January 2012

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Illustrating the Perceptual Process Through a Music Video

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ABSTRACT
This exercise uses a popular music video to illustrate the significant role that perception plays in the communication process. Perception is a continual and active process that impacts how people see their world, themselves, others in it, and the ultimate creation of meaning. By using a music video, students are immediately engaged because it is a medium that they are very familiar with. Upon completion of this activity, students will demonstrate a better understanding of how and why people perceive the same thing(s) in a variety of ways. They will also have a tangible example of the centrality and complexity of communication that can be interwoven throughout the class, connected to other classes, and applied to their daily lives.

Objectives

- To illustrate that perception is a complex, continual and active process.
- To explain how common and likely it is for people to perceive common stimuli in different ways.
- To encourage students to examine their personal beliefs, values, attitudes, etc. and how they contribute to their perceptions.

Courses

This assignment is appropriate for an introductory communication course, courses in public speaking, intercultural communication, or any course where perception is examined.

Rationale

Perception plays a key role in the communication process. Since it impacts how people see others, it influences how they ultimately interact with others. As well, how one perceives him/herself plays a significant role in how they see themselves and the world around them. Therefore, perception is an important factor in how people make meaning and draw conclusions. As Wood (2010) explained, perception is the process of selecting, organizing, and interpreting...
information. Perceiving requires people to select certain things and organize and interpret what is noticed. Cherry (2012), reiterated the interactive aspects of perception, saying that it is the “sensory experience of the world around us and involves the recognition of environmental stimuli and actions in response to these stimuli.” It “creates our experience of the world around us and allows us to act within our environment.” (p.1)

In this activity, students will create a common storyline from their viewing of a short music video. Their responses and subsequent class discussion will allow them to see how their personal experiences with the world influence their perceptions.

**Activity Details**

Students will watch a music video called “Save Room” by popular singer, John Legend. The instructor will likely be able to find the video on YouTube. If not, it can be purchased via an online music store for $1.99. This video is appropriate because it depicts the singer in a New York brownstone in relationships with a number of different women. On its surface, it suggests certain conclusions. This activity encourages the students to examine superficial assessment. The video begins with some mild sexual-oriented content, suggesting it is appropriate for students at the junior level of high school and older.

The exercise can take place at the beginning of the perception material as a lead in. It can also be done along with instruction about the perception process or common perceptual tendencies.

The instructor will set up the video before class begins to maximize time. Students will be broken into groups of four or five depending on class size, with one person in charge of writing down the ideas of the group members. First, the video will be viewed with no sound. Typically, it gets a response out of the class because they recognize the singer. Some may even recognize the video and/or know the song. It does not matter if they do or not and does not impact the effectiveness of the assignment. After viewing the video, groups are asked to develop a common description of what they believe is the meaning/plot/storyline being conveyed in the video.

Once they’ve completed their storyline, a member from each group writes it on the blackboard and we all discuss them, examining if there are any similarities and/or differences. Students are encouraged to share their rationale for their conclusions.

Next, the students in the same groups are given the lyrics to the song. They can be found on different song lyrics websites. For this assignment, Lyrics.com was used. Again, after reading and analyzing the lyrics, they are required to determine a common meaning/plot/storyline just from the lyrics. A group member is selected to keep track of the notes and ultimately write the scenario on the board next to their initial summary. We discuss them, determining if there are any common themes shared by the groups and if there are any similarities to the video-based conclusions.
Once all of the summaries are on the board, as stated above, we examine if there were common themes across groups and if there were overlaps between the video storylines and the storylines they developed from the lyrics. Students are required to share their rationale behind the conclusions they drew. Once examined, we also open the discussion to everyone so they can share ideas, comments, and ask questions about how they perceived the video and lyrics the way they did. Many find themselves sharing how their personal life experiences powerfully impacted their rationale for the storyline they created. Just for fun and to provide closure for the students, we watch the video with the sound up. It is not relative to the assignment but the students seem to want that piece.

Assessment

There is no right or wrong answer to this assignment. The fact that there will likely be two or three different scenarios illustrates the primary goals of the assignment. Since perception is so active, continual, and individual, those elements become clear after completing the exercise. The activity has gotten positive responses. Students reported having fun doing it and enjoyed the opportunity to interact with a popular text. They also recognized how perception influences their daily encounters, therefore improving their understanding of the scope of communication.

References