



Student perceptions of object-based learning

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Abstract

Since returning to face-to-face teaching, post COVID-19 UK higher education has needed to adjust to significant challenges, including the acceleration of the role that generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) and personal screens play in the student experience. Whilst screens now mediate the learning experience to a large degree, this study investigates a return to materiality via object-based learning (OBL) as a multisensory, experiential pedagogy with the potential to stimulate criticality and build confidence in person-to-person communications amongst taught students.

This paper details a research project into student perceptions and experiences of OBL at the University of Leeds. Taught students participated in experimental OBL workshops and then reported their experiences in a qualitatively focused questionnaire which included some quantitative questions aimed at understanding overall satisfaction. Participants were overwhelmingly positive about their experience of taking part in OBL workshops, particularly in relation to working with others, engaging with materiality, using their skills of analysis and interpretation, and the active nature of learning in this context. OBL requires a classroom dynamic in which academic staff facilitate and guide discussion, rather than conforming to traditional didactic patterns of teaching.

Students of Sociology and Social Policy taking part in the study saw the direct relevance of the objects under discussion to their disciplinary area, and the results of this study are assisting the School in strategically implementing OBL within the curriculum, specifically in a new module for third year undergraduate students, The Sociology of Objects.

Keywords: experiential learning; object-based learning; pedagogy; sociology.

Introduction

In disciplines traditionally dominated by interactions with texts, it can be challenging to incorporate experiential learning in curricula tightly packed with content, often didactically delivered. A Learning Developer-led one-year research project at the University of Leeds aimed to understand the pedagogies, best practice and potential applications of object-based learning (OBL) in the area of Sociology. This paper shares details of an investigation into student responses to experimental OBL workshops at the University which formed part of that project. The pedagogical foundations of OBL will be explored, insights into the research methods used will be given, and student perspectives on their OBL experience will be presented. Finally, the benefits of active, social learning in relation to agency and student perceptions of participating in the workshops will be discussed, as well as the implications for adapting the role of academic and professional staff in delivering OBL as a form of guided discourse rather than a traditionally didactic experience.

What is object-based learning (OBL)?

OBL is an established means of engaging students in active, discursive and critical learning, that puts learners at the forefront of investigation and offers them an experience far beyond traditional didactic learning (Kukhareva et al., 2019; UCL, n.d.). In contrast to lectures, in OBL students explore an object/s, often using their own questions as a starting point within a disciplinary context. Geology students, for example, might examine a mineral specimen to establish more knowledge about it and its context, History students could utilise antique coins as a means of understanding the nature of power, or Sociology students might use a tent to stimulate discussions around homelessness or leisure. The material object is therefore the starting point for deep critical and synoptic thinking, often in a collective learning context.

It is important to differentiate between OBL and the practice of using objects as a basis from which to teach didactically. In OBL, the active process of investigation comes to the fore, allowing students to critically explore their own questions and pathways with guidance from the facilitator. Active learning, as Chickering and Gamson observe ‘...is not a spectator sport’ (1987, p.4), and students participating in OBL actively practice a range

of academic literacies and broader skills connected to thinking critically, solving problems, hypothesising, and communicating etc.

The researcher (a Learning Developer), came to OBL through a specific teaching experience with students in the School of Sociology and Social Policy using magazine covers to stimulate critical thinking. Critical thinking is core to the work of Learning Developers and the success of students. Noticing the authenticity and enthusiasm of the student response to this activity, further investigation into the ways in which materiality might be used in higher education resulted in discussions with the then School Director for Student Education, Associate Professor Tom Campbell. This study confirms the relevance of OBL to fostering critical conversations both in disciplinary and cross-disciplinary contexts.

Why is OBL useful now?

Higher education is currently grappling with a range of fast-moving issues which have relevance to the value of harnessing materiality in learning. Our relationship with personal screens is a case in point. The mediation of learning via screens and generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in addition to a post-COVID-19 environment in which digital learning was essential, has resulted in a sense of digital ubiquity in our campus classrooms. Whilst this has many benefits, it does not mean that the analogue space is obsolete or undesirable for learning. In fact, we might argue that the opposite is the case:

We're at a moment where the desire for a tangible, haptic encounter with something is understood to be an antidote to something that is perceived to be unhealthy in our society, which is the extent to which we reside in the digital sphere (Grafe, 2021).

