

Use of Primary Source Material in Blended learning: digital assets from the TUC Library collections

Christine Coates
Library Services
London Metropolitan University

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Introduction

This paper summarises the main themes of two presentations, delivered at the London Metropolitan University Learning & Teaching Conference 2009, on the topic of reusable learning objects and the use of primary source material in blended learning.

The TUC Library Collections

From its foundation in the mid 19th century, the Trades Union Congress [TUC] has played a key role in ensuring legal rights in employment, education and the creation of the Welfare State. It established the Labour Party so that working people would have parliamentary representation and it has played a major part in both national and international affairs. The TUC Library documents this rich history and is now a major research resource for the study of all aspects of trade unions, lifelong learning, public policy and people at work. The Library collects not only trade union and political publications from the UK and overseas, but also official and pressure group publications, and material from the various campaigns and policy areas in which the TUC has been involved.

The emphasis is on British material but most countries are represented, especially in Europe, North America and the Commonwealth. In 1996, the TUC Library transferred to the London Metropolitan University [then the University of North London] Holloway Road Learning Centre where it re-opened in 1997 as the TUC Library Collections. Together with The Women's Library, it now forms the University's Special Collections. The TUC retained its ownership of the Library and continues to add material on a regular basis. There are special collections on women workers, the labour movement in the Colonies and a number of deposited archives, including those of the Workers' Educational Association and the Labour Research Department.

The digitisation programme

Following the transfer to the University, access to these rich resources and disclosing the strengths of the Collections became a priority and several successful applications were made to major public funders such as the British Library, National Manuscripts Conservation Trust and the Heritage Lottery Fund [as well as several private trusts] for conservation and cataloguing projects.

The next development was to create digital copies of key ‘treasures’ in the Collection. This had four aims:

- to provide access to precious and fragile archives for those who would find it difficult or expensive to visit the library.
- to democratise access to rare or unique archives for people who would previously never have entered record offices or academic libraries
- to create surrogate copies which would aid conservation by reducing the need for handling
- to create an easily accessible online library of resources for the study of labour movement history. Trade unions have played, and will continue to play, a decisive role in shaping economic and social developments in Britain – yet much of their history remained unknown and inaccessible to the public.

Our first website, *The Union Makes Us Strong: TUC History Online* [1] presents a history of the British trade union movement since the development of organised labour in the early 19th century. Introduced by a *Timeline* of nearly 200 years of social history illustrated with digitised photographs, posters and documents, the site also includes a number of themed learning packages:

- 1926 General Strike
- Manuscript of *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* by Robert Tressell – written 100 years ago, this novel has international iconic status
- 1888 Bryant & May Matchworkers’ Strike Fund Register with personal details of all 700 strikers
- TUC Annual Congress Reports from 1868-1968, over 18,000 pages retelling the key events and political debates of the modern era.

Subsequent history websites, *The Worker’s War: the Home Front Recalled* [2] and *Winning Equal Pay : the value of women’s work* [3] have used similar templates but have added oral history and streamed video to the resources. These websites provide access to the voice and experience of working people: primary sources that are even harder to locate than the records of the ‘great and good’. The film and audio transcripts, texts, image captions and academic narratives across all three

websites are held in a single database, which can be searched from one integrated Advanced Search page[4].

The use of digitised primary sources

Together, the websites provide access to some 25,000 images, digital surrogates of primary materials which otherwise would be difficult to view or read. A wealth of cultural material delivered to the student's desktop. It would be completely impractical to capture this vast amount of material in a printed format – and it is more flexible, allowing searches, links and dis-aggregation for re-use in multiple contexts and to create new resources. Tutors' notes on the site provide guidance on how researching primary sources can provide 'added value' to students, allowing a closer relationship with the topic or the period. They look at potential uses of specific packages as well as providing general guidance on, e.g.-

- interpretation of photos, cartoons
- how to read documents to see how perceptions of a situation at the time guided subsequent actions
- how personal sources such as letters and diaries show an individual's motivation
- examining issues of bias

Digitised primary sources can be used in teaching

- to illustrate specific topics
- in support of course-books and materials – using images / multi-media can be more engaging for students
- as preparatory work for lectures / tutorials, 'reading-around' a topic
- by incorporating into a virtual learning environment, such as Weblearn, with links to the online images.

However, it should be noted that the copyright ownership of some of the images on the websites resides outside of the University and any plans to re-package / re-publish images should be checked with the TUC Library Collections.

Examples of primary materials available on the websites

war-time images



Students enjoy attractive and colourful images like these Wartime posters. Part of the appeal is the layers of inference that can be unravelled. At the simplest level, students could be asked to explain the need or purpose of these posters. At a deeper level, they might try and explain the thinking behind them and consider why the language might not be used today.

The digitised newspapers in the 1926 General Strike learning package can be used to examine the relationship between trade unions and Government, to look at tactics and the role of the media, bias and the differences in ways of reporting.



Images of women in promotional media



Surveying images of women in promotional campaigns may be of interest to students following a wide variety of courses, such as history, politics, design, media.

Case study

A recent example of the use of e-resources developed by the TUC Library Collections is that of the BA and MA Labour and Trade Union Studies courses. One of the lecturers uses photos and film clips in lectures to provoke discussion and debate, and observes that “this has worked particularly well in classes”. Considering the advantages of e-resources over print, she commented:

“I think using visual material alongside written sources helps to bring the subject alive. Students have much to learn from listening [to] and seeing the stories of the past as well as reading about them. It is particularly helpful for students with different learning styles to have material presented in different ways”. Dr Jane Holgate: extract from interview published in the Summer 2010 issue of the *Londonmet Library News* [5].

Students interviewed in the same report noted that e-resources are useful for providing images for presentations and information for coursework that is “much quicker to use even if you follow up later with further printed research” (*ibid.*). In addition, the resources can be accessed from home, which is especially appreciated by students who also have to balance study and employed work.

Website references

- [1] <http://www.unionhistory.info> . Funded by the New Opportunities Fund and launched in 2003
- [2] www.unionhistory.info/workerswar Funded by the Big Lottery Fund and launched in 2006.
- [3] www.unionhistory.info/equalpay Funded by the European Social Fund and launched in 2008
- [4] <http://www.unionhistory.info/AdvSearch.php>
- [5] <http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/londonmet/fms/MRSite/psd/ls/HomePage/newsletters/summer2010.pdf>

Biographical note

Christine Coates MA MCLIP is the Librarian TUC Collections, Holloway Road Learning Centre. Since moving to London Metropolitan University in 1996, Christine Coates has managed several externally funded library projects. Apart from the three e-resources 2001-2008 detailed above, these have included archival cataloguing and conservation projects on the papers of the Workers' Educational Association, the Labour Research Department, Gertrude Tuckwell and Marjorie Nicholson, and a major grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund for the *Access to British Trade Union Publications* programme to catalogue all British trade union publications up to 1980. Email c.coates@londonmet.ac.uk