

## S2E04 Foreword: History Beyond the Classroom

### Guest: Dr. Elizabeth Vlossak

[00:00:00] **Alison Innes:** [00:00:00] Welcome to forward the podcast where we connect the community with the classroom. I'm your host, Alison Innes. And each episode, I bring you a conversation with one of our researchers at Brock universities, faculty of humanities.

[00:00:11] **Elizabeth Vlossak:** [00:00:11] Um,

[00:00:17] Um,

[00:00:20] **Alison Innes:** [00:00:20] guest is the recipient of this year's faculty of humanities award for teaching excellence. Dr. Elizabeth Vlossakis an associate professor with the department of history and her courses include 20th century European and world history, Weimar and Nazi, Germany, comparative urban history and women's and gender history.

[00:00:39] She has also taught a directed reading course in historic gardening using Brock universities, community garden, and directed students in research projects involving oral history. Dr. research interests include the cultural history of war. Women's and gender history, border studies, nations, and nationalism, critical heritage studies and the politics of memory.

[00:01:00] [00:01:00] Most recently, she has been bringing her students together with members of the local community to work on Niagara history projects. This includes work with the Niagara on the lake tennis club and the Canada games, which will be held in Niagara in the summer of 2022. Dr. Philoso is the co-director with Dr.

[00:01:16] Julie Stevens in sports management of the sport oral history archive, a digital interactive archive, preserving local and national sporting legacies through the collection of oral history, interviews and photographs.

[00:01:29] **Elizabeth Vlossak:** [00:01:29] So welcome. Thank you,

[00:01:30] **Alison Innes:** [00:01:30] Alison. I am so glad to have you on, we have chatted about your research and your work various times for, for Brock news and.

[00:01:38] I have, uh, certainly very, you, you are certainly very busy with many projects, so thank you for making the time for us today. Um, it's hard to know where to begin, but first off, congratulations on receiving the teaching award. And perhaps we could start with, um, a little bit about your approach to teaching.

[00:01:55] Um, and then we'll get into some of your specific

[00:01:57] **Elizabeth Vlossak:** [00:01:57] projects. Thank you so much. Yeah, I mean, [00:02:00] winning that award was a, it was a great honor and, and, uh, I was really, really honored and humbled by having received that considering how many amazing colleagues I

have in the faculty of humanities. So when I think about teaching, um, one of the things that I have noticed in, I mean, I've been teaching for over 15 years.

[00:02:19] And something that I've noticed is that there are these certain things that kind of, that I really focus on with my teaching and really it's placing people place in connections and the community at the center of my teaching. And so in my teaching, I also see, is, are these four major areas? That I incorporate into everything that I do.

[00:02:38] And the first one is mentorship. The importance of teaching is not just a transmission of knowledge, but as sort of this ongoing, almost dialogic relationship with, with, uh, between the instructor and the student. And I see myself really as a, as a guide and a co-learner I love to continue to learn. This is what I love about, about my job is that [00:03:00] I'm constantly learning new things and learning from my colleagues and learning from my students.

[00:03:04] And so mentorship, um, with my students, with my directed research students, my MBA students, but even my teaching assistants and my research assistants, I really see that that that role of being a mentor and a guide is so important in the work that I do. Something else that I really focus on in my work.

[00:03:21] And this is something that that's become much more prevalent in my work in the last, maybe five years. And that is the role of collaboration. And I've, I really I've discovered that the work that brings me the most joy is the work that I've done through collaboration, either with other colleagues in the department and other departments at Brock staff, other students, as well as members of the community and, and sort of bringing these ideas together and learning from each other and sharing those ideas with each other.

[00:03:50] So collaboration and, um, also experiential education. So all of my courses now have a component of experiential learning embedded within them [00:04:00] and from first-year to the ma courses that I've taught, there is a component of experiential and I'm, I'm, I'm hoping, you know, to, to incorporate more service learning, work, integrated learning opportunities for the students to, to provide them.

[00:04:13] That additional kind of experience and learning opportunity. And, um, and then finally the something that really motivates my work and my teaching practice is to make teaching and learning transformed transformational and transformational. Not only for the students, but also for, um, and transformational for me as a, as a teacher and as a practitioner as well, that, that, uh, that, that transformation happens to all of us as well as we're working together.

[00:04:44] And I also see the benefits to, through working with community of the transformational of the transformational opportunities for our communities, as well as they work with our students on, on various projects. So these are really the, kind of the, the four pillars [00:05:00] of, of my teaching. Yeah, it really puts

[00:05:02] **Alison Innes:** [00:05:02] the, the lie to the old stereotype of the historian.

[00:05:06] Um, you know, surrounded by stacks of dusty books, toiling away, silently, quietly, all by themselves, and then, uh, appearing on a stage to transmit information. It's, it's a very active and very engaging process. Isn't it?

[00:05:19] **Elizabeth Vlossak:** [00:05:19] I also love the sitting in a book in the dusty archives. That's also something that I, that I enjoy, but I I've found that more and more.

[00:05:27] I, and especially. The past year has been very difficult to go into those dusty libraries and archives and seeking out community has been something that I've, I've been doing a lot more just in the past 14 months as well is doing it remotely and virtually, but still wanting to have that, that connection.

[00:05:46] So, yeah, I like the old fashioned stuff too, but I love the new collaboration for me is yeah. As I said, it brings me the most joy.

[00:05:53] **Alison Innes:** [00:05:53] I think there will always be, there will always be a place, um, for, for our archivist and librarian [00:06:00] friends in the study of history. And I know that you have collaborated as well.

[00:06:03] You've, you've worked quite closely with the archivists and librarians at Brock to, to make those places come alive for students as well. Just out of curiosity. Um, are there any particular moments that, um, stand out in your mind as opportunities where you've learned from students or students have, um, created a transformational moment for you as a scholar or as a teacher or as a person

[00:06:26] **Elizabeth Vlossak:** [00:06:26] there's so many?