Grafe's assertion feels highly relevant in the current context and gives weight to the philosophy that on-campus learning experiences should be engaging and offer students opportunities for in-person connectivity not only with their discipline, but also with their peers and educators (Grafe, 2021). The results of this research indicate that OBL experiences are a potentially powerful means to counter digital ubiquity and burn-out by engaging with materiality and foregrounding socially distributed learning.

What are the pedagogic underpinnings of OBL?

The pedagogic roots of OBL lie within experiential and active learning, as well as social learning theories. Vygotsky and Dewey's work in social learning for example, is pertinent when (as it often is) group or paired learning is used in an OBL context (Dewey, 1967; Vygotsky, 1978). The lens of social learning lends itself particularly well to the process of the investigation aspect of OBL, in which students often work together to consider an object within specific learning objectives. The benefits of social learning are myriad:

... social contexts catalyze both within and between-person differences in motivation and personal growth, resulting in people being more self-motivated, energized and integrated in some situations, domains, and cultures... (Ryan and Deci, 2020, p.68).

When we are connected to our community, our sense of self and personal value is likely to be enhanced, making the university experience more fulfilling as a result (Fay and Skipper, 2022). Social learning may therefore play positively into students' sense of belonging to their learning community, university and discipline. The importance of social learning in OBL however, co-exists with an acknowledgement of the contribution of Piaget's work on constructivism and the ways in which we might consider individual students expanding their ideas about the material world and their discipline through their interactions and discourse with objects (Piaget, 1973). Students can of course, encounter and learn from materiality on an individual basis, as part of an exercise in object investigation for example, but it is not necessarily routinely a part of undergraduate curricula in many disciplines, including Sociology.

One of the ways in which OBL differs from other types of active learning, is the way in which it slows learning down, facilitating depth of experience and opportunities for reflection and hypotheses formulation. At a time when culturally, speed of experience is often seen as desirable, introducing a form of experiential learning which requires a reduction in pace feels almost transgressive. Slow-looking techniques were introduced into the workshops as a purposeful means of focusing attention on the objects in the room.

The practice of slow-looking is often used in the study of art to examine small details as well as a whole artwork, and can be practiced in numerous ways, including simply sitting with a piece for an extended period of time. One of the benefits of this technique is the opportunity to consider an object in depth and follow your own curiosity, instead of being guided towards what someone else might consider important or significant.

Contemporary university curricula are often fast paced with weekly changes of topic within the modular structure. Slowing down the pace, however, may benefit students through a focus on the individual and their learning and may have specific benefits in terms of ‘...the shaping of personal attributes, such as critical thinking, self-awareness, discipline, resilience, leadership, empathy and compassion’ (van der Sluis, 2020, p.6).

By deploying slow-looking, students are able to take an object investigation to a deeper level through structured activities which focus attention on details before engaging with the whole (Tishman, 2018). As painter David Hockney stated, ‘why not look longer at something, look longer and maybe see more?’ (cited in PBS NewsHour, 2018, 5:48). Hockney’s advice is particularly pertinent to OBL icebreaker activities in which an object may be explored by touch alone, setting both a slower pace and a collaborative atmosphere amongst the group; an object may therefore be considered for longer, inviting more observations, questions and hypotheses as a result. Utilising slow-looking is a powerful means to harness attention both individually and collectively.

With its pedagogical roots firmly in constructivist and experiential theories of learning, and by drawing on the practice of slow-looking, OBL therefore offers a rich environment in which to practice a wide range of skills and develop student confidence. This research project investigated student perceptions of their experience of OBL and the skills which they felt they were using and developing after taking part in an experimental workshop at the University of Leeds.

Research phases and methods

Background to the project

Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, discussions between the researcher (Learning Advisor to the School of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Leeds) and the then Director for Student Education for the School revealed a shared interest in

materiality and experiential learning. The possibility for enhancing critical thinking in the undergraduate cohort was another driver and there followed an interest in exploring the pedagogical suitability of OBL to the discipline. A research proposal was made to the Leeds Institute for Teaching Excellence (LITE) by the researcher, supported by the School. Given the primarily text-based curricula within the discipline, and the traditional dominance of didactic teaching methods, it was proposed that OBL would be a complementary pedagogy to engage students with materiality as an act of decentring the human within the discipline to take a wider view of Sociology beyond the anthropocentric, thus extending their conceptualisation of theoretical perspectives and offering new pathways to learning (Campbell and Newton, 2024). If students from the School responded positively to the experimental workshops, this would support the case to deploy OBL as a valid pedagogical approach. It was hypothesised that using groups of students from a variety of disciplines from across the university and then separate groups of Sociology and Social Policy students, would prove insightful. Would Sociology students, for example, respond differently to OBL in comparison to those studying in different subject areas?

