
ARTICLES

Humor as an Instructional Defibrillator

RONALD A. BERK, PHD

INTRODUCTION

Sharon Buchbinder: Ron Berk retired last summer as professor emeritus of biostatistics and measurement at The Johns Hopkins University after 30 years of teaching and research. He has won several teaching awards and has served as assistant dean for teaching for five years.

Ron found that retired sports great Michael Jordan was right about retirement. Ron says he has been able to spend a lot more time with Michael Jordan's family. (*Laughter*)

Ron's publications and presentations now total over 365. According to his bio, he says that all of this work reflects his lifelong commitment to mediocrity, and his professional model is: "Go for the bronze!" (*Laughter*) He has also published nine books, two of which are on humor: *Professors are from Mars; Students are from Snickers*, and *Humor as an Instructional Defibrillator*. In the last two years the *Defib* book has already sold more than 17 copies, (*Laughter*) 10 of which were purchased by his mother who has cataracts.

Ron will be available at the AUPHA booth outside for a book signing immediately after this keynote. His presentation is based on material from both books. I'm not sure where Ron is right now, but I think he wants me to show you this video.

[*Video—EXTREME PROFESSOR MAKEOVER*]

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Ron Berk: I want to begin by thanking Sharon Buchbinder for inviting me to do this address and giving me the opportunity to do what I love to do in a classroom. Also, you might be thinking, as this progresses, or even as we started, that the word "lecture" doesn't exactly capture the essence of what we're going to experience here today. So, despite the fact that it's such an honor to do the Pattullo Lecture, this is not going to be a traditional lecture. Its form is probably the furthest from a lecture format that you could imagine. In order to cover new and innovative ways of teaching this 'Net Generation of students. Hopefully, you will enjoy it.

I also want to thank Danny Linden. All of the communications, logistics, and these arrangements represent a team effort. It has been a joy to work with him. I have driven him crazy with all of the details. In fact, we have been here since 7:00 AM rehearsing. I also want to thank Chris, who's in charge of lighting and sound. We have a big production here, and I want to let you know that a lot of people are involved other than moi.

PASSION FOR TEACHING

I have a passion for teaching. I love being in the classroom with my students. There's no other activity I would rather do at Johns Hopkins than teach my students. Unfortunately, my students don't share that same passion for what I teach, and I thought you might be interested in what happens on the first day of class when I tell my students, "For the next 15 weeks we're going to study biostatistics." The image that pops into their minds is something like this. *[Music—"Shower" from PSYCHO followed by blood-curdling screams]*

They're thinking, "Why not just kill me now?" For those of us who teach statistics, we know we wouldn't have jobs if these courses weren't required. Let's be realistic.

HUMOR AND MEDIA QUOTIENT (HMQ)

What I'd like you to do first is to take an inventory on the last page of your handout. We're going to do several interactive exercises here today. On the last page, answer the 10 questions on the extent to which you are currently using humor and various types of media in your teaching, much of which you will see demonstrated here today. So take a moment to do that. Answer the questions and total your score at the bottom for your HMQ. *[Music—Theme from Seinfeld, Jonathan Wolff]*

Okay, let's take a look at your totals at the bottom and the category into which you fall. How many of you are in the high HMQ category? Look around. How many are in the moderate range? Whoa. How many are in the low category? You're all laughing. *(Laughter)* Hopefully by the time we

are done today, those of you in the low group and moderate group will have some ideas that will raise you at least one category. You will not be on this journey alone. I will be with you. For the next hour and a half I have four words for you. [*Music—“We Can Do It,” Nathan Lane, from The Producers*]

This is a definition that was offered for what I do: “A statistician is someone who doesn’t have the personality to be an accountant.” (*Laughter*) I heard that accountants use it in exactly the reverse.

DEFINITION OF TEACHING

Let’s talk about teaching. Basically it consists of two components. The first is the content: what we teach. You are the experts in your respective disciplines. That’s a given. That’s what we’re trained to know. The second is the pedagogy: how we teach. The two biggest trends in the last decade have been learner-centered teaching, on which more than a 1000 articles and 119 studies were recently reviewed, and the use of technology, which is increasing at an exponential rate.

We’re going to focus on the how. You know the what, so all we’re going to talk about today are hopefully some new ideas that you could take back to your classroom.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NET GENERATION

First of all, what are our students’ characteristics? Let’s take a look. According to Howard Gardner’s research at Harvard, we know that every one of our students, as well as everyone sitting here, has a unique profile of eight and a half intelligences, not just the two that we’re led to believe you need for success in school— verbal and quantitative. According to the SAT, GRE, GMAT, MCAT, and most other academic or professional school tests, only those two major areas of ability are measured.

