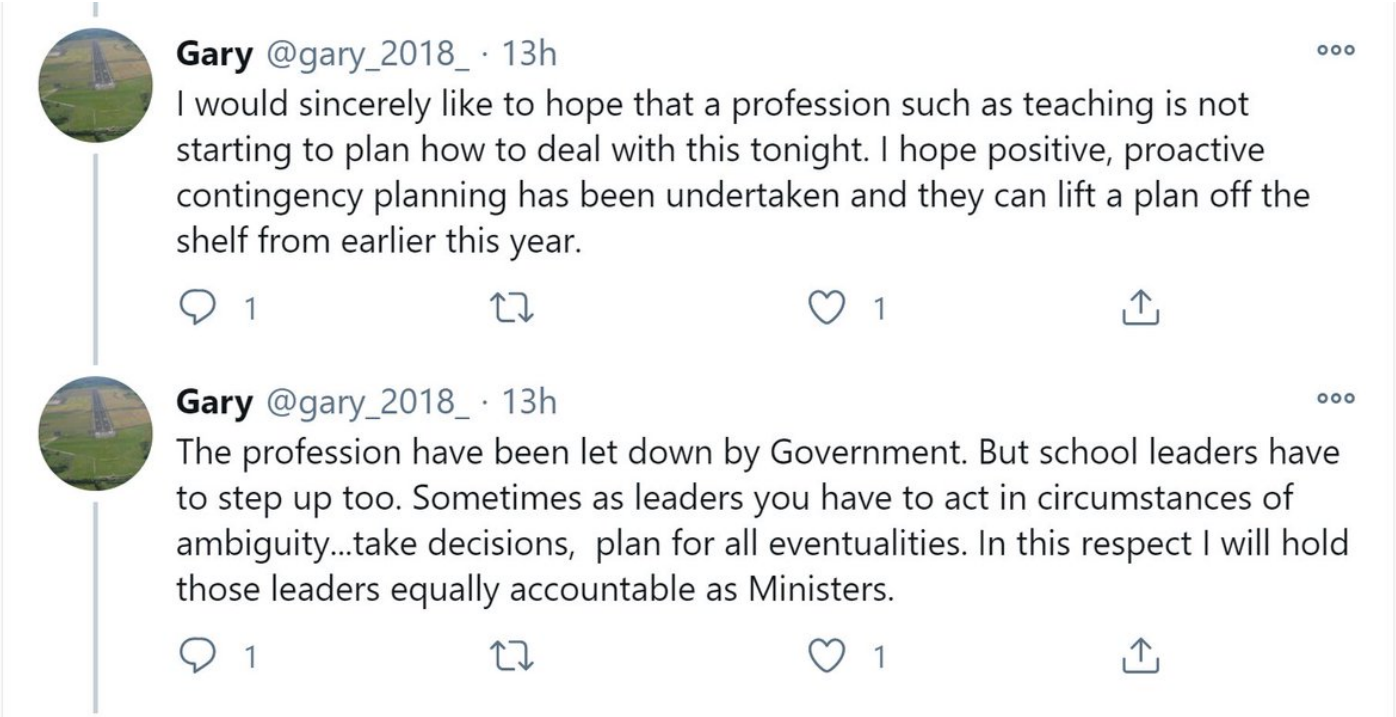
Twitter Thread by Alistair Hamill ■

Alistair Hamill ■
@lcgeography

**** Schools have been getting ready for this: a thread ****

In many ways, I don't blame folks who tweet things like this. The media coverage of the schools situation in Covid-19 rarely talks about the quiet, day-in-day-out work that schools have been doing these past 9 months. 1/



Instead, the coverage focused on the dramatic, last minute policy announcements by the government, or of dramatic stories of school closures, often accompanied by photos of socially distanced classrooms that those of us in schools this past term know are from a fantasy land. 2/

N. Ireland | N. Ireland Politics | Local News | NI 100

Covid-19: Homeschooling returns for first week of January

31 December 2020

Coronavirus pandemic



JACOB KING/PA WIRE

Schools will accommodate vulnerable children and the children of key workers from the start of term

Most pupils in Northern Ireland will not be returning to school in the first week of January as planned.

Primary school pupils will be taught remotely until 11 January, after which they will return to the classroom.

For some post-primary pupils (Years 8-11), online learning will be in place for the entire month of January.

Childcare settings including those attached to schools, pre-school facilities, nurseries and special schools will be open as usual.

Schools will accommodate vulnerable children and the children of key workers from the start of term.

If that's all you see & hear, it's no wonder that you may not know what has actually been happening in schools to meet the challenges. So, if you'd like a glimpse behind the curtain, then read on. For this is something of what teachers & schools leaders have been up to. 3/

It started last March with trying to meet the challenges of lockdown, being thrown into the deep end, with only a few days' notice, to try to learn to teach remotely during the first lockdown. 4/

https://t.co/S39EWuap3b



> In Lurgan College today we are using our timely staff training day to hone our skills in the use of Google Classroom as we prepare to educate our pupils at home in the event of school closure in the future. #beprepared pic.twitter.com/E0LQkYqvBD
>
> — Lurgan College (@LurganCollege) March 16, 2020

I wrote a policy document for our staff the weekend before our training as we anticipated what was to come, a document I shared freely & widely as the education community across the land started to reach out to one another for ideas and support. 5/
https://t.co/m1QsxlPaV4