After receiving full ethical approval for the project, two major phases of work took place between September 2023 and November 2024. The first phase was an investigation of exemplars of OBL both within the University of Leeds and at other Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the UK and internationally, as well as reviewing supporting pedagogies. This included speaking to a number of OBL practitioners and researchers in the UK and internationally, as well as desk-based research looking at the pedagogical basis of OBL and recent research. In addition, two visits to the University College London (UCL) OBL laboratory space on the Bloomsbury campus took place to learn more about OBL in practice. The second phase of work involved designing and running experimental workshops with taught student volunteers consisting of a) students from a range of faculties from across the university participating in a mixed group workshop and b), students from the School of Sociology and Social Policy only, at the University of Leeds. In total, 17 students from a range of faculties took part in the workshops, whilst there were 24 Sociology and Social Policy students in their own separate groups. The aim of the workshops was to trial OBL with taught students and understand their responses to this experience via a subsequent qualitatively oriented questionnaire.

Questionnaire design

A qualitatively oriented anonymous questionnaire was selected as a method to gain insights into the perceptions and experiences of participants. Focus groups were initially considered as a means of eliciting participant views, however, in the context of the highly interactive nature of the workshops themselves, it was possible that they may have felt ‘talked out’ after such a busy and novel learning experience, and therefore the responses might have been limited in nature. Holding focus groups at another time post-workshops was also a consideration. However, it was anticipated that there would be a reduction in participation with not all participants returning to take part in a focus group and that memories of the workshop may have been less reliable and fresh if they had been delayed. Another significant risk in holding focus groups is the likelihood of a small number of voices dominating and leading the discussion at the expense of other voices (Yeo, Miller-Young and Manarin, 2024). A group administered questionnaire, therefore, was considered a more reliable choice as a means of gathering data, and the format would require little explanation for participants.

The questionnaire included a range of multiple-choice questions and open response text boxes to elicit deeper reflections from participants on their behaviour, feelings and observations (Andres, 2012). Given the novelty of the pedagogical approach, open response questions were considered important to this research project to understand the student experience. A questionnaire limited to closed questions would give no access to the personal expressions of participants, and therefore miss their voice. Moreover, given the small scale of the research, the data from open responses would be manageable to process (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018; Yeo, Miller-Young and Manarin, 2024). The balance of questions was designed to prompt students to think about different aspects of their experience such as whether focusing on an object made it easier or more difficult to work with others, and which skills they felt they were practicing through their participation in the workshop.

Qualitative questions asked in the questionnaire were:

1. What do you think are the benefits of learning with objects?
2. Do you think that working with objects made it easier or more difficult to work with others? Why do you think this might be?
3. How was the workshop different from your usual on-campus classes?

4. What do you think are the drawbacks of learning with objects?
5. Do you have any other thoughts and reflections about today's workshop that you would like to share?

All participants chose to complete the survey straight after the workshop. To avoid researcher bias or tacit influence on students completing the questionnaire, the researcher left the room whilst students were engaged in this activity. A research assistant remained, however, to answer any questions which might arise.

Questionnaire results were collated into a spreadsheet for analysis, which was primarily a manual process of grouping themes and issues mentioned in free text answers as well as processing multiple choice answers using Excel tools. The spreadsheet indicated whether each student was from the School of Sociology and Social Policy, or from another School or faculty within the university, thus, enabling easy comparison of responses. In addition, due to the small number of respondents (39 in total), the results of open-response questions were printed out, colour coded into Sociology and Social Policy and 'other' students from different Schools and faculties and hand sorted into the questions that they corresponded to. This process enabled a visual overview of all the open response data and therefore whether there were any significant differences between the responses of Sociology and Social Policy students and others from across different disciplines.

Object selection

Given the rich object collections in the Feminist Archive North (a sub-collection in the University of Leeds Special Collections), objects from this archive and other archives, were selected for use in the workshops. In selecting objects, it was important to consider the nature of each in terms of its appropriateness to be handled and the nature of the content. Consideration was also given as to whether individual objects would provide sufficient scope for discussion, whilst also avoiding potentially triggering issues such as sexual violence. Guidance was given to participants to indicate that the objects reflected issues, ideas and opinions of their time and context. These opinions did not necessarily reflect those of the researcher.