Yet, in order to function effectively as a clinician in health, or as a professor or administrator, we generally need to draw on from four to six intelligences. As an example, let’s think for a moment about why students hate statistics? The best way I can illustrate this is with the theory of multiple intelligences. When we teach and draw on only one intelligence, in statistics that means teaching it as a mathematics or quantitative course. That’s the traditional way statistics is taught. When that’s the only way it’s taught, only those students with strengths in quantitative ability are going to do well. Everyone else is going to struggle, and that’s what happens.

If we teach a subject in its natural form, whether verbal or quantitative, and tap into only one intelligence, all of the other students will scramble to keep up because you are drawing on their weaknesses, not their strengths.

So the trick is this: while teaching statistics, I tried to figure out how many ways I could present material other than in quantitative form to keep everybody on the same page. It was possible to draw on verbal plus visual/spatial, bodily/kinesthetic, interpersonal or intrapersonal, which are your emotional intelligences, and musical/rhythmic. The more intelligences involved in learning, the greater the chances that everyone can succeed in the classroom. That's the concept, and that's what I tried to do.

So what we're going to do here is illustrate a lot of different forms of humor with music and videos, as well as demonstrate how to create visual/spatial representations or demonstrations of statistics? If I can do it with statistics content, there's hope for all of you. That's the challenge, and we need to do that.

Now, that links directly with the students' learning styles. They have from three to seven different learning styles, which matches the strengths in their intelligences. So if they are a kinesthetic, hands on, experiential-type learner, that's the type of learning style they have—they want to participate. They don't want to be spectators.

Here are other characteristics: technology savvy, and intuitive visual communicators. They do not want textbook-based courses; they don't want to read. They are image-oriented. They crave interaction. They prefer to work in teams using cooperative learning and collaborative learning techniques. They learn through discovery, again, hands on, experiential learning. They respond quickly and expect you to do the same. They can multi-task and shift attention rapidly. And finally, they have the attention span of goat cheese, which means that we cannot assume at any point that they're paying attention. They have so many other things going on in their lives.

But we missed something really important. Can anyone tell me the meaning and significance of this number—525,600? What does this number mean?

Audience member: Number of minutes in a year.

Ron Berk: Number of minutes in a year, okay. Let's take a look.

[Video with "Seasons of Love," entire cast, from *Rent*]

Rent has been playing for more than a decade on Broadway. When the movie version came out in 2005 in our area, the lines were very long, but, interestingly, the people standing in those lines were high schoolers and college students, not people who looked like us. That is the rock musical of this generation of students.

My younger daughter told me that I need to see it so I will understand her better, but she said: "Don't let mommy see it." This generation of students thinks this is something new. We had *Hair*, which broke everything

wide open for many of us years ago. My wife and I went to *Rent*, and we loved it. It was terrific.

But the notion of whether it's *Rent* or something else, we need to get into our students' world. That is really important. If we don't tap into their world, we're going to miss the connection, because this group is very different from previous generations.

Now let's examine the ingredients in our students' world. This is the Net Generation. They're called "digital natives," according to Prensky, because they grew up with the Internet. We are referred to as "digital immigrants," because we learned it on the fly. Take a look at these ingredients. [Music— "A Whole New World," Peabo Bryson, from *Aladdin*]

Starting with Sesame Street, MTV, and every form of technology they are using, you can easily go on a campus and you can tell the students from everyone else. They're the ones with wires coming out of their bodies all over the place, (*Laughter*) MP3 players, iPods, smart phones, and iPhones. They're listening to music and who knows what else. That's what they love to do.

This should make you, and it makes me, very nervous. This is what is at the end of those wires: [Music— "What a Feeling," Irene Cara, from *Flashdance*] music, movies, music videos, PC and video games, and TV programs. All of this produces "media over-stimulation." How much? The 2006 estimates are from 6.5 to 11 hours per day of multitasking with all of those forms of media. How many hours are there in a day and how many hours are they in class? That's their world. We need to find a way to tap into it.

So, basically, if we think in these terms, my concept of effective teaching is this: It's all about the students. It's about their characteristics, their world, and their intelligences. It's not about us. Most of the mistakes I have made in teaching have occurred when I thought like a professor and not like my students. If we haven't already changed our perspective to think like our students, we need to start changing. [Music— "I Am Changing," Jennifer Hudson, from *Dreamgirls*]

We need to view things through our students' eye sockets, focusing on their intelligences and their learning styles, and leveraging what's in their world so they will learn what's in ours. That's one way in which we can bridge that difference.

"FAIR USE" PROVISION OF COPYRIGHT LAW

We have a wonderful advantage in the teaching profession compared to other professions because we can use every form of media—print and nonprint. That is permitted under the "fair use" provision in Title 17 of

the copyright law. You can use the music and the videos that I've been using for teaching. I talked with Universal and Paramount Studios a year ago about issues of copyright, and the rumor was there were restrictions on the length of videos and music that we could use. First of all, we need to acknowledge the sources we use, as you've seen with the first video and every video I play as well as the music credits at the end. There are no time restrictions, such as 30 seconds for music and 3 minutes for videos. Instructors who teach courses on film, criticism, music appreciation, and the like can't have limits. So they said there's no time restriction. We can use all of the above.

