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Teaching With Objects 1

The Knowledgeable Object

PROCEEDINGS FROM THE

KNOWLEDGEABLE OBJECT SYMPOSIUM

EDITORS: EVE GUERRY, JANE THOGERSEN, GINA HAMMOND & ANDREW SIMPSON

A UMAC Publication

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Teaching With Objects 1

The Knowledgeable Object

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TWO

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PROCEEDINGS FROM THE KNOWLEDGEABLE OBJECT SYMPOSIUM HELD AT THE CHAU CHAK WING MUSEUM THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY 16 NOVEMBER 2023

UMAC established a Working Group for Object-based Teaching and Learning in 2024. The Working Group is a collective of university museum educators and researchers who believe that object-based teaching and Learning (OBTL) is a powerfully active, social pedagogy that benefits both teachers and learners. We advocate for the benefits of the active use of objects of all types of education programs. We seek to develop a global OBTL community of practice.

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Dr Paul Donnelly

Chau Chak Wing Museum, The University of Sydney

In the planning and funding of the Chau Chak Wing Museum, suitable and aspirational infrastructure and staffing for Object-Based Learning was seen as one of the greatest potential outcomes. OBL was part of a very clear reasoning behind combining the three independent University of Sydney collections of the Nicholson Museum, Macleay Museum and University Art Gallery to form the Chau Chak Wing Museum. It was anticipated the vastly improved accessibility and profile from a purpose-built museum housing an interdisciplinary assemblage would place the collections at the core of the University's teaching and learning.

The University has been fortunate in collections playing a role from its very beginning as Australia's first University. The Mediterranean antiquities collection was initially collected during the 1850s by Sir Charles Nicholson, first Vice-Provost, Provost and Chancellor of the University. These original 3,000 objects were the core of the Nicholson Museum, which opened in 1860 within the then lone gothic sandstone building of the nascent campus around which cows quietly grazed. In the 1880s the Macleay Museum was purpose-built as the third building on campus to house the extensive collections of the Macleay family spanning ethnography, natural history, and science. Collections and museums were a distinctive feature of Sydney University from its inception and a distinctive characteristic consciously aspiring to the illustrious institutions of Britain.

Since these early beginnings the University of Sydney's cultural and scientific collections have continued to expand in depth and breadth to include one of the largest holdings of antiquities in the southern hemisphere with strengths in ancient Egypt and Greece, the earliest known Aboriginal bark paintings, an historic entomology collection dating to the 1790s, Pacific cultures, historic photographs, Australian impressionist painting, and contemporary art. The range of objects impressively encompasses a diversity of natural phenomena and human achievement spanning millennia around the world.

It is within this materially diverse, rich and long-lived context that the 2023 Knowledgeable Object Symposium was conducted in November 2023 at the Chau Chak Wing Museum. The event embraced cross-sector collaboration between GLAM and Education professionals implementing OBL, with a program of speakers spanning school teachers, university lecturers, and library and museum educators. Over eighty-five people attended as well as thirty-six people registered to receive the online recordings. The schedule of speakers ended with a workshop to debrief the day and turn focus to future directions. The stimulating outcome can be seen in this Proceedings where the papers interrogate, strategise, and celebrate the opportunities embracing objects stimulate. Not long before the symposium the CCWM's OBL program won the UMAC 2023 Award. Since the symposium The Museum's OBL team was awarded the Vice Chancellor's Excellence Award for Student Experience 2024. Student experience! Such an impact puts the Museum central to the University's core business and demonstrates the power and potential of OBL that this collation of papers shows has limitless capacity.

Dr Paul Donnelly

Deputy Director, Chau Chak Wing Museum

The University of Sydney

THE KNOWLEDGEABLE OBJECT AND THE OBJECTIVE OF KNOWLEDGE

Andrew Simpson[1] **& Gina Hammond**[2]

1. Chau Chak Wing Museum, The University of Sydney 2. FMHHS, Macquarie University

The idea that knowledge might be embedded in objects can be traced back to a range of philosophical, cognitive, and even technological viewpoints. The German philosopher Martin Heidegger believed objects are not just passive entities; they carry meaning and function through their relationship with humans (Harman 2002). This suggests that objects carry knowledge not in any explicit sense but because of their designed purpose and context. They are embedded with a form of human understanding and cultural meaning.

In education, the philosopher John Dewey spoke about people's interaction with objects as being transactional; there was an exchange of sorts between objects and people every time one encountered the other. This was part of Dewey's foundational education philosophy built around active engagement, constructivism and social interaction (Dewey 1986).

The same idea arises in material culture theory and anthropology; objects can carry knowledge about the culture and history of the people who made them and used them. Cultural specificity and its applications links objects directly with a whole range of intangible factors and criteria. Ancient objects can carry a form of ancient knowledge depending on purpose and application. Things have agency (Brown 2001).

In the modern, world the dramatic new digital extensions and dimensions have opened up new ontologies allowing us to engage with a range of objects that enact new physical and metaphysical modalities. Artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things represent new epistemic digital analogue frameworks with data and information being reshaped in ways that are reshaping our societies (Yarlagadda 2018).

A few years ago, we deployed an eager group of museum studies students in a little experiment (Simpson & Hammond 2012). One group engaged with a selection of objects from two of our campus museums. Another group engaged with images of the same objects. A basic series of questions regarding the objects their form and functions were asked of both groups. Some six months down the track we tested each of the groups for their didactic recall of their engagement with either object or image. Not surprisingly those that engaged with the objects recalled what the objects represented much more effectively than those who simply looked at images of the objects.

A few years later, to enliven the pedagogic utility of university museum collections we explored object-based learning further in a project working with higher education teachers that looked at mapping the curriculum through individual subject units with individual objects in university museum collections (Thogersen et al 2018). The aim was to unlock the resources buried in the university's museums and maximise their value to teaching staff and curriculum developers. That project sparked new neural connections between collections and courses across campus, and in doing so enlivened the pedagogic possibilities and potential of the institution.

Part of that project involved testing the temperature of object-based learning outside the boundaries of our own campus. The Knowledgeable Object two-day workshop and symposium explored what makes objects so valuable in education and museum contexts. The first day of the seminar induced a thunderous storm and torrential downpour as physical accompanying fanfare about the power of objects. There was a total of 35 presentations on multiple object perspectives from poetry to practicalities all the way through to empathy and engagement. All of them provided unique insights into the pedagogic power of objects.

Some five years later and the Knowledgeable Object has moved to a new campus. The building of the Chau Chak Wing Museum at the University of Sydney brought together a range of discipline specific collections together into the one museum. Part of the rationale behind centralising collections was the potential it would bring in releasing those objects from their traditional disciplinary containment and allow them to become cross-disciplinary vehicles of educational engagement at the University.

Despite the traditional disciplinary structure of teaching and research in higher education, university museum collections are increasingly being seen as tools for facilitating cross-disciplinary engagements. In teaching, object-based learning is a key driver (Simpson 2022). Through the Academic Engagement unit at the Chau Chak Wing Museum areas of the university that had never previously used objects in their teaching programs are now drawing on the museum's collections to enrich pedagogy (Thogersen & Guerry 2024). The building of new networks across campus via object-based learning at the museum was recognised with the UMAC Award in 2023. This annual award honours excellence and innovation in university museums and collections work. In 2023 the impact of OBL at CCWM was lauded.[1]

So now, some five years after the inaugural Knowledgeable Object meeting, the second Knowledgeable Object symposium was convened, this time at the Chau Chak Wing Museum.[2] The presentations made at the symposium are captured in the series of professional papers herein. What we experienced on the day and what we have attempted to document here is the engaged set of conversations around the application of object-based learning across a diverse range of different professional settings and contexts. These papers represent the growing body of professional practice around objects as practitioners seek out not just new opportunities but also new applications, digital, analogue and hybrid, for our collections.

While these conversations are based on a local geographic area, perhaps it is possible that in another five years, the community of practice will be a global one?

Notes

1. UMAC news release, 23rd September 2023, <http://umac.icom.museum/category/umac-award>

2. <https://www.sydney.edu.au/museum/education/object-based-learning-program/knowledgeable-object-symposium.html>

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OBJECT-BASED LEARNING AT THE CHAU CHAK WING MUSEUM

Liam McGeagh, Jane Thogersen, Eve Guerry

Chau Chak Wing Museum, The University of Sydney

Keywords: Object-based learning, museum education, museum collections, skills development, close looking

Overview of the program

The Chau Chak Wing Museum at the University of Sydney (CCWM) is custodian of approximately 440,000 objects across three major collections: the Nicholson Collection of antiquities, the University Art Collection, and the Macleay Collections of historical, cultural, and scientific materials. Together, these represent an immense catalogue of items used by the Object-based learning (OBL) Program to provide interactive learning experiences. The OBL program is coordinated by the Academic Engagement team, comprised of two curators and a curatorial assistant who design and deliver workshops across three object study rooms as well as the CCWM's exhibition spaces. When planning workshops, the OBL team meet with lecturers to determine relevant themes and learning outcomes in order to design bespoke object lists and activities. These are also based upon pragmatic considerations including the size and frequency of classes, and level of facilitation by the OBL team. Most workshops are delivered in whole or part by the OBL curators, though lecturers/tutors may elect to deliver sessions autonomously. In these cases, additional safeguards and instructions are provided by the curatorial assistant to ensure object safety, including safe object handling training. Figure 1 provides an overview of engagement statistics for the OBL program between 2021-2023, showing participants from a broad spectrum of academic disciplines across the university.

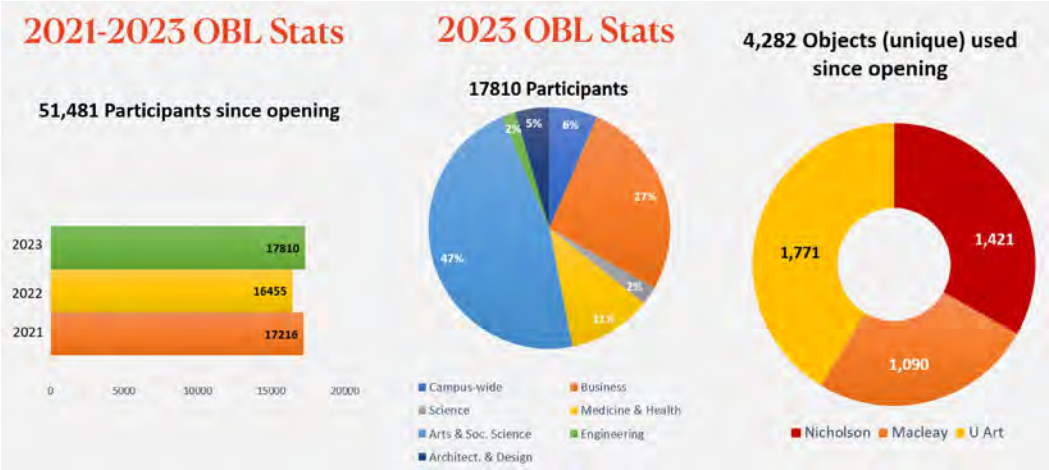

Figure 1: CCWM OBL Program overview statistics

Skills development

A core tenet of the CCWM OBL program is the development of cognitive and communicative skills, and this approach has contributed to its success in engaging participants from a range of disciplines.