[00:06:27] Uh I've as I said, there there've been these, um, there's been no individual students who've, um, who've made huge impact on them. With the work that they've done, but also just groups of students and actual sort of communities and classes that have really challenged me and made me a better teacher through the work that we've done together and how they've responded to my teaching and then how I've then responded and reflected on the work that I've done and, and how, and how that's, [00:07:00] how I can incorporate what I've learned into the course again or into the new courses.

[00:07:05] I guess one of the ones, um, that I can think of most recently, and I know that you were going to talk about this, but I would have to say that my experience with that with the historical gardening. Was a really transformative moment for me in terms of what teaching could be and the relationship that I could have with my students and the work that we could achieve together.

[00:07:27] And because it was so different and because everything was removed from the classroom, it was, everything was sort of changed. And the, the boundaries of, of, of how we do history was, were, were really changed and challenged during that project. And what came out of it is on one hand that I wanted to teach this course again, but it was also just the, what I learned from the students and the ways in which just to give the, those of those of you who don't know what this course is.

[00:07:59] Yes. [00:08:00] Tell us the directed research course that I did a couple of summers ago. And, uh, and I had two students working with me and they researched and grew and studied a garden. So they were up at the Brock community garden and they add a plot and they did some independent research and decided on a particular historical period that they wanted to focus on.

[00:08:23] And, uh, what gardening would is what gardens would have looked like, or what would have been grown at that time. And they built these gardens and they grew them and they blogged about them. And they had an Instagram, you know, Instagram posts about their gardens and they reflected on the gardens. And then they presented their gardens at the end of the summer.

[00:08:40] So it was quite a long drawn out process from may to August. Um, but one of the things that really struck me is that I was doing. Two students who were so different in their approaches and the way in which they studied and thought about things [00:09:00] and how they wrote and, um, like day and night and. Well, one of the things that that came became clear though, is that as a result of the way, the course was built and designed and the way in which I was assessing and evaluating their work, it allowed them to each be able to shine in the areas that they, that they enjoyed the most that they were really skilled at.

[00:09:23] And, and I, it was, you know, you learn about. These theories, you learn about how they're different types of learners. And as a, as an educator, I do all the reading and then I try to incorporate universal design as much as I can, but then I actually saw it and I witnessed it and I studied it. And I, and it was, it was so clear that if you design a course in a particular way, your students, regardless of what their abilities are going into the course, they're going to be able to thrive.

[00:09:53] And, and so it, that was one of the things that, that, that was the most lasting impression that, that it [00:10:00] was the everything about that course. The fact that we were removed from the classroom, we were outdoors. There's so much reflection. There was a lot of, um, dialogue and discussion between me and the students, but also that they, they showed me how, how this works in practice.

[00:10:16] And, and it was, and it was amazing. And, and so when I think about that course, I it's the course that I, it, it again, I mean, I think back to it and I want to do it again. I've thought about ways of being able to scale it up so that more students can take it. But I think that more than anything, it's what I learned in terms of my own teaching practice that has stayed with me.

[00:10:38] The

[00:10:38] **Alison Innes:** [00:10:38] two students you had, they did very different types of gardens, too. You, um, you had one student doing a monastic inspired, medieval, very symmetrical and formal with research about all the herbs and everything. And then you had another student doing a victory garden. Yeah.

[00:10:55] **Elizabeth Vlossak:** [00:10:55] And so the, the two gardens, and that was what was also so fascinating about the two projects [00:11:00] is that not only were the periods that they chose so entirely different and the types of gardens that they had to.

[00:11:08] We're so entirely different, the way that they actually approached the gardening was entirely different because the gardening that they did in many ways reflected the type of garden that they were growing. So for the victory garden, it was very like, okay, I'm growing food and I have to survive. And the deer eating all my food and what am I going to do?

[00:11:29] And how do I protect everything? Where's the monastic garden. There was a lot more kind of contemplation and just being in the garden and observing it. And, um, and just enjoying the beauty because, because, um, the student was growing a lot of flowers and there were these verbal with the herbs were also really important, but she also just had a lot of very beautiful flowers.

[00:11:53] And, and so her observations and her experience working in the garden reflected the type of garden. [00:12:00] Um, and just as the victory garden was, was a bit more almost utilitarian and like, uh, and there was there in some cases kind of more at stake too, like these tomatoes better grow or else we're not going to be eating this, this winter.

[00:12:14] **Alison Innes:** [00:12:14] Yeah. Your students did. I did a public tuber of their, of their plots at the end of August or towards the, towards the end of August that year. And we will include some links in the show notes to the Brock news coverage cause there's photos and videos. Um, I learned quite a bit from them and, and from what they had to say.

[00:12:37] Um, and I know that your student with the victory garden was talking about the role of victory gardens in a more propaganda angle, rather than an actual practical food supplying angle. And then, like you said, um, the monastic garden with its medicine, but also contemplative. It was a very, it was very interesting to, to watch.

[00:12:59] So I hope you [00:13:00] get to do it again because it also made the garden, the community garden really, really beautiful having those Fox gloves and, uh, marigolds and things. It's really gorgeous. Um, You have also been working more recently with some oral history projects. You've done a little bit of oral history with, um, with a couple of students already.

[00:13:21] And I know you've got some more oral history planned and, um, what is oral history?

[00:13:27] **Elizabeth Vlossak:** [00:13:27] So oral history, I can give you a sort of a definition. Um, it's, it's really the, the interviewing of eyewitnesses, um, or participants in events of the past. And so using these interviews to write about history or for historical reconstruction.

[00:13:46] So it's a, it's a new, it's a, it's a, it's a type of source. It's a type of primary source. And you're getting these interviews for, from people who lived through a particular historical event. I mean, that's a, that's a sort of a very simple definition of what oral history is. [00:14:00] One of the, another way of thinking about it.

[00:14:01] And this is I'm plagiarizing this from, um, professor Stephen. Hi, who is the director? Concordia university center for oral history and digital storytelling. And he has this wonderful term that he uses that oral history offers a different way of knowing. And, and I love that concept because that's what oral history and the beauty and the power of oral history is that it allows us to learn about the past, through the people who lived through it.

[00:14:32] And often we get the stories from those, from the voices, the voices of the voiceless, that the people who traditionally would not have left any records or written sources or whose experiences would not have been prioritized are, are allowed to share their stories and to add, to be part of that telling of history.