Virtual Learning Support

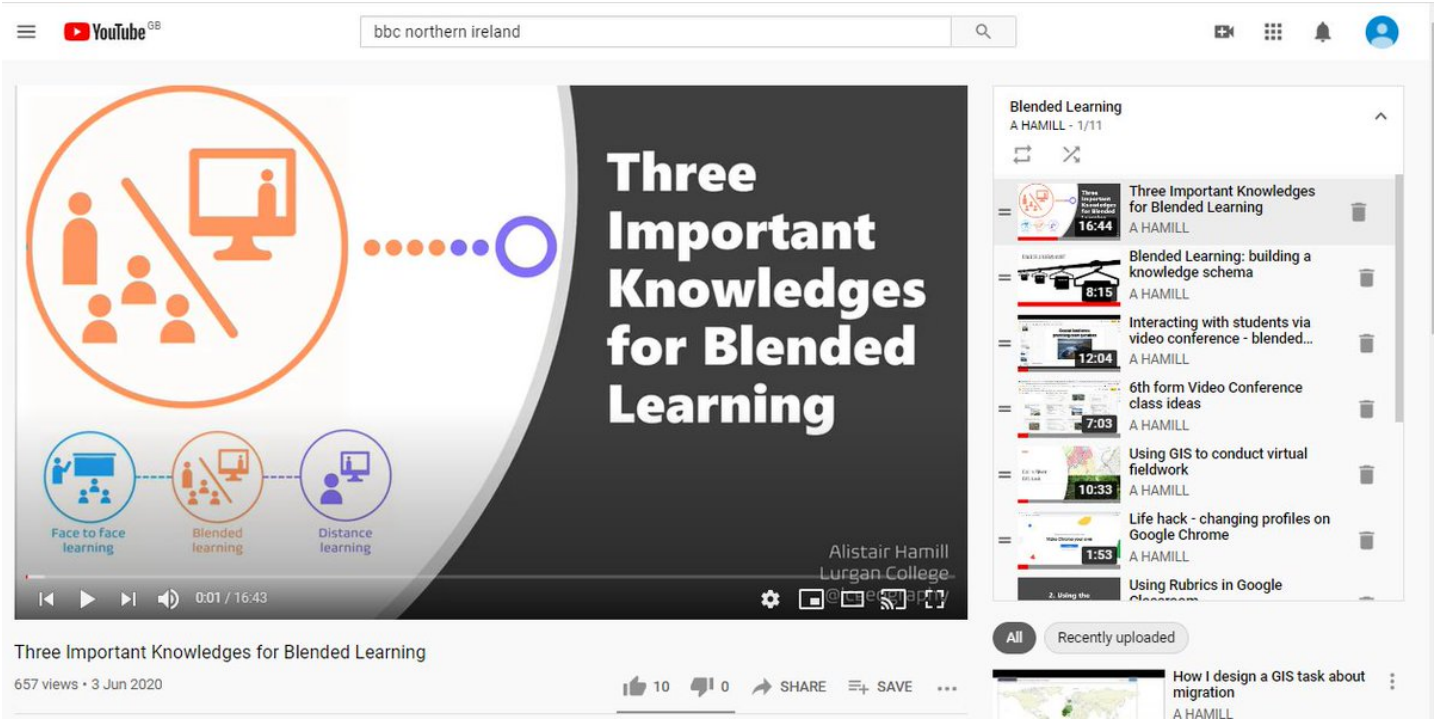
A Guide for Teachers in these Perplexing Times



Alistair Hamill

Senior Leader (Staff Development and Teaching & Learning)
Lurgan College (14 to 18 school in Co. Armagh, N. Ireland)
@lcgeography

And so, through the months that followed, all whilst managing our own families at home, we engaged in the most widespread upskilling not just in tech use, but in the fundamental pedagogies of how to support all of our pupils in these challenging times. 6/ https://t.co/YBXvYtfBat



Yes, some schools struggled more than others, and the personal experiences of some parents were far from ideal. Understandably, in their frustration, and given the lack of coverage from the media on what was going on, they asked questions about what teachers were doing. 7/

Throw in more than a little teacher bashing headlines and articles from certain newspapers, and the Lazy Teacher Trope™ was given a whole new lease of life.

It is misleading and it took its toll on morale within the profession.

But the trope is spectacularly wrong.

8/

Covid has made heroes of many of our workers... but not teachers



WE were never all in this pandemic "together".

Some have suffered a lot more than others. The elderly and the poor, for example. And more than anything, the young. Our children.

How did you feel when you read yesterday that pupils at an infant school in Walsall, in the West Midlands, were forced to eat mashed potato served in a Yorkshire pudding with their hands? No cutlery allowed because of Covid, according to the school's commissars.

How horrible for those kids. How undignified and demeaning. This is the Edgar Stammers Academy, which Ofsted says is "in need of improvement".

No kidding?

But that's not the half of it.

Teaching unions are now insisting that the schools break up for Christmas earlier than usual. This is so teachers can avoid "stress".

What stress, exactly? The stress of working for a living?

Is there any profession in the country which has had an easier, stress-free nine months than the teaching profession?

During this horrible crisis we have all come to respect, more than ever, our frontline workers in the National Health Service. And the frontline workers in other sectors – our bus and train staff, the taxi drivers.

But has any body of people lowered itself more in the eyes of the public than our teachers, spurred on by their unions? I can't think of one offhand.

What the teaching unions have made abundantly clear is that teaching children is at the very bottom of their to-do list.

During the first lockdown, from March to June, two thirds of our schoolkids received no virtual lessons.

When lockdown was lifted on July 4, the Government – and parents up and down the country – had a vague hope that perhaps the kids might get some extra tuition over the summer. The unions made it clear – not a hope.

They even said re-opening the schools in September would be a bad idea. Left to them I suspect the schools would not be open at all.

Meanwhile, they have warned that cancelling exams "may become inevitable". So there would be none for the coming year.

That makes life a hell of a lot easier for them, doesn't it? They say this is for the benefit of the kids, but once again it's to suit themselves.

