# CIE Podcast - Remote Teaching podcast, Part 2/2: From the Beatles to Beefheart: How is it going for students? - Transcript

Welcome back everybody. We are here continuing our remote teaching podcast hosted by the Centre for Innovation in Education. And I've got four guests here who will introduce themselves and they will launch into our well, into the podcast after, so can I start with Stuart, you're on my first.

Yes, I’m Stuart Wilkes-Hague from the Department of Politics.

Great, Diana?

I'm Diana Jeater. I'm an historian but I'm also Associate Dean of Education for the School of Histories Languages and Cultures.

Lovely. James you’re next up on my screen.

I'm James Gaynor. From the Department of Chemistry in the School of Physical Sciences.

Okay Anna?

I'm Anna O’Connor, I'm from School Health Sciences and I'm an Orthoptist.

Great. OK. So last time we talked about how remote teaching was going for you as the educator and naturally we would also want to talk about how it's going for, for the students from your perspective. So you might want to introduce what, when we start talking about your student characteristics and then just talking about how you have found they’re finding it. So I'm just opening up the discussion for you there, so that was probably two questions.

Well I'm happy to start. I mean I think I've got quite diverse experiences from my students in Politics. So I've got this huge group, first year students about 200 students. That is challenging to know really how they're doing. I mean virtually at the moment when we moved to online teaching they had an essay due and the deadlines were extended, and so on, but I mean that was really the period of maximum disruption when everybody was working out whether they were going to go back to their parents or you know some of them, international students, but they were going to go back to their own country. I think a few stayed in Liverpool, not many, so there's lots of them moving around and so on and trying to get ready for whatever was going to happen next. And I find it very hard to gauge with 200 students what was going on there really, quite a lot of them submitted the essay quite a lot didn't, the ones who haven't, I haven't necessarily heard from them. And in the midst of all of this we, you know we had university communications I thought was right, absolutely, about the no detriment policy and the safety net. A little bit concerned that some first years of thought was okay then I don't really need to do anything now which appears to me to not strictly be true. So actually to engage with that large cohort versus students, is, is difficult and challenging. My third year students have been, it's only 13 of them in a group making radio programs. But within that group very diverse, three have gone to one extreme and started to make daily podcasts with amazing guests and, and so on really grappling with the politics of this incredible period that we're in. Again some of the others have just gone silent, and it's quite, it's quite hard to reach them with that group but Ive’ set up a communication platform using Slack which for those who don't know it's a, it's a kind of social engagement tool. Its really meant as an alternative to email, it's a bit more sort of like Facebook or something like that. And that's worked really well actually with that, with that group and they've, they've really enjoyed using that. And it's been great communication tool. So really diverse experiences. And I am worried about the students that are just going to hear from the at all.

Okay. I mean for the students that you, you don’t hear, is that what, what is available. What, what is at hand for your, because that must you know that, that is a difficult situation when you don't have them on campus and you can't meet them.

If I could speak to that at the school-wide level we, we've put a lot of thinking and I think the university as a whole has as well, has done a lot of really good thinking about student well-being. A lot of the central communications from the University have been about student well-being, student support, mental health and that's very welcome. We've asked all of our academic advisors to contact each of their academic advisees just to say are you okay. And normally I find if you contact your academic advisees about half of them ignore you and you have to contact them several times. In this case almost all of them got back to me within hours to say I'm okay which suggests to me that that that reaching out was very welcome. So I think in terms of our students mental health and well-being we've got a pretty good idea of the ones who are not talking to us and they are quite a minority when it comes to their well-being. This is slightly different from the engagement with the academic side of things and I think the reassurance about their well-being and how the University is taking that into account has in some cases encouraged students to think, well in that case I can disengage from the academic work I can focus on my well-being. I'm in a very stressful situation. I mean we've already heard from, from each other about how when you've got a bunch of people in a household and everybody's trying to work from home there's this, there's pressure on the resources. And that's equally true for our students., and I think some of them are just sort well we've got the no detriment policy which I think made a huge difference actually particularly my dissertation students who were becoming incredibly stressed because they couldn't do their dissertation work and they just didn't know what was going to happen to their degree. So I think we've done all the right things in terms of, of addressing our students mental state and reassuring them that their whole university career won't be destroyed by this. But I think a knock on effect of that is that some of them very understandably have just decided to put university to one side because they haven't got the resources at home anyway. One of the things that's encouraged my first year is, is to point out to them that they may not be eligible for study abroad or some other things like placements if they don't have a two one or a first. And therefore it's worth trying to do something if they can because we want them to continue to engage with the learning anyway because that's providing foundations for what they'll go on to do. So I think there is a problem with our student a lot of our students engagement with the academic work. But I think we've been pretty good at making sure they're okay physically and mentally.