[00:14:57] And so it's, it's, um, it's, it's really [00:15:00] exciting. It's really a fun way of, of researching history. Writing about the past and thinking about the past,

[00:15:08] **Alison Innes:** [00:15:08] and it's very collaborative, you've got the historian interviewee, you've got, obviously the person they're interviewing and then you have that onward effect of people who will be using the material that has been, that has been

[00:15:22] **Elizabeth Vlossak:** [00:15:22] exactly.

[00:15:22] Yeah. And I think that one of the things too, you mentioned kind of that relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee and an oral historians, talk about it being a dialogic relationship, that, that the, what you get through that, that testimony or slip through that interview is that you develop a relationship between your participant or the person that you're interviewing.

[00:15:44] And again, like going back to Stephen high and he's really done some amazing, amazing work. He also talks about how, what we see happening through this dialogic relationship is that there's an expert authority and an [00:16:00] experiential authority. So the historian who has done all the research, who knows what it happened in the past, who has all the dates and the facts who then goes to the person who experienced it.

[00:16:11] And so they, that's why there is that dialogic relationship because they're sharing their knowledge with each other and, and you can create these really. Um, and this is one of the things that oral historians. Really focus on is creating that, um, that notion of a shared authority that there, that power dynamic it's really important to establish a relationship of trust and of equality when you're, when you're interviewing someone like that.

[00:16:39] **Alison Innes:** [00:16:39] What's, what's kind of the process of doing oral history. Like how, how does a historian prepare to sit down with somebody and record something? And, and I'm thinking here that our listeners may very well have family stories or things like that, um, that they want to capture for future generations or to contribute to something [00:17:00] larger.

[00:17:00] What kinds of tips, um, do, do you have about that

[00:17:03] **Elizabeth Vlossak:** [00:17:03] process? Um, well, doing it as a, as an academic, when you're interviewing somebody that you don't necessarily know there, there's all sorts

of preparation that goes into it, as you said. So it's very much like, you know, you're approaching a research topic.

[00:17:19] Paper and you're looking for your sources. So you have a research question or an idea, and you research that event or that theme or that topic and your question. And then you start thinking about, okay, Who would be able to provide me with stories who would have been there, who would have experienced it and, um, whose, whose points of view do I want for it to tell me the story?

[00:17:48] And maybe you want to cast your net really broadly and think I want as many points of view as possible. And I want to be able to get a really good sense of how this particular event was experienced [00:18:00] by a range of different people in different contexts. Um, and so then you, then you. Yeah, there's an ethics.

[00:18:08] There's an issue of ethics and permission forms and all the rest of it, but, but really going out and seeing how you can enlist people or, or, um, encourage people to, to share their stories with you. And that can be done through just posting something on social media, putting a column, a paper, uh, another, another really cool way of doing this is through what are called community collecting events, where you would have an event, you would host some events and ask people to.

[00:18:37] Bringing, you know, pair of like memorabilia or papers or photographs about a certain event. And then at that event, they have the opportunity to maybe share a story with you that you could record, or if there's not enough time, they can leave their contact details with you. You can set up an interview later on when it comes to, um, to [00:19:00] recording the stories of family stories that, that in itself.

[00:19:03] I mean, it's, it's, it's a wonderful, a wonderful thing to do. And to capture that family lore, it's different though, because you are working with somebody who's a family member. And, um, and so there, there's some really interesting work that's been done on sort of the difference between kind of family lore and recording those family stories and an oral history.

[00:19:22] But definitely you can, you can approach the recording of your family's stories using those same methods. Of of, um, those, those oral history methods and, and, and certainly in, uh, the course that I taught last year with my making history and Niagara course, I had my students just as a little activity to get them thinking about oral history.

[00:19:45] I had them do a very quick interview with, um, either a family member or friend. And, um, there was a very specific question that they would ask and, and the, the impact or the, the feedback that I got from, from that was, was really [00:20:00] amazing. And, and the students, I think, were in some cases really surprised by what they learned.

[00:20:05] Um, one example was a student to learn all this stuff about his father that he, that his father had never shared with him before, because the, they were talking about that. The question that I asked them to, to ask their friend or family member was because this was kind of a story. Um, project that we were working on to ask them what their, their most

memorable sports memory was, their most important sporting memory, either amateur sport or, uh, or, uh, something that they see professional sport memory.

[00:20:38] And this one student, um, was talking about how his father had witnessed the DJs winning the world series while he was on tour. Um, he was in the Navy and his ship was docked in, in states and all of these Canadian, um, enable their baby guys watched the game. And, [00:21:00] and he then started telling his son about what it was like serving in the Navy at the end of the cold war.

[00:21:06] And, um, all of these stories about his service that he never told his son before. And so that one, that one memory opened up this whole basket of, of a treasure trove of stories. And. That was one of those, I guess it's coming back to that question. You asked a little while ago about these really these memorable moments in teaching.

[00:21:29] And that was one that really stuck with me. Yeah. Yeah.

[00:21:32] **Alison Innes:** [00:21:32] That gives me goosebumps to stay. Just to hear. So your, your work with oral history has really revolved around sport and oral history. And, um, last year, last summer, I guess you worked with a fourth year student, Adam Williamson and the Niagara and the lake tennis club member, Rosemary Goodwin, um, on a special project.

[00:21:54] Um, do you want to tell us a little bit about that project and what it led to?

[00:21:58] **Elizabeth Vlossak:** [00:21:58] That was, again, one of [00:22:00] these, I was, I was thinking about how, when you start working with community, you, you can't stop it because you realize how, how much, how much fun it is and how many great projects there are. And you just want to do more, more of it, but also the more people you network with, the more people that are.

[00:22:17] Appear in your life. And to have these, these interests that you have in common and you want to work together. So, so Rosemary Goodwin, um, this all came out of the work that I was doing, putting together this collection of oral history interviews for the Canada games for this co Canada games collection that I was going to be using in my course where my students would have access to these stories about the Canada games, for the creation of a, of a, of an exhibit to launch for the Nagra summer games in 2022.

