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LLITUP NEWS

Sharing all things new in LLITUP

LLITUP 2021: INNOVATIVELY EXPLORING WHAT WORKS WELL

by Annèl van Rooyen and Jody Joubert

Over the years, LLITUP has collected a variety of valuable innovative tools and techniques that really work. 2020 added the transition to online teaching to our bag of experience. In 2021, LLITUP still consists of the same innovative and living characteristics, but with exciting improvements. We approach the new year, expecting a significant amount of online teaching, as we commence with the first semester, and leading into future academic activities. We foresee that 2020's adaptations will be reinforced by perseverance and refinement of what proved to work well. With our 2021 motto of *Innovation explored* we hope to focus on doing just that.

In this issue, we explore teaching from four angles. First up, Soené Botha shares her experiences of teaching with Google Classroom at school level. Next up, Jody Joubert ponders the value of online discussion forums. In *Froggy's Tech Corner,* Jody explores the pros and cons of the Aver340+ camera with his usual brand of enthusiasm. Annèl van Rooyen lastly explores the potential use of *Perus*all software for WIL (Work-Integrated Learning) and Lesson Study.

LLITUP NEWSLETTER

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NEWSLETTER TEAM

Editor: Annèl van Rooyen
Contributors: Annèl van Rooyen, Jody Joubert and Soené Botha
Proofreading: Vernon Candiotes
Photographers: Annèl van Rooyen and Jody Joubert

TEACHING WITH GOOGLE CLASSROOM

## In conversation with Soené Botha

By Annèl van Rooyen

Soené is a current Computer-Integrated Education M.Ed student who started teaching grades 6 – 8 Afrikaans FAL in 2021. The school where she teaches uses Google Classroom as LMS (Learning Management System). During the early weeks of online teaching, the LMS enabled weekly organisation of learning material as well as synchronous classes via the Google Meet platform. In January, Soené experienced the typical present-but-not-present synchronous online teaching reality: The learner logged into Google Meet in camera, but never attended the session. Instead, his chair remained empty for the entire duration of the session.

Once learners returned to school, the LMS was employed as a platform for online assignment submissions and marking, as well as the sharing of learning materials, videos and learners' marks. Soené rates the system as beneficial since it allows parents to also keep track of their children's progress and upcoming or missed due dates.

Soené finds the Google Meet platform enjoyable as she is afforded the opportunity to include other Google-based tools in her lessons. Google Forms, for example, is useful for assessments, since appropriate assessment rubrics can be setup. The design of these rubrics, however, is a time-consuming process. The use of Google Docs aimed at improving learner collaboration is another useful idea that she demonstrated during our interview.
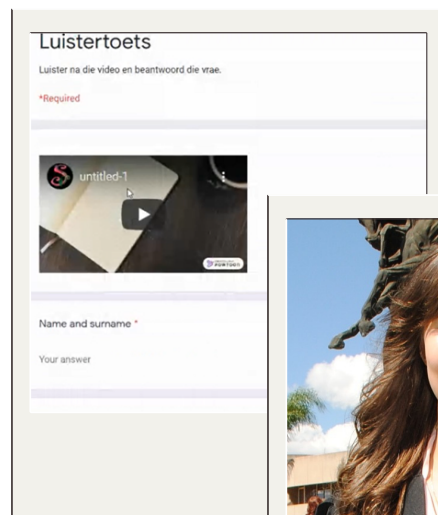


LEFT: Assessment created using Google Forms
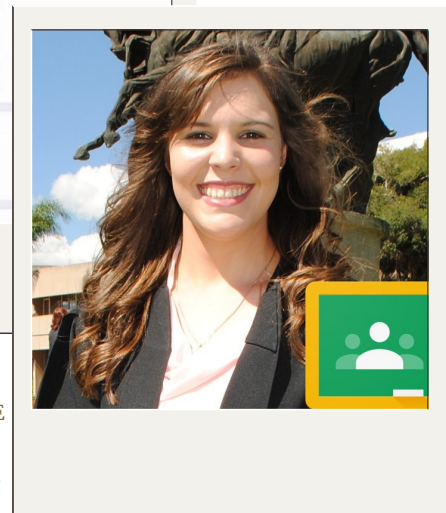
**RIGHT:** Soené Botha, a CIE Master's student and Google Classroom teacher

Soené highlighted some key strengths and weaknesses of Google Classroom as LMS as per her experience. In terms of learners' safety online, the use of the school's subscription domain is effective in preventing unauthorised parties from accessing the system. She also finds the LMS compact, user-friendly, and a great administrative help. If designed well, she says, the LMS can enhance the organisation of learning. In general, she enjoys the interactivity of the system and even had her learners design their own banners for their pages. In this manner, learners can personalise their work.

