OB Comic Xchange: Sharing our Best Teaching Comics

Let's face it: people are funny, and OB is well positioned to capture the quirks and foibles of human nature. Incorporating comics into your teaching is effective for highlighting hidden truths and paradoxes of ourselves, our co-workers, and our organizations. In this session the author will share examples from their personal library of OB-themed comics and demonstrate ways to use them in teaching practice. A shared Flickr site will be developed, and requests for comics will be sent to the MOBTS list prior to the conference to establish a shared community resource for comics.

Keywords: humor, presentations, critical thinking

OB Comic Xchange: Sharing our Best Teaching Comics

OB is a conceptually-based field with the potential to be, well… dry. PowerPoint lectures and 'slide decks', which tend to be text-based, are a standard way to present lecture content. Incorporating images to one's slides is helpful to break the "wall of text" effect which can lead to "death by PowerPoint" (Roberts, 2018). Comics are a special category of image that can engage critical thinking, adding visual interest, humor, and often a recognition of paradox or irony that taps into different learning paths. Plus, it's just fun, and funny!

In this session the author shares their rationale for and approach to incorporating comics into lectures and online classes, and invites MOBTS comrades to share their comics in a shared Flickr site (similar to the longstanding tradition of the movie clip database shared among MOBTS members). Comics can be used across the full spectrum of educational levels, including undergraduate, graduate, executive, and practitioner training workshops, so this session is appropriate for anyone looking to enliven their lecture slide decks.

Theoretical Foundation

Learning theory tells us that people can learn more deeply from words and pictures than from words alone. Multimedia Learning (Mayer, 2014) argues that humans use 'dual processing', meaning that they have separate systems for processing images and language; each system has cognitive limits. Thus, speaking words while presenting an image allows both systems to engage, whereas speaking words while presenting a text-based PowerPoint is redundant and overloads the language processing. Teachers may be surprised to hear that close or exact correspondence between the on-screen text and narration – an approach used in many lectures if they read passages from their slides – generally impairs learning (Yue, Bjork, & Bjork, 2013). Empirical evidence supports balancing the load between the image and verbal processing channels to reduce pressure on working memory (Clark & Lyons, 2010).

Given the characteristics of our current students, incorporating imagery is especially helpful. Contemporary students are accustomed to multi-media and visually rich information displays. Millennial students are digital natives, and Smith (2012) suggests that digital natives prefer graphics to text, which makes traditional text-based PowerPoints all the more problematic. Critics of PowerPoint rail against its templates which weaken verbal and spatial reasoning (Hopper & Waugh, 2014); Edward Tufte has identified this as the problematic "cognitive style of PowerPoint" (Tufte, 2003).

Comics are a special kind of humorous graphic that engages different pathways in the brain. Many studies reported in a meta-analysis on the effects of humor in the classroom by Banas et al. (Banas, Dunbar, Rodriguez, & Liu, 2011) find that it improves both student motivation and learning. The best known theory of humor gives an idea of how humor supports learning. According to incongruity theory, humor arises when there are two different frames of reference presenting an incongruity (Morreall, 2016). When an individual recognizes the incongruity, they have a shift in perspective which can lead to laughter. Comics often present a surprise or contradiction which is an incongruous situation; people understand humor when they are able to resolve the incongruity. The structure of comics can highlight paradox and inherent quirkiness of a situation. Presenting comics prompts application and critical thinking for students as they determine: What is funny or incongruous about this situation in the comic? And what does it tell us about human nature?

Learning Objective for this Session

The aim of this session is to introduce and demonstrate some examples of using comics to teach. The session will:

- Demonstrate the use of comics to illustrate a specific OB concept

- Consider ways that comics can be incorporated to enhance lectures and assignments (to be developed both from the author's and participants' ideas)

- Share resources for finding suitable teaching comics

- Share a collection of comics and launch the building of a shared resource

Session Description

I request 60 minutes for this session. I will begin with a brief introduction, and then I will demonstrate 3 examples of using comics to illustrate the topics of power, motivation, and diversity. Lecture segments will be modeled to show how these specific comics have been used. For illustration, I share an example of a power comic in Appendix A.

