

Why Objects Matter in Higher Education

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Integrating artifacts into the curriculum can increase students' confidence when working with historical fragments. This article provides insight into what happened when students engaged with authentic historical artifacts for the purposes of learning for the first time. It draws from a range of qualitative data collected during a two-year period while teaching an undergraduate New Zealand history course. Students described learning how to read such objects and gaining skills in how to synthesize information highlighting both the short- and long-term pedagogical benefits stemming from object-based learning (OBL). While OBL needs specialist collections staff to work alongside the teacher, the article closes with encouraging comments about how OBL caters for different age groups, interests, and learning contexts.

Introduction

Object-based learning involves incorporating objects into the teaching and learning setting. The method is popular in the museum and art gallery sector and frequently used in programs designed for the primary school level; this article, however, explains OBL's usefulness in higher education settings. In New Zealand, the United States, and the United Kingdom, the term *higher education* refers to institutions that teach degree-level qualifications such as universities, for example. For the purposes of this article, Rosalind Duhs, University College London, 4-Step OBL learning cycle provides a useful template for integrating OBL in higher education settings: step 1 involves a hands-on tutorial for students on how to handle and read objects. As part of step 2, students reflect on their OBL experience. For step 3, students study objects to form abstract concepts from these reflections by testing their ideas within their discipline-specific knowledge. The last step, step 4, requires students to transfer these ideas to new situations (such as in other courses).¹ Duhs believes that OBL helps university students leap lightly "over knowledge hurdles," and that touch strengthens the learning process.²

OBL has a long history in higher education contexts. In fact, teachers' use of OBL methods can be seen as far back as the Middle Ages.³ As academic disciplines developed, so too did the diversity of teachers incorporating OBL into their practice.⁴ The OBL method transfers easily across higher education disciplines, as described in Helen J. Chatterjee and Leonie Hannan's edited book, which demonstrates with OBL examples teaching zoology, art, and archaeology courses.⁵ Furthermore, Jane Thogerson et al. revealed that even staff from disciplines not traditionally trained in OBL, such as business and law, expressed interest in using objects in their

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teaching after training in this method.⁶ Thogerson's study went beyond the higher education sector, demonstrating that OBL is flexible enough to cater to different types of learners from different educational contexts.⁷ Today the main barrier to wider use of OBL in higher education is a general lack of awareness by staff and students in institutions of their special collections.⁸ This article addresses that gap by explaining the usefulness of university collections in supporting teaching and learning, as well as research.

Background

"Why Objects Matter in Higher Education" reflects on a two-year study into teaching New Zealand history to undergraduate students using OBL methods, and it builds on the author's previous experience as a museum and art gallery educator and museum development trainer. The study took place at the University of Canterbury (UC) when the author taught "HIST128: New Zealand History from Waka⁹ to Weta¹⁰" during the first semester of 2014 and 2015. It was apparent that the UC's Macmillan Brown Library and Archive collections suited the course content. Therefore, the history teacher (the author), the university archivist, an art curator, and several subject specialist librarians based at UC's Macmillan Brown Library and Archive (the Macmillan Brown) decided to collaborate in a teaching and learning experiment. Its goal was to introduce HIST128 students to OBL and develop their historical research skills by working with primary sources.

The project was shaped by the desire to find out how the students perceived primary source documents and how they incorporated the source material into their coursework assessments to explore a major moment in New Zealand history. More generally, the project tested ideas about how libraries, including archives, museums, and other heritage-focused organizations, engage and connect people to knowledge and information. Considering the theory that novices learn the most in the shortest time span,¹¹ one motivation was to provide insight into what happened when undergraduate students participated in OBL for the first time. Another motivation was to investigate OBL's versatility. This was founded on the idea that students engage more through sensory, tactile, visual experiences if combined with an inquiry-driven activity.¹²

The methodology section outlines the decisions that shaped the framing and logistics of the study, including research ethics, how the different exhibits for the study were selected, notes about the class context such as student demographics, and the course content, mode of instruction, assessment and desirable learning outcomes. The results draw from a range of qualitative data collected during the two-year period curated into six "collective stories" about teaching and learning. Following Laurel Richardson's approach of creating collective stories allows explanations and understandings to take place—*the individual is still the central character, but most significant is that there are transformative possibilities in the collective story*.¹³ Using student coursework (such as OBL assignments and exam responses) and class discussions, as well as informal conversations including emails with the history teacher as evidence, the first five stories feature the experiences of undergraduate students learning how to unravel the mystery behind the objects and primary source documents. Students described two distinct phases: stories 1 and 2 touch on the fieldwork phase, which involved immersion with the primary source material, and stories 3 and 4 describe the write-up phase, where students learned to synthesize their fieldwork immersion with the secondary literature. In story 5, students consider the value of the OBL experience when they understood they had developed lifelong

skills. Story 6, the last story, includes observations from the academic librarians, archivist, and history teacher involved in the project. Collectively, these stories highlight how sensory experiences facilitate understanding. Students gained skills such as how to read historical fragments, and they enjoyed the tactile learning context (for example, engaging senses such as sight, sound, and touch). They also valued learning how to work independently. These findings serve to enrich our understanding about the significance of OBL in higher education; however, some explanation about OBL is required before unpacking its usefulness in higher education contexts and beyond.