Figure 2 represents the framework upon which OBL workshops are designed and delivered. Objects are the focus of the session, and observational abilities are framed as the first step from which data is gleaned before moving on to draw conclusions and communicate findings to others. Workshops are scaffolded in line with this framework, starting with observational activities where participants practice close looking and progress to increasingly complex tasks which hone their analytical and communication skills. These activities are predominately collaborative and discussion-based, drawing upon theories of social constructivism and experiential learning whereby knowledge is co-created as participants are in

conversation with the object, themselves, and their colleagues.[1] This creates an environment where skills such as critical thinking, deductive reasoning, identifying multiple perspectives, and communicating with diverse audiences can be identified and practiced.[2]

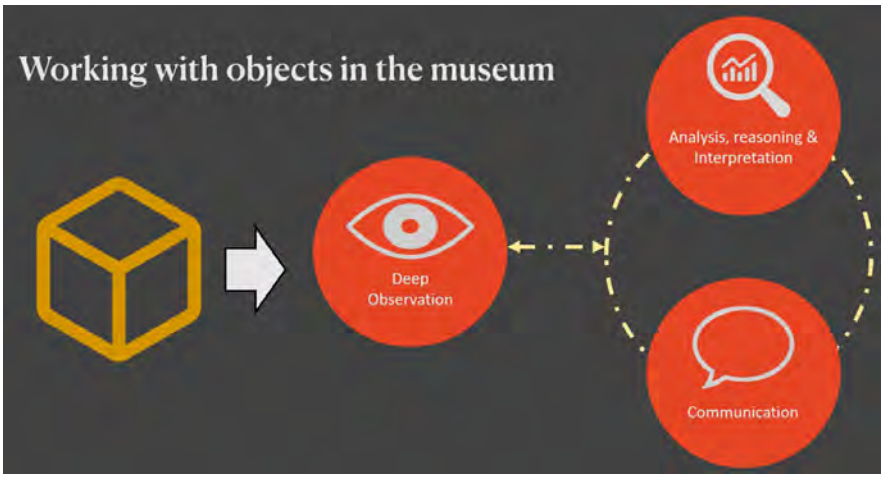

Figure 2: OBL skills framework

Focusing on on the development of skills allows audiences across different academic disciplines (e.g. business, engineering, economics, medicine) to engage with museum objects, as these skills and approaches are relevant to all learners.[3]

Access to the CCWM's myriad collections aids in planning and delivering OBL sessions as there is a wide range of historic, scientific, and cultural material to elicit curiosity and engagement from participants. However, the significance or 'wow' factor of objects in the classroom is not the primary reason for a workshop's success. Pedagogical considerations are more crucial, including the structure of a session and scaffolding of skills-building activities, engaging activity design tailored to the needs of an audience, and proficiency of educators in working with collections. These factors work in tandem with the inherent engagement that comes through working with objects of any kind, as well as the natural suitability of objects as a focal point for learning activities designed to hone cognitive and communicative abilities.[4]

Objects in focus

An ancient Roman oil lamp (Figure 3) exemplifies how the OBL program engages participants with diverse collections. Students begin with observation, identifying individual details of an object before progressing to interpretation and analysis of its features. They next combine group observations to build a more complete understanding of the object and its potential meanings. This ancient lamp is small enough to fit in the palm of one's hand; ideal for individuals to handle and inspect, but its small size and fragility makes it challenging for multiple participants to engage with simultaneously. A multi-modal approach offers a solution to this issue. The object is made available for handling by individuals, whilst a large image is projected onto a screen. In this way, all participants can simultaneously observe the object and its finer details, and more easily engage in group discussion. With its intriguing shape and striking incised decorations, the oil lamp is particularly effective at engaging participants in

Figure 3: Oil lamp, Roman Period (150-250 CE), Tunisia, NM62.716. Image credit: CCWM

1. Chatterjee et al., 2015: 2-3
2. Milkova and Volk, 2014: 40-42
3. Thogersen and Guerry, 2023: 134
4. Milkova and Volk, 2014: 42

deductive reasoning. Working together, students without prior knowledge are able to identify the image of a rooster with its symbolic links to the dawn and thus the bringing of light. The multi-modal approach facilitates effective collaboration, which would otherwise be hindered by the material considerations of an ancient object. It also enables educators to draw upon a wider range of learning activities, guide focused observation of parts and the whole, and affords students both a tactile and visual experience of the object.

Engagement across disciplines

A postgraduate unit of study in the University of Sydney Business School titled 'Leading with purpose' considers poverty alleviation through profitable business solutions. The lecturer approached the OBL program with the aim of creating a space where students can practice the skill of taking time to fully understand all aspects of an issue before generating solutions. The OBL curators designed and delivered a class on identifying multiple perspectives, creative problem solving and challenging assumptions. For example, one activity involved examining an item recorded in the museum's catalogue as an opium weight from Myanmar ('Bird-shaped weight', UA2012.1124). The scaffolded release of information prompted students to question how stereotypes and misinformation can lead to false assumptions about an object that is essentially a trade weight and not specific to the opium trade, despite the allure for collectors and souvenir hunters. In the week following this workshop, students submitted self-reflection videos and overwhelmingly reported an appreciation for practical experience in identifying multiple perspectives and the importance of doubt.

Successes and challenges

Successful programs saw University of Sydney students engage deeply with CCWM collections to produce new information that contributes to the museum's data and research on the collections. For example, undergraduate French and Francophone Studies students provided translations, contextual notes, and historical research for an obscure French photograph album (HP91.26). Postgraduate students in the School of Architecture, Design and Planning used CCWM collections as the basis to create 3D-printed 'touch surrogate' items for blind and low-vision museum visitors. Rather than simply replicating the objects, the touch surrogates allowed users to engage with a particular physical feature or associated narrative connected to the original item. Postgraduate Economics students worked with data from the art collection to analyse the factors that influence artwork value and determine whether trends over time can be reliably predicted.

A key challenge for the OBL program was hyflex learning, a flexible hybrid model employed by the university between 2020-2022. OBL activities can be difficult to translate effectively into this dual format without compromising the experience for both the in-person and online groups. Although the preference tends to be for in-person, the OBL program has experienced success with digital-only sessions, where learning activities can be adjusted for visual and auditory sensory engagement and effective discussion can be facilitated using videoconferencing software and other digital engagement tools.

A universal design framework that ensures accessibility and inclusivity is essential. The need to provide an inclusive educational experience within the limitations of a multisensory and experiential learning format can be challenging. Some examples we have encountered include participants who have low vision, are unable to wear gloves or unable to sit at a table for long periods. Furthermore, some objects can trigger difficult conversations, so strategies must be in place to ensure everyone feels safe in the OBL environment. Finding solutions for each of these scenarios often benefits all, attesting to the importance of universal design for learning.

The OBL program activates the CCWM collections to provide bespoke, hands-on learning experiences for diverse audiences. The focus on skills combined with pedagogical rigour forms the backbone of a successful program, not simply relying on access to a broad range of objects. OBL continually provides opportunities for success such as real-world student outputs responding to collection items. The OBL team has an adaptive and flexible approach, giving students agency in their learning, meeting challenges as they arise and motivating students by offering meaningful ways to engage.

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SCHOOL PROGRAMS AT THE CHAU CHAK WING MUSEUM: EXPERIENCES PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Julian Woods and Craig Barker

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Keywords: Chau Chak Wing Museum, collection-based learning, OBL

The Chau Chak Wing Museum (CCWM) is located at the University of Sydney and houses the Nicholson Collection of antiquities, the Macleay Collections of natural history, ethnography, science and historic photography, and the University Art Collection. The CCWM school education program incorporates Object Based Learning (OBL) into the museum experience, making connections between what students learn in the classroom and the material items in the collection. This paper will look at the past, present and future development of this program.

Past

School groups have been visiting the museums at the University of Sydney since the 1860s. Groups of school students, governesses, tutors and headmasters are recorded in the first two volumes of the Nicholson Museum's Visitors Book which date from 1863 to 1903. Schools included the Queen's College and Balmain Public School. In the 1950s the Nicholson Museum employed a casual education officer to guide school students around the museum collections. This was developed further in the 1980s by Louise Zarmati and Helen Nicholson with curricular-linked programs for schools. In 2005, Craig Barker was employed as the first permanent staff member dedicated to the education program, also responsible for its growth and expansion. A hands-on interactive session with ancient objects developed during this period for schools visiting the Nicholson Museum.

In 2003, David Ellis was employed as the director of the three university collections, the Nicholson, the Macleay and the Art collections, with the plan to unify them. The 'Sydney University Museums' structure was implemented and encouraged the education program to incorporate the Macleay and Art collections to enhance the offering of subjects to schools. However, physical access issues for the University Art gallery and the Macleay Museum impeded sustainable growth of school education opportunities with these collections. The program continued to develop and grow in the Nicholson Museum due to the availability of a dedicated education room and access to the collections. In the following years casual education officers were employed and an additional role of Education Coordinator was created.

Present

The present format of the CCWM's school education program has been inherited from the Nicholson Museum with ancient history remaining the primary subject area. The program consists of a guided tour of the museum and an object handling session in which students hold ancient objects from the collection. With both sessions, displays and objects are relevant to the content requested (usually Ancient Egypt, Greece, and/or Rome) and we encourage inquiry-based learning and discussions with students about the objects and museum experience.

The connection to the school curriculum is vital to ensure the excursion is relevant to student learning, as per feedback from a high school teacher; "It was so worthwhile and linked closely to the content and skills that we did and are doing in class." The object handling session assists students to develop and hone their skills in source analysis, almost replicating what an archaeologist would do on a dig site. Students are led through a series of questions and use their prior knowledge and reasoning skills to deduce what the objects can tell us about the past.

The object handling session includes a safe object handling briefing, students wear gloves and attention is drawn to fragile parts of objects. Objects are presented in a padded tray. This process and the protective materials used to hold and store the objects were developed with the museum conservation team. Opening in late 2020, the new museum allows the three collections to be exhibited together. It includes a dedicated school education room and four floors of exhibition space. This has increased the capacity and potential

growth of the education program at a scale that was not possible in the previous museum sites. The COVID-19 lockdowns delayed and limited the intended expansion of the education program, however school participation has now returned to pre-pandemic levels. For reference, before 2020 around 7000 students participated in the education program annually, in 2022 the museum had 5427 students; in 2023 the museum had 6980 students and in 2024 we are on track for around 7000 students.

In 2024, by October, 43% of school classes attending have been senior secondary schools (Years 11 and 12), primarily due to the aligned content of the collection with the NSW Ancient History syllabus. Year 7 classes make up for 28% of sessions, but due to the large cohort sizes, Year 7 students represent 54% of all participants, whereas year 11 and 12 are around 20% of student numbers. The students come from both government and independent schools. We have recently received a bequest to support students from low Socio-Economic Status schools to increase their participation in this program, as teacher feedback has indicated that cost is a significant factor affecting some students' participation in this program. We also take English as an Additional Language classes, international visiting schools and classes of students with disability.

The program must be adaptable to the range of student backgrounds, prior knowledge and needs. The education officers delivering the program must feel equipped and ready to adapt. The current staff have studied or are studying courses in ancient history, archaeology or a related discipline and receive on-the-job training in both peer to peer and formal sessions.

In recent years the museum has developed partnerships with other faculties on campus, such as the Faculty of Science, to co-develop and deliver school education programs. For example, Mega Maths Day has science educators come to the museum and deliver a maths-based education program inspired by objects on display in the museum. This fulfils the science faculty's outreach strategy, as well as the museum's strategy to expand the school education program beyond ancient history. Feedback from a primary school teacher in 2024 stated:

> "one of the students said, "this is the best day of my life" and I think they all learnt so much more in 2 hours than they ever have on an excursion! It was certainly the best excursion I've been on in my 15 years of teaching."

Future

Future developments of the CCWM school education program include an ancient history program for primary schools and expansion into new subject areas including visual art, drama, English, science and maths. We are expecting an increase in primary school visits due to the updated primary syllabus which includes a unit on ancient history in stage 1 where they will cover Ancient China, Egypt, Greece and Rome.[1] We will pair objects with stories, myths and sites of these ancient cultures.

The challenge with this future development and growth will be how to teach outside of the dedicated space as we expect multiple programs to be run simultaneously. How do we teach beyond our existing conventions of using the education room to allow students to handle objects? What approaches might we use for teaching students with objects in the shared space of the public exhibition galleries?

