

ARTICULATING THE BRIDGE BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE: A CONSIDERATION OF POSTERS AS GENRES OF SUCCESSFUL ASSESSMENT IN EUROPEAN PREHISTORY

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Abstract

Poster presentations are common at professional meetings and specifically within academic events such as the conference forum. The aim of this paper is to consider how posters provide an opportunity to research, synthesise and report on an archaeological subject and explore how they operate as a pedagogic teaching and learning strategy. Drawing upon poster presentations submitted as an assessment component for a certificate course in European Prehistory at Birkbeck, University of London (2005/6), I will consider how the making of a poster requires the exploration and articulation of an idea, recognising the importance of design and critical writing, identifying forms of knowledge and developing the lexicon of interpretation in both collaborative and individual formats. As such (with careful planning and integration into course design), the poster represents a successful form of assessment that demonstrates student awareness of the critical construction of knowledge and the development of intellectual ideas in European Prehistory.

Keywords

Peer assisted learning; group work; poster presentations; assessment; reflexivity

Introduction

Poster presentations are common at professional meetings and specifically within academic events such as the conference forum. The aim of this paper is to consider how posters provide an opportunity to research, synthesise and report on an archaeological subject and explore how they operate as a pedagogic teaching and learning strategy. Drawing upon poster presentations submitted as an assessment component for a certificate course in European Prehistory at Birkbeck, University of London (2005/6), I will consider how the making of a poster requires the exploration of an idea, recognising the importance of design, identifying forms of knowledge and developing the lexicon of interpretation in both collaborative and individual formats. As such (with careful planning and integration into course design), the poster represents a successful form of assessment that demonstrates student awareness of the construction of knowledge and the development of intellectual ideas in European Prehistory.

While there are a broad range of pedagogic models that form the basis of course design, the general archetype is that students acquire skills (e.g. in dating and analysis), knowledge (in terms of data collection and observation) and understanding (the methods of interpretation applied) throughout the duration of a course. Contrary to these didactic categories, Morton and Booth offer a lateral perspective and define learning as a process of seeing something in a different way (1993). Whatever the perspective, often both students and tutors can at times feel that other aspects of participating in a course, in particular the development and articulation of critical thinking and theoretical aspects of

interpretation, are overlooked or put aside. Yet, the reason why the consideration and articulation of critical thinking is often put aside is because it is seen as dry, dull, wordy, problematic and laden with undecipherable jargon. I contend that the very reason it is problematic raises stimulating pedagogic issues associated with the consideration, and articulation, of theory and practice within any given discipline. Why not therefore use critical thinking as a teaching strategy that involves students as active agents in the process of interpretation? In particular developing an engagement with the vocabulary of a person, language, branch of knowledge (i.e. the lexicon of learning) and the art of effective and persuasive speaking or writing, drawing upon language designed to influence or impose (i.e. the rhetoric of learning).

How and why do people learn?

There are numerous factors which may influence how people learn; their ability, motivation, personality, attitude, age, previous experience of learning, life experiences, physical well-being and time available for learning (Hillier 2002:86). As such, an underpinning consideration for approaching the how and why people learn is to take into account who our learners are and what they want to learn. This is positioned within the right environment for study (Tooley 1999), the individual needs of the student, the group dynamics of a class, content coverage and assessment. The benefits of assessment are that it provides feedback, clarifies achievement, motivates and encourages student progression and development. It is said to be the major driving force which gets students down to serious studying (Race 1995:3): it can also as Boud (1995:36) outlines, lead to confusion and a myriad of complex emotions that are contra to learning. How therefore do tutors facilitate a complementarity between assessment and learning rather than the perceived tension that exists between them? Hudson (1996) describes assessment as tending to be ideographic or nomothetic, that is either concerned with characterising or describing an individual's uniqueness or more interested in comparing individuals with others in an attempt to arrive at a more general understanding of achievement. This is pivotal to our understanding of the effects of assessment strategies in that it has a direct impact on teaching strategies and student progression. Indeed, assessment methods and requirements are said to probably have a greater influence on how and what students learn than any other single factor (Boud 1988).

Method: posters as an effective form of assessment

I propose that if assessment is implemented into the design and planning of a learning event and is an integral component of a tutor's teaching strategy, it will encompass a more holistic scope in the overall experience of a course and produce a body of work that demonstrates the development of student critical reading and writing skills. That is, that the broad remit of learning is not fully realised in an assessment; rather that an assessment represents the product of a broad range of socially and culturally driven reasons and motivations behind participation. Brown and Glasner (1999) comment that it is not the actual methods or tools of assessing which they believe should be changed in many cases, rather the underlying philosophy and the aims of their use and application. Thus if a tutor situates themselves within this remit they can make informed links between student competence, learning and assessment that necessitates clarifying student perception of what is required, while encouraging discourses of interpretation (e.g. critical thinking), rather than descriptive narrative. If this is the case, how can we improve quality of assessment, rating its methods in terms of validity and reliability in which a valid assessment method is one which tests whether the aims and objectives of a learning experience have been achieved?

I integrated posters into the assessment criteria for a course in European Prehistory which comprised 25% of a course portfolio, also consisting of a book review and two essays, thus creating a portfolio of contrasting assessment types. In preparations for the poster work, students were placed (or chose) to work in groups of 4-5 people. Topics were chosen and poster workshop sessions scheduled into the teaching calendar, in the form of seminars, workshops, presentations, peer review and tutorial sessions. Four posters were submitted as assessment for the 2006/5 course, reflecting a contrasting and diverse range of approaches to the topics selected. An essential aspect of integrating this into course design was that as well as the submission of a poster (representative of a collaborative piece of work) students were additionally required to submit an individually written 2000 word critique and reflection on the poster. The mark for poster assessment was based on the poster (25%: representative of collective) and critique (75%: individual perspective) and clear guidelines were provided throughout the duration of the course.