Objects which featured in the workshops:

1. Leeds Lesbian Line fabric banner (no date).
2. Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament Christmas card (no date).
3. UCU armband (2023).
4. Cats against bombs protest t-shirt (no date).
5. Nuclear disarmament protest t-shirt (no date).
6. UPIAS disability activism newsletter (1981).

Workshop structure

All workshops began with students participating in a whole group slow-looking activity using a simple advent calendar technique devised by the researcher and inspired by the work of artist Corita Kent (Corita, 2025). A flat document was covered by a larger piece of paper in which five one-inch square ‘doors’ had been pre-cut. Participants were encouraged to volunteer to open one door at a time, after which the whole group would discuss what they could see. This slow-looking activity generated intense, wide-ranging discussions amongst all groups and helped participants to acclimatise to looking deeply at each object, debate their observations and formulate hypotheses.

A visual thinking tool ‘see, think, wonder’ was used as the basis for discussions in the workshops (Project Zero, 2025). An A3 paper template was used which was split into three columns: ‘see’, ‘think’, ‘wonder’. Students were encouraged to use a new template for their examination of each object, and these were quickly filled with information as they moved between objects. Students often took their completed templates around the room with them, accumulating material evidence of their critical thinking. The templates were used in largely similar ways by the students in each group; many noted down their further questions and hypotheses, for example. In conversation with others, they referred to their notes and compared ideas. The ‘see’ and ‘wonder’ columns tended to be the most used, as conversations moved very quickly and students did not always capture their ‘think’ phases in writing. Although this way of working was largely effective, it must be acknowledged that it is not entirely inclusive, and an alternative e-solution might be more appropriate.

Results

100% (39) of students completed the post-workshop questionnaire and the results gave deep insights into student perceptions and experiences of OBL in the experimental workshops. Open response questions were thoughtfully answered, resulting in a rich set of data which demonstrated overwhelming positivity towards OBL from participants. 100% chose the questionnaire options 'fun' or 'interesting' when asked about their impressions of the workshop. No one selected 'uninteresting' or 'boring' as responses.

Fun was a recurring theme in student free text comments throughout the questionnaire and whilst this was not an observational study, it was clear from frequent laughter during workshops that participants enjoyed many aspects of the experience with one participant commenting: 'It was fun because I enjoyed seeing how we all have different interpretations of the things we see around us. I found it quite interesting to learn new things in such a relaxed way'.

When asked why they chose the words 'fun' or 'interesting' in a subsequent open response question, many expressed the view that the objects in and of themselves were interesting. One Sociology and Social Policy student commented directly on the materiality of the objects: 'We could actually have a look at the details or textures unlike media'. Another student from a different discipline wrote that: 'quite a lot of my work is virtual, and when reading/searching for information I am not taught to question it'. The contrast of this material experience with their usual digital practices was stark, highlighting the extent to which students are habituated to using institutional and personal devices and the ways in which learning is frequently mediated by the screen; learning with objects was clearly a new experience.

Participants specifically and repeatedly mentioned the following areas positively in their open responses:

- Examining the details of objects.
- Analysing and interpreting information.
- Making connections and associations with their prior knowledge.
- Using questioning skills.
- Using active listening skills.

Quantitative questions also asked students to indicate which activities they had noticed themselves participating in during the workshop. It is notable that active listening, discussing different perspectives and other skills/experiences connected with sharing and communicating are all strongly highlighted, reflecting the broader finding of OBL as a means of working together meaningfully. Students had different ways of expressing their views on their experiences, often referring to critical thinking and active learning, for example, with their own terminology: 'It actually makes you question the information [sic] you are being given, rather than just memorizing it.'

In relation to working with others, almost all participants expressed the view that objects facilitated easier discussions and group working. Numerous comments focused on the enjoyment of working with others and thinking collectively: 'I think for group work, it is perfect. It gives you a sense of belonging and it is quite fun when you try to know something from scratch'. Only one participant reported having a different perspective on the experience of working in groups: 'In a smaller group, [it was] easier [to work with others], as it removed awkwardness and gave us direction. In the larger group I felt overwhelmed and like I couldn't get my voice heard as easily'.

