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IDEAH

Discovering the Digital: Reimagining a Module and Co-creating Assessment at Foundation Level

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In this article we review the redevelopment of a foundation level module in the humanities and social sciences that was adapted to include a greater focus on the use of digital tools and methods.¹ We begin by reviewing the current landscape of digital humanities (DH) teaching in the United Kingdom and we explain why we are introducing DH at an undergraduate level when the focus at other institutions is on the master's level. Proceeding from this we situate our efforts within pedagogical theory, utilizing hidden curriculum theory, constructive alignment, critical pedagogy, and critical digital pedagogy to inform the new shape of the module. We then describe how the module had been previously delivered and the need we identified that was addressed by its redevelopment. It was important to involve the students in the redesign of the assessment to make sure we addressed their needs. We showcase examples of student projects and then provide an analysis of successes and challenges, alongside proposals for future development.

Digital Humanities Teaching in the UK

Digital humanities in the UK may be at a significant turning point when it comes to pedagogy. While the focus has been on the development of the field through research and postgraduate teaching, there is now a shift toward including DH instruction at an undergraduate level.² Master's degrees in DH are offered at several universities, but undergraduate programs are more limited in their provisions.³ However, if we look to the US as a blueprint, we can anticipate growth in this area. Caitlin Christian-Lamb and Anelise Hanson Shrout note in their 2017 article that while DH discussions have “coalesced around faculty-driven digital humanities labs and graduate digital humanities education” there is an impetus to develop undergraduate education in this area (para. 1).⁴ Chris Sula, Alan Hackney, and Philip Cunningham identified eight US-based universities that had recognized undergraduate qualifications in DH, while a publicly curated list on GitHub identifies eleven undergraduate programs in the US that are either exclusively DH or have some DH elements.⁵

In continental Europe, too, we see more of a focus on undergraduate DH. Sula et al., drawing on data from the Digital Research Infrastructure for Arts and Humanities (DARIAH), noted that in 2017, 25% of European DH programs were at an undergraduate level. Currently there is one undergraduate degree in DH, offered at King's College London, but conversations and presentations at conferences and interactions on social media suggest that DH in undergraduate classrooms is on the rise. Certainly, if there is a trend toward teaching DH at an undergraduate level, it behoves institutions to stay competitive and relevant; however, as educators we usually require deeper reasons than market trends to include anything in our curricula.

Informal conversations with other lecturers have indicated that some view the addition of DH teaching at an undergraduate level as imposing too much complexity; they argue that students need to master the themes and traditional methodologies of their subject areas before attempting to apply digital tools and methods to their own research practices. While it is true that additional methodological training places a burden on both teachers and learners, it is becoming ever more difficult to justify a lack of DH training.

Humanities subjects are increasingly using digital tools as a matter of course. In fact, it is misleading to suggest that computing is in any way new to the humanities, as David Berry notes:

The key to understanding the digital humanities is to reject the idea that digital technology is invading the academy. Computers were used for humanist ends from very early on in their history, and not only, as one might expect, as mere storage for large libraries of text.

Therefore, to deal with the themes and methodologies of humanities subjects necessitates understanding how digital tools have been employed, especially if one wants to offer a critique or alternative approach.

The impetus to focus on vocational skills and ensure degrees have relevance for the job market has intensified in the UK over the past two decades. Both students and their future employers expect a range of functional training. It is far better to deliver this as contextual learning. Contextual learning is based on the constructivist principles that knowledge is more easily developed if it relates to real world issues or experiences. This is then more easily and flexibly applied to real world contexts (Budiman et al. 2021). As Eden Dahlstrom et al. found, “students aren’t really interested in taking separate ‘digital literacy’ courses or even using on-demand web or help desk resources”; they prefer to seek guidance from their instructors about the role technology will play in both their learning and future careers (10). Hence, as Kara Kennedy notes:

DH methods belong in the classroom because they offer a fruitful means of developing the digital literacy skills that students need to prepare them for their personal and professional lives. Teachers should not leave them to navigate the challenging ocean of digital technology and culture on their own. (para. 6)

This fits with research into contextual approaches to adult education (for example, John M. Dirkx and Suzanne M. Prenger). Yet, there is also a growing resistance to purely functional training that proposes DH tools and methods should not be included merely to pander to neoliberal, capitalist drives and that, instead, a thoroughgoing critique of assumptions and norms must be applied to any technologies employed. There is a broader ethical concern at play. Students are not only future employees with a skill set to offer an employer but also citizens in a rapidly evolving digital society. As such, it is important to prepare them to ask searching questions about the effect of digital technologies on society and democracy.

Digital Humanities Teaching at UCLan

Recognising the growing importance of including digital methods and tools in humanities teaching, the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) made the decision in 2018 to create the post of lecturer in digital humanities. The aim was to consolidate existing good practice and create new learning opportunities for our students. Alongside a new second-year module and workshops for faculty, one of the major outcomes has been the work carried out in conjunction with the foundation team and, in particular, the foundation module that was redeveloped by the authors of this paper.