Posters have been said to have the capacity to reach a wide audience and offer the possibility of asking questions in a non threatening situation (Taylor & Turner 2005). Posters are co-constructed and therefore act as group-based assessments that help students develop their transferable skills within a social and constructivist frame of reference in which the implementation of change, as proposed by Hulme (1999:19), means that the reciprocated problem solving is not seen as a form of craft-knowledge or technical expertise but as the achievement of an on-going process of collaboration and reflection. My rationale behind introducing posters as an assessment criterion was to encourage and develop experiential learning which when theorised is characteristically within the model of education of Carl Rogers (1983). Rogers believed that meaningful learning entails taking an altered orientation towards things, an orientation which, though new and different, can yet be felt to be one's own, and the teaching through which such learning comes about is itself essentially the exemplification of what that orientation means. Furthermore, I have drawn upon Grossman *et al.* (1989) who propose the importance of deep learning (where students focus their attention of the overall meaning or message in a lecture, text or situation - where they relate their ideas together and construct meanings that have partially drawn on their own experience), in *conjunction*, rather than in *contrast* to surface learning (where students focus on the details and information in a lecture or text). Here:

1. Content knowledge includes:

- Factual information
- Central concepts
- Organising principles and ideas

2. Substantive knowledge includes

- Explanatory models or paradigms
- Conceptual tools used to guide enquiry and make sense of data

3. Syntactic knowledge includes

- relevant forms of methodology
- easy of introducing new knowledge-justification and evaluation

By integrating these teaching and learning educational models, what we can achieve is the acquisition of content, substantive and syntactic knowledge in one learning event, rather than as three separate styles that essentially deconstruct skill, knowledge and understanding into three separate entities. From the research conducted for this paper, the structured integration of posters as assessment demonstrates an effective method in which these styles can be effectively combined and the rhetoric of deep learning articulated.

Knowing your educational establishment, context and discipline

The politics inherent in higher education are to the most part specific to all educational establishments and an understanding of the conflicts and contrasts between them are fundamental to designing and planning events within them. Birkbeck is:

“a specialist provider of flexible, evening higher education that is part of the University of London and offers the chance to study a range of programmes from pre-degree to PhD at full- and part-time study formats” (www.bbk.ac.uk/ce/archaeology).

Issues surrounding the design and planning of learning events and activities for Birkbeck are therefore specifically orientated to accommodate for student diversity to predominately part-time, adult students from diverse social and educational backgrounds: as such a Birkbeck class is a varied and challenging group to teach. Many students are graduates and enrolled onto a course to develop their professional development or as a route into postgraduate degrees (especially after some years in the work place). Many students already have postgraduate degrees; others have no formal higher education qualifications. Each class comprises an assortment of student identities, backgrounds and reasons and motivations behind attending the course.

The decision to integrate posters into the teaching and learning of this course was because I felt the need, particularly with the Prehistoric Europe class, to engage students in a more dynamic and proactive process of knowledge acquisition and interpretation, as outlined by Grossman et al (1989) and Rogers (1983). I wanted to encourage students to be active participants in the construction of understanding of prehistoric archaeology in theory and practice and also in the construction of the concept of Europe and in being European, bringing together their own constructs of identity, knowledge and interpretation. At both the beginning and end of the course, we collectively considered the following key questions as a route into understanding how archaeology is communicated, considering the characteristics classifications of Europe/European and recognising that these definitions are situated within a socially-informed and socially- situated discipline.

GROUPWORK CLASS-BASED EXERCISE

1. What is meant by the term Europe?
2. How would you define Europe? By what criteria?
3. What does it mean to be European/non-European?
4. How does our concept of Europe today influence our understanding of Prehistoric Europe?

Figure 1 Integrating class-based individual and collective constructs of identity, knowledge and interpretation of Europe and in the study of European Prehistory.

The poster design

Poster A (Figure 2) was designed by a professional exhibition designer, who was a student on the course. This is illustrated in the quality of structure, format and how the poster is 'read' by the viewer. The group decided on a thematic title 'Shared Identities' with a clearly defined aim 'of exploring similarities and differences'. It includes a timeline and centrally placed map and structured its method of enquiry by region. This group assigned one person as editor to gain a cohesive writing style and in their reflection commented how working as a group worked well as they made use of the particular strengths of each individual.