They will be charged instead with assessing the abilities of their students.

They did that before, in the summer, if you remember – and their assessments bore no resemblance to reality.

Kids bottom of our list for too long

We are left with a batch of kids with wholly unrealistic expectations. Based upon wildly inflated grades.

All done at a time, incidentally, when German kids were sitting exams.

Since September, pupils have been sent home for a week or more if one of them develops so much as a sniffle.

This has a knock-on effect, of course. It means the mums and dads can't go out to work. The economy takes a hit just when we are all desperate for recovery.

Our children have had a truly horrible nine months.

Separated from their friends for ages. Receiving very little in the way of a normal education. Dragooned into social distancing at school. And at the end of it forced to eat food with their hands because the teachers are scared of cutlery.

Our country has let its children down. They have come bottom of our list for too long. Let 2021 be the year we put them first.

All agreed? Good. Now, somebody tell the teachers.

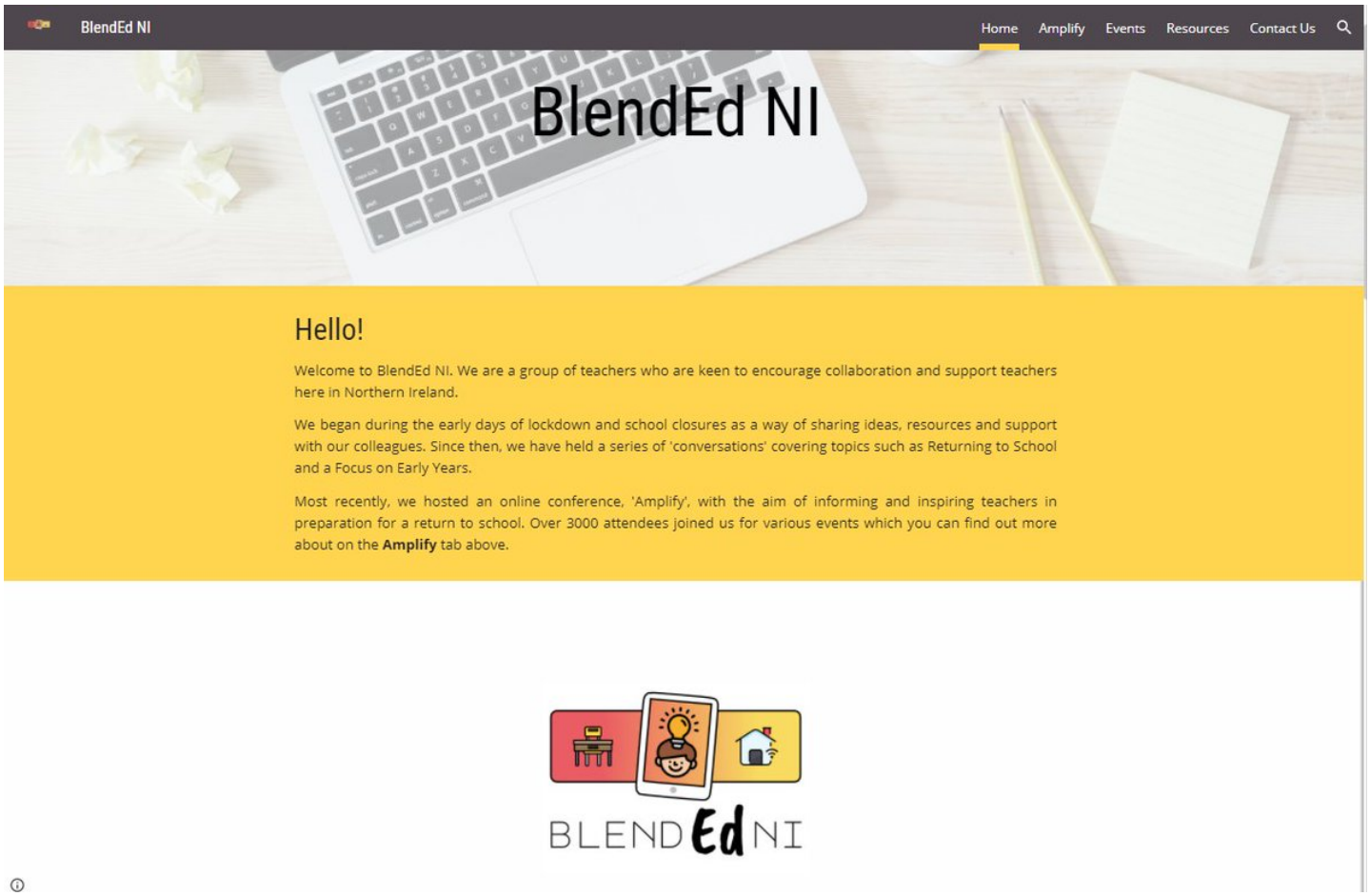
What follows here is merely a snapshot of the past 9 months, the merest flavour of the incredible work teachers and school leaders have been doing. Here we go!

