

Object-Based Learning for Neurodivergent Students

By Dayna Tohidi

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Project Context

Research Question

How can object-based learning (OBL) be used to support the needs and interests of neurodivergent female students of colour?

Rationale

- My positionality as a neurodivergent woman of colour who recently graduated from Central Saint Martins
- The opportunity to create the first OBL methodology for neurodivergent students (Willcocks and Lange, 2024)
- The need to reduce the -17% attainment gap between White and B.A.M.E students at CSM (UAL, 2022)

Project Aim

Develop and deliver an OBL workshop aimed at neurodivergent students, which can be adapted for specific courses and rolled out to staff for professional development

Project Inspiration



Interwoven: Neurodiversity and the Creative Mind Exhibition
(Kelly, 2023)



Museum of London Social Justice
Study Day (Renke, 2024)



British Museum Multi-Sensory Learning in Museums
Conference (Hoare, 2024)

Topic Research

Problem-Posing Education Model *“Through dialogue [...] the teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach”* (Freire, 1996)

Social Model of Disability *“When a flower doesn’t bloom, you fix the environment in which it grows and not the flower”* (Renke, referencing Heije, 2024)

Intersectionality Theory Intersectionality describes how different aspects of a person’s identity – such as race, gender, and class –interact and create overlapping systems of discrimination and privilege (Crenshaw, 1991)

Neurodiversity Thesis Neurodiversity is a term and social justice movement that recognises neurological differences as part of human diversity, challenging the view that such differences are deficits or disorders (Singer, 1998)

Universal Design Guidelines *“Universal Design for Learning [is a] framework developed by CAST to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn”* (CAST, 2008)

Research Methods

Action Research

- *“Action research is a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations” (McNiff, 1995)*
- Completed two cycles of action research by gathering feedback from seven critical colleagues and then piloting my improved OBL workshop with UAL students through Academic Support

Guided Interviews

- *“Certain questions are asked, but respondents are given freedom to talk about the topic and give their views in their own time” (Bell, 2010)*
- Pros: gathered rich feedback that drew on each colleague’s expertise while maintaining enough structure
- Cons: took a lot of time to interview everybody, so I couldn't complete a formal thematic analysis before delivering the workshops

Mixed-Methods Surveys

- *“Mixed-methods surveys combine both qualitative and quantitative approaches to gather a comprehensive view of the research problem” (Bell, 2010)*
- Pros: managed to quickly and easily gather feedback on key aspects of my workshop from students
- Cons: was unable to gather thorough written feedback from students because it had to be convenient

Key Learnings

- Be a facilitator of knowledge, not authority figure (Freire, 1996)
- Reduce barriers to participation in the classroom (Willcocks, 2024)
- Provide multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression (CAST, 2008)
- Ensure choice and flexibility in learning (Willcocks, Crawley, & Sarkar, 2024)
- Use inclusive, sensitive language towards neurodivergent learners (Willcocks, Campbell, & Barton, 2024)
- Foster emotional safety through practitioner vulnerability (Kelly & Crawley, 2024)
- Highlight and celebrate neurodivergent strengths (Singer, 1998)
- Include a glossary of key terms to level the playing field (Kennedy, 2024)
- Use the British Dyslexia Association style guide for resources (Willcocks, 2024)
- Choose objects that spark discussion about intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991)
- Incorporate movement and nature to enhance engagement (Kelly & Sodderland, 2024)

Workshop Outline

Learning Objective

Explore the three intersecting identities of neurodivergent women of colour through carefully curated objects from the CSM Museum & Study Collection

OBL Activity

Ask students to analyse their chosen object using the emotional object reading worksheet to encourage meaningful independent reflection and group discussion

Object Selection

1. National Coming Out Day print series by Ashton Attz
2. Bioprothesis keratin nipples by Arianna Pezzano
3. Worth 100 Women print series by Farida Eltigi
4. Framing Fragility embroidery samples by Angelica Ellis
5. Eso Extension pineapple fibre bundles by Funmi Olawuyi

Workshop Promotion

Exploring intersectionality through object-based learning

🕒 13:00 - 16:00 📅 04 Dec 2024 📍 CSM Museum and Study Collection 👤 Dayna Tohidi

This workshop will use the CSM Museum's historic collection and hands-on practice of object-based learning to spark inspiring thoughts and important conversations about the intersections between race, neurodiversity, identity, and gender.

