

How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Digital Pedagogy (Part II)

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In [Part I of this Toolbox](#), we discussed using [Critical Digital Pedagogy \(CDP\)](#) to restructure online courses. Here in Part II, Elaine and I (Jessica) offer descriptions of some of the pedagogical practices, design decisions, and various tools I tried in my online courses last year.

[Building Community with JMU's WordPress Installation](#)

One of my goals for my Feminism and Performance course, a small seminar, is to build a strong classroom community informed by feminist practices. To help me achieve this objective in the online version of the course I taught in the fall of 2020, Elaine suggested I develop a class website, to which students could post their assignments. After consultation, JMU Libraries staff worked with me to [create a course site](#) using JMU's WordPress Installation. Each student had their own page on the site, which they used as a blog, posting four reflections over the course of the semester. I loved that these posts demonstrated the development of their understanding of feminist thought over time. Students read and commented on each other's blogs, fostering a true sense of engagement and support in the class even as we were online. Our site was private, but professors can make theirs public and, in other course contexts, it might be beneficial for students to create work knowing that it will be shared more broadly. (A key tenet of CDP and [Open Pedagogy](#) is student agency in matters of privacy.) The site housed student responses to the readings, which they wrote as "tweets," and student-generated videos and short papers on feminist theorists, so it became a resource for the class as they worked on their final papers and presentations. (Interested in how you might be able to use WordPress in your class? You can email [JMU Libraries support](#) or fill out a [consultation request](#). There are [many people](#) in the Libraries who can help you work through the questions and concerns to determine a best fit for your class).

[Social Annotation and Hypothes.is](#)

Consulting about my Theatre Histories courses, I mentioned to Elaine that I sometimes assign challenging readings that students struggle to get through on their own. Enter social annotation! Elaine introduced me to an open source, free program called [Hypothes.is](#). Hypothes.is enables students to annotate PDFs and web-based artifacts and to see and comment on each other's annotations, which gives them the effect of working through the reading together. ([See an example here](#).) Hypothes.is also calls students' attention to *how* they read. I invite students to share definitions of unfamiliar words they encounter, to point out where the author makes their argument, and to highlight the evidence they use to support it. Since my class is somewhat large—I had 40 students—I assigned them to groups of five to annotate, but I know colleagues who have their entire class annotate together. Hypothes.is lets me track students' engagement with the articles and allows me to respond to any confusion they're having. (One drawback: while Hypothes.is *can* integrate with Canvas, faculty can only use it through Canvas for a single semester unless JMU decides to subscribe to and test it.) Hypothes.is can also be a useful open

pedagogical tool. (Read more on that [here](#).) Several students have told me that they like Hypothes.is so much, they now use it to annotate readings in all of their classes!

[Engagement and PearDeck](#)

During the fall of 2020, I delivered my theatre history lectures asynchronously. Wanting to make things as simple as possible for myself, I [recorded audio over PowerPoint slides](#) and posted them on Canvas for students to work through at their own pace. At the end of the semester, I lamented to Elaine about the lack of interactivity of these lectures. I wondered if there were any such thing as an interactive asynchronous presentation software, something that would allow me to embed questions into the lesson so that students would stay engaged throughout. Elaine suggested an application that does just that: PearDeck, which can be used as an add-on to Google Slide or PowerPoint decks. Students access the deck using a link; they don't need to sign up for an account. After a free trial, teachers pay \$149.99/year for the application. It allows teachers [to check in with students](#), [pose questions during the lesson](#), and save their responses in a [dashboard](#). I used it to deliver both synchronous and asynchronous lectures in my online Theatre Histories course in the spring of 2021. Now that I am back in person, I am continuing to use it. I love it because it allows *all* students to participate, even those who don't feel comfortable speaking up in a large lecture class. Follow [this link for an example of one of my PearDeck slides](#).

[Storytelling with Wakelet](#)

In the in-person version of Feminism and Performance, I have students work in pairs to give presentations analyzing feminist protests. In brainstorming about an online-friendly version of the assignment, Elaine pointed me toward [Wakelet](#), a free online platform that allows students to curate content to share. Students can use Wakelet to collect, organize, and save videos, articles, images, tweets, links, and more. While curating is considered a key [21st century skill](#), it was also important to me that students contextualize the resources and build a narrative about them. Wakelet allows students to add their own writing around the selected artifacts. I told the students that [their Wakelets](#) should make a compelling argument about their protest using text and artifacts (e.g., images, videos, articles, and other online content) as evidence. Each Wakelet entry, or block, included a heading and text that explained the relevance of the artifact and analyzed it toward their argument. The Wakelet was a particularly appropriate medium for exploring protests because it allowed students to bring living online artifacts (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, comments from websites, etc.) created by protest participants and witnesses into their analysis. Elaine and I often discuss the role of reflection in the classroom. For the Wakelets, Elaine suggested a reflective feedback tool called ["Glow/Grow/Questions."](#) Each pair was tasked with providing feedback on another pair's Wakelet. Students commented, identifying something positive about the work, pointing out an area of growth, and posing one or two questions for further thought.

[Data Visualization with Timeline JS](#)

I used Timeline JS to translate what was an in-person research presentation to a web-based assignment in the online version of my Theatre Histories II course in the fall of 2020. [Timeline JS](#) allows students to create gorgeous, interactive, web-based timelines. Inspired by [The 1619 Project](#), I asked students to research events in U.S. American history, analyzing them in terms of their long-term and short-term effect on African Americans, as a way of contextualizing performance practices in the 19th century. In the past, I have had students make posters for their events, which we arrange around the classroom and discuss over the course of several class

periods. In the online course, my students created [entries using Timeline JS](#), which we embedded into the class WordPress site. Since the tool allows students to pull in media from all over the web, students learned how to find and use open access media. We ended the unit by discussing the limitations of a timeline as a structure for representing histories of marginalized communities. The students suggested brilliant alternatives to linear representations: spirals, circles, networks, and webs. Perhaps next semester, Elaine can help me find a tech tool to bring their visions for non-traditional timelines to life!

About the authors: [Jessica Del Vecchio](#) is an assistant professor of theatre in the School of Theatre and Dance and a faculty associate in the teaching area of the Center for Faculty Innovation. [Elaine Kaye](#) is an instructional designer (Assistant Professor, JMU Libraries) who is interested in critical instructional design, critical digital pedagogy, open pedagogy, curriculum design and development, equity-based teaching, and social justice pedagogy.