Learning archaeology: Another story

Catherine Clarke

The best teachers are the best storytellers
(Smith cited in Barrett 2004:1).

Simply put, archaeologists are storytellers
(Deetz 1998:94).

Abstract

Developing more effective teaching and learning approaches is an important aspect of disciplinary practice and will require archaeologists to undertake a scholarly exploration of educational theory and methods, areas as yet unfamiliar to most. Here, I argue for this undertaking through an exploration of the role of narrative in teaching and learning. Although often undefined, the term ‘narrative’ has been addressed by archaeologists from a range of theoretical persuasions to argue for different research and interpretive perspectives as well as to acknowledge the value of narrative for developing public awareness of archaeology. However, such projects are primarily aimed outside the discipline: to provide socially responsible information about the past and to generate and maintain public support. There has been a dearth of attention given to the possible ways that narrative can be used to educate archaeologists to better equip them to engage with their professional responsibilities. Here, I outline theoretical considerations for the use of narrative in education and suggest some research approaches for improved teaching and learning in archaeology.

Introduction: Once...

In 1999-2000 I worked with Wendy Beck on a proof of concept for a program aimed at assisting students’ learning of foundational concepts in archaeology. The project, Archaeology: Developing Initial Concepts – Building a Learning Experience, funded through the University of New England’s Teaching and Learning Centre, followed the redevelopment in the previous year of the first year archaeology course. As part of our project we collected students’ evaluations of their experience of the new study materials and textbook using a brief written survey and focus group interviews. The thrust of our inquiries was on how well students felt various study materials had helped them learn, and mainly sought evaluations on specific components of the materials. However, some more general comments indicated that students also sought something to help them make sense of the material overall. Brief comments to the effect that they would like more readable texts and help with deciding what was relevant hinted at, I believe, a need to build a pathway through the material, a way of gaining some overall sense of what it all meant. Time did not allow us to pursue the project but the notion of constructing a meaningful summary interpretation for learning came back into focus later when, encouraged by reading such texts as Joyce et al. (2002) on narrative construction in archaeology, I became interested in exploring the potential connection between the narrative construction of meaning and helping students achieve meaningful learning outcomes in the formal study of archaeology. Investigating this connection and making it meaningful to an audience of archaeologists, some of whom perceive their discipline, its purpose and teaching, as ‘scientific’, would clearly require not only telling the story but also making the case for the exploration of theoretical and methodological areas outside of archaeology. In this paper, therefore, I embark on an investigation of the role of narrative in teaching archaeology to tertiary students and suggest some teaching approaches that might be taken. For I suggest that engaging with narrative as a central, indeed inevitable, aspect of learning and representing archaeology, is an important avenue to sustaining and improving disciplinary practice through education.

What’s to improve?: Education for archaeology

A concern with teaching and learning is necessary to the survival of a discipline. This is a perception evidenced in interest in the relationship between archaeology and education articulated at least since the late 1980s (Stone and MacKenzie 1990) and currently revived, particularly for the tertiary sector, as reported in the literature (see articles in World Archaeology 36(2), 2004; this volume of Australian Archaeology 61, 2005) and reflected in the activities of bodies which provide forums for discussion and seek to generate research interest, such as the Teaching and Learning Subcommittee of the Australian Archaeological Association (now subsumed under the Australian Joint Interim Standing Committee on Archaeology Teaching and Learning). A very general summary of the concerns expressed is that they combine the philosophical with the pragmatic. Archaeology as a discipline needs, for example, to continually deepen its understanding of how to study the past and to produce more accurate interpretations and more critically aware practitioners. An important means of doing this is to recognise and address pedagogy as a ‘contested domain’ rather than a passive process of knowledge delivery (Hamilakis 2004). A more pragmatic, but nonetheless legitimate, concern includes that of sustaining support from higher education funding bodies, particularly in the face of a perceived need for increased public accountability monitored through such education auditing agencies as the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA), established to report on quality assurance in higher education. Indeed, key challenges identified for archaeology teaching and learning in Australia centre most prominently on associated issues of government funding and policy (Colley 2004:195). Another related concern is the need to prepare students better for professional practice as consulting archaeologists (Colley 2004:196) in what is
in fact the largest area of archaeological employment. If teaching and learning are vital for archaeology, then, what of narrative and its relation to teaching and learning?