[00:22:49] At the time, it was awesome. Slated for 2021. And I was recording these interviews and I was starting to set things up and I was working really closely with Julie Stevens who is working on [00:23:00] Canada games. And, um, she and I had been, she'd been assisting me and putting me in touch with Canada games, council people to arrange these interviews.

[00:23:08] And in a, during a conversation with Julie, she said, oh, by the way, I'm a friend of mine. Um, Rosemary Goodwin, um, whose husband. Or late husband, Dawn good Goodwin was very much involved in the Kennedy games. And especially in the early years of the Canada games, she lives in Akron, the lake, she's a past president of the, on that like tennis club and we were chatting and it turns out that she's putting together a history of the club.

[00:23:36] And, um, I said, oh, that sounds interesting. And she said, yeah, it's, she's really interested in history. And, and I thought I should put her in touch with somebody in the history department. And so we had this conversation. And so, so Rosemary was, um, her COVID project. She called it this after things shut down last March.

[00:23:55] She, um, decided that it was the 50th anniversary of the mag on the [00:24:00] lake tennis club was coming up later that summer. And so she decided to go through all of the old papers and write a history and had heard about the fact that I was working on this oral history for the Kennedy games and thought that.

[00:24:14] It sounded like something that might work really well alongside the more traditional history that she was writing for for the club. And I said, oh, that sounds amazing. And she said, if you have a student who wants to work on this project, I would love to work with the Brock students on something like this.

[00:24:29] And I thought, Ooh, I wonder if I have a student who'd be interested in this. And, and, um, Adam had already contacted me and said, you know, if there's any projects or any, if you need research assistance. And, and so I wrote back to him and I said, Hey, I think I. A project for you. Can you put together a proposal and we'll see if we can get you some funding to work on this.

[00:24:50] And we got the funding and Adam worked really closely with Rosemarie on that project and not only on that project, but at the same [00:25:00] time as Adam's work was beginning. And, um, I was supervising him and Julian was co-supervising him on that project. And Julia and I thought, hang on, we've got the caddy games collection.

[00:25:12] Adam's doing this oral history collection on Netherland, like tennis club. And Julie and I had already started talking about maybe collaborating on a women's hockey collection. And we thought, well, are these oral history collections that revolve around sports? Why don't we actually have them all housed within the same, under the same umbrella or within the same space, wherever we, um, wherever we put these in, we knew from the get-go that we wanted to make sure.

[00:25:38] Interviews open access and interactive and available to the public. Um, and so that's how the, the Soho, the sport world history archive was born was as we were working with Adam, as we were working, um, with, um, my research assistant and Jessica Zell on the Canada games project, this larger [00:26:00] project kind of emerged.

[00:26:02] And, uh, and, and Adam was really central to those early stages of us, you know, setting up the so hot and working through things like ethics and permissions and digital infrastructure and how we were going to present this material and what kind of material we wanted in this archive and what the, what the mission would be for, for the sofa.

[00:26:24] So, so he was working. You know his project for the tennis club, but he was really instrumental in the founding of the too. And I'm

[00:26:32] **Alison Innes:** [00:26:32] going to the link to the Brock news article, where I interviewed Adam about his, his experience. And it seems like he really enjoyed his, his experience and got a lot out of it.

[00:26:42] And, um, of course, anything done during the pandemic is not without its challenges. Um, but it sounds like it was a really, really rewarding project. So I want to move into talking about what I guess is your big project these days, which is this course [00:27:00] designed to go along with the Canada games course. So with, uh, so a little bit of background to that is that Canada summer games scheduled to be held originally 2021.

[00:27:08] Now postponed to 2022. Um, some of the events are being held at Brock university, uh, but Brock created, uh, funding opportunities for the creation of new courses and experiential learning around around the candidate games. And you have developed a course that I think has already run in a modified perhaps fashion.

[00:27:29] And you're going to be working with your students with these oral histories that you have collected from across the country. So tell us a little bit more about that course and what it's doing and how it's tying in with the

[00:27:42] **Elizabeth Vlossak:** [00:27:42] games. So the course. I taught it for the first time last year, when we thought the games were going to be happening in 2021.

[00:27:49] And the course is called making history in Niagara. And the course is designed in such a way that it is not always going to be about Canada games, that it is a, of course, that really introduces students [00:28:00] to public history and to how history is presented, interpreted as well as consumed by the public in different public settings.

[00:28:12] So museums, but things like historic plaques, monuments plays music, musical theater, all these different ways in which we're presented with, with history in these public fora and, and the, and the Canada games was kind of a theme for that first launch of the course. And so student learned about kind of theory methods and case studies on how different histories and difficult histories are presented in museums.

[00:28:40] Um, monuments and, you know, the interaction between heritage history memory. We talked about oral history as well in the course, and, um, things like shared authority, the concept of decolonizing, the museum, lots and lots of things that, that, um, that public historians and, and she, you know, museum, [00:29:00] um, curators have to work through and are grappling with right now.

[00:29:03] And, and so the students learned about this in theory, and then they put it into practice by building, um, what originally was going to be, you know, actual physical, uh, displays. But because of COVID, we turned this into a digital, um, exhibition and the concept was. This notion of, of threads through time. And that was that's the name of the, of the exhibit and the idea for threads through time, uh, came about because the Canada games, there's a few different reasons behind this for the Canada games.

[00:29:34] One of those or their motto is that the, uh, the kit, the games strengthen the fabric of Canada through the power of sport. And I really liked that notion of fabric. And I

was thinking, well, how's fabric made, it's made with thread and how that thread is woven together. And so I thought about all these stories crew across Canada from across the region, um, some across time.

[00:29:57] Are woven together to make us who we are [00:30:00] and, and shape our identity. And so the idea for the, for the exhibit of Fred's through time was then to also take the concept for the games which was developed by the, or host society, which is this concept of 13 for 13. So we have 13 provinces and territories. We have 10 municipalities or 12 municipalities in Niagara plus the regions of 13 entities.