Literature Review

OBL in Higher Education Contexts: Forgotten and Underutilized?

While the practice of teaching with objects within higher education has a long history, Marta C. Lourenço argues that research into the historical contribution that university collections make to the teaching and learning experience is less studied. This invisibility within the literature places university collections and the OBL method at risk of remaining undervalued and university special collections not being used enough.¹⁴ Even those trained in OBL can forget to use it in their teaching, as Christina Kreps, University of Denver, confessed when she started using university museum collections and exhibitions to provide students a multisensory and socially engaged learning experience.¹⁵ Even though the OBL method transfers easily across higher education disciplines, a general lack of awareness by both faculty and students of such collections remains the biggest challenge for academic librarians today.¹⁶ Fortunately, research also shows that university lecturers unfamiliar with OBL methods expressed interest in learning how to integrate objects into their teaching.¹⁷ To address these challenges, and more, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) commissioned two separate reports: one published in 2010 addressed value and another in 2017 looked at impact. Both found that, when academic libraries enhanced the teaching and learning experience, teachers and students felt invested in it, and some may even become future library advocates.¹⁸

Some Important Notes about Academic Libraries and Their Specialist Staff That Support OBL

From a teaching point of view, OBL is a collaborative endeavor requiring input from experts (such as special collections librarians, curators, and archivists) to facilitate the students' hands-on engagement with items from the university collections.¹⁹ From an academic library perspective, collaborating with faculty on OBL projects promotes the university special collections, fosters a community of future users, and provides professional development opportunities for staff. For example, Pablo Alvarez, as Rare Books and Special Collections Curator at the University of Rochester, NY, has infused his specialist knowledge into courses in history, English, library & information studies, as well as the history of science.²⁰ Importantly, Alvarez also talks of how enjoyable it was to collaborate with faculty and students on OBL projects. Furthermore, Alvarez believed learning more about his institution's collections was another added benefit of OBL collaborations.²¹

Research also shows the shorter- and longer-term pedagogical benefits of OBL. For example, a five-year study on undergraduate liberal arts students' early exposure to special collections in their courses reported they had more confidence to investigate other forms of material evidence in the future. Valerie A. Harris and Anne C. Weller, who based their study

on the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) Special Collection, argued that academic librarians and archivists play an important role nurturing those lifelong skills. Harris and Weller's study also links increased outreach activities by UIC Special Collections staff with an increased use in services over time. Other important factors cited by Harris and Weller include "good service," which helps form long-term connections with students and faculty wishing to use the collections.²² In fact, success with one faculty member using OBL could spur another to consider incorporating the university special collections into their courses. These same themes appear in the results section of this article; first, however, the OBL method requires further explanation.

Unpacking OBL

Objects and their stories fascinate people of all ages.²³ Since the 1980s, a resurgence of interest in material culture has boosted the significance of university special collections for teaching, learning, and research,²⁴ and today there are as many variations of the OBL method as there are practitioners.²⁵ It is even possible to teach oneself the method simply by learning how to read objects and making careful, reflexive, and critical connections between the object and its broader historical context.²⁶ In addition, OBL is flexible enough to cater to different types of learners from different educational contexts.²⁷ For teachers new to OBL, Duhs' 4-step method is a useful template to follow.²⁸ Step 1 involves a practical, hands-on OBL tutorial where, working in small groups with the university special collections staff, students learn how to handle and read objects. Step 2 requires students to reflect on their OBL practice in preparation for step 3, where students test their ideas through some form of formal OBL course assessment. Step 4 involves OBL skill transfer; this last step occurs sometime afterward in a different teaching and learning context.

Duhs' 4-Step OBL method builds from David Kolb's theory that "learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience."²⁹ In turn, Kolb was shaped by John Dewey's idea that the individual discovers by experience to construct their own understandings (that is to say, constructivism) and by Jean Piaget's theory that children take an active role in their learning.³⁰ Over the decades, museum and art gallery educators have adapted these ideas into hands-on learning programs, mostly aimed at school-aged children. Research highlights how the immersive nature of OBL activities arouses multiple senses (such as looking, listening, and touching), which in turn stimulates dialogue (for example, language and analysis).³¹ These same educational concepts also apply to OBL in higher education contexts by replacing the traditional lecture-theatre model and simulating fieldwork instead.