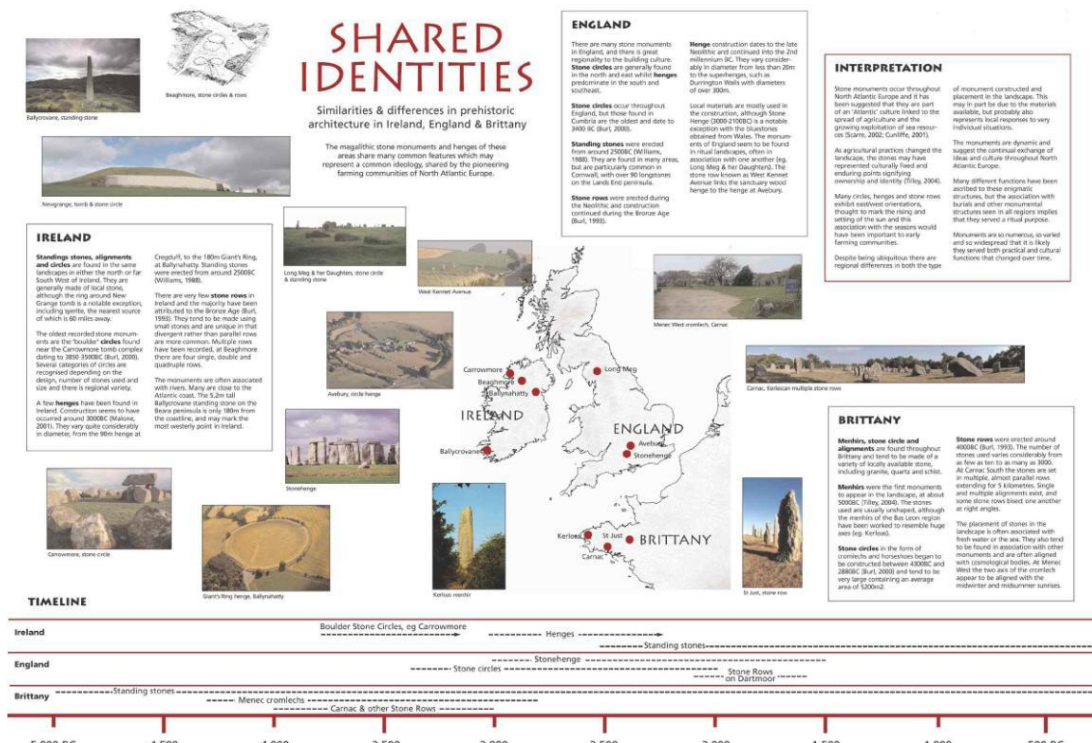


Figure 2 Poster A - Shared Identities.

Poster B fragmented as a group half way through the course mainly over issues of design and the focus of the paper. Out of the four students on the group, two submitted their individually designed poster formats that focused on the overarching theme of 'Trade, Production and Use of Bronze Age Textiles'. One (Figure 3) was designed by a student who has a background in textiles and who chose to focus on a method of enquiry by structuring her themes in the form of questions: 1. What did they use? 2. How do we know? 3. Where do we find it? In contrast the second student (who struggled a little with software) focused on evidence for trade and exchange with a focus on depictions of textiles within the island culture of Crete and how it is positioned within trading networks. These two posters present alternative approaches to the same dataset: one practical, illustrating a more methodological approach, the other thematic, structured around a more enquiring perspective.

Bronze Age Textiles Trade, Production and Use

• Dyed and Darned

- The earliest textiles found so far in Europe, have been to the east in Turkey at Catal Hoyuk. There in amongst the deposits dating from the 6th millennium BC are of a variety of linen weaves, including fine spun, plied thread, plain weave, tabby cloths with a collection of garments, dyed and darned. All indicative of an established production of textiles which were of complex structure and sophisticated weaving. This was the background for the textiles found in the Bronze Age.

• What did they use?

- The earliest fibres used were from tree bast such as lime, oak and willow. Nettles and hemp were used in much the same way as flax. After retting (rotting of outside covering) the fibres were used to make string and nettle fibres could be used to make a soft woven textile. Flax produces long fibres often a couple of metres in length and the young fibres can be made into fine textiles.
- Wool came into use during the Bronze Age with the wool combed from the sheep and the kemp (long wavy outer coat) removed. This was done when the began to shed their winter coat. In the early stages of domestication sheep shed their coats annually and until the invention of the iron shearing scissors the fibres were too short if cut with a knife.

•How Do We know?

The ephemeral nature of textiles has meant that it is largely by negative evidence that our knowledge is extended. Impressions and imprints on clay materials and fused to metallic corosions give information about textile construction. Drawn and painted on rock no matter how schematic there are clues to be found and used in our understanding of how clothing was constructed. It is by the remains of spindles whorls and loom weights, knowledge about weaving is understood. The depiction of the wearing of clothing on pottery and metal gives clues about how textiles and animal skins were used. Not only in ritual and ceremonial use but also in the depiction of everyday activities our understanding of textile use is extended. Barber (1995) notes that the production of clothing was the most time consuming activity throughout prehistory.

Where do we find it?

Clothing can be preserved in various conditions, such as where it is dry in sand, or where there are chemicals or minerals present, as in some burial spots. An anaerobic site will preserve animal fibres but not vegetable such as linen or cotton unless it is an alkaline sediment as in late Neolithic remains in Switzerland. Freezing as with the Ice Man Oetzi preserves most vegetable and animal fibres. Carbonisation in burnt remains, give clear clues about techniques of construction but sometimes makes identification of the type of fibre difficult to identify. Finds at Alishar in Turkey from the Early Bronze age show that a 2/2 twill was being made producing a twill weave, (see Barber 1991) evidence for which is not found in Europe for another 2000 years later until the Hallstatt period. There in the cemeteries of the salt producing communities and in the salt mines textiles and clothing exhibit complex and sophisticated production.



Map of Bronze Age Europe



Warp Weighted Loom

KEY DATES	
textile impressions	c. 21,000-22,000 ac, Czech Republic
twined textiles	c. 10,000 ac, Turkey
warp-weighted loom	c. 6000 ac, E. Europe
use of wool	c. 3500 ac, Mesopotamia
use of silk	c. 2700 ac, China
use of felt	c. 2600 ac, Anatolia
domesticated cotton	c. 2500 ac, South/SW Asia



Reconstruction of Oetzi's coat



Spindle Whorls



Textile Types

Figure 3 Poster B - Bronze Age Textiles.

The "Treatment of the Dead" was the focus of the work of poster C. This group produced many design formats and went through the most processes of change in layout and terminologies used. The drafts show changing perspectives on the title of the project, the focus of the themes and whether a map or timeline would work best as a central theme. This group also experienced some conflict, but interestingly chose to document this as they felt it was a crucial aspect of their subject designs. Overall there were seven drafts: Draft 1 (Figure 4) was structured by a map placed in a central position and thematic sections (allocated to one per person). By draft 4 there was a significant change of thematic titles e.g. one section changing from "England: *Ethics are seen as a set of standards*" to "Burial Practices in the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic". This represents a significant re-configuration of the scope and focus of the project design from thematic to temporal, perhaps representing a collective lack of confidence in pursuing the thematic perspective. They also decided to include their names for the sections they worked on as they wanted to present a sense of ownership to their research; demonstrating developing issues of power and knowledge within the group: "we started to struggle for direction and considered other ways to approach the theme. We could of looked at the way in which archaeologists interpret remains to develop ideas about past societies" A student summarises the changing perspectives this group went through: "On the title – I suggested "Dead and Buried in Prehistoric Europe" but it was not considered acceptable, maybe a bit unrespectable with slightly negative connotations and not serious or academic enough"