[00:30:22] And, um, that each one of the 13 provinces and territories would be partnered with a region or a municipality in my Agra. So the games. And so there would be cultural programming in each of the municipalities to reflect the province and territory that they'd been partnered with. And I love this idea. I thought this was really cool because it would be a really cool way of exploring connections between Niagara and the rest of Canada and doing it through the.

[00:30:52] And those pairings have been already settled by. They've been set out by the host society. So we had these parents and so we were looking for [00:31:00] connections. How do we connect the region to the province, to the territory and thinking about it in terms of larger themes within Canadian history and, um, and also connecting it to count the game's history as well.

[00:31:13] So we have all these different things kind of woven together, local history, provincial national history, sport history, Canada games, history. And so the, so what ended up being created was a story map in which each of the 13 parents. So province and territory or province and municipality parents has these 13 states.

[00:31:35] That come out of it. And so starting with this one kind of note or starting point or a site, and then from that 13 threads kind of tail out and in some ways kind of connect to other ones. So on a map, you really see this amazing kind of connection that we're all connected across time and across place.

[00:31:55] And, um, and through, and in some cases through Kennedy games [00:32:00] and some of the sort of, um, stories from, from past Canada games, So it was a really exciting project because it got students thinking about how do you do public history? How do you make it exhibit? How do you make it interactive and engaging for, for your audience, but also just doing a deep dive into local history and deep dives into provincial history that, um, and the kinds of things that, that the students were able to find out and the really fascinating stories that then had these amazing connections to, to.

[00:32:33] So two other stories are when the other side of the country were really exciting. And, and one of the things that really struck me, so the whole purpose, the whole starting point for making that Canada games, oral history collection was to provide additional material for my students to use when they were building these exhibits.

[00:32:53] And so I got to meet all these amazing people. So pat, so athletes who competed at the games, [00:33:00] coaches, people who worked for it for different provincial missions,

Premier's Canada games, past Canada games, presidents. All sorts of amazing people from coast to coast. And, but one thing that always came back was how, um, first of all, that, so few people know about the games, unless you've participated in the games or your community hosted the games, or you had a friend or family that participated with the games, you probably don't know much about if anything, about the Canada games.

[00:33:29] So it's this hidden gem. Uh, the Canada games is hidden gem and, um, but the benefits of these games to youth sports, to the host communities, the long-term. That, um, aren't measured in numbers that are measured in these stories that people tell about the profound impact that these games have had on them, on their careers, on their outlook, on their understanding of Canada and who they are and their, their sense of identity.

[00:33:58] It was, it was really [00:34:00] quite something. And one of the things that then came out of the course was that the, the idea of these games is that you have these young athletes who travel to different parts of the country and learn about these other parts of Canada and these other cultures and communities and interact with each other.

[00:34:19] And that, that is an amazing experience for them. And that there is this kind of educational, this, this is the importance of the education of education in these games. And what I felt had happened in the course was that my students had had that. That they had learned so much about, about Canada and about these, these, these local histories that are so important that these micro histories have these really important profound implications and ramifications.

[00:34:54] And so it ended up having this, this, this unexpected, um, [00:35:00] impact on an unintended consequence of actually mimicking or echoing the purpose of the candidate.

[00:35:09] **Alison Innes:** [00:35:09] That's really neat. Um, now you had invited me, um, to the virtual class when students presented their work. And as of our time of recording, it's not publicly available yet, but it will be at some point is the plan.

[00:35:21] Yeah. And one of the, I just want to come back to this idea of threads and, and. Tease out a few examples of, um, for, for our audience, the one that still sticks in my mind, I think the theme that they were looking at was education, and then they wound up looking at flight schools and they trace that all the way to, uh, September nine 11.

[00:35:48] Um, do you remember enough of that one off the top of your head to give us a little kind of just a little taste of kind of where that thread went and how it developed? Because I think that was one of the more [00:36:00] challenging pairings as well.

[00:36:02] **Elizabeth Vlossak:** [00:36:02] Yeah. So that was, um, that was the pairing that linked, um, Lincoln and Newfoundland.

[00:36:09] And so the starting point for that was the themes bill aerodrome and from the beam Ceville Jerome, the students then. Threaded out and made these connections to, okay, this was a, this was an aerodrome that was opened during the first world war and, uh, trained pilots during the war. And so they were looking at kind of war memorials and the

danger flight and, um, the, you know, the, these very dramatic crashes that took place, you know, around, around being themselves.

[00:36:41] And then they traced it to the, um, the, the, uh, the group of seven. Um, oh gosh. Now I can't remember which, which one of the group of seven, it was, did these amazing aerial drawings of the beam Seville aerodrome. And, and so, and, and, um, did these, are these paintings from the [00:37:00] sky, from, from a plane, from the swell.

[00:37:04] And so they made the connection to the group of seven and connected, um, this to Newfoundland through AYA Jackson's work, uh, painting the Labrador coast, but also AYA Jackson's relationship to Banting. So, um, so Banting was actually really good friends with Abe Jackson and the group of seven and was kind of an amateur painter.

[00:37:28] And he was actually killed in a plane crash in Newfoundland and that crashed in Newfoundland. So there were these multiple connections that linked Thiensville aerodromes through this plane crash. Group of seven to Newfoundland and Banting and group of seven. And then also there was a connection to war memorials.

[00:37:49] And so we talked to, so they connected it to war memorials in Newfoundland. And also just the fact that, you know, that he's a man who wasn't part of Canada during the first world war. [00:38:00] Um, but then this long, longer history of Newfoundland's, um, importance, geopolitically and, and it's, um, it's airport during the, during the war during the second world war during the cold war, but then also the, uh, the airports, um, Gander airports, um, which hosted these claims that were diverted after, after nine 11 and posted, um, all these people and, and the musical.

[00:38:28] Is based on that, on that story of what happened after nine 11. And so they made these amazing connections and then another connection, and this is all in the same exhibit part of the same threat. This is the same one is that they connected military history to AVN aviation history to Newfoundland, but then they brought it also back to, um, sports because there was also, there has to be a sport component.

[00:38:53] And so they talked about different regimental sports, sporting teams. And then also how the [00:39:00] development of, um, sports like wheelchair basketball and other the, the way in which sport was used for rehabilitation of soldiers after the war was also where, so the paramount. Comes out of that tradition of how do we really rehabilitate our soldiers when, when they come home.