Although not essential to the successful delivery of OBL, some higher education venues such as the University of Melbourne have purpose-built OBL laboratories. Andrew Jamieson, a senior lecturer in classics and archaeology who uses the lab, described OBL as an "active form of learning" and believed that it led to "better results for students."³² As one University of Melbourne OBL student said: "I just cannot go past the immense aid the objects and practical exercises were toward learning."³³ In particular, the immersive process of OBL helped the student understand abstract concepts better. Objects stimulate the senses.³⁴ Susan Guinn-Chipman et al. use the term "*haptic* exploration" to explain how touch interacts with movement and vision to produce an enhanced learning experience for students.³⁵ Likewise, the OBL research featured in Chatterjee and Hannan's edited collection clearly demonstrates different ways that sensory learning leads to higher levels of student engagement. This is

because hands-on, inquiry-based activities not only deepen a student's understanding, using objects often injects an element of playfulness into the learning process for the students.³⁶

Methodology

Research Objectives: Developing Undergraduate Students' OBL Skills for Now and the Future

This study exposed students to the first three of Rosalind Duhs' 4-Step OBL learning cycle (that is, concrete experience, then reflection, followed by doing). There was also the possibility of early evidence of the last step, skills transference. The teaching objectives focused on helping students to develop their history research skills by providing an opportunity to use primary sources.³⁷ The objective for the academic library team was to promote the Macmillan Brown collections and, more generally, to help prepare students to do advanced research as future archive and library users. These ideas follow from the tradition of librarians and archivists wanting to ensure access to the collections while meeting the preservation needs of such items so that they are available for future generations.³⁸ Most of the Macmillan Brown Library material is held in closed stacks in its basement, with its archive documents stored in another building nearby. This inaccessibility of material makes relationship building between students, teachers, and researchers very important in enabling the finding and accessing of appropriate reference material required. Therefore, the academic library team's research objectives link to a larger conversation about how to engage and connect people to the wealth of knowledge and information held in university heritage-focused collections.

Background to UC, the Course, and the Macmillan Brown Holdings

This study centers on "HIST128: New Zealand History from Waka to Weta" taught at UC during semester 1 in 2014 and 2015. The course introduces the essentials of New Zealand history, structured around themes of Māori and Pākehā³⁹ conflict and collaboration, the development and tensions of a "new world" colonial nation, and New Zealand's changing place on the world stage. New Zealand undergraduate history courses have always been small (that is to say, fewer than 50 students). However, this was magnified in 2010 and 2011 when a series of severe earthquakes hit the city of Christchurch and the greater Canterbury region of New Zealand's South Island, UC experienced a sudden drop in student numbers. Combined with the loss of teaching spaces, this created an opportunity to rethink the curriculum and mode of delivery. Small classes provided an opportunity to use the OBL method. The HIST128 course content also matched well with the collections housed at the Macmillan Brown. The Macmillan Brown holds documents and artifacts important to New Zealand, the Pacific, and Canterbury's history.⁴⁰ The cultural heritage collection includes architectural drawings, photographs, rare books, audio recordings, and ephemera as well as UC's art collection and a range of unpublished material. The archive holds trade unions' papers and documents related to voluntary organizations, professional associations, and other local groups and individuals active in social change and politics, as well as writers and artists' papers, personal and family papers, and documents connected to UC's history.⁴¹

Taking an Action Research Methods Approach

During the two-year period, the teacher and specialist Macmillan Brown staff collaborated as a "community of practitioners" by adopting an action research methods approach: a cyclic

process involving planning, action, observation, and reflection to improve program delivery.⁴² Action research methods work well in educational settings, as critical reflection happens on a number of levels. Students reflect with fellow students on their experiences; students reflect in their coursework about how well they used their OBL training; the teacher reflects with the Macmillan Brown staff on the effects of the OBL program and on the effectiveness of action research for staff development and curriculum change.⁴³

The Nature of the Collaboration: Hands-On OBL Tutorials Using Items from the University Special Collections

The collaboration involved holding two practical hands-on OBL tutorials at the Macmillan Brown (for example, step 1 of Duhs' 4-Step OBL learning cycle). The tutorials prepared students for their OBL assessments based around rupture points in New Zealand history. Nineteenth-century New Zealand earned its reputation as an innovative social laboratory, and 1890s Christchurch in particular was a hotbed of radicalism. For example, Kate Sheppard, President of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, spearheaded the campaign for universal women's enfranchisement, introduced in 1893, and William Pember-Reeves championed the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act of 1894, which encouraged the formation of trade unions and regulated wages and work conditions.⁴⁴ The Macmillan Brown Archive holds documents related to these events and more. These topics exposed students to diverse viewpoints that still have relevance today. To tempt the students to engage, the Macmillan Brown staff selected visually interesting sources such as diaries, journals, paintings, and posters. With students grounded by the assigned tutorial readings,⁴⁵ small-group discussions took place around a table with a range of documents and objects laid out for students to see—and touch, if possible. The specialist library staff introduced students to important concepts such as how to handle historical documents and the different ways of working with primary sources,⁴⁶ as well as providing insights into the gallery, library, archive, and museum (GLAM) sector as a future work option. Reflecting beliefs similar to those outlined in Harris and Weller's study, the Macmillan Brown staff placed value on good customer relations, believing this would facilitate ongoing use of their services. Highlighting the New Zealand context of this study, Macmillan Brown staff describe this using the important Māori concept *whakawhanaungatanga*, which is the process of connecting and relating to people in culturally appropriate ways.

