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Kimberly Emmons
Case Western Reserve University, kke1@case.edu

Melissa Hubbard
Case Western Reserve University

Author(s) ORCID Identifier:

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Kimberly Emmons, William Claspy, and Melissa Hubbard

Library as Laboratory: Using Primary Sources and Research Tools in the HEL Classroom

This essay is the result of an ongoing collaboration among an English faculty member (Kimberly Emmons), a humanities research librarian (William Claspy), and a special collections director (Melissa Hubbard). We work at a private research university, with an undergraduate population of approximately five thousand students. Our campus is best known for its scientific, medical, and engineering research and innovation. Accomplishments in the arts and humanities are equally robust, but undergraduates in these fields nevertheless find themselves justifying their interests to a more pragmatic and professionally oriented peer group. Initially, our collaboration was a simple show-and-tell activity meant to give students in the history of the English language (HEL) access to special collections materials. We wanted to offer them an experience that their peers in large science courses were not having. Our ongoing collaboration has led us to rethink this model of an impressive, but isolated, encounter; we now design activities that encourage students to use the library as a laboratory for exploring the English language. We have learned, along with our students, that a research library can be a productive space for asking and answering questions about the history and future of the English language. Regardless

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of the depth of a school's collections, we argue that integrating library resources (human, textual, and digital) into HEL courses is an opportunity to engage our students and broaden our learning outcomes.

Out of the Vault and into the Stacks: Perspectives from the Library

Faculty members may not be aware of recent changes in librarianship that emphasize instruction as much as (or more than) collecting and curating. Librarians and archivists, in their professional literatures, demonstrate that designing instruction around primary sources enhances students' critical thinking and research skills, provides unique opportunities for students to engage with history and culture, and raises the visibility and relevance of special collections (see, e.g., Mitchell et al.; Bahde et al.). In January 2016, the board of the Association of College and Research Libraries adopted its "Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education." This document reflects the changing ecosystem of information and tasks librarians with taking "a greater responsibility in identifying core ideas . . . that can extend learning for students . . . and in collaborating more extensively with faculty." Librarians, whose professional training gives them a transdisciplinary perspective on the organization of knowledge, are well situated to make connections for students and faculty members across an array of library collections and services.

Librarians need faculty engagement to realize their instructional goals, and faculty members and students benefit from the active learning experiences that their libraries can offer. Our collaboration has taught us that faculty members and librarians should share responsibility for student learning across an entire course instead of separating information literacy from course content. The simplest and most effective way to improve student engagement with library collections is to give students multiple access points, in the following forms: an online research guide, several classroom visits, and individual consultations with both librarians and teaching faculty members. Repeated interactions with the library develop students' confidence and familiarity with the materials but also with the spaces and processes (even the mundane realities of reading room hours) that constitute primary research. Most significant, students will only come to see librarians as instructional collaborators and collections as valuable research tools through repeated instructional contact.

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Library as Laboratory: Perspectives from English Studies

The philological roots of English studies are sometimes curiously forgotten in today's English departments. Often one of the last vestiges of the discipline's origins, HEL courses sit uneasily amid contemporary approaches to literature, film, and composition. Yet, as scholars have argued convincingly (and as many do in this volume), HEL can contribute to the larger discipline and, indeed, to the goals of a more general, liberal education in a variety of ways (see especially Moore). Even as it does so, HEL cannot stand alone—throughout the course, students need to acquire elementary concepts from linguistics, a firm grounding in the history of the anglophone world, and a sociological perspective on English speakers themselves. Collaborating with colleagues in the library can help identify appropriate background material for students with varying levels of knowledge about the complementary disciplines relevant to the study of HEL.

HEL serves a variety of goals, many of which are central to English studies. It introduces students to what R. A. Buck calls "the notion of historical text" (47–48) and to what Michael Dressman calls "the dueling concepts of cultural studies and cultural literacy" (108). Both scholars point to the ways that HEL enhances traditional literary criticism and textual engagement. In addition, HEL gives students the opportunity to engage with "all types of evidence" (Williams 170) and to develop "concrete principles on which they can base their own pedagogical decisions" (Tyler 467). In other words, it teaches the skills of inquiry, analysis, and application. Information literacy instruction (provided to students through online tutorials or single visits) has similar goals: teaching students that the context in which information is created must be considered when evaluating sources, that research is a process of inquiry and exploration, and that scholarship is a conversation ("Framework"). Classroom activities that engage with library collections in the context of their particular scholarly content make these skills both more relevant and more visible to our students (and to our colleagues).

