



## Object-Based Learning in a World Dress Course

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Object-based learning (OBL) is an active-learning teaching approach that uses artifacts as teaching tools in the classroom. In an OBL activity, students use their senses to analyze unfamiliar objects in the process of learning about a topic. Studies suggest that OBL is a valuable tool for educators and students as it encourages deeper interaction with a subject than may occur through viewing only a two-dimensional photograph of an artifact (Chatterjee, Hannan, & Thomson, 2015; Simpson & Hammond, 2012; Tam, 2015). Recognition of this difference has motivated museums and other historical organizations around the world to identify new ways to foster their connections with learners in a first-hand manner. Artifact analysis of garments has been used in fashion history courses as a valuable hands-on teaching method (Banning & Gam, 2013; Butler, Stonewater, & Kinney, 2005; Marcketti, 2011). To date, however, there is little research that documents student learning through OBL at the university level. The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of an OBL assignment in teaching students about unfamiliar items of dress.

Students were enrolled in a world dress general education course at a university in the Midwest United States. The course met both social sciences and “global studies” graduation requirements. The course goal was to enable students to value dress as a means of communication and as a way to understand and accept people of other cultures, ethnicities, and nationalities. As a way to provide first-hand experience with worldwide dress through the department’s historic costume collection, an OBL assignment aligning with each unit was completed by students throughout the semester. Students used an artifact analysis framework to observe and characterize examples of dress that had been learned about in lecture. An artifact analysis framework based on sensory judgements (sight, sound, touch, smell) and personal reactions (Mida & Kim, 2015) was developed since students were novices to the field of apparel and textiles and would not have the background knowledge to complete more advanced artifact analysis frameworks. Students spent approximately 20 minutes engaging in each week’s OBL artifact analysis and relating it to what was learned previously in class. During these assignments, students were required to answer questions that assured active interaction with the object. Students were trained in methods of safely handling historic artifacts so that threats to garments analyzed were minimized. A reflection at the end of each artifact analysis asked students what was learned from the analysis that could not have been learned from a photo or written description of the garment.

Researchers analyzed student responses from one OBL assignment to examine its effectiveness in teaching students about unfamiliar items of dress. The garment analyzed was a woman’s silk ikat coat from Uzbekistan dating from the late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Students had learned about ethnic dress of Uzbekistan, including viewing photos of garments similar to the subject of the OBL activity, in the prior class period. A garment from Central Asia was chosen as the subject of this study as it was determined that students would be very unlikely to

have previous knowledge of this culture's dress prior to exposure in the world dress course. The OBL activity would then serve as a valuable tool in educating students further about dress.

Of the 45 students enrolled, 39 gave their consent to have their Uzbekistan OBL assignment answers analyzed for this study. To minimize coercion and undue influence on participating in the study, the author who was not the course instructor collected the consent form and analyzed the data. A grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was used to code student responses and group them according to theme.

Students in general appreciated the use of OBL for this course as they gained additional knowledge about the object. Students indicated that they gained new insights into fabrics and dispelled stereotypes they had about silk (i.e heavier, thicker, and noisier). As OBL encouraged interactive learning, students expressed interest in seeing the object's details, different perspective views, and construction methods (i.e quilted, layered, patched). Students' descriptions about the object reflected what they learned in class through reading and lecture. These findings concluded that OBL was an effective tool for this course as it allowed self-directed learning activity and motivated intrinsic curiosity about the object (Tam, 2015). Based on this analysis, the OBL assignment will continue to be used as a teaching tool in the course.

Limitations for this study include relying only on students answers to measure OBL effectiveness; it is recommended that student's exam scores be used to measure memory retention of the subject. Future research should also investigate how multiple OBL activities influence student learning throughout a course as well as examining the effectiveness of OBL as it relates to students' identified learning styles.

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