

DIGITAL TEXT EDITING AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER: SHARING TRAINING AND TEACHING METHODS

School activity on digital scholarly editing (working group 6)

Senate House, University of London, UK

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Final Report

Organisers:

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Scientific Abstract

Over the past decades, those active in developing a range of digital scholarly editing practices have built up a large body of knowledge about digital tools and methods that enable the development, presentation, and analysis of digital texts. This has resulted in a wide variety of methods for teaching and training of text editing. However, those who have to adapt quickly to working in a digital scholarly editing environment are often not aware of these different training methods. As a consequence, they could be overlooking available resources, or even re-inventing the wheel. To address this, we organised a one-day workshop on sharing digital text editing training and teaching methods. The event brought together teachers of digital editing with a group of people who have faced the need to learn more about this area, especially young scholars or (early career) researchers who did not receive formal education or training. A number of key practitioners were invited to discuss the core resources available for text editing, and how expertise can be shared more widely. Specifically, the aim was to see how the experience of those in academia who teach and research text editing can contribute to the development of a core set of training materials for those new to the field, and how we can have better knowledge transfer around digital text editing.

The underlying aim of the workshop was therefore to scope what is already available in terms of training materials, and to develop a methodology to assess different kinds of teaching material. This critical overview will assist the community in the further development of teaching material for text editing. As an output of the workshop, a basic and open curriculum will be developed and published as an online resource by NeDIMAH.

The event was funded by the European Science Foundation Network for Digital Methods in the Arts and Humanities (NeDiMAH.eu) and endorsed by DARIAH-RS, and Erasmus +. Co-sponsorship for bursaries was provided by DiXiT, a Marie Curie-funded training network for digital scholarly editors.

Three bursaries were awarded to students and early career researchers from NeDiMAH countries.

Programme

9:00 - 09:30: Coffee, registration, welcome

09:30 - 11:00: Presentations of those who have taught digital text editing. Was asked to discuss what resources and methods they used, their experiences, the challenges they encountered, etc.

Amanda Gailey

"What's the value of digital editing for English majors?"

Toma Tasovac

"Why should we use English words to describe Serbian texts?" The challenges of localization, WYSIWYG and dissemination in teaching Text Encoding

Elena Pierazzo

"After teaching is done: what support for first-time digital editors?"

11:00 - 11:30: Coffee break

11:30 - 12:30: Presentations of people who had to learn digital text editing mainly by themselves: research assistants, people from commercial enterprises, etc.

Elena Spadini

"Contents ... or how to find contents?"

Elli Bleeker

"Learning through different practices: the devil is in the details"

Anna Pytlowany

"The rise of the enthusiastic DH amateur"

12:30 - 13:30: Lunch

13:30 - 14:30: Strategic issues: framing the knowledge transfer issues

Wim Van Mierlo

"Where do you start? What do you know to know about the digital when you embark on a digital edition?"

Arianna Ciula

"Prototype – a practical metaphor."

The issues/questions addressed:

- How to reconcile the need for finite teaching outcomes with the iterative lifecycle of digital editing?
- How to simulate the dynamic aspects of digital editing in 'static' assessment exercises?
- What is an acceptable balance between mastering a technology and imagining its functionalities? (said in other words balance between theory and practice)

Lorna Hughes

"The value and impact of digital editing methods: scholarly production and knowledge exchange"

14:30 -14:30:Charge to the working groups: Split up in different groups, working on the designated issues in knowledge transfer (KT).

14:45 15:45: Breakout session and working group discussing: framing the KT questions, four groups, assign questions to specific groups.

15:45:16:15: Coffee break

16:15 - 17:00 : Final discussion, reporting back, discussion of next steps. Report back of different groups; wrap up; look beyond

Registration was managed by eventbrite: <http://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/workshop-digital-text-editing-and-knowledge-transfer-tickets-16086848196>

Summary of scientific programme

The workshop was an important opportunity for a wider reflection on text editing: how it is taught, developed and understood by the scholarly community, and how it is communicated and disseminated to new academic audiences (including postgraduates and early career scholars) but also to the wider community who can benefit from these approaches, including those working in publishing, the media, and other creative industries.

This topic was framed as part of a wider discussion: an exploration of how engagement with information and communication technologies is transforming knowledge in the arts, humanities and cultural heritage sectors. Where does digital editing sit in the wider debate about what Digital Humanities is, and where it sits within the scholarly ecosystem? Digital Humanities is certainly very fashionable at this time, with much attention in the media and popular press as well as in the academy. Notably, available funding has been directed towards digital humanities:

In the US, the National Endowment for the Humanities Office of Digital Humanities has funded a lot of research, and in the UK, the AHRC strategic theme, “Digital Transformations” has supported a number of projects and activities. Through cross referral with standard research grants an even wider reach of projects with a digital component was created.

There has of course, been a backlash: recent hostile debate on social media has found more thoughtful manifestation in publications exploring underlying tensions, including articles in DH Now, and a recent special issue of the Duke University Press Journal, “Differences”. It is clear that there is some existential angst about Digital Humanities as an emerging area that is gaining ground, yet one that is still hard to define.

Digital Humanities has become almost a brand. However, while many digital humanities flowers have blossomed, this project and centre-led focus can seem fragmented, with little impact on everyday scholarly practice, or the outside community. The very things that make these projects so exciting to work on –their combination of disparate content, tools and methods, and collaborations with researchers and disciplines outside the humanities- can lead to a lack of any sense of disciplinary or practical coherence.

Willard McCarty talked about this in the 2013 Busa award lecture, calling for a digital humanities that has:

‘resonance with the intellectual cultures of the arts and humanities . . . and [of] the technosciences’.

