Using Object-Based and Open-Enabled Pedagogy for Authentic Learning

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Rhode Island College
1. Object-Based Learning: An Opportunity for Students to Conduct Original Research
Information for “Object-based learning” is taken from:
Object-Based Learning

Object-based learning (OBL) is an experiential pedagogy concerned with the close and tactile study of material things, such as artworks, specimens, texts, and artifacts. It is an approach for “learning about, with, and through objects” (Paris, 2002, p. xiv).

Image: Anchor Plaza via @newanchors
OBL presents opportunities to:

- bolster the use of campus collections in teaching and scholarship
- teach research fluency concepts through experiential/authentic projects
- diversify forms of knowledge production on campus
- collaborate with librarians and staff

Image: AH-TAH-THI-KI Museum Blog
Object-Based Learning: A Brief History

1543: Andreas Vesalius’ *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*

18th and 19th centuries: University departments amassed incredible collections pertaining to the study of art, archeology, and geology.

20th century: Object teaching and use of collections fell from popularity.

21st century: Public museums overhauled their engagement strategies, resulting in OBL research and education programs that championed visitor interaction with objects. Faculty began to look at their university collections with renewed interest (Hannan et al., 2013).
Object-Based Learning Theory

- OBL shares a branch with other **experiential learning modalities**, such as active and problem-based learning.

- OBL is a specialized type of experiential learning distinguished by its **focus on physical materials and sensory experience**. Pioneered by art and museum educators, OBL makes a case for the educational value of visual, tactile, olfactory, and auditory engagement with objects. Research in the Museum Studies field demonstrates that hands-on interaction with objects triggers emotion, aids memory retention, and facilitates understanding (Chatterjee, 2008).
Real objects activate visual, spatial, linguistic, kinesthetic, and interpersonal intelligences (Simpson and Hammond, 2012). They invoke the mindbody connection.

Digital surrogates are helpful for the purposes of object selection, review outside of class, and digital knowledge production.

Image: *Durga as Slayer of the Buffalo Demon Mahisha* @Met Museum
OBL: An Emerging Pedagogy in Higher Education

- A body of scholarship explores the potential for OBL practice in higher education. These studies demonstrate how educators are deploying OBL to teach subject-specific knowledge and instill transferable skills across disciplines and academic levels (see references).

- After a lifetime of looking at websites and paging through textbooks, students are generally enthusiastic about access to real artworks, manuscripts, scientific equipment, artifacts, and even ordinary household objects.
Research Fluency + Object-Based Learning

● The specificity of an object imposes important limits on inquiry, making the task of research more manageable for students.

● Students conduct original research, which teaches them resourcefulness, helps them to avoid plagiarism, and gives them experience working in a professional manner.

● At some stage, students may be delighted to realize that they are making discoveries, and that they are foremost experts on their objects.
OBL + Digital Knowledge Production

- Objects are excellent candidates for digital presentation formats, such as interactive online exhibits, images, and videos.

- Media presentations may be intellectually and logistically accessible in ways that student research papers are not.
Barriers

- New pedagogy
- Changes to curriculum
- Reduced time for lecturing
- Increased collaboration with curators and librarians
- Practical concerns: What about the challenges presented by stationary classroom design, large class size, student-to-object ratio, security, note-taking, absences, and access to objects outside of class?
Making OBL happen

Professor Joe Cain, a practitioner of OBL at University College London, recommends several helpful strategies for resolving some of these issues:

- Approach knowledgeable library and archives staff who can make specific suggestions based on the curriculum.

- OBL will find a home on campuses that support faculty through dialogues and training workshops, and led by staff who are versed in the theory and practice of teaching with collections.
OBL in Higher Ed: Case Study 1

Researching provenance of items belonging to Wheaton College’s Permanent Collection (Niederstadt, 2014)
OBL in Higher Ed: Case Study 2

Describing the physical characteristics of 18th Century Enlightenment texts at the University of Colorado Boulder (Schmiesing and Hollis, 2002)
OBL in Higher Ed: Case Study 3

Developing an FYS course with integrated OBL for Rhode Island College (Fall 2018)
Research Fluency + Object-Based Learning

- The **archival community** has a strong tradition of encouraging faculty to integrate original source material into the curriculum.