Integrating OBL into Student Learning and Course Assessments

The HIST128 course work component required students to complete two primary source assignments and an end-of-course examination (for example, steps 2 and 3 of Duhs' 4-Step OBL learning cycle). Through conducting their own investigations, students had the opportunity to learn how to read and handle historical evidence, then synthesize their readings of the primary source material with their critical understanding of the secondary literature. Students were asked to describe the item (what is it? who produced it? when was it written or produced?), evaluate the broader context of the source (how did it come about?), and consider whether the ideas embedded in the artifact were still relevant today. Students were free to choose whatever issues and angles they wished to explore on a significant moment in New Zealand history based on the themes explored in lectures (such as migration, war, social reform, trade unionism, feminism, race relations, and homosexual law reform). In addition, the end-of-course examination included a section that required students to demonstrate their

understanding of doing history. Questions related to how students perceived primary source documents and how they incorporated the source material into their course work assessments.

Notes on Research Ethics, the Student Population, and Data Collection

With research ethics approval from the university, the history teacher collated data drawn from the students' primary source assignments and examination responses. The research ethics consent process required that the history teacher brief the students about the project in lectures and during tutorials. Thirty-eight students enrolled in 2014 and 28 in 2015, of those 46 students (in other words, 70 percent), agreed to participate in the project. Students opted in by signing a consent form and leaving it with their exam answer book.⁴⁷ Most HIST128 students had an interest in New Zealand history. The majority were first-year liberal arts students, with the addition of some from other disciplines such as business and law. A small number of these first-year enrollments were mature students. A number of the students enrolled in HIST128 planned to pursue a teaching career, and some were interested in working in the heritage sector. All students were novice archive users. What made the student cohort so dynamic was that nearly one third were Americans on various study-abroad schemes. These young Americans sought to combine cultural activities with their studies and the HIST128 course content and assessment format accommodated that interest. Being outsiders to New Zealand, the Americans asked questions that made New Zealand history appear strange and unfamiliar.

Results Retold as Teaching and Learning Stories

A narrative research approach suited the type of data gathered. Qualitative data included the primary source assignments and direct quotes selected from student exam responses. The exam questions related to steps 1, 2, and 3 of Duh's OBL method (for example, step 1 was the practical hands-on OBL tutorial, and steps 2 and 3 involved students doing OBL assessments that included reading secondary texts as well as critical reflection). Class discussions, as well as informal conversations and emails between students and the history teacher, provided important insights and served as background information only. Although the history teacher was the author of these stories, the intention was to capture the collective experiences of a student cohort, several academic librarians, an archivist and art curator as well as the teacher and in this way provide a vehicle to inspire others to try OBL. The first five stories feature undergraduate student OBL experiences. The requirement to preserve student confidentiality influenced the decision not to include images of students engaged in OBL and to use pseudonyms. The academic librarians', archivist's, and teacher's observations about the OBL experiment shaped the last story. The Macmillan Brown staff emailed their collective reflections to the history teacher in 2014 and again in 2015.

Story 1: Teena and Crystal Explain How They Learned to Read Material Culture and Make Visitor Observations at Canterbury Museum

HIST128 students with an interest in archaeology based their primary source assignment at Canterbury Museum. They focused on *Iwi Tawhito—Whenua Hou: Ancient Peoples—New Lands* and *Ngā Taonga Tuku Iho o Nga Tupuna: Treasures Left to Us by the Ancestors*. Both exhibitions document the everyday life of ancient Māori prior to European contact, c. 1500 until 1800. *Iwi Tawhito—Whenua Hou* is the first display that museum visitors encounter. It is three di-

FIGURE 1
Canterbury Museum Diorama



oramas.⁴⁸ Adjacent is *Ngā Taonga*, an extensive display featuring body adornment, tools, rock art and *waka ama*, an outrigger canoe.⁴⁹ Teena and Crystal, both American students, said they immersed themselves “for hours” in the dark space. They described how they studied the dioramas (see figure 1) and then opened the drawers containing neat rows of flints, fish-hooks, and adzes.⁵⁰ They also observed museum visitor behavior. Teena and Crystal noted that their fieldwork phase involved more than one museum visit, often during the weekend. They were somewhat surprised at how much they enjoyed their self-directed museum experience. Teena and Crystal were most excited about how they acquired a new set of lifelong skills related to the ability to read material culture; they also gained some insight into how visitors experience the museum as a social activity. Crystal, a teacher trainee, felt inspired to ask about a museum practicum when she returned to the United States. She also envisioned museum visits in her lesson plans. Crystal’s comments reflect both immediate and long-term benefit from her object-based experience and reinforce Harris and Weller’s argument that early exposure to primary source documents gives students confidence to explore other forms of material culture.⁵¹

