

# TRANSITION/TRANSFORMATION: EXPLORING ALTERNATIVE EXCAVATION PRACTICES TO TRANSFORM STUDENT LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE FIELD

---

**Hannah Cobb**

Archaeology  
School of Arts, Histories and Cultures  
University of Manchester  
Manchester M13 9PL, UK  
Email: [Hannah.Cobb@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:Hannah.Cobb@manchester.ac.uk)

**Phil Richardson**

Archaeology  
School of Historical Studies  
Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences,  
Newcastle University  
Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 7RU, UK  
Email: [Philip.Richardson@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:Philip.Richardson@newcastle.ac.uk)

---

## Abstract

**Transition:** In summer 2006 the Ardnamurchan Transitions Project began its first season of excavation at the Neolithic chambered tomb of Cladh Aindreis on the Ardnamurchan Peninsula, Western Scotland. This work, alongside some field walking at a series of other key sites on the peninsula, aimed to explore the nature of the Mesolithic/Neolithic transition in the area. However the excavation also aimed to do something much less conventional...

**Transformation:** By bringing together a crew of both academic and professional field archaeologists this excavation sought to transform student attitudes towards the integration of theory and practice. Explicit theoretical questions were considered as integral to the excavation process. Furthermore, through stressing the importance of self reflexivity, the project also aimed to allow students to transform themselves. Taking advantage of high staff/student ratios, this excavation invited students to develop key interests, to take greater responsibility in excavation and interpretation, and to reflect explicitly upon transferable skills they were gaining whilst directly considering issues of employability. This paper discusses the techniques used to achieve this and as well as discussing their relative success in the field, it also addresses the directions we hope to take such methods in future seasons.

---

## Keywords

Neolithic; Scotland; vocational training; transferable skills; peer assisted learning; reflexivity; Ardnamurchan; theory and practice; undergraduate

---

## Introduction

This paper begins with the premise that digging, teaching and researching are messy. Of course it is an axiom of our profession that such work involves *getting* messy, but in this paper we suggest that we can all gain much more from our work by *thinking* messy as well. That is to say that the structures that we create within the archaeological profession suggest that rigid divisions can be drawn between teaching archaeology and researching archaeology, between theory and practice, and between academic archaeology and commercial archaeology. Yet in reality these rigid divisions are harder to define. It would be nonsensical to undertake a training excavation that did not also have a research agenda, and rarely does any academic or commercially driven excavation take place that does not bring together staff with diverse backgrounds in both academic and commercial contexts. Furthermore, we can never separate meaning and materiality, or theory and practice:

*“Archaeological practice is always conducted by finite mortal beings whose experience of*

*the traces of the past is always contingent. Their interpretations of those traces will arise from different sets of pre-understandings and may thus be irresolvable. Despite this, their accounts of the past will gain in richness from a process of dialogue that is not intended to reach a definitive, non-contradictory point of closure” (Thomas 2004:248).*

It is clear then, that these boundaries that we create for ourselves are more often simply arbitrary divisions, which represent a characteristic of current archaeological discourse rather than any true reflection of how we do archaeology in reality. Yet whilst the critique of such divisions is not new, as Baines and Brophy have observed, attempts to address these have often continued to define themselves through and operate around a rather similar set of tensions and oppositions (Baines & Brophy 2006:70). Consequently in this paper we suggest that we must transcend these artificial boundaries that divide us as archaeologists by going beyond these within our teaching. We must pass on a messier archaeology, and we must strive to develop ways of doing this.

In response to these issues this paper will discuss the work of the Ardnamurchan Transitions Project (ATP), a five year survey and excavation project currently underway on the Ardnamurchan Peninsula in Western Scotland (Figure 1). The basis of this project is an explicit recognition of the contingency of our work and the central importance of the constant, reflexive dialogue that the quote above encapsulates (Thomas 2004:248). Consequently we will discuss the background to the project before moving on to outline a number of strategies we have so far employed in the field to put such a reflexive outlook into practice. As we will illustrate here, such strategies provide a holistic, and much less conventional form of training for undergraduates, designed to breakdown divisions between theory and practice, between academic and commercial archaeology and between teaching and research, and thus ultimately to empower students and enrich the development of the discipline.

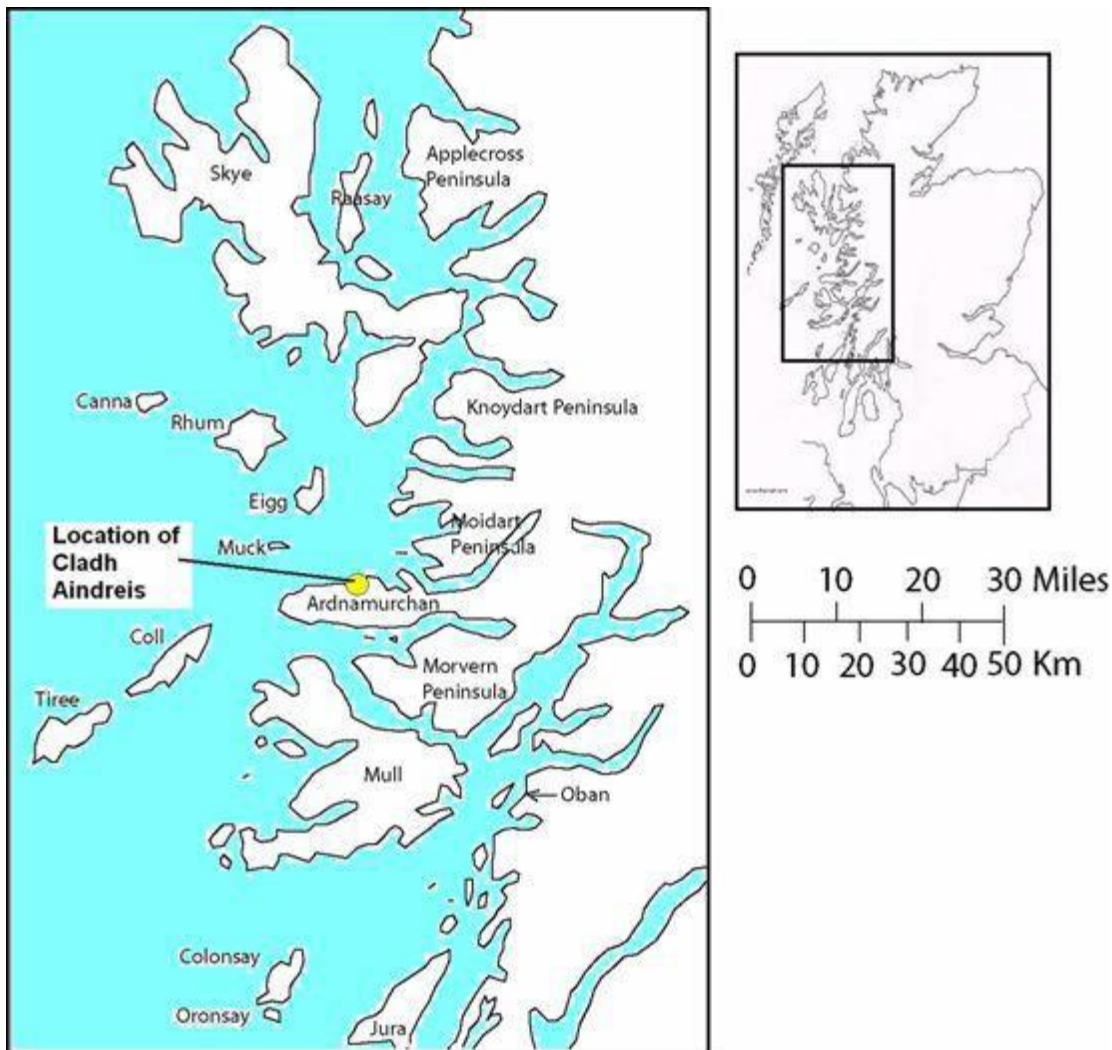
### **The Ardnamurchan Transitions Project: Background**