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1. NSW Education Standards Authority, 2024

CARE AND SCHOLARSHIP: WORKING WITH AN ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER ARTS AND ARTEFACT TEACHING COLLECTION

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Keywords: Indigenous, teaching collection, Country, cataloguing, protocols

This paper discusses teaching and learning with the University of Canberra Faculty of Arts and Design Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts and Artefact Teaching Collection (the Collection). The Collection was formed in the late 80s to educate cultural heritage and materials conservation students about the diverse cultures and styles of the First Nations peoples of Australia. Over 500 objects were purchased from art galleries across the northern parts of Queensland, the Northern Territory, and Western Australia.

Internal and external challenges to the university have meant the Collection has been disconnected from its main purpose for the better part of two decades and remained largely untouched. The Cultural Heritage program has been closed twice since the items were purchased and is often under review due to fewer enrolments. The decision by the Commonwealth Government to charge more for cultural studies has impacted class sizes and the courses available. Curatorship, the unit most likely to teach with the Collection, is now not offered. Piecemeal engagement with the Collection resulted in the disappearance of labels and contextual information. We are working to revitalise the Collection to its main role and function by reclaiming histories/stories of connection.

The pieces were bought on the souvenir market but that does not preclude them being of, from, and with Country. The artworks are all connected to the Country from which they originated. By this we mean that they have been produced by people with intimate knowledge of their Country and culture. In First Nations Australian's terms, Country is not just landscape, it includes all entities in Country such as people, waters, skies, songs, winds, animals, cultural knowledge, and so on, in fact 'everything that comes together to make up a place'.[1] All of Country is related.

The cultural objects in our keeping are representative of a moment in time, a time when the Bicentennial of invasion/colonisation was about to be celebrated loudly by most of Australia and protested by large numbers of First Nations Australians.[2] Thus, the time that the purchase and establishment of the Collection took place was a time that Australia was celebrating colonisation and the removal of people from their ancestral Country. Colonisation directly led to a break in the connection and consequently the knowledge that was held on, in and by Country. We often hear of caring for Country through practices by First Nations Australians such as fire-stick farming, but less often do we hear of caring for culture. This means caring for songlines, language and the stories that connect us to Country. First Nations Australians are obliged and privileged to care for all that Country is, which means we must care for entities made through relational knowledge of Country.[3] This includes the materials kept in the Collection. As the lead in research and the curator of the Collection the responsibility of teaching others the importance of respect and care is Wendy's (lead author).

The future

The focus of the work we plan to do with this Collection will be around gathering as much information as we can, to add context to the cultural objects we are privileged to work with. Not only do we aim to find some of the maker's names, in future we want to reconnect the artworks with the source communities

1. Gay'wu Group of Women, 2019: ix
2. Marcus, 1988: 4
3. Tynan, 2021: 597-610

from which they came. The pieces in the Collection were made over 35 years ago and it would be expected that some, if not most, of the makers would have died in the interim.

A semester long work integrated learning internship was run in 2023. Our students produced a catalogue and developed protocols for working with the Collection. Two students spoke at the symposium about this work and its impact on the students. Kyrah is a Wiradjuri woman who will discuss the protocols and Frankie is non-Indigenous, comes from Wiradjuri Country and reflects on the experiences of the students.

Collection Protocols - Kyrah's talk

Through our work with the collection, we became aware of the importance of the objects and the care they deserved. We recognised the diverse and complex culture of each object and learned ways cultural materials differ from community to community. The protocols/guidelines that were chosen were adapted from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Protocols provided by AIATSIS, Creative Australia and Oxfam Australia. These sources were chosen as the protocols they outlined encourage ethical conduct and promote interaction based on mutual respect and cultural values. They detailed appropriate ways of engaging with Indigenous cultural material and encouraged ethical ways of interacting with Indigenous peoples and communities.

The protocols/guidelines we felt applied to the Collection were,

Respect:

This should be implemented when handling the collection.

- An acknowledgment of Country should be provided within the document. This must be the foundation for the guidelines. Working with the collection is guided by the concepts of Respect and Care.
- Cultural safety - This relates to ways objects are treated through care and respect and the way research with the collection is conducted. For example, research should be Indigenous led.
- Representation – This asks researchers to be thoughtful about the language and terminology that is used when referring to Indigenous people and their cultural objects to avoid offensive or appropriated terms.

Communication, consultation and consent:

Is important when handling the collection

- This relates to such things as identifying people in authority and seeking permission to research with the collection.
- First Nations objects require context and some might not be suitable for conservation.

Cultural integrity and authenticity:

- Terminology is an important area of cultural integrity and authenticity. It is important to be aware that the language people use to describe their worldview should not be appropriated.

Attribution:

- Attributing communities and language groups. This helps to build a picture of the origins of collections and their connections to particular nations/Countries.

Embracing diversity:

- Non-Indigenous collaborators should engage from project development to completion engaging Indigenous-led guidance with the project development.

Learning tools:

- Providing researchers with the capacity for learning and building cultural capability.

Reflecting on student experience - Frankie's talk

The internship started in July and ended in September 2023. One of the first things that became apparent was that we functioned well as a group. We each enjoyed or became immersed in certain aspects of the

cataloguing process. For instance, some liked setting up pieces and photographing them, others liked measuring, others condition reporting. I personally enjoyed the hands-on time we each had working with the objects. One object in particular stands out in my memory, a shell door string that had been tangled over time. As I worked to detangle each of the strings, I noticed the finer details of each tiny shell that had been collected, drilled and strung together by the artist. I imagined the time and dedication each string of the piece would have required. As I worked, Wendy and Hakim further researched the provenance of the object, this created an amazing learning experience that has inspired me.

We discussed each task as we went along. We decided that we needed to document as much as we could about the collection and the spreadsheet we produced ended up having eleven columns. We did not put in a column for de-accessioning.

Catalogue Descriptors:

- Accession Number
- Item Name
- Language Group
- Condition
- Accession Date
- Artist Name
- Art Centre
- Inscription/Description
- Current Location
- Origin
- Item Type

We were asked to tell the story of the internship. After discussion, we decided to use that story as part of our final assessment task, which was a reflection on the internship itself. Some themes arose from our reflections, including:

Enjoyment:

> "I have enjoyed working and connecting with First Nation objects from country I have little to no knowledge about"
>
> "I have enjoyed working and engaging with the University of Canberra's Indigenous Art and Artefact Collection".
>
> "I have enjoyed the sensory engagement of working with the University of Canberra's Indigenous Art and Artefact collection".

Learning:

> "Working and engaging with objects from a number of areas around Australia have significantly let me learn about ways of being in these places",
>
> "one thing I learned most is how to handle objects with care that is culturally appropriate".
>
> "Researchers are responsible for their own ongoing cultural learning and self-awareness and I have recognised and acknowledged the importance of Indigenous-led engagement and collaboration in this team".

Immersion in Indigenous artefacts of substantial worth and significance has been transformative. Within this collection lie narratives, languages, cultures, and spiritualities representative of numerous distinct Aboriginal groups across Australia. Engaging with objects provides the chance to gain insight, respect, and connection with First Nations cultures. This project has shown that collections can be enriched and enlivened through care and scholarship.

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HANDS ON WORLD WAR I: TAKING A STUDENT-CENTRED APPROACH

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Keywords: library, inquiry-based learning, OBL, World War I

This article examines '*Hands on World War I*', a school program offered by the State Library of NSW (SLNSW) in which secondary history students are given the opportunity to handle authentic historical artefacts and use them to conduct their own investigation.

Provenance of the artefacts

The items used in this program have come from a single collection, which was donated to the SLNSW on the condition that they would be used as part of an education program. More than 20 authentic World War I (WWI) artefacts were presented to the Mitchell Librarian, packed into a single suitcase. These artefacts (Figure 1) included badges from Australia, Britain, Germany and Bulgaria; annotated maps of the Western Front; and personal items belonging to the collector, including his shaving mirror, compass and wristwatch.

Before this program was created, research was conducted by university student Alexander Staats as part of his Master of Museum and Heritage Studies (University of Sydney) internship with the SLNSW. Staats investigated each of the artefacts and compiled notes on their origin and historical context. In doing so, details of the collector began to emerge. He was a member of the Australian Imperial Force, named Geoffrey Vaughan Rose.[1] Rose enlisted in August 1916, at the age of 20, and in November he embarked from Sydney on the SS *Port Napier*. He served in the 30th Battalion in France and Belgium, and during his service he began his collection. He brought home an extensive array of items relating to his experience in the war, from Allied countries as well as from the opposing Central Powers.

Preparing the program

The items were divided into five boxed sets, so that during the program students could work in small groups with their own carefully curated set of items to investigate. Each set contains evidence of the collector's name, items from Australia and other Allied countries, and most sets also contain one or more items from German armed forces. Each box also contains one paper-based item, either a map, letter or newspaper article. The combination of different pieces of evidence ensures that each group has the resources needed to answer the inquiry question we pose to them.

Inquiry-based learning approach

Using an inquiry-based learning (IBL) approach, the order of learning is reversed.[2] Students are presented with unlabelled artefacts with minimal contextual background and are tasked with discovering the identity of the collector. When developing the inquiry question, we took into consideration the range of students who visit the SLNSW. The inquiry question needed to be interesting and achievable for any group participating in the program.[3] We offer a broad, open-ended inquiry question: 'who collected these items and what was their involvement in WWI?' Students take on the role of historian to find out the name, nationality and the role that the owner of this collection played in WWI.

This question can be answered with varying levels of depth and is highly adaptable to the learning needs of individual students. Less confident students can focus on the item they are holding in their hand without feeling intimidated by a complex research question, and they can find success by uncovering the collector's name and nationality. Students who are open to deeper learning can use the items as a launching point for further investigation into the items and their significance. Once students are given a briefing on object

1. Papers belonging to Geoffrey Vaughan Rose are also held in the collections of the Australian War Memorial.
2. Australian Government Department of Education, 2023.
3. Dallimore, 2022

handling protocols and put on gloves, they are quickly able to start investigating their set of items. This is a deeply student-centred activity as students take control of their own learning, explore and handle historical artefacts, pose questions, and conduct their own further research.

Scaffolding

As we have no prior knowledge of the abilities and interests of students when delivering this program, we must make very quick assessments of students to ensure that we are giving them a valuable learning experience that extends their current knowledge and understanding. Another challenge when delivering this program is that we do not know whether students have any experience with museum collections. We begin each session by making the significance of this collection very clear, both for the safety of the items and so that students have a full understanding of the value of this experience.

For many students, the initial challenge will simply be figuring out what an item is without having a label to rely on. We provide each group with an object interrogation scaffold, which guides students through the process of observing, describing, analysing and interpreting an object. For Item 1 (Figure 2), we might ask students to focus on its physical properties. Students may realise that it is small and light enough to be held in the hand; it has a faint smell of tobacco and has signs of wear at the thin end (teeth marks). With these observations, students can confidently determine that this item is part of a pipe for smoking and can then think about how this item is connected to its owner; appreciate its authenticity and think about it being used in the trenches between battles.

Guided analysis

At a higher level of inquiry, we offer Item 2, a wristwatch (Figure 2). Students instantly recognise the object as a watch, which means they are not intimidated by an unknown item. When they look closely, they find that there is an engraving on the back of the watch.

> *Presented to G.V. ROSE The administrat(or) Depot Staff of th(e) (N).S.W. State Bric(k) works* [indecipherable] *to his departure with the A.I.F 9.9.16*

They are now able to answer some questions, including: who, what when and why? Some students can come to these conclusions without in-depth discussions while others need to be guided, and further questions need to be asked, such us what is the A.I.F? What are the Brickworks? Who is G. V. Rose? Who wrote this message and why? Once this conversation has occurred and they have been guided through the object analysis they are able to develop an understanding of the soldier's name and his life before the war. They can put this together with other items to build a picture of a real person.