Foundation Level Teaching

UCLan's foundation entry transitional program is a pre-degree, one-year introduction to the skills and knowledge students will need to be able to successfully navigate the university environment. It is based on the principles of widening participation. Widening participation was originally established on the notion of education as a social good as put forth in the *Report of the Committee appointed by the Prime Minister under the Chairmanship of Lord Robbins 1961–1963*. The idea is to create more equitable opportunities for marginalized or non-traditional students to participate in higher education. This category includes those students who are underrepresented in higher education like mature, first-generation, and working-class students, as well as students with disabilities and, in some disciplines, female students (Fragoso et al. 69). Foundation entry students are from diverse backgrounds and of various ages, some with limited experiences of using technology. They need academic skills development and mentoring, including in strategies for navigating the university culture as students who do not fit the dominant archetype (Allen and Joseph).

The main purpose of the foundation year is not just learning how to write an essay or use the library, although we do teach this. It is also about critical thinking, evaluating and conducting ethical research, and navigating the university and its expectations. The foundation year is about ways of being and belonging in the academy. Additionally, the foundation entry offers students the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the higher education environment, access resources and staff who will be with them for the next four years, and make friends to support them along the way. It gives the students insight into the habitus and culture of power within the university.

The hidden curriculum theory supports the need for explicit teaching about the culture of power (Delpit) and that students learn to be and act in a specific socio-cultural environment (Giroux). Learning happens not just from doing classwork but also from the way they are taught to behave and see the educators and institution behaving. José Víctor Orón Semper and Maribel Blasco state that educators or institutions may or may not be aware that they have implicit expectations and are often transmitting these more effectively to some students who already understand these codes of power and interactional styles. Educators often do not critically examine the notions of what the dominant culture sees as truth and worthwhile knowledge. The massification of higher education and the one-way transmission styles of some lectures assume a particular ideology and are often less effective for marginalized students than dialogic teaching, which affirms student and teacher agency.⁶ This is also supported by bell hooks' experience from teaching marginalized students. Orón Semper and Blasco confirm what Delpit has stated, that “teachers must ask themselves, and discuss with students, in what ways the curriculum they teach represents the dominant ideological interests in the society in question, and how their institution legitimates these forms of knowledge as ‘truths’” (491). When both teachers and students become critically aware of the culture of power and its impact on dominant curriculum discourses, they can explicitly understand, and more effectively position themselves within, the culture of power. DH and critical pedagogies are useful in this regard as they often address the complexities of power and agency.

Digital Skills

Even though critically thinking about society and power is important for our students, and we tackle topics linked to a variety of themes, this rarely translates across to the digital world we all now inhabit. For many students embarking on a degree in the humanities or social sciences, the learning outcomes are still most frequently assessed through essay-style assignments, which only necessitates use of Microsoft Word or other word processing software. This reflects the dominant mode of assessment in higher education and particularly the humanities, but we need to challenge and diversify this and allow for alternate forms of expression, not only to help create a more inclusive assessment but also to improve students' digital capabilities.

Some projects may require interaction with Excel or similar software, and the COVID-19 pandemic has forced everyone into a greater familiarity with online meeting platforms such as Teams. However, we have found that students are not readily experimental with their use of technology (even among students who are keen gamers).² While we were concerned that they were not becoming familiar with a broader range of digital tools, technologies, and platforms, we were also aware of a deeper problem: that we were training humanists, who had the ability to ask deep, searching, and difficult questions about language, culture, and politics, but we were not directing them to turn that keen insight upon the digital world that is evolving around us. By introducing them to these ideas and concepts at foundation level, we had the opportunity to set them up to ask these questions during their whole degree and beyond in the working world.

From a functional perspective, our university already offers a great deal of skills training in programs and platforms including the Microsoft and Adobe suites. These are offered via the Technology Enabled Learning and Teaching Team. We also have a subscription to LinkedIn Learning, which provides students with training videos for several tools and technologies. This support is a great boon for students and lecturers alike, enabling students to build their skills and ensuring lecturers do not spend excessive class time on technology instruction at the expense of other content. All of this is available to students from the moment of their entry into the university; however, we have found that the wealth of opportunities can be overwhelming and, without proper guidance, can be as damaging to a student's confidence as a lack of adequate support. In addition to acknowledging that guidance is essential to developing meaningful digital skills, we were also keen to develop a critical approach to digital tools and digital culture. We will offer some specific examples of how we have done this in the section below on the module redesign.

Redeveloping a Module

“Target Award” Module Prior to Redevelopment

Students take four compulsory modules which cover study skills, critical thinking, research skills, and independent learning. The module under redevelopment was an independent extended essay, with some supervisor sessions, which was known as “Target Award Extended Study.” The students picked a topic they were interested in that was relevant to their degree program (target award) and planned and wrote an essay on

this topic. Some students did quite well, but many struggled with the lack of support provided since there were no taught classes to attend and only six supervisor meetings. Based on student feedback and the pass rate of this module, we knew this was not working for many. It was just too early for these students to be independent without regular class contact, and since the module was not timetabled, some students did not engage with it until it was too late. So, we transitioned to more in-class, timetabled sessions but kept the same assignments and supervisors. This still did not work, and students also kept asking for more support with digital skills and university systems. This echoes the findings of Kennedy and Dahlstrom et al., mentioned above, who also show that students reported a need for more digital and software skills.