One downfall, however, is the functionality where learners can mark tasks as completed, when in fact, these tasks have not been completed. This leads to a lack of notification to the learners, their parents and the teacher about incomplete work and additional administration for the teacher.

It is clear that the pros outweigh the cons for Soené. Soené attended several online courses in the use of Microsoft for education. One such tool, Microsoft OneNote, is something that she would like to include in the future. She values the functionality of OneNote's reader view, its aloud-reading of texts and space for note-taking. LLITUP would like to wish Soené well on her technology-integrated teaching career!
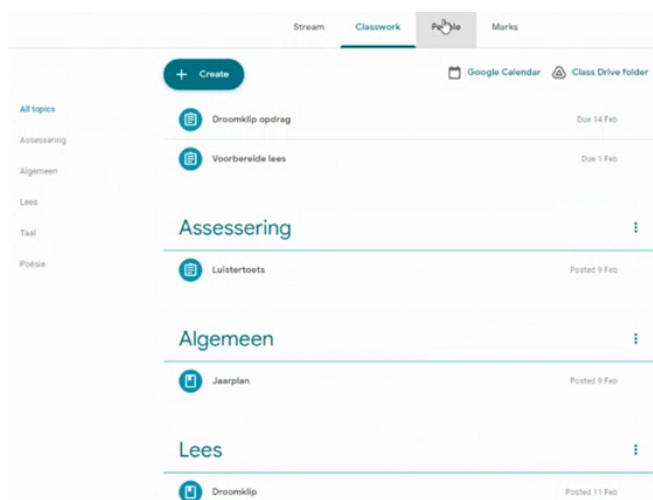
TOP LEFT: Demo class created on Google Classroom
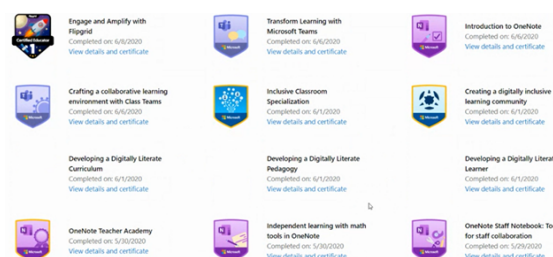
TOP RIGHT: Soené's badges for online Microsoft courses

ONLINE DISCUSSION FORUMS

Jody shares his thoughts on the potential of online discussion forums

Compiled by Jody Joubert and Annèl van Rooyen

Discussion forums, especially in Higher Education, are magnificent to encourage a continuous thought process and engage students in self-paced discovery. With the growing importance of online student interaction, online discussions can facilitate teaching outside the lecture hall.

This focus requires a critical consideration of the abilities of discussion forums, their impact on lecturers' practices and the practical considerations that need to be made.

1. What are the abilities of discussion forums?

Discussion forums provide a centralised platform for students to access in order to share their knowledge with others and engage in meaningful academic discussions. Such discussions often lead to the convergence of many different ideologies and backgrounds, creating a rich, colourful exploration of even the simplest concepts. Such discussions have the potential to be conducted in a structured and supportive way. As students learn collaboratively in these social settings, lecturers can observe and grade their discussions as a means of feedback. As lecturers grade these discussions, students' involvement and mastery of a course and its content is provided in a quantitative overview. What's more, lecturers can gauge and guide all of the various groups' discussions, unlike in a face-to-face classroom setting where some discussions are possibly not heard by lecturers.

It remains important, however, to realise that discussion forums do not provide the lecturer with a scapegoat for student interaction. Students remain dependent on a lecturer's expertise and guidance to achieve the level of learning required from Higher Education courses.

