

Treasure Island Pedagogies Episode 2

Podcast Transcript

Tunde Varga-Atkins: Hello welcome everyone and this is another episode of Treasure Island Discs. This is a podcast by the Centre of Innovation in Education at the University of Liverpool. I am Tunde Varga-Atkins and we have four guests going to talk about Treasure Island pedagogies.

One of the things I have asked our guests is to identify a lightbulb moment, where you felt your students were getting it and talk about what made it happen.

So who would like to go first? Can I call on somebody?

Kathryn Fox: I'm Kathryn Fox from the School of Dentistry and my lightbulb moment isn't quite a definite lightbulb moment in terms of teaching, but it was really in terms of feedback. We're finding that the students were being very self-defensive and not really wanting to take on board perhaps the feedback and engage with the feedback is as much as we hoped. And I think it was probably when you say the lightbulb moment at the same time, Alex Forsyth in psychology when she was in psychology, released a paper, called 'Thanks, but no thanks for the feedback', and that's how we were feeling with our students that they were sort of taking on the feedback but really weren't looking at it and engaging with it.

So we then looked further into that and looking into the mindsets of the students and really finding the Carol Dweck work on growth mindset and fixed mindset, how interesting that was and how really, a lot of our students very much having gone through the standardised testing school

system were very much in the fixed mindset and how we try and take them to more to the growth. And also really from the staff POV in giving feedback.

And I suppose from there, once we got thinking what really what was feedback and do we all agree on that as the staff and the students as to what feedback is and really how we accept it and the best ways of doing it?

So I suppose my next stage still in my lightbulb that I was having really was then going on and looking at those American educational Grant Higgins and he was looking at what actually feedback is and the main you know the main reason is what it is. And really it's about students reaching their goals and sometimes I'm not sure that we concentrate enough on that.

On the students reaching the goals, we sometimes use feedback as assessment or use feedback as giving advice to students and really perhaps we need to think about it of what. Finding out from the students, what their goals are and then them using the feedback to reach those goals. Yes, Helen, do you want to add something?

Helen: I yes, I was going to join in and say my lightbulb moment is along those lines as well so, you know that moment where you realise that the students have got aims of their own and you can help them achieve them.

And to some extent, what you might think is the learning opportunity or the learning outcome can only be accessed if the student engages with it and actually says yes, that is what I want to learn. I agree with you.

KF: Yes, well I think that was very much it. So thinking of the goals, but then also thinking of the staff and the students how they give the feedback and how they accept the feedback. So we then started going

into sessions for coaching for the staff as to how they were actually giving the feedback and then sessions with the students of how to accept the feedback because the students all wanted feedback of “yes I've done great. This is really good”. But actually when we showed them different types of feedback for them to realise, that doesn't really help me. It might make me feel better.

But it doesn't actually help me in achieving my goals, so it was more from that side of it actually educating both the staff in giving the feedback and educating the students in what is good feedback. That's going to help them. So I suppose that's really where I was. That's where I was going with my lightbulb moment.

Yes, that sounds that's transformative for both the students and for staff as well, what you describe, Katherine, yes thank you.

I mean, if you wanted to summarise or translate it, you know in terms of wanting to take this learning to your Treasure Island, what sort of you know in essence, you've already identified your pedagogy, around feedback and theory of feedback and growth, mindset and that sort of thing. I would like you to identify a luxury item as well for your Treasure Island. You know something that will help you relax when you're not teaching and not giving feedback to students.

KF: And so I would say if I was taking my prop in dentistry at the moment, it's really difficult because we're not able to do dentistry because of Covid. We're not allowed to do any aerosol generating procedures, so we're finding it really difficult. So we are working with simulations so much and we have in the dental school what we all call phantom heads and they're basically dummy heads that the students are all working on at the moment, and without it, I'd be lost.

So I would have to take, if I'm allowed to take, my phantom head with me.

You can of course, and the luxury item for yourself, you know, because you also need some down time?

KF: My luxury item. For me, it sounds wrong as I'm a dentist, but it would have to be chocolate, I would have to then have my toothbrush. So I was thinking now with the bamboo toothbrushes that you can now get. Can I make my own toothbrush on the desert island? If you won't let me take two - but I would need the chocolate.

Yes, I think yes, definitely allowed. Yes, OK, that's brilliant. Thank you, Katherine. So shall we move. I don't know, Helen, do you want to pick up the rein given that you made useful insight and contribution as well.

Helen: So hi, I'm Helen. I'm a physicist but I work at the Central Teaching Laboratory as well and my lightbulb moment came when I was teaching a course called Communicating Science and this was a third-year module and it was like, if you like, an escape. Modules often taken by students who had decided maybe physics wasn't for them.

But they knew that they would need various skills to actually be employed, and the reason that it I had this lightbulb moment was that I had designed a series of blocks of activity. Real authentic challenges for students to complete, and the lightbulb turned up right at the end. It was feedback from students on this course, one student said, "I have not been taught anything Helen has tried on this course. I have had to learn how to present how to organise my time, how to work in a team, how to communicate in the team, how to write reports, how to make PowerPoints, but I have not been taught anything" and I sat there and I thought, yes, I've done my job.