The Jisc “Digital Experience Insights Survey” looks at further education in colleges and universities in the UK. The 2018 survey found that only 41% of students thought their course prepared them for the digital workplace (Newman et al.). So, we used the taught sessions to introduce more digital skills. This, however, meant that the extended essay assessments no longer fit the class content. The module was no longer constructively aligned (Biggs 52). Constructive alignment ensures learning outcomes, course content, and assessment are integrated. It was also useful to connect this to student feedback and our own reflective evaluations (Biggs and Tang). It was at this point that the lecturer in digital humanities was asked to join the foundation team to help redesign the module with a greater focus on digital skills and literacies.

“Target Award” Redesigned

While we had identified a need to teach digital skills that were contextual and critical as well as functional, our research into digital literacies and digital humanities demonstrated that this was rarely how digital skills were being framed in the classroom. The Jisc report on the 2020–2021 academic year regarding students’ digital skills and online learning found that the digital capabilities that were offered to students across the UK mostly focused on learning online and behaviour management. Information and data literacy is at the bottom with only 15% of courses offering support. The percentages of learners who said they were offered support or training to develop digital capabilities (they could select more than one) were:

- 61% – learning online
- 46% – tracking your progress and achievements
- 41% – behaving safely and respectfully online
- 37% – basic information technology (IT) skills
- 35% – keeping personal data safe
- 32% – protecting your privacy in online spaces
- 29% – avoiding plagiarism
- 19% – specialist software for your course
- 15% – information and data literacy

(Jisc, “Student Digital Experience Insights Survey 2020/21”)

Much of the focus on digital skills in the UK seems to be on employability skills and learning online. There is more emphasis on how to use digital tools and technologies and on behaviour management than on being able to critically evaluate these digital tools and develop information and digital literacies. This fits with the neoliberal mindset reflected in policy positions both in the UK and the US, that universities are primarily about employability and not really for preparing students for becoming engaged and informed citizens (Giroux).

DH and critical digital pedagogy seem to be some of the few areas in which the link is being made between functional digital skills, literacies, and a more critical and ethical approach. Kennedy identifies this link and the need to integrate digital methods as key to overcoming inequalities: “Incorporating DH methods into non-DH classrooms is more than pedagogically important—it is an ethical duty and a feminist imperative” (para 1). Students increasingly need digital literacy skills, but they are also subject to various discriminations that can be amplified by certain technologies. For example, racial and gender bias in algorithms is well documented (O’Neil; Noble). Western students also must navigate societies where the internet is often the first place they go for information (Szymkowiak et al.), but this risks exposure to disinformation and conflicting ideas. Being able to critically evaluate information for accuracy and bias is important. Public problems can be exacerbated by a lack of critical thinking about technologies (Shin et al.; Dalkir and Katz.) This is evident from the Cambridge Analytica scandal; the issues with Facebook and other media platforms can confuse the public and dilute access to accurate information (especially in the case of the ongoing pandemic).⁸ In keeping with our student-centred approach, we believe students must be encouraged to think about how they can take these questions about the digital world beyond the classroom and scrutinize technology both within their own lives and society as a whole.

In this regard, alongside learning digital tools and methods, we strive also to question received narratives and decolonize our digital curriculum. The very history of our engagement with forms of data storage, processing, and transformation in the humanities is fertile ground for enquiry and education. Father Roberto Busa’s *Index Thomisticus*, begun in the 1940s, is often cited as one of the earlier examples of the electronic processing of texts for humanist scholarship. This founding myth has been problematized by some and rejected by others. Steven E. Jones’ 2016 book traces the history of Father Busa’s involvement with the emergence of humanities computing and, later, digital humanities. Jones cautions that while Busa helped “to establish a viable form of [...] humanities data processing” (3), DH came along much later and should be distinguished from humanities computing. It would also be misleading to suggest a direct genealogy from Busa’s work to most of the work carried out today. Arun Jacob further destabilizes the “founding father” narrative, noting the problems inherent in allowing our cultural memory to be shaped by such myths and reinstating a more complex and nuanced history. Both Jacob and Dorothy Kim provoke us to acknowledge some of the unsettling connections between DH and the military industrial complex. Kim proposes a radical re-examination of the history of DH, reminding us that non-electronic Indigenous technologies for data recording, such as the Andean Khipu, were both highly successful and largely erased by colonizers. Further, she explores the history of the programmable loom as a locus of innovation in the use of binary code. Challenges to dominant narratives form an important

part of authentic humanities education and this must extend to include the digital tools, techniques, and platforms that we use.

