Investigating the Potential of Deaccessioning as a Tool for Public Archaeology Education

An Example from New Mexico

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ABSTRACT

In the United States, deaccessioning is a poorly understood collections management tool. Archaeologists often view deaccessioning with what Robert Sonderman called "primal fear," and this fear has caused them to overlook the opportunities that deaccessioned artifacts and collections may provide in the area of public archaeology education. Although deaccessioning without checks and balances can be problematic, when done properly and ethically, it offers previously untapped resources to the creation of educational programming, such as teaching trunk programs. This article discusses the process of deaccessioning and suggests that deaccessioned artifacts may be useful as content for teaching trunk programs. We discuss a case study from our own institution, where we implemented a trunk program in 2016 that was largely stocked with material from a deaccession we had performed the previous year. We also offer suggestions for anyone wishing to implement a similar program.

Keywords: public archaeology, education, deaccessioning, collections management, curation, teaching trunk

En los Estados Unidos, el desacoplamiento es una herramienta de gestión de colecciones poco conocida. Los arqueólogos muchas veces ven el desapego con lo que Robert Sonderman llamó "miedo primario", y este miedo nos ha llevado a pasar por alto las oportunidades que los artefactos y colecciones desacreditadas pueden brindarnos en el área de la educación pública de arqueología. Mientras se desacopla sin controles ni equilibrios puede ser problemática, si se realiza de manera adecuada y ética, ofrece fuentes no explotadas previamente para la creación de programaciones educativas, como la enseñanza de programas troncales. Este artículo discute el proceso de desaccesión y sugiere que los artefactos desacoplados pueden ser útiles como contenido para enseñar programas troncales. Discutimos un estudio de caso de nuestra propia institución, donde implementamos un programa troncal en 2016 que estaba en gran parte abastecido con material de desaparición que realizamos el año anterior. También identificamos los desafíos que encontramos durante este proceso y ofrecemos sugerencias para cualquiera que desee implementar un programa similar.

Palabras clave: arqueología pública, educación, cesión, manejo de colecciones, curaduria, materiales educativos

Archaeology is a field known for its methodology. Putting trowel to dirt is an exciting and rewarding aspect of our job as archaeologists. Excavation, however, is neither the beginning nor the end of archaeology. Due to the now widely acknowledged "curation crisis" (Childs 1995; Sullivan and Childs 2003), new attention is being paid to methodologies that promote noninvasive research and/or that include the public in the course of archaeological investigation. Archaeologists are looking to collections management strategies to minimize the amount of unnecessary material sent to curatorial facilities at the same time as they are confronting the massive backlog of material already housed in repositories across the nation.

Deaccessioning is one method that may be employed to combat this crisis. Deaccessioning, which is the formal removal of an object or collection from the holdings of an institution or other owners, such as a repository or state agency, once evoked what Robert Sonderman (1996) referred to as "primal fear." We were taught that "with few exceptions, it is all deemed precious" (Sonderman 1996:26). Consequently, the thought of removing—and subsequently discarding—objects from a collection once sent a shiver of fear through many stout-hearted archaeologists. At the same time, collections managers and curators recognized deaccessioning as a valuable and necessary preservation tool (Ainslie 2004; Miller 2018; Weil 1997). Recent years have seen a shift in this attitude, especially with the proposed addition of deaccessioning language to 36 CFR 79 (Childs 2019).

In this article, we argue that deaccessioning is more than merely a tool for preservation. It may also be used as a tool for public

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archaeology education. By integrating deaccessioned materials into teaching trunks, archaeologists can provide hands-on learning opportunities for the public that utilize genuine artifacts to facilitate experiential learning. At the Blackwater Draw Museum, we have had great success using deaccessioned materials in our teaching-trunk program, prompted by a large-scale inventory, move, and reorganization of the museum and associated curatorial areas in 2016. We believe that using deaccessioned artifacts in teaching trunks may offer a path toward widespread acceptance of deaccessioning as a valuable tool, with the added benefit of creating unique experiences for our public.