**Narrative and its study**

The narrative form and its study, narratology, have attracted widespread interest in the human and social sciences (e.g. Hawthorn 1985; Polkinghorne 1988; Prince 1991; White 1987). Developing initially in literary studies, and with a lineage traceable from Aristotle’s *Poetics* (c.350 BC), an interest in narrative emerged as a formal study most strongly in the twentieth century (Chatman 1978; Prince 1991). Intensified interest in narrative in the last 30 or so years is attributable to the development of post-modern or non-essentialist theory (Hawthorn 1985:x). A perceived essential connection between narrative and human behaviour (Jameson 1981; Polkinghorne 1988; Ricoeur 1983) has resulted in substantial attention being focussed on narrative in varied humanities disciplines, sociology and psychology (e.g. Green et al. 2002:2). The role of the narrative in studying the past has also been a significant topic of discussion. The work of Hayden White (1987), drawing upon narratology to examine the construction of grand master narratives to interpret historical events and their operation in both justifying and sustaining social action, has been particularly influential. An interest in narrative has also informed both theory and method in applied contexts, such as in psychotherapy (Green et al. 2002) and education (Bruner 1986).

**A central function**

Such widespread interest supports Mink’s (1978:177) statement that narrative is the ‘primary and irreducible form of human expression’, indeed the central function of the human mind (Jameson 1981), and an activity that ‘could appear problematical only in a culture in which it was absent’ (White 1987:1). Ricoeur (1983:52) echoes these assertions of narrative’s centrality and universality in his characterisation that ‘time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through narrative’. While such statements are of course still open to question, narrative is certainly pervasive, being present, as Prince (1991:58) notes, in ‘every human society known to history and anthropology’. It is thus unsurprising that the broad range of contexts in which narrative excites curiosity, together with its pervasiveness, is matched by the complexity and sometimes elusiveness of the concept to definition.

**Defining narrative**

Chatman (1978), approaching the definition of narrative from literary studies, argues for a focus on delineating form rather than content. Our concern is ‘not, for example, what makes Macbeth great but what makes it a tragedy’ (Chatman 1978:16). My definition will therefore take the view that ‘definitions are to be made, not discovered’ and is ‘deductive’ rather than ‘empiricist’ (Chatman 1978:18). So how can such deductions, found in a selection of many texts, be summarised?

**Story and event**

At its most basic level, narrative is:

- The recounting (as product and process, object and act, structure and structuration) of one or more real or fictitious events communicated by one, two, or several (more or less overt) narrators to one, two, or several (more or less overt) narrators. Such (possibly interesting) texts as “Electrons are constituents of atoms”, “Mary is tall and Peter is small” do not constitute narratives, since they do not represent any event … On the other hand, even such possibly uninteresting texts as “The man opened the door” … are narratives (Prince 1991:58).

In essence, this definition draws upon Aristotle’s, seeing narrative as a sequence of causally related events – narratives have a structure that includes a beginning, middle and an end (Prince 1991:59). However, as Shanks (1992:187) points out, the sequence is not always presented in strict linear order of presumed occurrence.

**Sequence and time**

If narrative is not necessarily linear in the way it presents time, it always proposes a temporal order to the events. Indeed its ‘most distinctive feature’ has been said to consist of at least one modification of a state of affairs through time (Prince 1991:59). This fundamental quality of narrative as an account of a transition, is closely allied to Ricoeur’s (1983) thesis that narrative is the process through which humans comprehend and give order and expression to experience through time. In this respect the role of narrative in interpretation of the human past would seem inevitable. Certainly, in the discipline of history, the role of narrative has been proposed as fundamental, as in Gay’s (1974:189) formulation that ‘historical narration without analysis is trivial, historical analysis without narration is incomplete’. In this sense, narrative can be seen to be a major, even essential, form through which we structure and represent our understanding of the human past.