[00:39:18] And so they made that connection between, between war rehabilitation, sports, and then, um, uh, Paralympics. That's sort of the disabled athletes.

[00:39:31] **Alison Innes:** [00:39:31] That's fantastic. And I am really looking forward to whenever that project is ready for public consumption, because if that's one thread and there's 12 other threads, I'm really curious to see where, where, where everything goes.

[00:39:46] Now, did the students select a topic like the theme? Did they settle? Okay, we're going to do the theme of education. Was it, or was that theme part of something larger with the, uh, Canada [00:40:00] games we

[00:40:00] **Elizabeth Vlossak:** [00:40:00] had? Um, one of the things that I did in the lead up to the course was that when I was putting together kind of ideas for how I would approach the interviews and the oral history component, I was thinking about how I was, I wanted to kind of touch on particular.

[00:40:16] In, in my interviews. So one of the things with oral history, and I didn't mention this earlier on is that there's different ways we talked about, like you were asking, like, how do you do oral history? There are different ways of approaching the interview. And so you can do it through, you know, either other structured interview or semi-structured interview or totally unstructured, which is more sort of life story where someone will just talk about their whole life from start to finish with just a few cues here and there by the interviewer.

[00:40:41] Um, what I did for the world history for the Canada games collection was much more structured because I really, and I mean, it was structured and there was a room for the, you know, a little bit less structure, but I, but there was, but I was guided by these particular themes and it was themes like education and gender [00:41:00] and disability and equity and multiculturalism, um, black history, first nations.

[00:41:09] Um, people, it was, there were all these different themes that I was so that when I approached people and said, I'd like to talk to you, and if you can speak about the games in relation to any of these particular themes, that would be wonderful. And can you identify which ones you would most like to speak about?

[00:41:26] And, um, and so we use those themes to kind of think about how we would approach the exhibits as well. And so we had these scenes that we were working from, but what, what, um, what I ended up doing is that the students kind of provided ideas and proposals. And then based on what the students had had presented, I worked with two research assistants to help kind of shape what each one of the 13 exhibits, certain exhibits would look like.

[00:41:54] Um, so that, so that would be covered a different theme in each one. And that there would be sort of [00:42:00] to the whole thing, because we had lots of different groups working on these things. And your

[00:42:06] **Alison Innes:** [00:42:06] approach in this whole class was a little different. Um, it, wasn't what we might think of those of us who have had university history classes may be in, in, in the dark and distant past might be familiar with, with lectures and reading and that kind of thing.

[00:42:21] You kind of flip this whole idea of classroom on its head and you approach it as a lab where you were, which is an idea that may not be as familiar. Um, we, we might be familiar with it from science or something like that, but not so much with history or humanities. What was that setting? What does it look like to, for a classroom to kind of function with this lab approach that

[00:42:43] **Elizabeth Vlossak:** [00:42:43] you took?

[00:42:44] What I did is I told the students at the beginning of the term, I said, don't think of this as a, as long as a class. And don't think of me as your professor, think of me as the director or, or, and I said, I don't want you to think about me as your boss either, but kind of think [00:43:00] about this almost like a, a workplace environment where I'm your manager, um, or, um, you know, in charge of the company.

[00:43:06] And we have these research assistants who are kind of the line managers and, um, you're working in these teams, these research teams, and you're responsible for this. We're working on this mega project together. And in order for that mega project to succeed, we all have to work on that. Sections of the big project.

[00:43:26] And so I kind of was overseeing the entire thing and could sort of see where everything was happening. And then the research assistants were kind of more on the ground, um, helping with what was going on in those individual groups and providing feedback and support, and then bringing that information back to me.

[00:43:44] And then I, and then we could kind of consult and come back to the groups to that, to just to check in with them. And so it's, it was, uh, it was challenging for sure. And, um, having never done it like that myself, but there was a lot of kind of learning stuff kind of on the fly. [00:44:00] And, um, but I, but I think what it achieved was that it provided this very different workspace for the students to engage in.

[00:44:08] And one of the things that really struck me in their final reflection pieces that they, that they wrote was that some of them had either never done group work before, or had done groups before on a page. And generally the students were actually really positive about the experience of that group work because of the way that it was designed that there was that they worked together in groups, that there were somebody who was kind of coming in and kind of assisting them every once in a while, um, that there was a significant amount of autonomy, but at the same time, they weren't totally left to figure it out on their own.

[00:44:42] And certainly I I've, there's certain a lot of things that are gonna kind of change moving forward and, and improve upon. And, and the reflections were really, really helpful to help me think about how, how it all worked. But I, I, I like that idea of, of, [00:45:00] of the us providing students with that new way of kind of thinking about what they're doing and the skills that they're learning so much of it was really skill-based.

[00:45:08] So what skills are you gaining, working with a team and, um, how can you take. Outside the classroom. How can you take them into other classes, but also how are you going to take those into a job or how are you going to kind of pitch those skills to a potential employer? Um, I think things that you learned about yourself and how you work and, um, and also just the, the, the skills that you've developed along the way.

[00:45:33] So that was, uh, it was very interesting. It's a very interesting kind of experiment. And, and one that's, um, as I said, some things I'm definitely going to change a bit, but I liked the overall kind of approach

[00:45:47] **Alison Innes:** [00:45:47] of it. And it's interesting too, because they sort of wound up with a sort of finished product at the end of it.

[00:45:53] So you're not even really assessing them on the final product. How did you assess students on [00:46:00] that? Just sort of curious. So

[00:46:01] **Elizabeth Vlossak:** [00:46:01] a lot of it was like, how are they working as a team? How are they communicating? Not only with each other, but with me and the, and the research assistants, um, is their work on time is, um, you know, where are they delivering everything on time?

[00:46:16] And even though the final assignment wasn't necessarily assessed, like I would assess a research paper. I was still, I still graded them on the quality of the work that they produced up until that point. So, um, what was a lot of additional work going to be needed after they finished the course, um, did, was, um, had they, had, they done all the things that were required up until that point.