In this article, we begin by discussing teaching-trunk programs, outlining their usage and goals. Then, we move to describing deaccessioning—its purposes and its limitations. Because we are suggesting the use of deaccessioned materials in public archaeology education, we discuss the legal limitations of deaccessioning as well. Our case study follows, and we outline the background of the Blackwater Draw Museum, our goals in pursuing a deaccession, what we deaccessioned, and how we designed and implemented our trunk program. Because this was a learning experience with a particularly steep curve, we also offer some of our suggestions for a successful program.

TEACHING TRUNK PROGRAMS

Trunk programs are among the best-known education tools available to archaeology educators. They are mobile and targeted, and they often conform to either state standards or another benchmark strategy (Phillips 2004; Ryan 2013). They have been embraced by educators across the nation, and they have become staples of museums, historical societies, and other institutions that engage in public archaeology education. Moreover, trunks are uniquely qualified as ambassadors of archaeology because their capsule-like nature means that they can be shipped, either across town or across the country. In contrast to digital modes of teaching, trunks contain hands-on activities with a focus on tactile experiential learning. Trunks expand educational possibilities for communities that either do not have access to major state museums or that struggle to find the funds to sponsor large field trips to major cities to visit museums or cultural centers.

Teaching trunks provide exciting opportunities to bring objects into the classroom. Depending on their theme and their targeted age group, trunks may contain books, artifacts (both large and small), activities (with or without accompanying accessories), puzzles, and any number of other objects or games. The Maxwell Museum of Anthropology (MMA), which has a particularly robust trunk program, has trunks designed around the topics of Ancient Tools, Instruments from around the World, and even an Introduction to Skeletal Biology (MMA 2020). The skeletal biology trunk has skulls, fur samples, blades, charts, diagrams, and tools for learners to document their experience (MMA 2020). This type of array of diverse teaching materials is the hallmark of an engaging trunk. Wing and colleagues state that "vision may prompt us to make contact with an object or person but, by touching, we reinforce the subjective impact of that object or person" (2016:31). The initial viewing of objects in a trunk may be visually pleasing, but it is through holding those objects—imbuing them with our own interpretations and making them a part of our experience—that we cement their significance in our learning process. The presence of a wide variety of materials in teaching trunks aids in this process by providing first a stimulating visual experience and then a thought-provoking intellectual experience.

Teaching trunks are often sent to K–12 classrooms, where students are divided into smaller groups to perform an activity. For example, stocking five sets of manos and metates permits five pairs of students to learn about prehistoric peoples' subsistence strategies and to practice corn grinding at the same time; stocking eight pottery assembly kits permits eight groups of children to rebuild and learn about various types of pottery. This enables a teacher to oversee the entire group at once, rather than being forced to circulate among a variety of activities. This also means that the teacher will only need to remember the requirements or rules of one activity at a time. Trunks are meant to bring the archaeological experience into the classroom, and they are tools for teachers who are not generally experts in archaeology. It is the job of the trunk program—and its creators—to ensure that teachers have the tools they need to understand and teach the activities.

Trunks are also available to the general public, outside of the traditional educational system. Many institutions allow their trunks to be checked out by anyone with an interest, which expands the possibilities for community enrichment in exciting ways. This means, for example, that homeschooling parents have the same access to these resources as traditional classrooms do and that public libraries can request trunks for summer programming. The Office of the State Archaeologist of Iowa (OSAI) offers its Discovery Trunks to any educational group, regardless of affiliation. Moreover, although simply checking out a trunk is perfectly acceptable, the OSAI also offers to send an educator along with the trunk to aid in its interpretation (OSAI 2020). At the Blackwater Draw Museum, we will send a trunk anywhere in the country, providing the receiving institution pays for shipping and puts down a deposit in case of damages beyond normal wear and tear. From our research into trunk programs nationwide, this appears to be common practice (see Table 1).

DEACCESSIONING

The process of deaccessioning is a necessary and vital tool in a collections manager's tool kit. Some archaeologists question the place of deaccessioning because they fear losing the knowledge—or potential knowledge—that the object or collection might offer the discipline. They also question whether the ethical principles guiding archaeologists conflict with deaccessioning archaeological materials (Childs 1995). The inability to deaccession, however, presents its own issues. For example, it is illegal to deaccession federal collections, except under unique circumstances (Childs 2019), which include deaccessioning human remains, associated and unassociated funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony. This is because the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) has specific procedures to follow. However, without guidance for deaccessioning federal collections without NAGPRA components, repositories find themselves at a loss when dealing with collections with redundant or unprovenienced elements.