The history of the English language is preserved in the pages of historical dictionaries, letters, pamphlets, guidebooks, and other valuable materials available in each library collection. But to understand that history, students must interact with texts in ways that may be unfamiliar. They are no longer seeking a fact or quotation to support a claim, as in standard research assignments that make an argument, but instead are hunting for evidence of linguistic change. In this hunting, they are likely to have many

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questions about the materials themselves (see Noonan's essay in this volume). They are also likely to want to know where they can find additional materials. These are moments that benefit from the multiple perspectives available when disciplinary faculty members and librarians share the classroom. We believe that sustained collaboration between them offers students more meaningful engagements with primary source materials and more opportunities for developing critical reading and reasoning skills. It may also help justify the value of HEL in an ever more crowded English (and general education) curriculum.

More than a Photo Op

Our library holds a facsimile of the Ellesmere Chaucer, beautifully adorned with gold leaf and bound in oak boards. It is a stunning book; our students get excited when they see it. But after their initial exclamations (and photographs), they quickly become disoriented. Where are the page numbers? Why is it so difficult to read? Without guidance, they typically drift to other, more modern printed editions of Chaucer, which we also provide during this class session. Directing their attention to comparisons among the editions encourages them to reconsider the value (and beauty) of the collected texts. We begin by asking students to document linguistic features: for example, instances of multiple negation, spelling variation, or dialect. Through this process, students begin to notice other details: they become interested in the practice of manuscript illumination (and make connections between it and digital image processing); they find spelling variation frustrating and compelling (and imagine how they might teach elementary school children about current spelling conventions); they ask why the editions are so different from one another.

We have found that putting students in a room with primary texts leads only to a superficial engagement unless we provide a structured task to encourage critical thinking and exploration. For example, students searching for dialect features in "The Reeve's Tale" can use their findings as an opportunity to reflect on the representation of nonstandard speech throughout the history of English. Chaucer's historical distance enables this discussion to begin in a nonthreatening way and encourages students to become more flexible in their consideration of contemporary dialect representations. Similarly, students cataloging spelling variation within and across editions must reconcile their findings with their prior knowledge of canonical literature, which typically appears in the form of editions

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with regularized spelling. This reconciliation challenges them to question the rigidity, universality, and timelessness of grammatical and orthographic rules (see Baragona's essay in this volume).

Another approach to using historical collections linguistically is to present students with transcriptions first, turning later to the material objects themselves. We adapted the following exercise from "The Dating Game," designed by Will Hanson. It is a useful way to move between historical principles and the physical realities of primary source material.

Suggested Assignment: Textual Time Line

> Break students into small groups. Give each group a set of typed transcripts from four to six texts in the collection. Ask each group to arrange the transcripts chronologically and to estimate their publication dates. (These initial steps can be assigned as homework, before a visit to special collections.) Ask each group to explain its decisions to the class. Then show students the original texts in order, explaining which transcriptions go with which texts and giving the publication dates for each. Allow students to examine the texts and discuss any surprises about the dates. Ask them to discuss how seeing the excerpts in their original contexts is different from reading the transcribed passages.

This activity asks students to attend to the language first and then incorporate the physical aspects of their information sources (i.e., the primary texts) into their analyses. They practice justifying their observations and predictions about the English language in the first part of the assignment, then reassess their knowledge after they encounter the original texts. This iterative process helps them understand the complexity of historical language scholarship.

HEL and the Organization of Knowledge

One of the pleasures (and perils) of HEL is the wide range of subjects it touches, from literary production to legal history, from paleography to movable type, from the declension of nouns to the illumination of manuscripts. To study language is to be widely curious; one cannot really understand the influence of the *King James Bible* on the English language without understanding the religious, historical, and cultural contexts in which it was produced, not to mention the history of vernacular translations of the bible in general (see Crystal). In the following activity, we encourage

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students to see how scholars of language history can contribute to a wide range of disciplines.

Suggested Assignment: Where in the Library Is David Crystal?

Break students into six groups and give each group the title of one book by David Crystal. Ask the groups to search for their book, write down its call number, locate it on the shelves, and browse the nearby volumes, identifying their topics and themes. When the students reconvene, discuss the range of topics addressed by Crystal's linguistic attention. Consider how the Library of Congress classification system organizes knowledge and how HEL is incorporated across a wide range of subject classifications.

Selected Books by David Crystal

Begat: The King James Bible and the English Language (BS537.C79 2010)
How Language Works: How Babies Babble, Words Change Meaning, and Languages Live or Die (P121.C678 2006)
Making a Point: The Persnickety Story of English Punctuation (PE1450.C89 2015)
Pronouncing Shakespeare: The Globe Experiment (PR3081.C93 2005)
Grammatical Analysis of Language Disability (RC423.C75 1989)
Txtng: The Gr8 Db8 (TK5015.79 2008)

In our current information climate, we find that students do not always have the opportunity or inclination to browse library shelves, so they miss the serendipity of adjacent knowledge. Using this exercise to explore the organization of information helps them connect the study of language to other potential interests, and it orients them to the geography of their library. Our goal is to help students explore library collections strategically, pushing them past the paradigm of simple database searches aimed at text retrieval.

