Let's Find a Barn and Put On a Show

Ten Lessons Learned from Designing Public Programs

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Archaeology has become a popular subject in television programs, video games, movies, and novels because people are curious about the past and especially about the "mysterious" or unknown past. For the general public, archaeology seems to be an ideal platform that combines this mysterious past with exotic settings. So, many people take the opportunity to visit an excavation or go to a museum to see the results of an archaeological excavation. Archaeologists are often invited by teachers or historical societies or other groups to come to classrooms and present programs. In other cases, archaeological groups look for opportunities to meet with the public to better explain what archaeologists do and how they differ from paleontologists. Often, the programs are one-time events, and archaeologists talk about their current or favorite projects. Archaeologists typically

ABSTRACT

Archaeologists are regularly asked to present public programs. The audiences are varied, as are the settings. Often, the programs are one-time events, and archaeologists usually talk about current or favorite projects. However, public programs may run into unexpected problems because they take archaeologists into unfamiliar situations. In addition, not all programs, including some that seem successful, leave the audience with the message the archaeologist intended to convey; occasionally, the audience will even receive the opposite message. This article is designed to help anyone preparing public programs to avoid some common problems. The lessons fit into three groups. The first group consists of knowledge lessons: know your audience, know their interests, and know their community. The second group consists of logistical lessons: how many programs or classes should be involved? How long should each program last, and what facilities should be used? The third group consists of development lessons for both you and your audience, including building goals and objectives into the program and using appropriate assessment methods. It also includes creating networks that support your program. Can you develop the individual encounters into a coherent approach? Whether a program is designed for a single school class of 30 fourth graders or for a booth at a county fair visited by 4,000 fairgoers, each one should be designed to provide a coherent message to the audience.

A los arqueólogos se les pide a menudo presentar sus programas al público. Las audiencias son variadas, así como son los puntos de vista. A menudo, los programas son eventos de una sola vez, y los arqueólogos a veces hablan de sus proyectos actuales o preferidos. Muchos programas, especialmente uno de los programas caen en una categoría que me recuerda a las películas de la década de 1930, en las que a menudo Judy Garland o Mickey Rooney aparecieron. En estas películas, los personajes principales encontrarían lo que necesitaban para recaudar dinero o ayudar a alguien, para hacer un espectáculo y lograr ese resultado. A menudo, uno de los protagonistas podría sugerir "encontremos un granero y pongamos un espectáculo" con sólo unos días de preparación. A veces, el espectáculo podría resolverse con éxito, otras veces, se encontrarían con problemas inesperados. Los programas de arqueología pública pueden funcionar en patrones similares de preparación, que pueden conducir a problemas inesperados. Además, no todos los programas incluyendo algunos que parecen ser exitosos, no pueden haber dejado en la audiencia con el mensaje que pretendían transmitir. De vez en cuando, un programa dejará a la audiencia el mensaje contrario de lo que se pretendía dar. Este documento está diseñado para ayudar a todos los que preparan los programas públicos a evitar algunos problemas comunes.

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spend much more effort developing what they want to say than considering what their audience wants to hear, because they want to share the aspects of archaeology that they find most interesting. This contribution has been designed to provide some suggestions on ways in which archaeologists can develop and improve their public programs by listening to their audiences and incorporating not just their own goals but also those of the teacher or program developer.

Many programs, especially one-time programs, remind me of movies from the 1930s that often featured Judy Garland or Mickey Rooney, in which the main characters would find that they needed to raise money to help someone. Often one of the protagonists would suggest that they "find a barn and put on a show" with just a few days' preparation. Sometimes the show would successfully solve the problem, but often the "show" would run into unexpected problems. Public archaeological programs either for schools or other public groups may run into similar preparation patterns, which can lead to unexpected problems. In addition, some programs that seem successful may not have left the audience with the message that the archaeologist intended to convey. Occasionally a program may actually leave the audience with the exact opposite message. This How-To article is designed to help those without formal training in program development to prepare public programs on archaeology and to avoid some common problems. It focuses on public outreach rather than other forms of public education, as defined by several papers in this journal (for example, King 2016; Kowalczyk 2016). It is especially designed to help practitioners who are not specialists in outreach, but who find that they are often faced with developing such programs, even though their real job is something else.

WHY SHOULD ARCHAEOLOGISTS SPEAK TO PUBLIC AUDIENCES?

The first question to ask as you prepare a program is "Why do you want to speak to the public?" or "Why do you want to speak to this part of the public?" While many archaeologists have spent their careers in a variety of engagements with the public, public outreach and education became a responsibility of all professional archaeologists during the 1990s (McManamon 2000). This development was primarily in response to the destruction of many archaeological sites on federal lands in the western United States. Federal involvement in archaeological outreach follows a much longer history in the National Park Service (NPS) of developing methods for interpreting archaeological, historical, and natural phenomena for the public.