The redesign of the “target award” module had to strike a careful balance. Critical digital literacy is as important as developing functional skills. We did not want to just teach basic digital skills, although these will be useful. Students needed guidance in developing functional skills that would be relevant to their degree program and future careers. But this skills development also needed to be contextual so that they could appreciate why these skills were relevant. We wanted to nurture their critical thinking to enable them to ask and answer deeper questions about how digital tools are used and how they shape society. Alongside this, we hoped that this kind of skills development would give them resilience in a world that is still painfully full of biases, assumptions, and prejudices. While we still have much work to do, this is the blueprint that we bear in mind as we design and develop the module components. Delivering this in practice required us to be responsive and agile. The numbers of students from each degree program can vary from year to year, as can their circumstances (UCLan has a particularly high rate of students who fall under the umbrella of widening participation) and their familiarity with technology. Add to this that we were attempting this module redesign during the COVID-19 pandemic and the result was a very unpredictable environment and set of circumstances.

The digital tools and methods that we included ranged from planning and research management tools that would benefit all, to demonstrations of subject-specific data management and analysis tools, to philosophical and sociological discussions of the impact of digital technologies. For every practical element we introduced, we worked to ensure that it was presented in a context that resonated with at least some of the degree programs the students were taking and led to a discussion that would engage their critical faculties. Hence, using Boolean operators allowed us to demonstrate library skills but also generated a conversation about how metadata shapes our ability to find materials, while project management tools allowed us to consider work-life balance and well-being in relation to use of digital tools and platforms.

A particularly good example is how we have adapted our training in Microsoft Excel to develop functional and critical skills in a contextual manner. We begin by ensuring that all students have a good grasp of basic Excel concepts such as rows, columns, cells, ranges, worksheets, and workbooks, as well as how to navigate through all these and where particular tools are located using tabs and ribbons. We then progress to some simple conditional formatting and formulas. Some students at this point may still struggle to see the relevance, so we progress to finding and downloading data that might be relevant for an essay or project. We demonstrate how to search and refine that data and produce a graph or chart that could be used in a poster or presentation assignment. One such data set is a list of those killed and wounded at the Battle of Gettysburg. We show students how they can refine the data to show, for example, figures by state or by regiment. Having shown how historians might use a spreadsheet, we then discuss how other disciplines might employ this kind of data, showing examples of maps and network diagrams that draw on spreadsheets to generate data visualizations. From here, we can then orient the discussion toward ethical issues of data collection. This can range from

modern legal requirements such as GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) through to the moral issues associated with using slave manifests as primary sources in understanding slavery, as discussed by Jessica Marie Johnson.

Use of text mining and corpus linguistics tools such as Voyant and AntConc was popular with many students (Sinclair and Rockwell; Anthony). This led to an examination of close versus distant reading and some of the ethical issues in text mining, such as diagnosis at a distance based on factors such as vocabulary density (for example, Agatha Christie's corpus of novels has been analyzed by Ian Lancashire and Graeme Hirst, who drew some initial conclusions drawn about the decline in the richness of her vocabulary. While her family noted some dementia-like symptoms, this raises questions of the ethical use of such text-mining technology). In our political, philosophical, and sociological discussions we employed Safiya Noble's *Algorithms of Oppression* and Andreas Ekström's TED Talk on the moral bias behind search engines as a jumping off point for discussions on race and digital technology. We also used Carole Cadwalladr's uncovering of the Cambridge Analytica Brexit scandal to generate a conversation on politics, the ethics of social media and filter bubbles ("Facebook's Role"). We introduced students to the issue of how data itself can be sensitive by talking about Johnson's work on slavery archives and projects such as [Mukurtu](#) that help communities to "manage [...] their digital heritage in culturally relevant and ethically-minded ways" ("Welcome").

We had issues with the assessment not really fitting the kind of module we were now teaching, so based on other research around co-production and engaging students more with the design of the module (Doyle et al.; Meer and Chapman), we decided to let the students devise the marking criteria for the assessments. This links with our student-centred pedagogy and addresses some of the issues of the hidden curriculum. The questions we asked were: What did they think, based on the learning outcomes and module introduction, would be an appropriate assessment for this module? What criteria should we use to decide if this was a good assignment? In the first week of this module in January 2021 students had discussions in the seminar groups about these questions and came up with an assessment schedule that incorporated a plan and project as assessments, and then the criteria the projects should meet. This was then finalized and sent out to all students as the marking criteria for their projects:

- How accessible and understandable is it? (Is it easy enough to use?)
- Does it have an interactive element?
- Is the interactive element interesting and relevant to the stated project?
- Have they used the right digital tool for the project? Does it work well for that particular project?
- Does the project have clearly stated aims?
- Has the project met the stated aims?
- Have they used appropriate academic evidence to back up their research?
- Is there the ability for peer feedback, e.g., a feedback form or link?

