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ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

How can we improve cognitive accessibility in Virtual Learning Environments?

IDENTIFY Context

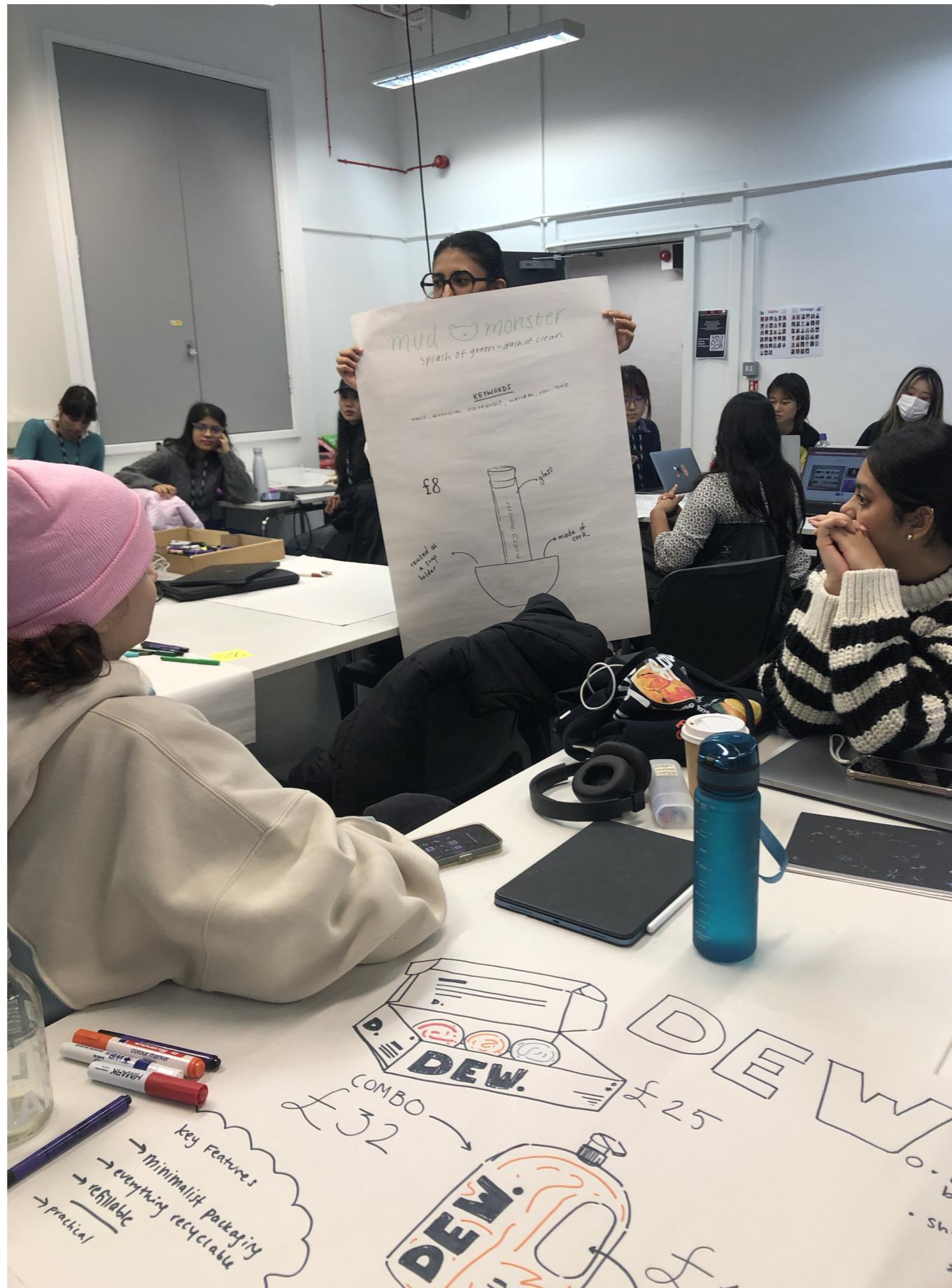
Transition from residential teaching to a fully online MA Graphic Design

Learning mediated almost entirely through Moodle

Online learning is experienced differently, not just where it happens

Loss of physical studio culture and informal peer learning

The platform effectively shapes both learning experience and pedagogy



In-person group crit session on the MA Graphic Branding and Identity at London College of Communication (Huber, 2024).

Expanded in Blog Post 1

(via Online) 22 January 2026 at 14:48

MN Critical Perspectives: 3.4 Discuss: Reading circle
To: Antonia Huber,
Reply-To: Do not reply to this email

[MAGD3 Critical Perspectives](#) » [Forums](#) » [3.4 Discuss: Reading circle](#)

MN 3.4 Discuss: Reading circle
by [Merlinda Nicolls](#) - Thursday, 22 January 2026, 1:17 PM
60 minutes

In this discussion activity, you'll share your responses to the articles you explored in the previous activity, then review and comment on your peers' interpretations of the authors' perspectives.

Instructions

Part 1: Share your responses to the essential reading (around 300 words)

Post your responses to the questions about the articles by Rock and Lupton in the relevant discussion topic.

- What can you find out about the authors of the articles?
- In what contexts (historical, geographical, etc.) were the articles written?
- To what extent do you agree with the authors' perspectives?

Part 2: Review and comment on your peers' contributions

Briefly respond to at least 2 of your peers' posts.

- To what extent do you agree with your peers' opinions?
- Did they engage with the articles through the same lens?
- What differences or similarities do you notice between your perspectives?

Tip

Everyone deserves to have a safe space to express themselves. Please respect your peers' opinions when discussing the readings and other course content, even when you don't agree with them. This helps to build a supportive and inclusive community.

[Reply](#)
[See this post in context](#)

[Unsubscribe from forum](#) [Unsubscribe from this discussion](#) [Change your forum digest preferences](#)

Email notification from the Moodle discussion forum for the MA Graphic Design (Online) (Huber, 2026).

IDENTIFY

Rationale

Studio culture supports experimentation, and trust through shared physical presence

Entering a physical studio produces a clear cognitive and social transition into practice

These conditions are not automatically replicated online

Online learning environments fragment this transition across multiple locations

Online studio pedagogy depends on conditions that platforms may or may not support

Reference

Orr, S. and Shreeve, A. (2017) *Art and design pedagogy in higher education: knowledge, values and ambiguity in the creative curriculum*. London: Routledge.