Online Searching and HEL Research

When could a boy be a girl? Answer: around 1300, when *girl* meant "a child of either sex."

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> When did vegetarians eat meat? Answer: around 1200, when *meat* meant "solid food."

Examples of semantic shift quickly make concrete the reality of language change. Students are often surprised and delighted by a quick tour of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, but reproducing the challenge of such historical lexicography allows them to practice skills that enhance close reading as well as general research (see Chrambach's essay in this volume). Although it often seems expedient for faculty members to offer their own search tutorials, inviting colleagues from the library to provide database overviews and to lead search activities gives students an opportunity to establish personal connections with librarians who can identify collections suitable for HEL (and other) research.

Working together to design such activities, we have found ways to highlight general information literacy principles while addressing specific HEL topics. For example, the database *Early English Books Online* highlights both the opportunities and the challenges of such digitization projects. Students gain access to a wide range of texts, but they are also afforded the opportunity to interrogate the search technologies providing that access—for example, they investigate the search tool's accommodation of spelling variation. In the following exercise, we invite students to experiment as historical lexicographers (see in this volume the essay by OCallaghan and the essay by Curzan, Moore, and Palmere).

Suggested Assignment: Adopt-a-Word

> Have students identify a word for which they can track the history (or give them a predetermined list of words). Ask them to search for their word using a combination of physical texts and library-provided databases of primary source materials (e.g., *Early English Books Online*, *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, *Early American Imprints*, or any of the varied newspaper databases). Have students record passages in which their word is found from at least four centuries. Then ask them if they see any shifts in meaning of their word over time. Finally, ask them to look up their word in the *Oxford English Dictionary* and compare the entry to their own lexicographical history.

In this activity, students quickly come to appreciate the astonishing accomplishment of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and they learn to engage with a range of digitally and manually searchable collections. In gathering

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their examples, they refine their ability to read texts carefully (for meanings established by context) and to craft precise definitions (to capture subtle semantic shifts).

Offline Searching and HEL Research

In addition to digital tools for HEL research, we can show students how to conduct their inquiries "old school" (a term that dates to the early 1700s, much to our students' surprise). Scholarly editions document language change, particularly in literature of the earlier periods, where editors are working from multiple manuscript versions. In our library collection, there are (at least) three excellent examples of such editions: the 1850 printing of the Wycliffe bible, which tracks differences in the various identified manuscript versions of the work; the Oklahoma variorum edition of the works of Chaucer (see, e.g., Andrew); and the English Hexapla bible (our library owns an 1842 edition), which presents the Greek text at the top of the page, with six parallel columns beneath showing the Wycliffe, Tyndale, Cranmer, Geneva, Rheims, and Authorized King James versions across the lower half of the page. The Hexapla bible allows students to see, simultaneously, language decisions in the six English-language versions of the bible, from Middle to Early Modern English. As they browse texts such as these, they come to understand the research process as an iterative form of inquiry, which requires meticulous cross-referencing.

Suggested Assignment: Textual Variation

> Select a text (or several) for which your library has multiple editions and for which a concordance or other scholarly reference guide is also available. Ask students to select several words from the concordance and locate them in each edition of the text you have available. (Note: our students often need help deciphering the basic editorial conventions of such materials.) Encourage students to compare the contexts and varied orthography of their chosen words. Then ask them to examine any front matter, editorial notes, or essays included in various scholarly editions or guides. Discuss what the paratextual material tells us about the history of English and processes of publication.

In this exercise, students have difficulty at first with the tools (e.g., concordance), the paratext (e.g., front matter, editorial notes), and the texts

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themselves. With perseverance, however, they begin to identify the kinds of information they must record in order to make sense of their explorations. For example, page numbers (or even line numbers) rarely produce insights, and so the syntactic environment and semantic context for their chosen words becomes essential to their ability to communicate what they have observed. In addition, the accompanying editorial notes can be especially revealing of the scholarly processes and language choices involved in producing scholarly editions.

The Value of Collaboration

Our collaboration suggests that integrating library resources and instruction into the HEL classroom benefits both students and instructors. Students grow more familiar with the scholarly tools available to them, find their own entry points into historical linguistic topics, and become more aware of the long history of language uses and users. Faculty members benefit from the instructional support librarians can offer and from the ongoing collection management activities of their library colleagues. Librarians extend the reach and depth of their information literacy instruction and in the process have another opportunity to combat students' fears and reluctance to engage deeply with research collections (for a compelling discussion of library anxiety, see Gremmels). After many years, we have found that pairing HEL with consistent library engagement makes the course richer, more enjoyable, and more effective for everyone concerned.

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