The Ardnamurchan Transitions Project was originally conceived to examine the transitions between the Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age in the area. The area was chosen because whilst the last few decades have seen an explosion of work on the prehistory of the West Coast of Scotland (e.g. Armit et al. 2004; Mithen 2000; Noble 2006; Ritchie 1997; Saville 2004), the Ardnamurchan Peninsula has remained relatively understudied. Indeed the sum of recent work on the peninsula is the basic survey of the three chambered cairns identified as part of Henshall’s seminal study of the chambered tombs of Scotland (Henshall 1972), some small scale excavations of lithic scatters (Kirby 1983, 1992; Pollard 1993) and the excavations in the 1990s of the Mesolithic site of Risga in Loch Sunart by a team from the University of Glasgow (Pollard 1996, 2000). Consequently our knowledge of the early prehistory of the area and the key transitions from hunting and gathering to farming and metalworking is limited.

Yet despite the limited work in the area, a series of finds that have resulted from the informal survey work of a number of local amateur enthusiasts, suggests that the current paucity of knowledge does not reflect the true record (see, for example, Christian 1970; Crerar 1961; Kirby 1983, 1992, 1995; Pollard 1993; Thornber 1974). Indeed in the light of recent research which has stressed the mobility of the prehistoric populations of the area (Noble 2006; Sheridan 2003; Wickham-Jones 2005), and the geographical position and central location of the peninsula between the northern and southern Inner Hebrides, it seems likely that this area could have played an important role during critical periods of early prehistoric change in Western Scotland. Thus, the Ardnamurchan Transitions Project aims to explore evidence for the transitions between the Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age in the area using a combination of site specific excavation and wider survey work to find new material from the periods and to provide a detailed investigation of some already known sites.

However, as outlined briefly above, a key aim of the project is also to explore new ways of practicing archaeology. As the project will be assisted in the main part by the work of undergraduate students who will be actively training in archaeology we hope to use our work to bring together and explore new pedagogical directions that will achieve the kind of integrated, ‘messy’ thinking advocated above. Specifically, the ATP aims to move away from the format of a traditional training excavation, and instead explore the potential of embodied archaeologies, where the experiences and encounters of all participants in the excavation process are placed in the foreground, in order to provide and develop innovative, theoretically situated vocational training for undergraduate students. It is clear that only by

challenging our assumptions about the importance of excavation, of the core skills of archaeological fieldwork and of those who excavate, can we then develop and implement more empowering and productive training provision (Edgeworth 2006). Moreover, since such skills lie out with the scope of most theoretical discussions and excavation reports (Chadwick 2003:99), it is vital that we recognise the value of these skills at this stage; during training excavations.



As such, the pedagogical aims of the Ardnamurchan Transitions Project follow recent arguments to this effect (see Berggren & Hodder 2003; Edgeworth 2006) and the project is explicitly driven by an ethos that if such skills begin to be recognised, developed and valued in training they may attract the value they deserve within the discipline as a whole.

The value placed upon core archaeological work is clearly a highly problematic issue at present within many strands of the discipline. There is an underlying concern within professional archaeology in particular that junior archaeologists are undervalued and under paid and are merely used as manual labour or as silent automatons for the collection of data (see Berggren & Hodder 2003; Edgeworth 2006; Everill 2007). A similar feeling was also revealed amongst archaeology students in a recent Higher Education Academy study of undergraduate attitudes towards the role and provision of fieldwork training (Croucher et al. 2008). When asked what they felt they were contributing to the bigger picture of the excavation in which they were involved, just under 7% of students in the study felt they were only contributing manual labour and 3.7% of students felt they weren't contributing anything at all (Croucher et al. 2008). Such observations reveal a clear paradox within the discipline; excavation and core field skills are often undervalued, yet at once there is a growing argument, both in Britain and America, and both in academic and commercial contexts, that archaeological degrees are not sufficiently preparing students for their careers (Aitchison 2004; Berggren & Hodder 2003:423; Sandlin & Bey 2006:263-4; Wilson 2001:30). We argue that to address this paradoxical situation

archaeologists must integrate explicitly vocationally driven learning outcomes within reflexive, theoretically situated projects which attempt to empower students and allow their voices to be heard.

Of course we are not alone in this call for radical changes in both the teaching and wider undertaking of field practice, however in reality many of the projects that have echoed this call have only been able to put such reflexivity into practice due to the large scale, well funded nature of their work (e.g. Andrews et al. 2000; Bender et al. 1997; Hodder 2000). In turn it is clear that the emphasis such large projects are able to place upon aspects such as digital methodologies for recording reflexive observations has meant that many of these approaches in fact “perpetuate traditional hierarchies of power and representation” (Chadwick 2003:97). This manifests itself through the varied levels of control and access to both the resources and areas of the site (Chadwick 2003:97). Additionally, whilst digitally-dependant approaches may have enabled a degree of reflexivity in the field in some cases, such technology is clearly out of reach of the budget of the majority of much smaller excavation projects (Chadwick 2003:102). Moreover, it is critical to recognise that any reflexive technique, from video recording to reflexive site diaries, can only be productive when excavators are empowered and recognised as decision makers and not merely data retrievers (see Chadwick 2003:103). In turn such an observation brings us back full circle to the fact that we must recognise the value of core field skills as inextricable from reflexive theoretical approaches and develop training methodologies that hold these factors as central (Edgeworth 2006).