[00:46:44] And, um, and also looking at things like how, how were they, were they working together? Were they helping each other out? Um, were they, um, was anybody, was, was there, is there some, some kind of leadership? [00:47:00] I didn't, I didn't assign leaders for each of the groups and one group, interestingly enough, no leader actually emerged.

[00:47:07] They, they, they had this great sort of shared leadership and they worked really, really well together because they had excellent communication skills and the work that they produce. It's phenomenal. And then you had other groups that were there, a leader had emerged, but you could see that there was some tension within those groups where, um, there wasn't always necessarily that they didn't really want to do what the leader was doing and wanting to kind of do their own thing.

[00:47:36] And, and so it was interesting to sort of see those dynamics and how the students dealt with those dynamics as well. And so how they actually were able to, uh, engage in conflict resolution and managing their project like that was, um, it was something that's very hard to actually assess because I wasn't there all the time.

[00:47:56] I had to assess this based on kind of the feedback that they were [00:48:00] giving me the work that they were doing and submitting and, and assessing it that way. So, um, so that was really, really challenging. And having spoken to other faculty members who work on similar projects in different disciplines, they say that this is the eternal challenge of how, how exactly do you.

[00:48:17] And how, and how do you assess the skills, like the, the level of skill that they've achieved? So, um, so again, like I, I learned a lot and there are a lot of things that, um, I've subsequently like been taking notes and incorporating into the next version of the course, which I'm offering again in the fall and it's going to look very different.

[00:48:38] So I'm going to do a plug. I'm going to do a plug for the course next year,

[00:48:47] please plug the course. So the first one, uh, so again, so this is history three or four, two making history in Niagara, which is going to also be Canada games, but it's going to be really different. So one of the things that came out of that. [00:49:00] Version of the course was that I'd always sort of imagined that, um, the first half of that's a full year course.

[00:49:06] So the, the fall term would be all about hearing methods, case studies, um, familiarizing yourself with like, what is public history? What is heritage? What is memory, all these things and what is decolonizing the museum, what is shared heritage, all these things. And then the winter term, the students would apply that knowledge through this big project.

[00:49:28] And what ends up happening is that that the students didn't necessarily see clearly enough how, what they learned in the fall term was directed. Implicated in what they were doing in the winter term. And what I'm doing now is kind of weaving the two terms together a little bit more. So there still is going to be this major project.

[00:49:50] The students are going to be building for the Canada games for up rock. So last year it was a purely digital project. This year, knock on wood. We're going to be at [00:50:00] some point in person and students will actually design physical exhibits that are going to be deployed scattered across broad campus at the different locations.

[00:50:12] Um, either in sites where students and athletes and families will be wandering during the games or at the actual, um, venues that are on Brock's campus, as well as the new Cadillac games park. And so the students themselves will develop. Projects and there'll be done, um, with the support of the Canada games council, as well as we had special collections.

[00:50:37] And, um, and thinking about Brock's history, sport history, Canada games, and these really cool kind of interactive exhibits throughout campus. So the students, they're going to figure that out next to ensure, but what I'm doing in the fall term is that instead of it being strictly just text-based and case studies and just learning all this prep for [00:51:00] the actual doing, there's also going to be kind of a, a practical component as well.

[00:51:05] And so I've incorporated a work integrated learning component in the fall term that then provides them with kind of that practical experience that they can then, so they can take the theory and the practice and applied both to their major project in the winter term with a lot more kind of.

[00:51:23] Integration of additional kind of things to think about as they're working on the major project. So I'm hoping that this will provide more of a bridge between the fall term, the winter term, but the exciting thing is that for that fall term, the work integrated learning piece is going to be done in collaboration with the mag Ramon lake historical society museum.

[00:51:43] Oh, that's fantastic. And, um, so what the students are going to be doing is they will be assisting and collaborating and receiving hands-on training from museum staff to build an exhibit. And the exhibits that [00:52:00] they were going to be working on are going to be housed in the museums, tiny museum, which is this wonderful.

[00:52:09] And I don't think it's, I think that they, they haven't actually had a formal public exhibit of it yet because of COVID, but it's this tiny little it's based on the tiny house movement, tiny home. And it's a little. Kind of almost like a shed that has four display cabinets inside it, and it can be moved to different venues, so it can be moved to a school or a library or to a community center, depending on what's in the exhibit.

[00:52:35] So, and I'm so excited because the students will actually, they get to pick the artifacts from the collection that they want to put into their display case. They're going to learn how to write, um, you know, the, all the wording and the descriptions for all the artifacts. And so they get this real hands-on learning experience that they can then take along with all the stuff that they've been reading about and other examples of [00:53:00] exhibits, they can take that and the hands-on training and then apply it in their own, in their own project.

[00:53:06] So I I'm, I'm really excited cause I think that that might've been 10th, a missing link. To a certain extent. And it was, it was very difficult to do in COVID, but I think that it was that, that there was kind of that there was a, there was a stage missing of the reading about it. And then the actual, like doing it on your own, there needed to be that sort of insight, that kind of guidance

[00:53:25] **Alison Innes:** [00:53:25] will they be building on the work that your students did this past year?

[00:53:29] Or will they be starting completely from scratch with new themes and new topics?

[00:53:33] **Elizabeth Vlossak:** [00:53:33] So there'll be, um, have access to the work that the students did last year. And one of the things that they can do is they can take that project and maybe create kind of an ancillary side project that would go alongside it.

[00:53:45] It it'd be, it'd be up to them. Um, another thing that I was imagining is that if, if a team in that new group wants to create some kind of an information panel, or there's even like an, like a little exhibit and a case, there could also be like a little [00:54:00] shout-out to the threads through time project with QR code, so you can access it.

[00:54:05] And, um, and so these, these exhibits will be talking to each. And informing each other. Right?

[00:54:11] **Alison Innes:** [00:54:11] So our listeners can stay tuned to the Brock news next year to catch the stories as, as this project unfolds. So you've got me convinced to sign up for history for history three fo two. Um, you mentioned two courses.

[00:54:24] What was the other one?