And from that moment I have actually tried to encourage students to learn for themselves so I don't see myself as a teacher. I see myself as an-, it sounds really arrogant, as someone who designs opportunities for students to learn from. I try and build these scenarios which students have to complete and along the way they will learn rather than, "here is what I want you to know", because I very much believe that education is more about being creative and getting to the answer rather than trying to make them conform to a specific way of thinking.

And often in physics that can be quite hard because we lay down a foundation of understanding and it's only in the third and fourth years that creativity could really come out, because without that foundation students aren't able to make big leaps in logic or interpret their data in a specific way.

So wherever I can, I try to have some form of open-ended inquiry or open-ended activity that allows the students to try out their own understanding of the world, but also learn some other things along the way.

And I guess my big influence at the moment is Jenny Moon. So it's all about reflection and if you get students to reflect on what they do, there is a better chance that they recognise they have learned so this year that's going to be even more important because they are going to need to recognise, "Yes, I have learned something", even if it's in a hybrid or remote way.

KF: Well, I'd really agree on that and what you're saying about the reflection. They need to actually be able to take on board the feedback to then reflect and move forward with it and work on their own developments. And that's where the sort of issue is with the feedback they

need to really be able to take that so they can move forward. But the reflection is so important.

Helen: Yes, and the reflection with that feedback is useful because they can-, you can identify which you want to take on board, which you can park and use later.

Matthew Fitzjohn: I was going to say I've found that a couple of modules have been really successful to get reflection going with the students where I've opened up the Journal in Blackboard. I'm trying to try use the portfolio in Canvas because I've just said to them it's a completely blank personal space for you to write things and only I will be able to see it. And what's interesting is that the first few sessions I try and get them to talk about their experiences or maybe an activity I've asked them to do and post something in there.

And I've found it really rewarding when I've then commented on their thoughts and their ideas, they're putting down their reflections and it's ended up with quite lengthy dialogue.

But I've been able to solve problems and answer questions about what I'm trying to teach, which I think under normal circumstances I would spend ages on emails or trying to explain things in the session. Because it's hidden and it's their personal journal, I think the students being more willing to write and say, "I don't understand" or "I didn't like that lesson" or "what was the point of that?" because there's they're not doing it in front of the rest of the class.

So that's been positive for me, and that sense of giving you a chance to reflect. That's great.

Yes, and I think I like, Helen, from your example as well, there's almost like two lightbulb moments. One for the teacher and for you, that you know that the student is getting it and then one for them when they recognise that they have learned because your list from that student was so impressive.

Helen: Exactly yes, it really helps me to recognise that you really do need to shift as the instructor. I do you see myself more as, you know, a cheerleader on the side most of the time. And just to pick up something at Matthew said there about getting students to write. You've clearly never met physics students! The majority, I say the majority. That's not fair. A lot of the students will have chosen physics because they don't have to write essays. So the very idea that they have to write something can be really terrifying. So actually what I'm going to be doing this year is I'm going to be using Canvas quizzes and getting them to rate themselves and then have a text box.

This has a real benefit for me because not only is it a quick set of questions, but it gets them to think about what they want to do, and it can be a little formative assessment about what they've done in the laboratories.

In terms of your Treasure Island, so precious contact time for students. What are your pedagogies, music albums, or teaching props? Luxury items that you would like to take?

Helen: For my teaching prop, it feels a bit like a luxury item today, partly because we had rumours that it was going to be rolled out last week and this is the remote access to the computers on campus and this particular thing will allow our students to log in to our detectors in the laboratories and actually take data.

So instead of having 150 students on campus, which is what we would normally do in our laboratories, we can actually provide the same experience. But the students can be wherever they are in the world, but they can still use the equipment, so they still get to plan their experiments and actually do the experiment themselves.

So fingers crossed out, that's not going to be a luxury, and that is actually going to be my teaching prop. So if I'm allowed a second luxury, so I get my teaching prop.

That's a teaching prop!

Helen: Yes, my luxury will be the stash of yarn that I have. I'm a king crocheter, and so since lockdown, I've made three scarves, a blanket and two jumpers, so I'm hoping for another two jumpers before Christmas.

That's very well timed for the winter. Is that one that you're wearing now?

Helen: It is. It's my first lockdown scarf and but as somebody said to me, you know crochet and knitting. It's not a hobby, it's a life skill for the apocalypse. My family will be warm this Christmas.

Okay, excellent thank you so much and whose Treasure Island are we going to next.

MF: I'm Matthew Fitzjohn from Archaeology Classics, and Egyptology. Teaching wise I teach undergraduates through to the master students across geographical and period-specific contents are covering classical Greece through to practical archaeology modules involving field work. And then some of the research skills modules.

So in terms of a lightbulb moment from for me it would be quite easy to think about some other practical classes where I feel like when students are doing hands-on things they-, there is often a sense of where they suddenly understand a concept and it's been much more difficult for me to get those lightbulb moments in research skills modules, and even the period geographical specific region modules so dealing with ancient Greece, because those modules tend to be lectures followed by a seminar or a couple of lectures a week. So my lightbulb moment has actually come in the last four or five years and comes from outside University. It's now something I've brought in the University teaching and it all starts with my luxury item.

Now I have a large version of it here. But it's these, if you can see them?

Can someone say what you see!

KF: It looks like huge Lego!