2. How do the use of discussion forums impact lecturers?
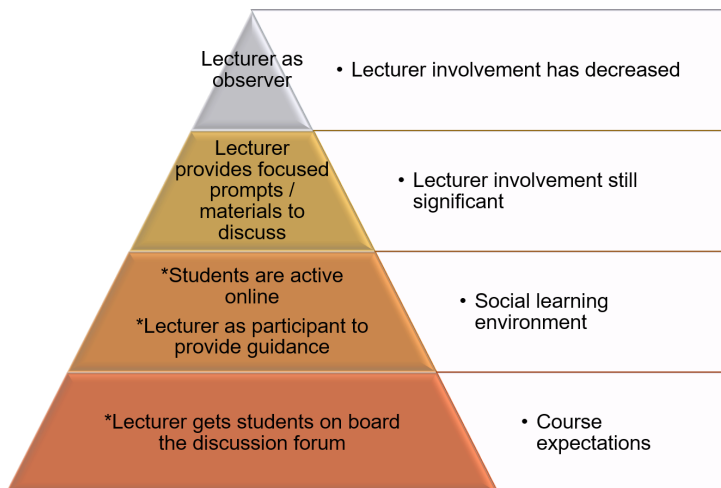
Gilly Salmon, who Jody believes to be one of the gurus of e-interaction, suggests that as a course progresses, lecturers should become less involved in discussions and allow the students to exchange their ideas and create their own knowledge. This ideal can be realised in a process illustrated from a bottom-up approach in the pyramid at the top right of the page.
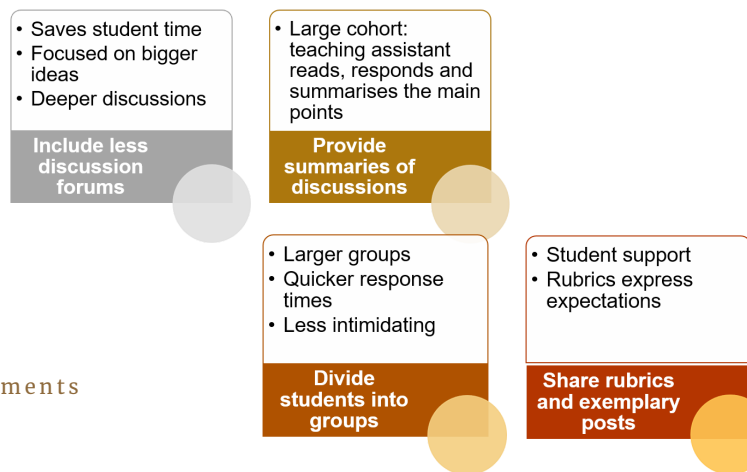
3. What are the practical considerations?

Rob Kelly, contributor to FacultyFocus, suggests four strategies to manage online discussions in the diagram at the bottom right. While his suggestions strike some important keys, experience has shown that there are no cookie cutter solutions.

To reduce the possibility of information overload generated by multiple threads on a discussion forum, Jody not only suggests good netiquette, but also supports the advantages contained in discussions summaries.

Jody believes that group division is particularly useful for larger groups to enable more meaningful discussions and leave students feeling less overwhelmed. For lecturers, smaller groups mean that you can plan your online facilitation time better and focus on smaller groups in a more meaningful way.

Jody is not a fan of examples, so he tends to cringe at the idea, however, he acknowledges the importance of students being informed of the online participation expectations. Rubrics can show students that the assessment of online interactions is more than just a quantitative exercise. The best midway for Jody is to lead by example by focusing on positive and constructive online support to student learning.

The Faculty Focus article is available at https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/online-education/online-course-design-and-preparation/strategies-managing-online-discussions/

TOP RIGHT:
Lecturer involvement in discussion forums
BOTTOM RIGHT:
Four strategies to support online discussions with comments

FROGGY'S TECH CORNER 1

Tech according to Jody: The Aver 340+

Compiled by Annèl van Rooyen

The use of Aver visualisers for teaching and learning is not a new trend at UP. The newcomer, however, is the Aver340+ camera recently introduced by Education Innovation. Currently, the Faculty of Education has 12 Aver340+ cameras, with six of them residing in the SMTE (Science, Mathematics and Technology Education) department and LLITUP.

