

Object Based Learning as an Aspirational Educational Pathway

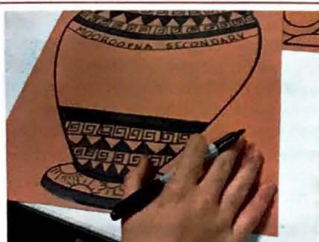
Engaging young people with history

Summary

Object-based learning (OBL) in an ancient history context was employed to promote a significant shift in learning retention and educational aspirations in students from a selected group of rural schools in Victoria, Australia.

Background

The programme was delivered at 5 government secondary schools in the Goulburn Valley, a demographically diverse region where tertiary education enrolments are low. Participants, who were 12-13 years old, attended the programme in their school and spent a day at the University of Melbourne's OBL laboratories, and the National Gallery of Victoria.



Challenge

Many students from Australian rural schools suffer educational disadvantage as a consequence of socio-economic status and constraints inflicted by geography, making it difficult to sustain high aspirations.

Approach

OBL, gamified learning, and creative activities were deployed to engage student interest. 15-minute activity capsules focused on archaeology and Egyptology as pathways to deep learning experiences and cross-cultural understanding.

Teaching sets included deaccessioned authentic herds and replica objects, and on the trip participants interacted with authentic objects. Students benefitted from the visual and tactile experiences and immersive gallery spaces, moving away from traditional learning methods.



Intended outcomes

By broadening contextual historical perspective, improving knowledge retention, and providing opportunities for skills-building through creative activities, the project aimed to advance participant aspiration, educational outcomes and career pathways.

Intended outputs

A robust year-by-year outreach education plan adaptive to different learning environments and a variety of subject matter.

Resource sets for use by teachers at their home institutions.

Obstacles and issues

- The most significant obstacle has been obtaining long-term funding for the project. The time limit for many funding schemes means we can't follow the students to the level required for the project outcomes or make any long-term commitments to our partner schools. Instead we must re-fund our project on a year-by-year basis.
- There were several scheduling issues, staff discontinuities, and our project requirements (e.g. groups of <25 to ensure sufficient support and resources) were not always met.
- Some parents were resistant to additional humanities programming, leading to some students being left out.



- There was a greater need than expected to adapt or replace some of the activities for certain classes/age-groups.
- The 6-8 month gap between the final trip to Melbourne and the next school visits was too big for students to fully recall the material, so more diverse and layered techniques must be developed to re-affirm learning.

Actual outcomes

- The project curriculum and activities are now well-established, though there is room for modification.
- Material continues to be added for older participants from previous years.
- Additional partnerships have been developed with archaeological professionals, enhancing learning outcomes while highlighting employment pathways.
- Data collected from student surveys following the Melbourne visit indicated an increase in interest, confidence and retention, especially among the older students. 90% of year 8s said OBL increased their interest in history, and 95% said it helped with retention as opposed to 66% and 70% for year 7s. There comments included "More schools should do this" and "All the objects were amazing. Learned lots today :)".



Actual outputs

The project has begun to develop its own resources, including a memorisation game and a number of museum replicas and custom-made 3D prints that can be handled by students. We also developed a Tomb in a Box in collaboration with Museum in a Box to provide an interactive learning tool. We are currently working with the older students on a Goulburn Valley in a Box. Finally, we have a website that gives information to parents, teachers and funders.

Lessons learned

- Activities will only work if they include clear instructions.
- It is often the simplest activities that provide the best results.
- Make engagements more frequent through more visits or year-round resources.
- Find champions in the schools and regions you want to work with.
- Make your programme as accessible as possible by removing financial barriers, but realise that no matter what you offer, not everyone will want to be involved.
- Make plans with schools well in advance but build in contingencies, be as flexible as possible.

Next steps

- With the end of the project's current funding scheme in sight, the project is looking for new partners and funders to support its ongoing engagements with the rural schools.
- Next year our first group of students will be selecting their VCE subjects and by 2021 they will have the choice to end their formal education, so these next years are key to evaluating the success of our project.
- Eventually, we also want to expand to other schools in rural Victoria, and to Egypt through an online exchange.
- We hope to enhance our resources with a more comprehensive independent teaching collection using authentic de-accessioned material and replicas, as well as a set of teaching aids for school teachers to use between our visits.

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Further information

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