

After 11 months of using this teaching style, I have received positive feedback from students such as: *'The ticket out session is an opportunity to individually reflect on your learning and gain confidence from the things others are highlighting'*.

Figure 1 Aleeza Khan at work

Meyers and Jones^{5 p27} say "active learning involves providing opportunities for students to meaningfully talk and listen, write, read, and reflect on the content, ideas and issues of an academic subject." From this experience I have learned students can direct learning as well as tutors. Moving forward, I will encourage further reciprocal peer learning through 'ticket out of the online classroom' as an extracurricular activity as well as sharing of this practice. This practice can also work very well in the [physical] classroom once we do resume teaching [on campus].

This teaching style is now being adopted by other academics which will strengthen development of learning and support opportunities between peers.

This teaching style was also presented at University of Bolton, Teaching Excellence Network.



References

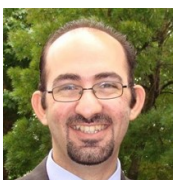
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Logging On, Checking In...Expressing Digital Care and Learning Routine as Part of Online Teaching

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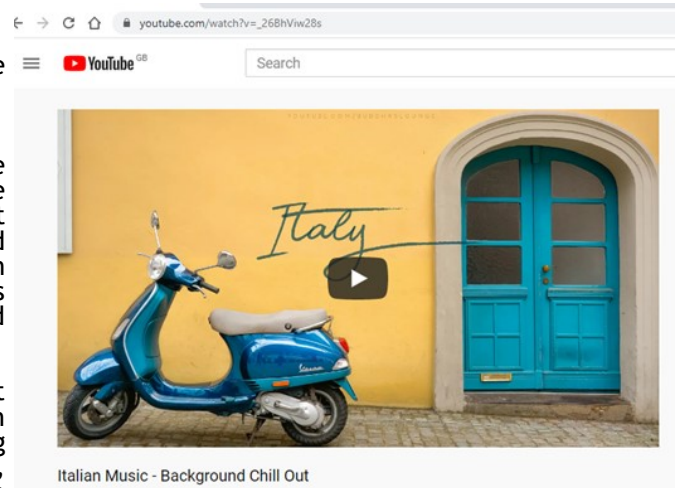


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One of the challenges about synchronous online teaching is the lack of build-up to starting teaching sessions. Online sessions are unlike in-person on-campus teaching when you walk into the classroom and say hello to a few colleagues or you see your teacher walking in from the car park, or all the little things that mean that a learner is 'walking into the classroom'. The online teaching sessions mean that once you log on to your online class, you are 'on' straightway, facing many people or most likely facing blank tiles on your screen.

We started using the same clip of music¹ for the 15 or 20 minutes before the start of each online session. This is free, YouTube music that was selected for its beauty and calm. It is long enough so it would not be a very short piece on repeat.

Figure 1 A screenshot of a YouTube music clip used at the beginning of online sessions



The same piece was used before the start of each online synchronous teaching activity. It helped to keep a routine to each session, remove the awkward silence at the start of the session and perhaps bring in a unique background to the learning environment and allow those who log on early some time for reflection if needed. Students commented on the music, that listening to it was linked positively to the start of online lessons.

As these teaching sessions were taking place at the height of the pandemic, it was felt that there was a need for an opportunity for students to 'count down' to the teaching session where they can see that their teacher is online, the music is on and the classroom is about to start in a few minutes. It was reassuring that they are 'in the right room'. Using the same piece of music also played an important part for educators as it became part of their own rituals before the start of online teaching sessions. Some students started to ask about the music and halfway through the semester, as well as using the music before the start of the session, it was also used at the end of the class while students were completing their online feedback, saying goodbye and signing off.

While it may be difficult to bring some of the soundscape of a 'real' in-person classroom, perhaps a piece of music that students can identify before the beginning of an online session can add an element of reassurance and can help ease the students into the headspace for a new learning session.

The use of music also helped to build up to the start of the session and to check about the 'mood in the classroom'. Another challenge for online sessions was not being able to observe the dynamic of learners walking into the classroom tired, excited or sleepy. So as the music faded at the start of each teaching session, we would say hello to the learners and start by "how do you feel today" activity using a range of illustrations, memes and emojis. These ranged from tired, happy or excited cats to cartoon illustrations and/or pictures with a range of emotions. The aim was not only to check how learners were feeling at the start of each session but also to gauge the mood of the whole classroom at the start of the session.

Figure 2: Character illustrations were used to help students indicate their mood. This one by illustrator Patrick Sanders, represents the emotional roller-coaster of an immersive experience



Learners were asked to mark on the screen which character represented them (students were able to circle or indicate on the whiteboard their selected character). This was anonymous and allowed learners to engage early in the session. As students circled or indicated their choices, the educator will comment about each selection; "I see walking a tightrope", "yes, lots of reading", "a very tired cat indeed" and so on. At times, students volunteered to explain their choices or indicated that they needed a chance to talk after the session and so on. At other times, shyer students were still able to anonymously take part and express how they felt perhaps without having to share their cameras or even be identified through typing in the chat box.

This was a chance to demonstrate care online at the start of each session, it was also a chance to ease students into the online classroom with an opportunity to actively engage early on. Setting the tone early on in the session highlights to the students what type of session they are about to be part of - an interactive one!

Sources

1- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=26BhViv28s>