MF: This is actually a Lego box container, so all my colleagues in the Department, are probably sick of me talking about Lego. I've been doing a research project where I've been going into into schools and supporting teachers teaching about Ancient Greece. And it's connected to an impact project and one day I went in there to teach about Greek buildings and then I was dragged into another class on ancient history and about politics and the students were talking to me about different political ideologies. And so I gave them Lego and ask them to stop talking and to build what they wanted to talk about in Lego and the way they responded to that task and the way they represented ideas of democracy or oligarchy or tyranny.

I was amazed that there's 15-year olds that creative, much more creative than I thought I could have been. So anyway inspired by this activity, I started taking large quantities of Lego into my University classes

Excellent!

SF: And it helped in a variety of different ways. I'll give two examples. First is teaching about, so if I'm giving a lecture about the development of the Acropolis and then the next class we have a seminar on some feature of the Acropolis. I've normally taken Lego and ask the students to build what they learned about the previous week and then talk to me about it and what was significant in the reading they've done on these buildings and the kind of social and historical significance.

So that's been a great way to get students to start conversation and reflect upon the things that they've been learning about. Now I should say as the module goes on, they've been clearly practicing out of class because their constructions become much better and much more realistic by the end of the module. But I've also found it useful in the skills modules, the research skills module I teach in the Masters level because some of the sessions there, particularly in my example, one of the first ones I asked the students to reflect on what they want to learn, why they are doing the MA, what do they want to get out of it, and in order to get that stage, I say, "So where are you now? Who do you see you are? And what are your aspirations and what are your aspirations for the MA?"

And before they talk, because they're broken up into small groups, they have to build something in Lego which represents who they are and where they want to be and what they want to get from the class. So that has turned an activity which is quite difficult to commence and to get people to reflect and to open up into something that's quite fun.

And much of this is based on the idea of learning through play, which is typically adopted for kind of nursery and primary level education, but I think it can be applied to any level of education and so that is my kind of my inspirational model.

Yes, did you want to say something?

KF: Yes, I was just saying it's quite strange, we brought Lego in when I was talking before about helping the staff learning to give feedback. We had a staff training day and every table at the Staff Training Day was full of tables of Lego and we all had to build different things and it was learning to give feedback to each other and everything. And so actually Lego play is coming in in lots of places. It was really useful.

Wow, and I think the other connection between the two examples you both gave that it's Matthew you were talking about goals and aspirations and Katherine. you mentioned that as well. In fact, that's what you were trying to focus on with feedback, is the student aware and what are their goals? So that's another nice connection.

Fantastic, Okay, Matthew, can I ask you then in terms of your Treasure Island, what would you like to take?

Matthew: So my luxury is the Lego because at the moment I'm not sure how I would use that on campus other than with industrial cleaning afterwards.

True!

Matthew: Probably not, but I'm but I've been thinking about other ways to be creative so the luxury is the Lego that I would have.

What about teaching props or things that you want to focus on? So we were asking about pedagogies.

Matthew: I think it is. I'd still like to maintain this idea of play and being playful particularly in this in this moment where students are going to spend a lot of time-, so even if they're coming onto campus, they're going to spend a lot of time on their own or trying to learn through these online environments. I think those sessions are going to need a lot of fun and activity in them, so I think that idea of playfulness will be important.

That sounds great. Thank you. okay, that's fantastic. I am wondering whether Minecraft or some online Lego building could be-, or unless people have Lego at home and they can do their own Lego in front of them.

Okay, thank you so James, can I call on you then to share with us your lightbulb moment?

James Cooper: Yes, so I'm James Cooper from School of Environmental Sciences and I suppose my lightbulb moment came when I first started at Liverpool about eight years ago. I was asked to take over a particularly difficult module, and this module is called Catchment Hydrology, and it's teaching geography and environmental science students about really how water moves around the landscape, and I guess this is kind of fundamental to any geography and or environmental science student to understand water and how it moves because it impacts things like flooding, water quality, through to how much water is in our oceans to how much rainfall there is.

And of course, students' study this from a very early age, you know. So from primary school they studied the water cycle and that continued, all

the way through to, if they do, A-level geography or A-level geology, but often one of the difficulties that students were having before I took on this module was trying to understand why on Earth you would need to know all of this and what kind of practical application there is for understanding where water is within the landscape and how it moves around, how fast it moves around and where it ends up going to.

And so my lightbulb moment came when I realised how powerful, authentic assessment is, which of course you know we're all being asked to do as part of Curriculum 2021. But I really realised how powerful it was to convince students that catchment hydrology was of some practical use and that they needed to study it. And so I suppose I just wanted to talk about two examples of how I kind of felt and why I thought that these experiences really went well and.

The first one was trying to get students to understand how the Environment Agency developed these flood risk Maps. You know, if you go online, you pop in your post code and it will tell you what the risk is of flooding for a particular house, even to that kind of level.

So it's kind of showing them, how do the Environment Agency actually build up those maps? How do they model them? And then once the Environment Agency has all that, all of this information is, then what do they do with it?

So the example we got was that to model a particular a town in Lancashire called Ribchester and they had to run a flood model to work out where the water went within the town and then they had to look at the risk, the flood risk, to approve a proposed residential development and to see whether it complies to the National Planning Policy Framework, i.e. that whether it's in a low risk area or is it joining an existing urban area and so on.