WHY USE HUMOR IN TEACHING?

What are the purposes of this presentation? I'm going to try to demonstrate at least five strategies for incorporating humor, music, videos and games into your teaching. We're talking about systematic teaching strategies and tools, not stand-up comedy here, folks. And finally, I will provide a wide array of techniques that you can adapt to your own classroom, personality, and students.

Why should we use humor in the classroom? There are two classroom applications. First, it can improve your connection with your students. The moment you walk to the front of the room there is a disconnection because of your age, your title, your educational level, and your cholesterol level. Second, humor can bring dead, boring content to life.

There are also two teaching applications of humor: to enable you to cope with the stressors associated with teaching, and to help you survive all of the demands of your institution.

What about the research on humor and laughter? There are close to 70 studies conducted over the last 45 years. Here's the basic structure. Humor is the stimulus; it produces one response, which is emotional, called mirth. This topic has yielded a stream of research on the psychological effects. The second response is physical, which is laughter on which research has been conducted on the physiological effects.

You have in your possession a summary of the benefits based on all the research as well as the myths or warnings. That summary is in the form of a prescription, which I thought would be appropriate for all of you. It is called Mirthium (available from www.ronberk.com). It even has a generic. (*Laughter*)

So you have the list. Everything else there is for your entertainment. We're not going to spend a lot of time because you can read these at your leisure. There are several humor effects in terms of benefits based on the research up to this point. Most of the psychological research has been con-

ducted on stress, anxiety, and tension. The concept here is that when you encounter a negative situation or aversive stimuli, if you're able to joke, you can detach yourself from that situation.

The best example that I can think of is in the classic TV series *M*A*S*H*. How many of you remember the character of Hawkeye Pierce, played by Alan Alda? That character joked constantly in the mess tent, the OR, everywhere, so he could separate himself from all that he hated around him in the Korean War. The joking served as a coping mechanism to distance Hawkeye from the negative situations.

Humor provides a way of coping. In several studies in the Emergency Room, physicians and nurses use it to cope with all that they see. Clearly, humor is one of the most effective coping strategies. Furthermore, there's mounting evidence that humor decreases whining, howling, and body piercing. So you might want to try it.

Okay, that's based on what we know in terms of the studies. Here are the warnings or myths. There are claims being made in all of these areas, and the reason is because there's research on every one of these topics. The problem is that either there are conflicting results from the research, or there are flaws in the experimental designs of the studies, such as small n's of five or eight graduate students, no control group, and violations of protocol in gathering the saliva or blood assays to measure the physiological effects. There have been a lot of problems, especially with the physiological studies.

The mass media has blown this research way out of proportion. These are claims that you will see all of the time. But, as researchers, you need to know that we don't have enough evidence to make those claims. There is a lot more detail on the list of killer cell studies in your handout on Mirthium. Again, there is mounting evidence here that laughter cures halitosis, gingivitis, and gangrene. Not true.

OFFENSIVE HUMOR

The first issue we have to tackle if we're going to do this in the classroom, is what forms of humor can be offensive to our students. Consider for a moment how you feel or react when you are offended. Try to remember the last time you were offended by a friend or something you saw on television or in a movie. What did you do?

Audience member: Withdraw.

Ron Berk: You withdraw. What else?

You can turn off the TV or walk out of a movie. Other feelings when you're offended?

Audience member: Anger.

Ron Berk: Students can't turn us off. If they're offended by something that we say or do, they come back the next class and they may be muttering under their breath: "He or she's a moron." And it just continues. You probably have lost those students for the entire semester. "Offensiveness" is not determined by a democratic vote, such as, "How many of you think that joke was offensive?" It's a very personal feeling based on your own values.

And right now what you see on television and the movies is out of control. It's one-upmanship in every way, shape, and form in order to attract all potential audiences, because that's what they want. People love put-down humor particularly. The culture demands that type of challenge: Who can we offend next?

What I want you to do is take a few minutes and, with the person on your right or left, talk about what types of humor or targets you would consider to be inappropriate in your classroom?

Audience member: Any type of racial, ethnic jokes.

Audience member: Weight.

Audience member: Weight. Jokes about weight.

Audience member: Sex, sexual innuendo.

Audience member: Politics.

Audience member: Gender.

Audience member: Religion.

Audience member: Disabilities.

Audience member: Age.

Audience member: Health status—health status like cancer, depression.

Ron Berk: Right. Okay, what else?

Audience member: Intelligence.