FIGURE 2
Watercolor Painting



Story 2: How Hinemoa Used a Watercolor Painting and Her Grandmother's Story to Explore New Zealand Women's WWII Experiences Working on the Land

New Zealand's experience of WWII was another topic that students explored. When WWII broke out, there was much pressure on New Zealand to increase food production to nourish their troops, supplement Britain's pantries, and feed the 100,000 American forces based in New Zealand.⁵² In addition, New Zealand wool was used to keep the allied troops warm and dry. The Women's Land Service, aka "Land Girls," were New Zealand's solution to the labor shortage problem. Despite opposition from farmers who wanted experienced men and from farmers' wives who had the expectation of the Lands Girls' support in domestic chores rather than on the farm, when:

"23,000 men left the farming industry to serve overseas; 4,500 women stepped into their shoes. And production in every area of agriculture increased. This wasn't because of better machinery — the government had commandeered all farm trucks, spare horses and weapons."⁵³

After the war, some Land Girls returned to the city but many stayed on, and some became farm managers. The Land Girls service was not officially recognized; and government military histories barely mention them.

Hinemoa, a mature student, combined visual culture and oral history methods for her investigation into Land Girls who worked on New Zealand farms as part of the war effort. Hinemoa gained access to *Woolshed Interior* (1944), a large watercolor by Juliet Peter (see figure 2), which is part of UC's art collection.⁵⁴ The artwork captures Peter's Land Girl experience on a Canterbury high country sheep station. Hinemoa said she scheduled multiple appointments to look at the painting "without rush."⁵⁵ Hinemoa also interviewed her grandmother who had worked on the family farm during WWII but not as an official Land Girl. Hinemoa then compared her grandmother's experience with her interpretation of Peter's painting.⁵⁶ Hinemoa said that looking at *Woolshed Interior*—depicting three women dressed in hardwearing work gear sorting wool, which is such hot, physical, dirty work—combined with her grandmother's personal story, helped her "emotionally connect" to her chosen topic. However, Hinemoa also noted that "in order to understand the importance of the primary sources one must supplement it with contextual background knowledge."⁵⁷ Hinemoa's story demonstrates three of the four steps of Rosalind Duhs' 4-Step OBL learning cycle discussed earlier: step 1 involves students learning how to handle and read objects; step 2 requires students to reflect on their OBL practice so that (step 3) they can test their ideas through some form of formal OBL course assessment. Ultimately, Hinemoa successfully synthesized her fieldwork insights with the secondary literature to produce a deeply insightful piece of writing.

Story 3: Mark and Allan Describe the Wonder of Working with Archival Documents

Allan and Mark, both non-liberal arts students, highlight the tactile experience that stems from working with archive documents. Allan, a business student, worked with trade union papers related to the 1951 Watersider strike, New Zealand's longest labor dispute.⁵⁸ This took place during the Cold War era when New Zealand was a small, conservative society of just 2 million and the post-WWII economy was booming yet the cost of living kept increasing, and wharf workers demanded better pay. The strike, or lockout, lasted 151 days and involved more than 22,000 workers. Those who opposed the strikers branded them "Commies, traitors and terrorists."⁵⁹ In his exam response, Allan described how: "Reading these newsletters that were each printed on different colored paper, typing on a slant with an obvious homemade feel to them was fascinating." Even though he also drew from insider accounts for his assignment,⁶⁰ Allan felt physical objects made the past feel more tangible.⁶¹ He thought that he gained "a much better feeling for what was happening in this era for the striking workers."

Mark, a law student whose topic related to nuclear disarmament, looked at "The Harold Evans Papers."⁶² Harold Evans, a retired Christchurch district court judge, along with peace activist Dr. Kate Dewes, initiated The World Court Project in the 1980s; their objective was to progress nuclear disarmament through international law.⁶³ A recurrent theme across the study related to how the physical artifact served as a portal into the past; for example, Mark said his archive immersion allowed "me to go back in time to when they

were first made.” Based on Allan’s and Mark’s comments, the tactile experience of working with archive documents drew these students into a more active form of learning compared to their regular coursework.

Story 4: Emily, Maria, and Eleanor Describe How Frustration Turned into a “Learning Moment” When Learning How to Interpret Archival Documents Such as Political Newsletters, Pamphlets, and Ephemera

Self-directed learning in unfamiliar learning environments such as the archive challenged some of the students. When met with boxes stuffed full of documents, first-time archive users often feel overwhelmed, especially if students feel time-poor. For example, Emily’s first thought was that “Archives were hard to access and it was also hard to find anything specific.” Maria echoed Emily’s sentiments: “It was difficult to find relevant and helpful information, I had to skim the entire thing [newsletters], which could become dull and frustrating... the sources had no global context and so were sometimes difficult to integrate and interpret.” Students, motivated by coursework deadlines, found solutions. Maria and Emily, who often studied together, developed some ways of managing the wealth of archival material. For example, Maria explained how, “Ultimately I just picked a random issue...”