Mm hmm. Can I just check that with Anna and James as well from your perspective?

Yes oftentimes. So just to follow on from Diana as year coordinator, immediately after this this discussion I'm going off to have a catch up with all first year students where they can just dial in and have a Q and A ask me about arrangements for the alternative assessments. Just have a general chat with me, small talk is not my forte, so it puts me out my comfort zone but our support offers will be there as well. I did one of these a couple weeks ago and whilst he was like oh yes ten people came our first years are a hundred and fifty. So it's erm, we've had some online support for workshops, again we're like ooh, ten students turned up but usually our attendance is ninety one at 150 is a minimum. So the engagement side of it from our perspective from on the academic side, it's been an issue with our first years, but that said they have been submitting work they’re just not taking up the support that we're trying to put on. Now going back to, when the idea is just turning support online isn't necessarily the best way of doing it but it's what we're trying to do to get through this and for the next few weeks. I agree with the mental health issues, I think we've, by the sounds of we're doing similar things in Chemistry to what Diana was saying. Erm, so but the students do seem to be struggling with this from the ones I've come across by I only hear about the cases where they're struggling. People don't generally come and tell me oh I'm fine. They generally get in contact with me to say I'm really struggling to keep on top of all the emails the deadlines, things on Teams now, some people still using discussion boards, so it's that there's there's a students that some have adapted some haven't and I think a big consideration is that their resources at home, I think that's a massive thing that's already been pointed out. And that's all I was basically gonna say really. So it sounds like we’re having similar concerns.

Yeah. I mean in terms of the, the support level so working in Health Sciences you know some of that is sort of integrated within our programs anyway, so the mental health side of things and so that hasn't changed. You know there are mechanisms University wide and school-wise in terms of engagement. I think it's been heartening to see the third years engaged, we've got about 30 odd students in a third year, 30 or 50 in our first year the third year because it's this is graduation and it's with yes, with the assessments, and things have to happen not just in terms of their academic ability for registration to work as a clinical practitioner. We have requirements that we need to meet for registration. I'm sure that's, that’ll be true across all the clinical programs. So I think the third is very motivated in that respect. And so we've been, one of the things tools we use quite a bit is PebblePad because they use it when they're on clinical placements. And then so we've been putting cases on that and they've been really engaged in sort of joining and asking questions and putting up evidence. And so that's really been heartening to see, I think, yeah similar to what you're saying James the first year for us, for my experience seems to be the ones not engaged as much. But I still think there's a there's an element there still in that transition from school to university to be independent learners, aI think that's still in that transition.

Absolutely.

Of wanting information and wanting Vital to be an information portal and not an interactive, you know, I'm here to help you understand this is that transition and trying to manage that at the same time as all of this is a challenge.

At a distance and with the tools, and because I was going to ask that in terms of I mean have you felt that apart from the resource issue that we've all mentioned, you have all mentioned, in terms of the digital tools and perhaps there was new tools that you and colleagues might be using with students in terms of their skills of using that or just the way they think of what learning is like, and you know people might be used to coming to campus and doing learning in a particular way. What you mentioned about transitioning to independent learning. So have you had a sense of that, how, how that their response to that side of things as you're trying to engage them in learning.