[00:54:25] **Elizabeth Vlossak:** [00:54:25] The other courses? My new fourth year honors seminar. That is a full year course. It starts this coming September. It's for history for F two. It's also cross-listed with Canadian studies and it's called voices from the past oral history. And it's. Oral history course again, um, in some ways, um, kind of modeled on the 3 0 2 kind

of structure of a full year course, but there too, you know, rather than fall term being all methods, methodology, historiography, case studies, and then the second term [00:55:00] filled an oral history collection.

[00:55:01] It's going to be a lot more integrated. So the, the, what the end product for these fourth year students is the creation of an oral history collection that would then be housed in the so. And, um, yeah, so it's really, it's really, really exciting. And so the students will build from, start to finish everything from developing permission forms, to recording interviews, creating transcripts, uploading stuff, creating metadata, even earlier, you know, like finding people to interview and that too, there's going to be a work integrated learning company.

[00:55:33] In the fall term, and that is going to be a community collecting event. The theme that I've already, I've already chosen a theme because I, I thought I I'd like to be able to get things set up prior to the course starting so that the students know from the outset, what it is that the large project is going to be when they starting in September.

[00:55:55] And this is going to be an oral history of the garden city arena. So the garden city [00:56:00] arena, or Chuck, Kate cliff of vena, it's unclear when, when it's going to be decommissioned. But, um, it's probably not going to be operational for much longer, especially after the Canada games park with this four pad. For public use after the games.

[00:56:16] And it got me thinking about what happens when we lose these spaces, these places, these sites that are so important to a community's history, it was opened in 1938. The Jackie cliff marina was a, what was it? It was a great depression era make work project. It was, um, the site of, you know, it was things, it hosted the circus.

[00:56:36] It was the OHL team before the Meridian or, uh, arena before the radiant center was opened. Uh, there's, there's all sorts of amazing history and stories embedded within those walls. And, and, and I was thinking about how you capture those stories and how do you keep something alive after it's physically going to be gone.

[00:56:58] And that's, again, coming back to some [00:57:00] of the, well, one of the reasons why history is so powerful is that it allows you to capture these stories. Of places that disappear or that eventually have half gone. And, and I thought, well, this is, this is the time to do it. And so my idea is that that the students would actually go into the arena and capture the soundscape of the arena and interview people in the arena and have them talk about some of their experiences and their relationship to that, to that.

[00:57:30] And the, the importance of that arena to St. Catherine's community. So that work integrated learning opportunities going to be done in collaboration with, um, the St Catherine's museum. And, uh, and so that's one of the, one of the projects that, and that'll also allow students to them, um, start finding people that they could then interview later on for the, the oral history collection.

[00:57:53] Excellent. And

[00:57:54] **Alison Innes:** [00:57:54] that's that little blue, I call it the little blue arena. Whenever I drive, I drive past it on Geneva street, [00:58:00] um, just near the 4 0 6 there for, for those who, who may not be familiar with it, it's usually has a big pile of snow outside it from the ice, not this year, unfortunately. Because of the pandemic, that sounds like a really exciting project.

[00:58:14] Um, so those are two great courses. I think they're going to keep you busy and, uh, definitely keep, keep our students busy at this point. Do you have any anticipated launch date for the Soho? Um, to

[00:58:26] **Elizabeth Vlossak:** [00:58:26] be publicly available? We had originally thought that we would have it ready to go by September. We're still hoping September, but it may not be until kind of early in 2022.

[00:58:39] Um, as I said, you know, it's, it's, it's been a work in progress and, um, and with COVID, it kind of adds that extra layer of challenges, but, but we will be. Promoting it far and wide, as soon as it's available. And we're really excited about it because as I said, those, those stories that we've we've [00:59:00] captured, some of them are one of the things that's really struck me.

[00:59:03] I, I'm not a sports historian and I just suddenly found myself. Doing all this sport related history. And one of the things that's really struck me is that sport acts as this fantastic sort of launching point or vehicle for exploring all sorts of really important themes in history and, and really thinking about the impact that score has had on communities and that you can explore it from the perspective of gender and class and race and industrialization and gentrification.

[00:59:34] And, um, one of the things that we're looking to do with the Soho is as we start developing more, more and more collections, we're really focused, not on just the stories of things, athletes, or, um, famous coaches, but really thinking about how sport has impacted our community. And so interviewing the people and, and creating these collections, focusing [01:00:00] on, um, you know, community sports and cultural, like cultural leaks and church leaks and, um, worker in factory leaks.

[01:00:11] Like there were five factory and workplace teams and then exploring all the themes that come out of those interviews. And, and it's actually, it's so rich and this is something that's really struck me is that it's a very, very rich sort of way of entering into kind of social history, urban history, rural history, local history, but also thinking about it again in these, in these, in this more global context as well.

[01:00:37] **Alison Innes:** [01:00:37] If you're not sport oriented, there's an angle in there for you as a, as a researcher, as a student, there's, there's a way to, to dig into whatever your interest is really.

[01:00:49] **Elizabeth Vlossak:** [01:00:49] Definitely. And I think that this is what I really am excited about with the garden city arena project is that it's sport related, but that arena is way more than just the [01:01:00] site of sporting events.

[01:01:01] There's a, there's so much scope regardless of what your, your research interests are. You'll, you'll find an angle. Speaks to you and your interests,

[01:01:10] **Alison Innes:** [01:01:10] we will have to check in with you next year and see, see what, what your, you and your students have, uh, produced. So thank you so much for talking with us today and thank you so much to our listeners for joining us.

[01:01:23] You are welcome to engage with us on social media at Brock humanities. And of course, there's lots of links in the footnotes for this episode to learn more about Dr. work, her courses, and the history department at Brock in general. So thank you very much for joining us.

[01:01:39] **Elizabeth Vlossak:** [01:01:39] Um,

[01:01:44] **Nicole Arnt:** [01:01:44] Thank you so much for listening to forward. Find all of our footnotes links to more information transcripts and past episodes on our website, RA u.ca forward slash humanities. We love to hear from our [01:02:00] listeners. So please join us on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram at Brock humanities, please subscribe and rate us as well on your favorite podcasting app.

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