Interviewer

How did you learn to teach undergraduates with primary sources?

Respondent

How did you learn how to teach? From my own research experience. I learned, and I used that experience in using primary sources to teach students.

Interviewer

Did you receive any support or instruction from others, when you were learning how to teach primary sources?

Respondent

As I said, I learned how to use primary sources in my research, throughout my research, myself, with the help of my supervisors, when I did my postgraduate research. And then for teaching, applying that to teaching. I did not get any specific training.

Interviewer

Do you make your own ideas or collections of sources or resources available to others? Any of your primary sources? Do you have, like boxes of them or do you have them online, that you share with other people teaching?

Respondent

My primary sources at the University are not many. The reason is that the University is not... a library there or archival research… are not really specialised in the field that I am working on. Therefore, for undergraduate students, most of these primary sources can be used or in fact, found online and there are many that are available. And primary sources is not set format. I mean some primary sources… many are nowadays… many primary sources are published, or digitised and published. So the definition of primary source depends on the module or it depends on the subject, and also depends on the audience. I mean the student. Undergraduate students who study the history of Iran for example or the history of, you know, Middle Eastern countries at the University, have many sources for them, are primary. Probably for a postgraduate PhD student who is doing a PhD dissertation on, let's say for example Egypt or Muslim brothers in Egypt or Islamism in North Africa or in Iran or whatever, the same sources that are considered here for the undergraduate students as primary for him or her are not primary. They need to be more advanced. So everything depends. It depends on the… on the site, on the library, on the resources, you know, and it depends also on the person, who is a student, who is doing research.

Interviewer

Okay, thank you. So I'm going to ask you about a specific course that you teach and you shared with me. Tell me a little bit about the module, and what are the, for example, the pedagogical aims, the teaching aims, why you developed it, how it has evolved over time.

Respondent

Well, I mean, I teach this module since... for many years, here. Probably 10 years. This is because students are interested in the subject, if that is the module that you are referring to is the module called ***A* (course name)**. It is dealing with studying the transition of Iran, from the Shah regime to the regime of Ayatollah, the clerical regime today. So, this is interesting for the student and that's why I developed that and throughout these years, of course, I revise that, etc.

Interviewer

Yeah okay, thank you, and explain to me how you incorporate primary sources within this, within that particular course?

Respondent

As I said, the primary sources for this...we are required to ask students to, familiarise students with primary... with the use a primary sources in higher education. So, we need to include primary sources. But as I said the University is not Oriental Studies... The School of Oriental Studies in London or in Oxford or Cambridge. Here is the very basic information that we give, you know, provide to students, and therefore we need to be careful about what we mean by primary sources. Most, as I said, most of the primary sources are/include these primary sources amongst the secondary materials, and I explained to students, what does that mean and what is the definition of primary source, so that they are aware of the sources that they use for their research.

Interviewer

So, why did you decide to incorporate primary sources in the way that you do? Was it purely because you're required to or because it makes the course more interesting?

Respondent

No, just because there are some sources that are directly related to the events they study. They are… these sources are the product of the person or the people involved in that event. So these are primary sources and their uses are different from the use of secondary sources. You see these are the primary material that the students need to use in order to analyse… what… by referring to them etc. The secondary sources are completely different things. They are analysis, they are studies, they are ... We have two kinds of assignments. One is a source assignment, which is should, you know, should study/examine sources. It's a subject that they refer to sources… is based on sources, which… that source, this primary source. And the other assignment is an historiographical assignment.

Interviewer

A what? Sorry.

Respondent

Historiographical. It means that they examine the historiography, the development of the debate, the historiographical debate on a subject. It is a completely different assignment. That is why I include primary sources. I mean you see there are two different assignments.

Interviewer

Okay, thank you. So what challenges do you face when incorporating primary sources into the course?

Respondent

As I said, the challenge here is that these primary sources… first of all there are not many. And second, they are… they need to be accessible to more students, and as a result they, they have to be in English (language). They cannot be in Persian or Arabic or whatever. So these are the limits and challenges in terms of, you know... and I always say to my students that... so they are all aware of that. So that they don't misunderstand. This is what we mean here, primary source and they should be aware that primary sources are not only this.

Interviewer

Absolutely. Okay, thank you.

Interviewer

Do you incorporate primary sources into all your teaching, into all your courses, in a similar way?

Respondent

Audio? No.

Interviewer

Pardon?

Respondent

Audio courses?

Interviewer

No. In all of your courses.

Respondent

Oh yeah. Yeah. Yes, Yes, yes, all my courses. Yes.

Interviewer

Okay. In this course, does anyone else provide instruction for your students when working with primary sources for example any co-instructors or archivists or teaching assistant?

Respondent

No, these are the modules that I convene. There are not co-tutors, so...