And the lightbulb moment came really when I was reading the feedback, to actually see students saying for the first time it was saying to me, "Ah! That's why I need to know where water is and how fast it moves and where it goes too. Because if we don't have that information then I could potentially buy a house that's in a high-risk flood zone and be suffering for the rest of my life."

And I guess it's a lightbulb moment for me because I kind of then realised that I could just keep applying that kind of same model to any kind of module that I do, and so it's really powerful for me.

And then I suppose the lightbulb moment in terms of students was just seeing and hearing from graduates when they said they got this job as a flood risk consultant. and I went for this interview and then we got chatting about this particular project that we go-, you know I got them to complete and they had to then explain exactly what they did to their perspective employer. I then realise you know it's really, it's-, it's getting geography and environmental science students who, you know, it's a non-vocational discipline. So there's no real clear career routes, it's a lot of development of generic skills but can you get them to experience a particular career area and then yes, some may absolutely hate it, but you know then at least they know that's not a career area they want to go into. Also some might like it and realise I could start to specialise more in that. So yes, that that's my lightbulb moment.

So it sounds like it was a win-win situation for everybody. That's amazing. Thank you. And I mean in terms of the aspects that you would like to take to your treasure islands, what would they be? Teaching props and luxury items and so on.

JC: In terms of a teaching prop, a field class is of paramount importance, particularly to geography students. And thankfully though, within this hybrid model, we can deliver those field classes, not residential, unfortunately. So you miss out on some of the sort of social aspects, but we can still take them out into the field, get them to experience the environment, see how it operates, see what environmental problems there are, and so on. So I definitely couldn't be without a field class.

OK, I think Helen is nodding and Matthew. I think all of all four of you were nodding at that point and luxury item for you.

JC: But if it's a luxury item not related to teaching, it would have to be a pair of running trainers.

Okay, sounds great.

JC: To get out and about and well frankly to spend some time away from the kids for a bit as well., I think it is nice to get outside and run around and get some of your frustrations out.

So yes, I think that's definitely it was in much need. Yes, OK sounds great. I think that definitely granted even two pairs of trainers if need be.

Okay, thank you everybody. So that was a lovely round up and I think we can probably roll onto the next discussion.

Helen: Yes, I mean I think one of the interesting things that comes out there is, you know we know that we want that authenticity. Whether it's a Phantom head or it's you know real data. But one of the things we were all nodding about is that field trip. So I know for myself as physicist, when we go on a field trip we tend to go to the top of mountains where we've got beautiful night scene with a telescope so we can take data that way, but I

suppose in a way that authentic live experience is very similar to the hands-on experience the dentists have. So it's about how we're going to recreate that field trip. Or, you know, real-life contacts in a hybrid situation that-, you know a lot of the disciplines that have required field trips or hands-on equipment are, I wouldn't say struggling with, but we've had to be creative, and it's interesting that we touched on this idea of play.

Where, you know, we've had to be creative within the constraints we've had, and it's because we are creative people, even though we might be boxed into a specific discipline. But if we weren't creative, we wouldn't come up with the answers that we do, and that creativity is really come out and certainly in my colleagues. How are you going to overcome this problem? "Right? Tell you what gaffer tape and blue tack will make it work right. Proof of concept done. Let's make it something more sophisticated."

So in a way we've got the same problems, but it would be quite nice to talk about field trips or things like that because they are something that students see as being quite a transformative experience.

I know I've been on the top of a mountain with students using a professional telescope, and you can genuinely see the wow I'm going to be an astronomer and the "Oh, this is what astronomy is" an "No!", and you can genuinely see the moment where the student turns into the discipline specialist if you like, and so those are going to be moments that we need to recreate in a hybrid model.

So shall we unpick this? Sso there seems to be a lot around the field trips whether it's practical elements, whether it's the disciplinary realisation or whether it's the social or the fun element that you all need to have, you know it's not necessary that we are just here to learn. It's about the social experience and the shared experience is so

important. And the human connection, the play having fun and you know, educate-, education is the wider term.

KF: I would really echo that. I think it is so important having it's the whole student experience really isn't it. It's not just the education and the learning, it is the social side. It's all of it. And you know now at the at the moment we are doing a lot of simulation with our students and will hopefully get them back to seeing patients soon. But absolutely what Helen said.

The one thing that I've noticed so much in our Department and I'm sure it's the same in all the others is the creativity of the staff in, actually you know, going through all these things we've had sort of simulated cases. I'm sure, you know, you've been doing in every other Department, and I think that has been great side. Of Covid - that people have been able to express this creativity and come up with different things that they wouldn't have done before, but I think it's the one bit of the learning experience that we all crave for our students and I'm sure they do that. They actually do get some fieldworks and practical some all together as a group and actually see that side of University as well. And I suppose it's for us. How do we get as much of that as possible?

JC: Yes, I think this idea being creative. Yes, I mean it's so important at this stage to really see this as an opportunity, and we've seen, because we can't run our residential field classes which could have gone to a really nice exotic places like California or Portugal or wherever, we've had to obviously look to our local region for field days within an hour or two hours. And I think it actually really gives us, the students and staff, the chance to have a say and opportunity to really appreciate the range of different landscapes

that are within our locality and for students to understand the context within which they are studying.