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TABLE 1. Selected Trunk Programs in the United States.

Institution	Location	Cost	Duration of Loan	URL
Iowa Office of the State Archaeologist	Iowa City, IA	$25 with free shipping	30 days	https://archaeology.uiowa.edu/archaeology-discovery-trunks-educators
Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum	St. Leonard, MD	$50 plus shipping, where relevant	Four weeks	https://jefpat.maryland.gov/Pages/education/outreach-programs.aspx
Crow Canyon Archaeological Center	Cortez, CO	Free; $50 refundable deposit required	Two weeks	https://www.crowcanyon.org/index.php/classroom-resources
Maxwell Museum of Anthropology	Albuquerque, NM	$15+ (depending on activity), plus mileage costs outside Albuquerque	For the day, brought to classroom by educator	https://maxwellmuseum.unm.edu/education/k-12/traveling-trunk-programs
Oklahoma Historical Society	Oklahoma City, OK	Free, or cost of shipping	One week	https://www.okhistory.org/historycenter/trunks
University of West Georgia, Waring Laboratory	Carrollton, GA	$15, in-state only	Two weeks	https://www.westga.edu/academics/coss/anthropology/waring-lab/available-programs.php
Kansas Historical Society	Topeka, KS	$30, in-state only	Up to four weeks	https://www.kshs.org/p/traveling-resource-trunks/14969
Wyoming State Museum	Cheyenne, WY	Free, but need to pay return shipping; in-state only	One week	http://wyomuseum.state.wy.us/Learn/DiscoveryTrunk.aspx

Because deaccessioning is not routinely practiced, it is also poorly understood, especially with respect to its legal ramifications. This can get archaeologists into trouble—although we may not all be familiar with the laws and regulations that guide collections care, we still must abide by them. One of the key regulations for collections is 36 CFR 79, which guides the collection and care of federal collections. This regulation outlines how to curate federal collections, but it does not provide a method for deaccessioning them (Childs 2019). Efforts have been made to change this twice—most recently in 2014, when proposed amendments were posted to the Federal Register for comment (Childs 2019:134). Unfortunately, no changes have yet been approved or implemented.

If it seems as though a great deal of attention is paid to deaccessioning (or not deaccessioning) in federal collections but little in nonfederal collections, it is, in large part, true. Although state museums/repositories may have their own guidelines, many others are on their own in developing deaccessioning policies and procedures, with help from templates available from resources such as the American Alliance of Museums (AAM 2020). Those of us who also curate federal materials are, of course, bound by 36 CFR 79 and its requirements for federal collections, but this does not apply, for example, to private collections. This opens up the possibility of deaccessioning all or parts of those collections, provided that they meet a strict list of requirements. Although it might be tempting to deaccession for reasons that are more immediately beneficial to a museum—such as stocking educational collections or programs, as we have done at the Blackwater Draw Museum—that must not be a primary goal. Being able to use collections for education is a happy accident, but it would be unethical to perform a deaccession if that were the sole justification for doing so. Below, we discuss the full deaccessioning process we followed, including our subsequent decision to create the trunk program using deaccessioned materials.

The Ethics of Deaccessioning

Ethical concerns form the foundation of the push against deaccessioning. S. Terry Childs noted that the concerns about deaccessioning can be summarized as concern over losing and (or) failing to conserve nonrenewable resources; loss of potential future research value, especially through technological innovations; diminishing the possibilities of collections-based research, especially for students; undermining overall collections' integrity; and concerns about ownership (1999:39–40).

Another concern, in addition to these points, is the fate of the object(s) removed from the collection. Under ideal circumstances, there is no time that an artifact is safer and better cared for than when it is held in the possession of a repository that conforms to curatorial standards and best practices.

Another ethical conundrum with deaccessioning is the lack of knowledge, understanding, or experience of many archaeologists with the process. Deaccessioning an item or collection must never result in a loss of the information that item possesses. Paperwork must be kept documenting the object, including its complete life history, and associated documents and photos should never be discarded (Malaro and DeAngelis 2012). Removing objects from a collection without documentation creates a void of context and knowledge that is entirely avoidable. As archaeologists, we know that the objects we study are worth little to research without their documentation and provenience. Continuing to maintain records after deaccessioning preserves the data, even without the object.