One of the earliest formal attempts within the NPS to define interpretation methods was Freeman Tilden's *Interpreting Our Heritage* (2007), originally published in 1957, which provided a primer for NPS interpreters. Tilden defined six principles for interpretation that were designed to be used by interpreters in NPS settings but are relevant to other kinds of programs. These principles are (Tilden 2007:18):

- Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something with the personality or experience of the "visitor" will be sterile.
- Information, as such, is not interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.
- Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical, or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.
- The chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.
- Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part and must address itself to the whole man rather than to any phase.
- Interpretation addressed to children (say, up to the age of 12) should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best, it will require a separate program.

When archaeologists began to develop the pedagogy of public education, some experienced practitioners defined the types of archaeological messages that would be useful or interesting to the public. Shereen Lerner (1991:103) developed a list of messages that could be used as a guide for public education efforts. The first characteristic she defined is that a program must be of local interest and enticing to those without special archaeological training and knowledge. Other suggested messages included:

- Stories of local interest help individuals draw connections between themselves and the archaeological record of their own place.
- Such stories might relate how people lived in an area at some point in the past, an unexpected event, or an unusual kind of feature or artifact found locally.
- Community-specific topics are essential to successful public education, yet communication with the public should also directly or indirectly make general points related to the value of archaeological resources; the care that must be used when studying these resources; the effort necessary to curate artifacts and records following excavations; and the nonrenewable, often fragile, nature of archaeological remains (Lerner 1991).

An important aspect of both Tilden's and Lerner's lists is that they both identify general types of content for public programs that provide a framework that can be adjusted to meet the needs of each program. This early research created the basic approaches that are the foundations of public outreach today. These approaches can be adjusted to the type of program that is planned by any practitioner.

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LESSONS FOR ARCHAEOLOGISTS

The rest of this contribution provides examples of some of the issues that archaeological practitioners might encounter as they develop their own approaches to public archaeology. While formal approaches to public archaeology are currently taught in a number of archaeological programs in universities, not everyone has had the benefit of that training, and many practitioners still find that they will have to develop their own programs. The lessons described here are for the practitioners, not their audience. They are lessons for the archaeologist who is designing a first program.

These 10 lessons fit into three groups. The first group (Lessons 1–4) consists of "knowledge lessons" that include topics such as knowing your audience, knowing their interests, and knowing their community. They describe questions to ask when you are contacted by a group about presenting a program. The second group (Lessons 5–9) includes lessons that describe the logistics that you need to develop a program for a specific audience. These are the "how many, how long, and what facilities" questions you need to ask as you begin to develop a program. The third group (represented by a single Lesson 10 in this article) can be characterized as "development lessons" for both your own development and that of your audiences. They focus on building goals and objectives into your program, as well as identifying methods for the assessment of the program. They also include creating networks that support your program. Can you develop your individual encounters into a coherent program that can build greater long-term interest supporting your message? Whether a program is designed for a single school class of 30 fourth graders or a booth at a county fair visited by 4,000 fairgoers (Figure 1), each experience should be designed to reinforce a coherent program.



FIGURE 1. Noel Strattan of the Pennsylvania Bureau of Historic Preservation trying out a canoe replica at the Pennsylvania Farm Show. More than 4,000 people visit their booth each year (photograph by Donald Chiarulli).

Every good program should start with an understanding of the audience, their interests, and how your presentation will tell them more about something they need or want to know more about. While we may not be presenting our information using Lerner's approach or the NPS formal interpretation framework defined by Tilden, their suggestions provide guidance for the types of material that can resonate with a public audience. Effective programs start with a clear understanding of the audience and their interests. When you get a call from a teacher, a historical society, a Boy Scout or Girl Scout group, a librarian, or a nursing home social director, you should ask questions. The first questions you should ask if you haven't spoken to the group before are

1. Why have you called an archaeologist? Occasionally you will get an answer that indicates that the person who called you has no idea what an archaeologist does, so they may have confused you with a paleontologist. In this case, you should positively explain the difference and explain what an archaeologist does. You may still be interesting to the group.

2. If you have been called by a teacher, ask what the students have been studying or where it fits in their curriculum. If the students are high school juniors studying ancient Greece, you might want to talk about the archaeology of ancient Greece, but you can also include some information on the archaeology in their town or county. Students often believe that there is archaeology only in Greece and Italy or the southwest United States. Letting them know that there are archaeological sites near them can be a valuable opportunity for you to let them know that sites are endangered. You could also talk about historic sites and how archaeology tells us about local history.

3. If you are initiating the contact with a teacher or with a school, some of these same questions need to be answered, but you first will have to make the case that your program fits into the school curriculum. In some states, you may be required to have a background check. One way to develop these contacts is through state social science or science conferences.

4. Once you have developed a relationship with a school or teacher, encourage the teachers to make archaeology a normal part of their curriculum. I have had relationships with several teachers at a school who invite me to be part of "their" archaeology programs every year. In one case, I have been part of the teacher's "Archaeology Day" for the past 20 years. Another teacher has invited me to be part of her curriculum for gifted students for 12 years. In these cases, you support the teacher, but you are also able to provide the teacher with materials and ideas that support

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the development of her or his course. This also will help you gain an understanding of how teachers develop their programs. If you are able to work with a teacher who wants to develop materials for his or her students, you will find that these students will have a deeper understanding of what archaeologists do than those students who are just exposed to a single class period.