Extension

Item 3 (Figure 2) is more challenging as it is less familiar to students. If they look closely at the pin they can discover that the purple and yellow stripes indicate that Rose belonged to the 30th Battalion. Keen historians in the group can use this information to launch into further research about the 30th Battalion and where it served through WWI. As a result, Rose's involvement in the war becomes much clearer. To extend students even further, this box also includes Item 4, an armband (Figure 2) that Rose wore as a volunteer in World War II. He had sewn on the colours of the 30th Battalion as a marker of his knowledge and experience as a veteran of the Great War.

When students look at the four items discussed, they see a dedicated and much-loved colleague from the NSW Brickworks, who enlisted to serve in World War I and served in the 30th Battalion. He was a collector and a recorder of this enormous historical event, gathering all these items and keeping them together in a collection. When World War II began, he volunteered, and wanted to make his veteran status known, a proud member of the 30th Battalion. Through questioning, handling and examining the objects, students can build a picture of a real person who is representative of others who served in WWI.

What do students take away from this experience?

Students have the opportunity to be a historian for a day, handling authentic historical artefacts, solving a mystery and participating in an experience they could never get from a textbook. They develop an empathetic understanding for the experiences of people during WWI and forge personal connections with the items they have handled and the person who collected them.[4] At the end of the program, we ask

4. Kador and Chatterjee, 2021

students to reflect on why Rose kept these items for his entire life. His involvement in the war affected every part of his life, and although these items represent his story, there were many other people just like him across the world, whose lives were forever changed because of the war. By focusing on Rose's story, students learn more about the bigger picture of WWI and the impact that it had on real people.

This is a truly memorable experience. It promotes the value of collections held at cultural institutions and encourages young people to connect with SLNSW again in the future. We hope that our *Hands on World War I* program inspires a greater love of history in all students, even those who walked through the door thinking that history was not for them.

Figure 1: Geoffrey Vaughan Rose Collection (Image by State Library of NSW staff)

Figure 2: Example objects used in Hands on WWI OBL program (Image by State Library of NSW staff)

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LIVE OBJECT-BASED LEARNING IN A HOSPITAL SCHOOL

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Georges River Environmental Education Centre (GREEC)

Keywords: science education, hospital school, object-based learning, animals, geography

Teaching hospital school students about geography and the world outside, which is temporarily inaccessible to them, was always going to be a challenge. However, a pilot object-based learning (OBL) program with a difference provided an unusual approach that met multiple outcomes.

Using live objects for OBL

The Georges River Environmental Education Centre (GREEC) is a NSW Department of Education School and part of a network of 24 Environmental and Zoo Education Centres (EZEC) specialising in providing enhanced learning opportunities to all schools across NSW. The Centres support school communities to experience and connect with the natural world whilst fostering the development of positive behaviour changes towards its protection. The GREEC prides itself on taking learning outdoors, so when challenged by Liverpool Hospital School to teach Geography in the Children's Ward of Liverpool Hospital, it was a project too good to refuse. The solution was to use OBL with an interesting twist. To motivate our students, when they were not feeling the best for learning in the first place, we decided to bring in live animals. Not the usual cute and fluffy varieties but species that can only be described as slippery, cold, spikey or scaly. GREEC understood OBL to include live animals usually on display at the centre including spiny leaf insects, a shingleback lizard, a blue-tongued lizard and a green tree frog. Our live animals have proved a great addition to other natural objects used in OBL lessons, which as Chatterjee and Kador believe, should include objects beyond those found in cultural institutions, to include those found in "natural heritage such as parks, gardens, forests, natural and cultural heritage sites".[1] Kador also stresses that it is important that what students learn in lessons can't be found using Google, which is why OBL is so powerful.[2]

Live objects in the classroom

The main objectives of the live OBL lessons in the hospital school room, and sometimes bedside in the ward, included improving student wellbeing, to assist students to forget why they were in hospital, providing learning opportunities that were syllabus-focused, immersive and hands-on, and bringing the outside world inside the hospital classroom. The lessons were conducted for students from kindergarten through to Year 12, and sometimes included the younger siblings of the students. They were students from government and independent schools, and they attended for as few as 10 minutes up to the full 2-hour session, depending on whether they needed to leave the classroom for medical tests, treatments or if they were discharged from hospital.

The structure of the live OBL classes followed a similar pattern for each different animal. As the lesson commenced, students were asked to rate how they were feeling using an emoji scale of 1 - 5, with 5 being the highest level of wellbeing.[3] Then natural items such as fallen gum leaves and gumnuts were placed on the tables and students were asked to write their name on a leaf and allow them to connect to natural objects. The lessons then started with a story, usually in a book related to the animal that was brought in for the day. The students learned where the animals live and Google Maps was used for students to go on a virtual excursion using Google Street View to places such as Lord Howe Island. Depending on the skills of the students, they were asked to help navigate with Google Maps. The students would then be quizzed about their knowledge and experience of the animal. The live animal was then carefully introduced to the students, allowing for the potential of phobias. Surprisingly it was often the adults in the room who had fears of the animals rather than the students. The students were able to study the movements of the animals and look closely at them using magnifying glasses before being invited to touch them.

1. Chaterjee and Kador, 2021: 1.
2. Kador, 2019
3. The scale was developed by Liverpool Hospital Schools (Sydney, Australia). Cf. similar scales in Davies et. al., 2022: 218-226.

The students were keen to interact with the live animals, or at least touch them. Some students ended up embracing the shingleback or blue tongued lizards which the lizards also appreciated as the student's body heat warmed up these cold-blooded animals (Figure 1). The students were then invited to create an art-based response to the live animal and could choose the media for the artwork, such as air-dry clay sculpture with natural fallen objects, scratch art, watercolour pencils, collage, and stop motion animation.

Sometimes students were unable to attend the classroom so the animals were taken to their ward room to enable them to have the same opportunity as the other students. On one occasion a child (approximately 8 years old) was being treated in their room for an asthma episode. Her mother was with her and welcomed the visit by a shingleback lizard. The child was in some distress before the lizard entered the room, and very quickly after its arrival was so focused on the lizard that they forgot about the difficulties they were experiencing with asthma and calmed down. The mother was so pleased and relieved the child's distress had lowered and amazed that a lizard could have such a positive effect on her child's wellbeing.

On another occasion, two Year 9 students were studying the near extinct Lord Howe Island stick insect, as well as studying the geography of the island using Google Maps and Google Street View. They made comparisons to the Spiny Leaf insects that had been brought into the classroom. By the end of the 2-hour lesson the students commented that they were so engrossed in the lesson they felt like they had been on a holiday to Lord Howe Island.

Student responses to live OBL

Student exit slips were used to collect data about how students felt after their lesson and what they learned whilst in Liverpool Hospital School. Exit slip data, published in the Liverpool Hospital School 2022 Annual Report, stated that: 70% of students who attended the classroom experienced an increase in their wellbeing, 30% of students recorded the same level of wellbeing, (these students started on a 4 or a 5 at the beginning of the day), and 4 students, (0.03% of the students) had a decrease in wellbeing after lessons finished, and offered explanations such as "school was going to end" and another "ran out of brain energy". Student responses to the learning published in the same document also included comments by students including "I actually really like learning about frogs", "I take interest in water bugs", "It was so fun, I learned about frogs", "I like frogs", "I like blue tongued lizards", and "I care about the earth". From this small sample of students, it could be concluded that the wellbeing of students attending Liverpool Hospital School lessons, including live OBL with animals, either stayed the same or was improved by attending the lessons.[4]

Wellbeing outcomes unexpectedly included other hospital staff

There are many studies that show OBL positively impacts wellbeing. Thompson and Chatterjee describe how "wellbeing is enhanced when individuals are physically, cognitively, and emotionally engaged in multisensory, creative tasks in social settings".[5]

The Liverpool Hospital School live OBL lessons were rated positively by the students. There were however additional unexpected outcomes for these lessons. Sometimes students attended the classroom with younger siblings, parents, other family members who also participated in the hands-on learning. Typically doctors and nurses also checked on students in the classroom and wanted to hold the animals. One enthusiastic nurse commented that it had "made her day" to interact with the live turtle in the classroom (Figure 2).

In the Hospital School setting, using live animals for OBL improved student wellbeing, assisted students to forget why they were in hospital, provided learning opportunities that were syllabus-focused, immersive and hands-on, and brought the outside world inside the hospital classroom to help teach geography.

4. NSW Dept of Education, 2022
5. Thompson and Chatterjee, 2015: 29-50

Figure 1: Liverpool Hospital School student holding a shingleback lizard.

Figure 2: Liverpool Hospital Children's Ward nurse holding a turtle.

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INCORPORATING OBJECT-BASED LEARNING AND ART IN NURSING EDUCATION: ENHANCING COMMUNICATION IN 1ST YEAR STUDENTS

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Keywords: Nursing, Object-based learning, communication, empathy

This article explores the integration of Object-Based Learning (OBL) and art-led pedagogy into the "Communication for Nursing" curriculum at Flinders University, aiming to enhance first-year nursing students' understanding of meaningful care, empathy, and communication across the lifespan continuum. This initiative employed OBL to foster compassionate, ethical, and altruistic qualities. Despite challenges such as catering to large class sizes and managing copyright concerns, the initiative produced notable successes, including enhanced engagement with the Flinders University Museum of Art (FUMA), positive feedback from both students and tutors, and the development of teamwork and empathy. Nursing education faces the ongoing challenge of equipping students with the clinical skills and personal qualities necessary for providing compassionate, person-centred care. As the healthcare environment grows increasingly complex, nurses must not only master technical competencies but also develop qualities like empathy, ethical decision-making, and altruism, which are essential to patient care.[1] This paper shows how the integration of OBL can inspire students to develop these qualities early in their professional training.

Methodology

The initiative aimed to inspire first-year nursing students to explore meaningful care, empathy, and communication through the application of person- and family-centred care concepts.[2] By incorporating OBL principles, students were introduced to the Flinders University Museum of Art (FUMA) and engaged with selected artworks to explore these themes. A teaching team of 16 tutors, including permanent and casual staff, facilitated the program across 20 classes with a cohort of approximately 560 students. Through group presentations and reflective discussions, students were encouraged to engage deeply with the artworks and their relevance to clinical practice. Evaluation of the effectiveness of student learning was collected through a staff survey based on observations of learning and engagement in class, the quality of group presentation assessments and an end-of-topic survey for students.

Results

Several challenges emerged during the integration of OBL into the nursing curriculum. Managing a large student cohort presented logistical difficulties in terms of ensuring consistent engagement and facilitating meaningful group work. With such a large class size, it became increasingly complex to maintain an inclusive and interactive learning environment where all students could actively participate.

Initial reluctance from both tutors and students was another significant challenge. Tutors had to adapt to using OBL as a teaching method, which required them to step outside their comfort zones and embrace a more interactive and less traditional approach to teaching. Similarly, some students needed time to understand the idea of learning through art, as this method diverged from their prior educational experiences and expectations. Balancing these concerns while fostering an engaging learning environment posed an additional layer of complexity to the initiative.

Discussion

Despite these challenges, the initiative yielded substantial successes that highlighted the effectiveness of incorporating OBL and art-led activities. One notable achievement was the enhanced engagement with the Flinders University Museum of Art (FUMA). The introduction of artworks into the curriculum not only enriched the learning experience but also fostered a connection to the gallery that extended

1. Obara et al., 2022: 113–120
2. Kitson et al., 2014

beyond the classroom. Both students and staff reported an increased sense of well-being and personal satisfaction, which positively impacted their overall learning outcomes.[3]

As students prepared for their group presentations, discussions about their selected artworks naturally emerged, fostering team collaboration and creating a sense of connection among peers. This aspect of the initiative acted as an effective icebreaker, facilitating deeper and more meaningful discussions about empathy, diversity of thought, and the role of unconscious bias in healthcare.[4] It enabled students to safely explore their own and other's ways of knowing, personal knowledge and experience that helped to develop their growing professional identity as nurses.[5]

The feedback from the teaching team at the completion of the topic was overwhelmingly positive, with tutors expressing both personal and professional satisfaction in observing students' growth throughout the initiative. Students demonstrated enhanced learning outcomes, particularly in their understanding of communication, teamwork, and ethical responsibility in patient care. A literature review on arts-based pedagogy by Obara et al. aligns with these findings, indicating that OBL activities can effectively enhance the learning of key nursing values such as care, empathy, and compassion.[6]

Future Recommendations

Looking to the future, providing more structured resources for tutors will be essential. Tutors play a critical role in guiding students through these novel learning experiences. Equipping the tutors with comprehensive resources and training will enhance their ability to deliver OBL sessions effectively. By doing so, tutors can feel more confident in facilitating the learning process, which will ultimately lead to a more consistent and enriched student experience.

