutor and student; in other words it focuses on the social aspect which is the most significant part of the educational procedure *per se*. It is estimated that nowadays the link between the two is not always clear. It is the duty of the academic community to adopt one or the other, or both learning tools, with respect to the particular circumstances and the needs of the students.

NB: The programme of the conference and the relevant PowerPoint presentations are now available for internet access on the Higher Education Academy - Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology website: http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/hca/events/detail/6thAnnualTeachingandLearnin ginArchaeologyConference_01_7_09

Abbreviations and terms

Blackboard: Software Company which has developed software applications to manage e-learning. See also WebCT.

CBA: Council for British Archaeology

E-learning: A pedagogical tool empowered by digital technology.

HCA Subject Centre: Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology

GLO: Generative Learning Object/s. Any learning object that can be customised, adapted, edited or recombined for specific teaching and learning purposes.

GLO Maker is a computer software used for the creation of rich, interactive

learning resources.

IFA: Institute for Archaeologists

IT: Information Technology. IT is the study, development and management of computer-based information systems, such as software applications and computer hardware.

Podcast: A podcast is a video or an audio digital media file which can be released and downloaded on the WWW. Podcasts can be used for informative and educational purposes.

PowerPoint: A presentation program.

VLE: Virtual Learning Environment. VLE is a software system and an educational tool, designed to support teaching and learning.

WebCT: Web Course Tools. Web CT or Blackboard Learning System is an online proprietary virtual learning environment system used by many university institutions for the purposes of e-learning.

Web 2.0: Web applications which facilitate interactive information sharing, interoperability, user-centred design and collaboration on the World Wide Web.

WWW: World Wide Web