PREHISTORIC BURIAL PRACTICES IN EUROPE: Demonstrating relationships between the living and the dead

England: Ethics are seen as a set of standards

Anthropologists and social norms of behaviour. They are interested to give a base from which to judge existing practices as well as make decisions about how to continue when conflict occurs. Anthropologists have the moral obligations of anthropologists but also to their employees they have special responsibilities which are defined by the goals of their profession and the role they play as anthropologists (Wylie, 2003). Initially, variations of the same death and afterlife practices were motivated by the economy or a lack of personal care or sale to someone or collection. In the late 19th century the main ethical concern developed in the need to protect them from being used in a scientific manner (Lyons, 2003). Anthropologists and social norms of behaviour. They are interested to give a base from which to judge existing practices as well as make decisions about how to continue when conflict occurs. Anthropologists have the moral obligations of anthropologists but also to their employees they have special responsibilities which are defined by the goals of their profession and the role they play as anthropologists (Wylie, 2003). Initially, variations of the same death and afterlife practices were motivated by the economy or a lack of personal care or sale to someone or collection.



Horatio Smith described this as a 'negative model of the Golden Rule: do not do to others what you would not want them to do to you' (Horatio Smith 1974, p.378). From those times until the 1950s archaeologists were interested in proposing excavation techniques and publishing reports. During the 1950s they began to discuss differences between professional and non-professional. Minimal standards for professionals were published by the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) in 1961. They were a definition.

Infant and child burials in Neolithic Ireland

A Neolithic Irish burial site suggests a difference in the treatment of infants during the Neolithic Age, particularly in the passage of two Neolithic sites at Fourknocks, Co. Meath, Ireland. Finlay argues that the burial characteristics of the infant burials reflect a different burial practice and that the dead were buried in a different way. Examining infant burials in prehistoric Ireland is problematic. There is a diversity of burial sites, some of which are located in the same site and there is the tendency to include infants in the broader category of adult. Yet there is still some evidence to suggest the difference in the treatment of infants and the rest of the population as a rule for their separate burial.

There are two types of Fourknocks. Fourknocks II is a Neolithic passage tomb with three chambers and a series of decorated stones. Fourknocks I is a Neolithic passage tomb with three chambers and a rock-outlet passage, apparently used as a pyre site and a ritual site with a central cairn. At Fourknocks I most of the infant deposits were found in the passage and of the children only three were identified. At Fourknocks II the infant remains of 10 children were found in the passage. Cooney (1990) identified a pattern based on the lifecycle stage, location of the remains and mode of disposal at Fourknocks:

Children – peripheral location – inhumation
Adults – central position – cremation

There was a distinction between the way adults and children were treated in death. There were far fewer children's remains than would be expected in comparison with the burial record of the whole population and they occur largely as collective deposits of ritual inhumation. The evidence suggests a pattern of infant burials in peripheral location and inhumation on the one hand and adult burials in central position, cremation and possibly a ritual cremation on the other. This implies a practice of excluding children from the full social process of death.

Sweden: more vocal about the study of their past

What they have controlled over the treatment of graves and human remains of their ancestors. The World Archaeological Congress Code of Ethics reflects this when it begins with: "Members agree that they have obligations to indigenous peoples". The Canadian Archaeological Association developed a 'Statement of Principles' purely to address this issue (Appendix 9). These developments coincided with an increase in the looting of sites due to an increased demand from the art market for archaeological objects (Lyons, 2003). That they have controlled over the treatment of graves and human remains of their ancestors. The World Archaeological Congress Code of Ethics reflects this when it begins with: "Members agree that they have obligations to indigenous peoples". The Canadian Archaeological Association developed a 'Statement of Principles' purely to address this issue (Appendix 9). These developments coincided with an increase in the looting of sites due to an increased demand from the art market for archaeological objects (Lyons, 2003). That they have controlled over the treatment of graves and human remains of their ancestors. The World Archaeological Congress Code of Ethics reflects this when it begins with: "Members agree that they have obligations to indigenous peoples".



Etruscans: Lip's paper also led to the establishment of the Society of Professional

Anthropologists in 1976. They developed a Code of Ethics covering a number of responsibilities. One in particular declared that archaeologists need to be sensitive to groups whose members were subjects of archaeological investigations. The concept developed into what is known today as Cultural Resource Management (Lyons, 2003). Lyons (2003) identifies other ethical developments from the 1950s onwards. Indigenous peoples of the world became more vocal about the study of their past and insisted that they have control over the treatment of graves and human remains of their ancestors. The World Archaeological Congress Code of Ethics reflects this when it begins with: "Members agree that they have obligations to indigenous peoples". The Canadian Archaeological Association developed a 'Statement of Principles' purely to address this issue (Appendix 9). These developments coincided with an increase in the looting of sites due to an increased demand from the art market for archaeological objects (Lyons, 2003). More vocal about the study of their past and insisted that they have control over the treatment of graves and human remains of their ancestors. The World Archaeological Congress Code of Ethics reflects this when it begins with: "Members agree that they have obligations to indigenous peoples". The Canadian Archaeological Association developed a 'Statement of Principles' purely to address this issue (Appendix 9). These developments coincided with an increase in the looting of sites due to an increased demand from the art market for archaeological objects (Lyons, 2003). More vocal about the study of their past and insisted that they have control over the treatment of graves and human remains of their ancestors. The World Archaeological Congress Code of Ethics reflects this when it begins with: "Members agree that they have obligations to indigenous peoples".

Figure 4 Poster C – Treatment of the dead, first draft.

