

**Developments in Business Simulation and Experiential Learning, Volume 28, 2001**  
**DIFFERENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE SAME THING: AN**  
**EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISE**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This experiential exercise shows one half a class the sequence A – B – C and shows the other half 12 – 13 – 14. The letter B and the number 13 are modified in a manner that enables the exact same symbol to be used for both. The class is then divided into groups based upon which sequence they saw and are given a task. The task is the creation of an advertisement to attract four-year-olds to a daycare, based upon the middle figure of the three-item sequence they saw. After presenting their advertisements, the students rate the effectiveness of their classmates, based upon how effectively they used the middle figure. These ratings are reviewed and the influence of perceptions and how to address differences in them are discussed in the debriefing.*

**INTRODUCTION**

A basic premise in behaviorally focused courses is that we function in a manner consistent with how we perceive things. Telling students this and explaining that we base our decisions upon our perceptions and not upon Areality@ is generally accepted. However, it is not particularly meaningful to most students.

In order to impress students with the implications of this, the following exercise was developed. In essence, the exercise has different groups of students look at the same thing. However, the item they are looking at is placed in different contexts, resulting in different perceptions of that item. They are then asked to complete a task based upon what they saw. The other students then assess their performance. The differences in their evaluations, which are based upon their differing perceptions, are discussed.

**INSTRUCTIONS**

The exercise starts with the following instructions. You have been hired by the owner of a daycare to develop an advertisement. The objective of the ad is to interest the parents of four-year-old children to register at this daycare. The owner of the daycare initially insisted that the ad be built upon the three figures in the transparency that I am about to show you. However, after the transparency was created she changed her mind and now requires that the advertisement be built entirely around the middle figure in the transparency. Further, to stimulate creativity, she wants you to work in

groups and have half of you look at the transparency and then have the rest of you look at it.

Ask the students to form into groups of five or quickly create the groups. The group sizes could range from 3 to 7 without any significant impact on the results. The group size may be a function of the number of students in the class and how much time you want to allocate to the groups stating the contents of their advertisements. A total of six groups are probably best, but the exercise will work well with four to eight groups and has been conducted with only two groups. It takes approximately one minute for a group to present their ad.

After the groups are formed, one half of the class is shown the transparency of exhibit 1, which consists of the letters A, B and C. The other half of the class is shown a transparency of exhibit 2, consisting of the numbers 12, 13 and 14. It is important to note the transparencies are not labeled as exhibits. When displaying the transparency, it is helpful to restate the instructions, that they are to develop their advertisement based entirely upon the middle figure. This requires only a few seconds and very shortly after giving these instructions the transparency should be removed. This is done to minimize the amount of time the students have to study the three figures. Unknown to the students at that time is that the figure used to represent the letter B and the number 13 is identical.

There are alternative ways of splitting the class in half. The simplest approach and the one I have used is to ask half the class to close their eyes while displaying the transparency and then repeat the process with the other half. A second method is to have half the class leave, show the transparency and then do the same with the remaining students.

A third approach is to distribute hard copies of exhibit 1 to half the class and exhibit 2 to the others. If this is done, it is recommended that the groups be formed and to distribute the handouts to each group. The instructions could be repeated and then the handouts could be recollected. The explanation for recollecting them so quickly could be that you want to save on printing costs and will be reusing them in future classes. Another purpose of recollecting them quickly is to minimize their being studied and having more people perceive the middle figure as B and 13.

The time given to create the advertisement should be five minutes. This gives enough time to complete the task and avoids having them over analyze it. Inform them that they will be presenting their advertisement to the rest of the class and that the class will evaluate how well they did. The

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Agrading@ for the ads is shown as exhibit 3 and would be the following. How effectively does the ad use the middle figure to interest the parents of four-year-old children to register? Please use the following scale:

1. Poorly
2. Acceptably
3. Good
4. Very Good
5. Excellently

The transparency of exhibit 3 is shown while the teams are developing their ad and while presenting it. After each presentation the students are asked to record their Agrades@ of the others= ad. After all the ads are presented, the Agrades@ are recorded on the transparency.

The reasons for the differences in the Agrades@ are then discussed. This usually leads to a discussion of the importance of perception and how perceptions are formed. The need to exchange one=s perceptions, assumptions, Affects@ and objectives, when the issue is important, is included in the debriefing associated with this exercise.

EXHIBIT 1



EXHIBIT 2

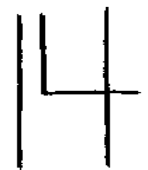
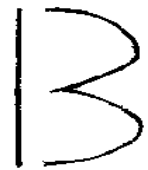


EXHIBIT 3

ASSESSMENT OF ADVERTISEMENTS

How effectively does the ad use the middle figure to interest the parents of four-year-old children to register? Please use the following scale:

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Poorly
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Acceptably
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Good
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Very Good
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Excellently