From learning about the CSM Museum's services and field of object-based learning, to exploring diverse objects from the Graduate Award collection with peers, you will meet students from other courses, gain transferable skills, and knowledge that will enrich your coursework and inspire your creative thinking.

The workshop will be led by Curriculum Development Curator, Dayna Tohidi, and is part of her PgCert Action Research Project.

[Find out more](#)

As a neurodiverse woman of colour and recent Central Saint Martins alumna, Dayna understands the importance of embracing your identity and navigating your place within this creative institution. Your feedback will play a vital role in shaping future workshops and fostering a more inclusive and supportive academic environment.

While specifically designed for neurodiverse women of colour, all students are welcome to join and share their valuable feedback. The workshop will be based at the CSM Museum in Kings Cross and take approximately 3 hours, with breaks included to ensure a comfortable and engaging experience.

The CSM Museum & Study Collection and Women@CSM support everyone who identifies as female and is non-binary and trans inclusive.

Once booked onto the workshop, we encourage you to make a committed effort to attend the session or cancel your registration if you can no longer make it.

Workshop Listing

This is a screenshot of my workshop description, published on the UAL-wide Academic Support website

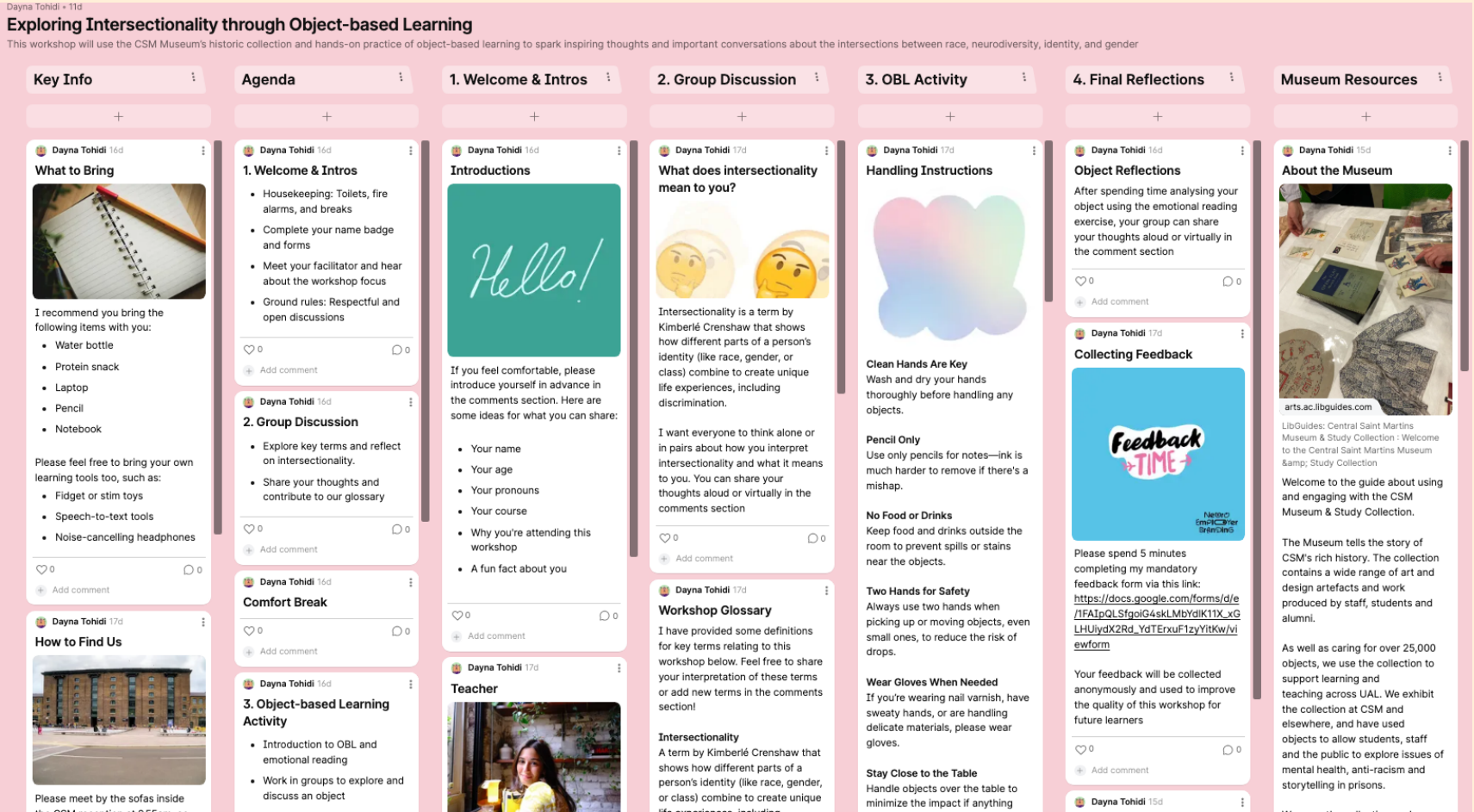
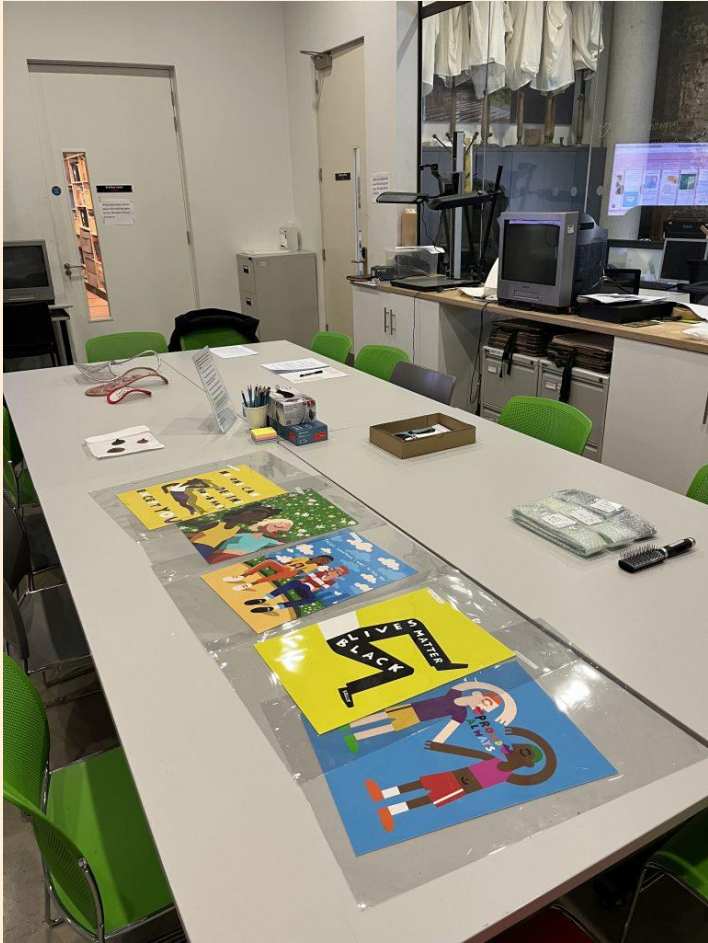
Marketing Channels

- Academic Support newsletter
- PgCert tutor group and Misc. forum
- Disability History Month newsletter
- Word of mouth by colleagues and students

