Abstract
This paper will discuss how the popularity of comics among young people makes them a useful conduit for engaging students in second language acquisition. There are several reasons to use comics in classes that are related to principles from second language acquisition, brain-based teaching, and progressive literacy. First, a number of classroom activities will be discussed: “Make-A-Title,” “Add-A-Panel,” “Comics Jigsaw,” “Fill-It-Up,” “Putting Panels In Order.” Then, the steps for student made comics will be discussed. Comics can be used as the main focus of a course by having students make their own comics or simply can be used as classroom activities, e.g., as a warm-up or extension activity.

Introduction
Comics have been a popular source of entertainment for decades. Banking on the popularity of comics can be useful in the teaching of English by capturing student interest and creating motivation for meaningful English production in the classroom. It is useful to define the term comics before investigating the subject any further. Comics are defined by Horn (1999) in *The World Encyclopedia of Comics* as: “A narrative form containing text and pictures arranged in sequential order (usually chronological)” (p. 852). The four major types of comics are: cartoons (a single stand alone panel); comic strips (stories in sequenced horizontal blocks of three to five panels); comic books (similar to comic strips but increased to 20 to 40 pages); and graphic novels (full-length comic books often carrying entire runs of stories previously serialized). There are several reasons to use comics in classes related to principles from second language acquisition, brain-based teaching and progressive literacy (Carey, 2004).

Theoretical Framework
Krashen’s (2003) theories regarding dynamics and optimal conditions for second language development are deep-rooted in modern approaches to ESL teaching. The most important ideas are those of input hypothesis and affective filter hypothesis. The input hypothesis suggests that second language is acquired through comprehensible input or messages when involved in activities using language for communication. This theory suggests that it is not the form of the message from which learners learn, but rather the message itself. The affective filter hypothesis suggests that emotions can have an impact on second language learning. That is students who are self-confident and highly motivated tend to make more progress in second language learning than those who are not. In addition, a student’s level of anxiety (affective filter) is crucial in the amount and speed of second language development. Comics can provide input and positive affect. There are many visual clues which help increase the amount of comprehensible input and can boost comprehension. This increased comprehension keeps the affective filter low. The affective filter might also be low due to the enjoyment of comics by students.

Several authors (Hatch, 1992; McGroarty, 1993; Johnson, 1995; Celce-Murcia and Olshtain, 2000) emphasize the importance of interaction in language. There are many ways students can collaborate using comics as materials for interaction in pairs or small groups. Many such activities will require students to exchange ideas and opinions, edit each other’s work or collaborate in teams for original comics production. When students interact with each other or the teacher they are using language for real communication.
Brain-based teaching is concerned with using practices that can increase student learning. These activities include hands-on, manipulative-based activities, simulations, role-plays, projects, and small group work. The emphasis is on more student-to-student interaction, which creates greater opportunities to use and develop language. Comics use an emphasis on engaging content and greater use of visual materials. Relevant and engaging materials, like comics, create a strong emotional buy-in and students become more engaged and learning accelerates. Added visuals are extremely useful with beginning to early intermediate second language learners who are largely visual learners at these stages. Pictures can make oral and written text more concrete and understandable. Visuals can also increase the number of concepts learned and the length or time those concepts are remembered.

Another theoretical framework for using comics in the classroom borrows from progressive literacy: engagement through authentic literature, using language for real communication, and a focus on content over form. This theory suggests that authentic materials, books and stories that are whole rather than excerpted use natural language and are meaningful, are much more likely to engage students (Smith, 1997, 2003).

Activities for Use in the Classroom
There are a number of ways to incorporate the use of comics in the classroom. These activities can be used to build critical thinking skills, help students to learn comprehension strategies, and increase literacy among other skills. The following activities have been used in a reading class and a special summer intensive group activity class focused on making an original comic in English (this process will be discussed after classroom activities): “Make-A-Title,” “Add-A-Panel,” “Comics Jigsaw,” “Fill-It-Up,” “Putting Panels In Order.” Most of these activities can be done in about ten to twenty minutes, allowing time for students to share their work or discuss their answers. Thus, these activities are ideal for warm-ups or cool downs at the end of class.

Make-A-Title
One of the advantages of this activity lies in the fact that most comic strips from newspapers do not have titles. Thus, preparation for this activity is quite easy— instructors need only to find comic strips and then ask students to write titles for the strips after modeling the activity, which will reflect comprehension and help build critical skills and test comprehension of the comic strip. (Some sample strips can be seen in Appendix A)

Add-A-Panel
This activity also needs little preparation, since students will be using prediction skills as well as learning comprehension strategies while adding another panel to the comic strip. After giving students a strip you can ask: “What happens next?” and students will create an additional panel. One variation is that you can pass several sheets around the class and have students continue the story by adding several panels after the original last panel. (An example comic strip can be seen in Appendix B)

Comic Jigsaw
In preparation for this activity, the instructor needs to remove the text from comic panels and compile it on a separate page so that partners can match the dialogue with the comic panel in question. It is possible to use a whole page, but it is simpler to use single panel comics. Again, students learn comprehension strategies while they try to match the text with the single panel comics (See Appendix C for examples).
**Fill-It-Up**
Preparation for this activity involves removing the text from a page of a comic, so that students can create original dialogue or narration. Students use learning comprehension strategies as well as activating their knowledge of English by creating their own original stories from the context of the pictures in the panels from which the text has been removed (See Appendix D for an example page).