When Deaccessioning Is Appropriate

Deaccessioning, although valuable, is not always the appropriate choice. Collections that have ongoing research value, have good provenience, and fit within the mission of an institution should not be deaccessioned. It cannot be overstated: deaccessioning simply

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to stock an educational program is not appropriate. However, if objects do not fit the mission of an institution, if they are represented in duplication to the point of significant redundancy, or if they are determined to lack significance or research value, then they are good candidates for deaccessioning. It is always a good idea to consult with an archaeologist who is an expert on the artifact types being considered for deaccessioning. Remember that objects that the institution does not own outright—with an accession record and clear paperwork to prove ownership—are not eligible for deaccessioning. Ideally an institution will have a written collections policy and plan. A collections policy should have an accessioning protocol, or a policy for what and how objects become a part of the collection. The other side of that coin is a deaccessioning policy.

Even once the decision to deaccession has been made, there are still other avenues that should be explored before items are entered into a teaching collection. First, other museums and/or other accredited cultural institutions (historical societies, state and federal repositories, universities, etc.) should be approached if the items proposed for deaccessioning match their mission. For example, although a Midland projectile point may be 3,000 years and 1,500 miles from one institution's area of concern, it could be the missing piece in another institution's collection. It is a matter of professional courtesy and an ethical imperative to first attempt to place items in repositories with well-developed policies that follow best practices. Teaching trunks, by their very nature, will be the death of some—if not all—of their contents. Over time, and with even the most careful of handling, objects will become worn or broken. Although educators do their best to preserve the objects they work with, and although the public is equally careful in handling those objects, accidents do happen.

OUR PROJECT

The Blackwater Draw Museum was first established in 1969 to display artifacts recovered from its associated archaeological site, the Blackwater Draw National Historic Landmark, which is also the type site of Clovis culture. Over the subsequent 45 years, the museum remained open to the public, but there were few major changes to the exhibits. The museum became static, failing to offer meaningful experiences or educational opportunities to the local community, despite annual events hosted by the landmark. By the time the director successfully lobbied to move the museum onto campus, the community had lost all interest in the museum as anything more than the "second-grade class trip."

Historically, Blackwater Draw staff accepted almost everything that the public was willing to donate. The logic for this centered primarily around the hope that the museum could recoup losses from the type site during the first half of the twentieth century, given that staff at the time knew that most of the lost material was in the surrounding community. However, a great deal of material also accumulated that was unprovenienced, that lacked research value, and that exhibited high redundancy, including unprovenienced potsherds, ground stone, and fire-cracked rock. There were also shelves upon shelves of boxes filled with lithic debitage and other unprovenienced lithic artifacts in a curation space measuring approximately 20 × 50 ft. (approximately 6 × 15 m). The university has both an undergraduate and graduate applied anthropology and archaeology program, but there were limits to what even the students and faculty could use in a teaching collection.

Moreover, it was discovered that in one particularly memorable episode in the early 1990s, every object not nailed down—as well as a few that were—had been accessioned. This included exhibit components, such as small plastic people from the dioramas or wooden boxes used as risers as well as a massive papier-mâché mammoth head that was—to put it kindly—a little the worse for wear. Another particularly befuddling object was a mop bucket with a faded number that appeared to fit sequentially into the museum's accessioning sequence. It was clear that, at some point, museum staff had attempted to retroactively implement an accessioning system on the museum collections. Although their intent was admirable, their methodology was flawed. A common misstep in the accessioning process is to either over- or under-accession due to a misunderstanding of which objects require accessioning. In light of these issues, among others, deaccessioning began to factor more and more into the goals and long-range planning for the new museum.

Everything changed in late 2015. Long-nurtured plans for the new museum facility were finally put in motion, and the process of transitioning into the new space on campus began in early 2016. Both authors came to Blackwater Draw in 2015, and we began exploring in earnest the possibility of deaccessioning some of the redundant material we were encountering, although initially we were unsure of whether this would be viable. We researched deaccessioning legalities and ethics, and we performed a formal inventory of our collections to see what we actually had versus what our database informed us that we had. There were huge disparities between the database and the shelving, and vast swaths of the collection were presumed to have been catalogued in a now-defunct cataloguing system that was inaccessible to us entirely, given that we did not possess the obsolete equipment to run it. After our inventory was complete and we had done the best we could to associate all provenience information and documentation with the collections we possessed, we were able to identify what we wished to deaccession.