It brings in their digital literacy doesn't it basically more from digital literacy perspective we're trying to maintain similar tools. We haven't bombarded them with a whole load of new tools and oh you could use this week to use, PebblePad they're very familiar with, so you know is trying to use what they're already familiar with and how what works and what we're familiar with. It is a learning curve for us, it's a learning curve for them, you want to add that as an extra layer. So I think that's one thing, yes we've tried it, we're looking at new things, we have introduced bits and bobs but fundamentally we're still using the tools that we and they are familiar with, I don’t know what everybody else feels.

Well what one the things that that I think always needs to be stressed with online learning is don't try to do something outside of your comfort zone. On the other hand going back to the, you know we used to just be doing things we were familiar with and how we need a new pedagogy. One of the conversations that we needed to have quite early on right across the school was whether we were going to go for synchronous or asynchronous teaching. And initially everybody went for synchronous teaching they just turned up in Teams to teach their seminar. A lot of students didn't turn up those that did turn up actually wanted to talk about how stressed they were and those having a chance to see people and see each other's cats and just a reassurance that life is normal and to talk about somebody new puppy. All of that was really important but it wasn't really where the teaching was happening. And, and also there was very low take-up. Whereas if you go for asynchronous teaching then students can fit it around what else is going on in their households. And you can get much higher levels of participation. So this is something that really neither staff nor students are familiar with. So but it is nonetheless a better option, I think despite being unfamiliar and these I think are the kinds of conversations we need to have more about, especially if we're going to have to be doing this next academic year where we will design this in abinitio, what works for students that you can't get together in a seminar room. And so I think we do need to talk much more about pedagogy.

And I think it's an important point in synchronous asynchronous, and I think we've been trained. Right. Yeah. Trying to sort of change what you were doing previously into an online format and it doesn't necessarily work, and what we do is we've got international students different time zones, you've got people who work like, I'm alternating with my husband working so maybe other people do, you know some of our students we do exactly the same thing. So yeah. But I think using Teams or things where we're recording what we're doing at least gives that opportunity to students to then revisit it later so that if there are barriers or there are reasons that they can't be at the computer at that time. I'm still giving everyone the opportunity. But like you say that there are also people who value that time together, so yes I think it's I think a place for both. Isn't there?

Mm hmm. James did you want to?

Yeah. For me I think my initial thinking was well let's go synchronous, because you know that's what students are used to, but they're not used to it online as was pointed out. The students who are supposed to who couldn't come to virtually come to workshops because they signed up to help with the NHS. Now actually driving things around for the NHS now. So yeah I think moving forward we need to have this conversation much for next year. Exactly, as has, sort of pointed out also from our perspective labs are a massive challenge. Students have not necessarily adapted well to be, you know we can give them data but that's not the same as them getting their own data and then understanding how to write an experiment up if they've not actually done the experiment themselves. So whilst because of the time in the year I think we could muddle our way through. But I think for if we've got to do this for the next academic year and in any, even for the first six weeks or first semester we really need to have a sit down and talk about the education side of this pedagogy, we really need to. That's a really good point. That was raised by Diana.

I just, I completely agree with everything that's been said really and particularly in terms of synchronous teaching that really I mean it works for the handful of people who are on at any given time but it's really not doing the job that we need to be done, about that, then I think it opens up other, that's where we're going in this conversation other discussions about, well it's no use then trying to record a one hour lecture which is the equivalent if you do in a lecture room. I mean if you do that it's really not going to work for the students. So you need to start to think if you look at the record fresh lectures you know make them much, much shorter. I would say you know probably maximum 20 minutes, and sometimes just very pragmatically you know an old lecture that you've got last year's lecture on available lecture capture that can be reusable. But I think it's very important then you know on Vital or somewhere just to put in the kind of if you like what the narrative of that lecture is that the summary of that lecture to give the students something to work with before they start watching something which is typically going to be about 50 minutes long. One of the big challenges I faced is that my first year seminars in particular delivered by GTAs, they were very much designed around group work activities most of which involved usually things like moving bits of paper around the classroom. So you know they were exercises where I didn't know a big graphic was cut up into bits and they have to reassemble it as a group. There were card trading games that I'd invented, and so now you cannot do that online. What I'd love to have is access to a web developer or somebody who can recreate these as apps or you know web based activities. I haven't got that clearly, but there is so much you could do with these same activities where a student could do it individually or in groups, you could you know turn it into a computer game type thing. I've got lots of ideas of how we could sort of replicate Duo-lingo type format for politics and teaching. But again you know this would require a lot of a lot of resource, but I mean I can see enormous potential from the materials we've already got that could be converted and thinking towards the future, you know there's lots of possibilities.