**Putting Panels in Order**
This activity usually requires the instructor to find a comic with same sized panels on a page so that it can be photocopied and cut up into individual panels. Students then try to put the panels back into original order. In this activity, students need to use prediction skills as well as learning comprehension strategies to put the stories back into original order (See Appendix E for an example page).

**Student Made Comics**

**Step 1: Production Teams**
There are several ways for students to create their own comics. One method involves dividing students into groups of a minimum of four. This way students can choose one of the four jobs: researcher/writer, penciller, colorist/inker, letterer/editor.

The researcher/writer gathers background information for the story and checks facts/drafts and reviews the script, all the comic’s written text. The penciller is the chief artist and does the roughing (first draft) and final versions of all pictures. The colorist/inker adds color to the penciled drawings/traces over pictures with black ink, adds shading when necessary, and erases leftover pencil lines. The letterer/editor prints the words in captions and dialogue balloons/reviews all visual and written work for accuracy and consistency. If the groups are larger than four or more students can be assigned to each job. Most of this activity has been adapted from *Going Graphic: Comics at Work in the Multilingual Classroom* (Cary 2004).

**Step 2: Plotting**
The writer begins with a log line, which summarizes the story in a single sentence, for example: “A small village hires a band of samurai to protect the village from raids by bandits in the Edo period of Japan.” Then the log line is expanded by using a narrative template. A typical template includes: title (What the comic is about: orientation/time/setting/characters introduced), conflict/problem, plan/action steps, resolution/climax, coda/moral. The template serves two functions: (1) it reminds the writers of the key ingredients that go into a good story, and (2) it provides a basic plotting sequence for writer and penciller—what they write/draw for the beginning-middle-end of the story (See Appendix F for a sample worksheet).

In this example, adapted from Akira Kurosawa’s film *Seven Samurai*, an eight-page sequence will be discussed as a model. Students will then plan the eight-page sequence. Here is an example: Page 1: the when, where, and who of the story “Edo Period, Japan, small village, farmers, samurai, bandits,” Page 2-3: the conflict “bandits raid the village for their food and valuables,” Page 4-6: action steps “the villagers hire samurai to protect their village from the bandits,” Page 7: resolution “the samurai protect the village but some of them are killed,” Page 8: moral/coda/upshot “good prevails over evil but not without some sacrifice and cost.” (See Appendix G for sample worksheet)
**Step 3: Panel Descriptions**

Next the writer takes each plot page and plans out the story per individual panel, adding details along the way. By the end of the plotting step, estimating three to six panels per page, this will result in 25-50 panel descriptions. Here is an example from page seven (resolution/climax) using the story from Seven Samurai: Panel 1: “Bandits are shown riding toward the village to plunder as usual,” Panel 2: “The villagers and samurai lie in wait to surprise attack the bandits,” Panel 3: “The villagers and samurai attack and kill some of the lead bandits,” Panel 4: “More fighting in which some villagers are killed by bandits,” Panel 5: “The fighting continues and one of the samurai is killed.” (See Appendix H for sample worksheet)

**Step 4: Roughing In**

The penciller takes the descriptions made by the writer and goes to work, roughing in (lightly sketching) the main action of each panel, translating words into pictures. Background detail will come later. Pencillers and their assistants (other group members) will need some drawing support. It is useful for pencillers to use HB or B lead pencils for roughing in. Erasers will be necessary since this is a rough draft. Eight sheets of A4 paper should be enough for this step. It might be helpful to remind the pencillers to leave room for captions and dialogue.

**Step 5: Captions and Dialogue**

Working from the written panel descriptions and penciller’s roughs, the writer creates a first draft of captions and dialogue. Captions, typically placed inside rectangles (or runners) at the top of a panel, provide information on character background, setting, and time shifts. Dialogue is placed in different types of word balloons, and it tells what characters say, think, and feel. The first draft of the text is down on the same sheet as the panel descriptions (below or to the right or each description), not on the panel roughs, because words and visuals will often change during the revision process.

Before starting the final draft the group should edit the rough draft by checking all the panels and text to make sure there are no errors. For example, the panels need to be checked so that all of the characters look the same in all of the panels. The group needs to make sure that the captions and dialogues make sense. The narration and captions need to be checked for proper grammar, punctuation, spelling, and capitalization.

