

Unlocking meaning: Using Visual Metaphors in Lectures

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Abstract

Metaphorical communication has long been used by writers to convey meaning in a powerful and compressed manner but can also be used by teachers to support knowledge acquisition and understanding. When students are encountering complex, abstract concepts, metaphors are a way to help make the unfamiliar seem familiar. Using an image to represent a metaphor may further increase accessibility. My research has taken a three-cycle action research approach to assess the effectiveness of using visual metaphors in lectures to help unlock the meaning of abstract concepts. The lectures were delivered to international postgraduate Management students. I have used a range of creative and innovative research methods to help overcome the metacognitive and linguistic obstacles associated with asking participants to explain their own learning. My findings indicate that presenting visual metaphors can be an effective way for international students to increase access to lecture content in real time by reducing the need to process text or spoken words. In this presentation, I will outline the theoretical foundations of metaphor use and explain why this use is fundamental to the way in which we create meaning and understand abstract concepts. I will suggest, based on the literature and using examples from my own research, how visual metaphors can be used in teaching, principally in the context of lectures, for greatest impact.

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