Interviewer

Okay, thank you. So moving on to finding primary sources. How do you find your primary sources?

Respondent

By looking online and also... How I find? I mean I know my… most of these primary sources by doing research.

Interviewer

Do you keep a collection of digital or physical sources that you use?

Respondent

Collection of them... again as I said these are quite limited in terms... So I do not need to collect them physically because they would take lots of space. And the benefit of digitalization is that you can have them as many as you have space on my computer. So no, I do not keep them physically. Unless I distribute them in class in order to (facilitate) discussion for example, you see some of these. You see, for example...Sorry, these are...copies of the newspapers (shows newspapers to interviewer). You see I mentioned to you that most of them should be in English because of the students, but this actually, in particular, is in Persian. But this would help me, in fact, just to browse it...

Interviewer

To browse it.

Respondent

Browse it, yes and convey to students what was happening at that time exactly in the first year of the Iranian Revolution, you see on various things. See sometimes the transmission of these primary sources is just oral. In class, rather than handing them to the students to read them because they are not able to read (Persian). So that is another way to...

Interviewer

Okay. So copies of newspapers about that time, in Persian, using that as a primary source but obviously translating it for your students.

Respondent

Yeah, yeah, I mean that is different kinds of primary sources because often the students ask "Can we see", for example, "sources on American involvement in Iran from the Persian point of view, rather than from what we see in archives”, and you know, “on the New York Times” etc that they find here. And I say, that is how it is. I mean, that's the only way I can... Sometimes I... It happened... I translated sections of these, you know, I put that on Blackboard for students or on in the handbook, to explain, or in my PowerPoint, for example. I just translate some of the sections you just illustrated, but in general...Yeah, I mean, in order to help the students, to take them back in time and history, I need to even do that orally, a translation... Sometimes, physically by putting them...

Interviewer

Okay, thank you. So I think you've already answered this question which is: "What challenges do you face in finding appropriate sources?" You've already mentioned that there aren't very many in the University, but you obviously have quite a lot of digital ones that you use. Any other challenges?

Respondent

No... I mean... other challenges. I mean one challenge probably might be... because these... I mean, these kinds of sources in Asian language, although now they are, they cannot be used by the majority of the students. In the future probably could be. And so it might be good if the library or institution for example could even, for the use of tutors/teachers who know the language. It would be good to digitise them. Why not? I mean if they digitise all of these Persian newspapers, which I could find just by looking here and there and is not readily accessible and accidentally, in fact, some of these newspapers are just accidentally… someone gave me when I was in Iran, they, they gave me from that time, you see they are not all available. Some of them I purchased. I went to the library there, in bookshops, I mean, not library, book shops in Iran. I found the old newspapers I've purchased them, expensive. And then, I think that these come from there. I just copy them and I stored them somewhere. I have… I had them stored somewhere here in my office. So, it would be good if digitisation also extended to other languages.

Interviewer

Okay, so how do your students find and access primary sources?

Respondent

Easily they access.

Interviewer

How do they do that?

Respondent

Online.

Interviewer

Okay. Any particular databases?

Respondent

No, there is no particular databases, and some of the primary sources for my students are travel accounts and are...

Interviewer

Travel accounts?

Respondent

Yeah, travel accounts for my other modules, for example, I convened other modules, etc. But, as you see, for example here, there is a book there, it says the Shah and I. It is a diary of... do you see there? The white and red (pointing to book). The diary of the court minister under the Shah, published in 10... nearly 10 volumes or its seven to 10 more volumes in Persian, and an extract of that is translated into English. This is… absolutely stands as a primary source. So, and there are many books like that that are... can be, you know, can be used as a primary source. Or for example a book written by Khomeini. Or the book written by the Shah. Published so many times. Still, they are primary source for these students and for this particular module. This can't be considered as a primary source for a PhD and as I said for you.

Interviewer

And do you specify the sources which the students must use or do you expect them to find them themselves?

Respondent

The primary sources?

Interviewer

Yes.

Respondent

Well, I mean, I specify, but at the same time I ask them to... you know... the... that is the task to look for primary sources.

Interviewer

Okay, so you specify what they should be looking for and they need to go out and search and find them?

Respondent

Yes.

Interviewer

Thank you. Do they have any... do they face any challenges when they're doing that, when they're going out to look for them?

Respondent

Do you mean any difficulty?

Interviewer

Yes, any difficulties they have.

Respondent

Yes sometime they don't know... they say... "Where can we find the primary sources?" Yeah. What I mean is I tell them… I tell them that online there are in the library website, now, nowadays links that leads to primary sources and then. Yeah.

Interviewer

Okay, that's great. Thank you. How do the ways in which you teach your primary sources relate to the goals for the student learning in your discipline?