Ron Berk: Intelligence. Geographical. Think about all of these categories. Whether you agree with my list doesn't matter. The issue is this: You have to decide where you're going to draw the line, and then communicate it to your students. I do it on the first class so they know the rules of the game. You want to create a safe environment, not a threatening one. Here is my list:

1. Put-downs of anyone. Sitcoms are based on put-downs. I would especially avoid put-downs of political figures and celebrities. Please stay away from Michael Jackson. He's had a rough time. (*Laughter*) Leave those people to Leno and Letterman.
2. Sarcasm. There was a dissertation conducted on sarcasm in higher education. It was found that over 90% of its uses is negative; it's

nothing more than a put-down. It is more frequently used by male than by female professors in all major disciplines.

3. Ridicule.
4. Profanity.
5. Vulgarity.
6. Sexual content and innuendo. And finally,
7. Sensitive personal issues that deal with personal tragedies. There are no restrictions on what you will see in the movies or on TV now, so we have to make our position clear on inappropriate humor to our students on the first class. They hold me accountable, and I'm able to hold them accountable for the whole semester.

So, the question is: "What else is there?" (*Laughter*) I thought this was going to be fun. There's nothing left.

First, there is positive humor. Use humor to build people up, not tear them down. Next is what I call the big butt theory. The "butt" of the joke should be so big that it focuses on those things that are bigger than life, such as your institution and the policies and practices in your department. There is material there, folks. Think about the things that we are asked to do and those things that occur in your school, which students and you experience together, such as standing in lines for coffee or food or the availability of parking spots. These are all fair game. And they're safe, because we all experience those situations.

Finally, the most limitless source is self-downs, which is self-effacing or self-deprecating humor. It is, without a doubt, the most effective way to break down barriers in your classroom, and you've got tons of material. How many of you use self-effacing humor?

INCONGRUITY FORMULA

Definition of humor: "The ability to see three sides of one coin" (Ned Roram). It's one of my favorite definitions. Those of us who have a naturally twisted mind see things normal people don't see. What we're going to talk about for the remainder of this session is the incongruity formula. That is the foundation of most all types of jokes. It is the juxtaposition of the "expected" with the "unexpected." Since we expect everything to be

serious, the unexpected twist or punch at the end is easy to do. Students are trained seriously and so are we.

Let's examine the format of humor that's delivered orally. There are three elements. First, the expected "serious set-up." Second, the expected "build-up of tension" as you are executing the material, and, finally, the unexpected twist or the "punch." I call this structure the humor trifecta. If any of those elements don't work, such as you don't understand the premise, then the punch is going to be meaningless. Here are some examples.

VERBAL HUMOR DELIVERED ORALLY

First, how many of you are parents? Okay. I dedicate this to all of you. How many of you had parents? (*Laughter*) I just want to play with your minds. Here we go. According to child-rearing expert T. Berry Brazelton, a serious authority, never raise your hand to your children; it leaves your midsection unprotected. (*Laughter*)

You have the unexpected and then that punch at the end. This is the most dangerous form. I do not recommend telling one-liners in your classroom. Very few people have a gift for doing that.

Doing what I do for a profession, I thought you could increase the probability of success, thereby minimizing the chances of an embarrassing situation. Instead of one punch line, how about using three or four in a multiple-choice format? So you have, in this case, the stem, which is a serious premise: What is the most efficient and cost-effective method to learn how to use new software on your PC at home?

Then you have multiple choices. Thanks to Regis, everyone knows the multiple-choice format, and we can play off of that by having different punches. A. Open the online instruction manual and actually read it; B. Disregard the instructions, insert the disk, and click every option until something neat happens (I don't know about you, but that's how I learned Word® and PowerPoint®); (*Laughter*) C. Hand the software to one of your children, age five to ten, and say, "Please show me how to use this. Please. I'll be your best friend!", or D. If you don't have or work with any children, call the toll-free, Technical Support Hotline who will explain step by step how to adopt a child, age five to ten. (*Laughter*)

As you use this multiple-choice format in your different classes, identify which choices work best. Where do you want to place those choices in the list? Place them at the end. In this item you have a logical sequence in the choices, but, in other cases, there may be just four or five options with no order.

The last resort format is a shotgun approach: the top 10 list, popularized by Letterman. We're going to try one here.

In the exhibits, there are a variety of materials and books available. What many of you may not know is that there are several books that didn't make the cut. So I thought you might be interested in hearing the rejected titles. Here are the top 10 teaching methods books rejected by the AUPHA Board of Directors; the ones that didn't make it to the exhibit tables:

10. Deeper Learning through Shallow Teaching.
9. The Pop-Up Book of Meta-Cognitive Teaching Strategies.
8. Traveling the Road of Distance Education without Asking Directions (special discount for male professors). (*Laughter*) Sorry guys.
7. The Virtual Classroom: Think, Pair, Share When Nobody's There.
6. "Survivor" Teaching: Innovative Ways to Vote Students out of Your Class.
5. Using Cooperative Learning to Punish Self-Centered Students.
4. "American Idol" Teaching: Simon Says You're Bad; That's Good.
3. Fostering Active Learning with a Cattle Prod.
2. Assisted Learning Communities for Senior Faculty. (We are all going to end up there, sooner or later.)