A group of teachers in NI just simply got on with teachers supporting teachers, setting up @BlendEd_NI

9/

A series of webinars in June 2020 were followed by a two day conference in early August which had over 3000 session sign ups by teachers from NI & beyond, hungry for CPD to learn from each other and prepare best for the new term. 10/

https://t.co/TkzGdlxPm3



As part of that, and for the benefit of the teachers in my own school, I started to plan for return in mid August 2020, thinking not only how we might help our pupils transition back into schools, but how we might prepare for further disruption. 11/

https://t.co/fXcDh2kKtf



Meanwhile, more & more ad hoc sharing was going on between teachers, on a scale I have never seen before. Quite simply, my colleagues all over the country (for that is how I view them now) stepped up to the challenge, spending hours discussing strategies. It was inspiring. 12/

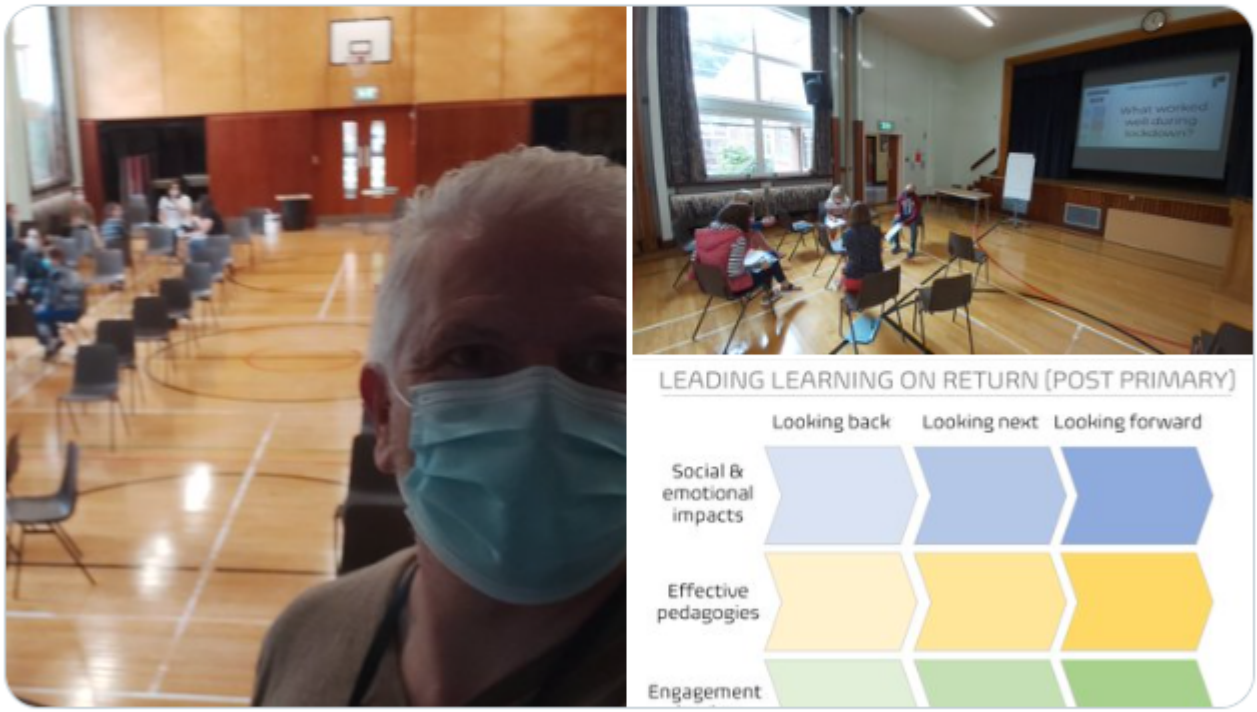
And, as we started back to school in mid August, I took the learning from all this interaction & shared it with our staff, thinking ahead about how best we could prepare for what lay ahead. 13/

https://t.co/mQhTTSWMJA

Tweet

Alistair Hamill 😷
@lcgeography

Socially distanced staff training in @LurganCollege today, looking back at what worked well during lockdown learning, so we can learn together - and prepare for what's to come next week...!