Expanded in Blog Post 1



Source: Orr and Shreeve (2017), *Art and design pedagogy in higher education*. Routledge.

“Studio as ‘a state of mind’ demands that learners engage in collaborative and community learning, using available spaces, whether physical, online, inside or outside the university.” (Orr, 2017)

IDENTIFY > PLAN Research Focus

Research questions developed through teaching context and reflection

Focus on cognitive accessibility in fully online design education

Framed through both pedagogical practice and platform design

Investigation into structure, navigation and experience of digital learning environments

Reference

Gray, C. and Malins, J. (2004) *Visualizing research: A guide to the research process in art and design*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Expanded in Blog Post 2

Pedagogical approach

How do educators understand and approach cognitive accessibility when designing online learning experiences?

Platform design

How do the design structures of Virtual Learning Environments and alternative platforms support or constrain clarity, navigation, and cognitive accessibility?

IDENTIFY > PLAN Social Justice

Platform design shapes who can participate confidently

Cognitive accessibility unevenly affects students with diverse learning, caring, and working contexts

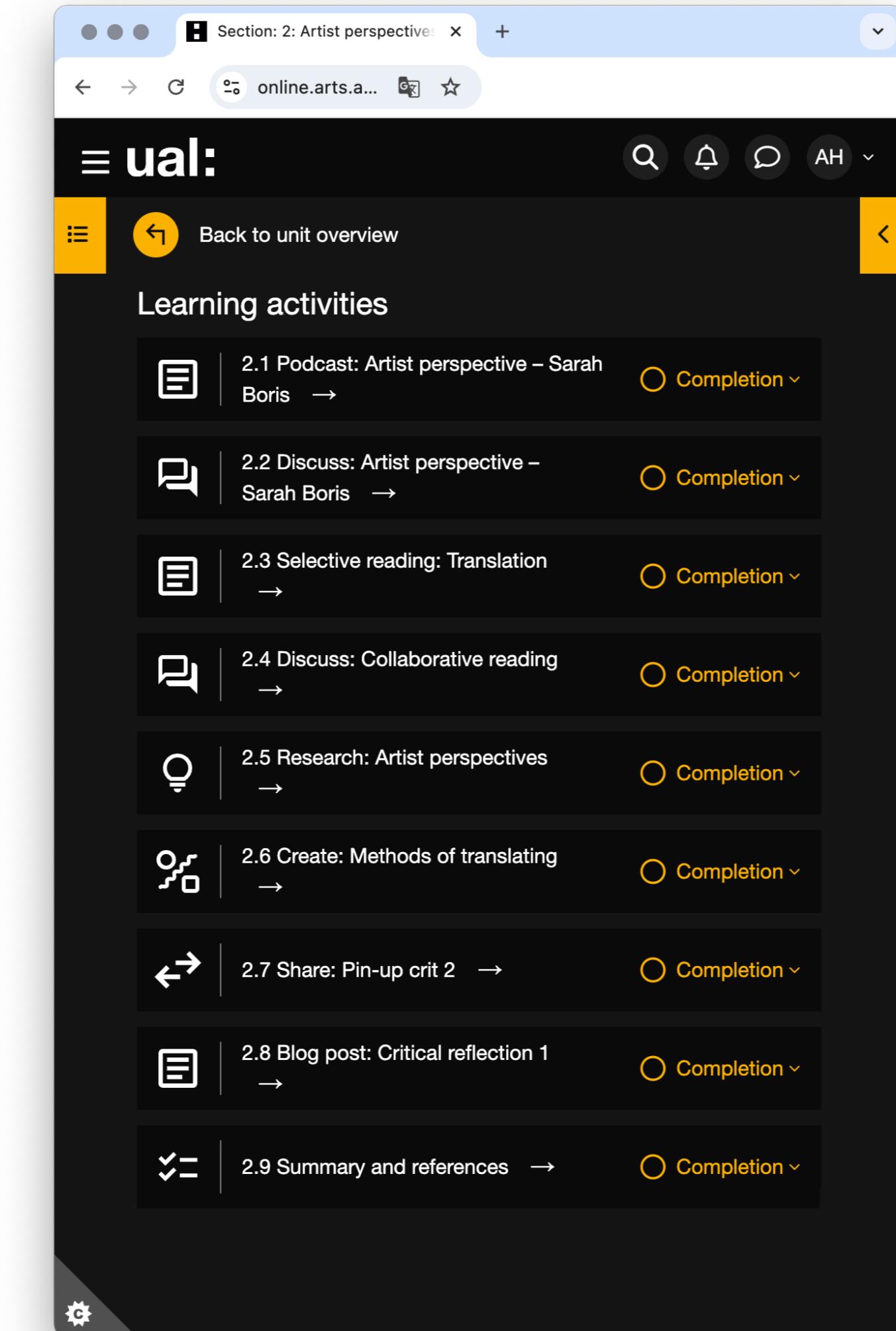
When systems lack clarity, responsibility shifts from institutional design to individual student resilience

Cognitive accessibility a social justice issue, not a neutral technical choice

Reference

Selwyn, N. (2014) *Distrusting Educational Technology: Critical Questions for Changing Times*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Expanded in Blog Post 1 and 5



The screenshot shows a Moodle-based learning environment for the 'MA Graphic Design (Online)' course. The page title is 'Section: 2: Artist perspectives'. The main content area is titled 'Learning activities' and lists nine tasks for the week:

- 2.1 Podcast: Artist perspective – Sarah Boris → Completion
- 2.2 Discuss: Artist perspective – Sarah Boris → Completion
- 2.3 Selective reading: Translation → Completion
- 2.4 Discuss: Collaborative reading → Completion
- 2.5 Research: Artist perspectives → Completion
- 2.6 Create: Methods of translating → Completion
- 2.7 Share: Pin-up crit 2 → Completion
- 2.8 Blog post: Critical reflection 1 → Completion
- 2.9 Summary and references → Completion

Screenshot of a weekly learning sequence within the MA Graphic Design (Online) course, within the Moodle Virtual Learning Environment (Huber, 2026).