And, finally, the number one book rejected by the Board of Directors:

1. Crouching Professor, Hidden Peer Evaluator. (*Laughter*)

VIDEO HUMOR

Okay, we're going to shift gears. All of the previous examples were verbal. Now we're going to examine the humor and the formula for videos. What's the difference? When we see a movie, typically, the humor consists of only two elements, not three. You have a serious element, and then you have the punch. But those elements may be in a variety of formats: verbal, visual, or audio. I am going to play a video clip for you, and I want you to identify

the two elements first. What's the set-up, what's the punch, and then, what's the form of each?

This clip is from *Meet the Parents*. The character played by Ben Stiller is trying to get a flight out late at night. He is at the gate about 11:30 p.m., and this is what happens. [Video—*Meet the Parents*] (*Laughter*)

Okay. (*Laughter*) Now, I'm going to play it again because you're all busy laughing, enjoying it. I'm going to play it again, this time to the end. But I want you to think about the set-up, what form it is, and then the punch and its form. Here it is again. [Video—repeat *Meet the Parents*] (*Laughter*)

In your packet, there is a slide titled "incongruity formula exercise one." Circle your answer to both of those parts right now.

For the serious element, what was the set-up?

Audience member: Verbal.

Ron Berk: Verbal. It was the interchange between Ben Stiller and the airline agent. What was the punch?

Audience member: Visual.

Ron Berk: Visual. And my favorite was the add-on visual and sound of the vacuum cleaner. I lost it when I first saw that scene.

Now we're going to do another one. This time the clip's from *Runaway Bride*. In this segment, Julia Roberts is walking down the aisle to marry Richard Gere. Take a look at what happens. Again, look for the two elements. [Video—*Runaway Bride*] (*Laughter*)

I love that. May I ask you a question? When would you ever see a FedEx truck outside of a church during a wedding? It was all for the joke. Now, circle your answers for exercise two. What are the set-up and the punch?

Audience member: Visual.

Ron Berk: Visual. And if I were to replay this you would see the side of the FedEx truck four different times. The director wanted to make sure that you saw FedEx over and over again to set-up the punch. And, of course, what was the punch?

Audience member: Verbal.

Ron Berk: Verbal. Hector Elizondo's wonderful line, "She'll be there by 10:30 tomorrow." Okay.

COGNITIVE PROCESSING OF HUMOR AND PROBLEM BASED LEARNING

For those of you who do PBL, problem-based learning, you should know that the cognitive neurological process for getting the punch using the incongruity formula is absolutely identical to the process involved in problem solving. If you want a way of preparing your students mentally

for a problem exercise, have them do some kind of a joke first. It engages the right hemisphere and makes the problem more fun.

“LOW RISK” HUMOR STRATEGIES

Now we’re going to move into specific methods in our limited time. You have an article that outlines 10 different methods there. You have more detail than what I’ll be able to go into here. I’m just going to describe and demonstrate about a half a dozen. My Mars & Snickers book goes into all 10 in detail for anyone who’s interested.

First, let’s take a look at “low risk” strategies. [*Music – Theme from Boston Legal, Billy Valentine*] We’re going to talk about humorous material on tests. We’re basically inserting humor into print material. You’re not standing up and telling any jokes.

There are two types of strategies. One is content-irrelevant, and the other is content-relevant. The first and safest one to use on a test is adding an extra choice. This is a content-irrelevant strategy. If it’s a four-choice multiple-choice format test, add a choice E. You need to tell the students up front in the directions that choice E is for their entertainment only and not to be selected as the correct answer. In fact, you should have an answer sheet that has only four choices on it to make sure it’s impossible to pick E. Otherwise; with a five-choice answer sheet someone will find a way to pick the joke as the correct answer. A content-irrelevant choice has nothing to do with the content of the item.

Here’s an example. Which country in Eastern Europe has a chronic shortage of vowels? A. Namibia; B. South Dakota; C. Saskatchewan; D. Trskmykczstkygistan; and E. Who cares? So you’re trying to think: “If I’m answering this item, what can I use for E that the students would be thinking, but would not expect to see?” Think about this for a minute. That’s the kind of answer that really works. By the way, I hope you got the item right.

The second type of strategy is content-relevant humor, which means that the humor is embedded in the item itself; it’s part of the content. There are several different methods. There are eight different strategies and a variety of formats, but I chose multiple-choice here because it’s one of the most frequently used formats.