**Step 6: Finishing: Lettering, Inking, and Coloring**

Lettering is the process of adding the written text to the final draft. The letters can be written using an H or HB pencil. An alternative to lettering is to do all the text on a computer, print it out and cut and paste everything into caption blocks and word balloons. Lettering is usually done in all caps. The next step in the process is inking. After the comic is fully drawn, written, and lettered, it’s ready for inking. However, another option is to leave it in pencil. Once the inking has been completed the students might want to color the comic and this process is known as coloring. The last step involves adding a front and back cover. One option for the cover is copying and enlarging a scene from one of the panels. Another option is to make an original cover. For the back cover students can use a blank, make a small logo, present a staff box or make their own advertisement.

**Conclusion**

Comics can be used in a variety of ways as motivating input to capture student interest. As discussed earlier, there is significant theoretical backing for using this type of comprehensible
input with second language learners. Using authentic comics can reflect the rewards of progressive literacy by motivating students to learn. Furthermore, comics can provide a valuable opportunity for interaction in English. There are a number of activities that reflect brain-based learning, which could be used as the main focus of a course by having students make their own comics or simply can be incorporated into other lessons as a warm-up or extension activities during regular classroom instruction.

**Biographical Statement**

**Patrick McCoy** is currently teaching English in the School of Global Japanese Studies at Meiji University in Tokyo. He has a M.A. degree in Education from Western Washington University. He has been teaching in Japan for 13 years and 10 years at the university level. He is originally from Washington state in the US. His research interests include authentic materials, methodology, and Japanese film. He has presented at Teachers Helping Teachers events in both Bangladesh and Kyrgyzstan.

**References**


Appendix A

Make-A-Title

Read the following comic strips and discuss the meaning with your partner, then come up with a title.

1. From Calvin and Hobbes

   "THE CHAMELEON SITS. MOTIONLESS."
   "AMAZINGLY, THE LIZARD CHANGES COLOR TO BLEND IN WITH HIS SURROUNDINGS."
   "MOMENTS LATER, HE IS VIRTUALLY INVISIBLE."
   "I SEE YOU WORKING BACK THERE! NOW COME CLEAN UP THIS MESS YOU MADE IN THE KITCHEN!"

   Title:

2. From Peanuts

   "YOU'RE WHAT?
   "I'M GOING HOME TO PLAY THE PIANO."
   "YOU'RE WHAT?
   "I'M MORE INTERESTED IN BASEBALL!"
   "YOU'RE WHAT?
   "SO I'M GOING TO GIVE UP BASEBALL AND GO HOME AND PLAY THE PIANO!"
   "YOU'RE WHAT?
   "AH, DO YOU USE THIS ROOM AS A BASEBALL CHANDLERY?"

   Title:

3. From Garfield

   "THERE IS NOTHING LIKE A FRESH VEGETABLE"
   "AND LET'S KEEP IT THAT WAY!"

   Title:
Appendix B

Add-A-Panel

What happens next? Add a panel to the comic strip to continue the story.

The Duplex by Glenn McCoy

[Cartoon panels with characters and dialogue]

[Blank panel for user to add a panel]
Appendix C

Comic: Jigsaw B

A.

B.

C.
Appendix D

Fill-It-Up

*Fill in the dialogue and captions for this series of panels.*
Appendix E

NEXT, I CALLED MY MOTHER AT MY AUNT’S HOUSE IN VANCOUVER.
HELLO, MOM! HOW ARE YOU?
MOM, I HAVE SOME VERY BIG NEWS TO TELL YOU... I’M GETTING MARRIED.
MUCH BETTER NOW THAT I’VE HEARD YOUR VOICE!
YOU’RE GETTING MARRIED? BUT TO WHOM??

WHO DO YOU THINK TO, REZA, OF COURSE!
BUT YOU ARE STILL TOO YOUNG! LISTEN YOU WAIT UNTIL I GET BACK. I’LL BE THERE IN THREE WEEKS. WE’LL TALK ABOUT IT AGAIN THEN.

SO?
WELL, SHE DOESN’T APPROVE.
I HALF EXPECTED THAT... IT’S NOT SERIOUS, I’LL TALK TO HER. DON’T WORRY.

I NEVER KNEW WHAT THEY SAID TO EACH OTHER, NEVERTHLESS WHEN MY MOTHER GOT BACK TO TEBRIZ...
ON MY DARLING, I’LL MAKE ALL THE ARRANGEMENTS. THIS CEREMONY MUST BE WORTHY OF YOU.
Appendix F

Log line:

Title:

Time:

Setting:

Characters:

Conflict/Problem:

Plan/Action Steps:

Resolution/Climax:

Coda/Moral:
Appendix G

Making Comics:
Page Plots
EXAMPLE:
Page 1: the when, where, and who of the story
   (Edo Period, Japan, small village, farmers, samurai, bandits)

Page 2-3: the conflict
   (bandits raid the village for their food and valuables)

Page 4-6: action steps
   (the villagers hire samurai to protect their village from the bandits)

Page 7: resolution
   (the samurai protect the village but some of them are killed)

Page 8: moral/coda/upshot
   (good prevails over evil but not without some sacrifice and cost)

YOUR TURN:

Page 1: the when, where, and who of the story

Page 2-3: the conflict

Page 4-6: action steps

Page 7: resolution

Page 8: moral/coda/upshot