**Structure**

Chatman (1978:19, original emphasis) distinguished story and discourse as the two ‘necessary’ components of narrative structure: ‘the story is the what in a narrative that is depicted, discourse the how’. Structure can, therefore, be distinct from the message (the story) and can be seen as created by the narrator/author and not a natural or self-evident representation.

**Transposability**

The story can be presented in a number of media (as a novel, for example, or as a film) but we can still describe it as the same story, separately, in words (Chatman 1978:20). While it can be transposed to different discourses or media, any particular narrative nonetheless has a definite shape, a product of the deliberate selection of events and other story elements by the author. It is possible, for example, to tell a story of Australian colonial transition from convict settlement to free selection in a fictional screenplay, a filmed documentary and a novel. Each discourse might present events and exchanges between characters in a slightly different manner, order and length but to be the same story the selected elements should all be there in some form.

**Selectivity**

Through narrative we seek to convey a sense of the meaning of the events recounted, to communicate an interpretive point. We might be introduced to characters in
a story, for instance, or we enter it at a certain point in time, but we do not hear every detail of the character's history or their social context, nor do we need to hear this in order to engage with the story. As Chatman (1978:28) expresses it, 'each character obviously must first be born. But the discourse need not mention his [sic] birth, may elect to take up his [sic] history at the age of ten ... or whatever suits its purpose'. The notion of serving a purpose, served in part by a process of selection, is central to understanding the function of narrative, which is that it has a moral intent.

**Moral, meaning and authority**

Narrative purpose gives the form a moral or ethical dimension. For Ricoeur (1983:59), 'the practical understanding authors share with their audiences necessarily involves an evaluation of the characters and their actions as good or bad'. This moral purpose extends beyond the creation of meaning in events but, in factual as well as fictional narration, is 'intimately related to, if not a function of, the impulse to moralize reality' (White 1987:14). Moralising, or the ascription of meaning, as White (1987:13) contends, is closely allied to, if not a prerequisite for, the construction of socially and intellectually constraining meta-narratives in interpretations of the past.

**Wholeness and filling in**

To attain the power of moral persuasiveness, a narrative must exhibit wholeness. Events in a narrative must be related or 'mutually entailing':

If we were to extract randomly from cocktail chatter a set of events that happened at different times and different places to different persons, we would clearly not have a narrative (Chatman 1978:21).

One of the critical features of the narrative form is that we fill in events, explanations and details to create coherence from what may be unrelated circumstances or we impose a closer relationship on events than actually may exist: 'If we have a story like “Peter fell ill. Peter died. Peter was buried,” we assume that it is the same Peter in each case' (Chatman 1978:30).

This glossing effect or ‘filling in’ is often, ‘all too easily forgotten or assumed to be ... a mere reflex action of the reading mind’ (Chatman 1978:31) and has been noted and criticised in narrative interpretations of the past, in archaeology (e.g. Brown and Hamilakis 2003; Danforth 2003; Landau 1991) and history (White 1987), particularly with regard to the operation of meta-narratives. However, while accepting the cautionary dimension of these critiques and seeking to avoid the mythologising effects of narrative, it is important to take into account the form’s transactional, or dialogic, nature.

**Communicative transaction and transformation**

The sense that we, as narratees, fill in what is not explicitly disclosed in the story highlights the communicative function of narrative. At one level, there are always one or more narrators, either implied or overt, who recount the story to one or more narratees, also more or less overt (Prince 1991:58). Narrative demands more than a merely transmissive view of communication, however; the act of narration calls forth a response from narratees, one which goes beyond mere receptivity: members of the audience must respond with an interpretation: they cannot avoid participating ... They must fill in gaps with essential or likely events, traits and objects which ... have gone unmentioned (Chatman 1978:28).

Narrative is thus a transaction, not merely a transmission, a creation of meaning through a kind of dialog (Bakhtin 1981). Further to this view is Ricoeur’s (1983:53-54) concept of three-fold mimesis, whereby narrative is the means by which we move through time from pre-understanding to post-understanding. Human time, as represented in the story, presents as prefigured, configured, then reconfigured. Through narrative both narratees and narrator traverse the events, interactions, and goals of the story to its conclusion, which to be acceptable must be ‘congruent’ with the episodes brought together by the story (Ricoeur 1983:67) but also, to function as narrative, must somehow reconfigure or add to, and not merely reinforce, previous understanding. Narrative is, in this sense, transformative as well as transactional and thus of critical interest for education. The notion of a dialogic transaction, moreover, implies that reconfigurations are open-ended. There is always the potential for a narrative to be re-opened, to develop further or to be reinterpreted.