Treatment of the dead in Prehistoric Europe

"In the face of the universal fact of death, attitude to the corpse are various and changeable. These attitudes are formed through practices of treatment of the dead and are embodied in various ways." (M. Parker Pearson 2003)

Palaeolithic

The form of Palaeolithic burials show that the 'body was at the heart of symbolism between life and death' (Malin, 1990). All the bodies had been sprinkled with red ochre, 'the colour of blood and the symbol of life'.

The skeletons of the 'Red Lady of Paviland' and that of a young male (figure 1) excavated in the Caves of Aene Candide, Italy, date from before 25,000BC. Each had been placed in an extended position and sprinkled liberally with red ochre. Many mammoth ivory beads, bone and stone artefacts had been placed with the Red Lady, identified as a young male.

Mesolithic (Ann Carey)

In the Mesolithic the first formal cemeteries were created. Excavations at Deer Island in Lake Onega and at Vedbaek, Zealand, (figure 2) have revealed differences in burial practices between and within these fifth millennium cemeteries.




Figure 2: Vedbaek burial

Some men were buried with tools and weapons and some women with jewellery; some had body parts removed most likely in association with ritual; and locally, dogs were buried with equal status to humans. Flint and stone artefacts, shell, bones and pierced teeth all stained with red ochre accompanied the dead.

Neolithic

A review of prehistoric material suggests differential treatment of infants during the Neolithic. Evidence of this can be found in the passage tombs of two sites at Fourknocks, Ireland.

At Fourknocks I (figure 3) 18 out of 21 infants were buried in the passage. At Fourknocks II the inhumation remains of eight children were found in the passage. Dr Gabriel Cooney identified a pattern based on the lifecycle stage, location of the remains and mode of disposal which shows a distinction between the way adults and infants were treated:

CHILDREN – PERIPHERAL LOCATION – INHUMATION
ADULTS – CENTRAL LOCATION – CREMATION

This implies the practice of excluding infants from the complete social process of death. Until accepted into society infants often had no social persona. Here burial location reflected the location of the infant on the edge of society.



Figure 3: Fourknocks I

Bronze Age

The amphora from Germany, 9th-8th century B.C. (figure 4) contains the cremated remains of a corpse wrapped in cloth. Concentric circles and water bird motifs, typical of the Bronze Age, are thought to be 'religious' symbols and may relate to a cult of the sun.

The practice of placing cremated ashes into urns before burial in cemeteries, became so common in parts of Europe from c1300-700 B.C. that this is often named the Urnfield Phenomenon. The immense effort involved in transforming the body by intense heat indicates a profound change in attitude to death and the afterlife.




Figure 4: Bronze amphora; Gavelinghausen, Germany

Iron Age

The Etruscans occupied the area between the Arno and Tiber rivers in Italy in the Iron Age. They removed their dead from the domain of the living by placing them in tombs in necropolises, such as that at Banditaccia (figure 5). These necropolises were laid out like towns, with roads, alleyways and small squares. The tombs had entrances off these thoroughfares.




Figure 5: Plan of the Necropolis

The tombs were carved from stone and internally resembled the interiors of houses. Many were decorated with magnificent wall frescoes. Often the dead were interred in elaborately carved sarcophagi, such as the funerary couch from Cerveteri (figure 6). The lavishly decorated tombs are representative of the power and wealth of the families to which they belong. Etruscan tombs are literally and metaphorically the houses of the dead.



Figure 6: Cerveteri funerary couch

These selected examples show that funerary practices varied throughout the Prehistoric according to time and place. What can be said is that the treatment of the dead was a fundamental issue in each of the time periods discussed. The values and concerns of each society were embodied in the way they treated their dead.

Figure 5 Poster C - Treatment of the dead, final draft.

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By the final version the poster C decided to remove from their title 'Demonstrating *Changing Relationships Between the Living and the Dead*', removed the map and included a timeline (see figure 5). Their thematic sections have been remodelled to broader periods of time and they have used a quote from Parker-Pearson as a unifying concept:

"In the face of the universal fact of death, attitudes to the corpse are various and changeable. These attitudes are formed through practices of treatment of the dead and are embodied in various ways." (Parker Pearson 2003)