Eleanor, another student, recounted how she managed to break through her experience of archive overload:

Perhaps even more helpful was just skimming the magazine itself, reading the headlines and other articles or letters, as they put the Vietnam [War] Protests into context. ... Seeing headlines about developments into women’s activism and Maori rights provided me a first-hand representation of the other issues at the time.

Eleanor read the Progressive Youth Movement (PYM) papers,⁶⁴ a radical counterculture movement active in anti-Vietnam War protests in the 1960s–1970s, and then combined it with an insider account, *Bullshit & Jellybeans*, by political activist Tim Shadbolt. Shadbolt was a key PYM key member and leader of the Auckland University Society for the Active Prevention of Cruelty to Politically Apathetic Humans (AUSAPOCHPAH); imprisoned for bad language in public, unpaid fines, and other antisocial behavior associated with his political activism.⁶⁵ Students found room to express ironic humor; for example, Eleanor labeled *Bullshit & Jellybeans* as “uncut,” as Shadbolt’s opening pages recount a sexual fantasy while in prison.⁶⁶ For most students, frustration turned into opportunity to critically reflect on the processes of doing history, as Eleanor commented:

“The primary source assignments challenged me to consider new types of sources, draw on my own conclusions based on original pieces of evidence, and learn how to connect diverse materials together in one, organized context.”

Eleanor also said, “Through these assignments I learnt how to think, question bias, and draw connections independently.” Like Hinemoa in story 2, Eleanor had learned how to reflect and test her ideas with discipline-based knowledge. Even students who had less time to linger in the archives such as Emily found a way—sifting “through a pile of trivial matters to find

something worth of your particular argument," she noted how "This can be time consuming but when you do find something, then it's very rewarding."

Story 5: Allan and William Consider the Impact of the OBL Exercises on Their Learning

An interesting aspect of the study findings related to the high level of student engagement. Students who invested large amounts of time in the archive said they felt enriched from the experience. The immersive nature of the OBL experience had an affective impact, helping students explore their own attitudes toward their own learning. For example, Allan, the business student featured in story 3, said, "I really enjoyed my many hours in the MB library exploring NZ history." He slowed down and thought of different ways to look at the Waterfront Strikers archive documents, such as wondering, "if these newsletters were leaked to the police or government officials who were opposed to the strike," and what their response might be toward the content and tone of the strikers' literature. William, another student who reflected on his learning process, demonstrated he understood OBL as an historical method, writing in his exam paper: "In order to produce a good piece of historical writing you need to use a wide range of sources" before concluding "although historical research takes a lot of time [...] the best way to learn is to do it." Allan and Williams' reflections confirm the OBL literature—that the greatest learning happens for first-time users over a very concentrated period.⁶⁷ Students certainly recognized immediate benefits from OBL, the focus of this study.

Story 6: The Academic Library Staff and History Teacher Reflect on the Project's Shortcomings and Successes

The process of observation and reflection was useful to the academic library staff who felt vulnerable when they sensed some students using the Macmillan Brown collections were overwhelmed or confused by the primary source material. Behind the scenes, they debated whether to "solve all of these [student] frustrations."⁶⁸ Their conversation helped them understand that: "not all the limitations students found in the primary sources were intrinsically problematic—they learnt much dealing to these limitations—skimming, seeking counter views, using secondary sources for wider context, identifying the producer of material." By means of Duhs' terminology, students managed to leap over most learning hurdles, as Maria (featured in story 4) summarized: "My main limitations were ... deciding what information to use.... The primary sources were interesting and the staff very helpful." Other successes include sparking student interest in the idea of a museum internship or practicum placement (Crystal is example of this).

While this study focused on the short-term benefits of OBL and exposed students to the first three of Rosalind Duhs' 4-Step OBL learning cycle (for example: concrete experience, then reflection, followed by doing), longer-term benefits such as transference, the last step, were also evident. For example, over the two-year study period, some students continued developing OBL skills and some became frequent Macmillan Brown users.⁶⁹ One HIST128 student, Catherine, applied her newly acquired OBL skills in another history course with the same teacher in the following semester. In this instance, Catherine combined oral history methods with cookery books from the Macmillan Brown collection for an essay about New Zealand food traditions. As the archivist observed: "We believe our project helped people feel confident about researching in the library and archive." Like Alvarez, the archivist in-

vested in the project because of its pedagogical value: “Working with motivated students, seeing ‘history’ become real for students. Witnessing their engagement and excitement was very rewarding.” The way the academic library staff worked together also contributed to a great sense of satisfaction, as the archivist said: “What we really enjoyed was collaborating as a team; the sum total is greater than the individual parts.” The OBL project also fostered future library advocates, as one librarian recounted: “We also saw student interest grow and some started to think about museum, library or archive work as a future occupation.” Such students were identified in the “ACRL Value of Academic Libraries” (2017) report as an important sector advocate group.⁷⁰