One of the aims of this study was to understand the perceived contrasts between OBL and the teaching that participants normally experienced. Aside from one participant who identified themselves as studying History, all other participants reported that OBL was very different to the ways in which they were normally taught. In many cases, they indicated that they welcomed the opportunity to be active in their learning and have agency in the classroom. Comments included: 'Very collaborative + lots of open discussions. Lots of different interpretations + building on each others ideas which is less done in usual classes', and 'We have more time to explore, analyse and talk about the material that we've been given, so it makes us very focused and interested. We became more critical and we're having fun learning.'

There were few discernable differences in the questionnaire responses from Sociology and Social Policy participants in comparison to mixed groups from a range of disciplines. However, some Sociology and Social Policy students commented on what they saw as the clear connections between the protest objects and their studies. These participants were clearly struck by this new way of viewing their discipline: 'Many of the sources related,

tangentially and also directly, to the modules I am taking within the School of Sociology and Social Policy. It was genuinely fascinating to delve into some of the minutiae of people's movements and the ephemera of marginalised communities'. Another commented: 'Objects are an important way to connect with our history and social connections, also with our way to express ourselves to others. I think they have a lot to say and we have a lot to learn about the symbolic world they represent'.

Discussion

Social learning and enjoyment

Participant responses indicate that genuine enthusiasm was generated by the experimental workshops. The presence of and focus on objects seemed to make the process of working with one another easier than in other kinds of university teaching; participants found the workshops interactive and beneficial to their skills in areas such as critical thinking, analysing and interpreting information and using active listening. Furthermore, the vast majority of participants reported that an object focus made social learning easy. They described being able to '...bounce ideas off each other', discussions flowing more easily and having a '...willingness to learn from others'. Very few students mentioned frustrations or difficulties in working with others, which was an unexpected outcome, as it might be anticipated that some individuals would find this learning environment less comfortable than traditional didactic teaching.

It must be acknowledged that the 'low stakes' nature of the workshops may also have contributed to the positive experiences and responses to participation in this research. This activity sat outside of formal programmes of study, there were no assessments attached to it, and participants did not need to make notes or commit learning to memory. In essence, they were participating in a short and acknowledged experiment; this was in no way a test and therefore students may have felt freer to express themselves without consequence.

Prown's perception of object interpretation as an individual pursuit with narrow interpretive boundaries, has been broken down by the positive social nature of the experimental workshops in this study (cited in Kingery, 1996). When learning is socially distributed and constructed, opportunities to connect deeply with others naturally follow. Workshop discussions, for example, uncovered the fact that the symbol of a black cat (which featured

on one of our objects), is construed very differently depending on its cultural context. Equally, a rotary telephone was alien to one person, but an object of deep nostalgia to another. In sharing these contrasting experiences of the world, we may experience a positive form of cognitive dissonance in which connection and the benefit of another perspective are the rewards of our collective efforts.

Following this line of reasoning, it is proposed that inviting students to bring their personal cultural capital into the classroom has a beneficial impact on social learning. Furthermore, the collective learning that results when everyone's perspective is valued has a democratising effect on communication. This finding is in line with Woodall's (2019, p.101) view that 'objects might even be described as levellers, for everyone can be brought into a conversation about and with an object', following research into object dialogue boxes (another form of OBL).

The concept of 'joint action/attention' provides a means of understanding why working with others in this context was viewed so positively by participants as 'joint attention provides a mechanism for sharing the same perceptual input and directing attention to the same events' (Sebanz, Bekkering and Knoblich, 2006. p.75). Marsh, Richardson and Schmidt (2009) extend our understanding of joint action further by demonstrating that when people work together, they know that they can achieve more which, in turn, encourages cooperation. Applying the lens of joint action theory clarifies why participants in this study found it overwhelmingly easier to work with one another when objects were their focus.

A further, fundamental question is raised by this study: why is social learning easier with objects? Perhaps in the presence of an object we are able to focus on something outside of ourselves, a proxy for our ideas, thoughts and feelings which otherwise might be intimidating, even embarrassing to say out loud? My hypothesis is that the presence of objects allows us to go further in our thinking than we ordinarily would, to say more, to look deeper, to listen more intently to the ideas of others; objects mediate our interactions. By introducing students to objects within our disciplinary frameworks, we are improvising with the collective thoughts of our students, a process which, by its very nature, is unique in every iteration.