Another key area for improvement involves reducing the number of selected artworks for classroom discussions. A more focused selection will allow for better quality control and encourage deeper exploration of the chosen pieces. This adjustment will help students concentrate on the core themes, enabling more meaningful and in-depth discussions that align with their professional development goals. Additionally, offering clearer and more explicit instructions for students will be crucial. Providing detailed guidelines for navigating OBL activities will ensure that students can engage fully with the learning process. Clearer instructions will empower students to make the most of the art-led activities, fostering a deeper connection to the subject matter and strengthening their ability to translate these insights into clinical practice.[7]

The incorporation of OBL and art-led pedagogy into the nursing curriculum at Flinders University has proven to be an effective strategy for promoting empathy, compassion, and teamwork among first-year nursing students. While challenges such as large class sizes, initial reluctance, and teaching consistency need to be addressed, the benefits of this approach are evident. This case study demonstrates that arts-based pedagogical approaches hold immense potential in enriching nursing education. By fostering compassionate and ethical qualities, these approaches help shape the kind of clinicians who can provide person-centred care that is as empathetic as it is skilled.

3. He et al., 2019: 234
4. Monahan et al., 2019: 8-12
5. Hartigan-Rogers and d'Eon, 2023
6. Obara et al., 2022: 113-120
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LEARNING TO MANAGE TRAUMA-INFORMED OBJECT-BASED LEARNING

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Keywords: Pathology, Specimens, Trauma, OBL, object-based learning

In 1939 a nineteen-year-old male arrived in Australia from London and settled in Collinsville, an idyllic town in the Whitsunday Region of Queensland. He soon found work in the Collinsville Coal Mine. After fifteen years of service, he left the mine and moved to the city of Brisbane. Here his health rapidly declined. What began as a cough progressed to tightness in the chest and difficulty breathing. He struggled with his symptoms until finally succumbing to Coal Worker's Pneumoconiosis or Black Lung Disease.[1] His lungs are now in the collection of The University of Queensland's Integrated Pathology Learning Centre (IPLC). Today, they are used in the secondary school education program to highlight the fragility of lungs and how they can be impacted by environmental conditions. In order to use such specimens for object-based learning (OBL), the IPLC has developed a trauma-informed approach that is evolving to support the museum's context.

Museum Context

The IPLC is a pathology museum under The University of Queensland's Faculty of Medicine. Currently, the museum cares for approximately 5000 human specimens, collected from both surgical procedures and autopsies.[2] While the majority of the collection was acquired in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, a small selection of specimens date back to 1925. The IPLC is still a collecting institution, accepting donations through an acquisition process that prioritises informed consent.

The aim of the museum and its collection has consistently been to support medical education. Initially, the collection was restricted to medical students studying at the University and occasional secondary school groups. Over the past decade, however, the audience has expanded significantly. For example, there has been an increase in outreach to secondary schools and the museum has welcomed new undergraduate courses.

With this change has been the transformation of the museum from a didactic teaching space to one that is engaging audiences in new ways and supporting participatory practices. For example, the museum has embraced exploratory learning for undergraduate and secondary school students. Undergraduate courses in the museum allow students to search for specimens of interest and focus on these for their assessment. Another change has been the introduction of OBL for secondary school students. According to the museum's archives, school groups were visiting as early as the 1970s.[3] Teaching was limited to a didactic experience with a clinical pathologist or University faculty member. As the museum has opened to more visitors and different audiences, there has been the need to develop a strategy to ensure measures are in place for the psychological safety of visitors.

Defining a Space

The trauma-informed strategy of the IPLC revolves around the creation of a safe space. There are many definitions of what constitutes a safe space in a museum context. Elaine Heumann Gurian first raised the idea that museums could be 'safe, neutral congregant spaces in our communities'.[4] Since then, definitions have shifted depending on factors such as a museum's context and its audience. While there is no overarching safe space definition, there is agreement that working towards the creation of a safe space has extensive benefits for accessibility and sparking a participatory environment.[5] This is particularly pertinent for medical museums that may display uncomfortable histories. Manon S. Parry argues that

1. Integrated Pathology Learning Centre Archives, X117A
2. The University of Queensland, 2024
3. IPLC Archives, 1972
4. Gurian, 1995: 15
5. Katrikh, 2018: 7-15

medical collections have a significant role to play in supporting audience engagement with difficult conversations.[6] These objects have the potential to address stigma and break down barriers surrounding the understanding of disease.

For the IPLC, a safe space is critical for trauma-informed OBL. In this context, it has been defined as a space that is flexible, proactive, and reactive. Flexible means understanding the wants and needs of our audience and considering different ways to achieve those goals. Proactive is setting expectations for visiting the museum and ensuring staff are appropriately trained. Reactive concerns responding to situations as they unfold, combining flexible and proactive elements. The following is a case study on our secondary school education program and how a safe space strategy has been implemented to alter our physical environment, the content shared, and the role of staff in the program.

Secondary School Program Grant

The IPLC offers two secondary school programs with one focusing on biology and the other on psychology, aimed at students in years 9 to 12. Both programs follow a similar outline and run for approximately two hours. Each program begins with an introduction to the museum covering the ethics behind the collection, how the specimens are preserved, and Australian death statistics. Then the programs branch into relevant subject content, such as the lobes of the brain for psychology or infectious/non-infectious diseases for biology.

At various stages in both programs, students have the opportunity to engage in OBL. The activities draw on examples of OBL theory and practice provided by institutions such as Flinders University Museum of Art.[7] In the psychology program, students have two OBL activities. The first is a close observation activity where students break into small groups and focus on one brain specimen. They are asked to describe the specimen, consider the disease complications, and generate questions. They then present their findings to their peers. Towards the end of the program, students break into smaller groups and rotate through eight workstations where they view other organs and diseases. At each station, they are asked to discuss the specimens and think about why these diseases have been included in a psychology program.

At the end of each program, students have free time to explore the museum using glossary sheets to decode the medical terminology. This offers them the opportunity to ask additional questions and find specimens of interest. It is not uncommon for students to request to see a particular disease because of either a personal or familial connection.

Applying a Safe Space Strategy

Applying a safe space strategy has been essential for offering OBL that is trauma informed. The strategy of being flexible, proactive, and reactive with our environment, content, and staff has been central to the management of our programs.

For the environment, the physical space of the museum has become flexible to suit the program and can be a reactive measure if needed. There are two areas assigned in the museum as rest areas, or areas with no specimens. If students feel they need to sit out of the program at any stage, they can use these areas at their discretion and have teachers check in with them. Teachers and students have these rest areas pointed out to them as they first enter the museum.

The program is most proactive when considering appropriate content and its delivery to diverse age groups. On booking the program, teachers are sent information to pass on to their students. Before entering the museum, staff check with students if they are comfortable viewing the specimens. Once inside, each specimen is discussed before it is shown. This gives students the opportunity to not view the specimen if it sparks discomfort. The importance of debriefs is also acknowledged and used in the program with student check-ins after each activity or segment.[8] As for program content, diseases are selected that have preventative measures. This is so students associate the disease with an action they can take to help with disease prevention. Returning to the example at the start, of the coal miner's lungs, rather than share the whole story, elements are selected with a focus on what led to the development of the disease. The

6. Parry, 2021: 173
7. Flinders University Museum of Art, 2017
8. Armstrong et al., 2021: 454-466

importance of wearing proper personal protective equipment when working with hazardous material is highlighted.

The final part of the strategy is ensuring steps have been taken to prepare staff for reacting to various scenarios. Museum staff are trained as mental health first aiders and are equipped with an A4 sheet outlining their role as a first responder. In the event of an incident, staff are reminded that they are not counsellors or psychologists.[9] Instead, their role is to remove the student from the situation, meet their immediate needs (for example water), and inform their teacher who can follow-up at school. Crucial to this is also having a debrief with the staff member involved and ensuring they are aware of support systems in place. By applying the safe space strategy, the IPLC is now in a better position to cater to different audiences. While the strategy is constantly evolving, this has set a foundation for the future.

Through applying a safe space strategy, the IPLC has managed to use OBL as a powerful method for managing specimens attached to grief and trauma. By equipping students, teachers, and museum staff with the necessary tools to engage, the secondary school programs deliver health messaging while simultaneously caring for the psychological health of the participants. OBL has enabled the museum to fulfil its educational aims while also respecting those who have generously contributed their specimens.

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9. Armstrong et al., 2021: 454-466

OBJECTS TO THE FORE

Jeffrey Fletcher

Sydney Jewish Museum (SJM)

Keywords: Object-based learning, Holocaust education, memory, digital objects

Working with objects and collections can provoke many questions. First and foremost, Lubar and Kendrick explore the questions of why we examine artefacts when it is easier to read documents and why museums keep artifacts when it is easier to store pictures of them.[1] Museums develop collections that demonstrate and document their reason for being, and objects are the cornerstones of their work. Artefacts are tangible connections that inform meaning through physical and symbolic entities from the past that offer relevance for today. In the education space, object-based learning (OBL) provides specific encounters underpinned by a broader context. It can be a powerful, personal and emotional experience, and is not limited to a singular methodology. Connected learning in this setting employs varied approaches such as exhibitions, presentations, tours, workshops and virtual/digital spaces to ignite both personal and shared interest that fulfils academic goals and also elicits life-long learning outcomes.

We might ask what we want to achieve by bringing people into an OBL environment and how to provide a framework for visitors to meaningfully engage? Lubar and Kendrick suggest that objects tell their own stories, connect people, mean many things, capture moments, and reflect changes.[2] We could add that artefacts reflect social values. Furthermore, artefacts make history real, they can be viewed from many perspectives, offer the opportunity to debate meanings and connect to memories.[3] OBL uses objects as a point of departure to travel in many directions, depending on the desired journey and learning outcomes.

At Sydney Jewish Museum (SJM) we are re-shaping our offerings across digital experiences, student-active programs, gallery experiences and guide training. These initiatives are to prepare for the upcoming new history curriculum in 2027, and to expand our OBL approach to coincide with the opening of a new museum after extensive renovations. Digital and online learning experiences range from hi-tech to simple yet effective. Two SJM programs sit at either end of that spectrum, each different yet effective in their own way.

Dimensions in Testimony (DiT) is an 'interactive biography' experience developed by the Shoah Foundation to preserve Holocaust Survivor testimony, where Survivors filmed responses to thousands of questions as single vignettes. Visitors 'meet' them via a life-size screen and ask questions. A voice recognition program instantly matches a clip to the question, providing the feel of a conversation between visitor and Survivor, rather than passively watching a video. It is fascinating to see the level of engagement in this process. Some Survivors talk about personal objects now on display in the museum. Students can encounter those items whilst on a tour, then later in the program ask Survivors about them. Some were filmed with their objects, which creates a very personal and palpable connection.

At the other end of the tech-spectrum is our *History Live* series. These 45-minute online webinars relate to significant dates such as Harmony Day, NAIDOC Week, Book Week and History Week. There is usually a special guest and a 'meet the curator/registrar', where students are introduced to the role of the curatorial department. Objects are selected from the collection that pertain to the day's theme or the guest's story and we conduct a Q&A about how the objects tell that history.