“The application of digital technology in educational settings is almost always an unequal affair.”
(Selwyn, 2014)

ACT Research methods + data collection

**Small-scale action research situated
within my teaching context**

**Research focus shifted from student
to educator perspectives due to
institutional positioning and access
constraints**

**Semi-structured interviews and open-
ended questionnaire**

**Interview questions developed
iteratively through tutor and peer
feedback**

Reference

Kemmis, S. and McTaggart, R. (1988)
The action research planner. Geelong:
Deakin University.

Expanded in Blog Post 3

- Own use**
 - 1. How do you feel about online learning environments in general?
 - 2. What helps you most when navigating or building a course site online?
 - 3. Are there any features or layouts that you find confusing or difficult to use?
 - 4. How do you decide which digital platforms to use when teaching or sharing materials?
- Student use**
 - 5. How do you think the design of a platform affects how students learn or engage?
 - 6. In your view, what makes an online learning space clear, accessible, and easy to understand for students?
- General**
 - 7. Have you seen any particularly effective examples (at UAL or elsewhere) where an online space really supports learning well?
 - 8. If you could change one thing about Moodle or another platform, what would it be and why?
- 1. What kind of digital learning platforms are you using in your teaching? (assisted technologies)
- 2. How do you feel about online learning environments in general?
- 3. How do you decide which digital platforms to use when teaching or sharing materials?
- 4. In your view, what makes an online learning space clear, accessible, and easy to understand for students?
- 5. If you could change one thing about Moodle or another platform, what would it be and why?

What are your general thoughts or experiences of online learning environments such as Moodle or similar platforms?

How do you decide which digital platforms to use when teaching or sharing materials?

In your view, what makes an online learning space clear, accessible, and easy to understand for students?

If you could change one thing about Moodle or another platform, what would it be and why?

Visual summary of the iterative development of semi-structured interview questions through tutor and peer feedback (Huber, 2025).

Transcript 2
[Anonymised], [Date removed], [Time removed]

[Researcher] started transcription

[Researcher] 0:03
It because. She stops transcription. It does it today. At the same time. Yeah. I feel bad because I'm not doing my best work at the moment because I'm so in my zone still, but I think it will be right.

image, isn't it?
out it. And it's just like

Transcript 1
[Anonymised], [Date removed], [Time removed]

[Researcher] started transcription

[Researcher] 0:03
Bigger into smaller. So the first question is what are your general thoughts and or experiences of online learning environments such as small and similar platforms?

[Participant 1] 0:05
Yeah. Umm. I think it's a good one way transmission tool. So Moodle I think is. I mean I teach, I teach low residency course, if it's not on Moodle it's not a thing. Because we only teach 2 hours a week live, and that's purely discussion based. So essentially because my students could be sitting down to work at 2:00 AM, they need everything in front of them. And so Moodle is like the point of truth. I think and they, you know, they really praise that actually, but it takes quite a lot to get me to working in that way. I think, you know, you have to have a good head for like information hierarchy. And how to lay things out? The system itself doesn't afford nice design choices like you can't. You can't make somethings, like a table is the way to go. Say for example, for kind of certain information, you can't really make a decent looking table in Moodle without HTML.

[Researcher] 1:11
Yeah.

[Participant 1] 1:23
Like NCSS knowledge, if I'm honest, so it's kind of that's always a bit of a ball like we've got good digital learning coordinators. So that recently I've worked with mine on a template to make things look a bit less Moodle. And a bit

, there would be more
ment of Moodle itself, but
ust have to show we know
ake it tiny. So it's only four

an open-ended semi
and it's just going to be a

online learning
s about those? Yeah.

The screenshot shows a Microsoft Forms questionnaire titled "Improving Cognitive Accessibility in Virtual Learning Environments". The form is for an Action Research Project – PgCert Academic Practice in Art and Design – Antonia Huber. It contains four questions with text input fields for responses:

- What are your general thoughts or experiences of online learning environments such as Moodle or similar platforms? *
- How do you decide which digital platforms to use when teaching or sharing materials? *
- In your view, what makes an online learning space clear, accessible, and easy to understand for students? *
- If you could change one thing about Moodle or another platform, what would it be and why? *

Screenshot of anonymised interview transcripts and Microsoft Forms questionnaire design used to collect qualitative staff responses (Huber, 2025).

ACT

Research

methods +

data collection

Visual artefact review conducted alongside interviews and questionnaire data

Artefacts collected to understand why educators supplement or pivot platforms for pedagogic reasons