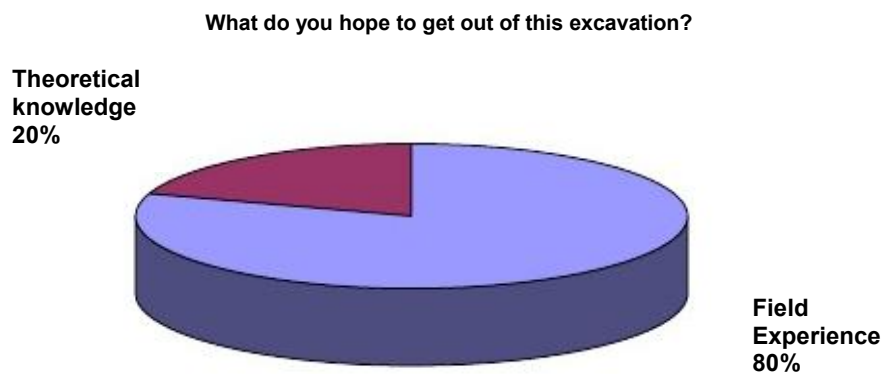
We came to the ATP, then, with these issues in mind. Like many in the profession today, we have as much studied these current debates as encountered them in practice and many of our key aims represent a response to our personal experiences of these issues. Building upon a series of recent projects that have endeavoured to tackle questions of reflexive field practice (e.g. Andrews et al. 2000; Bender et al. 1997; Hodder 2000), we have sought to explicitly integrate our reflexive practice concerns within a framework dedicated to providing rigorous, empowering, theoretically situated training for undergraduates. In contrast to other projects that have considered these issues we have had limited budgets and resources. Whilst to many this would be a set-back, we have demonstrated that it is still possible to implement our aims even with limited available resources. It is not then satisfactory for the issue of budgets to be used as a “get-out clause” for unsatisfactory training (cf. Berggren & Hodder 2003). Thus we explicitly aimed to develop affordable, realistic field practices that could be employed for little cost but that would ultimately provide students with training that sought to break down the divisions that we have outlined here. A key aim of the project then is to provide a comprehensive training in field techniques and theoretical issues as they intersect, enabling a deconstruction of the (un)intentional boundary between theory and practice. That is not to say that projects that do not explicitly set out such aims automatically do not consider them. Chris Fowler and Vicki Cummings at Cairnderry (Cummings & Fowler 2007) for example were able to create the necessary ‘spaces’ within which students could consider their role and how archaeological knowledge is constructed through vigorous discussion and inclusive participation. However on the ATP, fundamentally integrated with this is the aim to develop a student led ethos to teaching and learning, ultimately ensuring a bottom up approach to the project by giving students the kind of responsibility that would both empower them and enrich the continually reflexive exercise of excavation. However whilst such aims read well on paper, to put them in practice has so far required a holistic approach to how we excavated and to our relationship with the students. In the following section, we will review the various means through which we sought to implement these aims in our first season of work, in August 2006.

### **Transforming Student Learning and Development: Initial Logistics**

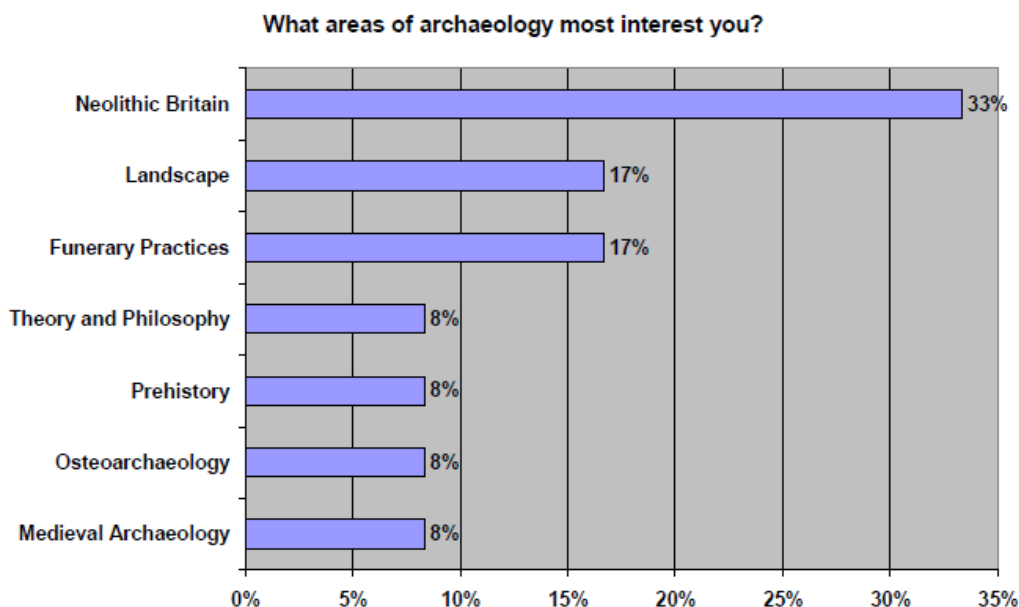
So far in this paper we have stressed the value of transforming student learning and development in the field, however we argue that to meet many of the aims outlined above requires a basis of strong communication and continual reflexivity from the beginning of any involvement with students. Traditional field practice operates within a series of power relations that marginalise students and diggers from the decision making process, from interpretation and from their own training. This situation is often further compounded by a lack of explicit communication between students and staff. In turn a lack of communication can only result in all concerned failing to implement any kind of reflexive interpretation or training. Consequently, for the ATP, meeting our aims in our first season of work meant establishing clear and inclusive communication channels. Prior to even entering the field a meeting was held with the students and staff in order to begin the process of dialogue and introduce the reflexivity that we hoped to maintain throughout the excavation. At this initial meeting we outlined

our aims, explaining that in order for them to be met the students would need to fully participate, and provide us with information about their wants and expectations of the dig. In order to do this we gave them a questionnaire to complete, defining their expectations from the dig, and how this related to their career goals. Additionally the questionnaire was designed to encourage students to consider and communicate areas of particular interest, and areas where they hoped to develop skills. This also gave us information about their prior excavation experience (some of these results are illustrated below in Figures 2-6). This meant that although we had students whose previous experience in the field ranged from none to almost two months of excavation, in the field we were able identify those students requiring the development of particular skills. Through encouraging students to be reflexive about their skills we were already enabling them to develop and feel comfortable with the kinds of reflexivity which we then asked them to employ in the field.

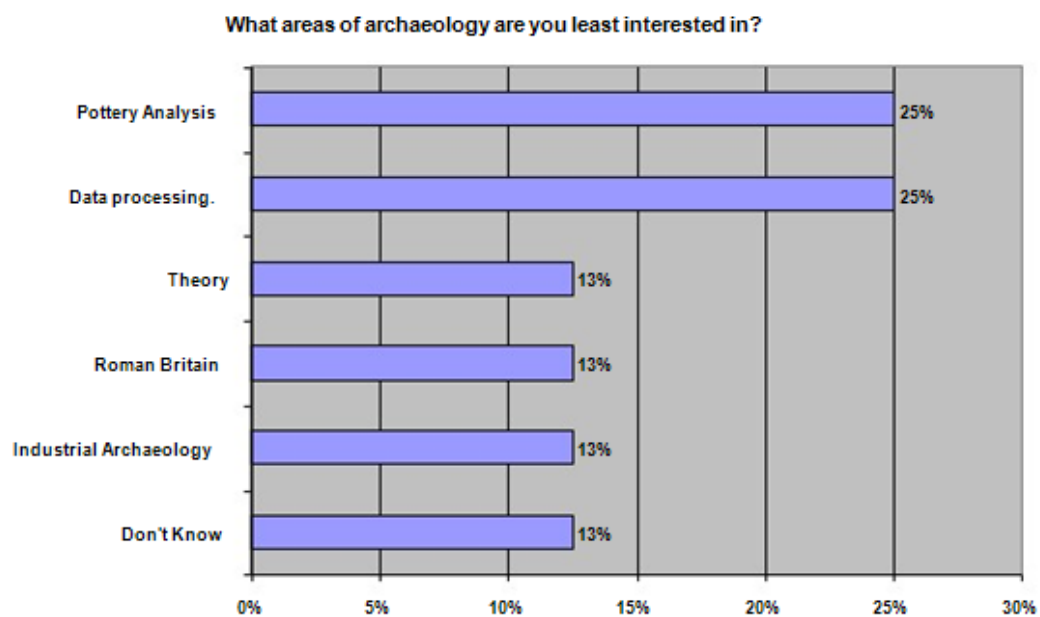
It must be made clear that, following season one, the sample size was small, only 8 students. This was the case for a number of reasons: principal amongst these was the small scale of the archaeological work being conducted, however, we chose to use this opportunity to conduct a small pilot study and to test our pedagogical aims in the field. Thus, the results of season one shown in the tables below and the methods we employed (see above) maybe seen as more applicable to smaller projects. That is not to say that our programme would not be applicable to larger projects, indeed a key aim of the ATP is to attempt to this kind of learning on groups of various sizes, in season two for example the number of students will more than double from 8 to 17.