Diana you want to. Sorry.

Yes, when I used to work for the Open University we had software that could do a massive range of things for a synchronous seminar and it would be great to have that software. But one of the tasks I had was to advise new staff on how to use this software. The thing I always said was don't try to do something that is too complicated because it's far better to do something you feel safe with and for it all to work then to try and use all of the bells and whistles. So I would love to see the University investing in software that has many more bells and whistles, the ability to divide students up into groups with whiteboards and with polling and with sorting activities and as Stuart says being able to move things around. All of these things are possible, but I think we also need to reassure staff that just because they have software that can do all these things that doesn't necessarily mean it will make their teaching better. And if they don’t normally teach like that if they normally teach a seminar by doing Q&A then go on doing that. Do what you know works well, but in the new context.

That sounds great advice Diana and I think it's, it's, it's definitely that thinking process is so useful to think through exactly what we are trying to do. And Anna I think you wanted to comment.

Yeah it was just so much resources out there there's a lot of stuff that’s that exists and I think we're trying to tap into that because well you know. Stuart saying things that you have to then create, yeah it’s great. That is exactly so made for purpose, but we use things like Quizlet and looking at what’s online and some lots, you know the first year stuff like I am brain there’s some brilliant stuff out there. Again it takes a bit of time to sort of figure it out. So you know suss it out and what we're looking at, because of not being able to deliver some clinical placements for students now working with clinicians across the country as well to sort of like let's pool our resources, we need to support our students. They're not going to be able to see the patients for the foreseeable future. So, and we can't recreate the placements without bodies but we can at least help support their learning, so pooling resources and seeing what's out there.

I mean I don't know whether that's, what my sense has been, that's what I've seen with this pandemic. Just the collaboration and collegiality just in every level you know in my field your field people are so ready to help and support and share. So that’s been really nice to see because obviously that’s such a hard situation for those students and for you as educators to try and deliver this education in the environment where it's not feasible, you know when ,when they can't go into the hospitals and, and get the experience first-hand. So I think if we talk about how we covered the question around you know some of the things what we might think about going forward. And I wanted to because we are aiming at, we're hoping that people will really listen to this podcast. Is there anything that you want to pull out from your bag in terms of advice or tricks or things that have worked for you that you wanted to pass on?

From a perspective of not having done a huge amount of online teaching I’ve used online resources, but that’s not the same, for me it's too early to know what has worked. The main thing I picked up partly through this discussion but I was also thinking this anyway is the, do what you know and don’t just jump into things using synchronous tools as the best. I'm repeating what Diana said but that is the main thing that I picked up on is that it's not the, you don't have to be all fancy, you know all singing and dancing type of stuff. Just do what works and be willing to try new things that just go to get students to engage. That was my, that's my main thing.

Yeah. Any of others?