During an online class session at the end of 2020, Jody setup two Aver 340+ cameras as well as his slides. He found the cameras easy to operate with a *plug and play* feel to it. Jody finds the wide lens perspective of the camera more natural, while the physical size of the camera is easy to handle. He appreciates the camera's built-in versatility including its pedestal that includes a tripod mount. This can then be attached to a laptop as a good document camera.

The big game-changer, however, is the EZLive software that is used with the Aver340+. This software enables screen-splitting where the camera remains live, even over a PowerPoint. This means that, with two Avers and a laptop, three screens can be projected: The presenter, the slides, and a demonstration to the class.

Jody evaluated the tech from a positive and negative point of view. He finds that the microphone of the camera is highly sensitive, resulting in an unnatural sound. He suspects that our lecture venues in general allow for too much echo. "While it's still a good camera, you have to compromise on sound quality," he says. The camera is, however, all-round excellent and its advantage lies in its design functionality; it is designed to focus on people and not documents.

> **"The Aver340+ camera is designed to focus on people and not documents."**
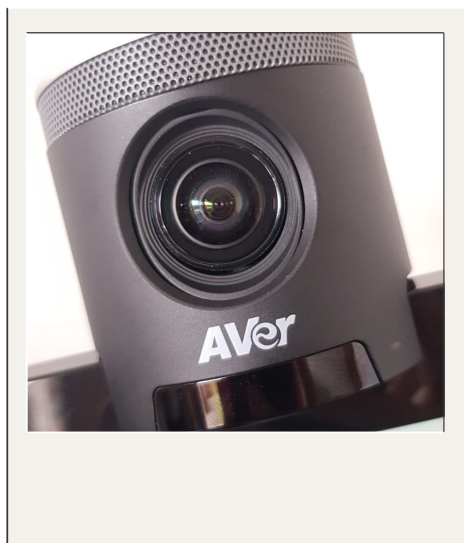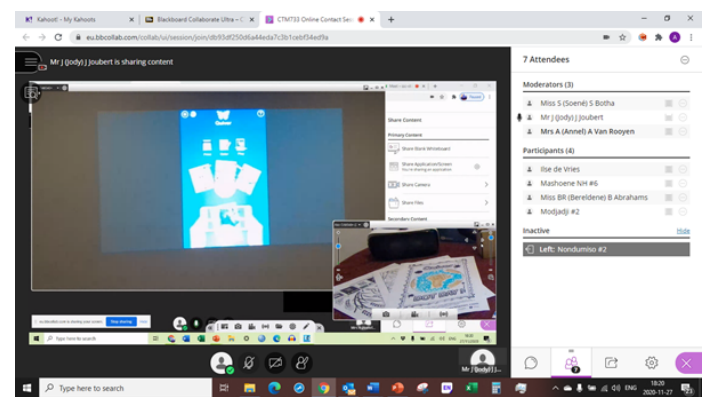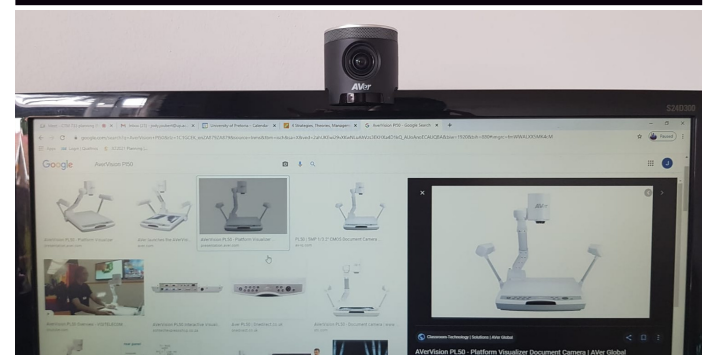
TOP LEFT:
The Aver 340+ camera

TOP:
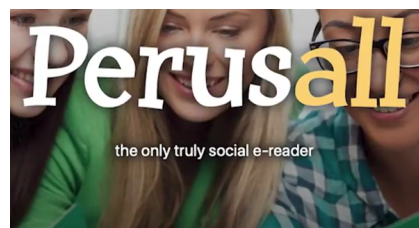The Aver 340+ can easily be mounted using its pedestal