If your urologist says, “You have a kidney stone the size of the Epcot golf ball,” that is an example of A. analogy; B. hyperbole; C. metaphor; D. simile; and I had to add an E. rather disturbing thought. Here the humor is part of a legitimate question. You’re just making it a little bit more fun than a normal question about hyperbole. [*Music – Theme from Law & Order, Mike Post*]

“HIGH RISK” HUMOR STRATEGIES

It's time for “high risk.” When we open our class, there are a variety of types of material we can use. There are lots of examples, some of which are in your handout and others in the books. I believe that everyone has the capability to be funny, even the most serious person. The issue is your willingness to take a risk to discover what form of humor is your gift. Until you try telling stories or anecdotes or presenting a multiple-choice joke or attempting any of the other formats, you will not know your humor gift and which format is natural for you.

That's my challenge to you. Professors are usually hesitant to test the humor waters because of feelings, such as: “I'm going to fail” or “I'll get embarrassed.” Students are rooting for you. They want you to succeed and will feel badly if you don't do well. You're in good company, but that still isn't a consolation when you bomb. Nonetheless, that's something to think about.

Let's move on to class demonstrations. One of the most powerful ways to tap multiple intelligences is with skits or demonstrations. Having your students participate in a demonstration to introduce a topic is one strategy for getting the whole class involved. We're now going to look at how to execute demonstrations. We'll begin with two people. I'll be back in a few seconds. Don't go anywhere. [*Music—Theme from The Odd Couple, Neil Hefti*] (*Laughter*) [Ron Berk and Steve Mick of VCU walk down the aisle to the front of the room.]

This is our version of *The Odd Couple*. Let me introduce my good friend Felix, and of course, I am Oscar. Today we're going to talk about relationships, the relationship between two things: in this case, the two of us.

What I would normally do is have everyone write down on a sheet of paper two characteristics that we have in common and two characteristics that are different about us, and then they would share them with their neighbor. That's an active learning exercise. Then I bring everybody together and make two lists, differences and similarities, on a transparency.

When we get to the similarities list, it gets difficult, such as: “You're both professors. You're both human.” The students are usually scraping the bottom of the barrel. That's what you want. You need that contrast.

Who you pick for Felix or Oscar makes a difference. Either can be a woman professor or student. I use a woman very often whom I call Felice. You could also have an Oscarette. I'm not suggesting cross-dressing here, though. Not a good idea, unless you have tenure. Kidding. Try to pick professors who your students know to represent the extremes of the personality continuum, those whom they would never expect even to talk to

one another, much less be seen together. When I walk to the front of the class with Felice, the students start laughing, just as you did as Felix and I walked to the front, because they don't expect it.

This demonstration works much better with two professors than with a professor and a student. Sometimes, when my Felice forgets to show up, I have to go grab a student and scramble to do the skit. It just doesn't work as well. You could try that and see what happens.

Back to our demonstration. Oscar and Felix provide a visual metaphor for relationships. I use it to introduce correlation instead of starting with the big, ugly Pearson formula, which scares students out of their boots when they see it. No, no, no, no. These are relationships, and they get the whole concept.

I say: "Well, suppose we compute a correlation of, let's just pick a number like, .50. Maybe that would explain some of these characteristics, such as what's in common. If I were to just square the correlation of .50 and make it a percentage by multiplying by 100, it would be 25% in common. What's leftover that's unique to both Oscar and Felix is unexplained, which is 75%. So we just talked about a correlation and explained and unexplained variance. The students don't even know what hit them. Then we go into the actual material step by step, but the demonstration really softens the blow a lot. Felix, Steve, thank you, sir. (*Laughter*)

MUSIC AS HUMOR WITH DEMONSTRATIONS

Let's extend the demonstration to groups of students. Suppose I want two groups, one representing each gender. How would I introduce them? All right, I have a group of six women students. Come on down. (*Music—“I'm Every Woman,” Whitney Houston*) (*Laughter and Applause*) [Six female AUPHA members dance down the aisle.]

Suppose I wanted to change that and say, "Today I just need one woman student for a demonstration." What would be the difference? Carla, would you go back please. Okay. Come on down. [*Music—“All By Myself,” Celine Dion*] Here's your Oscar. (*Laughter and Applause*) You did a lot more acting than was called for in your contract.

And this is what makes it so much fun. In my 30th year of teaching, I couldn't wait to get to class. It was better than my first year at Hopkins. That was because whenever you prepare any of these demonstrations, and it's all in the preparation, you can't wait to see what the students are going to do. And it's different every time. It's a live performance.

You all were laughing in both intros so far. I want you to think for a moment: Why did you laugh? There was no joke being told. I want you

to think about the incongruity. As you're doing that, I have to introduce our guys.

