

Values and Worth: An Enquiry-Based Learning Approach to Encountering and Constructing Collections

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Abstract

The initial aim of the project was to produce a reusable learning object based on EBL principles that encouraged a reflective approach to collections in museums, art galleries and other environments in a real or virtual setting and provided a framework for the construction of new individual or team collections; these 'new collections' might also be real or virtual. Early in the project we began working with the RLO-CETL, based at the London Metropolitan University, who were working on the development of Generative Learning Objects (GLOs) and wished to produce a model compatible with EBL principles. An additional aim would be to evaluate the impact of technologies for digital capture on the viewing experience. As the project progressed it became apparent that to achieve the initial aim it required the development of three GLOs that replicated the work that would be realised by three workshops in the real world.

Background

The primary target audience was potential HE students from non-traditional backgrounds in the secondary-education sector. The project would expose secondary-sector students to the reflective learning essential at university level; introduce minority disciplines not encountered in the present 14-19 curriculum; and introduce the potential cross-disciplinary nature of university study. Students would be able to undertake the workshops at the University and when based in a cultural asset this would include physical access to some of the objects. The virtual workshops would enable those

students in schools beyond the daily travelling distance of the University to experience something of the richness of the collections and to use the experience to inform visits to collections in the school area or to construct collections of their own. The workshops are intended to be accessible to Y9 students and above.

This present case-study contains material first prepared for a paper delivered at Electronic Visualisation and the Arts (EVA) 2008 London Conference which may be found in Proceedings of the EVA 2008 London Conference (Tatlock *et al.* 2008) and at http://www.eva-conferences.com/eva_london/2008_home

A more full account of the background and development of certain aspects of the project is to be found there.

Rationale

In addition to the benefits already mentioned the purpose of the project was to encourage students to examine and explore the concepts in terms of what makes an object valuable (determiners of value); how an object is viewed in a collection (art, artefact, object or commodity); who decides what is valuable (professionals, connoisseurs, consumers, academics, general public); and finally some of the problems with ascribing value. By addressing the objects and concepts in this way it was intended to introduce students to the process of scholarly debate by constructing arguments based on evidence, and to raise awareness that some of the evidence will be based on personal interpretations. These different interpretations must all be considered and carry equal value. The intention of this approach was to introduce students to University-level teaching and learning methods, so that students would be better equipped to succeed once there.

A colleague in the Classics Department at the University of Durham was developing undergraduate material that addressed the issue of multiple interpretations and had begun to design a GLO for this purpose in collaboration with the History, Classics and Archaeology Subject Centre and the RLO- CETL. After several meetings it was decided to base our project on a core GLO that was initially termed *Guided Confusion* (MacMahon 2007) and then, changed to evaluating Multiple Interpretations (eMI) (OKell 2008). OKell has expanded on the pedagogical underpinning in relation to HE students (OKell *forthcoming*). However, the EBL approach that we sought to adopt meant that in

a virtual environment we required something we initially termed 'a pre-GLO'. We wished for the students to develop an understanding that objects are invested with 'value' and 'worth', to which contextual information might contribute. The eMI format would allow students to explore an object from different disciplinary perspectives, while the EBL activity would enable students to understand concepts of Value & Worth. Initially, we had also wished for the students to consider more than one object. The RLO- CETL was enthusiastic about testing the GLO with EBL principles and generously provided the technical support, encouragement and inspiration to translate the pedagogical requirements into a virtual environment.

Approach

Agreement was reached with several schools that were happy to provide pupils to pilot and test certain aspects of the real and virtual workshops.

Workshop 1

A group of Y9 pupils from Ashton on Mersey School attended an Explore & Discover day; a constituent part of which was working with objects from the Whitworth Art Gallery. Our intention was to find out what and who they expected to find in a museum or art gallery; and then facilitate an encounter with objects that required them to specify what an object was and to state the evidence that had been used in the decision making process. The students were then asked if an object was valuable, why and to what extent. The purpose here was to gather information about the level of visual analysis skills and their initial responses when presented with the terms 'value' and 'worth'. The workshop revealed that the students, in the first instance, thought exclusively in terms of monetary value. It was only after further probing and discussion that the students came to the conclusion that object values are not always related to how much they thought an object might bring on EBay; they later concluded that value may go up the more one knew about an object and that different people had different values.