Conclusions: Gaining a Deeper Appreciation of OBL’s Significance

This article describes undergraduate students’ first-time OBL experiences. The stories show how students enjoyed the practical exercise of doing history; they gained confidence working with historical fragments, became more independent in their study habits, and learned how to think critically. The action research model established a strong and fun culture of teamwork between the academic library staff who supported the OBL project and the history teacher. Sharing reflections as a team, lessons included ideas about how to streamline processes. The project aligned with the academic library’s focus on fostering students’ object-based skills early in their academic career. The teacher valued the opportunity to incorporate archival documents into the New Zealand history curriculum to help students develop historical research skills. The course assessments developed students’ understanding of OBL as well as discipline-based knowledge. The OBL tutorials gave basic lessons about how to handle objects and how to read historical documents (step 1 of Duhs’ 4-Step OBL learning cycle). Students then applied this new knowledge to their own object-based inquiry, and their exam responses reflected on the overall OBL experience (steps 2 and 3). Some students, like Catherine, transferred their skills to other history courses (step 4). A fascinating result was that a sizable minority of learners had a transformative experience that helped them to “get” the temporality and physicality of history as a discipline. Getting students to develop a bit of true passion for their discipline is worth celebrating!

How then could the scope of this OBL project broaden? One idea involves collaboration with other collection-based organizations and the inclusion of teachers from other learning organizations in the region using OBL methods (such as supervision of student internships, practicums, or research projects). Another way is expanding the number of practitioners and scope of institutions involved at a national level, similar to the study by Thogerson et al., to help OBL practitioners better understand student learning as well as find ways to improve OBL methods. OBL is suited to small groups on topics related to the collection strengths. The model can adapt to the short-course format of summer or winter school timetables, with classes held onsite where the university special collections are housed. Beyond the university, galleries, libraries, archives, and museums can roll out a short object-based course for different communities of learners as part of their outreach program. Ultimately, educators from most disciplines could run a similar objects-based program. If teaching large classes, simply liaise with your academic library staff to discuss how to access the collections while meeting the preservation needs of such items. Integrating artifacts into the curriculum is well worth the effort. As the participant William, the New Zealand history enthusiast, said, “Objects bring history to life.”

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Notes

1. Rosalind Duhs, "Learning from University Museums and Collections in Higher Education: University College London (UCL)," *University Museums and Collections Journal* (UMAC) 3 (2010): 184.
2. Duhs, "Learning from University Museums and Collections in Higher Education."
3. Marta C. Lourenço, "Contributions to the History of University Museums and Collections in Europe," *Museologia* 3 (2003): 17–26.
4. Lourenço, "Contributions to the History of University Museums and Collections in Europe."
5. Helen J. Chatterjee, Leonie Hannan, and Linda Thomson, "An Introduction to Object-Based Learning and Multisensory Engagement," in *Engaging the Senses: Object-Based Learning in Higher Education*, eds. Helen J. Chatterjee and Leonie Hannan (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2015), 1–18.
6. Jane Thorgersen et al., "Creating Curriculum Connections: A University Museum Object-Based Learning Project," *Education for Information* 34 (2018): 113–20.
7. Thorgersen et al., "Creating Curriculum Connections."
8. Thorgersen et al., "Creating Curriculum Connections," 116–19; see also Chatterjee et al., "An Introduction to Object-Based Learning and Multisensory Engagement."
9. Waka is a traditional Māori wooden canoe with East Polynesian origins; they range in size from small fishing canoes to larger, decorated war canoes up to 130 feet long. See Hoturoa Barclay-Kerr, "Waka—canoes," *Te Ara: the Encyclopedia of New Zealand* (12 June 2006), www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/waka-canoes.
10. Weta or wētā is the common name for about 100 different giant flightless crickets endemic to New Zealand; see "Wētā," Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai, <https://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/native-animals/invertebrates/weta/> [accessed 12 January 2021]. However, it also refers to the name of Wellington-based Weta Workshop whose designs shaped the rich visual fantasy of the *Lord of the Rings* film trilogy (2001–03), produced by Peter Jackson. Each year New Zealand history courses attracted American students; a number said watching *Lord of the Rings* was a factor inspiring them to visit.
11. For further discussion on novice learners from a museum and art gallery education perspective, see Esther Helen McNaughton, "The Language of Living: Developing Intelligent Novices at The Suter Art Gallery" (Master's thesis, Massey University, 2010); see also Chatterjee et al., "An Introduction to Object-Based Learning and Multisensory Engagement," 13.
12. Chatterjee and Hannan, *Engaging the Senses*; Duhs, "Learning from University Museums and Collections in Higher Education"; Thorgersen et al., "Creating Curriculum Connections."
13. Laurel Richardson, *Writing Strategies: Reaching Diverse Audiences* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1990).
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15. Christina Kreps, "University Museums as Laboratories for Experiential Learning and Engaged Practice," *Museum Anthropology* 38, no. 2 (2015): 96–111.
16. Thorgersen et al., "Creating Curriculum Connections"; Chatterjee et al., "An Introduction to Object-Based Learning and Multisensory Engagement."
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18. Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), "Value of Academic Libraries: A Comprehensive Research Review and Report" (2010), www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/issues/value/val_report.pdf; ACRL, "Academic Library Impact: Improving Practice and Essential Areas to Research" (2017),