Respondent

They are very, very key. Key to the learning because… because without knowing the historical context, they cannot understand things, and in order to know your context, the primary sources are fundamental.

Interviewer

Fundamental. And do you teach your students what a primary source is?

Respondent

Yeah, as I said, I explained them what for us, does mean primary sources, and which are these primary sources and their significance. The importance for that.

Interviewer

Okay, thank you.

Respondent

Of course, one part of that teaching, a specific exercise or assignment, that we called a "commentary exercise", for year one, and what we call "gobbets" for year three. Now, these commentaries now extended even in the year two, as far as I am aware. So we... some modules introduce… have introduced this commentary. So, it means that in fact they comment on primary sources.

Interviewer

Okay, thank you. That's really interesting. To what extent is it important to you that your students develop information literacy or civic engagement through working with primary sources?

Respondent

It is not very clear for me what do you mean by information...

Interviewer

...literacy. Okay so the ability to think critically and make balanced judgments about the any information that they find.

Respondent

Within the limits of our module, we asked them to analyse, to be critical of those sources that they use.

Interviewer

And with civic engagement do go to any locations looking for primary sources or to take our students out anywhere or engaged publically or outreach type of thing?

Respondent

Yeah, it has happened. For some modules that we did that. For instance, for a module that I was convening, teaching on the history of medicine, I took them to a library in London to visit the sources there. And for a module on... second year module group projects, I took them to the Civic Centre here, in the library, where they were looking at... And then they were also looking at the police archives, at the General Hospital archives, you know, to find documents about that subject, specific subject and they did very well. And they found interesting primary sources.

Interviewer

So you mentioned that obviously you have print and digital images for the students to engaged with the primary sources, are there anything... is there anything else like born digital material or oral histories, so they watch different formats of primary sources?

Respondent

Yeah, and the other kind of primary sources that I always advise the students, and the students readily accept, are YouTube. That are oral and visual. And these are, of course, part of their, their sources that they use. And they refer to them in their...in their assignments.

Interviewer

Okay, thank you. And you mentioned about going to London too and various other places looking at archives. Do you do the teaching, when you, when you have done that? Or do you... do librarians or archivists assist with the teaching with primary resources in those locations?

Respondent

Well, I mean, in that library where we went, yes, there was a colleague, I mean the librarian, who came to, you know, explain to the students...

Interviewer

The librarian from here? (the University)

Respondent

No, no, not from here (the University).

Interviewer

London?

Respondent

From there. Yeah. I remember that they came because I made an appointment. Yes they came to explain briefly.

Interviewer

Yeah. Okay, thank you. Do your students use any digital tools to examine or interact, or present their sources? For example, 3D images or a collaborative annotation platform

Respondent

No.

Interviewer

To what extent are the formats that you use, for primary teaching... to teach primary sources pedagogically important to you?

Respondent

Could you repeat?

Interviewer

To what extent are the formats that you use the primary sources with and tools pedagogically important and important in your teaching?

Respondent

I think that I answered this. They are important, particularly because... I mean, the format. Without the primary sources the students cannot have an in-depth learning.

Interviewer

Okay, thank you. What advice would you give colleagues, or to a colleague who is new to teaching with working with prime resources? Any particular advice you'd give?

Respondent

They certainly would know about the importance of primary sources. The only advice that I would give them only, again, is to clarify what they mean by primary sources to students, relative to… relevant to that, you know, to students. And to make clear to students that they have... where they can find (primary sources).

Interviewer

And looking to the future. And what challenges or opportunities do you think that academics will encounter when teaching undergraduates with primary sources? Looking to the future?

Respondent

I would see rather more opportunities. I mean the challenges might be with the rise of new kinds of primary sources that we probably do not know exactly how… but as far as the current primary sources are concerned, increasingly, they are digitised. So it is an opportunity for them to have them ready, increasing what's available online, the result of many research works.

Interviewer

Okay, then no particular challenges at the moment, just opportunities?

Respondent

More opportunities than challenges probably.

Interviewer

Yeah. Okay, that's good. Final question. How do you reference or cite your primary sources? You have a particular method of doing that?

Respondent

Well, as I, as we said, if we talk about the undergraduate use of primary sources they are all, most of them they are... I mean, those are published books...

Interviewer

Most of them are published books?

Respondent

You know, they have for those published primary sources… it is very clear, they reference them as a published book. For online, they need to indicate access date. For example, if they… if there is a primary source that is YouTube for example, you know, an interview between the Shah and the journalist, British journalists in 1978. So they need just to indicate access date. And if they have seen archives online, digitised, for example, National Archives online, they need to exactly indicate, as far as possible, the reference that is clear online. And then also indicate the website. The site that I mean… the website and copy and paste the website.

Interviewer

Okay, thank you. Do you have any other things you want to say? No? Thank you very much.

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