



Object Based Learning: a New Pedagogical Approach to the Teaching of the Humanities in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Melbourne

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Abstract

The University of Melbourne is the custodian of over 30 cultural collections which span a wide variety of disciplines and mediums. These collections were initially formed for teaching purposes and they provide a fascinating insight into the history and development of teaching at the University. Today, they provide a unique opportunity to introduce the pedagogical practice of object based learning across the University's many courses. Object based learning encourages students to engage directly with objects to facilitate their own experience of learning. By bringing together the theoretical and the practical, it allows students to explore and engage with objects in a manner that moves away from the traditional, passive approach of imparting knowledge. Most importantly, it provides students with an opportunity to critically engage with, and contemplate, cultural material in all its forms and to question and challenge pre-conceived notions of meaning assigned to particular objects. In July 2016, the University expanded on this type of teaching practice when it opened a new building established specifically for the teaching of the Bachelor of Arts degree known as Arts West. This building is equipped with 2 purpose built object labs that facilitate the use of objects from the University's cultural collections in the teaching of a wide range of disciplines from across the humanities. It introduces students to the University's diverse cultural collections and seeks to embed them in future curriculum development. Using the new Arts West project as a case study, this paper will explore how the Faculty of Arts at the University of Melbourne is encouraging inter-disciplinary and collaborative practices in teaching and learning that go beyond the academy with object based and experiential learning at its core. This paper will provide examples of how this pedagogical practice is being combined with practical experience of collections in order to strengthen students' analytical skills and connect them with objects in a non-traditional manner.

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