Our Deaccession

Every deaccession is different, and as discussed above, a deaccession is not always possible or appropriate. Although little methodological research was available to us at the time, projects incorporating collections and artifacts with "aesthetic and contextual limitations" have cropped up in the years since our deaccession was begun. One such example readers might find useful discusses the utility of broken or unprovenienced artifacts in building an experiential educational event for the public (Thum and Troche 2016:538). Although the goals of the two projects are similar, the methodologies are different. During our deaccessioning project, we followed the steps below.

First, having already formally inventoried and accessioned the entire collection of the museum, we revisited the question of ownership among the collections we had earmarked as potential deaccessions. This was also the point at which we sought input from all of the potential stakeholders within our museum community. We have neither a curation committee to propose deaccessions nor a board of directors to approve deaccessions, as is recommended (Malaro and DeAngelis 2012; Miller 2018), but we

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do have an invested Department of Anthropology to help with decision making. Additionally, although we do not hold federal collections in our repository, we do have numerous collections from our site. We did not discard a single item from our archaeological site, regardless of the quantity, quality, or presumed significance of the items. The only materials we deaccessioned were from private collections that we owned outright and whose previous owners either accepted our decision to deaccession or were deceased. Some of these individuals wished to have their items returned to them, and we were happy to comply with their wishes. Others heard about our idea to reuse objects in a teaching collection and were excited about it. We did not originally plan to implement a teaching trunk program. Instead, we intended to make the objects available to the public as teaching aids in the museum itself.

Second, we made a list of the potential methods of disposal for the objects we deaccessioned. There are many possibilities for disposal, most of which simply involve a lateral transfer of the object(s) to another collection or institution (Childs 1999, 2019). We identified three possible methods suitable for our collections: (1) to return, when possible, to the donor; (2) to transfer, when possible and appropriate, to another institution, but because almost all of the objects we wished to deaccession were unprovenienced, this option was not possible; (3) to remove the objects into a separate teaching collection, thereby making space in our curatorial storage and making the materials available to the public. It was not until later that the trunk program was suggested.

Next, we double-checked any legal restrictions. None of our collections had provisions in place from their donors that might limit our decision making. None were federal, NAGPRA related, non-NAGPRA human remains, or in violation of any hazardous materials or firearms regulations.

Having done our due diligence, we wrote up a proposal to deaccession for consideration by the museum director and Department of Anthropology, including the complete file information on all artifacts, with their accession and catalogue numbers, conditions, quantity, and our justification for pursuing the deaccession. After a great deal of discussion and debate, we ended up deaccessioning five boxes (bankers-style boxes frequently used in repositories) of fire-cracked rock, 10 large bags of potsherds, seven variously sized bags of lithics (intact specimens, flakes, and debitage in bags spanning sizes 3×4 to 8×10 inches), one large bag of miscellaneous historic glass, one small bag of intact and fractured shell, and a varied selection of items that were nonarchaeological in nature—including the mop bucket.

We copied the proposal as well as all of the records concerning the objects to keep. It is critical to maintain a record of every artifact an institution has ever held, even if it has been deaccessioned. A museum that has performed a deaccession will then possess two types of paperwork: a catalogue, which documents the entry and existence of the objects in its collection, and a deaccession record, which documents the removal of objects from the collection. Deaccession records are critical for accountability purposes. A paper trail will ensure that an object is never erroneously listed as "lost," even if it is no longer in the institution's possession.

Once the paperwork was in order, we performed our deaccession: removing the artifacts from their shelves, recategorizing them in our database as "deaccessioned," and then, frustratingly, leaving them boxed in our closed auditorium until we could get started on the education program hovering just out of reach.