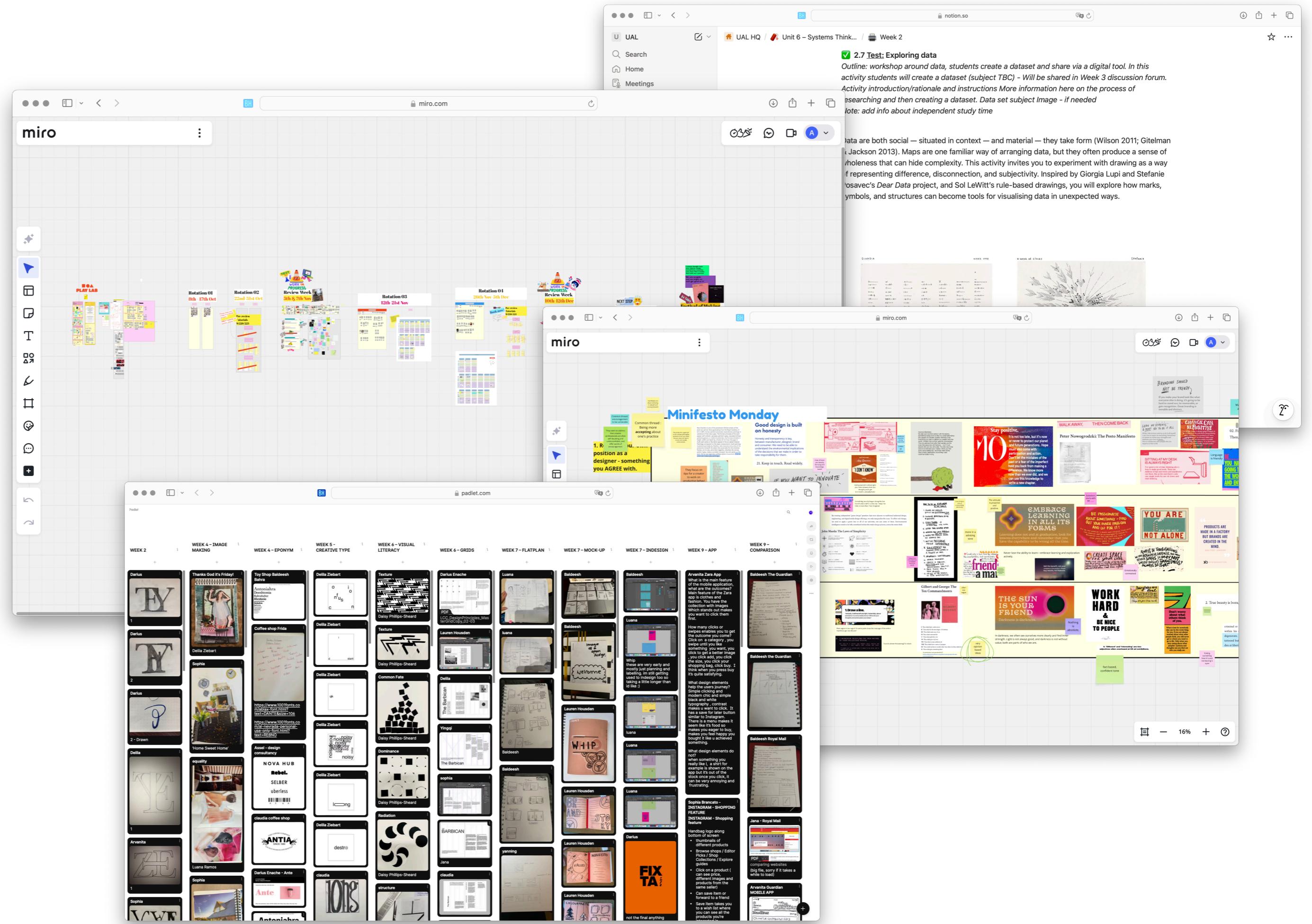
Comparative review of Moodle and alternative platforms (Miro, Padlet, Notion)

Focus on interface structure, navigation, and modes of content organisation

Reference

Bowen, G. A. (2009) ‘*Document analysis as a qualitative research method*’, Qualitative Research Journal.

Expanded in Blog Post 3



Screenshot of visual artefact review comparing Moodle and alternative digital platforms (Huber, 2025).

OBSERVE

Analysis + interpretation

Reflexive thematic analysis acknowledging that different methods produced different depths and qualities of insight (richer interview data alongside more concise questionnaire responses)

Visual clustering in Miro supported pattern recognition across data sources

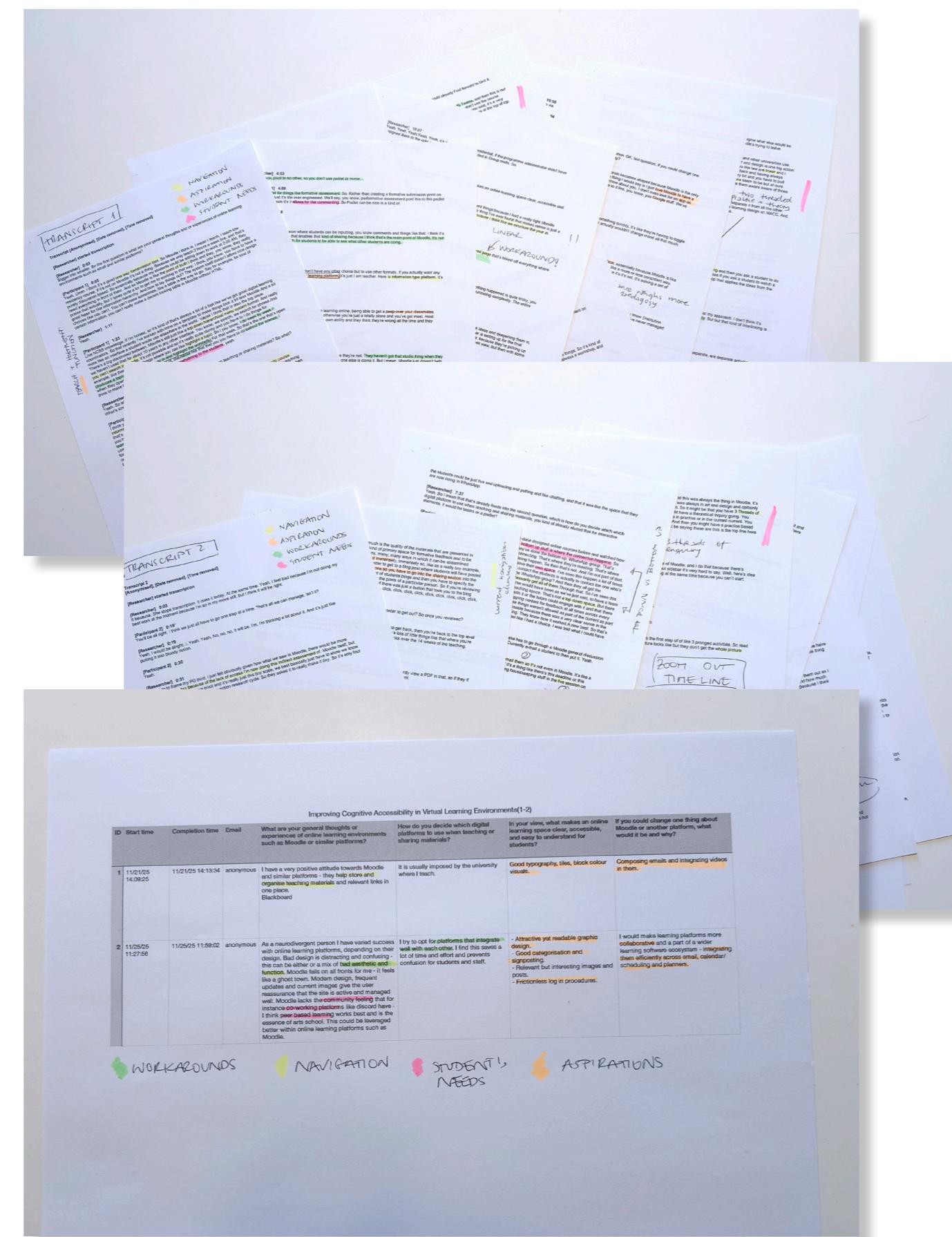
Themes were constructed through interpretation of emphasis, and relevance rather than frequency alone