The question is how to achieve this, so we aren’t just ‘doing digital humanities™’, but doing *humanities*, digitally.

It is instructive to look at projects that have a wider remit, and a greater degree of knowledge transfer. Text editing is an important area to explore this synergy, because of the ubiquity of the need to represent text appropriately in all aspects of publishing (especially online). As such, text editing projects have all potential to realise that much-needed broader impact on the scholarly community as well as the general public. One example discussed at the Workshop exemplified this ethos, the research programme in digital collections based in the National Library of Wales, which built a collaborative programme developing digital content and integrating it into research, teaching, and public engagement. This can be found in the use of the digital editions platform, KILN, to develop an edition of manuscripts of Welsh Saints Lives, in a project funded by the AHRC and led by the University of Wales.

Any discussion about Digital Humanities should foreground content, collection-building and curation. This is the core component of what a recent ESF report on ‘*Research Infrastructures in the Arts and Humanities*’ has called a *scholarly ecosystem*. This is no grand, top-down research infrastructure: it is simply the implementation of the optimal conditions for research in a digital environment that is seamless and open. Despite 20 years of digital humanities, and countless Centres and projects, we still haven’t created this. We need to be able to create a critical framework for research that addresses two key challenges: creating and sustaining better digital content as a process of co-production with libraries, archives and museums
creating environments for better use, re-use and linking of the digital content we create: including expensive and labour intensive digital editions.
What are these wider considerations and how do they help us think about digital editing?

A major concern for scholars is that digital text available for analysis is often unreliable. In a recent piece for *Cultural and Social History*, Tim Hitchcock of the University of Sussex argued that many historical digital texts are hugely problematic for research, due to their design and structuring, issues with algorithm-based searching, and their underlying OCR. Re-use and analysis of this material must incorporate these concerns about limits to current text processing. There is a role for the digital humanities scholar to act as an intermediary between scholars, curators, and those working in a digital environment, especially the development of new approaches to OCR, discovery and analysis, evolving into greater scholarly investigation and critique of digital resources. This need for richer, enhanced text is an area where those with experience in creating high-quality digital editions have much to contribute in the next phase of electronic text creations. It could take the form of a *co-creation* between libraries, archives, communities, and researchers, bringing together research, curation, and archive management principles to re-imagine the creation of digital content as a process of creative making.

Where does text editing and encoding have a role to play in creating a research infrastructure for this sort of content?

This leads to the second challenge: creating environments for better analysis and linking of digital content. The evaluation of users of digital content shows that scholars frequently have very simple questions or ideas that they want to test with data at the desktop, and

they do not want the technology to be a barrier. We still haven't managed to fully integrate tools for analysis and linking into content. Digital projects need to become open sandpits for experimentation, disassociating text and data from platform and delivery mechanisms, liberating digital resources for scholarship and ensuring we are not just replicating print culture digitally.

Any consideration of "impact" in the humanities (in UK) focuses on the REF: but we need to think about impact as much more than that. The biggest impact of digital humanities was probably the work to develop XML, led by Michael-Sperberg McQueen and the W3C, which drew directly on early work in text encoding using SGML (used by one of the organisers in 1991, for creating an edition of Scottish landholding documents from the seventeenth century) which fed into the development of the Text Encoding Initiative. However, the debt of XML (without which there would be now WWW) to digital humanities is rarely acknowledged.

What we can do in text editing is accomplish a reflexive analysis of the nature and organisation of the cultural and creative industries across a wide domain, and the praxis-led creation and theorisation of digital research infrastructures for the arts and humanities. We need to enable a more critical appraisal of how this is a major shift in cultural production and the creation and communication of knowledge. It should be forward looking, addressing *post-digital* issues. The focus should be on content: its creation and collection, and how memory and knowledge environments are affected by digital cultures. This will include key research and teaching themes: the ability to scale up (and down) while working with heterogeneous data from diverse sources; skills for the critical analysis and interpretation of data created locally, and by commercial entities; and the experience of embedding digital scholarship in cultural contents, and those that promote widest public engagement.

The key themes that the text encoding community should embrace for the future were summarized as follows:

We need to move beyond replicating print cultures online

We need to work with cultural heritage organisations to create more interdisciplinary, co-curation and critical making

We need to experiment with developing material that is richer, more visual.

We need to think about these issues in a way that is interdisciplinary, encompassing not just the arts and humanities, but art practice, and the STEM disciplines.

This next phase of text encoding should be collaborative, internationally focused, and should be the basis for strong alliances with the cultural heritage sector. This is key in order to take a broader view of cultural heritage, to include not just material culture but also historical archives, audio-visual media, oral history, as well as incorporating new media art practice.

Strategic alliances and collaborations are also necessary, specifically those that enable the co-creation and sharing of knowledge, and understanding use to which our knowledge is put. A key of focus should be sustaining and developing the existing connections and partnerships with libraries, archives, and museums. The experience and understanding of useful digital tools and methods within the GLAM sector is not to be underestimated. These are the partnerships that will enable research developing, using, and opening digital data and outputs for use and re-purposing. Not only would this reduce the risk of fragmented research projects or re-inventing the wheel, but it would also emphasise the core strengths of different digital humanities sectors and promote knowledge transfer.

Notes from each Working Group

The participants were asked to address four strategic questions related to the wider agenda, and their notes are replicated here (this is intended to be a working document to develop the publication: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ypuE5maZaPYA78V0Z-C-uMRvnrIjy020BN2DI8kmsNI/edit>)

Further information

Storify of tweets from the event:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ypuE5maZaPYA78V0Z-C-uMRvnrIjy020BN2DI8kmsNI/edit>

Website: <http://www.nedimah.eu/events/workshop-digital-text-editing-and-knowledge-transfer>