Student-active programs incorporate an element of 'doing', employing multiple pedagogies like explicit teaching, inquiry learning, discussion, critical thinking, problem-solving and recording. All these approaches can have objects as their central pivot-point. Our *Migration Stories* program explores the migration experience of Holocaust Survivor Olga Horak OAM. Students unpack a physical suitcase of

1. Lubar and Kendrick, 2021
2. Lubar and Kendrick, 2021
3. Gurian, 1999: 165-166; Lubar and Kendrick, 2021

documents, letters, photographs, and personal items relating to her life journey, using their findings to compile a take home dossier. It is not a 'what would you pack?" exercise, as we cannot possibly identify with Olga's experience (nor would we want to). We focus on creating empathy through using objects to represent key points in Olga's story against a historical backdrop, and the objects facilitate key points in the timeline. The final task is to formulate one question they would like to ask Olga. Students then 'meet' her by DiT and ask their questions directly to someone they have never met, but whose story they have explored through physical objects. This conclusion creates a synergy between physical and digital OBL, which resonates with students long after they leave the museum. (Figure 1)

What objects mean to others can have a profound effect on how each of us individually views their significance. Considering the personal import of our own objects can foster empathy for others. Our Intercultural Day brings together students from different backgrounds who bring personal objects that speak about their identity, share that connection, then work together in groups to build a showcase featuring everyone's objects around an aspirational theme. Making their own decisions on what stories their objects tell, especially when grouped with others, drives the students' creation of a display that has meaning and relevance. The program was developed by SJM educators and is supported by the family of Holocaust Survivor Lotte Weiss, a long-time volunteer at our museum after starting a new life in Australia. The program honours her memory and is inspired by her message of treating everyone with dignity and respect.

Recently the SJM shifted the emphasis of our guide training course to using key display objects as 'lead stories' to explore the exhibition theme, historical context and student focus area. Researching objects and linking them to overall aims and objectives is central to guide preparation, and, importantly, is not prescribed. Guides make their own choices about content anchors, giving them agency in the experiences they provide to visitors. Utilising the four elements of information, insight, question/response and 'free guiding' provides a focused yet varied experience. This embraces an 'airport embarkation' analogy, because even though the departure point may be the same, the destination is open-ended. It depends on who your group is and why they are there. For example, examining a showcase on concentration camp experiences identifies multiple narratives woven together against a historical framework while retaining the emotional uniqueness of each story. They hold their individual gravitas, explore systematic conditions and, when placed within a series of related showcases, speak to the overall narrative of the industrial nature of the camp system. This is a serious and difficult topic, yet apart from documenting the history of suffering and loss, these objects also inspire stories of hope, resilience and survival. (Figure 2)

Utilising objects in a teaching space enriches the student experience, evokes emotional responses, and fosters an interchange of ideas. Creating a handling collection provides scope to explore this in a facilitated setting, with appropriate boundaries and protocols, that encourages students to make choices and form opinions. This type of interaction is material, sensory, contextual and personal in its engagement. People can interpret the same object in different ways, depending on the circumstances, depth of knowledge and individual engagement. In one of our 'museum studies' programs we provide students with multiple objects from our Handling Collection and accompanying background information. Their task is to work in groups and select three objects to place in a showcase around a given topic. Students invariably choose different objects but generally there are one or two that overlap. What is particularly interesting is when they are asked to verbalise their methodology and articulate its relevance to the theme, we gain insights into varying interpretations, narrative construction and points of view.

Working with objects takes practice. It does not mean simply providing objects and passing them around. Understanding how objects are displayed helps appreciate the custodianship role of museums, and if students are in a museum, learning more about how they operate is important. Hennigar Shuh highlights that "reading" objects is a skill open to anyone, not limited to age or expertise; anyone can relate to an object in their own way.[4] Bringing objects to the fore in museum education creates fascinating opportunities to involve visitors in not only the content of museums, but also in how museum experiences are formulated and accessed. Objects become physical keys to unlock many doors, it is up to us to select which ones.

4. Hennigar Shuh, 1982: 80-91

Figure 1: Holocaust Survivor Olga Horak holds a blanket that helped her survive the conditions of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Photo by Katherine Griffiths, 2018

Figure 2: Showcase, Holocaust exhibition subtheme, Industrial Killing, Sydney Jewish Museum Original Photo by Katherine Griffiths, 2018, annotations by Jeffrey Fletcher 2024

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A MUSEUM OF WORDS: PODCASTING IN UNIVERSITY MUSEUMS

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Keywords: Podcasting, object description, object-based learning

The podcasting revolution of the past decade and a half has seen an explosion in subject matter. A podcast is a digital audio program, typically, in an episodic format that users can download to a personal device to listen to at a time of their choosing. A podcast series usually features a host engaged in a discussion about a particular topic, while the content of a series ranges from carefully scripted to completely improvised.

This paper presents the advantages of podcasting as a means of exploring objects. University museums are positioned perfectly to use podcasting as a means of understanding collections and creatively fostering object-based learning (OBL) experiences whilst engaging new audiences because their access to academic researchers and students. The Chau Chak Wing Museum's (CCWM) podcast, *Object Matters*,[1] will be used to explore some of the ways in which podcasting can be a tool for museums and their research, as well as a public-outreach service with unexpected educational outcomes. The range of papers in this publication demonstrates the breadth of OBL experiences and I would like to promote the concept of podcasting as a means of allowing students and a broader audience to engage directly with objects, helping to create a museum of words. The role of podcasting in museums is increasingly subject to research and analysis, see for example works by Buffington (2010) and Kalizhanova and Shelestova (2022)[2] and now even practical guides.[3]

Museum Podcasting

There are now a considerable range of podcasts that relate to museums in the marketplace. Like all subject areas quality can vary considerably, but, with a few notable exceptions, museum podcasts have largely fallen into a number of sub-categories. One is an extension of the more traditional museum or gallery audio-tour in which a professional voice artist outlines an exhibition or works with a relatively traditional description and some historical or artist contextualisation. Audio recordings of museum lectures have been another popular method of podcasting; the National Gallery of Art's *Talk* series is a good example. Some explore the history of a collection such as the British Museum's podcast[4] or behind the scenes of a museum such as Cincinnati Museum Center's *Meanwhile... at the Museum*.[5] Conversational series are not as frequent as one would expect and often follow broader discussions about the role of museums rather than more detailed engagement with objects. There are some exceptions, like the Minneapolis Institute of Art's podcast *The Object* launched in 2019 which focuses on individual items in the collection[6] which is closest to the model used in Sydney. Another interesting approach however is that typified by Harvard Art Museum's *A Closer Look* series which allows museum staff to tell personal stories of their careers.[7] Australian examples of museum podcasts include The Queensland Museum's *The Museum Revealed*[8] and South Australia's *Collection Stories*[9]although university museums in Australia have not created series at the same scale as larger state-based organisations generally; Monash University's Museum of Arts' short series of podcast conversations with artists and contributors developed specifically as part of exhibitions[10] is an exception.

1. https://sydney.edu.au/museum/news/podcasts (all websites accessed 13 March 2025)
2. Buffington, 2010; Kalizhanova & Shelestova, 2022.
3. Howard, 2020
4. https://britishmuseum.org/the-british-museum-podcast
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Object Matters

The *Object Matters* podcast was launched by the author in May of 2020; at the height of the COVID lockdown period. Although we had planned to launch a podcast at some stage of CCWM development, the pandemic brought this forward as a point of necessity. The closure of the University of Sydney's historical collections, including the Macleay, Art and Nicholson Museums had been completed by the beginning of 2020, with the planned opening of CCWM to take place in August of that year. To bridge the gap before opening and to slowly build an audience for the CCWM we intended to host a series of public events. That plan was halted due to the lockdown. With our potential audience stuck at home looking for content, but also with no brand-awareness of the name 'Chau Chak Wing Museum', it seemed an ideal time to launch the series. I rationalised that around 100 listeners per episode would be similar to a live audience, attending one of our regular public lectures or conversations. The time taken for producing, recording and editing an episode must not take longer than it would to produce a public lecture. In the end the production time was considerably less, especially after I had more experience and once guests understood the format. The podcast listening figures were astonishingly good; especially once the series become more established.

I had never hosted a podcast before, although I had gained considerable experience in broadcasting following a long-running radio segment on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and other media appearances as well as guesting on other podcasts. *Object Matters* was hosted on Audioboom[11] with a subscription that, upon release, enabled episodes to be shared on larger scale distribution platforms such as Spotify and Apple Music. Web-notes for each episode could include links to the guest's pages, social media handles and to the museum's online catalogue.

The first episode was recorded on my laptop in the attic of my home during lockdown, using Audacity recording software. Subsequent episodes were recorded over zoom. After the lockdowns had ended, most episodes were recorded in professional recording studios at the university which enabled a crisper and more professional sound.

Thematically, *Object Matters* had a very simple premise, a conversational podcast, in which I asked the guest a series of questions about their connection to an object or series of objects from the collection and to describe what it meant to them (Figure 1). The connection could be research-based and/or experience-based, for example, a disabilities advocate who used an object to explore ableist interpretation of collection items. Fundamentally the series intended to explore the rationale for stopping to look at one object on display when you might walk past others– what drew you to that object and why. Indeed, long term, we might end up with multiple episodes featuring the same object and a range of voices exploring different relationships with it. Guests were predominantly other museum staff and university academics, but episodes did include student interns, members of First Nations communities, artists and broader community members who had widely differing connections to the museum. Periodically episodes would feature guests discussing broader philosophical issues such as the concepts of university museums, decolonising collections or having the collection management team discuss the work done behind the scenes of a museum.

Generally, a new 30-minute episode was released monthly. In total more than 50 episodes have been recorded, covering collection items as diverse as early x-ray tubes, ancient Egyptian stele, plaster casts, a thylacine specimen, historic photographs of New Britain, contemporary and historic paintings and World War I photographs. In 2021 the podcast was highly commended at the Museums & Galleries NSW IMAGiNE Awards. *Object Matters* is currently on hiatus, but there are plans for a revamp and relaunch soon, with a more educational focus and shorter episode run-time.

Describing Objects

One of the key questions asked of guests on *Object Matters* is to describe their chosen object(s). I was astonished at the breadth of response to this question. Often descriptions were detailed with measurements, materials, condition and interesting perspectives, though at other times the descriptions were very rudimentary and required me to ask for more details. Although episodes were rarely recorded in front of the object under discussion, images of the object(s) could be used to prompt conversation. The formatting of audio recording was key here – with no visual engagement for the audience we became completely reliant upon the description. A literal museum of words.

11. https://audioboom.com/channels/5024918-object-matters

Describing objects is a skill that is repeatable in a classroom environment – what are the key features of an object that the student feels best conveys that item to someone who is unable to see it. Students benefit from practicing how to describe an object to an audience who cannot see it; bringing a new perspective to a more traditional museum tour. The other skill podcasting helps develop is storytelling; either through a scripted series or, as with *Object Matters*, guided questions. The episode needs to take the listeners on a journey. For *Object Matters* it was the fundamental question of why you find this particular object interesting and why listeners should care; but there are limitless opportunities for creating a storyline. For a university museum, podcasting is a wonderful way of engaging complex academic research into bite sized public components – an oral exhibition label.

Podcasting as an Educational Resource

Podcasting is now a regular teaching methodology within the curriculum of Australian schools and universities. The Australian curriculum features student designed podcasts as a digital technology unit called *ABOVE*, while the NSW Department of Education curricula has podcasting units as an education tool across a range of syllabuses including English, Visual Arts and History, and resources for teachers and students on developing podcasting as a learning tool, such as *The Student Podcaster* program.[12] The University of Sydney has incorporated podcasting into a range of blended learning pedagogies for numerous undergraduate and postgraduate courses across a wide range of faculties, including a specialised course within the Discipline of Media and Communications.[13] Academic colleagues across various subjects are now writing about the experiences of using podcasting as an educational tool.[14] Students learn to script and communicate their ideas, pace out a story and develop content. Although *Object Matters* was conceived as a public engagement tool, I was surprised at the number of schools listening-in regularly and university courses including episodes as parts of 'reading lists'. Across a range of disciplines at the University of Sydney I have now taught students about podcasting and the development of ideas of broadcasting complex concepts in formats that are accessible to a wide audience.