Workshop 2

This workshop was held at the Whitworth Art Gallery with a group of students from Littlemoss High School for Boys.

Level 1 (Introduction phase)

- Asked what they expected to find in a Gallery/Museum;
- Objects shown, no information or names attached to them, labelled A-F;
- Asked to select one object to learn more about.

Students then formed groups depending on choice: one object to each group.

Level 2

- Discussed why they selected that object;
- Groups made lists of individual reasons;
- One person from each group read out answers to all.

Level 3

- Presented with several individuals, specialists and general public;
- Asked to select person to provide information on the objects;
- Students form new groups based on choice.

Level 4

- Given information sheet that includes one identical paragraph describing each object and one with the opinion of the selected curator/historian/businessman or doctor etc. (there was a gender/ethnic mix);
- Asked to rank objects.

Students were then asked to pair with someone who chose a different information source.

Level 5

- Asked to re-rank objects and agree this as a pair;
- Presented rankings to group;
- (Listed on flipchart to see comparisons);
- Students remained in pairs.

Level 6

- Discussed in detail why they ranked as they had;
- Produced list of criteria/values used;
- Presented findings to all.

This workshop generated much, sometimes heated, debate about individual choices and reasons for decisions, particularly when pairs attempted to 'persuade' others and influence overall rankings. The concluding discussion addressed some of the reasons for their choice of information sources and why they thought particular 'experts' might have more to contribute than others. At this stage it was also disclosed that the doctor had a PhD in midwifery, and not, as they had assumed, anything to do with the gallery. This opened up a new area for debate about self awareness with relation to bias and stereotypes.

The responses to the first two workshops formed the basis for the production of two virtual workshops, '*Encountering Objects*' and '*Values & Worth*'. The workshops were initially created in hyperlinked PowerPoint presentations and trialled with students from William Beamont School at a computer cluster at the University. The presentation was also used as a form of story board for the development of the new GLOs by the RLO-CETL. These can be viewed at <http://personalpages.manchester.ac.uk/staff/janet.tatlock>. Other examples of GLOs, including downloads and support materials, can be found on <http://glomaker.co.uk>.

Workshop 3

The William Beamont Y7 students undertook two workshops via two hyperlinked PowerPoint presentations and were observed and facilitated during the process by a combination of five University staff and postgraduate students. Their responses to the questions and objects have been tabulated and can be found in Appendix 1.

This was a younger group than had been originally intended for the resource and of very mixed ability; but we were keen to see how the group approached the work. Although they found it difficult, they remained engaged throughout.

Findings from the workshops were included in amended PowerPoint slides and communicated to the RLO-CETL. In addition the objects were captured digitally in 3D format, while work on the GLO patterns also continued.

Assessment and Evaluation

Assessment and evaluation in the project phase have been predominantly by means of discussion with students, their teachers and facilitators. In addition, regular meetings have been held between the project holders to review progress and to discuss with colleagues the most appropriate way to translate the workshop experience into an on-line environment. It became apparent that the space and time required for an EBL approach could be satisfied more readily by the virtual environment. In the real-time workshops it was necessary to provide a range of sources for potential enquiry, but also offer opportunities for the development of lines of enquiry that would take place subsequent to the workshop. As a result it was possible to demonstrate the continuous and developmental nature of learning via enquiry and to introduce the concept of personalised learning.

Our review of e-Learning technology has been ongoing by attendance at and contributions to demonstration workshops with colleagues across the HE sector interested in developing similar approaches. When the workshops 'go live' virtually, self assessment will be embedded; when the workshops take place at the University, there will be assessment and evaluation by the Widening Participation team in addition to this self assessment. It is intended that the questions built into the learning objects will

promote reflective consideration of the process of knowledge acquisition and scholarly debate, in addition to provoking discussion about the nature and value of objects in collections.