**Open-endedness and conclusion**

As Ricoeur (1983:72) states there is ‘always more to tell’ given both the selectivity and, hence redundancy in any narrative. While there may be some circularity inherent in the process, therefore, narratives are always open-ended (Ricoeur 1983:76), leading to other potential facts (White 1987:23), story developments and meanings. Characterising narratives as pervasive and open-ended may convey the impression that there are few (or no) non-narrative forms. This is clearly not the case, although it may be fair to say that while there are forms of expression which are not narrative, there may be none of those which cannot be incorporated into the narrative form. Educational textbooks exhibit this feature. White and O’Connell (1982:1), for example, implicitly accommodate the use of narrative in their work by drawing the distinction between the science of archaeology as the means of deriving ‘uniformitarian assumptions’ and the writing of prehistory to ‘give meaning to observations’.

**What is not narrative?**

Notwithstanding the arguments cited above, narrative is not the only form through which we make sense of the world, or express this sense to others. White (1987:2), for example, shows how historians use other forms such as the meditation, not only for non-narrative but in some cases anti-narrative purposes. White (1987:6-25) also expends some effort in anatomising annals and chronologies as forms of historical writing in order, by contrast, to delineate the operation of narrative. Green et al. (2002:2), in focussing on the psychological impact of narrative, contrast the form, which claims verification through verisimilitude, with rhetorical persuasion (argument) which appeals for verification to formal proof. While these distinctions can be helpful, it is also important to restate that different forms of representation may be utilised within narrative. Argument may in fact contain narrative elements which may be obscured from the reader, sometimes by the very familiarity
we all have with the narrative form. A distinction between these two modes of persuasion brings us to a consideration of the role of narrative in, or in conjunction with, expository arguments presented in empirically based disciplines like archaeology (cf. Pluciennik 1999).

Relation of narrative to evidence and argument

Presenting arguments from evidence is not the same as using narrative to present evidence-based interpretations, although, as I have indicated, the rhetorical and narrative forms can become intertwined to the possible detriment of empirical reliability. The degree to which this can be done while maintaining coherence with evidence-based practice is one basic question for further research (but see Hamilakis 2003). The focus here is another central, though related, question: Can narrative be used to improve learning in archaeology? To explore this question, we first need to expand a little on how narrative functions to transform knowledge.

How does narrative work?

The way narrative functions to structure and represent our understanding, and to help us make sense of past events, has been studied in psychology, where narrative has been approached in terms of its ‘impact’ on comprehension and knowledge acquisition (Green et al. 2002). Key elements identified by these studies are transportation and immersion.

Transportation and immersion

Narrative impact occurs when the narratee is transported (or, given the transactional aspect of narrative, uses the stimulus of the narration to transport themselves) through narrative elements (e.g. event, setting). These elements combine to elicit imagery in the narratee, who becomes immersed in the narrative. Through immersion, narratees move temporarily out of their current mental frame of reference into a different one, another ‘world’ or context of experience. This transportation is affected in degree by a number of factors, including the quality of the narrative, its artistry and vividness and the adherence of the story to the narrative format (Green and Brock 2002:327-328). When these conditions are sufficiently established, transportation occurs at both a physical level – the narratee may become so immersed that they don’t notice other events such as people entering the room where they are seated – and the psychological level – the narratee may not think about contradictory events while immersed in the narrative (Green and Brock 2002:325). Transportation thus makes ‘some aspects of the world of origin inaccessible’ and the narratee can, even if only temporarily, lay aside beliefs and understanding about the way the world of origin is constituted before returning to that world ‘somewhat changed by the journey’ (Gerrig 1993:10-11). The degree of change experienced, whether to knowledge or beliefs, is variable. It may be no more than the narratee now having some memory of the account but may be much more significant and include ‘belief change’ (Green and Brock 2002:325). This recalls Ricoeur’s formulation already outlined, whereby the experience of narrative results in a reconfiguration of understanding, indicating quite directly the role of narrative in learning and its interest for teaching.