Being able to understand what the environmental issues are, this particular focus that I look at, but also in terms of the human geography looking at the social, political and economic situation within the Merseyside region.

And so you know rather than in some cases where students can feel that they're just restricted to the campus and only really know something about the city, it actually gives students the opportunity to experience their kind of broader issues. So you know, I think you know, although for geography and environmental science students, residential field classes, that's the kind of-, the most attractive element, and if you had an open day, you talk a lot about field classes. I still think these field days are there the plan will be that rather than having a one-week residential field class, we will have field days one day every week. And we do hope that you will still get some of the social aspect, you're not going to quite get the same. But they will still meet a range of staff and they'll obviously meet the whole of the whole of the cohort at least once. And I think that's a really important part, also of having that outdoor space to accommodate large groups, which of course unfortunately the indoor spaces can't at the moment,

So James, you've given a really interesting examples of the creativity of how you solve the issue of field work in your area, but also picking up on Katherine's other points about-, and Helen's other point about how it seems to have also brought staff together. Can you give examples for that as well, if that resonates it with you for instance?

JC: Well, I think in terms of trying to figure out some suitable sites for doing field work. Yes, it because staff are distributed across the region, often in different areas. We've had to kind of like, say, to the world, "Do you know somewhere local to you that might be useful for it?" So yes, it has brought us together in that respect. Yes, sharing local knowledge has been useful.

Yes, Matthew, did you have similar?

MF: Yes, so our students, our current first and second years who-, sorry going into second and third year now will have missed field work at the end of their last year and during the summer months. So most international field projects were cancelled and then the project that my colleague runs locally was cancelled.

So what we've been developing over the summer is field work that's taking place next week and the week after for different year groups. So we were trying to think should we space this over the first semester, but we ended up with the kind of condensing it into a two-week period for the current second years, as the archaeology students, the first years, we're taking all of them whether or not they signed up for an archaeology degree or not, they're going to Ness Gardens for different types of activities that are all field based.

Picking up the points of the others, it would be great for the archaeology students, because it's really related to their degree, the content of modules, but I think for all of the students it will be. It will be a positive experience because it's about creating a sense of kind of program, cohort or a subject cohort, even if they're not going to do archaeological field work afterwards. And so staff are happily, or have been happily, I hope, planning this all summer and most are either going out to Ness gardens or

onto the field sites. Or like me they're doing some online computer sessions and things like this to kind of balance when they're in and out.

So I mean, that's been the one thing that obviously we can't take all the students to the same place at the same time, so we're having to do kind of two days on two days off. So finding those other activities. And then I'm trying to devise some activities for Liverpool that can take place during the year so that they can just go out in small groups on their own and do some activities and report back in say Week 6 with their findings of their activity,

But I think that's, getting students out of the classroom will probably happen more now than we have it in a normal year just because it will be easier to organise that.

KF: I think the other thing that will be really important about all the sort field trips and things we're talking about is making giving the students a sense of belonging. So because you know they're going to be very much alone in their rooms during this, and at least if they're coming out and doing those, they will hopefully feel part of the University and feel part of their courses, and you know that's so important in the long-term success of the student-, is whether they feel that they do belong. So I do think that that is going to be so important in that area as well.

Do you want I was going to ask this and I'm going to also bring in the remote students or students who might not come on campus. But before that, can you share some tips that you, you or your departments have put in place around involving students and trying to create that social cohesion, belonging and cohortness? That might be nice if to share, Helen?

Helen: Yes, so we typically would have a set of equipment per student and they would do an activity. But there may be like 10 students doing the same activity. Or we have students working in pairs, so one of the things that we've shifted to is actually more group work, quite deliberately. Not just so that we have enough equipment for the entire group to do the same activity at the same time, but also because it will foster a sense of community.

I think the majority of departments, please correct me if I'm wrong, will be working in sort of bubbles of, you know, 10, 20, 30 students or whatever, so there is going to end up being an identity through each bubble as well. So we're looking at providing a bubble tutor. The sort of first point of contact for the students in that bubble with the person. But the general shift towards more group work is one way we're going to try and foster that, especially with our second-year students. So the second years of course have met each other and we should never forget that our second and third and my case fourth year students will have met each other before and will have met us, and so in a way we can capitalise on that in terms of they can work with people they've met or not met.

But in terms of the first year, a lot of effort is actually going on in this week and next week, in the Welcome Week and Foundation Week to actually create a way of introducing the Department and introducing students to each other.

So a colleague of mine has set up a treasure hunt in which students will have to go and find various things on the Internet, find codes to watch videos, and then another code, etc. So I'm quite impressed with that.

Yes, that sounds great.

Other ideas?