For the development of OBL programs, podcasting is a format that enables creative and engaging educational experiences for students, both listening to pre-existing content and developing their own perspectives on museums and their collections.

Figure 1: Recording an episode of the Object Matters podcast with curator Matt Poll.

12. https://t4l.schools.nsw.gov.au/resources/teaching-and-learning-resources/the-student-podcaster.html
13. https://www.sydney.edu.au/units/MECO6941
14. https://educational-innovation.sydney.edu.au/teaching@sydney/teaching-through-podcasts-reflections-on-a-year-of-practice

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‘WE CALL IT THE PINCH…ISN’T THAT COOL?’: DIGITAL GESTURES AND MUSEUM OBJECTS

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Keywords: digital modelling, history of museums, digital objects, touch in museums

On the 9th of January in 2007, Steve Jobs gave the keynote address at a Macworld event in San Francisco and revealed the first iPhone. Showing off its different features, he told the audience that the phone relied on what he called ‘the best pointing device in the world’ – the human finger. Now usable with ‘multi-touch’ technology, it allowed ‘multi-finger gestures’ and worked like ‘magic’ according to Jobs. To the sound of audience gasps and claps, he then explained the ‘swipe’ and the ‘pinch’ which allowed users to move between photos in the phone’s library and to zoom in on different parts.

Though Apple were not the first to use this technology, it was their product that popularised it and effectively choreographed many of our bodily interactions with the digital ever since.[1] With many museums digitising and giving access to digital 3D models of items from their collections, in this short article I explore how this choreography of gestures fits into a longer history of user interactions with museum objects and consider what associations these digital gestures might bring instead.

The digital modelling of museum collections using processes such as photogrammetry or structured light scanning has made objects accessible to more audiences. Through online platforms such as Sketchfab, Pedestal3D and others, these digital surrogates permit us to have a different range of interactions to those usually possible with physical collection items without concern about physical fragility.[2] Depending on the platform, users may have access to other features such as the ability to add annotations, control how the digital model is lit on screen, or the possibility to measure the object’s size. In higher education contexts, digital models of museum collection items have been used for teaching students through object-based learning (OBL) techniques in a range of disciplines.[3] Users are able to view digital models on computer screens and handheld devices, with the two different modalities enabling different gestures and types of touch: either through a computer mouse or using the ‘best pointing device in the world’ mentioned above on a laptop trackpad or phone or tablet screen.

While an object might be associated with particular gestures in its original context of use, these change once it enters a museum collection. In today’s institutions, even in cases where audiences are permitted to physically handle collection items, this is usually limited to specific examples and occurs under supervision, often while wearing gloves made of a range of materials. Visitors to early museums could instead expect to touch more things more frequently and, in some cases, with more intimacy.[4] In her study of the phenomenon, Classen has collected a range of recorded responses to museum collections from seventeenth and eighteenth-century Europe which testify to the value that the visitors saw in this practice and some of the gestures that accompanied it. One particularly striking example she cites come from Sophie de la Roche who visited the British Museum in 1786 and wrote that, when confronted with an ancient cinerary urn which still contained the ashes of the deceased, she ‘pressed the grain of dust between my fingers tenderly’.[5] The gestural response to the materiality of the ashes, through which she found a personal connection to an ancient individual would run quite contrary to most museum policies about the treatment of human remains today. Over time, such interactions as La Roche’s became increasingly limited due to privileging ocular-centric observation, concern for object safety, and the gatekeeping of direct collection access in response to the increased visitation of museums by working-class audiences.[6]

1. Saffer (2009: 6-11) for a short history of gestural interfaces that pre-dated the iPhone, including Myron Krueger, the American computer artist who built an optical system that could capture hand gestures.
2. Robson et al (2012) for an introduction to 3D modelling in museums.
3. Chapinal-Heras et al. (2023); Wyatt-Spratt and Thoeming (2019); Cunningham (2021)
4. Classen, 2005: 277-78
5. La Roche, 1933: 107-8 in Classen, 2005: 277-78
6. Candlin, 2020

Faced with more and more glass cabinets as barriers between visitor and object, some sought to determine the best methods of display in these settings. In 1916, a study at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston explored the 'amount of muscular effort' it took for 'an intelligent man with good eye-sight' to look at the exhibits. The published article on the topic goes into some detail about how displays position this visitor's body for him to see them properly and gives recommendations for less fatigue-inducing design.[7] The range of crouches, upward and downward gazes, and awkward leans shown in this now more than a century-old study would not be unfamiliar to many visitors today.

With digital models now also in the mix, collection items have come to acquire new gestural associations. In his work on the digitisation of medieval ivories, Hartnell writes of the 'tactile immediacy' of looking at historical objects on a phone or tablet screen, something taken away from viewers at museums through the rise of the use of the vitrine.[8] When digitised, objects become available for viewing and manipulation anywhere with internet access, with the potential to create new connections to place and space. In addition, whereas museum cabinets brought about the crouch and the lean, today's digital devices make objects viewable through the pinch and the swipe, redirecting the physical effort to another set of bodily mechanics.

We must ask then, what can these digital interactions and the gestures they engender mean for how we understand the objects, especially when brought into contrast with the same processes done with the physical originals? As an example, once an ancient wine drinking cup from Southern Italy was associated with pouring, raising to the lips, and a tilt for drinking, this then transitioned to the careful gloved handling of a museum setting where a visitor might turn the cup around to see the faintly stamped design in its inner surface.

Once digitised, the gestures associated with the objects change again. Our devices position us to pinch to zoom in (Figure 1), to swipe to flick upside down, or to even spin rather than just turn. We do not see the object itself in our hands, but the device that mediates it. Its sense of weight, the tactility of its texture, and its position in physical space are replaced by weightlessness, a materiality flattened on a screen, and a position that is nowhere and anywhere at once, in the visually vague notion of 'cyberspace'. In this context, when placed on the same online platform, all objects can be created equal, and the same pinch and swipe can move a marble life-size statue as easily as a coin.

If we return then to the touch of centuries past, where a visitor to the British Museum could find an intimacy with history by interacting with the ashes of an ancient individual with tenderness. We can ask and wonder what the version of this using the digital might be. That particular example of human remains is unlikely to have a digital copy, but the point about feeling a special connection with the past through handling its objects applies more broadly than just to cinerary ashes. With the digital marketed as something that has turned us into a networked society with people connected all across the globe, is the intimacy of touch impossible through its interfaces? Or can the gestures it requires that were once choreographed for us by corporate interests be thought of in this way? Is there a twenty first-century version of de la Roche's experience where a visitor feels connected to a past person specifically because of the gestures that the digital artefact copy, not the original artefact itself, requires? As museum practitioners and researchers who consider the poetics of touch on a regular basis, we are among the best placed to consider what connections specifically the gestures of the digital create.

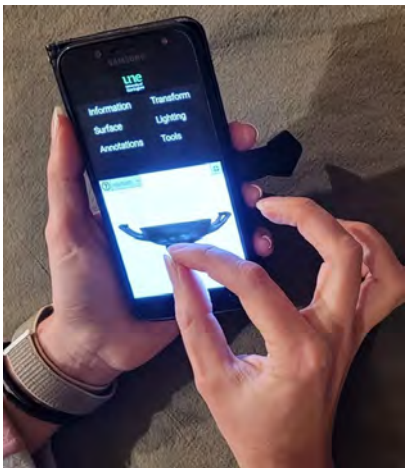

Figure 1: Digital model of ancient artefact as seen on the Pedestal3D platform. Object: Black Glaze Kylix, 4th century BCE. MA1996.4.1, University of New England Museum of Antiquities. Digital model creator: Jackson Shoobert, University of New England. Available at: <https://une.pedestal3d.com/r/7zKA2WCTwc> Photo: Thomas Fisher.

7. Gilman, 1916
8. Hartnell, 2017: 150

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AN OBJECT-BASED LEARNING COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE: BENEFITS FOR STUDENTS AND PRACTITIONERS

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The following paper was not presented at the 2023 Symposium but is a reflection on the proceedings of the day with a view towards the benefits of future collaborations in OBL. The reflections offered are from the perspective of a symposium delegate who is an undergraduate student and a volunteer working with multiple museums and collections.

Keywords: community of practice, interdisciplinarity, materiality, student, shared access

An Object-Based Learning (OBL) Community of Practice (CoP) would enable institutions to access adaptable resources and become inspired to think creatively about using objects outside traditional methods. This would in-turn have cross-disciplinary benefits for students of these OBL programs. A CoP approach fosters sustainable and multi-modal applications of OBL across different education spaces. An effective CoP will also provide a reflexive model for institutions that wish to reconsider how their engagement strategies prioritise the academic enrichment of participants.

This paper reflects on the author's experience as an undergraduate volunteer at the Australian Centre for Ancient Numismatic Studies (ACANS) at Macquarie University and with the Academic Engagement program at the Chau Chak Wing Museum (CCWM), the University of Sydney. It will focus on how working with ancient material culture can encourage the development of transferrable skills, specifically observation or 'deep looking'. The skill development will be further enhanced by collating resources within a CoP that invites participation from primary, secondary, tertiary, and GLAM sector educators.

Chau Chak Wing Museum

The CCWM OBL program invites University of Sydney staff and students, as well as members of the public, to develop life-long transferrable skills in observation, creative thinking, and communication. The program is facilitated by two Academic Engagement Curators, supported by a Curatorial Assistant. The OBL program enables tertiary students to both grow their knowledge of material culture but also develop adaptable critical thinking. A salient example of this two-fold outcome is a workshop facilitated for the course 'Jewish History from Rome to New Diaspora' (JCTC1003). Drawing on the stored CCWM collection, particularly ancient Herodian, Hasmonaean and Roman oil lamps and coinage from Judaea, activities such as a numismatics 'bingo' and creating relative chronologies were based on 'deep looking', rather than prior knowledge of the objects. 'Deep looking' consists of mindfully observing and noting small details from multiple perspectives. Students embarked upon observations on the style of the objects and applied deductive reasoning on why certain forms and materiality may have served functionality and ancient meaning-making. Subsequently, students were given the historical context to the development of iconography on lamps and coinage. I witnessed how realisation dawned on students when a puzzling object was contextualised. Students were "reading" an object, using the same critical thinking skills I developed through historical research as a tertiary student. However, these programs are also equally effective when historical knowledge is not a key outcome of the workshop. Instead, skills such as creative and flexible communication may be encouraged by asking students to weave engaging and informative narratives connecting disparate objects, mimicking the experience of health professionals, for example, who are required to communicate complex technical knowledge to an unfamiliar audience for retention.[1]

The Australian Centre for Ancient Numismatics

The ACANS volunteer and Professional and Community Engagement (PACE) program involves undergraduate and postgraduate Macquarie University students familiarising themselves with

1. Park et al., 2012: 162; Simpson, 2022: 51

numismatics through cataloguing ancient coinage. The program was conceived in 2021 by the ACANS founding director, Associate Professor Kenneth Sheedy, as necessitated by the expansive nature of the collections. In 2024 it involved twenty-two volunteers across two cataloguing projects: the Hansen Collection and the Kelly Collection, both numbering over 1000 coins. Students and volunteers receive access to the ACANS numismatics library and tailored seminars. Subsequently, they are tasked with identifying and cataloguing the collections with reference to existing databases. PACE students additionally undertake short research projects that include academic and public-facing outputs. The core outcomes of the program include in-person encounters with tactile ancient material culture, critical independent research capabilities, and collections management experience, particularly familiarity with a museum inventory management database (EMu). This program encourages industry-oriented skills development and invites enquiry that contextualises and heightens undergraduate and postgraduate research.