After sharing several examples of comics, participants will discuss their own possible applications. The author will also offer some resources for finding comics, and review a few pointers about items to consider (e.g., be careful of slang and cultural idioms that may confuse non-English speakers) and to avoid (Trump cartoons are, sadly, a no-no…).

Segment	Time
Introduction	0:00 – 5:00 min
Example 1: Power (with participant engagement)	5:00 – 15:00
Example 2: Personality (with participant engagement)	15:00 – 25:00
Example 3: Motivation (with participant engagement)	25:00 – 35:00
Sources for comics – how to find them and store them	35:00 – 40:00

Discussion of how to apply comics, and concerns	40:00 – 55:00
Wrap-up and invitation to join the Flickr site	55:00 – 60:00

References

Banas, J. A., Dunbar, N., Rodriguez, D., & Liu, S. J. (2011). A review of humor in educational settings: Four decades of research. *Communication Education*, *60*(1), 115–144. https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2010.496867

Clark, R., & Lyons, C. (2010). *Graphics for Learning: Proven Guidelines for Planning, Designing, and Evaluating Visuals in Training Materials*. Oxford, UK: Wiley.

Hopper, K., & Waugh, J. B. (2014). PowerPoint: An overused technology deserving of criticism, but indispensible. *Educational Technology: The Magazine for Managers of Change in Education*, *54*(5), 29–34.

Mayer, R. (2014). *The Cambridge Handbook of Multimedia Learning* (2nd ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Morreall, J. (2016). Philosophy of humor. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/humor/#IncThe

Roberts, D. (2018). The engagement agenda, multimedia learning and the use of images in higher education lecturing: or, how to end death by PowerPoint. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, *42*(7), 969–985. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2017.1332356

Smith, E. E. (2012). The digital native debate in higher education: A comparative analysis of recent literature. *Canadian Journal of Learning & Technology*, *35*(3), 1–18.

Tufte, E. (2003). The Cognitive Style of Powerpoint. Graphics Press.

Yue, C. E., Bjork, E. L., & Bjork, R. A. (2013). Reducing Verbal Redundancy in Multimedia Learning: An Undesired Desirable Difficulty? *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *105*(2), 266–277.

Appendix A: Comic Example for Power Lecture

Setup: When running this in class, I read the comic to them – pedantic, yes, but since it has some small text it can help to tell the story of this comic, and I can dramatize it a bit.

Questions
- What negotiation tactic is man using? What is man's base of power?
- What negotiation tactic is dinosaur using? What is dinosaur's base of power?
- Why did man's negotiation tactic fail?
- What are some other negotiation tactics man could have used that might have been more effective for man?

Debrief
When teaching power and influence, students should understand that tactics should be selected based on one's own power base, the other party's power base, the importance of the issue, and time available. In the comic, man's use of rational persuasion fails because he misread the other party's base of power, or perhaps overestimated the persuasion of his own rational explanation (cognitive bias).

Dinosaur's base of power is coercion/force: "I can eat you" should be an effective tactic, assuming dino is not bluffing. Using rational persuasion against coercion when one lacks a base of power is not the best strategy.

Other negotiation strategies that might work better could be ingratiation: "Dino, you are so big and powerful, we really admire you and we'd like to make a deal that can work for both of us! Sucking up is always an option, as long as it's used judiciously; I warn students of the risks of using this tactic too often. Man could try an exchange strategy, which requires thinking outside of the information in the comic strip: "I'll give you X and you give me Y". The counterargument to this approach is that dino doesn't have to give man anything, since he's got the power. My students sometimes say man could try force by using his spear (the nuclear option). Risky, but it could be effective; definitely not helpful for building a long term trusting relationship. Is this the right time for man to pick this fight, or should he regroup and develop a coalition?