MF: We've tried to-, several colleagues been working together to devise some program level activities going on now that will structure each semester and the whole year. Because we are aware that in so many of our modules, students will come in for lectures and seminars, come in to the new environment, they'll come in for certain activities, but they won't necessarily see the whole cohort. They could be in quite small groups, so we've been trying to develop program-level activities that are separate from the talk components of the degree, but will still add some value to the degree because it will create that sense of community. And so this ranges from-, we were building in the attendance at the Special Research seminars we're putting on that will have more of a student focus. So it will be guest speakers, but we're focusing on having them for an undergraduate or postgraduate experience and then a range of other activities. And like Helens, they start from Foundation Week, so we have a quiz and we have the activities out at Ness Gardens and around other things on campus. And then hopefully that will create a good framework that the students will realise that they're kind of part of a larger community. They're not just on their few modules that they're taking and remember the 20 people they interact with, but they might come together as so many of the events at the program level might be online like this, but they'll recognise each other or they'll go off into small groups and have activities. So I hope that will really enhance at the Department program level what is part of this kind of hybrid learning, but they're going to be experiencing now.

Great, James?

JC: Yes, I mean it's not really a solution, but kind of raising a potential issue that's concerned me. I mean, obviously we've all spoken about the need to get students together, and as I said earlier, we're quite fortunate in the field classes enable us to do that, but the I suppose the worry for me is actually students meeting all of the staff, the teaching staff, and face to face. I mean, in the sense that I worry about students just seeing somebody behind a screen and not really understanding who they are, what their personality is and not just having that kind of banter or chat, that informal chat that you would have otherwise had.

So one of the things we've been considering, and it is very difficult with the restrictions about the use of school buildings, is and it's-, it might sound really quite perverse, but it's to try and get students to come into the school buildings, so providing additional PCs for examples for students. So rather than studying at home though, hopefully come into the teaching centres that we have on Orbit, obviously at a distance, so that they could, you know, happen to see a member of staff as they come in and out of the building.

Because although we don't want them to bump into each other in the corridor, of course, because that would not really comply, but we do want them to see that there are staff around and we do want them to understand who we are and what our personalities are in the kind of modules that we teach, and so on. And because I would say even our second and third year more third year students may not know all members of staff just because there's quite a wide choice of modules and they can go on different pathways and they can actively avoid staff if they really want to do within those pathways, but certainly for those first-year students if they're going to-, if the majority of the time they get to see a

member of staff as we're seeing each other now, then, you know that that kind of personal connection - I worry about it, I suppose, I kind of open this up to everybody here, and is this something that others have considered in their own schools and how they could overcome this?

KF: Yes, I think the one thing we've done just done at the beginning is to try and get all the staff to do a FlipGrid, a little, you know, video, introduce themselves. This is me, so at least the student knows the name to the face and who they look like and a little bit. So we tried to get the staff to all do that and for the first-year students to do it. They've not been quite as enthusiastic of putting themselves out there, which I can sort of understand, but just to try and have a little bit of a sense of community. But I understand what you mean completely, unless they see you and you know it's more difficult to have that, you know, conversation and get to know you.

So I mean we are bringing students in as much as we can do, but within the restrictions obviously that there are.

Yes, that's a lovely idea, Katherine, I don't know if you can share the FlipGrid or I don't know if you've used it, but you said so I think what you're saying James as well, so I think especially because staff will be wearing masks or visors and the visibility it is nice to have that visual prompt even between students because they will be wearing masks to just have a prompt of who people are and what they. But the other thing I think James what you were saying, sorry Katherine, is this loss of the, you know, the photo copier type discussions? Isn't it the impromptu serendipitous and being almost like that invisible visibility of the departments around the students. Is what you saying? Sorry Katherine.

KF: Yes I would. Just like with those having already been in the buildings with the students as well when everybody is wearing masks it's hard for everybody to recognise each other and so you are, you know you. Suddenly was that somebody you thought because they've gone past with the mask on.

So that definitely it causes some issues. And also, I don't think people, even if you have the photocopy a moment when you're both wearing a mask. It's like when you meet people in the, you know the supermarket, right people aren't as keen to talk to each other when they're both wearing, so that does put a little bit of a barrier up there as well.

I don't know, Helen or Matthew. Is this something you've thought about?

MF: So we thought about and we did something? Anyway in Welcome Week where all the students from the first year would come to a lecture Theatre, and every member of staff had to stand up and talk about themselves for one minute. So they got to see everyone because you don't necessarily teach until semester two, or you might, or your teacher might be second and third year. So we're moving that online. We haven't thought about the FlipGrid, which I think is a great idea, but we're doing something like that, so there's a two-hour session on Wednesday where the students get to see us and aside from that, I think the student society-, we've got a really strong student society in the Department and they are organizing all sorts of imaginative types of social interactions. So we've been grateful that they're doing a lot to create a sense of community amongst the student body. And then they're inviting us in for events, so we're hoping that that

will work well that it's a good student led, but that we can participate in. So it's not us controlling everything.

Helen: It's a bit strange. I will confess that I have concentrated on my work this summer on how on Earth we're going to transition, you know hours and hours of laboratory work into something that is hybrid. So my colleagues are the ones that are leading the sort of social interaction and community. But what I've actually been a part of is building a national community of physics educators, which takes it to the other side. So I notice that there was a bit of a gap which was on when, "God! What are we going to do? What's everybody else made of the problem?" And I contacted our national body, the Institute of Physics, and we set up a series of meetings over summer and we've actually got a load of our own podcasts, if you like, video recordings of what other people's experiences have been, including what we're going to teach next year.

So we've actually built the community that way where we had a, you know, a common problem. People that were really interested, and it's built up from the ground up, and it's even had a spinoff for Postgrads, so I'm feeling fairly confident that with a little bit of effort, the students themselves can actually build start building the community. And as Matthew says you know, invite us in.