- After a lifetime of looking at websites and paging through textbooks, **students are generally enthusiastic** about access to real artworks, manuscripts, scientific equipment, artifacts, and even ordinary household objects.

- The specificity of **an object imposes important limits on inquiry**, making the task of research more manageable for students.
“Students get terribly excited when you put them in touch with real stuff. . .the object itself becomes the hub of a wheel of exploration, with spokes of inquiry radiating out in many directions.”

Research Fluency + Object-Based Learning

- Having to consult with peers, professors, librarians, and other stakeholders teaches students that research is responsive and social.

- Each new ability helps students to close the gap between their skills and those cited by employers as being areas of weakness among new college graduates, including: (1) engaging others in the research process; (2) retrieving information using a variety of formats; and (3) exploring a topic with dogged persistence (Head and Wihby, 2014).

- At some stage, students may be delighted to realize that they are making discoveries, and that they are foremost experts on their objects.
What about Digital Objects?

- Thinking about digital objects/digital surrogates as more than “the next best thing” or good for review outside of class.

- Digital objects have unique properties that can be described, measured, evaluated, analyzed, and contextualized. Ex: audio files

- Curation and arrangement: Unlike physical objects, digital objects can be organized into many different collections and/or exhibits simultaneously.
Perhaps one of the most compelling cases for OBL comes from students. They report that they like learning from objects, even preferring them to traditional lectures and research papers.

● Examples

Image: Jillian Carkin, Wheaton College Class of 2014, presents her research on the provenance of Wheaton College's Greek Black-Figure Attic Amphora, purchased in 1981 with the Newell Bequest Fund.
2. Digital Proxies:
Leveraging Open Licensing for OBL
Open-Enabled Pedagogy

Open Educational Practices, Open Pedagogy

“Teaching and learning practices only practical in the context of the 5R permissions characteristic of open educational resources.”

- David Wiley, Chief Academic Officer of Lumen Learning, Education Fellow at Creative Commons Faculty of Instructional Psychology & Technology, Brigham Young University
The 5Rs of Open Licensing

- **Retain:** Users have the right to make, archive and own copies of the content
- **Reuse:** Content can be reused in its unaltered form
- **Revise:** Content can be adapted, adjusted, modified or altered
- **Remix:** The original or revised content can be combed with other content to create something new
- **Redistribute:** Copies of the content can be shared with others in its original, revised or remixed form
Digital Public Domain Collections + Repositories

Digital Public Domain content often...

- Is digitized objects from museums, libraries and cultural institutions,
- With a physical description of the object,
- And use is **encouraged**

Resources: [library.ric.edu/open-collections](library.ric.edu/open-collections)

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Citizen Science for Humanities: Citizen Archivists

Example: Transcription as OBL

Healey journals and notebooks

"To satisfy my curiosity I look up places that Albert mentioned in his diary," he [Tai Lam] said. "I explore areas in Dorchester that I wouldn’t have done otherwise."

Citizen Archivists: Transcribing + Curating

Sample Transcribing Projects
- Europeana Transcribe
- Smithsonian Digital Volunteers
- NYPL Labs: Transcribing and geocoding menus for curation
  Building Inspector

Sample Collection + Curation Projects
- Book Traces
- Our Marathon


Open Licensing + Digital Knowledge Production

- **5Rs of Open Licensing** allow for:
  - **Reusing + Revising**: Sharing *digitally* without requesting permission from object holder.
  - **Remixing**: Creatively using beyond initial study and original presentation of the objects.
  - **Retaining + Redistributing**: Students can add copies of their work to portfolios, which can be used for further academic or professional work.

- Contribute to bigger *research and curation* projects.

- Discuss Intellectual Property, Copyright and Creative Commons Licensing.


References


