



## Physical Anthropology Section – 2008

### H34 Experiential Education: The Use of Simulation in Training in Forensic Anthropology and Archaeology

Margaret Cox, PhD\*, Cranfield University / Inforce Foundation, Shrivenham, Swindon, UNITED KINGDOM

After attending this presentation, attendees will have an increased understanding of the use of simulations as components of training in forensic anthropology and archaeology.

This presentation will impact the forensic community by increasing their appreciation of the complexities, benefits and potential pitfalls of using experiential education (simulations) in training forensic anthropologists and archaeologists in aspects of mass fatality response. This may range from investigating mass graves and mass disaster scenes, to working within temporary mortuary.

One of the most effective ways of teaching any subject is to combine qualitative and quantitative approaches via appropriate teaching vehicles. Much can be taught theoretically and practically in the lecture or seminar room, or in the laboratory or field. What cannot be taught via those modes is the ability to apply the skills learnt to a scenario that approximates to a 'real' event or set of circumstances with complete participation by trainees. Mass fatality response, whether to crimes against humanity, natural catastrophe, transportation accident or terrorist attack, is a context that by definition has no "norm", other than it will involve multiple fatalities. It is a context that is distressing and stressful and one that often has inappropriate and inadequate resources and personnel involved. It may involve a context where cultural and religious norms may be unfamiliar, where inappropriate authority may prevail, and where dangers to the health and well-being of responders are significant. Despite that, it is a context where we have a moral obligation to be able to respond effectively and efficiently for both judicial and humanitarian reasons.

Experiential education has a role in such teaching and training. It is a teaching vehicle that ranges from computer simulations to employing teaching modes that mimic reality to a greater or lesser degree. The key with experiential education is that trainees are required to engage intellectually, emotionally, socially and often physically. They have to take the initiative, make decisions and be accountable for results. Very often such learning is done through unrelated activities that are totally removed from the context and subject area in which trainees are engaged. This is "safe" as those who do not perform effectively are doing so in a context removed from their area of normal professional practice.

Experiential teaching vehicles should not be confused with "field-work" or "laboratory sessions" which provide a semi-realistic setting for what is a formal and formative educational approach. In such, the level of responsibility for the outcome on individual trainees is generally low. Only rarely is such teaching a "real" group effort where success or failure of the overall task depends upon effective team work and where accountability rests on trainees.

Experiential training for mass fatality respondents that is set within a "realistic" context (for example, simulated temporary mortuaries and scenes of mass fatality incidents) is extremely challenging for all involved. Trainees are required to implement skills and roles in a 'real-life' simulation that sets them in a context that mimics not only the reality of the roles they may be required to play, but significantly, also employs their day-to-day professional skills. This is a high risk approach to teaching. If it works it has immense benefits. If it does not it is extremely damaging to those directly affected. In this situation the stakes are high and should not be underestimated. If participants consider they have not performed well or 'failed' in a context that mimics their professional role then the consequences can be significant – depending on how they react. This creates a highly charged teaching environment and emotionally challenged and exhausted trainees, and of course trainers.

What is crucial in such training is that the trainers have the educational experience and understanding to recognize what is happening and take action to mitigate against adverse impacts before damage is done. It is not sufficient to put trainees into a difficult situation and leave them to cope. Such teaching must include periodic reviews that invite reflection on progress and on possible alternative strategies to challenges. This presentation examines aspects of this complex, risky but potentially hugely beneficial teaching strategy in light of the simulated mass fatality incident training sites (air-crash sites), mass graves, and temporary mortuaries designed and delivered by the Inforce Foundation.

#### **Simulated Mass Graves, Simulated Temporary Mortuaries, Training in Mass Fatality Response**