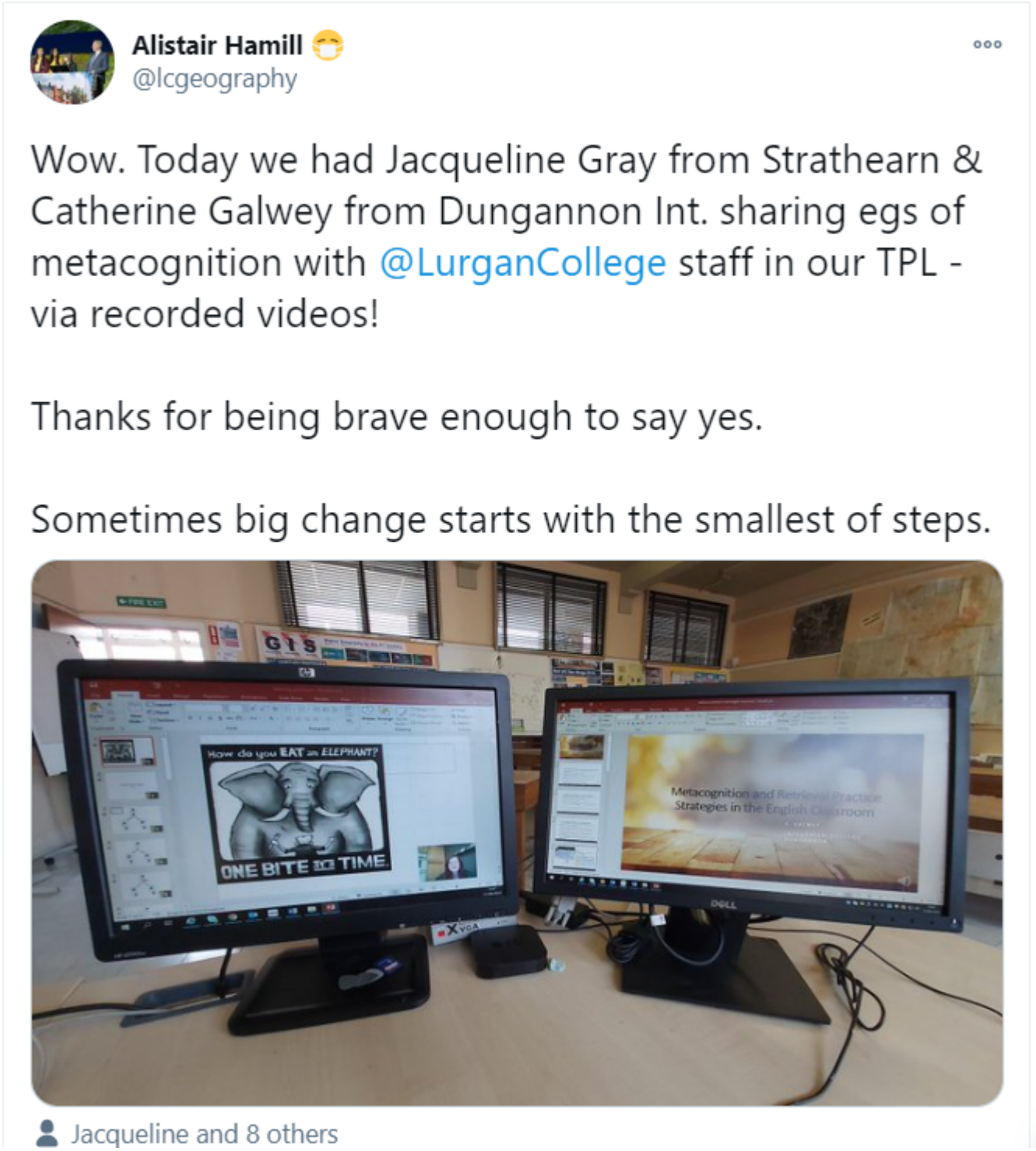


Tony Gallagher and 6 others

12:24 PM · Aug 19, 2020 · Twitter for Android

> Socially distanced staff training in @LurganCollege today, looking back at what worked well during lockdown learning, so we can learn together - and prepare for what's to come next week...! pic.twitter.com/rYHt9e5IxV
>
> — Alistair Hamill \U0001f637 (@lcgeography) August 19, 2020

But that training included not only sharing between staff in @lurgancollege, but also drew in some of the results from interactions across NI. Teachers from other schools made videos to help train teachers in NI. 14/ https://t.co/KqYDsu85eW



Wow. Today we had Jacqueline Gray from Strathearn & Catherine Galwey from Dungannon Int. sharing egs of metacognition with @LurganCollege staff in our TPL - via recorded videos!

Thanks for being brave enough to say yes.

Sometimes big change starts with the smallest of steps. pic.twitter.com/V3Lbat2jTd

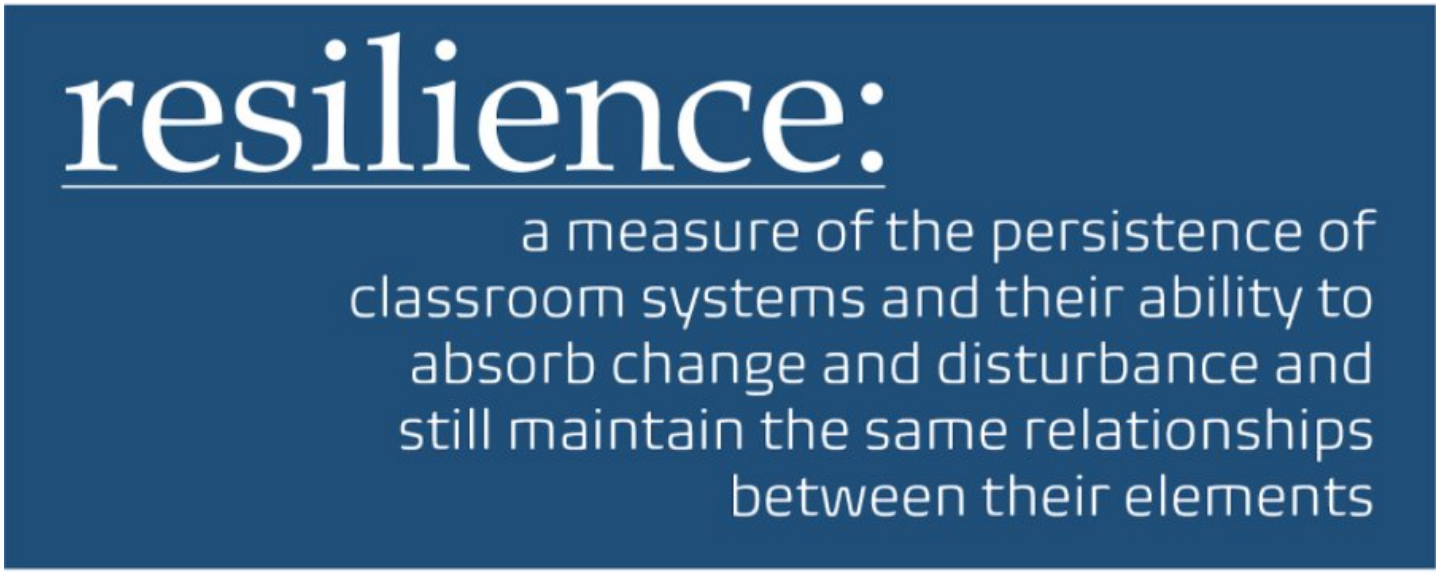
— Alistair Hamill \U0001f637 (@lcgeography) August 21, 2020

It became very clear to me that, whatever things looked like in August 2020, it was unlikely they would look like that as the term progressed. Covid would take its toll. Hence my most overused of analogies with our staff: we must turn into the wave. 15/