We were able to begin the first steps toward undertaking a comprehensive educational trunk program during the spring 2016 semester. We had nearly completed our move onto campus, and we had students willing—eager, even—to begin internships digitizing our photo archives, accessioning new donations, and designing a teaching trunk program utilizing our now-dusty boxes of deaccessioned artifacts. What began as a simple internship evolved into a detailed and multifaceted project, and then it became the blueprint for an entire program that the museum could adapt to provide educational trunks to the public.

Laying the Groundwork

We assumed that establishing a trunk program would be simple: pick a topic, procure materials, and offer a trunk to the public. We could not have been more incorrect. In practice, the process was far more complicated, and there were nuances we could not have predicted. Because the museum had not had any educational programming before this, the first step was to reach out to other museum educators in order to determine what steps should be taken, in what order, and how to ensure that the final product would be usable by local community and K–12 educators. For example, we learned that a trunk is most useful to educators, especially teachers, if it matches the benchmarks for state standards for a certain age group. A trunk can be aimed at more than one age group, but it is easier for educators to use it as an approved teaching tool if it adheres to standards already in place. We reached out to several cultural institutions and conducted interviews with representatives knowledgeable about their trunks and their educational programming. We asked questions about their trunks' contents; the costs to build, stock, and maintain the trunks; and their lending policies.

A common theme among the interviewed educators was that hands-on objects and activities are the best way to engage students. With this in mind, we conducted some background research on effective ways to teach children, and we looked into a variety of activities and how those activities could be adapted to fit the topic(s) of various trunks. We also familiarized ourselves with New Mexico's standards and benchmarks in order to determine which activities were best for which age group.

We were further convinced of the importance of touch at the 2016 Society for American Archaeology meeting. An archaeologist, now a fourth-grade teacher, presented her suggestions for improving K–12 education outreach (Theresa McReynolds Shebalin, personal communication 2016). She had a poster displaying the best ways to integrate archaeology into the classroom and how to get teachers to respond positively to the program. She observed that the focus of any educational program (in our case, trunks) should be on providing quality items to which the teacher would most likely not have access in the normal course of affairs. She felt that the program should provide an activity description but not be overly detailed. Her logic was that, although it was likely that teachers would review the directions, they would use the items in the way they saw fit for their specific classroom and to supplement the topics being discussed. Providing quality materials (artifacts, basic supplies, literature) allows teachers to

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FIGURE 1. Tawnya Waggle working with fourth-grade students using the dig box activity. Photograph by Jenna Domeischel.

access items that would otherwise not be available to them. They can then create activities that they know their students will respond to.

We agree that activities should be easily adaptable, although we also believe that having detailed and structured activities is the best place to begin with any educational programming. Our program includes a detailed educator packet that defines terms, describes the uses of objects and tools, summarizes the cultural histories of different Indigenous peoples, and provides all the general background information an educator might need for a given activity. We decided to implement these packets after realizing that there would be questions from activity participants that a teacher would be expected to answer.

Funding the Program

Finding a budget for the trunk program was initially a concern, although we were able to secure internal funding through the university to purchase the trunk itself and materials for its activities. This included things such as tubs for dig kits as well as clipboards and pens for notation (Figure 1). The first trunk cost less than $1,000 to create, which, in retrospect, could have been further reduced by selecting different products or seeking reduced rates from companies for volume purchases. Other options we could have pursued, had we been unable to gain this funding, would have been to approach our local Lodger's Tax Committee, to investigate state or federal grants, or to fundraise in our community. There are grants available to smaller institutions and to universities that support projects such as developing a teaching trunk program. We particularly recommend checking out the "Inspire! Grants for Small Museums" program through the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). Using deaccessioned potsherds, lithics, and historic glass also made a difference financially!

Designing Activities

Each set of educator directions should include an overview of the activity, information regarding whether or not all materials are provided, possible additional costs, the estimated time to complete the activity, the recommended age for the activity, and the number of suggested participants. For many of the activities, we provide a vocabulary and definitions packet that aids educators in answering questions they might encounter. For example, in the projectile point typology activity (Figure 2), we include a packet that defines and describes the process of hafting and how it influences projectile-point morphology. This allows teachers to engage with the activity at a deeper level. The lesson plan then provides information on the materials, any setup that is required, and directions to students for the activity. The lesson contains follow-up questions and a master sheet of any worksheets that are required for the activity. We include the point typology activity sheet for reference (Supplemental Text 1). This is an example of our activity structure. It does not include the full packet compiled for each activity.