Yet it can be argued that changes in knowledge and/or belief are also possible through the experience of non-narrative forms, such as an evidence-based argument or practice. Why, therefore, should narrative be seen as in any way necessary or helpful for learning archaeology, where evidence-based practice is afforded particular primacy? On the one hand, narrative may indeed be seen as not only unnecessary but perhaps dangerous. Green and Brock (2002:329), for example, state that the power of narrative to persuade may not be dependent on its factual or fictional status, ‘although it is clear that rhetorical persuasion [evidence based argument] suffers from being labelled beforehand as false or untrue (Eagly and Chaiken 1993), narrative persuasion often is not discounted even when it is explicitly labelled as fiction’. The weak relationship between the persuasive power of narrative and its factual status raises questions about the use of the form in any reliable way. Even if factual and evidence-based material is used in constructing the narrative, what about the effects of other aspects of narrative? For example, how satisfied or confident can we feel about the story of human evolution or regional occupation which, by its very nature, requires selectivity by the narrator and filling in by the narratee? This is particularly obvious for the use of narrative in popular presentations of archaeology. What becomes of a complex and contested array of data when, as in a recently televised documentary, Tiny Humans: Finding ‘Hobbits’ in Flores (Hamlin 2005), the arrival of one (male) individual on an island is used to present, generalised as a single event for the purposes of narrative condensation, the migration of an entire species? On the other hand, given the pervasiveness of narrative and narratising, is it not more realistic to address and seek to appropriately utilise the role of narrative in disciplinary practice, including in its teaching?

Narrative in archaeology: A review

The word ‘narrative’ and the concept of narrative form have been both employed and discussed to a significant extent in writing about archaeology with much variation in the level to which both have been engaged. Broadly, these discussions can be categorised under the following four sub-headings.

1. Synonym for interpretive account

Many studies, too numerous and pervasively distributed in the discipline to cite, use or imply the terms ‘narrative’ or ‘story’ as a way of describing interpretive syntheses made from archaeological researches. Childe’s (1973) Dawn of European Civilization is an example of a broad-scoped archaeological narrative of this type, whereby the implied account is of social evolution from limited and fragmented social organisation towards more complex technological and sociological systems. There is an extensive range of such syntheses in many more localised contexts, and indeed, at the most general level, the production of interpretative syntheses of research, often presented as (pre)historical narrative accounts, may be seen as one of the basic tasks of archaeology.

2. Stories for (and by) the public

While generating interpretive accounts may be seen as part of the basic work of archaeologists, presenting an overview of research in an economical, meaningful way, others (e.g. Deetz 1998; Paynter 2002; Praetzelis 1998) have a more recognisably self-conscious narrative intention,
arguing for the use of narrative to make archaeology accessible to, and meaningful for, a non-specialist public. They are a means of fulfilling a ‘responsibility to communicate to as wide an audience as possible the results and significance of our findings’ (Deetz 1998:94).

Two major aspects of this responsibility have emerged. The first has been the promotion of accessible narratives for a ‘public’ conceived of in a general sense. The second, informed by both non-essentialist theory and post-colonial consciousness (see Layton 1989; Shennan 1989; developed in Joyce et al. 2002), has been more contentious, arguing for the need to acknowledge that the significance of findings may be differently interpreted by different groups who claim an interest in the past represented by the archaeological material. These groups seek to tell their own (and different) stories (Davidson 1991) and further, find ways to give voice to that interpretation, sometimes in opposition to that of the archaeologist. The archaeology and its interpretation is often the physical expression of conflicting assignations of significance and one means through which political negotiations touching on wider social and economic issues are carried out. Joyce et al. (2002), drawing upon Bakhtin’s (1981) proposition of the dialogic nature of narrative, offer an explicit and developed survey of the role of narrative in both enabling different, even contending, views of the past to inform interpretive accounts and the way archaeological accounts may be formulated and published. The moral and political considerations involved in developing accounts which recognise the possibility of different interpretations are closely related to a further area of discussion of archaeological narrative, the recognition and criticism of the operation of meta-narratives.