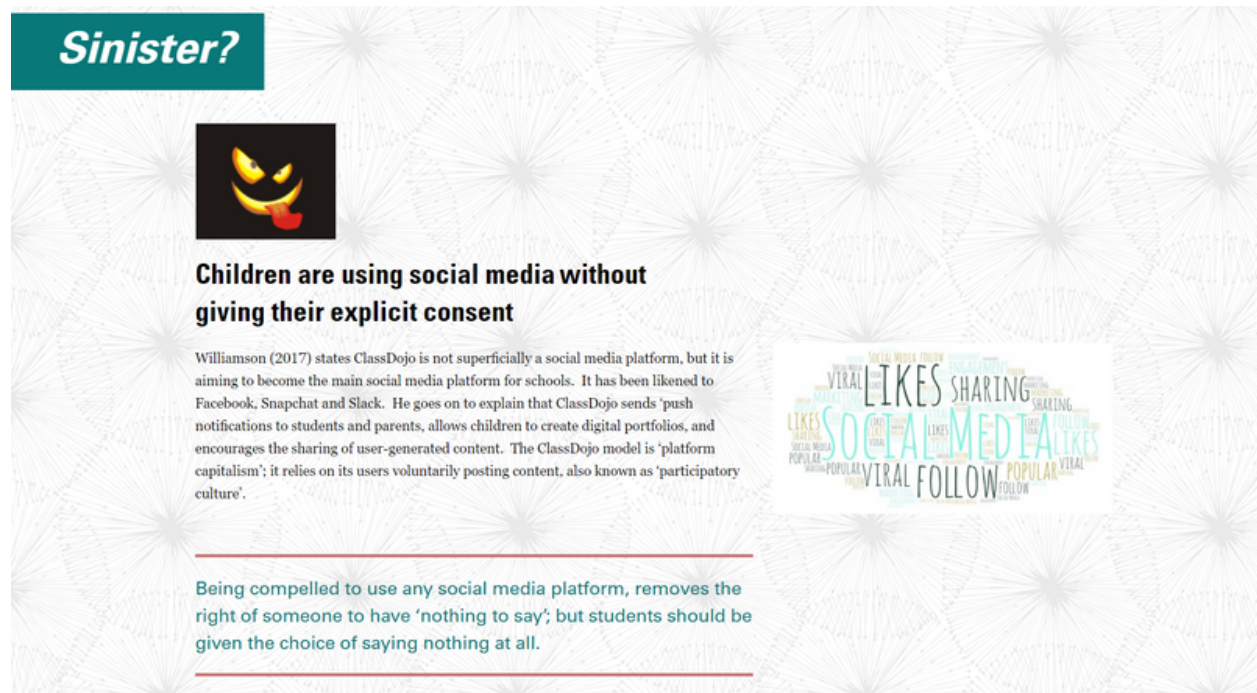
Student Projects and Feedback

The projects came in a variety of configurations. Some students utilized the digital technologies well and produced creative projects. Others stuck to a more traditional essay style format, in spite of the student-developed criterion that they include an element of interactivity. Although they were given training on Sway and other digital production tools, some students felt more comfortable producing an essay.⁹ Others were grateful for the opportunity to produce something different and develop new skills.


Three students have given us permission to showcase and discuss their projects. Martina made excellent use of [Sway](#) to discuss the pros and cons of Class Dojo, a learning platform used by her own children. She focused on the ethics of these platforms and the lack of consent that children have in how their data is used. Sway allowed her to include graphics and videos and create an interactive presentation that was dynamic and well structured. We made it clear to students that, while we wanted them to get creative with how they used digital tools and platforms, they still had to produce a cogent argument, backed up by academic sources and with appropriate examples. Martina's project demonstrated both style and substance.



Figure 1: Sample of Martina's project explaining how Class Dojo works. Courtesy of Martina, "Class Dojo: Superstar or Sinister," May 2021.



Sinister?