5. During that first conversation, ask how much time you will have for your presentation and what projection equipment might be available. If you need projection equipment, be sure it is available and compatible. If you do many programs, it's helpful to have your own equipment.

6. You should ask about the group. Is it a single class of fourth graders or the entire middle school? Clearly, different kinds of programs will be given depending on the size of the group. For a middle school group, the expectation may be that you provide a 40-minute lecture in the auditorium and have no hands-on experience with the students. In some cases, I have suggested to the teachers that we meet in smaller groups, either in classes throughout the day or on several days. These types of programs are more work for you and might not fit well with your schedule, but, with a few exceptions to be discussed later, they may be more rewarding. However, don't take on a group larger than you can manage. Ask about the speakers who have been invited to speak to the group before.

7. You may have to decide how flexible you can be when it seems your message is ignored or even countered by an enthusiastic but uninformed group. It is often possible to avoid the worst or most destructive plans by an overexcited group by explaining to them the time and effort involved in doing all the stages that are required to do "real" archaeology.

   For example, years ago, I had an experience with a middle school. Middle school teachers are the most energetic and enthusiastic teachers I know. They received a flier about the state archaeology month in September and, within a week, had organized an extensive program for their students. The school was divided into groups of 100 students who were in all the same classes with a group of teachers. This team of students and teachers had decided to have an archaeological dig and planned it on the farm that was adjacent to the school. The daughter of the farm family was part of the group. It was fall and the crops were in, and there were no recorded sites in this area. The custodians built screens. They invited me to talk about archaeology. I talked to them, but they went on with the project and continued it for several years. They kept me informed of their progress, and I met with them a number of times through the three years of the project. In that time, they found only a single artifact, although they screened all the soil from the plow zone of dozens of 3-m-x-3-m (10-ft-x-10-ft) units. Clearly, this was not an ideal program. However, the students and teachers learned a lot about archaeology and did not damage an archaeological site.



FIGURE 2. Student at the Ellis School prepared for flintknapping activity with safety glasses, gloves, and protective pads (photograph by Beverly Chiarulli).

8. While most experiences are wonderful, there is always the possibility that things may go wrong. I have had a couple of experiences in which artifacts have disappeared while being passed around a class. Never use irreplaceable objects. I also know of an occasion when an artifact disappeared during a program that involved too many third graders, inexperienced instructors, and passive teachers. Some teachers view speakers as a break for them and disengage during the program. In this instance, the situation escalated, the local police were called, and the children were searched, with no results. It is unlikely that this group has positive views of archaeology or archaeologists.

9. Be prepared for accidents. If you have a flintknapping activity, be sure that you have safety glasses, gloves, lap pads, Band-Aids, and small enough groups that you can monitor what they are doing (Figure 2 and Figure 3). Be sure they understand that the chert flakes are really sharp. If you tell students that they will cut themselves if they run their fingers over a sharp flake edge, some will immediately try that. Instead, show them how a fresh flake will cut wood or cardboard.

10. Develop a plan both for your development as a public outreach specialist and your audience's development in understanding archaeology. The plan should include

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FIGURE 3. Enthusiastic flintknappers at the Ellis School Archaeology Day (photograph by Beverly Chiarulli).

building goals and objectives into the program, as well as identifying methods for the assessment of your program. What are your goals in your programs? Is your goal to Save the Past for the Future? Is it to encourage greater interest in archaeology? Do you want to help support local groups, such as local historical societies or schools? You probably can't do all of these at the same time, so there will be many answers to this question, and none of them are wrong. You need to decide what you want to achieve and how you can achieve those goals. Do you have all the skills you need to achieve your goals? You may need to expand your network to find new resources and even specialized training to become a successful public education specialist. Do you know how to work with special needs groups or non-English speakers or other minority groups? There are often different ways to approach groups, and you should be aware of these situations. There are many different agencies and institutions that address special needs and that can be helpful. Similarly, more experienced colleagues may help answer your questions, too, so networking is critical. Some of the resources you will need to expand your program have been addressed in other articles in this issue (Ellick 2016; Henderson and Levstik 2016; Kowalczyk 2016; Reetz and Quackenbush 2016; Thomas and Langlitz 2016).

CONCLUSIONS

At some point, you may find that a major part of your work involves public programs, and you may begin to turn your ad hoc and occasional presentations into a comprehensive program and message that can build greater lasting interest and support by increasing understanding of the history of the community and the importance of archaeology more generally. Your efforts can be maximized either by creating a network of your own, establishing one in your institution, or by joining a community of specialists who can help you. For example, you may work with the local archaeological societies or state agencies to produce material about the archaeology in your area, and assess and improve new and existing efforts. The more individuals and organizations that work together, the more impact you can have. Public outreach is as much a specialty as many other areas of archaeology.

Public programs can inform and improve the public's understanding of the archaeological record. When carefully thought out and planned with audiences and message in mind, these programs help preserve and protect the past and provide students with a positive experience with archaeologists (Figure 3).

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Data Availability Statement

This paper is based on descriptions of programs developed by the author. Additional details are available by contacting the author at bev@chiarulli.net.

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