So yes, I I've got every faith that we can do it, and we've probably got a better platform now because you don't have to wait to put people in the same place so you can be in the same place very, very quickly.

With this you're referring to?

Helen: And so, like zoom in teams,

Yes well, you mean that students can also initiate those spaces. Is that what you mean by them?

Helen: Yes, right, that's right. And you know no longer can you say I'm not on campus. I can't come to that staff meeting. It's very easy to actually attend staff meetings and other meetings, and it's about trying to get the informality of it though. So if you know starting these meetings with a 15-minute tea break, or you know ending it early so you can have that tea break, or you know, and in fact those informal interactions, we've mentioned they're going to be lost, but they can be put back in and I'm trying my best to instigate, sort of like a virtual staff room for my colleagues. You know, virtual downtime, where you can turn up and go. "My God, what happened to you this week? This is what happens to me!" And it's something that I know that physics a level and GCSE's teachers have been doing throughout. You know they've had a 45-minute sort of meeting. If you like, if people from across the nation to share ideas so you know I, I'd advocate, that's something as much as we want to build a community within the students, we need to keep the community in the staff as well. I mean,

Thanks Helen, we had a trial last week with socially distancing seminars with colleagues, and we had some students I remember now I want meant to say Katherine, it was the students were actually wearing a name badge on their, you know, like a like a sticky label with their names on, which was quite helpful. I think, so that might be something to consider whether staff members could do that, or when you are in a small group setting for initial, you know, getting to know each other.

But yes, I think they did mention this Helen as well that what they have done in one of the-, I think communication and media, that they have academic advisory meeting but then they either before or at the end have 1/2 hour which is the academic advisor leaves. But then it's the meeting slot is there for the students to socialise a little bit either before or after the meeting. So that's how I think they were trying to solve that.

So thank you so much. That was really interesting, the discussion around that, social cohesion, and I suppose one question that we keep getting and you must be also considering, and I will make this into almost like the last final question is, we also know that some staff might not be ready to come on campus and also that some students might be shielding or not yet arrived to Liverpool. And it's how to, I don't know in terms of your cohorts, whether you know who they might be, how you might try and involve them? What is your thinking-, your creative hats that you brought to this situation?

JC: It's less about a solution, but more about trying to raise what the issue is. And I suppose, yes, the issue with remote students, or that those students that can't come on campus with face to face teaching, it is not about them setting tasks or assignments by which they can meet the learning outcomes. I think that's relatively straightforward. I think it comes back to the student experience.

It's so, we were talking about field classes. This is a classic example, isn't it? Where students that go on a field class on a field day, hopefully if we do it right, they're going to have a really nice experience. And we can ensure that those students that don't turn up to those classes meet the learning outcomes, but they're not going to get the same experience, and I think

we have to be up front with the students, to let them know, not hide behind that and pretend that in some way the experience is going to be the same. But to say, let you know this, this is your choice. And you know, and this is what you will experience if you're out in the field, and these are the things that you're going to miss out on.

Yes, not going to in any way negatively impact in terms of the potential grade that you can get for that module, but sadly you will miss out on those kinds of experiences.

And the only way-, it's not that innovative unfortunately, but it is only just to video the kind of activities that they are doing out in the field so that at least they can see how a piece of equipment is used and how they take measurements and so on. And to provide online guides about how to do that kind of field work.

But it goes back to that kind of social cohesion, that it's the interaction with the tutors and with their peers that they're going to unfortunately miss out on.

Helen: So we've done quite a lot of work to have remote experiments. As I mentioned before, we're going to be using the universities remote system so that students can actually take data from wherever they are, so hopefully students who are self-isolating or who can't travel to campus can still get that aspect in their learning. And we're also looking to send equipment home as well, so we're going to be sending some kits home again so students can do things on campus, or if they want to, they can come in.

And use their own kits, which, as Matthew indicated before you know, cleaning lots and lots of Lego is not something that you want to be doing, and it's even harder, more difficult when it's very expensive, optics and or electronics so you know we can send home boxes of Lego, or in this case electronics.

But one of the things we won't be able to replicate is that sort of, you know, if you like politeness in the lab, the "thou shalt not steal from the experimental next to you" sort of behaviours. And we're taking a very program level approach to this. This is hopefully going to be the one year where it's really, really bad. I can't say it's going to be perfect next year, but by taking a program level approach you know, OK, we might lose something this year. But what can we build back in next year? And to make sure that the students get those experiences of how to behave in a laboratory? For example, can actually happen?

Thanks Helen. Thank you. Any other thoughts?

KF: I, I suppose all our students are back because they are clinical ones they have, they have all come back and I suppose all I would say is that it's different, but you get used to it as a member of staff you know. And as the students, and they're very quickly getting it used to the new norm. I think the one thing that we've learned is that you need more staff to help you move the students around. You definitely need staff there and also whatever you thought you would manage to do in a teaching session, reduce it by a third! Because, you know, when you've got all the infection control procedures and the students just getting used to it and you can only bring so many students in at one time, you know bringing them all in through the locker rooms as we have at different times.