Children are using social media without giving their explicit consent

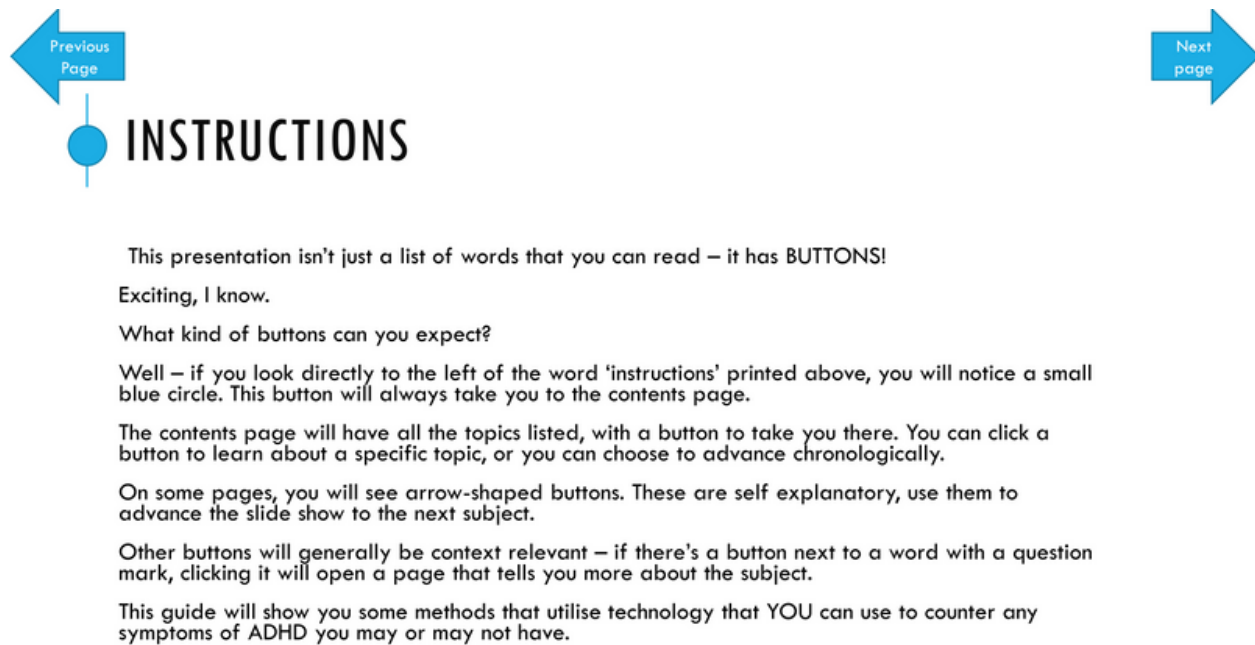
Williamson (2017) states ClassDojo is not superficially a social media platform, but it is aiming to become the main social media platform for schools. It has been likened to Facebook, Snapchat and Slack. He goes on to explain that ClassDojo sends 'push notifications to students and parents, allows children to create digital portfolios, and encourages the sharing of user-generated content. The ClassDojo model is 'platform capitalism'; it relies on its users voluntarily posting content, also known as 'participatory culture'.

Being compelled to use any social media platform, removes the right of someone to have 'nothing to say'; but students should be given the choice of saying nothing at all.

Word cloud containing terms: VIRAL, LIKES, SHARING, SOCIAL MEDIA, FOLLOW, POPULAR, VIDEOS, COMMENTS, MESSAGES, FRIENDS, POSTS, ALBUMS, GAMES, APPS, WEBSITES, BLOGS, PODCASTS, VIDEOS, MUSIC, ART, CRAFTS, WRITING, DRAWING, PHOTOGRAPHY, VIDEOGRAPHY, ANIMATION, CODING, ROBOTICS, GARDENING, COOKING, BAKING, CRAFTING, BUILDING, PAINTING, SCULPTURE, DANCE, MUSIC, THEATRE, SPORTS, GAMES, TOYS, CLOTHING, ACCESSORIES, HOMEWARE, FURNITURE, GARDENING, COOKING, BAKING, CRAFTING, BUILDING, PAINTING, SCULPTURE, DANCE, MUSIC, THEATRE, SPORTS, GAMES, TOYS, CLOTHING, ACCESSORIES, HOMEWARE, FURNITURE.

Figure 2: Sample of Martina's project exploring the drawbacks of Class Dojo. Courtesy of Martina, "Class Dojo: Superstar or Sinister," May 2021.

Leonard drew on his personal experience coping with ADHD. He explored the non-linear possibilities of Microsoft PowerPoint to create an interactive presentation that described symptoms and reviewed digital tools for living with ADHD. Alongside the usual slide advance features of PowerPoint, he created additional buttons that led to extra pages and content, allowing the reader to sidetrack and explore particular concepts. Part of the rationale behind Leonard's project was to give the reader a sense of his experience of the world: the linear arrangement of traditional essays can be more challenging, but there are other ways to express ideas. This was very rewarding for us as teachers, to be able to facilitate students in creating work that aligned with their talents and modes of expression rather than constraining them to less suitable formats. Other neurodiverse students also explored different formats successfully, including narrated slides and videos.



You can also click the slide itself to advance to the next page, but it won't be in the intended order, and it's going to leave me feeling quite upset – I made these buttons for you!

Figure 3: Sample of Leonard's project showing the interactive instructions. Courtesy of Leonard, "ADHD, University, and No Diagnosis: A Guide on How to Do Well with ADHD and Without a Diagnosis, using Digital Tools," May 2021.

