

## **‘Realia & Replica’: In-class Museums and Emotional Archives**

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### ***Abstract***

*The teaching project ‘Realia & Replica’ promotes learning in the History, Culture, and Heritage courses offered by the Universidad de Valladolid to English Studies undergraduates. It furthers their understanding and appreciation of the histories and societies of the English-speaking cultures, their links with Spain and their cultural heritage. It comprises four interrelated seminars that culminate in an internship at the university’s libraries and historical archive. In the seminars, the classroom becomes a museum, where students work with real historical artifacts and facsimile reproductions; as interns, they receive instruction in special collections description and management. Apart from yielding excellent academic results, the project has built a teaching collection and provided assistance in cataloguing the university’s library and archival holdings. It fosters the students’ professionalisation alongside their social, ethical, and cultural awareness development, inspired by practice at Rare Book School at the University of Virginia, the materiality of learning, and affect studies.*

**Keywords:** *In-class museums; materiality; affect; History; libraries; archives.*

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## **1. Introduction: The Materiality of Education and Emotional Archives**

In the teaching of the Humanities, experience has long shown the didactic deficiency of resources that lack material support. That fault was traditionally palliated by planning field-trips to museums, libraries, and archives, which mostly proved insufficient in terms of pedagogical gain, inasmuch as interaction with the material there exhibited was almost invariably, yet understandably, impossible. The multitude of onsite and online workshops, lessons, themed collections that such institutions have been preparing since the turn of the century is excellent, but those delivered onsite still want a direct link with the classroom and those published online often present discontinuity with the particular course syllabuses. Nonwithstanding, it is very much thanks to their effort that the materiality of the objects of study and of the learning environment are now recognised to have a fundamental bearing in the learning process, no matter how generously the digital world is contributing to education. Sørensen (2009) has explained this with respect to the learning media, while the recent turn to affect in teaching has incorporated the human body and corporeality to the teaching learning equation (Dernikos, *et al.*, 2020). In the field of History, the work that the students do with archival material (e.g. correspondence, diaries, photographs), printed matter (e.g. propaganda tracts, travel books, war declarations) and objects (e.g. coins, rare books, tapes) involves emotional work *per se* (Barclay, 2018): the texts or images contained in them often deal with people's lives and ideals and usually concern conflict and discord. It is only natural that the students produce affective responses to them, to perhaps either love or reject what they have just read or listened to. And yet, what matters here is how those affective responses (and the surge of future memory and desire they afford, according to Tyng *et al.*, 2017) are heightened by the physicality of their media, when students are given a chance to handle them. Since 1983, Rare Book School (RBS) at the University of Virginia has been serving as a worldwide reference in "teaching with stuff" (Belanger & Heritage 2019). Their method of teaching the history of written, printed, and digital materials with real historical sources in the classroom has spread internationally and to most areas of historical expertise, in such a way that today, the Humanities department that is not building up a teaching collection of artifacts and liaising with special collections repositories is clearly falling behind in its educational standards. The present project is inspired by their hands-on teaching method.

## **2. The 'Realia & Replica' Project: Courses, Participants, and Aims**

The teaching project 'Realia & Replica: In-class museums for students of History, Culture, and Heritage' (R&R) was first set up in 2017 at the Universidad de Valladolid (UVA) and has been continuously active since then. It is comprised of four interrelated practical seminars corresponding to the courses in History, Culture, and Heritage offered to undergraduate students of English Studies (*Grado en Estudios Ingleses*, EEII) at the School of Philosophy and Arts (*Facultad de Filosofía y Letras*, FyL).

In their first year at UVA, the students of English are required to take two core courses in the histories of the Anglophone countries and the societies that have been shaped by them: *Cultura y sociedad de las Islas Británicas*, followed by *Cultura y sociedad norteamericanas*, one semester each. *Relaciones histórico-culturales* is required in their second year. It marks out the historical and cultural milestones in the history that Spain has shared with the English-speaking nations. In their third year, they can opt for *Patrimonio* to learn about the principles and practices of heritage management and be introduced to British and American art and cultural heritage. Here is the average enrollment data over the past four academic years:

**Table 1. Course units and average matriculation figures (2017-2021).**

Year/S.	Course unit	Type	ETCS	Matric.
1Y/1S	<i>Cultura y sociedad de las Islas Británicas</i>	Core	6	52
1Y/2S	<i>Cultura y sociedad norteamericanas</i>	Core	6	53
2Y/2S	<i>Relaciones histórico-culturales España-mundo anglosajón</i>	OB	6	32
3Y/2S	<i>Patrimonio artístico-cultural del ámbito anglosajón</i>	OP	6	37

Source: SIGMA, Sistema Integrado de Gestión de Matrícula, UVA. Prepared by the author.