We created an inventory list for each complete trunk (Supplemental Text 2), as well as forms for add-ons to the core collection of activities suitable for the trunks. Having select activities that could be added on allows the trunks to be used at events or gatherings where multiple age brackets are represented. The inventory forms for the trunks include unique numbers for the individual objects, as well as their quantity and their location within the trunk. For example, smaller items have boxes in which they fit, so each of those items is given a box number as well as an item number. We recommend this strategy because it allows for

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FIGURE 2. The Projectile Point Styles activity in use at an outdoor archaeology fair. Photograph by Tawnya Waggle.

easy tracking of objects and quick replacement if they are lost or damaged. This has been useful for us when checking a trunk back into the museum: we can easily refer to our master list, see what should be in the trunk based on what the teacher requested, and refer to the box numbers within the trunk to ensure that they are present. Some items, such as pencils or sharpies, will eventually need to be replaced. We keep these on our master list but do not assign them tracking numbers—we just note the quantity each time they go in or out.

LESSONS LEARNED

This was the first time in the Blackwater Draw Museum's history that a deaccession was performed. We have since written a comprehensive collections policy and plan—including both accessioning and deaccessioning policies—and we hope that only updates will be needed in the future. The deaccessioning effort was challenging, and we spent months worried that we would do something irreparably wrong or that we would violate a law or regulation of which we were unaware. In the end, we found helpful resources about deaccessioning that should be used each time a deaccession is considered (AAM 2020; Childs 2019; Davies 2011; Malaro and DeAngelis 2012; Miller 2018).

We also recommend that you do not begin your deaccession until you are absolutely positive that your plan for disposal is viable. We began our deaccession knowing that most of the materials proposed for deaccessioning were going to be transitioning into an education collection separate from our permanent collection. We were also in the middle of a major museum overhaul and move at the time, so our deaccessioned collections ended up sitting in a decommissioned auditorium for months before we were able to integrate them into either an education collection or, eventually, our teaching trunk program. In retrospect, we should have simply postponed the deaccession until we moved onto campus.

We would also suggest that, prior to drafting a proposal to your prospective approving body, you make every effort to design each trunk down to the individual activity. When we sought internal funding, we had to justify the need for the program, explain the types of trunks we would be creating (the title, the rough goals, and maybe some of the content). We did not need to present fully formed activity sheets, but it would have better informed our actual budget.

Before designing any of your trunks, reach out to the educators in your community who might make use of the program and ask them what they would find helpful for their teaching. Standards and benchmarks imposed at the state level often shape what teachers are interested in. Also, a local school district might have a unit they teach every year about Indigenous peoples of their region about which they have some ideas. Or maybe they are scrambling to find educational materials for the sixth-grade rather than the fourth-grade levels. If you want your program to be useful to your community, you should find out what educators need and do your best to provide it.

CONCLUSION

As archaeologists, we recognize that deaccessioning can be intimidating. Our brains are telling us that our collecting practices are unsustainable, but our hearts are in the field, making discoveries and putting together the pieces of the past. It is once we spend time in collections spaces, seeing for ourselves the volume

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of material housed in repositories across the nation, that we are truly confronted with the magnitude of the problem. At the same time, we all wrestle with the complications of engagement (or lack thereof) in our communities, trying to find ways to make archaeology real and compelling but often lacking the tools to deliver our product in the best, most effective manner.

We have found that through thoughtful and highly selective deaccessioning, we are better able to meet our own goals as well as create unique and valuable learning opportunities for the public. We were able to reduce the density of redundant material in our collections spaces—items such as unprovenienced potsherds, pounds upon pounds of fire-cracked rock, and sacks of lithic debitage without context—and give those materials new life in our community. Deaccessioning may still be concerning for some of us and may still cause some degree of "primal fear," but when done correctly, deaccessioning has the potential to be a valuable tool for public archaeology education.

Supplemental Material

For supplemental material accompanying this article, visit https://doi.org/10.1017/aap.2020.39.

Supplemental Text 1. Activity #4: Understanding Projectile Points.

Supplemental Text 2. Total Items Inventory: What an Archaeologist Does.

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Data Availability Statement

No new data were collected as a part of this study.

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