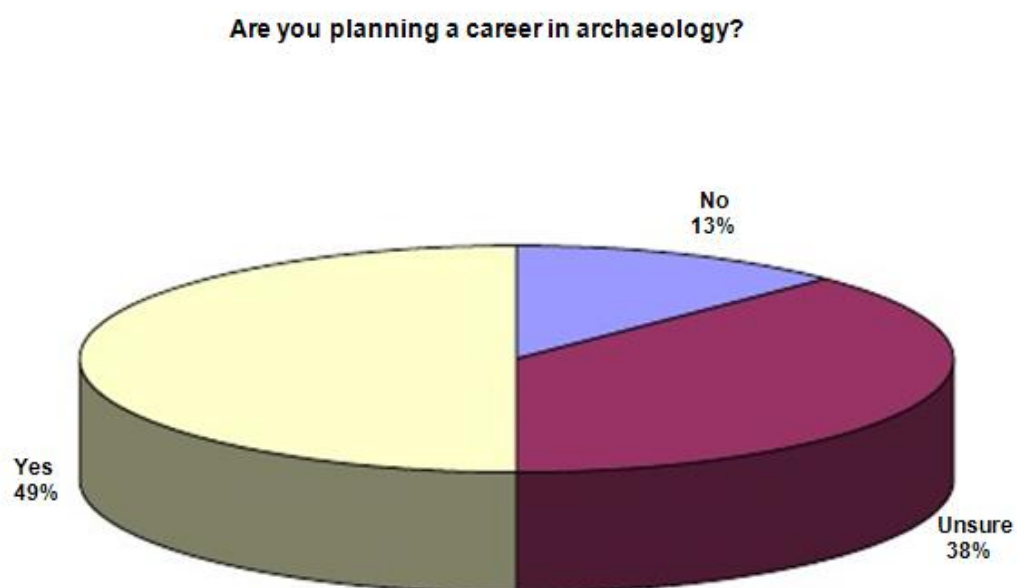
**Figure 2**



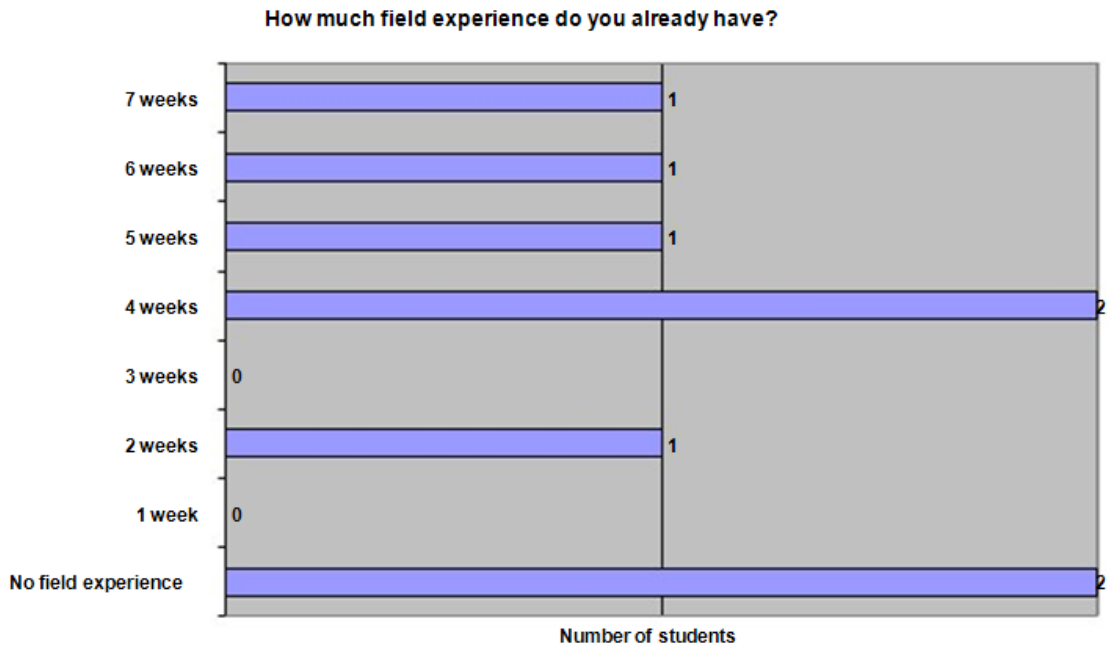
**Figure 3**



**Figure 4**



**Figure 5**



**Figure 6**

**Figures 2-6** Various statistics gathered regarding the students' expectations, attitudes to archaeology and prior experience of fieldwork.

Furthermore, prior to entering the field it was clear that, over and above simply getting information from the students, our aims could not be met unless we had the structures in place that would enable their implementation. Perhaps most critical was a high staff/student ratio of 1:2 (4 staff to 8 students). However it was clear that it was not simply a case of bringing lots of staff, but bringing a team with diverse backgrounds from commercial and academic sectors (2 staff were doctoral students, 1 member of staff worked as a full time commercial archaeologist and 1 member of staff was both undertaking a PhD and working commercially) and with very different interests from the Iron Age to the Mesolithic. We also drew upon local expertise (Figure 7), which meant students were able to access a wide range of people in order to find out both about the peninsula, and also in learning about how different types of archaeology take place.

### **Transforming Student Learning and Development in the Field**

Following our pre-excavation meetings and discussions with the students, we subsequently turned our attention to how teaching and learning would take place in the field. In considering this we were particularly influenced by the substantial body of literature available on different learning styles. There exist numerous models of learning preferences and styles, with some of the most well known and most frequently used including the Jungian inspired Myers-Briggs (1980) model, as well as the more recently devised Kolb (1999), Dunn and Dunn (1975), Honey-Mumford (1982) and VARK (Fleming 1992, 2006) models. What fundamentally underlies the majority of these approaches is the simple recognition that different people use different methods for learning. Thus, for example, the VARK model suggests learners may either have visual, aural, read/write or kinaesthetic learning styles (Fleming 1992, 2006). Whilst many models involve sometimes rigorous and thus problematic criteria and indices to identify learning preferences (e.g. Dunn & Dunn 1984), the power of such approaches is that almost all recognise that learners are frequently multi-modal and employ a range of different practices to facilitate their learning.