Using the only official evidence available (*La UVA en cifras*, 2017), the students participating in the R&R seminars may be described as female in their majority (62,7%) and residing in Valladolid or nearby provinces (over 80%). With an average grade of 6.9 obtained in their entrance examinations, most of them have earned similar general final results: Good (36,5%) and Pass (36,8%). Their social background is middle- or working-class. The project is administrated and imparted by five academics from the departments of English Studies and History of Art and the two directors of the UVA Faculty Library (*Biblioteca de Filosofía y Letras, UVA*) and Historical Archive (*Archivo Histórico de la UVA, AUHVA*). Two students aid in the management of the teaching collection and class administration as course assistants.

Grounded on the theories and practices presented in the introduction, R&R works with the hypothesis that teaching with artifacts in the classroom, in an awareness of the role that materiality and affect have in the process, enhances the students' long-term learning. It aims to provide students with: a) an understanding of the history and culture of English-speaking countries and the dynamics of their relations with Spain; b) a grounding knowledge of the tools of historical and documentary analysis; c) an appreciation of cultural assets and the institutions that manage them. Building a departmental teaching archive and promoting the connection between the academic and heritage centers of the university are two further aims, which, like those above, derive from the set of activities programmed: lectures, questionnaires, seminars, poster exhibitions, and internships.

### **3. Activities, Methods, and Materials**

At the UVA, the delivery of contents of any one of these undergraduate courses (6 ECTS) is often structured around ten core thematic units, which added to introductory and final debate sessions (plus the hours taken up by official holidays) span over a total fourteen weeks.

#### **3.1. Lectures and 'The Odd One Out'**

A week's plan starts with two 50-minute interactive lectures. In them, contents are delivered in 10-minute periods, preceded and followed by an introduction and a wrap-up, and intervalled by brief question and discussion time. Their focus is to provide exposure to the basic informative content and present further recommended reading on the subject. To aid the students with retention of facts and critical discrimination between similar phenomena, R&R has designed a particular form of Moodle questionnaire named "The Odd One Out." For each of the twelve questions posed, one of the four answers proposed will be "the odd one out": either three of them will be true and one will be false, or three of them will be false and one true. To answer them, the students may need to go back to their notes and suggested readings, but the point is precisely that, by reviewing content, the key facts and threads of discussion are clarified and retained (Roediger & Karpicke, 2006). They are encouraged to take the test as many times as necessary and once they feel they are ready, use the virtual forum to explain the reason why any three of them are true or false among the rest. The tutor's feedback will be available to the benefit of all students.

#### **3.2. The R&R Seminars: Emotion and Materiality**

After the lectures, the group of students is divided into two to attend one weekly seminar each. For nearly two hours, the classroom becomes an interactive museum (Gidcumb, 2015). Each seminar consists of 3/5 activities of about 10/20 minutes followed by the students' explanations and the tutor's feedback. The students work individually or in informal groups of 3 to 4 members and around either real historical-documentary material (*Realia*) or facsimile reproductions (*Replica*). Following instructions by the tutor, they fill in a worksheet which includes definition tasks (concepts, situations, problems), data extraction and organisation (timelines, family trees, tables, maps) and interpretation (summaries, deductions, hypotheses) (table 2). Like the lectures, the seminar begins with an introduction and ends with a wrap-up session and the submission of the completed worksheets.

During the two first-year *Cultura y sociedad* courses (1Y/1S&2S), in the seminars "The tools of the historian" (I) and (II), the students work with digital reproductions and printed replicas from the National Archives, UK (e.g. from "Gift from a King," through "English Reformation, 1527–90," reaching to "Victorian Health Reform") and the US National Archives (e.g. the US Declaration of Independence, Jefferson's correspondence, Nixon's tapes). They are used to introduce them to the study of primary sources, how to identify,

describe, analyse, and interpret them and their surrogates, presenting basic notions of paleography in the first semester and of editorial practice in the second.