The tangible encounters with ancient material culture align with an OBL approach. Deep looking is implicitly encouraged by the cataloguing process but requires volunteers to initiate and reflect upon their observations independently. Practitioners have proved that intentional OBL can provide additional structure to foster effective reflection.[2] My own explicit training in OBL at the CCWM has enlightened my understanding of coins as continually agentive material culture rather than a means of gathering historical data.

Volunteers undertake 'deep looking' as the first step of cataloguing. The minute detail and its obscurity on coinage invites both visual and tactile observation, creating a multi-sensory experience for volunteers. Volunteers often testify to their surprise at the weight of a coin or its detail which is only revealed when the impressions left by a die are felt. The durability of ancient coins and close supervision of project managers invites this multisensory deep looking without a heightened risk of damage. The process of noting possible features of a coin echoes the observation activities carried out at the CCWM, albeit volunteers have access to historical context and an existing numismatics familiarity. At its core, the observation required in the cataloguing process is a long-term, transferable skill of absorbing minute details without prematurely determining conclusions.[3] Without the impetus to subsequently catalogue the coin, historical context is not necessary for effective observation. Therefore, this activity may be applied in varying educational contexts, a fact already proven by the practitioners at this seminar.

Community of Practice: Requirements and Benefits

Although transferrable skills have been effectively developed through volunteer programs, these programs are not widely accessible and are reliant on student-driven engagement for skills acquisition. At this point, a CoP would provide a suitable, reflexive platform for cross-institution professional development and inspiration for existing and future OBL programs.[4] The knowledge of the benefits of OBL is often restricted to existing enthusiastic practitioners. The CoP workshop held during the Symposium highlights the need for practitioners to reflect on their experiences and share resources in the name of justifying and inspiring additional uptake.[5] OBL does not operate in silos of museums, or in history classrooms. It does not limit what type of object can be used; the object is a vessel by which diverse forms of meaning-making occur.[6] As such, its practitioners should not operate in silos either. A CoP would provide a platform not only for practitioners to share their own experiences but be inspired to try unfamiliar models from others. In turn, collaborative guides on promoting the inclusion of OBL in engagement programs could be developed. At the very least, practitioners will be less isolated within their institutions.[7] Spreading knowledge of OBL programs within and between institutions inspires the creation of new programs. This is proven by University College London's (UCL) collaboration between postgraduate students and the UCL Art Collections, which influenced the geography department to launch a similar workshop.[8] The practitioners in this issue have already attested to the importance of drawing upon existing resource banks, such as that provided by Flinders University Museum of Art.[9] Existing CoPs have proven that this model of community-based practice would fill a gap in professional knowledge by providing a collaborative space to increase practitioner awareness of available resources.[10]

2. Hannan et al., 2013: 161, 163-164; Marie, 2010: 188; Park et al., 2012: 158-162
3. Park et al., 2012: 158
4. Hoadley, 2012: 287-290; St. Clair, 2008: 24-24
5. Thogersen & Guerry, 2025: 43-45
6. Simpson, 2022: 46
7. Hoadley, 2012: 295-297
8. Gould, 2010: 209
9. Lush, 2025: 27-29
10. Fontaine & Millen, 2004: 6-7

However, an effective CoP would not solely be open to authoritative practitioners. Hart et al. has argued in their analysis of Community-University Partnerships that a CoP's knowledge-sharing purpose is heightened when it is open to "boundary" perspectives, such as those from student and public participants.[11] The author's experience as a student learning OBL skills as an ACANS research volunteer and facilitating fellow students to achieve these outcomes at the CCWM attests to the importance of student involvement in creating reflexive resources. This is an aspect of an OBL CoP that is currently absent. An informal, inviting space for students to share their experiences and recommendations would serve to heighten the uptake of OBL, as its effectiveness is documented through participant feedback. If the feedback is constructive, practitioners will likely reflect upon their use of resources and viability of the program.[12] To create an online, accessible 'blog'-like space for students and practitioners to democratise resources and share their experiences would require extensive resources but would respond to a salient need expressed by attendees of the Symposium.[13]

OBL develops transferable skills through its creative use of material culture. These outcomes can be explicitly taught through workshops, such as those at the CCWM, but they are also skills developed implicitly in the process of working closely with material culture through volunteer programs, like those at ACANS. The interdisciplinary findings that emerged from this author's experiences speaks to the value of cross-institutional reflection, something which would be heightened by a CoP that involves participants and practitioners. A CoP for OBL would be an accessible and far-reaching format within which enthusiasts can share their experiences and enhance their educational capacity for volunteers, researchers, and students of all disciplines.

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11. Hart et al., 2013: 286-287
12. Hannan et al., 2013: 164
13. Thogersen & Guerry, 2025: 43-45.

WORKSHOPPING THE OBL COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

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Keywords: Object-based learning, Community of Practice

The 2023 Knowledgeable Object Symposium was a continuation of a series of Object-based learning (OBL) events inaugurated in 2018.[1] Throughout 2022 the OBL team at the Chau Chak Wing Museum (CCWM) met with OBL practitioners around Australia to form relationships and to take the temperature of OBL in Australia. The key takeaway from these conversations was the desire for a community of practice for OBL practitioners (affectionately referred to as an OBLCoP). To realise this, the Knowledgeable Object Symposium was hosted at the CCWM in November 2023. The purpose was to embrace cross-sector collaboration between GLAM[2] and Education professionals implementing OBL, with a curated program of speakers including school teachers, university lecturers, library and museum educators. Over eighty-five people attended, including local and interstate delegates. A further thirty-six people registered to receive the online recordings, including international registrations.[3] The schedule of speakers ended with a workshop to debrief the day and turn focus to future directions for this OBLCoP.

The workshop began by posing two questions to the group, seeking anonymous responses via an interactive app. The first question asked, 'What was the most valuable part of the day?'; it received sixty-nine responses, where participants could make multiple submissions via a shared word cloud (Figure 1). The most common responses were: the sharing of ideas, the networking opportunity and the inspiration to refine their OBL practice. Also popular was the variety of speakers and diversity of sectors and approaches represented across the program. Other valued themes included a sense of community, professional development, better understanding of OBL, practical advice and examples shared, enthusiasm and permission to experiment with new approaches. The second question was multiple-choice with four options. It asked participants how they would like to be supported going forward. There were forty-seven responses; eighteen for the Knowledgeable Object Symposium as an annual event, twenty-seven preferred the symposium to be part of a broader calendar of events throughout the year and two respondents saw the symposium as a one-off experience. No respondents opted for the symposium to be replaced with something different. It was clear that participants valued the opportunity to connect and learn from each other as part of an OBLCoP.

It was important to focus on an emerging theme of the symposium, namely the varying definitions of OBL. Our prior research suggested that there was no standard definition of OBL and in fact, many people who taught with collections did not identify as OBL practitioners.[4] The OBL Program at CCWM understands OBL as any active engagement with objects for learning. Building on this context we see best-practice OBL as utilising curated objects in carefully designed and facilitated activities, focused on achieving identified learning outcomes. These can vary widely but are all focused on creating impactful learning experiences and enriching the academic environment. The integration of objects into teaching is not new but OBL experienced recent popularity across the education and GLAM sectors over the last two decades.[5] OBL classes may emphasise, but is not limited to: the development of transferable skills, transdisciplinary approaches, multi-sensory and/or multi-modal learning engagement, investigation of specific content or topics, the transfer of ideas through different perspectives, communication across boundaries and teamwork.[6]

1. Thogersen et al, 2018: 117
2. Galleries, Libraries, Archives & Museums
3. Attendees came from Sydney, Wollongong, Newcastle, Regional NSW, Canberra, Adelaide, Melbourne, Brisbane. Online registrations came from around Australia and internationally (including Philippines, Taiwan, Korea, Hong Kong, South Africa, UK, USA, Poland)
4. Guerry & Thogersen, 2023: 41
5. Simpson, 2022: 48; Adams, 2015: 89; Chatterjee, 2008: 1-6; Decrop Ernst & Zagallo, 2024: 3
6. Chatterjee & Duhs, 2010: 3-6; Chatterjee et al., 2015: 1; Barlow, 2017: 27; Hardie, 2015: 1-9; Marie, 2011: 187-190; Tanabashi, 2021: 3

The varied OBL approaches presented throughout the day further magnified the different conceptions of OBL pedagogy and practice. We found the pedagogical positioning of OBL changed depending on people's own discipline, approach and perspective. At the CCWM, our approach to OBL is fluid and adaptive. It can be unproductive to attempt to define it by putting limitations on what it does and doesn't involve. To provoke a conversation around this, four hypothetical definitions for OBL were generated based on the various approaches articulated in the literature and in our practice. Participants were asked to position themselves near the definition that most related to their approach or understanding, with the option to provide an alternative if undecided.

The four options stated: "OBL is…

1. learning about the historical, cultural, political and social context of an object
2. a specific pedagogical framework that applies to interdisciplinary engagement with objects
3. learning with curated objects paired with carefully designed activities
4. any learning that involves objects"

Option one attracted only a few delegates, with the justification that they sought to centralise the place of the object within its context and they offered a proximate definition where objects are used as a jumping off point for any richer and deeper learning. Options two and three were more popular with a roughly even spread of votes. By far the most popular was option 4 with supporters arguing that "any learning" embraces the interdisciplinarity of OBL and that it is unreasonable to insist on only one pedagogy as OBL is employed by so many different disciplines. A few participants selected none of the above, instead preferring to share their own definition. This group offered a definition that combined all four options, recognising that there are many pedagogical frameworks that feed into OBL. Additionally, it was argued that although context can be important, effective OBL can also be implemented devoid of object-specific context. There was also an objection to the use of the word "object", as this might be offensive for some items, such as, First Nations material culture, human and animal remains. In this case, "collection-based learning" may be a more appropriate term as there is a danger of perpetuating the process of objectification of indigenous culture and knowledge systems by museums.[7] Alternative views in the room expressed a preference for OBL as a term because they were working with objects rather than collections (e.g. primary school classroom) and OBL offered an established shared vocabulary. Clearly there is more work to be done around inclusive language and terminology.

Reflecting on the purpose and outcomes of the symposium, participants worked in small groups to formulate ideas about how an effective OBLCoP would operate. The key themes that emerged included the need for sharing resources, challenges, solutions and different approaches to OBL. A platform to facilitate this sharing could also be used to share events and professional development opportunities as well as social and informal opportunities for networking. Delegates requested conferences, symposia (including published proceedings), webinars, a group email list, and digital access points such as online discussion forums dedicated to OBL practice. Many participants identified the value of bringing people together from across the GLAM and Education sectors and wanted to see these connections strengthened for mutual benefit. Likewise, there was a desire to connect to and learn from other experiential learning Communities of Practice, such as kinaesthetic learning, to emphasise the interconnectedness and flexibility of the pedagogy and avoid siloing OBL. A particular challenge articulated by the group was how to implement OBL when encountering reluctance from colleagues who feel less comfortable working with collections. An OBLCoP would combat feelings of professional isolation whilst addressing these key issues.

The workshop revealed a resounding desire for an ongoing community of practice to enable OBL educators to come together to tackle small and large challenges. The collegiality was clearly felt around the room with open and honest conversations throughout the formal and informal proceedings. The continuation of this community of practice included the creation of an opt-in email group, an intensive OBL Professional Development training day (April 2024) as well as the publication of the present proceedings. It was a wonderful opportunity to learn from our colleagues, see the many and varied approaches and be impressed by those who are pushing the boundaries of OBL practice.

7. Schultz, 2018: 283-284

Figure 1: Mentimeter® wordcloud responses. Knowledgeable Object Symposium, Nov 2023.

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