Registration Success

- Workshop 1: 11/15 students
- Workshop 2: 13/15 students

Workshop Delivery



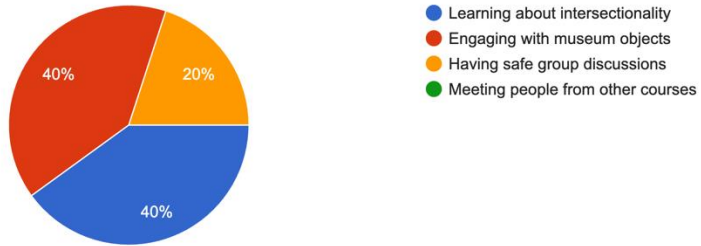
Workshop set-up in Kings Cross (Campbell, Willcocks, and Tohidi, 2024)

Workshop Padlet (Tohidi, Sarkar, and Crawley, 2024)

Workshop Feedback

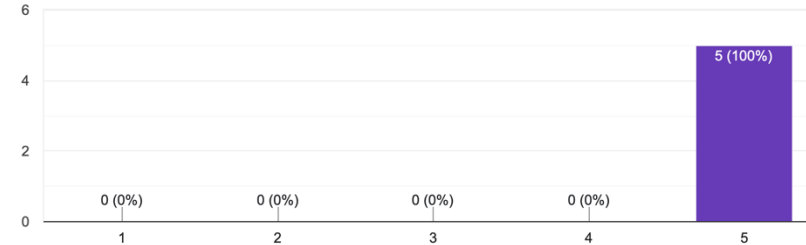
What did you enjoy most about this workshop?

5 responses



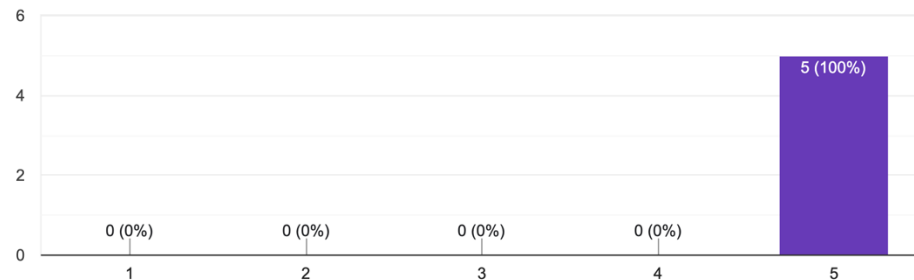
How well did this workshop explore intersectionality?

5 responses



How inclusive did you find this workshop?

5 responses



What can I do to make this workshop better?

5 responses

Maybe at the end having access to a bigger catalogue to other projects that are related to inclusion and intersectionality, that also relates to our own projects.

The diversity of the objects?

Have more pictures 🥰

I don't like the water/food restriction but that's the rule in this room. Maybe next time you can hold the workshop in other space and when it get to the session to engage with the museum object, bring back the students to this room.

The workshop was very good and inspiring. Thank you

Feedback captured on Google Forms (Tohidi, 2024)

Project Findings

Workshop Demand

- Huge appetite for neurodiversity and intersectionality-related workshops amongst students and staff
- Initial poor attendance (1/10) on Monday morning due to start-of-week challenges
- Better turnout on Wednesday afternoon (4 students) due to increased flexibility

Workshop Success

- Student feedback revealed 5/5 score for exploring intersectionality and inclusive learning
- Solo attendance in the first workshop facilitated personalised and meaningful delivery
- Museum objects helped students feel safe to deeply engage and reflect on sensitive issues

Areas for Improvement

- Allow participants to eat and drink before objects are displayed
- Create a public online collection of further objects to explore

Scope for Development

- Use my Padlet board as a starting point to adapt my workshop to online learning environments
- Follow-up with my Academic Support and Foundation colleagues to roll out my workshop

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