# Improving student engagement by including a "song of the day" in announcements

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ABSTRACT

This article introduces the inclusion of the " song of the day" in asynchronous online course announcements as a culturally responsive teaching practice. A song of the day is a participatory activity in which students and instructors can work together to foster a better learning climate and improve aliterate students' engagement with a course. An open-end survey with fifty-three students revealed that they benefited from a "song of the day" practice from various perspectives.

Keywords: Culturally Responsive Teaching, Asynchronous Course, Online Course Announcement, Online Teaching with Music
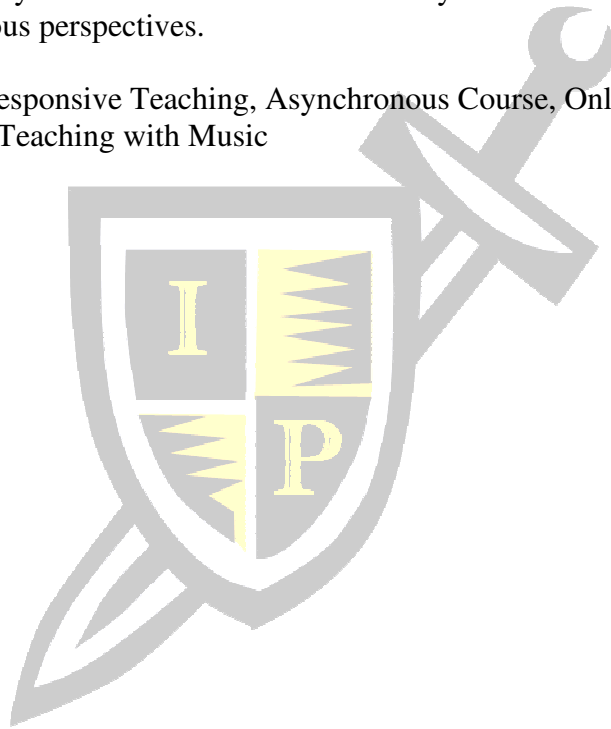
INTRODUCTION

Due to the Covid pandemic, higher education institutions have accelerated the number of online courses and program offerings in the last few years (Masalimova et al., 2022). One of the challenges instructors face in teaching online courses is the lack of student engagement with classes, despite its many benefits (Banna et al., 2015). Dumford and Miller (2018) find that students are less likely to engage with instructors or classmates in online courses than face-to-face classes. Even though students engage with instructors and students, they view such engagement as low-quality interaction. In an online course environment, students feel isolated from instructors and classmates due to a lack of social interaction (Hiranrithikorn, 2019). Students also feel disconnected from a course and lack the motivation to engage in a class (Zoe, 2021). Asynchronous courses can exacerbate such disconnection and disengagement because instructors and students don't interact with each other in in-person settings.

This article offers a teaching practice to enhance students' connection with instructors, classmates, and a course, thus increasing student engagement through a lens of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) (Gay, 2000). Culturally responsive teaching uses "the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (Gay, 2002, p.106). This perspective suggests that instructors should incorporate knowledge of the students' lived experiences and their cultural backgrounds in course designs. As a result of CRT, students can feel they are cared for by instructors and have a more meaningful learning experience (Gay, 2000).

The teaching practice includes a "song of the day" section in a weekly course announcement as a part of CRT practice in an asynchronous online course. A "song of the day" is a participatory activity in which students and instructors collaborate by sharing songs chosen by students and instructors. The current practice selects course announcements as a context for two reasons.

First, a course announcement is the primary communication tool instructors use to deliver course-related information to students. A course announcement is significant in an asynchronous course since instructors do not have the opportunity to reinforce course-related announcements in person. Despite the importance of course announcements in an asynchronous course, instructors question whether students even pay attention to reading course announcements.

The online education platform *Canvas's* blogs post many questions about how instructors can check whether students read the instructors' announcements. Blogs also offer how instructors can check whether students read course announcements. Many college students are aliterate, meaning they choose not to read because they lack motivation despite their reading ability (Applegate & Applegate, 2004). Aliterate college students prefer skimming, scanning, or even ignoring reading (Weeks, 2001). Therefore, college students are likely to skip reading online course announcements. This article suggests that a teaching practice of including a "song of the day" section in announcements can aid students' motivation to read the announcements.

Second, students' engagement with online instruction courses is critical for successful learning outcomes (Banna et al., 2015). Students' failure to read the announcements or to read but not pay attention to the announcement contents can lower students' achievements with coursework by not reading assigned articles, failing to complete assignments on time or even missing exams. Thus, preparing a better course announcement that includes a "song of the day" can improve students' learning outcomes through heightened student engagement with a course.

INCLUSION OF A "SONG OF THE DAY" IN A COURSE ANNOUNCEMENT AS A METHOD OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING.