**Figure 7** Jim Kirby of the Moidart Local History Group giving the students a tour of Sanna Bay and the surrounding area (Photograph: Oliver Harris).

There has, of course, been some criticism of work on learning styles, questioning a range of issues from the efficacy of identifying style in improving learning (Curry 1990) to the manner in which various models have been tested (Coffield *et al.* 2004; Hargreaves *et al.* 2005). However, despite these more specific critiques, the general points raised by the models about the variety of ways in which people learn are undeniably important. Consequently we felt a key factor in meeting our aims was to maintain an acute awareness that our group would almost certainly consist of students with a variety of different learning style preferences, and this would ultimately impact upon the way field skills were learnt. Indeed it is clear that a failure to identify the diversity of learning styles that exist and their impact upon students' learning of core field skills has fundamental implications not only for how students learn these skills but also for how they come to understand the role of fieldwork in relation to wider aspects of their course. This is clearly reflected within the recent Higher Education Academy fieldwork survey, where 4.5% of the students interviewed felt that fieldwork did not contribute towards the rest of their course, whilst another 4% felt it did not contribute towards understandings of theory or provided only period specific information (Croucher *et al.* 2008). To overcome this and to cater for all learning styles we employed a number of methods for teaching and learning. This involved a combination of directed teaching of specific skills in the trench as well as encouraging informal discussions amongst the students on both theoretical and methodological issues. This combination of both explicit and implicit learning in the trench was supplemented by the provision of explicit teaching and discussion sessions in the evenings. These discussion sessions were designed to correspond to and overlap with the issues raised in the trench in order that the relationship between theory and practice could be explored through 'real-life' situations and in an informal setting. To further support these sessions we also referred students to relevant online resources they could access after the dig (e.g. the Council for British Archaeology, BAJR, Prospect, The Diggers Forum amongst others), and made a wide range of literature available to the students in order to accompany all issues raised. For example we brought with us all the relevant literature concerning excavation and survey techniques and Mesolithic-Neolithic Scotland so that they would have easy access to important sources and be able to investigate issues raised on their own if they chose to.

As we have briefly touched on in the previous section, we felt that encouraging students to take responsibility for and being reflexive about their learning and development were integral to formulating a reflexive field practice, as well as enhancing student learning. As such, beyond the explicit learning sessions outlined above, we encouraged this in a number of different ways. For example whilst we provided explicit training in a full suite of field skills, we encouraged this process not simply through our own instruction, but rather we encouraged peer assisted learning where possible. Peer Assisted Learning has shown to be highly effective both within archaeology (e.g. Stevens this volume) and elsewhere (see papers in Rust & Wallace 1994; also Donelan & Kay 1998; Topping 1996). To ensure this took place we paired students who already had certain skills already with those who wished to develop new skills, and in general we encouraged students to draw upon each other's knowledge from their previous experience to support their development. For example, we encouraged students to discuss methodological differences encountered within their archaeological careers, and to think about the implications of this for the interpretation of the evidence being excavated. We also specifically asked students to reflect upon the skills that they felt they were gaining whilst they were in the field in order to further clarify areas they wanted to develop further. This kind of reflexivity had enormously positive impacts as it encouraged the students both to recognise and value the fact that they were developing a professional skill set, whilst at once having the confidence to identify areas in which their knowledge was lacking. This was particularly important for several of the students who had just graduated and who intended to follow careers in field archaeology but had not been instructed in either filling out context sheets or planning. For those students, who had never had the chance, or the courage to speak up about the fact that they lacked these key skills, this was incredibly important.

As well as simply encouraging the students to develop reflexive practices through informal discussion with ourselves and with one another, we also provided field diaries whose use we encouraged for the purposes of self reflexivity and to enhance learning for those with a read/write learning style. Additionally we regularly asked students to explain to the group what they were doing and why, and towards the end of the excavation we held an open day at the site, attended by around forty visitors. At this event each of the students was required to give at least one tour to members of the public (Figure 8). This simple strategy of encouraging the students to talk to us, to one another, and to the public was perhaps one of the most positive and effective ways for both enabling them to reflect upon what they were learning and the skills that they were developing, and in turn this significantly enhanced their confidence in their own abilities within a wide range of areas.

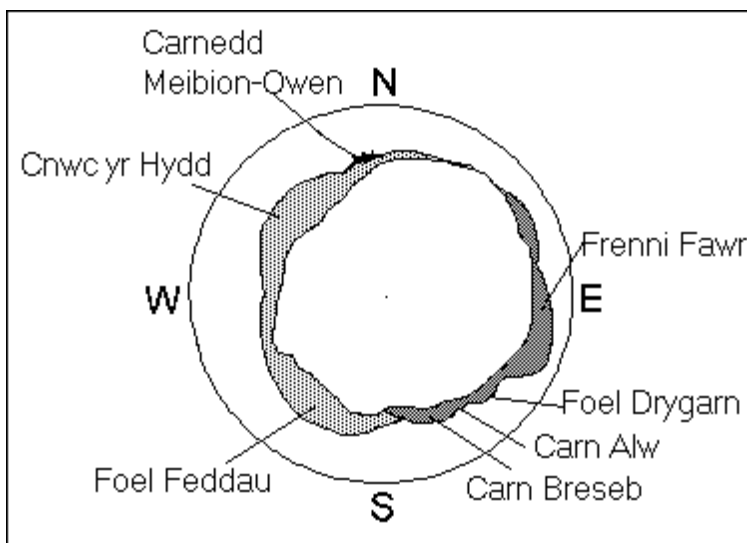


**Figure 8** One of the students giving a site tour to members of the public (Photograph: Hannah Lawson).

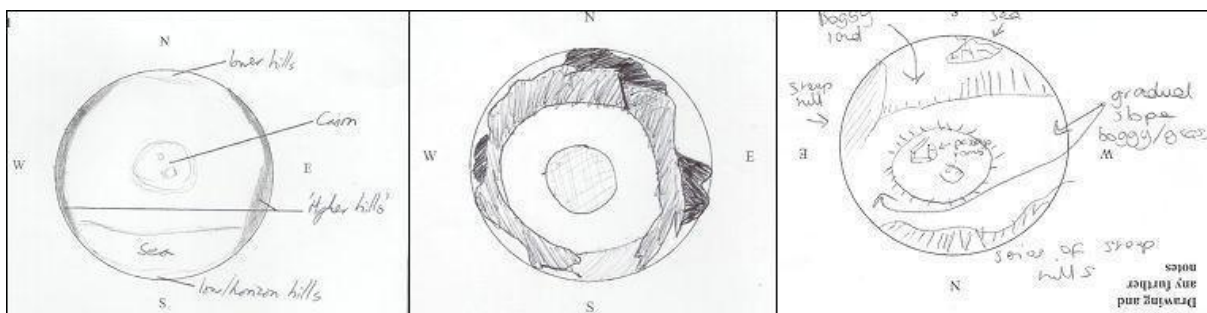
However, above and beyond encouraging reflexivity within the student's practices, we encouraged staff reflexivity as well. This worked to enable us to actively challenge in the field our modern preconceptions that are abundant in field practice and to explore alternative approaches to the

production of experience and of identity. These were aspects which we felt it was also mutually beneficial for the students to participate in, because this provided us with additional thoughts on issues such as the encounter and experience of sites, but it also provided an active way for students to engage with key theoretical debates and to think about methodologies to address certain questions.