3. Meta-narrative

Narrative constructed (either implicitly or explicitly) to represent idealised, and – the implication is often – fictionalised, views of the past, has received much attention in archaeology and related areas of study. In this, White’s (1987) study of the operation of meta-explanatory narratives in history, engaging with the works of (among others) Jameson (1981) and Barthes (1977), has been influential. The characteristics of narrative and its role in scientific interpretation were notably delineated by Landau (1984, 1991) in her study of palaeoanthropological texts. Landau (1984:262) cites the concept of narratives as the primary and irreducible form of human comprehension as well as the ‘more controversial’ idea that humans draw upon a ‘repertoire of basic stories’ which are retold and reinterpreted in different temporal and social contexts. She then highlights the ‘narrativising’ elements in accounts of human evolution and concludes, ‘these texts are determined as much by traditional narrative frameworks as by material evidence’ (Landau 1991:x). Pluciennik (1999) has produced the most comprehensive review of narrative in archaeology, pointing to the operation of meta-narratives and raising the issue of their distinctiveness from scientific forms of explanation. How the results of archaeological research may be used to support the creation of national or cultural group meta-narratives in more general social contexts, particularly the role of these meta-narratives in justifying and sustaining contemporary political acts and assumptions about national identity have also been the subject of attention (see articles in Brown and Hamilakis 2003). While a number of these discussions have been implicitly cautionary, seeking to remind archaeologists of the possible misuse of their work for political purposes, some have more explicitly noted the responsibility of archaeologists to pay careful attention to the way they construct and write interpretations and how they offer these for public information and education (Danforth 2003; Joyce et al. 2002; Spector 1993).
the form can be consciously deployed for learning and teaching. At the very least, we can highlight areas where the role of narrative in learning can profitably be attended to in order to develop educational approaches in archaeology which work toward reconciling the constraints of both narrative and evidence-based principles. I suggest that this approach could be very fruitful for sustaining the discipline through the improved education urged by various authors (e.g. Danforth 2003; Fagan 2000; Smith and Bender 2000). The research methods and methodologies appropriate for such an examination are rather different from those familiar to most archaeologists and I shall outline some considerations for these below but, first, I will set the scene by briefly summarising how the various narrative characteristics articulate with considerations for teaching in archaeology.

**Characteristic 1: Story and event**

The sequencing of events into a coherent account has obvious application in a discipline where, among others, one major aim is the construction of accounts of the human past. An awareness of the narrative form and how we construct narrative interpretations can help challenge potential glossing effects of this basic form of disciplinary activity by ‘problematising’ (Bass 1999) it in a scholarly manner rather than treating it as incidental. Decisions about what may reasonably constitute significant events and their degree and scale of significance are critical factors for archaeology that can themselves be directly addressed through careful examination of the narrative form. If stories are inevitable in interpretation, we need, to paraphrase Cronon (1992:1375) writing about environmental history, to teach students not just how to write stories about archaeology, but stories about stories about archaeology.

**Characteristic 2: Sequence and time**

A critical approach to, and wariness about, reconstructions of sequence and time scale, depth and duration and interpretive accounts in which they are represented is, likewise, an essential aspect of education in archaeology at the most basic conceptual level of the discipline.

**Characteristic 3: Structure**

Being able to discern the structural nature of a narrative account, as well as being able to distinguish it from the message (the story), as something created by the narrator/author, albeit drawing upon empirical data, is another basic attribute of critically reflective education as well as professional practice. It might be illuminating, for example, to invite students to analyse the narratives and counter narratives both within the text of Flannery’s (2005) *Future Eaters* and in the responses to it since first published in 1994.

**Characteristic 4: Transposability**

The ability of narratives to transcend the media in which they are expressed has its clearest educational relevance in the potential diversity of ways they can be considered for presentation to diverse audiences. This characteristic has particular relevance for those interpretive narratives constructed for public non-specialists and considerations of the possible strengths and weaknesses of different media for different purposes. As with the example above, exercises in constructing and analysing interpretive narratives would be instructive. How would the development of narratives of the extinction of megafauna for different media, perhaps as an oral account and as a computer simulation, throw into relief disjunctions in timescale and evidence? To what degree could these be resolved for different media and what difference would it make?