Effective teaching requires delivering subject materials and maintaining superior teaching skills. Howard (1999) suggests that effective teaching requires instructors to possess knowledge of both subject matters and students. Most instructors, however, are well prepared to teach subject matters but lack knowledge of these students, thus creating a teacher-student disconnect (Griner, 2001; Howard, 1999).

Thus, instructors need to understand students' cultural characteristics and incorporate such knowledge in teaching so that students feel cared for and engaged in class. Utilizing the knowledge about students' diverse cultural backgrounds in the classroom is called "culturally responsive teaching" (Gay, 2000). The knowledge of students can encompass students' dress, music, jokes, language, religion, and other areas. Instructors can bring students' experiences to the classroom (Kopkowski ,2006). The extant research demonstrates that students' academic achievements improve when instructors teach students through students' cultural experiences (Hollins, 1996). There are various CRT practices in the existing literature (see more details in Woodley et al., 2017) that include encouragement of self-introduction, interactive class discussions, collaborative group projects, etc.

Past research has shown that music increases students' positive moods, improving mental flexibility and learning outcomes (Nusbaum et al., 2018; Stewart et al., 2019). Thus, a knowledge of the various types of music (e.g., rock, rap, hip hop, classical, R&B, country, and songs from different countries) students favor is a great resource that instructors can utilize as a CRT practice. A "song of the day" can elevate students' moods and motivate them to pay more attention to coursework. Instructors posting songs students selected can make students feel instructors care about students lives and thus feel motivated in fulfilling course activities. By learning more about each other through music, instructors and students may feel a sense of connection with each other. This feeling of connection may improve a learning climate that impacts students' course engagement. Listening to songs selected by culturally diverse classmates and an instructor improves students' cultural sensitivity, which is critical in any marketing course in a global marketing environment. Hence, the "song of the day" teaching practice offers various advantages for students and instructors to foster a better classroom environment.

DESCRIPTION OF IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation is simple. Before a course start date, instructors prepare a self-introduction course assignment that includes a request for their favorite song's YouTube link. Instruction for this assignment also lets students know that an instructor will share students' songs with other classmates throughout the semester. Thus, students must screen for lyrics and cannot include any songs with offensive lyrics. As a first-week assignment, students should submit a self-introduction via their online course platform (such as Canvas) to instructors. After the due date, instructors start grading self-introduction assignments and screen song choices by students. Instructors prepare a YouTube folder that includes selected songs.

When instructors post weekly course announcements notifying students of assignment due dates, assigned reading, etc., each announcement will include a "song of the day" section at the bottom, so students are likelier to read through to reach that section. Each announcement

contains one or two songs with a YouTube link recommended by students. Instructors can also share their choice of music as a variation of the "song of the day." Instructors can add more content to this section by adding their reactions to students' song choices. Once instructors prepare an announcement, they can post it in the announcement section of Canvas as it is. If instructors want to track whether students viewed each announcement, instructors can upload it via Voice Thread (See Appendix for the proposed timeline and an example of a "song of the day" section).
"as indicated in Table 1 (Appendix)"
"as indicated in Table 2 (Appendix)"

DISCUSSION OF ITS USAGE AND STUDENT FEEDBACK

The author of this article implemented a "song of the day" teaching practice since the Covid pandemic began in the author's asynchronous online marketing courses. Students' responses are encouraging so far. The author conducted an open-end survey with fifty-three undergraduate students (Female 40%, mean age = 21) who took the author's fall 2021 courses to examine the effectiveness of this practice. Students answered an open-end question, "what do you think about a "song of the day" in your course announcement? Please tell me honestly about your thought on this practice." Students also answered demographic questions and received extra credit points for their participation in the survey.

The survey revealed that students considered a "song of the day" a positive class experience. Students felt that they made a better connection with their classmates and instructor, improved their mood, and enhanced their sense of engagement with the course. The following themes have emerged, and I provide notable comments.

Connection with Classmates: Students considered "a song of the day" a unique practice that helped them connect with other students by learning about their musical interests. Students also felt that this practice allowed the class to connect:

> *"I really enjoy it because it not only helps me explore new artists and genres, but it also gives me an insight into my fellow classmates and their interests since we can't interact like we normally would in a classroom."*
> *"I think it is something unique that I will forever remember with this class. I think it is a nice small way to connect the class together."*
> *"I love it; it is such a fun way to connect with us and figure out which one of my classmates has good music taste."*

Connection with an Instructor: Students acknowledged that connecting with an instructor in an online class environment was difficult, but a "song of the day" made them feel more connected with a person, not just as a teacher:

> *"I really like the idea because although the class is online, it helped me feel a closer connection to you as my instructor. In other words, it goes a long way knowing that the instructor is passionate about their field, class and engaging with students. Those I feel are key elements that make up a good teacher."*

"Since it's an online course, I find it harder to connect with my instructor but having the "song of the day" was a great way to connect with the instructor."
"It provides an insight to our instructor as a person and not just a teacher."

