

Teaching with Material Culture, Department of Archaeology

Context

Handling archaeological objects can be inspirational, making the past more immediate, creating a tangible link with past societies and using multiple senses for more effective learning. However, teaching in centrally timetabled, generic spaces made teaching and learning with artefacts and ecofacts difficult. Handling material from the past therefore became restricted to 'practical' modules rather than infused in to all learning. Nationally, fewer students are graduating with detailed knowledge of material culture, leaving a skills shortage in the profession.

Aim

This project involved the creation of dedicated teaching space where teaching and reference collections are kept, making the incorporation of more use of material culture in to teaching sessions more readily feasible. Increased handling and the provision of reference collections will increase student confidence in undertaking materials-based dissertations. The use of new visualisation technologies will also help make small objects visible to even large groups of students.

Resources and Processes

The project had three strands:

- creating the dedicated teaching space. This was managed by personnel within the CETL and Archaeology over a 9-month period, and included the refurbishment and equipping of the space to improve interactive teaching.
- sorting, storing, purchasing and cataloguing reference collections. As well as re-organising existing collections, gaps in the collections were identified and new materials sourced and purchased, ensuring that the collections are a comprehensive resource.
- creation of teaching support materials. This strand is being undertaken by a Project Officer and includes information sheets and virtual resources to accompany the collections and to raise awareness of the collections amongst students.

Results

The improvements to the archaeological reference collections and to the teaching space have already impacted on a wide range of modules, and have helped change the quality of the student experience. The visualisation facilities have also had an impact on methods of teaching and learning, with the smartboards increasing interactivity within otherwise formal teaching. Staff are using the collections in teaching more often because of greater ease of access. The development of teaching support materials is also contributing to the greater use of the collections.

'The new room has hugely enhanced the teaching of Roman artefacts – it is now possible to simply pull out boxes of relevant material during a lecture that also uses the smartboard.'

'The chance to handle artefacts is better for bringing them to life than staring at pictures.'

Sustainability

Use of the dedicated teaching space is completed and is extremely popular with staff. The cataloguing of the reference collections and development of teaching support materials will continue until Dec 08, but once completed will provide a long-lasting and comprehensive resource to enable the continued use of collections based teaching.

Further information

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