Gentlemen, would you please line up? Then we'll talk about why we have some type of laughter here and how the incongruity formula is applied in this context. Dean, do you have them all together? Okay, bring them down. [*Music—"Bad Boys," Inner Circle, theme from Cops*] (Laughter and Applause) [Six male AUPHA members dance down the aisle.]

Guys, take off your shirts. Kidding. No one actually watches Cops because we know the plot. It's always some guy without a shirt in his backyard in the dark being wrestled to the ground. That's it.

So now, why did you laugh? What was the set-up? What's the first element of incongruity here?

Audience member: Music.

Ron Berk: Not exactly. First, there's going to be a demonstration. We're going to have a demonstration, and students do not know who's involved. That's the serious set-up. Then students pop up at different points in the room and line up in the back. The class doesn't have a clue what's going on, what music is going to be played, or what's going to happen next. What's the punch?

Ron Berk: Why did you laugh in each case? What was the punch line?

Audience member: Unexpected.

Ron Berk: What did you expect in this situation? I could have had the groups just walk down by themselves without any music. You probably wouldn't have laughed. What was it that made you laugh?

Audience member: The music.

Ron Berk: The music was the punch line. So far we've used verbal, video, and now music. Music is the punch line, and all you have to do is press a button on a CD player or recorder. That's it. There's no joke. It's picking the right music. Music does not belong in your classroom. It's unexpected. That's the incongruity.

And if you can match the music to the visual image of whatever you're doing—the incongruity with what the women were doing and what the guys were doing—and the actual lyrics, you'll have a winner. And make sure to use songs with which your students are familiar. I kept using the theme from *Friends* after it was canceled. The students still watched it in syndication. You can't kill *Friends*. The students sing the song as their buddies are walking to the front of the classroom. Another popular theme is the one from *CSI*. You can use pop songs and other themes from the top 10 rated Nielsen TV programs.

So now I have a dozen students up here for a demonstration. I have to do something with them. This is how I begin sampling designs. I just selected two samples. I want to know what kind of a design it is. They see nonequivalence before their eyes. It's not just a term in Campbell and Stanley. I want them to see why the samples are nonequivalent. What are the independent and dependent variables? What kind of t-test can I use? Can I use a covariate? Can I use analysis of covariance to adjust the differences between the two genders? What an exercise in critical thinking.

The students see the whole design right before their eyes. They're thinking through the statistics and the variables. Next, I bring both groups together, and then I randomly divide them. We now have created a randomized design, which is the foundation and gold standard for all research. Is that an important topic to draw on visual/spatial, verbal concepts, bodily/kinesthetic, musical/rhythmic, and interpersonal? We have at least four or five intelligences being tapped, but nothing quantitative yet. That's the point of the demonstration.

The challenge is to find a way to make the words, formulas, or graphs on that textbook page jump off and come to life with your students. The best part is that those students in the audience have their roommates on stage, their buddies. They're on the edges of their seats. That's how I would begin the different types of experimental designs.

So it's thinking about concepts and processes that are really important to render them worthy of the time to do a demonstration. The explanation takes a little time, but you would be doing that anyway. The grand entrances by the students are typically about 30 seconds each, so you have spent a minute with the music to create an atmosphere where they're saying: "Oh my gosh, what is he going to do next?" That's how long it takes. The rest is up to you to deliver.

I have students act out equations in front of the room. For multiple regression and logistic regression, I have a dozen students as the predictors along with a criterion student set off from the group. It could be continuous or dichotomous criterion, and the students are asked to pick out the order of the predictors based on visual characteristics. I want them to understand the relationships between the characteristics of the predictors and the criterion and among each other to know which variables are going to enter, and in which order. So I use gender, height, hair color, hair length, eyesight (glasses or no glasses), slacks or dress, and so on to look for visual similarities and differences. You must avoid any potentially offensive characteristics, such as weight or the popular BMI. You can do this.

There are about a half a dozen safe characteristics. The task for the students is to visually trace through the mathematical process of one of the forms of regression against the criterion and then say, "Well, we picked that variable. The next one I select should not have a lot in common with the variable I already selected, but it has to explain some percentage of the variance of the criterion." That's the whole idea. It changes the image of regression analysis and any other equation-based topic.

Because they're scared spit-less with these statistics, especially logistic regression, the demonstration can turn them on to topics like odds and ratios. So try to create visual images for your content topics. It really helps get the concepts across.

Ladies and gentlemen, you may take your seats. Give these demonstrators a hand. Thank you.

HUMOR IN GAMES

Okay. We're winding down here. Let's try a Jeopardy!-type review and see whether we've learned anything here. I know some of you are thinking: [Music—"I Can Do That," Wayne Cilento, from *A Chorus Line*]. I hope so.

The idea here is to first pick a category, which is "characteristics of humor." I will read the answer to which you will respond in perfect unison with the question. Here we go.