The initial project for one real-time workshop and one in the virtual environment became three of each. As a result of this increase in scale and the complexity of the work required by the RLO-CETL the project is slightly behind schedule. Real workshops and a pilot for two virtual workshops have taken place, and the project will be completed for 2008-09 academic year.

Outcomes

These will be available for use in the 2008-09 academic year:

- a suite of workshops and extension material for use with students in Y9 – Y12 range;
- Three related GLOs.

Further Development

The three GLO patterns are infinitely adaptable in terms of content and level with objects and information sources easily changed and updated. It will also soon be possible for the students to construct their own GLOs. A potential project would be for University students to support, for example, Y10 students in the production of a GLO for Y7 students and to evaluate the impact on learning and transferable skills of the three groups.

It is hoped to produce a collection of eMI GLOs that reflect the diversity of the collections at the University of Manchester, both the more well known collections of the Manchester Museum and Whitworth Art Gallery and the lesser known School/discipline collections.

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References

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Appendix 1

Responses of William Beamont Y7 Students to PowerPoints 'Encountering Objects' and Values & 'Worth'

List six things you expect to find in a gallery or museum.

Table of Responses (includes number of responses when more than one).

Café 6 (Souvenir/gift) shop 2/0/2 Big staircases Toilets Gallery	objects Artefacts Exhibits relics	Ancient items Old things 2 Historical objects Historical pieces Historical artefacts 3 Historical items Old stuff 3 Old traditional objects 2 Ancient artefacts 3 Memrobilities Time capsule 2	Art 4 Pieces of art (Famous) art work 1/4	Pictures 6 (famous) paintings 2/17 drawings Portraits
Statues 7 Sculptures 10 Statues/sculptures	Pottery 4	Old tools/weapons 2 Tile work Models Clothing Famous peoples' belongings 2 Pastimes/ old toys ornaments	Bones of animals Bones/fossils Bones 3 Fossils 10 Bones(fossils) Animals 2 Stuffed animals	Rocks Rocks/crystals
Egyptian/roman statues & clothes Mummies 2	Roman pottery		Dinosaurs 4 Dinosaur bones 2	
Exhibition presentations	Facts Information 4 Descriptions 2 PCs	People (security) 7/1 staff		

Ranking Objects, Object Key:

A	Walter Crane Sketch	D	Et in Arcadia
B	Donkey Harness	E	Chinese Shoe
C	Muirhead Bone Pencil Sketch	F	Turner

First Ranking: table of responses

Pupil→ Rank ↓	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1	C	E	D	E	D	C	B	E	C	C	F	E	E	C
2	A	C	C	F	F	B	E	B	D	D	C	C	B	E
3	B	B	A	B	C	A	A	F	F	B	B	D	C	A
4	E	D	F	A	A	F	F	A	B	F	D	B	D	F
5	F	F	B	D	B	D	C	D	A	A	E	A	A	D
6	D	A	E	C	E	E	D	C	E	E	A	F	F	B
Pupil→ Rank ↓	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	
1	D	B	D	D	A	F	C	D	F	E	F	C	E	
2	A	A	C	F	E	D	A	C	A	B	D	B	B	
3	B	D	F	A	B	C	D	F	B	A	A	E	A	
4	C	E	A	B	C	B	E	B	D	D	C	F	C	
5	E	C	E	C	D	A	F	E	E	C	B	D	D	
6	F	F	B	E	F	E	B	A	C	F	E	A	F	

Some Comments re why highly ranked:

B – *looks the newest*

C – *because it looks like an old sketch showing war*

D – *it looks like it tells a story*

E – *because it looks different, interesting.*

it looks interesting and I'd like to find out what it's for

it looks like there's a lot of history behind it

because it looks Chinese

General – *I have chosen this order because of how interesting the work is*

Some Comments re why not highly ranked:

B – *just a normal necklace/bracelet for an animal; like the design*

D – *looked the oldest*

F – *I don't really like this because I can't really see what it is a picture of*