I think student engagement is the key thing isn't it. And help and showing that it’s mooting supporting the students and their understanding and re-use tools and sort of little online quizzes and all those sorts of things, you know since students can be competitive you know certain little games and things like that and sort of, so you can have a little table or a league table or just make it a bit of fun as well, but alongside the learning. And it's so like you were saying that kind of just as well-being a little bit as well. Make sure you know that that they’re out there and go well you can do this. It takes 10 seconds like some of the quizzes, and you know when someone’s got a score of eight seconds can you beat it. Can you. So there's some little things I think that can address both wellbeing and sort of the learning side of things. But yeah but thinking from the student's perspective that you know they can’t just follow the normal timetable, they’re not on campus that they have got other demands as we have that we've just got to try, and so know at the minute you're like James says it is early days. And I think because we're just figuring it out as well and juggling as we go along that we'll just have to be very interesting to see sort of come the summer where we are in terms of pandemic, where we are terms of the university and where we're going to be moving forward.

Mm-Hmm. Yes. Yes. This is the final, in the final words. Now I think because I suppose the last question I wanted to, to ask is just what keeps you going or what. You know what’s, what's in your resources and we can come back to our initial analogues of art or whatever analogy, analogy we want to make. You know we started off with roller coasters the scream some sort of order and we are in it for the long haul, you know it is going to be a long year. So I'm, I’m asking you when I guess colleagues, well what keeps you going or what would be or I don't know aspirational thing to, to hold on through in these times?

There's a couple of things I would say. One is care for the students. I think a lot of our students on this it may be even more true for Anna’s students and James' students is a fear that they will be assuming that something you know that we might call normal in some sense returns to us that they will be a stigmatized group. They will always be that the Covid generation of graduates who, who didn't quite have a good enough education didn’t have the clinical practice and so on. So one of the things that keeps me going is doing my best to make sure that those students can feel confident in the education that they’re getting. And one of our heads of department in my school used to work in, with the UN doing crisis stuff in in conflict zones. And he said one of the most important things you have to do in a crisis is to create a sense of confidence in the people that you're dealing with that they feel that you know what you're doing, and I think that's really important. The other thing that keeps me going but this is just because I'm a geek is, is I, I am, I like the idea of exploring the new pedagogy. But what can we do, what are the possibilities? How can we work with new people in new ways? And so for me it's a kind of exciting adventure to discover what else we can do.

Excellent, lovely. That’s really nice Dianna. James just put a note here. His view on the last question. Look after yourselves and colleagues who might be living alone. Give time to yourself away from the computer, particularly if looking after children also. OK so that’s. Yeah, Stuart?

Yeah. One of the things that's been keeping me going and I've mentioned already but my students who have turned from making weekly radio shows to making daily podcasts which is quite, quite incredible that's been a kind of highlight every evening. It tends to sort of drop onto SoundCloud or Spotify around about the time that I'm making dinner. So I listen to their latest broadcast while I'm making dinner, and you know one of the great things is they're talking to other students on their as guests asking them how it’s going. Obviously those broadcasts are available then to all students in the department. So there is a sense of it you know not just being reassuring for me because I know these students are doing great work and some sort of a sense of it kind of sustaining and building a kind of virtual community for staff and students and in politics. And I always surprise me with who they got on the show every night. And that's, that's been absolutely amazing.

Wow, that's fantastic.

Just think what's keep me going, realistically this semester isn't too far over, too far to the end. There is a, at least a little bit of a break in, we've just got to be realistic. What we’re prioritizing what we’re making sure that our students are supported and that they're ready for their assessments and this sort of thing that other things can wait. In terms of for our mental health in terms of making sure that we're available to students in terms of just reality. And yeah I, I’m, I’m enjoying sort of the online teaching aspects. But yes it's just a juggling act for everybody, student’s lecturers and, yeah we know we'll drop some balls sometimes, so it's just trying to make sure you're not juggling too much.

Yeah that’s fantastic. And I hope you have some of your students listening because such, the care, the pride and the empathy you have towards them and the commitment for the learning is just amazing to hear. And yeah I think that that's why you are in this profession and that's why the students are lucky and hopefully it will work out for them. But thank you so much, I think, thank you so much for coming along and sharing your experiences and views and hope to see you on another topic or perhaps some follow up after this. Thank you very much. Okay. Thanks. Bye.