Improved Mood*:* Students reported that a "song of the day "created a positive mood and relieved stress:

"It added joy to my day."
"I think it's fun and something to look forward to!"
"I feel this is a great way to help students feel more engaged with the instructor as well as relieve stress."

Engagement with a Course*:* A "song of the day" practice enhanced students' engagement with a course in an online learning environment:

"I thought it was a cute way to personally engage with this course throughout the week."
"Personally, I find them so interesting, I think it can be very pleasant to hear as well, and it makes me more engaged within the course."
"I really enjoyed this part of the announcements because I think it is a great way to engage with the class for an online platform."

DISCUSSION

Implementation of this practice is straightforward, yet it can still pose some challenges. If the number of students reaches over 100, checking every song and its lyrics can be a taxing exercise for instructors unless they are willing to invest their time in this task. In that situation, instructors can opt to sample 30 to 40% of students' songs to include them in-class announcements. A teaching assistant can help instructors to go through this task. However, such practice is discouraged because instructors should be the ones who understand students' cultural backgrounds and musical interests, not teaching assistants. Screening, listening, and posting a "song of the day" is a part of a practice that helps an instructor learn about students on a deeper level. This innovation is adaptable across all asynchronous online courses.

Students can still ignore reading course announcements or skip the first part of the course announcement and jump to a "song of the day" section of the course announcement. If skipping or ignoring is a concern, instructors can post a course announcement in Voice Thread, track each viewing, and prepare course announcements in a short bullet point format to motivate students to read.

When instructors have diverse ethnic student bodies, this exercise can be particularly appealing because the song choice can be from all musical genres worldwide, which can develop cultural sensitivities among students. The "song of the day" is a simple participatory teaching practice that both students and instructors can enjoy, enriching the online learning experience.

CONCLUSION

In summary, a "song of the day" CRT practice is ideal for aliterate college students who are not motivated to read. This practice can increase overall student engagement with a course. A "song of the day" can boost students' mood and connection with a class, classmates, and instructors, which are often difficult to achieve in the online environment. Improving students' engagement with a course can enhance course learning and outcomes. This practice will also be beneficial for instructors. A "song of the day" CRT practice can aid instructors in understanding students' lived experiences through music, thus increasing their understanding of students' diverse backgrounds and connections with students.
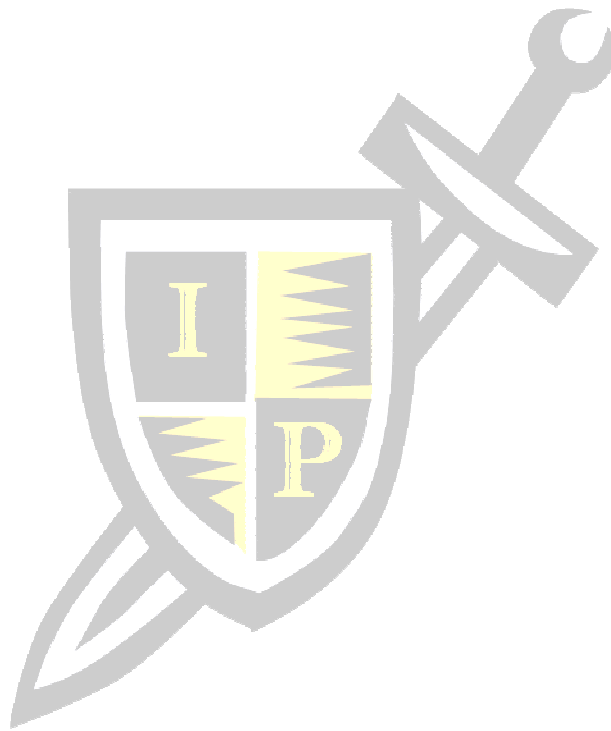
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APPENDIX

Table 1
Song of the Day Implementation Timeline

Timeline	Preparation
Before the Start of the Semester	Self-introduction assignment creation and posting to the online teaching platform
Week 1	Students: Self-introduction assignment due
Week 2	Instructor: • Start reviewing songs and lyrics of songs • Prepare a YouTube folder with screened songs
Week 3 to Last Week	Instructor: • Include a "song of the day" section in the weekly course announcement • A "song of the day" section includes songs with YouTube links. • Instructors can add their favorite songs in this section as a variation of a "song of the day" practice. • Post each announcement in the announcement section of the online teaching platform or • Upload each announcement via Voice Thread to track students' viewing

Table 2

Example of a Song of the Day Section in a Weekly Course Announcement

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* Song of the Day

Your classmates recommended so many great songs! Here is a Japanese pop song for you from one of your classmates. I love the excitement of this song, even though I don't understand any lyrics. Do you prefer Jpop over Kpop?

Flow's Colors

Here is one for you from me. It reminds me of 80s songs I love!

The National's Rylan

Have a great day!

Best,
XXX