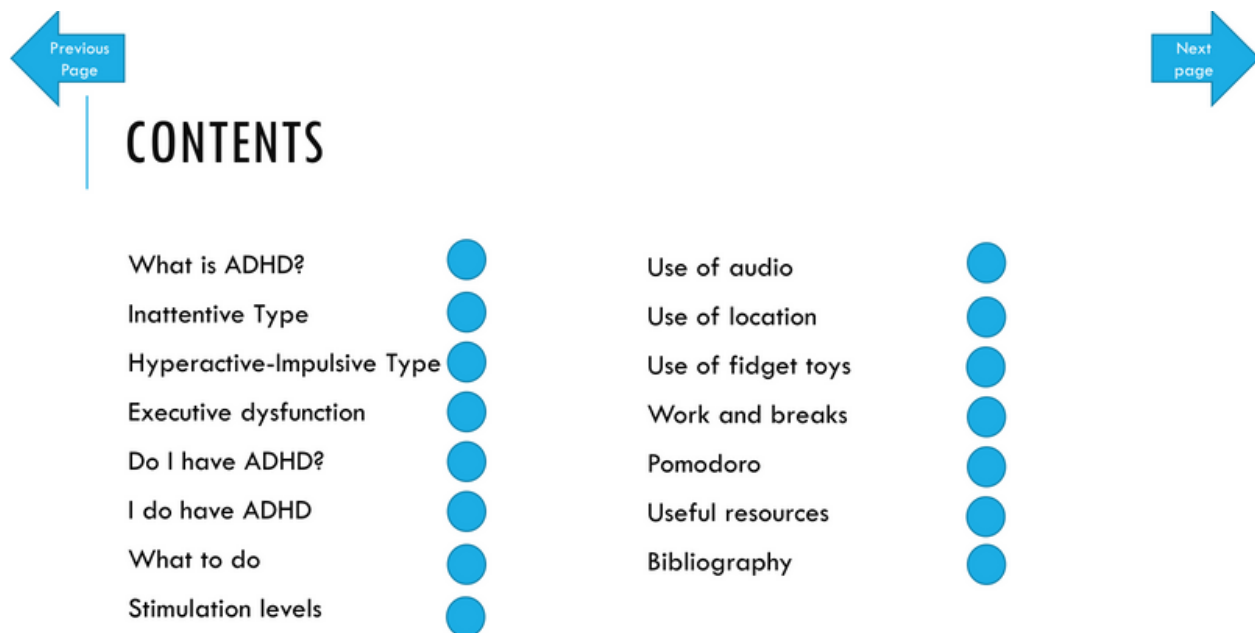


Figure 4: Sample of Leonard's project showing the contents page. Courtesy of Leonard, "ADHD, University, and No Diagnosis: A Guide on How to do Well with ADHD and Without a Diagnosis, using Digital Tools," May 2021.

For those who did opt for a more traditional format, many produced insightful commentaries including explorations of how digital technology has affected the d/Deaf community and whether video games can support mental wellness. Caolan's essay was a deep dive into the ethics of technology. His insightful essay explored pieces such as Heidegger's *The Question Concerning Technology* and Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* and engaged particularly with ideas concerning social media and freedom and what it means to be human.

When students were asked about feedback for the module they indicated that they thought it was relevant and that they felt they were developing new and useful skills:

- "I am glad my tutor convinced me to use Sway for my assessment, it's easier than I thought and I learned new skills."
- "As a mature student who's never been good with technology I'm surprised how much I learned, my laptop isn't a paper weight anymore!"
- "The opportunity to use a new medium (Sway in my case) was really good and helps build my skill set. I don't often ask for help, but when I did, I got it immediately and it helped me get on the right track with my project."
- "The course was excellent - the 2 assignments were linked together well (Project Plan and then the actual Project) and I feel I've learned how to be a better researcher."

This feedback, in conjunction with the interesting and innovative projects, enabled us to reflect on what we have achieved with this module and consider how to further develop students' digital capabilities.

Conclusions and Future Development

Overall, we felt that the redesign of the module was a success and improved upon its previous incarnation. Nevertheless, there was much that we learned that will help us to build on this success in the future. One area for development is how we help students to understand the possibilities of different modes of presentation. For example, some students effectively wrote essays and pasted them into a Sway and did not insert additional media. If they had done so, it would have better illustrated their points or allowed them to skip wordy explanations by providing an image or a video. There seems to be a tension here about translating the expectations of academic writing into digital media. We will have to be more explicit with our expectations regarding working with digital media. Now we have some examples to show students, we should be able to articulate this difference more effectively.

Several students expressed a lack of confidence in using digital tools. Despite receiving some good submissions in essay format, we decided that next year this will not be an option unless a student needs inclusive adjustments. Instead, we will offer the training on Sway, Wakelet, and video presentations in the first couple of weeks and give them more time to practice and prepare.¹⁰ In most cases, we feel that it is a matter of taking students out of their comfort zone, challenging them, and showing them they can learn something new.

This will also be ameliorated by the return to classroom teaching. Face-to-face classes will be followed by a “stay and play” session in which students can experiment with what they have just learned. Instructors will be present to answer questions one-to-one while everyone works on their own projects, something that was not possible with the online class format.

While we have emphasized the importance of contextual learning, the scope of material and relevance of topics is a problem. Since the foundation is designed to prepare students for a range of degree programs in the School of Humanities, Languages and Global Studies, we cannot make every demonstration or discussion relevant to every student. This does mean that we risk overwhelming students with too many different tools, methods, and platforms or being too shallow in our treatment of particular topics or technologies. Unfortunately, timetabling constraints mean that we cannot divide the seminar groups according to degree program, so balancing the module is going to be an ongoing process. We do need to emphasize to students that they do not need to absorb everything we show them. In the previous semester the students had taken a module which consisted of twelve lectures on different subject areas in academia, ranging from politics, to music, to sociology, to Japanese culture, and more. Yet they were only expected to write an essay on one of those subjects. Similarly, in the digital skills module, we do not expect students to exhibit competence in every technology or topic and we must, therefore, ensure that they understand this.