One particularly successful example of this came in the form of work considering the experience of the sites within their landscape setting. Here we followed the work of Vicki Cummings in creating hand drawn schematic panoramas (e.g. Figure 9) from each of the three chambered tombs on the peninsula. We discussed the theoretical context in which this work had arisen with the students and encouraged them to create and compare their own schematics (Figure 10). This enabled the students to reflect upon the variety of experiences of different places and their own diversity of understandings of themselves in relation to these. In turn this enabled them to question the nature of the encounter of the archaeological record and the reproduction of this. Furthermore, this work very explicitly highlighted for the students their own responsibility in generating interpretations through the archaeological practices in which they were involved.



**Figure 9** An example of Vicki Cummings’s hand drawn schematic representations of the landscape around Bedd yr Afanc, Pembrokeshire (After Cummings 2001:96, Figure 5.3).



**Figure 10** Schematic hand drawn representations by three students from the Neolithic chambered tomb of Greadal Fhinn near Kilchoan.

We also ensured that we gave all students responsibility for their work on a practical level, by allocating them certain areas and certain features within the trenches. In one case one of the students had responsibility for her own small test trench. A regular and demoralising experience that many of us have encountered within our field training is being moved away from a feature once it becomes clear that it is more important or more complex than previously thought. Indeed few of the students on our excavation had ever had the opportunity to follow their work all the way through the excavation process. Consequently we encouraged each of the students to do this, in turn both enhancing their

understanding of the archaeological process in general and enhancing their confidence in their own skills and in their own understandings of issues such as chronology and stratigraphy.

Finally, an area we deemed to be critical, to enhance and contextualise students' developing reflexivity, confidence and skills was to encourage them to think explicitly about employability and the directions these skills could take them. To facilitate this, a number of strategies were employed including providing a specific session about careers in archaeology. In this the staff present on the excavation all drew upon their various experiences and areas of knowledge to talk about different careers in archaeology. We also used the opportunity to highlight to students important organisations and resources for following careers. So, for example, we talked to them about joining the IFA, and about aspects of field archaeology such as conditions and pay. However we were aware that at least one student on the excavation explicitly did not want a career in archaeology, and a few had not made up their minds. As such we also wanted all of the students to be clear on the transferable skills that archaeology provides. To do this we undertook two self reflexive sessions, one at the start and one at the end of the excavation. At the first of these the students were encouraged to discuss why transferable skills were important, and contexts in which they had had to think of such skills. They then listed transferable skills they felt they were gaining from the dig and their degree in general and in the second session they reflected upon whether other skills could be added, and how this could enhance their employability. Whilst these two specific sessions covered this subject, it was also one which was a topic of continuous discussion in the field. Often this was as a joke made by students ("I'm sure bailing a trench out must be a key transferable skill"), but inevitably in most contexts that the subject was brought up it allowed students to be further aware of the skills that they were gaining.

### **Transforming Student Learning and Development in the Field: Success or Failure?**

As we have so far only undertaken one season of five within the work of the Ardnamurchan Transitions Project, and less than a year has passed since the end of season one, it is difficult to assess outright the relative success or failure of the various methods employed to transform student learning and development in the field. Nonetheless our preliminary assessments of this are encouraging. Within the field, for instance, student confidence noticeably increased over the duration of the dig. For example, a number of students explicitly noted that the open day had played a key role in developing their confidence in their own understanding of the site and of the archaeology they were undertaking. Moreover, for many students, talking to the public cemented a newfound recognition that they were more than simply powerless students, waiting to be taught and moulded, but individuals responsible for generating and presenting interpretations in their own right. Yet the students were not daunted by this recognition of responsibility, but rather most embraced the implications of this, and began to actively offer and share interpretations. Indeed at the end of the excavation the students themselves requested to present to the rest of the team the areas for which they had had responsibility, the work they had undertaken and their interpretations of each area.

Of course most of our success so far is purely anecdotal; however, we also provided the students with feedback forms at the end of the excavation and these reflect a clear affirmation of the success of the project in a number of areas. For example, 6 of the 7 students who returned the feedback form felt the excavation exceeded their expectations, and all felt that the teaching of archaeological techniques was excellent. Moreover, when asked what the most useful aspect of the excavation had been, students cited not only learning specific archaeological skills, but also the integration of theory and practice, being given more responsibility always being clearly instructed about everything going on, and having careers advice. Additionally, students towards the end of their undergraduate career were able to reflect upon areas of specific interest and a number have subsequently focussed these further in applications for postgraduate study or in formulating clearer ambitions in their graduate careers. At least one of the students, who was unsure as to whether they wanted a career in archaeology prior to the dig, left Ardnamurchan with a firm ambition to enter field archaeology, and is now in the process of applying for work on graduating. Clearly there is no way to assess whether such students would have undertaken these choices and career paths if they had attended any other excavations, but it is nonetheless clear that the sense of empowerment and reflexivity that these students encountered on the ATP will ultimately impact upon their future work in whatever graduate career path they take. Indeed, towards the end of the project, in 2009 and 2010, we intend to more formally investigate this by exploring the career directions of students who have attended the project and asking them to reflect upon practical outcomes of their learning and development that have resulted from this.

Yet whilst the project has undoubtedly been successful in many areas to date, it is clear that archaeological practice and traditional training provision are structured in such a way as to make self-reflection and critical awareness problematic (Sandlin & Bey 2006: 263). Thus whilst the ATP has ultimately sought to resist traditional structures and re-centre such critical self-reflexivity at the heart of both our field practices and training, there are areas where our attempts to undertake this require some work in the future. Critically we recognise that many of these areas are as integral to wider field practices as they are to training. For example, in our first season of work we adhered to a number of standard, normative recording practices (such as those employed in our context sheets and our plans, sections and drawings), which have a fundamentally negative impact upon the reflexivity at the heart of our aims. In particular such recording practices prohibit any form of empowerment of the digger by implementing exactly the kind of Cartesian subject/object relationship between excavation and interpretation that we seek to disrupt. Of course we attempted to offset this by engaging in continual dialogue with students and undertaking the many measures discussed above to ensure their interpretations were recorded and were of central importance to wider site narratives. Nonetheless we recognise that this is one key area that requires further work, and in future seasons we hope to develop alternative approaches to recording that are not so prohibitive (Cobb *et al.* In preparation).

Despite these issues, it is nonetheless clear that season one proved highly successful for the ATP. Our intention to provide a flexible framework within which the students could gain confidence and begin to challenge themselves seems to have been a success in many areas. Indeed we were lucky to have a cohesive and dynamic project staff who not only remained conscious of the discursive nature of archaeology throughout the project, but who also fully encouraged this amongst the students. As such, despite issues with more traditional and binding areas of archaeological field practice, we were able to encourage the students and staff to reflexively engage with the practice of excavation in order to attempt to deconstruct the theory and practice division and empower plural, multivocal archaeologists and archaeologies. And in turn, such reflection will have a significant impact on the project in future years as we attempt bolder approaches to the archaeological record.