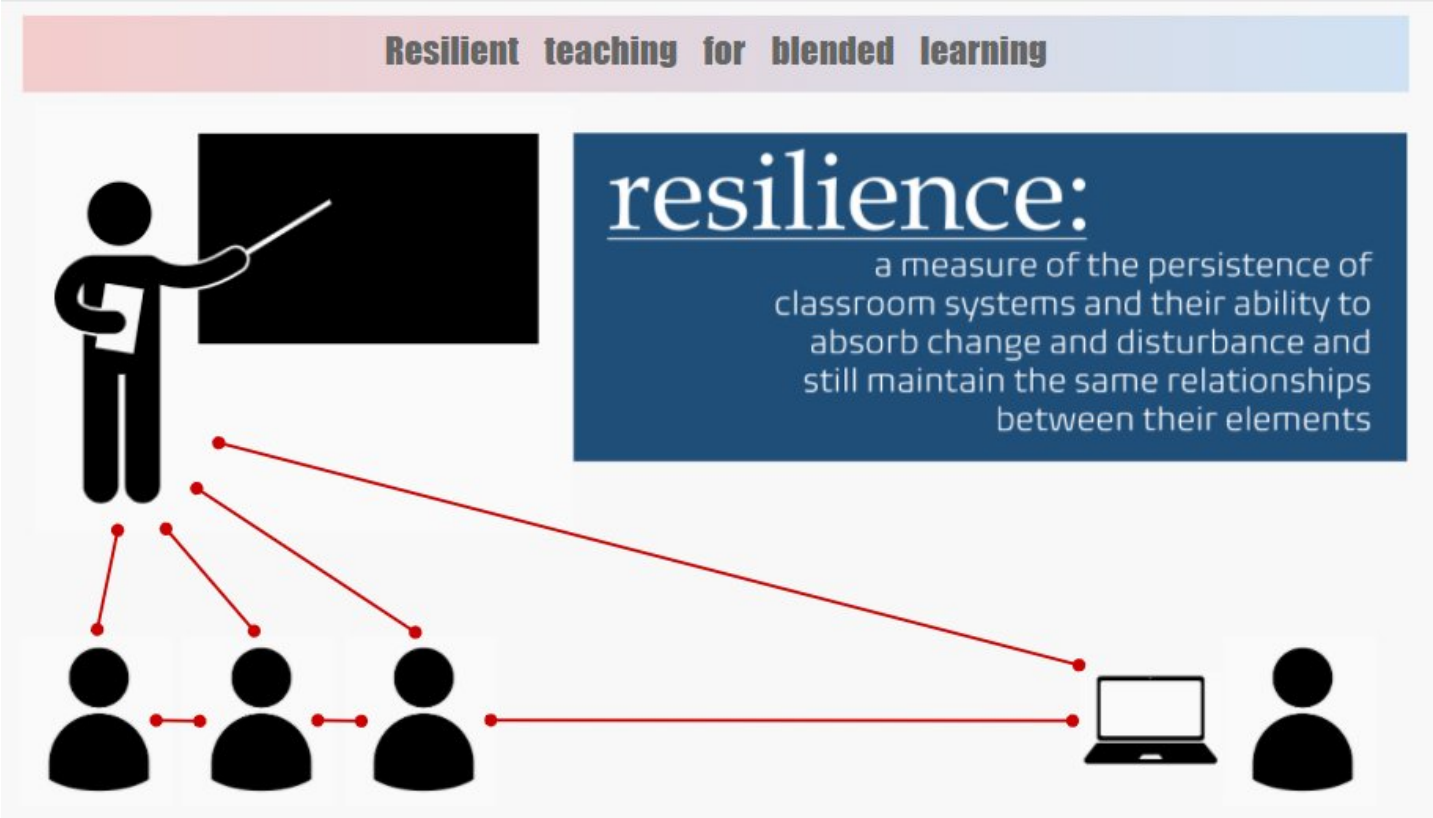
But how? How do we look ahead & anticipate what might happen better to ready ourselves for it?

The inspiration came from me from a definition on resilience I hadn't heard before. And so the concept of resilient teaching was born. 16/



Resilient teaching for blended learning: how we can use strategies in class now than seamlessly transition into supporting our pupils' learning, whether they are in school or learning from home.

And it didn't take long for those strategies to be put to the test. 17/



The moment all schools faced in September: the moment when the first positive cases occurred and/or pupils had to self isolate for an extended period.

But we were ready for the wave. And it all kicked into place.

And it worked. 18/

https://t.co/1LuMquH2WJ



As the term progressed, more and more pupils had to self-isolate for longer and longer periods. We simply got on with the business of teaching the pupils in class & at home, doing our best to ensure continuity of learning. And it continued to work. 19/

https://t.co/0BwFzIFJli



4 Y14 in the classroom, 6 self isolating from home joining via live stream. Some excellent evaluations of the preparations for eruptions at Fuego based on my presentation. Here are some of the pupils' answers - those at home were as good as those in the room. That makes me happy. pic.twitter.com/clImhFSame

— Alistair Hamill \U0001f637 (@lcgeography) November 23, 2020

And what if teachers needed to self-isolate? No problem - our system was able to cope!
https://t.co/hi6KHrpmzn
20/



Today's resilient teaching for blended learning in @LurganCollege
\u2022 Teacher has to leave to self isolate after break? Live streaming his lesson to his class after lunch from home!
\u2022 Pupil stuck in Pakistan since half term? Joined A Level class by live stream this afternoon!
pic.twitter.com/QC3cBGTh3m