That's one of the things that we found that you can't actually achieve as much in a session. So you've really got to think about your hybrid and your blended learning, as in what do you want them to have done beforehand that they can have done online to prepare themselves for the actual teaching session you've got?

And so that you can really link the two together and the students know if they haven't done their online work before, then this session isn't going to be as valuable as it would have been, and you can really link the two so you know the students are really engaged.

The staff, it's been tiring. It's been hard work, but we're getting there. But that's, you know. Once you do get back into the swing of it, I think everybody you know is managing fine, so it's difficult the first few days you go in. It seems very strange, but then it does start becoming just as everybody says, a new normal.

I think you're not the first one who says it's tiring because you are yes, and I think we've also found that in the trial that you can only do fewer things because also the turn taking and listening. And so yes, that thank you.

Yes, is there any final things, Matthew?

MF: I was just going to go back to the one of the points, about the balance between the students who can't come onto campus than those who can. At the moment there's one large module I'm running this semester for Master students and we don't know exactly how many students will come and those who won't, and so I've been trying to create activities that would happen away from the timetable. So in terms of discussion boards and extra sessions where they can meet so that it's part of the module, but it's

not the formally timetable component, so that the students who might not be able to come on campus still have some class time. Because the thing that I worry about is the logistics of trying to involve them in a live session are pretty difficult. So I wanted to make sure that there are alternative types of experiences that they can have as well with the whole cohort. It's relatively easy because it's only a class of about 30 students. It's much more difficult when it's the classes of hundreds to try and think around that solution. Unless you could find within your large class, a group of students who aren't able to come on campus, you can put them together or mix them together.

But some of these things we won't know until everyone's registered and is finally on campus or decided to say that they're not on campus, so we've been thinking about how to do things, but nothing's been formalised yet. because of course we don't know.

I think what you've all demonstrated is that you're all considering and it's partly a waiting game as well, but I think-, let me just bring this back with closing the discussion, because I think you've been all excellent. And thank you so much for creating this lively and energetic debate. I think it's creativity I will turn back to because you brought this idea of how this period has made you creative, so I would like you to think, of taking either a luxury item or a teaching prop of someone else from this room here and see if you can make use of it.

So we had phantom heads. We had Lego, James, you had. Well, I remember the trainers, yours was a field trip Helen. Yours was the remote lab wasn't it?

MF: I'd like to cheat and take a little bit of everybody's. So for the Department, I think we know that some students really want the field work, others it is the logging onto the PC centre so we can teach together, they can access data, I think. You know, to fit into that hybrid teaching experience, it is going to be sharing knowledge and sharing different practices that we might not normally, explore, students might not normally experience, and taking bits and trying to put them together to create a new type of teaching experience, certainly our Department will be like that.

Sorry that was cheating a little bit, taking a bit from everybody like that.

We like that! It's very sustainable, again, reusing and curating love it. Anyone else?

Helen: Rather than the actual Lego, which of course would keep a lot of physicists very happy for, you know, years. I mean, mine's still in the loft, but just as an aside, my husband and I knew it was true love when we combined our Lego sets. You know you were never going to separate it, but actually I'd like to take the concept of play because I do believe that you know that concept is very valuable on when you are dealing with say, complex datasets. You have to have an imaginative mind when you're dealing with any datasets, so I'd like to take that sort of concept of play with me as well, please.

KF: Yes, I I would agree with the play and in fact the very first session we had with our students coming back in the building. They were obviously, you know, apprehensive. The staff were apprehensive and so that is what we said our first session they were doing. We gave them tasks to do but we said play and you know and just to make everybody feel more comfortable and then more comfortable. Our first session was playing.

But what's playing? If you give us an example.

Well, Alves was with their Phantom heads and they were going to be practicing doing things, but we really said do what you'd like to do. Do what makes you feel comfortable, you know, as a dentist, you need to pick back up your hammer drills and everything we just said. Do what you want and just play and feel comfortable and get your confidence back. But I think very much for all of them and the staff just tell everybody feels comfortable. Again, it's definitely a good way forward.

That's a lovely opening. Yes, thank you. James, do you want to pinch anybody's?

JC: Pinch a bit of a light bulb moment I think, and that's on reflection and feedback, and I think you know, particularly for the incoming students that haven't been in formal education for what coming on for six-seven months now, or eight months when they arrive in Liverpool. It that first time when they get their feedback through Turnitin. And it's ensuring that we support them when they read that feedback. You know, help them interpret what we're trying to say and what the purpose is of that feedback, and ensuring that they do reflect even when they get some criticism, because I think when they do get well, not criticism, but they get some constructive feedback is they won't be used to getting that, of course, and it might be quite a shock. Particularly as they all have a bit of a learning shock when they move to University anyway.

So it would be thinking about how we can ensure that they feel supported when they get the feedback, ensuring they reflect in the right way and they read that feedback as well, and I think that's perhaps something that we need to think a little bit more about, particularly as we have like study skills modules where the students will have tutorials every week. I think

that might be an opportunity there to go through the feedback as it comes through with their tutor and ensure they understand what it is we're trying to say in that group.

Excellent, thank you so much. I think that this brings us nicely to the end. So we had creativity, play, reflection.

So thank you so much for your contributions and we will say goodbye from our Joint Treasure Islands which I loved being in and sharing it with you. So thank you very much.