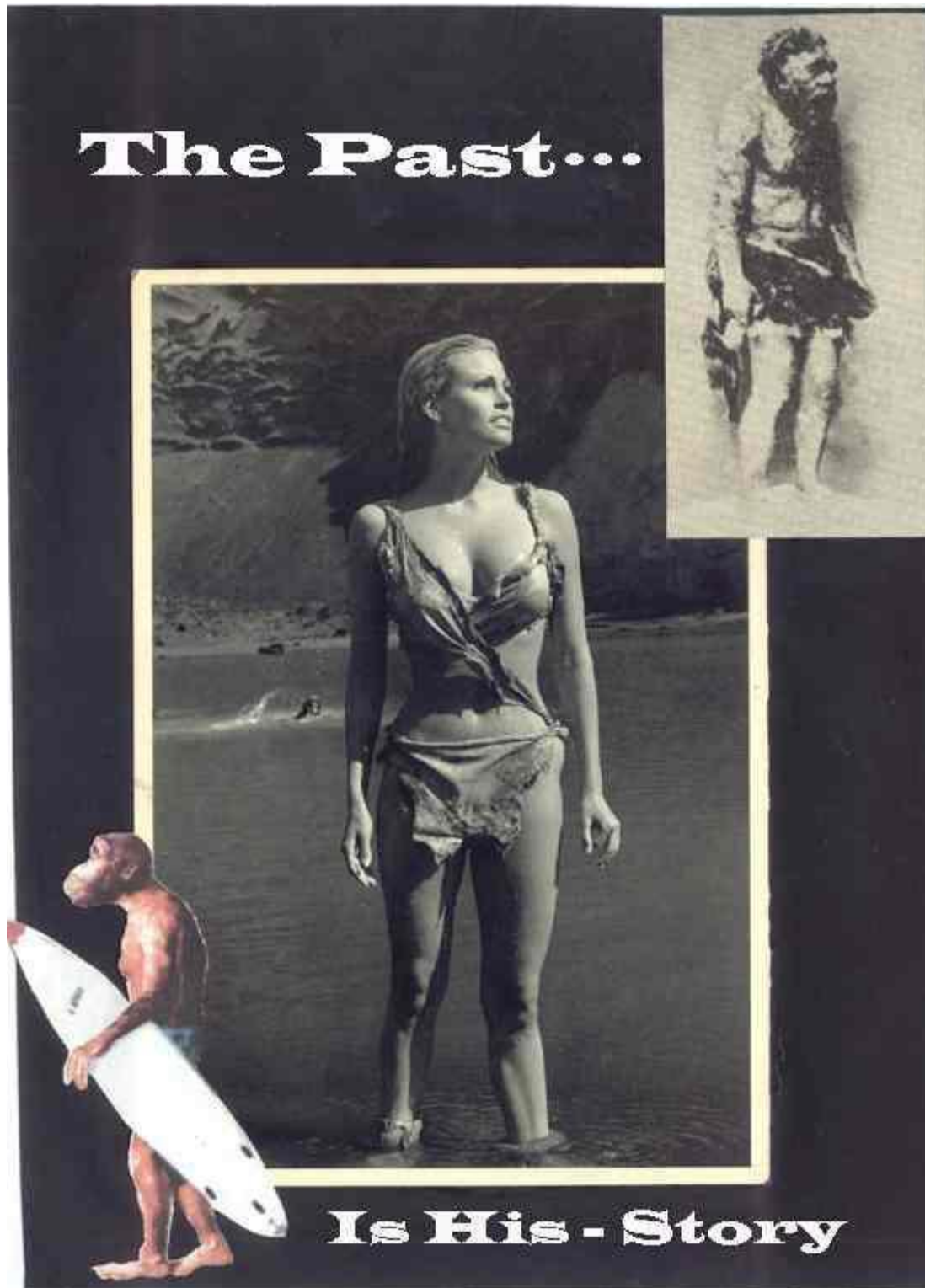


Figure 6 Poster D - The past is HIStory.

Poster D, *The Past is HIS-story*, (Figure 6) represents the work of a student who chose to work individually. In his essay reflection the student credits the influence of design of his poster to Fredy Perlman an author, publisher and activist. Perlman's most popular work, the book *Against His-story, Against Leviathan!* (2002) is considered a major source of inspiration for anti-civilisation perspectives in present-day anarchism for this student. A great part of his theoretical and practical struggle was an investigation of this process of alienation and fragmentation. Drawing upon this, the student who made this poster designed '*The Past is HIS-story*' as a comment on the presentation of gender in the re-construction of human evolution. He undertook an internet search for depictions of males and females of the ancient past and was surprised at the overt and problematic gender stereotypes that he found, and decided on this format to focus on the male/female dichotomy. In this rather alternative poster (that did not follow the presented guidelines) the student articulates his concerns of how can we approach and consider sexuality in the past, to actively and positively present sexualities and "feel as if we were not offending"? The poster may seem rather unconventional, and is not typical of an academic poster. There is no accompanying text and it is 'read' in a divergent way, carefully designed to provoke reaction and enquiry in terms of the use of a realistic photo and virtual cartoons. In his accompanying critique the student critically develops his reflection to broader considerations of the construction of methodologies and effectively challenges who controls the meaning of the past.

The poster critique

I now consider the reflections, how they meet the aims and objectives of the poster assessment and of the course objectives overall. Toward the end of the course (so as not to influence their poster design and content) I posed a range of carefully designed questions that I wanted the students to consider in their critique reflections (in addition to their own questions). I designed this as a route into articulating the development of skills, knowledge and understanding (deep and surface etc.) but also to observe the development of student critical thinking and evidence for the bridging of data and theory. This represents the development from a prescribed process (the poster) to an evaluation that looks beyond what is evident (i.e. the individual/personal critique).

Define your selection of subject matter - why choose that topic?

My aim in asking these questions was to bridge the divide between data (and how it is defined and structured) and theory (setting questions, finding outcomes) but also to consider the approaches that they were taking i.e. practical, thematic and theoretical (this links back to the key questions asked at the beginning of the course [see, Figure 1]). Moreover, this highlights the relevance of knowing your methods of enquiry and how they are articulated. This promotes a reflexive way of thinking and encourages the development of experiential learning through which students can engage with the real world and relate to their studies with relevance.

Two posters presented clearly outlined statements of intention, defined aims and prescribed knowledge:

"at the outset we thought we might be able to discover patterns in both the development of megaliths from standing stones, circles and henges and also find some hints of influences from which this evolving culture was shaped" (poster A) "to collate all the things I'd been thinking, but previously in a more jagged, uncoordinated and abstract fashion" (poster D)

Broader perspectives and an experiential approach were reflected upon by poster C, who observe that:

"The topic wasn't so much chosen as 'evolved' While poster B drew upon the subject matter to explore a key theme in the study of European prehistory:

"the subject offers an artefactual context, trade, cross-cultural impact (I hope)"

The effectiveness of these questions is that they demonstrate contrasting reasons and motivations behind poster selection, drawing upon pre-existing knowledge (either through methodological considerations or subject based schema) but also effectively seeing the poster as an avenue of enquiry to gain knowledge and understanding. The benefits of retrospectively asking a seemingly straightforward question can be observed in the student's critiques; they are more aware of the process they went through, both individually and collectively.

How do you think this process help you understand the definition of cultures/identity in European Prehistory?

My rationale behind asking these questions is to place emphasis on seeing multiple angles and perspectives in evidence for and study of European prehistory. I wanted students to become sensitized to the materiality of their chosen areas and how this is embedded in the construction of identities of the past, but also of themselves as a group and as an individual practitioner.

Identity was focused on by posters B and D. Poster B saw challenges in the creation of boundaries and the delineation of 'culture' and island identity:

"I can write about Minoan textiles in use and about their production in Crete specifically but how are the two linked graphically? Maps all seem to stop just south of Kithira, as though Crete isn't part of Europe!"