Many issues we have noticed really come down to the assumptions we make about people being “digital natives,” especially younger students. There is a good reason why digital humanists are wary of that phrase. Those who grew up with an iPhone in their pocket are not necessarily more confident with technology. One particular assumption related to distinctions between the words “digital,” “technology,” and “electronics,” which we believed were implicitly understood, was challenged. It was not until project plans were submitted mid-semester that it became clear that we required better clarification of terminology from the outset. This could take the form of interactive quizzes so students can see that everyone has misconceptions and confusions when it comes to definitions of technical words that we may employ every day.

While we acknowledge the limitations and drawbacks of what we delivered over the past academic year, we cannot help but feel excited and inspired for what is to come. The new module addresses some of the imbalances in digital teaching that caused us concern: it has allowed us to bring an ethical and critical dimension to introducing digital skills. At the same time, it has allowed us to make the module more relevant and up to date, giving students the opportunity to foster their digital skills and to consider which skills will be relevant for their degree program and the working world beyond. Indeed, on examining the Jisc “Digital Capabilities Framework,” we believe our module addresses all six of the defined elements. As stated above, student feedback reflected our own impressions of how the module was received. We look forward to continuing this journey with a new cohort and guiding them in becoming digitally engaged students and citizens, too.

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Footnotes

0. A module in the UK is equivalent to a course in the US. ↵
0. [Christian-Lamb and Shrout](#) (2017) make a similar point about the development of DH pedagogy in North America. The development of undergraduate digital humanities appears to be ahead of the UK, with more examples of DH teaching embedded at that level. ↵
0. [University College London](#), [Lancaster University](#), and [Kings College London](#) all offer master's courses. [Swansea University](#) offers an MA by research, while [Durham University](#) has a master of data science (digital humanities) course and [Coventry University](#) offers a course in post-digital humanities. Related degree programs include courses in digital media at the [University of Sussex](#) and digital and social media at the [University of Huddersfield](#). The University of Exeter, which has a Digital Humanities Lab, offers DH support across a range of subjects at the undergraduate and master's levels. The only DH course at the undergraduate level in the UK is King's College London's [BA in digital culture](#). Several universities offer a BA in digital media, and Newman University's [BA in applied humanities](#) has a digital component. ↵
0. While it is not our purpose here to explore DH provision at an undergraduate level in the US in any great depth, it is worth acknowledging the long history of concerted efforts to integrate DH into the curriculum. Pannapacker in particular highlights the efforts that have been made, with support from bodies such as the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, to make DH more visible and accessible, particularly within Liberal Arts colleges. We also note the importance of tools such as Voyant, which have made complex methods like text mining more palatable for beginners. ↵
0. A lively discussion on the Digital Humanities Summer Institute mailing list identified some further undergraduate programmes that did not appear in either Sula et al. or [the GitHub list](#), giving the overall impression that DH offerings in the US at an undergraduate level are on the rise. ↵
0. Massification in higher education is a term that has been used to acknowledge the dramatic increase in student enrolment starting in the late 1990s, due to widening participation policies which increased the places available for disadvantaged or marginalized students at university (Hornsby and Osman). ↵

0. While research has been carried out into inequalities of access to technology and training and data is available on the kinds of technologies schools have used, particularly over the pandemic, for the purposes of our study here we were interested in the experiences and reactions of our students. We found that factors such as age, educational experience, or recreational use of technology were not reliable predictors of a student's level of comfort with new digital tools and platforms. In some cases the resistance could be linked with being unfamiliar with digital tools and technology, while in other cases students appeared overloaded by having to deal with too many different programs despite their technical ability. [↵](#)
0. One such example was the misinformation spread regarding Turkey's position within the European Union, with some posts on Facebook claiming the country would join the Union by 2020 despite concerns about human rights violations within the country; other examples include anti-vaccination groups disseminating false claims about the nature and purpose of the COVID-19 vaccinations. In 2020, the UK Cabinet Office published the results of their consultation on this problem in the report *Transparency in Digital Campaigning: Technical Consultation on Digital Imprints*; however the Electoral Commission in their response *Transparency in Digital Campaigning: Response to Cabinet Office Technical Consultation on Digital Imprints* have identified some problems regarding the lack of transparency in some processes that could continue to result in misinformation being shared with the voting public. [↵](#)
0. Sway is a Microsoft Office product that can be used for presentations, reports, or blogs. We find that the block-style manner of adding content prepares students for working with more complex website-building programs that they may encounter in the future. The resulting piece of work has a URL, making it easy to share with future employers or other educators. [↵](#)
0. [Wakelet](#) is a platform that allows users to curate digital content. Blocks of text can be interspersed with things such as website links, videos, PDFs, and images, making it a useful platform for a student who wishes, for example, to analyze the purpose and content of an academic website for their project. [↵](#)