“Themes do not emerge from the data; they are generated by the researcher through engagement with the data.”(Braun and Clarke, 2021)

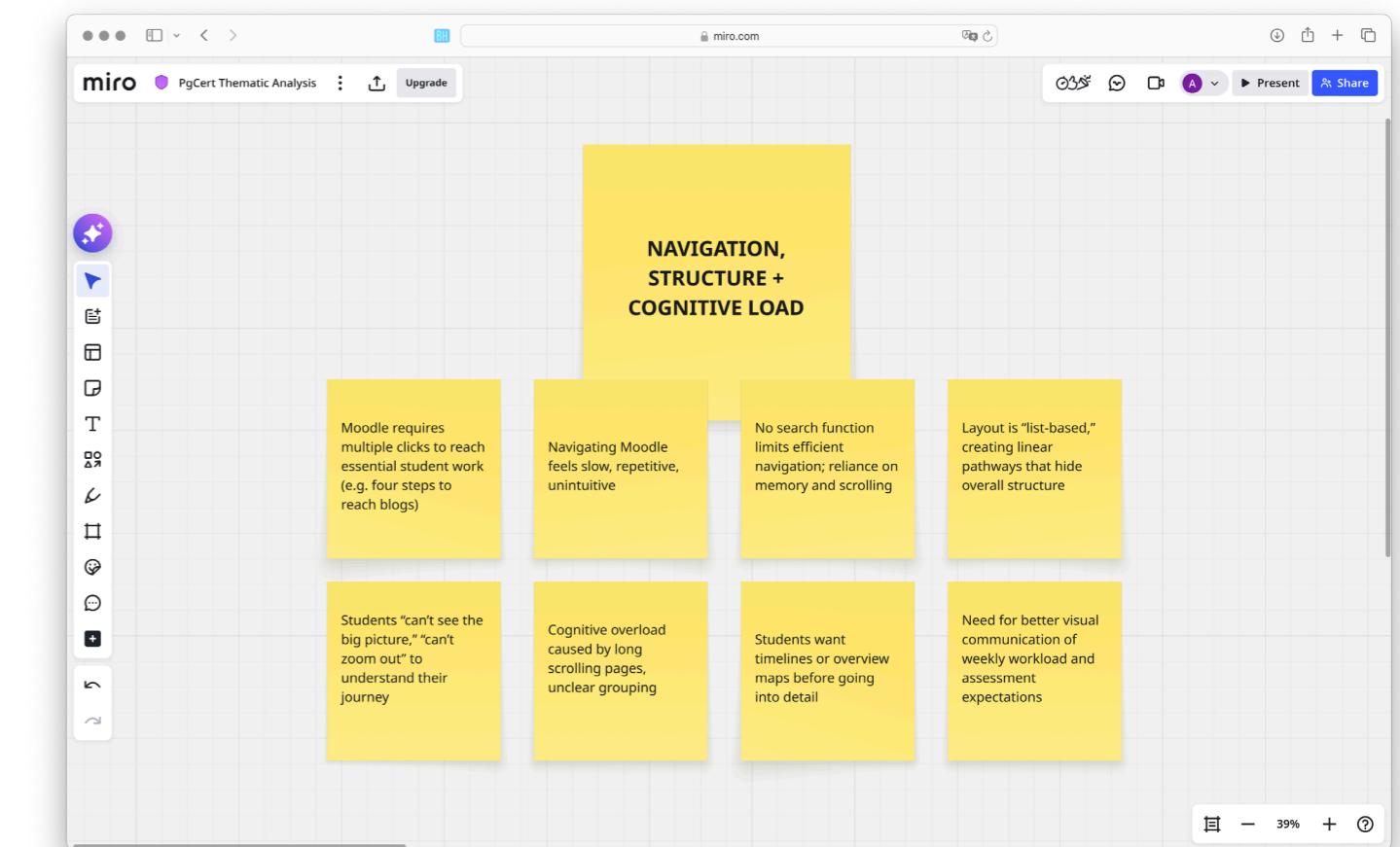
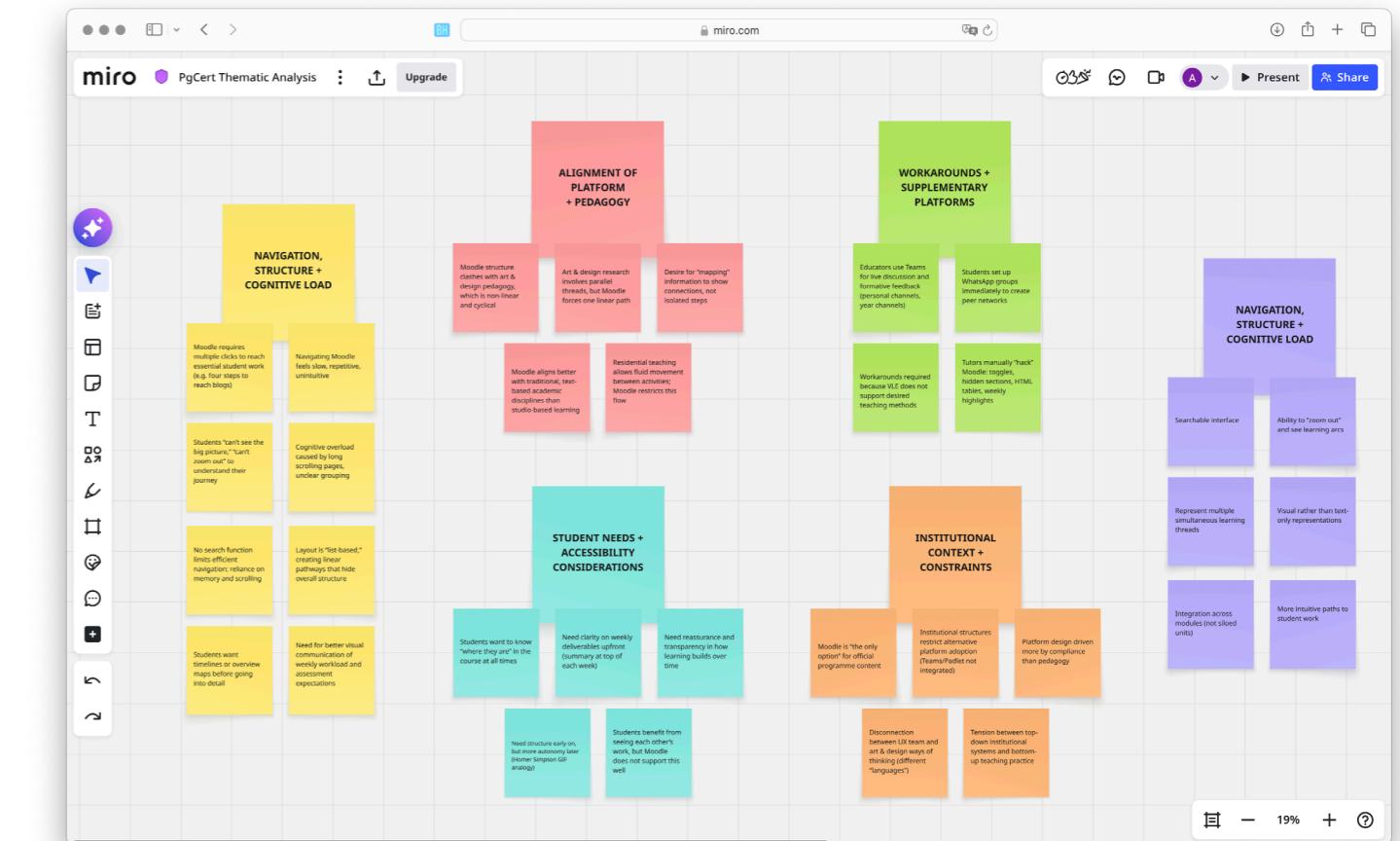
Reference