— Alistair Hamill \U0001f637 (@lcgeography) November 9, 2020

We even had the NI Education Minister himself come and visit our school to hear from me and some of my colleagues about the work that we have been doing. 21/

https://t.co/eG0iqk59no



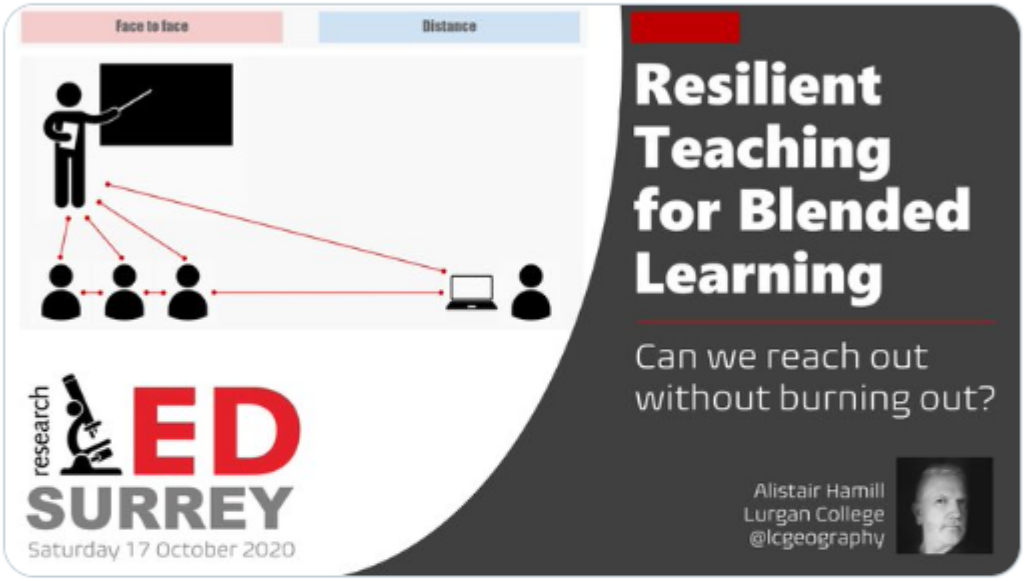
> Presenting today to Peter Weir, Education Minister in Northern Ireland, about the innovative work going on in Lurgan College the effective delivery of Blended Learning for our pupils.
>
> Read more here https://t.co/glZKNNxfzc pic.twitter.com/nW86dDzrOx
>
> — Alistair Hamill \U0001f637 (@lcgeography) October 14, 2020

But sharing wasn't confined to just those in NI. I was invited to present at the @rEDSurrey2020 event in October 2020, sharing our ideas with teachers all across the UK. In fact, you can view the presentation here, if you like. https://t.co/CPRsxtmvRk 22/

Alistair Hamill @lcgeography · Oct 11, 2020

Can we reach out without burning out?

Pleased to be joining some amazing educators at next weekend's @rEDSurrey2020 when I'll be sharing something of our experiences in trying to make blended learning effective for learners - and sustainable for teachers!



> **researchED Surrey** @rEDSurrey2020 · Oct 10, 2020
>
> rsearchED Surrey 2020 isn't going ahead this time next week.
>
> ****However, some of our very generous speakers have recorded video...
>
> Show this thread

1 3 12

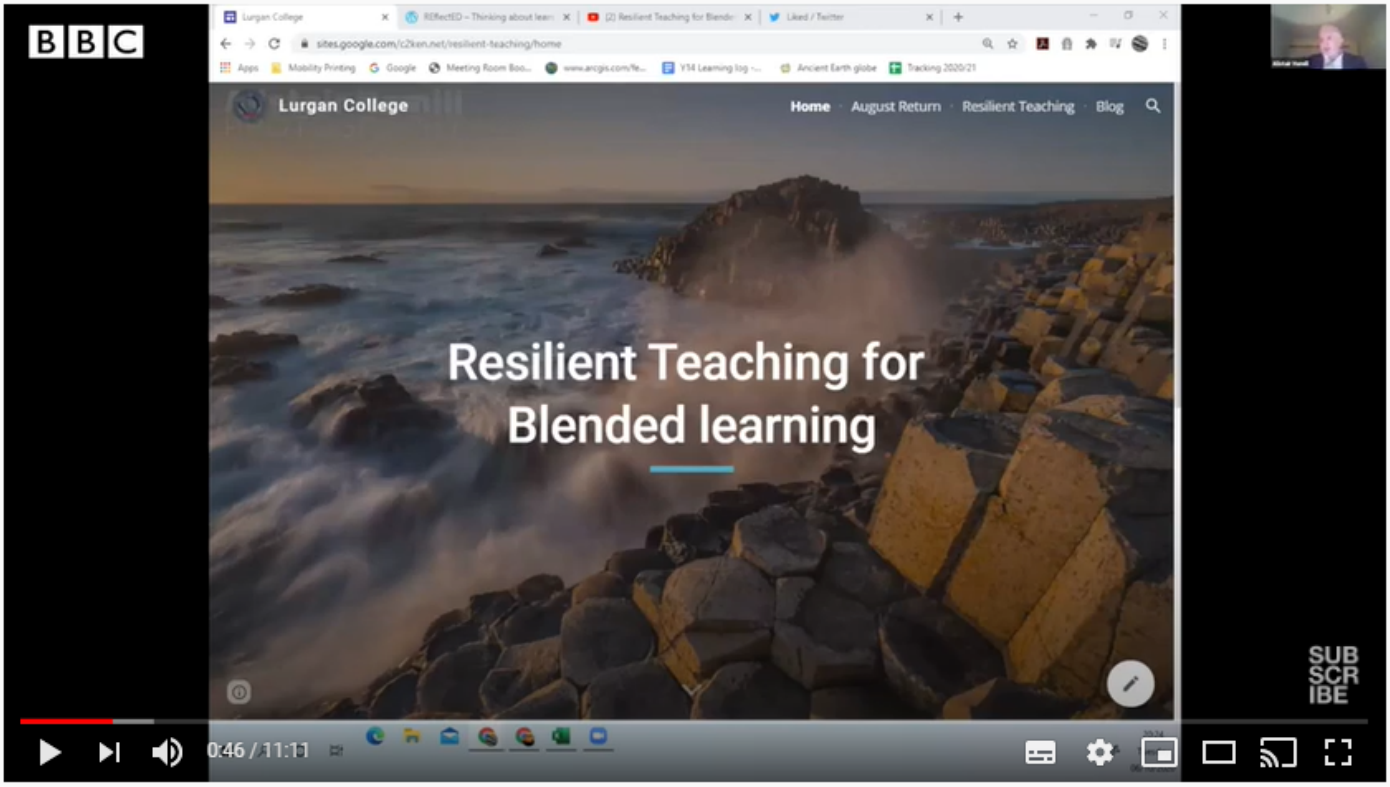
researchED Surrey @rEDSurrey2020 · Oct 11, 2020