### **Present Day Conclusions and Future Transformations**

Traditionally archaeological excavation has been perceived as simply a process of objectively recording the nature and extent of archaeological layers and deposits. Excavation is often portrayed as an objective science, where the data can be seen to ‘speak for themselves’. Whilst this view has been questioned and critiqued within archaeological theory (e.g. Thomas 2004), we have argued here that the concept of an objective past, being ‘out there’ to be found, still underlies our methodologies and our teaching of these when we enter the field. Yet, as we have sought to illustrate in this paper, this problematic premise remains largely under evaluated. Perhaps this should not be too surprising since a fundamental element of modernity, upon which the archaeological method is based, has been to construct representational systems that attempt to obscure or even hide the subjectivity of physical encounters. As the Swedish Geographer Martin Gren puts it: “objectivity [has been] constructed by placing the situated and embodied character of all knowledge-and-practice, including the observer, in the background” (Gren 2001:212).

In contrast, this paper has sought to explore how we may challenge the clear subject/object divide that traditional archaeological methods and teaching are founded upon, by arguing that we should regard digging, teaching and researching as messy. By this we mean that the rigid divisions that we create within the archaeological profession between teaching archaeology and researching archaeology, between theory and practice, and between academic archaeology and professional archaeology are a series of well constructed, artificial tensions. Such divisions and tensions endeavour to separate and compartmentalise aspects of the archaeological process in order to define and organise this in a ‘scientific’ manner; a matter of method at one level, and yet of interpretation at another. In reality we argue that these rigid divisions are much more complex, messy if you will, and harder to define. As such, in this paper, we have argued that we need to deconstruct such divisions, and fundamental to such a critique is the need to develop a reflexive archaeological methodology in which targeted explicit and implicit training provision empower those who actually do the digging. Thus it is only by considering how digging, recording and presenting archaeology can transform student learning through a reflexive framework that a truly multivocal approach may emerge.

Whilst we may not be the first to argue these things, nor the first to attempt to implement them in the field, this paper represents an attempt to outline a series of affordable and realistic field practices that can be employed on a smaller scale and on a lower budget excavation, but that may still provide a comprehensive, theoretically embedded and empowering training in field techniques. In turn, as we have shown, in our first season of work such ways of working have fundamentally ensured a bottom up approach to the project by giving students the kind of responsibility to both empower them and enrich the continually reflexive exercise of excavation. Thus our work calls into question the very idea that we may conceive of archaeological excavators are 'unskilled' whilst those who write reports and publications are viewed as 'skilled' (See Berggren & Hodder 2003; Edgeworth 2006). Furthermore, as we have argued, it is critical to develop an awareness of this at the level of training excavation if we are to ever realise the kind of radical archaeology that the discipline needs in order to empower those that are currently censored and undervalued.

Of course this paper reflects very much a 'work in progress', with clear areas that require further development. As Matt Edgeworth (2006) has recently argued "[w]e need to get rid of the old ideas, so theoretically outmoded, of excavation as mere data-collection or manual work", and this sentiment informs the kinds of work the ATP must take if it is to truly meet its aims. As such, as we have discussed above, a central intention of future work will be to develop and implement recording strategies which allow for the plurality and multi-vocality of the reflexive nature of excavation (Lucas 2001). Further areas we aim to work on include getting students more explicitly involved in a number of skills that are rarely taught, but which significantly inform the excavation process, such as report writing, finds processing and other post-excavation techniques. Moreover, it is key that we develop ways to engage with and reflexively record these parts of the process as well.

In conclusion then, it is clear that our work on the Ardnamurchan Transitions Project reflects simply a starting point for what must in the future be a more comprehensively developed way of thinking that is messy; that sees excavation, interpretation, teaching, learning, and research as entwined and inseparable. In turn we argue that an archaeology which not only *does* messy, but also *thinks* messy will be an archaeology that has the potential to transcend many of the problems that arise from its product as a construction of modernity. Indeed as we have demonstrated here, a theoretically situated, reflexive consideration of the relationship between the archaeology, the archaeologist as a learner and the archaeologist as an embodied participant in the construction of archaeological narratives can ultimately have a fundamental impact upon the discipline as a whole.

#### **After word: Transition/transformation in 2008**

Following our first season of work in 2006 the project has gone on to undertake two more seasons in the summers of 2007 and 2008, and we are now developing a project design for a further 10 years of work on the Ardnamurchan peninsula. The kind of messy, joined up thinking that we discuss in this paper remains integral to our project, with the development of a series of context sheets and other recording forms which explicitly seek to foreground the excavator in the interpretive process (further details in Richardson *et al.* forthcoming). We have also employed the *Inclusive, Accessible, Archaeology's* ASSET questionnaire (<http://www.britarch.net/accessible/>) and developed a skills training record or passport, all of which are designed to further enhance the training process and empower students within this.

Furthermore, we are beginning to see the tangible, positive outcomes of our approaches to the training process. Prior to attending the ATP dig in 2006 only 3 of the 8 students on the project team definitely wanted to follow a career in archaeology. However two years on we are really pleased to report that of these 8 students, 3 are following careers as field archaeologists with units in the UK, Europe and Australia, 2 went on to achieve first class degrees, 3 have undertaken an MA in archaeology, and one of these is now a studying for a PhD in the subject, and one student is in the process of applying for an MA in Museum Studies.

#### **Acknowledgements**

The Ardnamurchan Transitions Project would like to thank the Ardnamurchan Estate for permission to conduct work in Swordle Bay. We also gratefully acknowledge The Prehistoric Society, The Council for British Archaeology, the "Students as Partners" Scheme and the Universities of Manchester and

Newcastle, without whose funding our first season of work would not have been possible. We would also like to thank all those who have participated in the project so far and Karina Croucher, Helena Gray, Cara Jones, Tim Phillips and Jesse Ransley, for their constructive comments on earlier drafts of this paper. Many thanks also to Vicki Cummings for permission to reproduce Figure 9 here.