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2021) *Thematic analysis: a practical guide*. London: Sage.

Expanded in Blog Post 4



Visual summary of the iterative development of semi-structured interview questions through tutor and peer feedback (Huber, 2025).



Screenshot of anonymised interview transcripts and Microsoft Forms questionnaire design used to collect qualitative staff responses (Huber, 2025).

OBSERVE

Analysis + interpretation

The artefact review analysed how platform structure, hierarchy, and visual organisation influenced orientation, navigation, cognitive load

Investigation also revealed the pedagogic approaches enabled by each platform

AI-supported indicative weighting used after thematic analysis to visualise relative prominence of themes

Artefact Analysis				
Feature	Moodle	Miro	Padlet	Notion
Navigation	Linear, list-based	Spatial canvas	Board layout	Database / multi-view
Search	None	Yes	Limited	Excellent
Peer visibility	Low	High	High	Medium
Cognitive load	High	High	Low	Medium
Supports multiple threads?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Best use case	Official content	Mapping journeys	Sharing work	Information architecture

Screenshot of artefact analysis comparing Moodle with alternative digital platforms (Huber, 2025).

Theme	Interview 1	Interview 2	Questionnaire	Artefacts
Navigation & cognitive load	●●●	●●●	●●	●●●
Workarounds	●●	●●●	●	●●
Alignment of pedagogy & platform	●●	●●	—	●●●
Accessibility	●●	●	●	●●
Institutional constraints	●	●●	●	●●

Screenshot of an indicative thematic weighting matrix across interviews, questionnaire responses, and artefact analysis using AI. (Huber, 2026).

REFLECT

Insight

Reflection revealed a structural tension between studio pedagogy and platform design

Art and design learning operates through layered, iterative, and non-linear processes

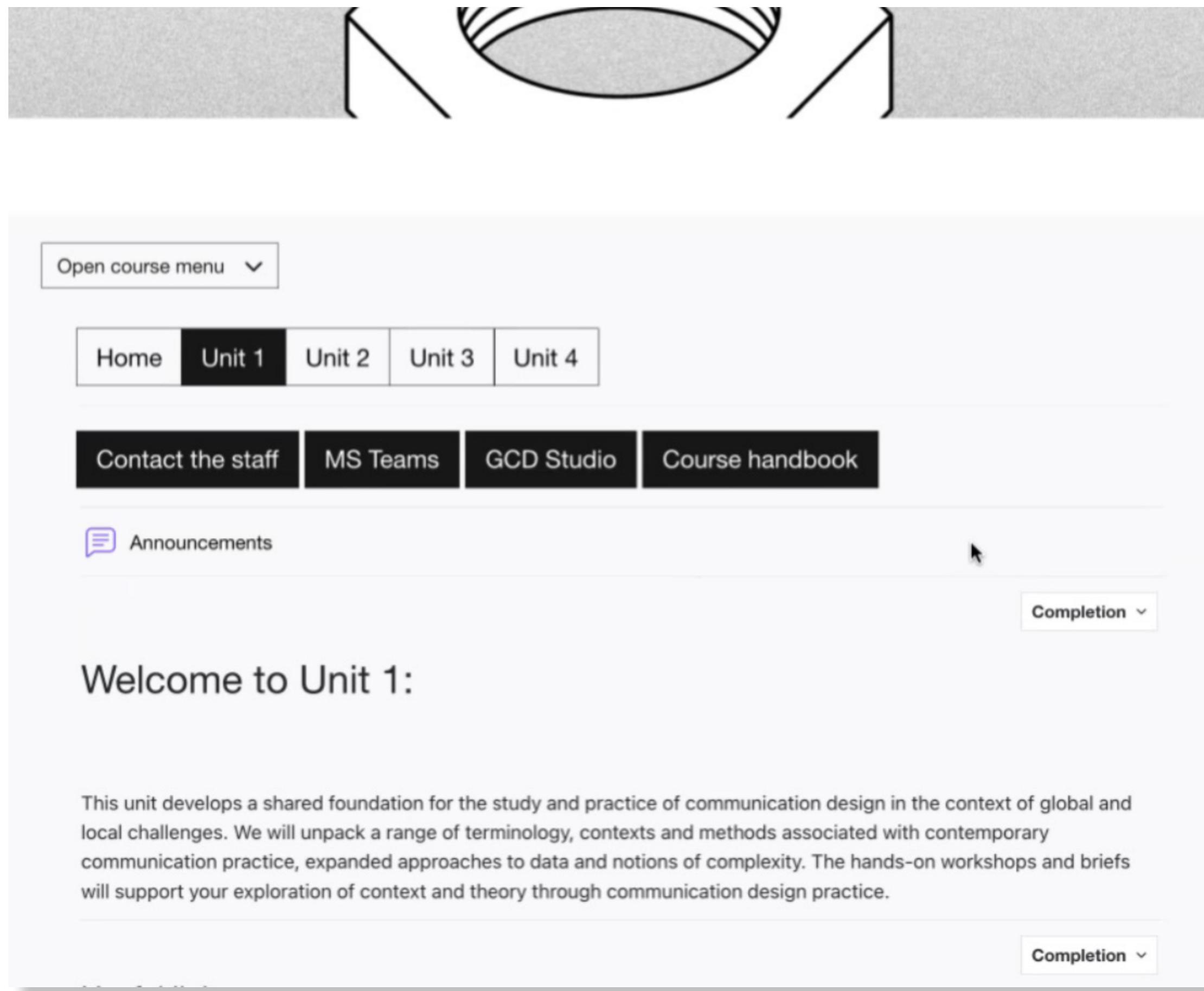
Moodle's present-centred logic made it difficult for students to perceive learning as a continuous journey