Poster D sees the poster as a successful methodology to research and reconsider gender identity:

"The composition exposes the relationship between past and present popular representations of ancient peoples, as well as insinuating a feminist dichotomy between male and female, both today and also back through time to our origins"

Through the making of the poster this student has become aware of and challenges ethnocentric and iconographic representations of humans and challenges gendered depictions of the past, questioning images that legitimise heterosexual hegemony and re-considering images that represent a way of ordering the world and an attempt to recreate self-identification.

The definition of culture was considered by poster C who saw posters as an aid to understanding the fluidity of culture identity i.e. depending on what you are considering. This directly references their decision to move from map to timeline:

"It helped me realise that peoples from different regions had different approaches to burial over different time periods and that these customs were an expression of the culture of that time and place."

Moreover, of interest, poster A begins to critically consider and challenge their own methodology and the definition of culture itself:

"we were seeking to show cultural variation and/or difference in stone monuments. But the evidence emerging was forcing us to question what we mean about the word culture. We found considerable amount of regional variation in the design of these monuments – this indicated to us that they were built to be used for different activities by possibly culturally different people"

This represents an awareness of the significance of articulation and the development of intellectual ideas and the study of European Prehistory. It demonstrates how critical reflection is an ongoing process and furthermore concerned with forming personal positions. Thus, the outcomes of these critical reflections demonstrate that through the making of the poster and written critique, students became aware of new ways of looking and interpreting the material.

Describe how this affected your ideas of change and/or continuity in European prehistory

Here I wanted the critical reflections to extend beyond what is presented in the poster to consider the development of students own experiences, to challenge prescribed notions of a fixed and static past and to consider the temporalities of how time is constructed and considered. This was supported by time allocated in a class based session to consider absolute and relative dating techniques, sequencing and the very concept of the construction of time (drawing upon for example Gell 1992; Braudel 1966 [1958] as case studies).

Both posters A and B challenged the making of the poster expressed through their ideas of change and continuity and how this is defined:

“our intention was to use the variations seen to illustrate cultural differences in prehistoric Europe – however during the process of poster production it became apparent that there were more similarities than differences” (poster A)

“What I am hoping is that there will be some evidence of modification by contacts with other cultures, tradition affected by the impact of trade, aesthetic change” (poster B)

Interestingly poster C wanted continuity and felt overwhelmed by evidence for change. This is reflected in the changing drafts reflecting changing perspectives in an understanding of the temporal construction European prehistory:

“There may not have been as much continuity in time as I would have liked. The examples we explored jumped around not only in time but also place. There would have been more continuity if we’d stuck to either one place over different time periods or different places at the same time”

In contrast poster D promotes a change in the way we as practitioners think:

“I like to think that in this way the slogan has a positive [theoretical] impact i.e. ‘Don’t live in the past!’”

Poster D’s observation in particular has some relevance to Simandiraki’s observations of how we feel we control the past, because for us it is our constructed version that counts (2005). She argues how the paradox between theoretical fixity and practical infinity of the past can be explained as “different viewpoints of the present” (Simandiraki 2005:173). Thus, the making of posters and writing of critical reflections students (a) recognize their initial fixed perceptions of the past and (b) became aware of the validity of their perspective, but also that of others (peers, tutors, authors, media etc.). Moreover, students commented that the making of a poster helped them to re-consider the process of change in European prehistory recognising that what they were initially looking for was continuity. One student commented that this has altered how she reads archaeological texts. This process challenges the didactic transmission of information into an environment of learners actively engaged in their own learning and building upon their own experiences of knowledge construction to consider the art of critically reflecting as a method of looking past or beyond what is immediately evident i.e. “looking deeper beyond the façade” (Philips & Bond 2004:287).

How did this affect your understanding of the reconstruction of past societies in European prehistory?
In this question, the student’s skills of critical reflection are intended to consider broader viewpoints. Critical reflection involves questioning the construction of identities in the past and presents a route into exploring plurist perspectives and approaches. In their consideration of what it is to reconstruct past societies the posters raised perceptive viewpoints situated within a developing awareness of the significance of their own biases and prejudices:

“I did consider that in reconstructing past societies we have a tendency to place what may have happened in the past against a background of how we would do it/define it today. This brings our own prejudices and cultural interpretations into view” (poster C)

towards challenging stereotypical constructions of identity:

“It is an attempt to juxtapose the generalisation of so-called primitive, uncultured and barbaric humans” (poster D)

For the other posters methodological perspectives were raised. Poster A commented on how the subject matter was not what they expected it to be, and that their regional distinctions did not work. This led them to consider whether regionality was a suitable method of enquiry to adopt:

“we considered these monumental cultures to be portable, they didn’t necessarily merge into one another – some were placed completely outside of their expected region”

While poster B raised an overarching paradox in research design:

“at times I feel like the character in Dickens who wrote a book about Chinese Metaphysics: he wrote all he knew about China and all he knew about Metaphysics and then combined the two.”

In this case, reconstructing past societies was considered through two perspectives: the tangible (object based) paradigm of poster design and issues of knowledge construction, in comparison to intangible (an attitude) perspectives that considered a developing awareness of how self influences interpretation, and how prescribed models do not always fit the data.

Describe how this process affected your understanding/empathy with the study of European prehistory?

In this category critical reflection continues to depend on a given process. It now involves the theme of situating the self as author, raising awareness for students that their ideas and intellectual traditions came from a (mostly Western) historical process. This format allows students to become more aware of the significance of their own identities and through this process, understand the past as inhabited by a diverse population. Emphasis in critical reflections was either placed on a methodological approach as a route to understanding how European Prehistory can and/or might be studied, while another perspective was to engage with a sense of empathy of the past.