www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/publications/whitepapers/academiclib.pdf.

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22. Valerie A. Harris and Anne C. Weller, "Use of Special Collections as an Opportunity for Outreach in the Academic Library," *Journal of Library Administration* 52, no. 3/4 (2012): 294–303.
23. John Hennigar Shuh, "Teaching Yourself to Teach with Objects," *Nova Scotia Journal of Education* 7, no. 4 (1982): 8–15.
24. Kreps, "University Museums as Laboratories for Experiential Learning and Engaged Practice."
25. Chatterjee and Hannan, *Engaging the Senses*; Duhs, "Learning from University Museums and Collections in Higher Education," 184; Thorgersen et al., "Creating Curriculum Connections."
26. Shuh, "Teaching Yourself to Teach with Objects."
27. Shuh, "Teaching Yourself to Teach with Objects"; Thorgersen et al., "Creating Curriculum Connections."
28. Duhs, "Learning from University Museums and Collections in Higher Education."
29. Duhs' diagram of Kolb's experiential learning cycle is referenced in Jenny Marie, "The Role of Object-Based Learning in Transferable Skills Development," *University Museums and Collections Journal* 3 (2010): 188. Kolb's model also appears in Chatterjee and Hannan, *Engaging the Senses*, 2.
30. David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984), 1–19, 38, 42. For detailed analysis of the constructivist museum, see Kodi R. Jeffery-Clay, "Constructivism in Museums: How Museums Create Meaningful Learning Environments," *The Journal of Museum Education* 23, no. 1 (1998): 3–7, and George E. Hein, "The Constructivist Museum" (1995), <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.461.3236&rep=rep1&type=pdf> [accessed 14 March 2019].
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(Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

47. The teacher advised the examination invigilators about this additional process.

48. *Iwi Tawhito—Whenua Hou: Ancient Peoples—New Lands*, Canterbury Museum, <https://www.canterburymuseum.com/whats-on/iwi-tawhito-whenua-hou/> [accessed 13 January 2021].

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50. In 2020, in response to the Black Lives Matter movement, local iwi and members of the public called for the removal of the dioramas. The Canterbury Museum responded by partially screening the displays and issued an apology. The new label explains that the dioramas were built in the 1980s and represented a “colonial mind-set.” The director said the diorama were due an upgrade but the Canterbury quakes set this plan back, Cate Broughton, “Complaints About Māori Exhibit not Addressed for Four Years,” *Stuff* (15 June 2020), <https://www.stuff.co.nz/the-press/news/300035413/complaints-about-mori-exhibit-not-addressed-for-four-years>.

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55. This idea of slowing down for time-taking purposeful interactions resonates with similar trends such as slow thinking.

56. Hinemoa’s grandmother passed away just some months after the interview.

57. Hinemoa read Dianne Bardsley, *The Land Girls: In a Man’s World, 1936–1946* (Dunedin, NZ: Otago University Press, 2000), which also included oral histories.

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60. John Bates, *1951* (Auckland, NZ: Bates Productions Limited, 2001).

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62. “Harold Evans Papers,” Macmillan Brown Archives, University of Canterbury.

63. “The World Court Project,” Aotearoa/New Zealand 30 Years Nuclear Free, <https://rune.une.edu.au/web/bitstream/1959.11/16790/5/open/SOURCE03.pdf>.

64. “Progressive Youth Movement Papers,” Vietnam War protest, Macmillan Brown Archive.

65. Tim Shadbolt, *Bullshit & Jellybeans* (Wellington, NZ: W.A. Taylor, 1971), 97–104. Shadbolt was later elected Mayor of Waitemata in 1983 and 1986 then Mayor of Invercargill from 1993–95, voted in his second term in 1998, and re-elected since.

66. Shadbolt, *Bullshit & Jellybeans*, 12–13.

67. Chatterjee et al., “An Introduction to Object-Based Learning and Multisensory Engagement.”

68. Email correspondence with Macmillan Brown staff in 2014 and 2015.

69. Three to four years postproject informal conversations between the history teacher and some student research participants revealed how they felt *manaakitanga*, a strong sense of belonging, at the Macmillan Brown.

70. ACRL, “Value of Academic Libraries.”