In the seminar “Historical contact through Realía & Replica,” in *Relaciones* (2Y/2S), they explore the dynastic alliances, explorations, conflicts, travels, literary and artistic exchanges, that have linked the histories of Spain and the English-speaking nations, through original and facsimile sources like Armada pamphlets, 18th-century picaresque books, newspapers of the Spanish-American War, or ELT material from the US-Spain cooperation agreements of the 1960s (table 2). The students advance in their analytical skills (with more complex exercises on paleography and primary source description) and improve their interpretative and critical ability by reading and evaluating research on the documents and sources under scrutiny.

**Table 2. Seminar Resources and Materials.**

Source	Aim	Items
Instructor	Defining, analysing and interpreting	Worksheets: concepts, situations, problems; timelines, genealogical trees, tables; hypotheses, summaries
Instructor	Preliminary reading	Reading guidelines: e.g. Hariot's <i>Report</i> (1588), Paine's <i>Common Sense</i> (1776), <i>US Office Statistical Atlas</i> (1898), Brown v. Board of Education (1954)
Dep. teaching coll. (Curating)	Exhibiting and handling documents	book cradles, snakes, loupes, spotlights, gloves
Departmental teaching collection (Facsimiles)	Source identification, description and interpretation	e.g. UVA Matriculation Books, 1588-1800, AUVA LIB 33-58; US Constitution, LOC; Yndice de las obras inglesas, c.1805, BHSC MS 506; English pamphlets of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1937)
Departmental teaching collection (Donations)	Source identification, description and interpretation	Donations from the Ford Foundation and the British Council (1960s). Including: vinyl records (33 ½ RPM, 12", 7"), magnetic tapes, phonetics lab handbooks, slides and posters

Source: Prepared by the author.

“Principles of bibliographical and archival description,” in *Patrimonio* (3Y/2S), teaches the students how to technically identify, analyse, and describe the materiality of documentary heritage (creator, hand, format, collation, provenance), through contact with originals (historical paper, exemplars of folios, quartos, octavos, duodecimos, and archival items).

As explained earlier, each of these four seminars is conceived as an interactive in-class museum, where a number of textual and non-textual artifacts relating to the week's lecture contents are displayed in the classroom (fig. 1). Some of them are replicas; others, realia. In

all cases, the students are allowed to touch and handle, following the required protocols. Here is where emotion plays its role. Seeing how most students get excited, engaging emotionally with historical testimonies appears to be the natural reaction. Even if it is not always to like them, the corporeality of those artifacts brings a sense of nearness of the past. With the hands-on interaction, they “teach fast,” as Belanger would put it (2019), and the emotion they produce induces learning with memory and desire, as Tyng *et al.* have explained (2017).



Figure 1. Materials from the R&R teaching archive. Source: Photographs by R&R team (2020).

Outside the classroom, divided into formal groups of 3 or 4, the students work on a teamwork project. They must research one specific case study around one primary source relating one of the course units, design an academic poster around their findings, and present it orally in an end-of-term debate session. In two group tutorials, they report on their reading and draft poster and receive suggestions and corrections, before the final posters are printed out and displayed in a joint physical exhibition at the Faculty, for the public to visit.

### **3.3. Internships, Engaged Learning, and Service-Learning**

During their final year of studies, some students choose to put their knowledge and skills to practice as interns. R&R offers placement posts in the UVA FyL Library and the AHUVA, to work with their historical collections. They are taught the principles and basic practices of special collections description and management by the professionals at their care. In return, the students assist them in their cataloguing of historical and rare material and several have written their final dissertations around their collections and helped the author of this article prepare their online exhibition in her Omeka site: *Spanish Connections*, under a CC Licence.

## **4. Results**

It is fair to say that R&R is marked with success. The last academic year (2020-21) is a good example. Its results reflect very closely those of previous years and their steady improvement.