As a result, educators enacted additional pedagogical labour to restore coherence, orientation, and trust

Reference

Biggs, J. and Tang, C. (2011) *Teaching for quality learning at university*. 4th edn. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Expanded in Blog Post 5



The screenshot shows a Moodle course page with a light grey header and a white content area. At the top, there is a decorative graphic consisting of a grey oval with a black outline and two black brackets on either side. Below this is a navigation bar with the following items: 'Open course menu ▾', 'Home', 'Unit 1' (which is highlighted in black), 'Unit 2', 'Unit 3', and 'Unit 4'. Further down, there is a horizontal row of buttons: 'Contact the staff', 'MS Teams', 'GCD Studio', and 'Course handbook'. Below these buttons is a section titled 'Announcements' with a small purple speech bubble icon. At the bottom of the page, there is a 'Completion ▾' button. The main content area is titled 'Welcome to Unit 1:' and contains a paragraph of text about the unit's purpose.

This unit develops a shared foundation for the study and practice of communication design in the context of global and local challenges. We will unpack a range of terminology, contexts and methods associated with contemporary communication practice, expanded approaches to data and notions of complexity. The hands-on workshops and briefs will support your exploration of context and theory through communication design practice.

Screenshot of an anonymised educator-generated workaround within Moodle, introducing a coded navigation bar to enable students to “zoom out” and view multiple units simultaneously (Huber, 2025).

REFLECT

Re-planning

Re-planning focused on improving orientation, and expectation-setting

Two modest but targeted interventions were introduced:

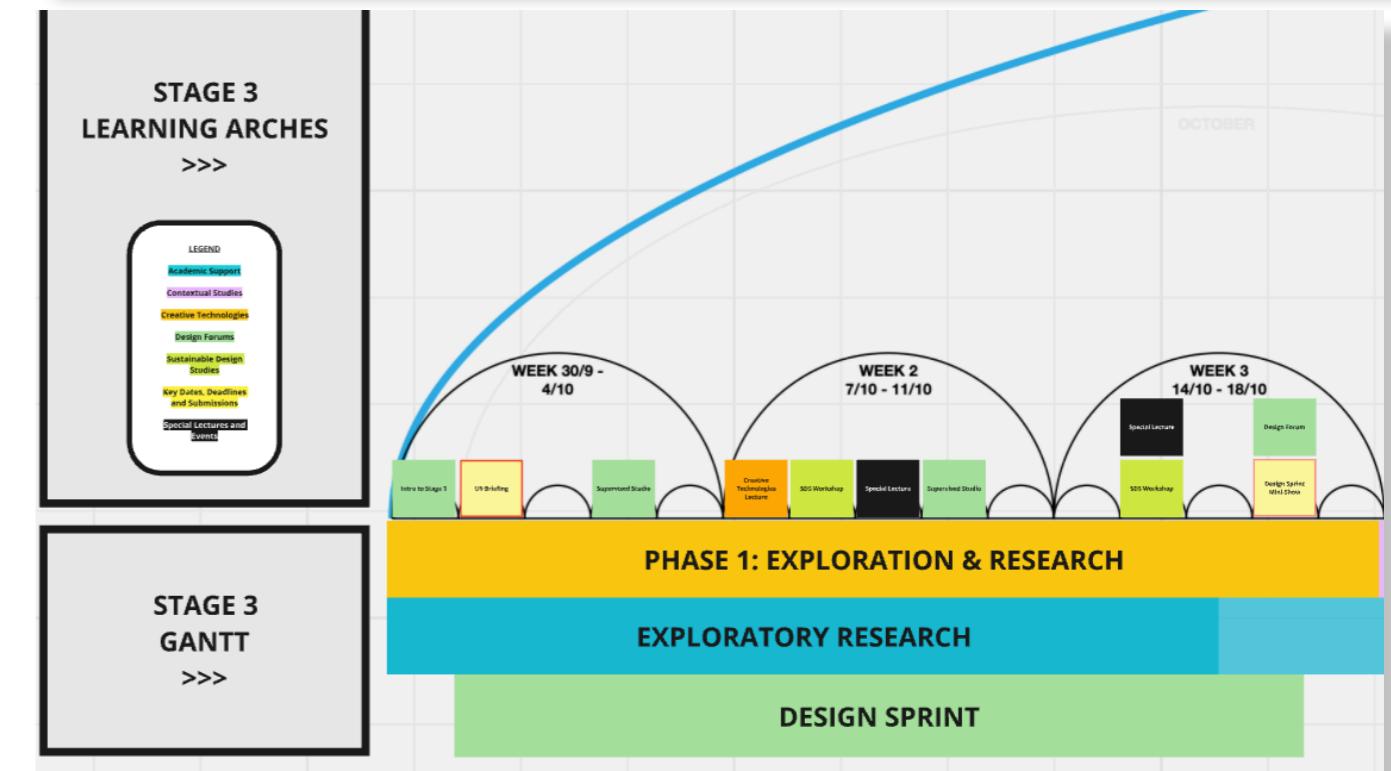
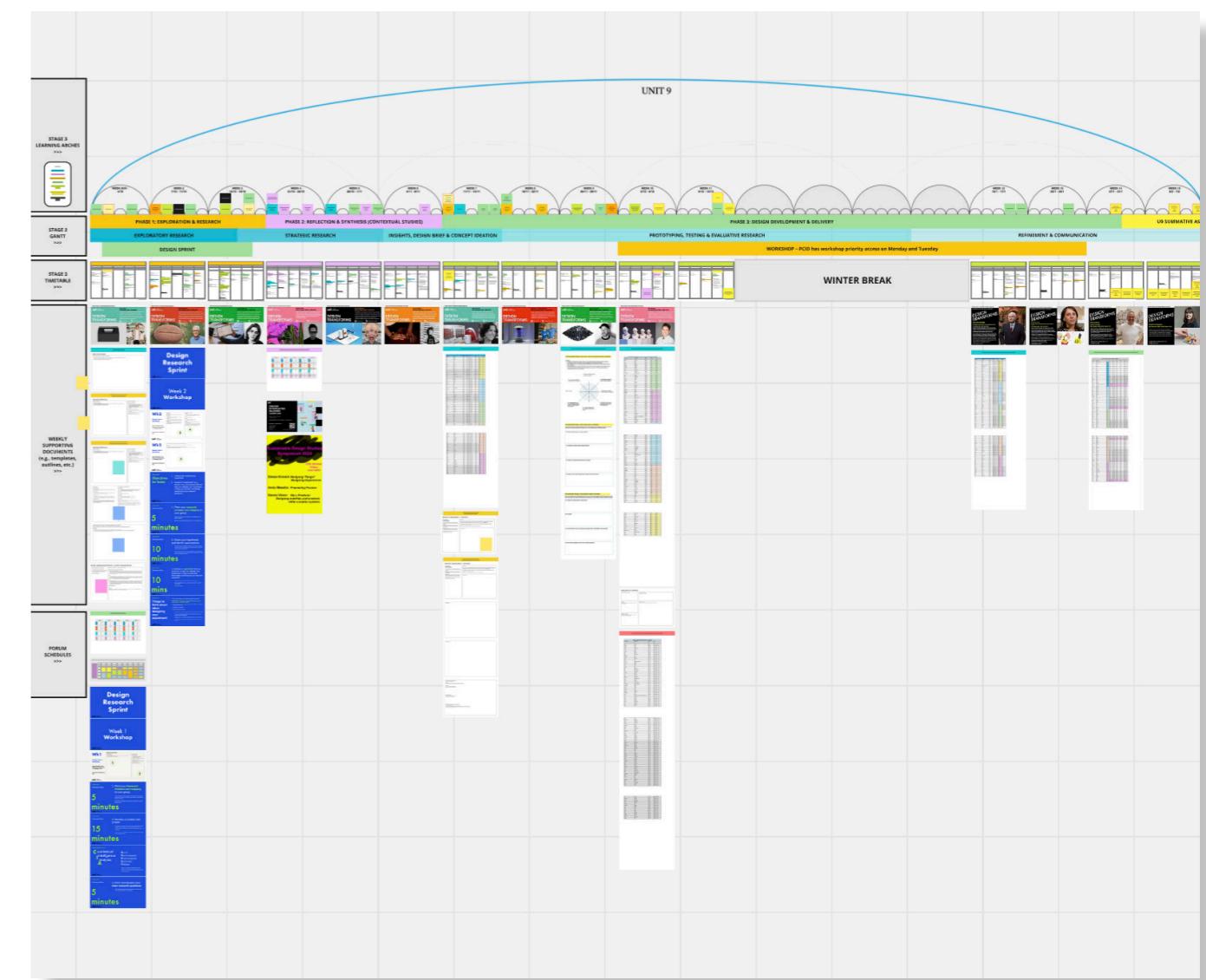
1. a weekly “Prepare for the week” overview clarifying purpose and deliverables
2. a visual learning arc diagram during live sessions to support “zooming out”

The aim was not to redesign Moodle, but to reframe how learning is signposted

Expanded in Blog Post 5

The screenshot shows a Moodle page titled '2.1 Prepare for the week' under 'Industry Focus / 2: Design heroes / 2.1 Prepare for the week'. It includes a 'Mark as done' button, a '60 minutes' timer, and a text block: 'This week is all about inspiration. You'll build a vision board to visualise your future career path and choose your design hero for Project 1: Designer Critical Review.' Below this is a 'Key learning activities this week' section with a list of tasks, a 'Your key outputs this week' section with a list of deliverables, and a 'Preparing for your Live session' section with instructions and a 'Before the session' list. At the bottom is a 'Discussion starter: Your design inspiration' section with a question and a '2.2 Developing your vision' button.

Screenshot of a Moodle page from the MA Graphic Design (Online), illustrating the new activity to support student orientation and reduce cognitive load (Huber, 2026).



Screenshot of an anonymised Miro board visualising a full unit structure through an arc-based diagram to help students' orientation and overview. (Huber, 2026).

REFLECTING ON ARP

How my project evolved

- Focus shifted from platform critique toward understanding how educators navigate cognitive accessibility within institutional constraints

What worked / what didn't

- Combining interviews, questionnaire responses, and artefact review allowed rich triangulation of perspectives
- Small sample size limited breadth and reinforced the need for depth over generalisation

Blocks and how they were addressed

- Access to student data and platform limitations
- Shifting the research lens toward educator perspectives and focusing on navigational clarity rather than system change

Looking forward

- Aim to embed clearer orientation, learning arcs, and signposting as core pedagogical responsibilities within online design education

REFERENCES

Biggs, J. and Tang, C. (2011) *Teaching for quality learning at university*. 4th edn. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Bowen, G. A. (2009) 'Document analysis as a qualitative research method', *Qualitative Research Journal*.

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Kemmis, S. and McTaggart, R. (1988) *The action research planner*. Geelong: Deakin University.

Orr, S. and Shreeve, A. (2017) *Art and design pedagogy in higher education: Knowledge, values and ambiguity in the creative curriculum*. London: Routledge.

Selwyn, N. (2014) *Distrusting educational technology: Critical questions for changing times*. Abingdon: Routledge.