Really looking forward to this!

1 1

I also shared - along with my @BlendEd_NI colleagues - at a TeachMeet organised by BBC NI, again allowing us to share our ideas widely with others and to advance to conversation. 23/

https://t.co/NEtGt38PQa

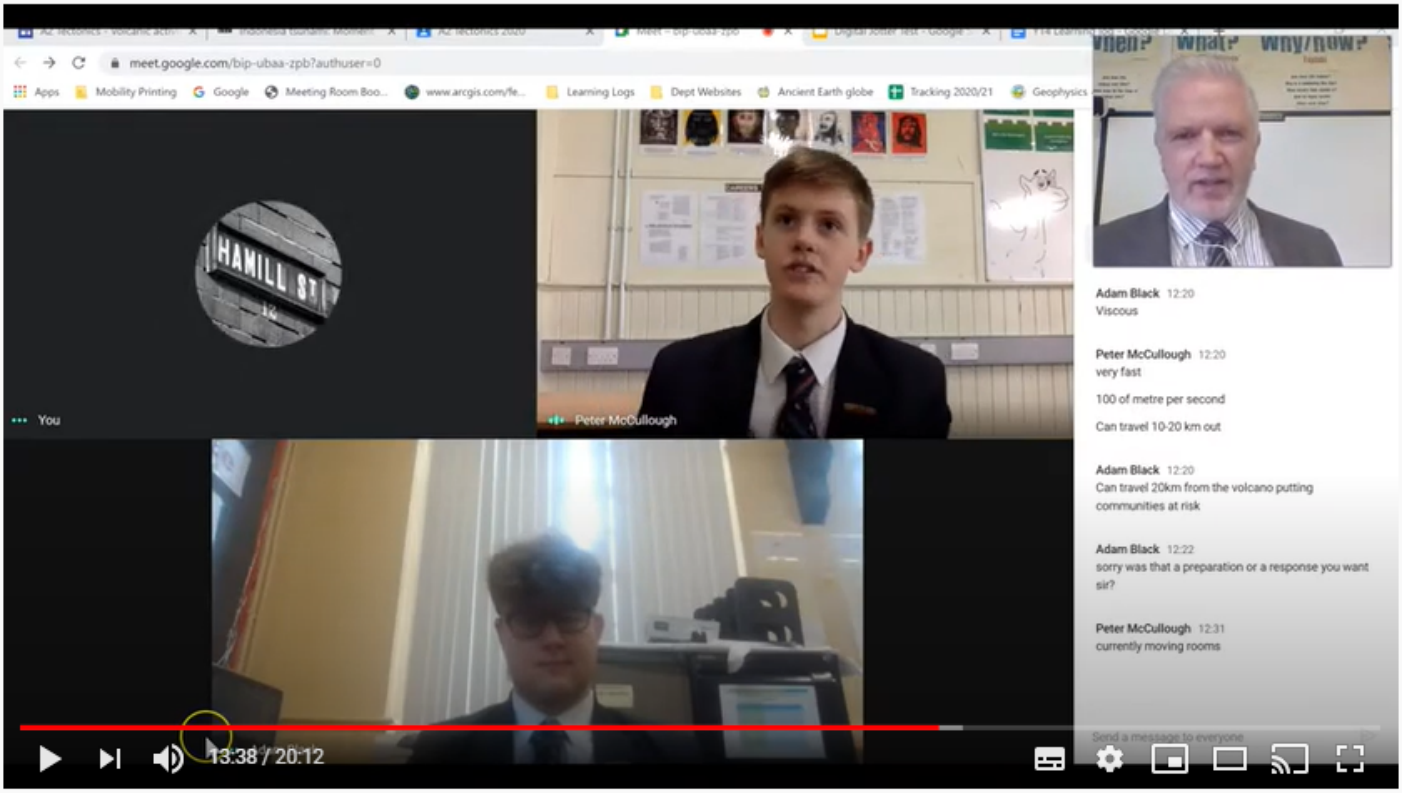


BELFAST
BBC NI Teach Meet - Alistair Hamill - Resilient Teaching for Blended Learning

This is just a taste of my journey these past 9 months, and some of the amazing teachers I have interacted with who have been coming up with incredible, innovative and inspiring ideas, and sharing widely. It is an honour to call them my colleagues. 24/

And why are we doing this? Because - Lazy =Teacher Trope™ notwithstanding - we passionately care about our jobs and the young people we are charged with teaching. We do it for them.

And, really, would you want it any other way?
25/
https://t.co/nMPIQ1st7r



How we managed our live streamed lessons

116 views • 10 Dec 2020

2 0 SHARE SAVE

So, if all you're seeing is the dramatic news coverage, or perhaps your personal experience last March was less than you would have liked, take heart - teachers have been working harder than ever. We are ready for this. We have got our pupils' backs. We won't let them down.

Fin/