### **4.1. The Students' Grades**

Of a total 24 students of *Relaciones*, more than 75% of those that sat the first call (72.31%) passed the course. The majority of them (66%) obtained grades *Notable* (Good) and *Sobresaliente* (Excellent), markedly improving the performance of past groups. Apart from

being naturally talented, this group’s general participation in “The Odd One Out” tests boosted their content retention and clarification of concepts. Their satisfaction was high.

#### 4.2. Their Evaluation of the Teaching Performance

It was also the case of the 35 students of *Patrimonio* evaluating the project. Like those of *Cultura* and *Relaciones*, the graded the project “Excellent.”

**Table 3. Patrimonio: Teaching performance evaluation (2020-2021).**

Course	Planning	Materials	Methods	Motivation	Assessment
<i>Patrimonio</i> (R&R)	100	100	100	100	100
Degree (EEII)	87,8	93,5	89,4	92,3	86
School (FyL)	88,2	93,2	87,6	90,4	85,8
UVA	80	86,8	86,3	85	83,5

Source: SIGMA, Sistema Integrado de Gestión de Matrícula, UVA. Prepared by the author.

It is gratifying to see that maximum levels of satisfaction were reached very generally. In all sections, the instructors obtained an average 11.3 points above those teaching the other courses in the Degree and the UVA. A median of 4.5 or 5 was always obtained, with the maximum of 5 being awarded to course planning, materials used, learning benefits in class, and interest aroused by the subject.

#### 4.3. An Assessment Questionnaire on R&R

The final anonymous Moodle questionnaire submitted by 16 of the 24 students of *Relaciones* corroborated those results. It offered additional data on specific student preferences for certain activities and materials. The majority opted for those that included realia, like the Ford Foundation and British Council donations; however, favourite activities and materials also included facsimiles (e.g. newspapers from the Spanish-American War or the UVA manuscript inventory of 18th-century English books). The poster project was considered rewarding, unlike “The Odd One Out” questionnaires, which, albeit rewarding, was found to be too demanding by 27% of the participants.

#### 4.4. Serving the community

Our undergraduate students are by no means the only beneficiaries of R&R. Its teaching archive has been put to use with the matriculates of the UVA Humanities International Semester and in the workshop “Shakespeare and the material book,” which was designed as part of the UVA Research and Excellence Baccalaurate. We are proud also that one of our R&R students sits at the Board of the UVA General Library to represent her fellow students.

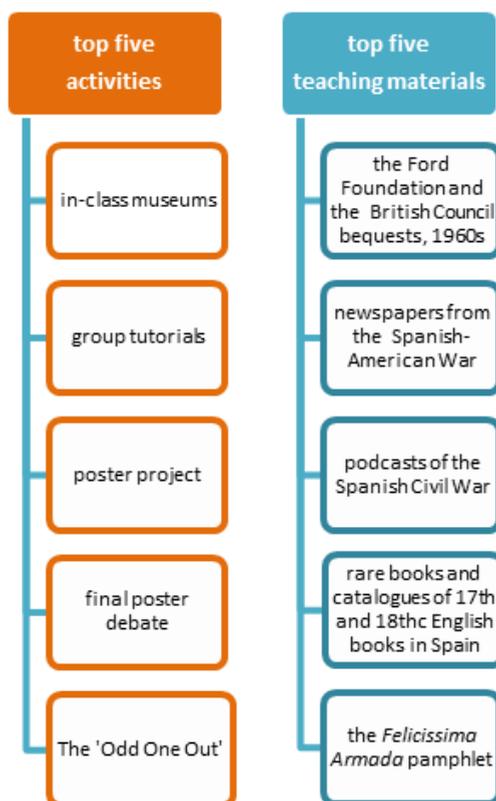


Figure 2. The students' top 5 activities & learning materials. Source: R&R Report (2021).

## 5. Conclusion

This project has now been tested out for four academic years. Although there are aspects that need to improve, its principal goals regarding student learning in History, Culture, and Heritage have been well reached, our teaching archive grows, while our links to the UVA repositories strengthen. We are certain that our methodological preference for the materiality of learning and affect has created a uniquely emotional learning environment for the students, spanning across their undergraduate years, where they are able to articulate knowledge, think creatively, and develop a social and cultural awareness, capable of opening up for them new career prospects in the field that the majority would never have considered before.

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