In their consideration of how the dead have been treated in the past, poster C raised the point of how collaborative work helped them understand and appreciate how archaeological projects and publications and fieldwork projects are designed and articulated:

“Working with others made me realise that there could be many points of view on a topic”

A consideration of the importance of research methodologies, within subject specific areas of the discipline, and how crucial knowledge acquisitions is to explore ideas was raised by both posters A and B:

“we discovered that you can see some interesting patterns in cultural change during the Neolithic in this region by looking at the big picture, but only if you put quite a lot of effort into looking at the detail first”

“In the sense that all research leads one to read around the subject (even though one has in the end to discard most of the information gathered as not relevant to the matter in hand) it is inevitable that this leads in itself to the development of understanding”

Focusing on more empathetic considerations, poster D considered how others and the author constructed gender identities in the past and in the present:

“The Past Is HIS-story is a statement of literal fact as well as a comment on who tends to write history gender wise”

The question of gaining an understanding/empathy with the study of European prehistory presents a route for students to observe their own process of situating self in the methodological design of a poster and to consider their own ways of thinking about and understanding the past. By understanding this process, students move, through their own route, into in the process of interpretation. Furthermore, their interpretations are not confined to the classroom. Students commented on their developing awareness of how they incorporate their sense of self into the poster projects i.e. their self (individual) and construction of themselves (collective). This promotes an awareness that they are students, but also daughters/sons and (perhaps) mothers/fathers, employers/employees etc.; that they have political, social and gendered constructions of self, and so, in various ways, did people in the past.

Conclusion: developing intellectual ideas

“In teaching we do not merely pass on a free standing package of knowledge of different periods, culture and traditions... what we do rather is offer, however indirectly, a sense of personal meaning which our curriculum has for us – its value, its relevance, its implications for us as particular human beings. In teaching...we represent not only our own subject, more importantly that stance we take towards it” Salmon (1995:24)

Integrating posters into course design provides a forum that aims to train students as active agents in the process of making sense of data, designing a research project, articulating their ideas in a prescribed format, thus opening up of avenues of enquiry e.g. gender, sexuality, the politics of the past, collaboration and social inclusion. Through the format outlined in this paper, it can be seen that experientially evaluated situations e.g. socialization, knowledge construction and data presentation, helped students to realise the complexities of studying European prehistory. Students commented on how they had previously thought more about European prehistory as static with broad evidence for change and data; they reflected on how they wanted self-contained, set-parameters when initially designing their posters. This reflexive awareness articulated by the students in their critiques is the positive outcome of peer assisted learning, which is implemented into the dynamics of the teaching and learning environment from the outset. Thus, the students become aware of the values of groupwork and the significance of posters as assessment of that groupwork. From the examples shown in this paper we have seen how the making of posters brings about an awareness and development of transferable skills. As such, the poster represents an effective tool in engaging students actively and purposefully in their own learning. In considering the reconstruction of societies students were able to critically consider the construction of identities – those of the past, of the discipline and of themselves. Moreover, they challenged homogenous, static social stereotypes and the concept of social differentiation. Methods of enquiry were critiqued (e.g. maps, timelines, etc.) and through the process of reflexive thinking students were able to articulate the complexities of bridging data and theory and consider values and where they are situated.

In considering how knowledge is generated, I wanted students to come to this way of thinking of their own accord – through their constructed avenues of enquiry. Through this process students are able to recognise, elaborate, enact and articulate critical processes and became aware that knowledge is negotiated. Overall students showed increasing personal engagement in the critical reflection processes. They become aware of the validity of their own perspectives (collective and individual) and demonstrated a development from generic skills to the notion of a person as a critical being, illustrating their awareness of their own agency as constructors of knowledge and understanding. For example, they understood the validity of taking into account their own past experiences (beliefs, values and emotions) in their evaluation of the poster and its aims. Moreover, the making of the posters and critique writing impacted on their understanding of other aspects of the course. Students commented on how they felt more confident in their essay writing (for example, in terms of addressing an idea and shaping an argument) and had developed an awareness of the interplay between image and text in the discipline. Furthermore, they commented on how the poster workshops and group-based assessment overall had a positive aspect on group dynamics (e.g. they were more confident working as a group on field excursions). The reflexive process can therefore be seen to impact on many aspects of the teaching and learning environment.

The lexicon of learning is demonstrated through the process of writing both for both poster format and reflective critique. Students learnt through managing a particular writing style in their posters and through their critical reflections that how we write tends to produce certain kinds of truths. It involves meanings and resources (Preucel & Hodder 1996:14) and is the product of a series of transformative processes. Thus, it can be demonstrated through this process, that writing is not fixed or neutral but reflects historically shifting domination of particular schools or paradigms (Richardson 2000:925). Richardson comments “I write because I want to find something out” (2000:925), questioning how we put ourselves into our own texts, and with what consequences? How do we nurture our individuality and at the same time lay claim to ‘knowing something’? Through the writing formats required for this assessment criteria, students have found out about their subject matter, their stance, the approaches made by their colleagues and how to cohesively bring these together in an articulate written form.

In this paper I have specifically focused on the importance of considering values in the design and planning of posters in which students are involved in commenting not only on the events themselves, but also on wider issues of the discipline and through an awareness of themselves as critical practitioners, moving from a focus on generic skills to a notion of person as a critical being (Phillips & Bond 2004:277). My orientation in this paper was to propose that the design and planning of learning events and activities should consider the responsibility to present an 'inclusive' present and past that is of central importance in the teaching of archaeology, and which encourages learners and teachers to realise the essential connection between learning activities and events and the control and exercise of power and education. What I have aimed to present was that placing learners at the heart of the learning process, means that people are able to learn what is relevant for them in ways that are appropriate (e.g. Edwards 1991:85), thus in one respect challenging the representation of the past propagated by a dominant group in a given society (cf. Bell et al. 1997; Gathercole & Lowenthal 1990; Jones & Pay 1990). Overall it has highlighted that teaching and learning is part of an ongoing process of personal and cultural development, social and political understanding.

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