BOTTOM:
Three screens are displayed: *BlackBoard Collaborate* as well as both a software demonstration and documents in class captured by the Aver 340+

FROGGY'S TECH CORNER 2

Perusall software and its potential for Lesson Study and WIL
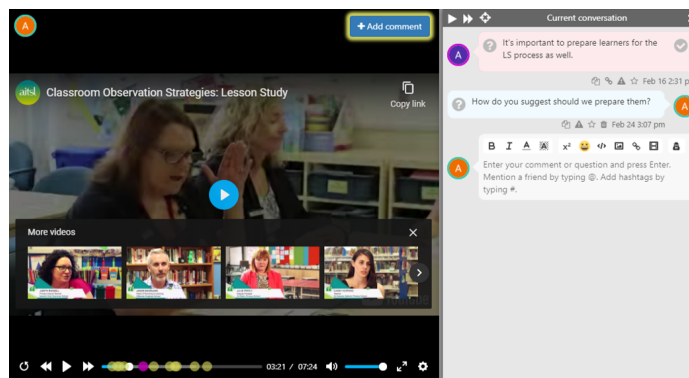
Compiled by Annèl van Rooyen

Eric Mazur, the brain behind Just-in-Time Teaching (JiTT) and Peer Instruction (PI) strategies within a flipped classroom setting, helped to develop and promote *Perus*all software. So, why would we be as excited as him about the software?

Perusall is described as "the only true social e-reader." (https://perusall.com/about). The software aims to enable more or even most of the students in a course to actually complete the assigned reading tasks. Without students completing their preparatory work, the strategies of JiTT and PI are less effective. Once students engage in their reading and preparatory activities via *Perus*all and its collective reading tasks, student motivation tends to increase.
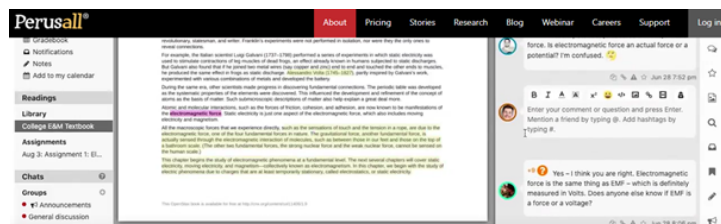
Annèl experimented with the software. She found it to be very much like an LMS (Learning Management System) with a calendar, gradebook, assignments, and discussion boards. To explore the capabilities of the software, she created both an instructor and several student accounts. As instructor, she uploaded a YouTube video and as student she made several comments on the video. All of these comments were captured on *Perus*all and could be commented on by fellow students or the lecturer. In this way, the software enabled online interactions and deep-level learning, just as Jody envisioned in his take on the value of online discussion forums.

While *Perus*all can be integrated with other LMSs such as *BlackBoard*, we have not explored that potential yet. It is, however, promising.

TOP LEFT:
Example of student interactions

TOP RIGHT:
Example of student comments on video with lecturer interaction

A significant strength of *Perus*all is that it is free to use by students, lecturers, and educational institutions where the use of own materials or Open Educational Resources (OER) from the web are involved. *Is it really free?* (This is a vital question we always ask when evaluating tools.) Well, no… The idea behind *Perus*all is to add prescribed textbooks to the platform for the assignment of reading tasks. These textbooks are often not free. Institutional licenses are also not free. So, for the general user the software might seem free of charge depending on how it is used, but *Perus*all collects usage data and account login information during use. So, there are not necessarily physical costs involved, but definitely some information costs.

In practical terms, *Perus*alls' use for WIL and lesson study would involve students sharing a variety of lesson materials as they plan for and reflect on their lessons. Shareable materials include webpages, Dropbox or personal documents, videos and podcasts. The software enables lecturers to keep track of students' interactions, but *BlackBoard*'s discussion forums can do the same. The automatic summaries of students' inputs, referred to as valuable in Jody's article on online discussion forums, are also beneficial. The software also has automatic grading options and ignores repeated posts by the same student.

Annèl found the program to be user-friendly and highly interactive. Students will easily be able to navigate themselves on the software and have thought-provoking Lesson Study discussions with this software. While the integration with *BlackBoard* still needs addressing, we are definitely excited about the software.