Ron Berk: 1. This is the number of elements in most forms of humor delivered orally and also the number of bears who mauled Goldilocks.

Audience member: Three. What is three?

Ron Berk: 2. This type of humor is totally inappropriate in a teaching/learning context; also which you become when you don't use deodorant.

Audience member: What is offensive?

Ron Berk: 3. This theory of humor focuses on bigger than life targets, such as the institution, practices, and policies; also what can result from eating too many Twinkies®.

Audience member: What is "big butt"?

Ron Berk: This is how I review statistics material to prepare my students for all of the exams. You can get a lot of content covered very quickly, plus you can add the humor to that punch at the end. Of course, the students want to know whether you are going to do that on the test. I don't think so. But it does help motivate them and provide clues to remember the content.

Final Jeopardy! The category is: "targets of humor." You'll have 30 seconds to think of your question to the following answer. When you're in doubt about any joke being offensive to your students, focus the joke on this to be safe. Good luck. [Music—Theme from *Jeopardy!*, Merv Griffin]

How many of you need more time? Always be ready with more music if they need more time. *[Music—repeat theme from Jeopardy!]* I usually pick a problem for Final Jeopardy with which I know they have difficulty, often a problem from previous tests. That's the one with which you want to spend a little bit more time.

Okay, on a count of three, shout out your question: one, two, three.

Whole Audience: What is yourself?

Ron Berk: Excellent!

COUP DE GRÂCE

We're coming down to the wire. I'm going to give you one more technique. This one can only be used once. If you have an acronym, a term that's four or five letters, or four syllables that you don't want your students to forget, this technique will do it. Once you do this with your students, that term or acronym will be embedded in their brains forever.

There is only one obvious choice: A U P H A. I combined H and A at the end. The first thing you're going to do is say the letters with me. Ready? And A-U-P-HA. Okay, I think we're ready.

[Music—"YMCA," Villag People] Get ready. A-U-P-HA! A-U-P-HA! *(Laughter)* You now know what's coming. This is the aerobic portion of the program and probably the conference. Everybody up.

Remember the letters. A-U-P-HA! Do not poke out the eyeballs of the person next to you. All right, let's try it one more time. Ready? A-U-P-HA. Now with the music. *[Music—"YMCA" continued]* Ready, and A-U-P-HA! A-U-P-HA! Give yourselves a hand.

Please be seated. We have a couple of things to do to bring this to a close. *[Music—"One," John Williams, from A Chorus Line]*

METAPHOR FOR TEACHING

I tried to think of a metaphor for teaching. For those of you who have a passion for teaching the way I do, I hope you can relate to this. I think teaching is more of calling than just a job we experience. I remembered a Broadway show that opened about 32 years ago, and then was revived in October 2006. It was all about putting it on the line. Let's take a look. *[Video—A Chorus Line]*

To be serious for a few moments, our soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, police officers, and fire fighters put their lives on the line every day. You could probably relate this metaphor to most any profession, but there's something different about teaching that all of us have experienced: Those of us who put our mind, our body, and our soul before our students as I

have done here this morning. Teaching is so much more than just standing up and talking if we want to have a true connection with our students.

It involves the commitment we have made to be the best teachers that we can be, the sacrifices that we have made to get to this point in our career, the preparation that we have gone through, including attending conferences like this one to get the latest ideas in terms of teaching techniques and research evidence that you can take back to your classrooms for your students, and the live performance that happens in that classroom. You don't want your students walking out of your class saying, "Just get the notes." You have the handout content from this morning's presentation. If you were to hand that to someone who wasn't here this morning, I would hope that you would tell them what happened in this room is not in the handout.

You want to use your class time to do those things that cannot be replicated in any other venue, such as small-group exercises, whether they're cooperative learning or active learning techniques, dramatizations, improvisation activities, and the like. When my students leave class and tell a student who missed class: "You're not going to believe what we did today, and there's no way he can repeat that logistic regression demonstration; you're going to have to learn it on your own," that changes everything.

Once the word is out, the students don't know when the next demonstration is coming. The element of surprise is crucial. Intermittent reinforcement really helps. But use your time wisely, because these students will find other ways to get the material. They don't need us anymore for a lot of this.

Finally, the satisfaction that you have done your absolute best. Here's an example of putting it on the line both literally and figuratively. [*Video — "One" finale from A Chorus Line*]

What's the point of the last hour and a half? This is the point: [*Music — "Looks Like We Made It," Barry Manilow*] Leverage the multimedia elements in your students' world: music, movies, TV programs, games, with a variety of humor techniques in your teaching to tap their multiple intelligences and learning styles so every student can succeed in your class and can have fun learning in the process.

Thank you all for your responsiveness and your attention. I wish I could take you back to Baltimore with me. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.