## References

- Aitchison, K. 2004. Supply, demand and a failure of understanding: addressing the culture clash between archaeologists' expectations for training and employment in 'academic' versus 'practice'. *World Archaeology* 36(2):203–219.
- Andrews, G., J. Barrett, & J. Lewis. 2000. Interpretation not record: the practice of archaeology. *Antiquity* 74:525–30.
- Armit, I., E. Murphy, E. Nelis & D. A. Simpson (eds). 2003. *Neolithic settlement in Ireland and western Britain*. Oxford: Oxbow.
- Baines, A. & K. Brophy. 2006. Archaeology without –isms. *Archaeological Dialogues* 13(1):69-91
- Bender, B., S. Hamilton, & C. Tilley. 1997. Leskernick: Stone Worlds; Alternative Narratives; Nested Landscapes. *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* 63:147-178.
- Briggs-Myers, I. 1980. *Gifts Differing: Understanding Personality Type*. Palo Alto (Ca.): Davies-Black Publishing.
- Chadwick, A. 2003. Post-processualism, professionalization and archaeological methodologies: towards reflective and radical practice. *Archaeological Dialogues* 10(1):97–117.
- Christian, S. 1970. Sanna. *Discovery Excavation Scotland* 9.
- Cobb, H., O. Harris & P. Richardson. In preparation. *An Archaeological Research Design for the Ardnamurchan Transitions Project: excavating, learning, teaching and methodology*.
- Coffield, F., D. Moseley, E. Hall, & K. Ecclestone. 2004. *Learning styles and pedagogy in post-16 learning. A systematic and critical review*. London: Learning and Skills Research Centre.
- Crerar, R. 1961. Sanna Bay, Ardnamurchan. *Discovery Excavation Scotland* 12.
- Croucher, K., Cobb, H., L., and Brennan, A. 2008. *Great Expectations: the role of fieldwork on teaching and learning archaeology*. Liverpool: Subject Centre for History Classics and Archaeology
- Cummings, V. 2001. *Landscapes in Transition? Exploring the Origins of Monumentality in South-west Wales and South-west Scotland*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis. School of History and Archaeology, University of Cardiff, Cardiff.
- Cummings V. & C. Fowler, 2007. *From Cairn to Cemetery: an archaeological investigation of the chambered cairns and early Bronze Age mortuary deposits at Cairnderry and Bargrennan White Cairn, south-west Scotland*. Oxford: Archaeopress.
- Curry, L. 1990. One critique of the research on learning styles. *Educational Leadership* 48: 50-56.
- Donelan, M., & P. Kay, P. 1998. Supplemental Instruction: Students helping students' learning at University College London (UCL) and University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN). *The International Journal of Legal Education* 32(3):287-299
- Dunn, R., K. Dunn & G. E. Price. 1975. *Learning style inventory : an inventory for the identification of how individuals in Grades 3 through 12 prefer to learn*. Lawrence (Ks.), Price Systems.

- Edgeworth, M. 2006 *Diggers – Their role is still unrecognized sixteen years on*. Paper for BAJR Conference, University of York <http://traumwerk.stanford.edu:3455/mattedgeworth/1146>
- Everill, P. 2007. British Professional Field Archaeology: Antiquarians and Labourers; Developers and Diggers. In, Hamilakis, Y. & P. Duke (eds). *Archaeology and Capitalism: From ethics to politics*. Left Coast Press.
- Gren, M. 2001. Time-Geography Matters. In, J. May & N. Thrift (eds.) *Timespace: Geographies of Temporality*. London: Routledge Hargreaves, D., D. Wood, U. Goswani, C. Desforges
- Hargreaves, D., D. Wood, U. Goswani, C. Desforges, D. Wise, M. Swindells & J. Beere. 2005. *About learning: Report of the Learning Working Group*. Demos <http://www.demos.co.uk/publications/aboutlearning>
- Fleming, N., & C. Mills. 1992. Not Another Inventory, Rather a Catalyst for Reflection. *To improve the Academy* 11:137-144.
- Fleming, N., & D. Baume. 2006. Styles Again: VARKing up the right tree! *Educational Developments* 7(4):4-7.
- Henshall, A., S. (1972). *The Chambered Tombs of Scotland: Volume 2*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Hodder, I. 2000. 'Developing a Reflexive method in archaeology'. In, I. Hodder (ed.), *Towards Reflexive Method in Archaeology: the example at Çatalhöyük*, p. 3-14. Cambridge: McDonald Institute Monographs, British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara Monographs 28.
- Hodder, I., & A. Berggren. 2003. Social practice, method, and some problems of field archaeology. *American Antiquity* 68 (3):421–34.
- Honey, P. & A. Mumford. 1982. *The manual of learning styles*. Maidenhead: Peter Honey.
- Kirby, J. 1983. Sanna Sands Ardnamurchan, sherds, flints. *Discovery Excavation Scotland* 12-13.
- Kirby, J. 1992. Glen Hurich Forest, Lochaber Forest District (Ardnamurchan parish): survey of Forestry Commission land. *Discovery Excavation Scotland* 43.
- Kirby, J. 1995. Ardnastang (Ardnamurchan parish), grass-tempered sherd. *Discovery Excavation Scotland* 40.
- Kolb, D., A. 1984. *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. London: Prentice-Hall.
- Kolb, D., A. 1999. *Learning style inventory: Volume 3*. London, Hay/McBer Training Resources Group.
- Lucas, G. 2001. *Critical approaches to fieldwork : contemporary and historical archaeological practice*. London: Routledge.
- Mithen, S., J., (ed.). 2000. *Hunter-gatherer landscape archaeology: The Southern Hebrides Mesolithic project 1988 - 1998*. Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research.
- Noble, G. 2006. *Neolithic Scotland : timber, stone, earth and fire*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Pollard, T. 1993. Dahl lay-by (Ardnamurchan parish): lithics and prehistoric settlement. *Discovery Excavation Scotland* 45.
- Pollard, T. 2000. Risga and the Mesolithic occupation of Scottish Islands. In, R. Young (ed.), *Mesolithic Lifeways: Current Research from Britain and Ireland*, p. 143-152. Leicester: University of Leicester.

Pollard, T., J. Atkinson & J. Banks. 1996. It is the technical side of the Work which is my Stumbling Block: A shell midden site on Risga reconsidered. In, T. Pollard & A. Morrison (eds), *The Early Prehistory of Scotland*, p. 165-182. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Richardson, P., H. L. Cobb, H. Gray, & O. Harris. Forthcoming. 'The Struggle Within', in: Richardson, P., H. L. Cobb, O. Harris & C. Jones (eds). *Reconsidering fieldwork: exploring on site relationships between theory and practice*. New York: Springer.

Ritchie, G. 1997. *The Archaeology of Argyll*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Rust, C., & J. Wallace (eds). *Helping students to learn from each other: Supplemental Instruction*. Birmingham, Staff and Educational Development Association.

Sandlin, J. & G. Bey. 2006. Trowels, trenches and Transformation. *Journal of Social Archaeology* 6(2):255-276.

Saville, A. (ed.). 2004. *Mesolithic Scotland and its Neighbours: the early Holocene Prehistory of Scotland, its British and Irish Context, and some Northern European Perspectives*. Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

Sheridan, A. 2003. French connections I: spreading the marmites thinly. In, N. I. Armit, E. Murphy, E. Nellis & P. Simpson (ed.), *Neolithic settlement in Ireland and Western Britain*, p.3- 17. Oxford: Oxbow.

Thomas, J. 2004. *Archaeology and Modernity*. London: Routledge.

Thornber, I. 1974. Ardnamurchan, Kentra Bay, mesolithic flints, etc. *Discovery Excavation Scotland* 22.

Topping, K. J. 1996. The effectiveness of peer tutoring in further and higher education: A typology and review of the literature. *Higher Education* 32(3):321-345.

Wickham-Jones, C., R. 2005. Summer walkers? - Mobility and the Mesolithic. In, N. Milner & P. Woodman (eds), *Mesolithic Studies at the beginning of the 21st Century*, p. 30-41. Oxford: Oxbow Books.

Wilson, M. 2001. Tales from trenches: the people, policies, and procedures of Cultural Resource Management Pt. 1. *The SAA Archaeological Record* 1(2):30-3