**Characteristic 5: Selectivity**

Narrative entails selectivity. We are introduced to characters (either individuals or groups), or we enter a narrative at a certain point in time, but we do not hear, nor do we need to hear in order to engage with the story, every detail of the character’s history. From an educational point of view, focussing on selectivity in the analysis and construction of interpretive narratives can be means by which students gain experience in the judicious analysis of relevance as well as being schooled in recognising and accounting for all relevant data. Selectivity is essential to narrative interpretations not only from the point of view of manageability and economy but is also central to the purposeful conveyance of meaning.

**Characteristic 6: Moral, meaning and authority**

As discussed earlier, narrative purpose and the moralising impulse it implies has been linked to the reinforcement of socio/political authority through the deployment of meta-narratives (White 1987:14). For teaching, two main messages emerge: narratives can have a tendentiousness which is incompatible with objectivity, yet they necessarily also have athesing role which is essential for understanding. Investigating how a balance can be achieved will be a task for educators in archaeology.

**Characteristic 7: Wholeness and filling in**

As Chatman (1978:21) points out, we can choose to insist on inferring narrative even from disparate events and information. This search for wholeness, the act of filling in – in effect, the construction of meaning – points to the centrality of narrative in the learning process (Schank and Berman 2002) and points to the need to critically address this feature in teaching.

**Characteristic 8: Communicative transaction and transformation**

As narrator and narratee communicate to construct knowledge, the act of filling in leads, through transformation, to a reconfigured understanding. Relatedly, most if not all knowledge is stored in the form of stories (Schank and Berman 2002). There is also, it should be noted, an autobiographical element in such reconfiguration. As transactees involved in constructing understanding, we, to varying degrees depending on the context, fill the details into our lives through building statements of personal relevance or response. The connection between narratives of knowledge about aspects of the external world and autobiography have been noted by educationalists (Barrett 2004; Rossiter 2002), who advocate the exploitation of this connection to encourage reflection and thus ‘deeper’ learning in students. For teachers of archaeology, the need to educate about the dangers of imposing meaning on others, rather than negotiating meaning with them, is another aspect of practice that can be illuminated by an examination of narrative processes.
Characteristic 9: Open-endedness and conclusion

That aspect of narrative that preserves it from tautology and allows for a possibly fruitful exploration of contingency (Landau 1991:180), is where the explicit use of narrative in education may not so much challenge evidence-based practice but serve it. There is an argument (Ballard 2003) to be made, for example, that data alone, particularly limited data in limited instances, as happens not infrequently in archaeology, may be more illuminating to a study of the past if a range of possible narratives are considered as a matter of course in interpretation. The exploration of each narrative characteristic outlined for teaching, however, will require the investigation of productive theories and appropriate methods for education in archaeology.

Toward productive theory and method for teaching

The concept of narrative’s role in enabling learning as a constructive process of communicative interaction, is closely allied to contemporary “constructivist” (Phillips 2000) educational theory and is also of interest to textual analysis in cultural studies (Parker et al. 1999; Titscher et al. 2000; Wetherell et al. 2001). Both these broad areas of research may have much to offer archaeology. A basic starting point is the recognition that research into appropriate, albeit unfamiliar, areas of scholarship is required. While this recognition is emerging increasingly (e.g. Hamilakis 2004), we are still at the beginning of the story, or at least of this part of the story.

All in the telling?

Far from being an insidious fantasising element to be eschewed in disciplinary practice, narrative is not only inevitable but also essential to our processes of comprehending, learning and representing. Archaeology is no different to any other discipline in being part of a broader social context upon which various and conflicting political and social narratives seek to impinge. In fact, archaeology may be more publicly situated than many others, practiced, as it mainly is, in the arena of cultural heritage management, where numerous, competing and often conflicting interests are at work. Archaeologists need to be mindful of both the constraints and the potential for narrative in the creation and representation of their discipline in order to rise to the challenges it faces. An understanding of narrative is not the only thing required to equip students for these challenges but, given the pervasiveness of the form, it is a good place to start.

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