Playful learning and agency

Corita Kent's concept of work/play (or PLORK) (Corita, 2025) sits well here as a means of understanding the classroom dynamic in evidence in the experimental workshops. Kent coined the term PLORK to describe the seamless feeling of absorbed purposefulness experienced when engaged in work that feels like play, and which often results in new and creative intellectual pathways. The PLORK-like feelings reported by participants in their OBL experience are also evidence of the development of social cohesion of a different kind. Not only is learning taking place between groups of students, but it is happening in a way which is engaging and fun. Play as a facet of learning in universities is often characterised by gamification, including escape rooms, card games etc. (Playful Learning Association, 2025). Learning with objects, however, presents an alternative to this highly structured and rule-driven pedagogy which may not appeal to all, and may lack the element of student agency (Newton, 2024). The workshops in this study were specifically designed with student agency in mind, to allow free exploration of the objects in the room. In contrast to the didactic experience of lectures, students were encouraged to make their own meaning, ask their own questions and engage in debate and hypothesis. This was clearly a new or unusual experience for most participants, as evidenced by their questionnaire responses.

Rich social and experiential learning is particularly valuable in a post-COVID-19 and Gen-AI saturated higher education sector. By engaging our students in active learning with material culture, we are more likely to catch and retain their attention and motivation, perhaps reducing the likelihood of them outsourcing their assessment submissions to Gen-AI. As one student participant commented: 'it has reminded my [sic] why learning & education can be rewarding & fulfilling'.

Conclusion

Participant perceptions of OBL workshops in this study were overwhelmingly positive, regardless of their discipline. Their comments encompassed reflections on OBL as a highly engaging learning experience and a means of learning positively with others, using criticality, cultural capital and communication skills. Underlying many of the questionnaire comments was a heightened sense of belonging and deep engagement in learning. The enjoyment of students during the workshops was particularly notable; participants were

able to connect with others in their conversations and the spirit of joint action which resulted, undoubtedly contributed towards making the experience rewarding (Sebanz, Bekkering and Knoblich, 2006; Marsh, Richardson and Schmidt, 2009).

The lens of materiality appears to have had particular significance to some students of Sociology and Social Policy, as the objects featured in workshops were perceived to be highly relevant to themes in their programmes. Comments made by these participants about the applicability of OBL to their discipline are encouraging in the context of deploying OBL pedagogies in specific areas of the School's curriculum. Understanding the role that objects might play in teaching within Sociology and Social Policy is currently underexplored and the data from this study is a useful starting point for further research. Furthermore, as this study focused on learning with objects in a co-curricular setting, it would be desirable to understand whether these findings are also true in deeply contextualised OBL Sociology and Social Policy workshops taking place within the curriculum.

The results of this research have been directly applied to the development and delivery of a new module for final year undergraduate students, *The Sociology of Objects*, which uses practical workshops in Special Collections and engagement with contemporary objects to elicit deep thinking in relation to themes such as our human entanglement with materiality. Several taught student programmes at the University of Leeds now explicitly feature OBL learning opportunities as a direct result of dissemination activities which the researcher undertook with colleagues on concluding the research. The researcher has established a local and national network of academic and professional staff with an interest in OBL who are now sharing their in-curriculum practices from disciplines as diverse as Mathematics, Design, History, Classics, Dentistry and Performance. Their approaches are highly varied and many spill over into research and publication. The Bauman Institute at the University of Leeds for example, has recently introduced a 'Thinking with Objects' programme of work. This programme is an acknowledgement, not only of the importance of the materiality of the Bauman archive at the University of Leeds, but of the ways in which the material world can be unfolded through sociological thinking (University of Leeds, 2025).

OBL clearly offers an opportunity to capture enthusiasm for learning, capitalising on the fact that objects appear to be lightning conductors for ideas and a natural fit with socially distributed learning with all of the benefits inherent in that practice. Whilst it is not

recommended that OBL should become the dominant pedagogy in higher education, strategic and meaningful deployment of OBL has great potential. Learning Developers, for example, might consider it as a pedagogy for enhancing specific academic skills, such as critical thinking and group work, across a range of disciplines or in multi-disciplinary settings. The results of this research also show that OBL has huge power in encouraging communication and active listening.

Pedagogically, OBL challenges didactic learning and teaching as students are placed in an investigative position. The ethos of inquiry and critical thinking inherent in OBL requires a different classroom dynamic where the student's own observations, questions and hypotheses direct their attention and learning. In utilising guided discourse, academic staff can facilitate questioning by introducing meaningful disciplinary frameworks for student discussions. Thus, OBL provides an opportunity to move students away from answer seeking behaviours, to a more nuanced position of accepting doubt, uncertainty and the pursuit of independent enquiry.

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