Few colours, looks a bit lifeless

Not very colourful and very smudged

Second Ranking: table of responses

Pupil→ Rank ↓	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1	C	E	D	E	D	C	B	E	C	F	F	C	E	C
2	A	D	F	B	A	B	E	F	D	C	E	D	C	E
3	B	B	C	F	B	A	A	B	F	E	B	B	B	A
4	E	C	A	D	F	F	F	D	B	B	D	A	D	F
5	F	A	B	A	C	D	C	A	A	A	C	F	A	D
6	D	F	E	C	E	E	D	C	E	D	A	E	F	B
Pupil→ Rank ↓	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	
1	D	B	D	D	D	C	C	D	F	E	F	C	E	
2	A	E	C	F	A	A	D	C	E	B	D	F	A	
3	B	A	F	A	C	B	B	E	B	A	B	E	B	
4	C	C	A	E	B	E	F	A	D	D	C	A	C	
5	E	D	E	C	E	D	A	F	C	C	A	D	D	
6	F	F	B	B	F	F	E	B	A	F	E	B	F	

Some Comments re why highly ranked:

C – because the artist tells us a lot about the country

E – because its over 200 years old

Some Comments re why not highly ranked:

A – It's not very old even though it looks it

E – because it's just a Chinese shoe that seems to cause pain and doesn't tell us much about culture

F – because it was thought to be a Turner but it wasn't

Rankings: table of changes in rankings

Pupil→ Rank ↓	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1	E/E	E/E	D/D	E/E	D/D	C/C	B/B	E/E	C/C	C/F	F/F	E/C	E/E	C/C
2	B/C	C/D	C/F	F/B	F/A	B/B	E/E	B/F	D/D	D/C	C/E	C/D	B/C	E/D
3	C/B	B/B	A/C	B/F	C/B	A/A	A/A	F/B	F/F	B/E	B/B	D/B	C/B	A/F
4	D/D	D/C	F/A	A/D	A/F	F/F	F/F	A/D	B/B	F/B	D/D	B/A	D/D	F/A
5	A/A	F/A	B/B	D/A	B/C	D/D	C/C	D/A	A/A	A/A	E/C	A/F	A/A	D/B
6	F/F	A/F	E/E	C/C	E/E	E/E	D/D	C/C	E/E	E/D	A/A	F/E	F/F	B/E
Pupil→ Rank ↓	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	
1	D/D	B/B	D/D	D/D	A/D	F/C	C/C	D/D	F/F	E/E	F/F	C/C	E/E	
2	A/A	A/E	C/C	F/F	E/A	D/A	A/D	C/C	A/E	B/B	D/D	B/F	B/A	
3	B/B	D/A	F/F	A/A	B/C	C/B	D/B	F/E	B/B	A/A	A/B	E/E	A/B	
4	E/C	E/C	A/A	B/E	C/B	B/E	E/F	B/A	D/D	D/D	C/C	F/A	C/C	
5	C/E	C/D	E/B	C/C	D/E	A/D	F/A	E/F	E/C	C/C	B/A	D/D	D/D	
6	F/F	F/F	B/E	E/B	F/F	E/F	B/E	A/B	C/A	F/F	E/E	A/B	F/F	

Comments

My ranking hasn't changed, I don't care about how they were made or why, just if they look nice or horrible! I still like my order.

I've changed my mind as I know more about some objects.

Determiners of Value: what kinds of value did you discover?

Monetary 15 Financial 3 Intrinsic 4 Diamonds/crystals Treasure	Personal 13 How you think about something 2 Sentimental 12 Memories 6 Love 5 Possessions	Beauty 4 Aesthetic 5 Visual 7 Richness 2	Uniqueness 6 Rarity 5 Authenticity 6	Fun 3 Entertainment 14 Personality
Family 12 Social 12 Friend/friendship 9	Cultural 7 Traditional Life 5	Pets 4 Animals	Temporal 3 Times 4 Ancient 2 Heirloom 2	Dealership Business
Sensational	Unknown	Research 3	World peace	Nature
Everyone has different values	Important 4			