### KUL2021 - Online Special

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Contribution to round table discussion on distance learning and digital examination

### Focus student - a method to stay in contact while lecturing to black boxes

## Keywords:

student contact, online lecturing, nonverbal communication

#### Summary:

I have successfully used a method I call "focus student" where I ask for a volunteer among students to keep their video on during an online lecture.

### The problem:

When most or all students choose to attend online lectures with their own video turned off, a number of negative consequences can be noted, including:

- difficulty for the teacher to read facial reactions and see whether explanations are sufficient
- difficulty for the teacher to teach enthusiastically without seeing any students

#### The solution:

Explain to the student group how important it is to maintain contact, so that teaching can be both inspiring (for students and teachers alike) and adjusted to a suitable level.

Among other things (like encouraging questions and regularly checking understanding), do this:

- Ask for a volunteer student to be your "focus student" and keep their video on.
- Give plenty of appreciation for this volunteer, and promise to switch volunteers after break.
- Pin the video, in Zoom, of your focus student.
- Watch your focus student's reactions while lecturing, and adapt your pace as you normally would do if you could be with your class in person.

# Focus student – a method to stay in contact while lecturing to black boxes

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# What's the situation?

- Online lectures with student video off (usually)
- "Black boxes" with student names (usually)

# What's the problem?

- Teacher loses contact
  - Can't read facial expressions
  - Can't see if explanations are sufficient
  - Can't teach enthusiastically

- Students lose contact
  - Can't see peer learners
  - Can't always avoid distractions
  - Can't receive optimal teaching

# Whose problem?

- The students' problem:
  - Suboptimal learning

- The teachers' problem:
  - Suboptimal teaching

- Everyone's problem:
  - Suboptimal social interaction
  - No fun!

## The solution – focus student

Explain how teaching to black boxes impacts students.

- Ask for a volunteer "focus student" with video on.
  - Give plenty of appreciation to volunteer.
  - Promise to switch volunteers after break.

- Pin video of "focus student" in Zoom
  - Keep "focus student" in view while sharing screen.
  - Watch for clues adapt pace and explanations

# Other solutions - dummy student

- Choose a "dummy student" photo or mascot
  - Place close to video camera
  - Pretend "student" enthusiastically following your explanations

- Show your students this mascot
  - Ask for volunteer "focus student" to replace non-enthusiastic mascot

## Other solutions — non-verbal students

- Sample the whole student group's understanding regularly.
  - Short answer polls
  - Yes / No voting
  - Ask for "thumbs up"

## Other solutions – verbal students

- Ask for video on during student verbal communication
- Explain to the student group:
  - Importance of verbal communication skills within subject area
  - Power of learning by explaining to others
  - Chosen method for activating student verbal participation

# Other solutions - group learning activities

Video on in breakout rooms

• Jump between rooms to interact with students

- Clear instructions including required documentation e.g.
  - Saved whiteboard
  - Canvas discussion thread
  - Canvas assignment

## Other solutions - social breaks

- Organise short regular "social breaks"
  - All video cameras on
  - Breakout rooms for social interaction
  - Stay in main room for informal questions

- Hope for the best:
  - Students might forget to turn their video off again
- Organise separate "offline breaks"
  - Give reminders to get moving

# Pick and choose!

- Black box lecturing
- Focus student
- Dummy student
- Non-verbal students
- Verbal students
- Group learning activities
- Social breaks