

From: roth_linda

Date: February 3, 2009 12:37:14 PM

To: "Peter DeBenedittis, Ph.D." <peterd@medialiteracy.net>

Subject: Re: Download Lessons - Sample Pack 1

Hi,

I presented your media literacy/Super Bowl lesson to my high school classes and thought you might like to know how it turned out.

Let me first explain to you a little bit about my classes! I co-teach a course called Academic Skills at Dublin Scioto High School. My area is English and my co-teacher's is math. We get the students who are failing at least one, usually more, of their classes. We have all grades, 9 - 12, and most of our students are re-assigned to us each year, so we get to know them pretty well. There are usually a lot of reasons why they are not being successful in school, but the main barrier we run across time and time again is a student's drug/alcohol use. Based on what they tell us, 95% of our students are using drugs/alcohol and a good number of them are problem users. Some even label themselves as addicted and have been to outpatient treatment (inpatient for teens is nearly impossible to find in our area).

We have six academic skills classes and to be honest, I wasn't really sure how our students - kids who are already using drugs/alcohol - would react to the project. Would they be defensive? Roll their eyes and think it's stupid? Tune it out? At the same time, I think teaching media literacy is something we should do MUCH MORE of in our schools... so last Friday, I passed out the log sheets and explained to my students what they were to do. When we came back on Monday, most of the students had not done the log sheets, though most had watched the game. Those who did complete the log sheets typically found only 4 - 5 alcohol promotions within an hour. My co-teacher had also done the log sheet (I was busy downloading commercials during the game!) and practically filled up the whole page with alcohol promotions. There were numerous things our students didn't pick up on - like the blimp sponsored by Budweiser, or the big alcohol logo behind the head of a player being interviewed or the fan in the stands drinking beer.

I followed your lesson and we talked about the enormous amount of money spent on advertising by beer companies, especially Budweiser. We also talked about targeting. When I asked the students who they thought the target audience was for beer ads, some students said people over age 21. In other classes students said college kids or teens. I told them we'd watch some of the beer commercials and try to figure it out. While they really enjoyed watching the commercials, they didn't at first catch any subtle messages being presented - they just thought the ad was selling beer. We'd watch a few commercials and then break them down

and look at what the ad was saying, without coming out and saying it. After viewing most of them, they were getting pretty good and finding the subtle messages and seeing the way they were being targeted in the commercials. They were especially shocked about how many of the ads were directed towards little kids. We got into some really good discussions about it. The most interesting thing is that the class I thought would be the worst (the one with our most serious drug/alcohol abusers) was the best in terms of talking about and contributing to the discussions! They really got into it.

Today we finished up the lesson and talked about the effect alcohol has on their brain and I presented them with the brain scan pic and the statistics you gave in the lesson. My co-teacher has a "Why 21?" talk he does with students on the effect alcohol has on the brain and why they shouldn't drink before age 21, so he threw some of that in too. I also found some of your stats online that you give in your Seduce Me/Binge Drinking presentation that I gave to the students. I was even shocked and surprised at a lot of the stats!

That class I told you about that got really into the discussion? (the students who are heavily involved in drinking and drugs) They were floored by the stats - and didn't believe some of them!! They were not being argumentative or difficult, they really just didn't think it was possible and they also couldn't figure out how you could possibly measure some of those things. They asked some questions that I told them I'd send to you and maybe you'd answer. I think they're mostly curious as to how research is done and how reliable it is.

1. They were absolutely stunned that the alcohol industry makes 5 billion dollars on underage drinkers and didn't think that was possible. They also felt it would be impossible to determine how much underage drinkers spent on alcohol because they got it in a number of ways that didn't involve buying it at the store. They even wondered how you would even know how many underage drinkers there are because they believe most kids would lie about their drinking. We talked about a drug/alcohol survey they do in Dublin with students and how they assume a certain percentage will lie and the questions are built to weed out some of those who are lying. They were still, however incredibly curious as to how a researcher would come up with the numbers - especially for the entire United States.

2. The second thing this class just couldn't believe was that only 1/3 of adults are heavy drinkers and the other 2/3 drink no, or very little alcohol. Again, they didn't know how on earth you could come up with that statistic! Sadly, many of them come from homes where one or both of their parents do drink heavily. Quite a few of them talked about their friends' moms who go out and party. I think in their world, most of the adults around them do drink heavily and sometimes even drink WITH their kids.

This Super Bowl/Media Literacy project was powerful and engaging to my students. I thank you for making it available!! You have truly opened up their eyes and given them a new perspective on the media!!!

As you know, times are tough everywhere, but I plan to look into the possibility of bringing you out to our school district. We have a parent group called PERC (PARENTS ENCOURAGING RESPONSIBLE CHOICES) that works to raise money to bring speakers to our students and parents. I am going to contact them tonight to give you my endorsement and encourage them to check out your website.

Thanks again,

Linda Roth

On Feb 3, 2009, at 7:31 PM, Peter DeBenedittis, Ph.D. wrote:

Hi Linda,

What a powerful testimony you sent to me. Thank you! I'm touched that my work is making a difference for some of your kids. With your permission, I'd love to convert your letter into a .pdf file and have it available on my web site to inspire other teacher. Have fun when you share these responses with your students.

To answer your questions:

>1. They were absolutely stunned that the alcohol industry makes 5 billion dollars on underage drinkers and didn't think that was possible.

There's a couple of ways to determine how much sales are accounted for by minors. The easiest is to take the SAMHSA (substance abuse and mental health services administration within the US Gov, National Institutes of Health) numbers and simply divide out drinking percents by age group. SAMHSA does a study every 4 years where they ask 200,000 people to log every drink they have for 30 days. It's the most accurate and comprehensive alcohol consumption study there is. You then take the total alcohol sales (Adams Liquor Handbook) and you know how much is accounted for by teens.

>They also felt it would be impossible to determine how much underage drinkers spent on alcohol because they got it in a number of ways that didn't involve buying it at the store.

It's unimportant whether or not the minor actually buys the beer, as long as minors consume it, then it still counts towards sales profit for the company. Keep in mind that total beer sales in the US for 1 year are \$60 Billion. \$5 Billion is hardly much at all. Also the older a person gets, the less he or she drinks. So by the time kids are out of college or the military, their drinking barely registers compared to the amounts younger age groups consume.

>They even wondered how you would even know how many underage drinkers there are because they believe most kids would lie about their drinking.

The surveys given to kids have internal check questions that need to be consistently answered or else the questionnaire is flagged for possible lying. Also, the types of questions and selection criteria for respondents have been tested for decades to ensure accurate data is collected. Kids, who are very smart, don't quite understand that researchers have been at this for decades. Kids only have a few years to perfect their lying. Researchers have years of education and a whole long history of survey techniques and published reports to draw from, so they are a few steps ahead of the kids. Also, not every kid is a paranoid as the ones asking this question. Researchers know the ratio of the truth tellers to the ones who think they should lie and are able to extrapolate the data.

>2. The second thing this class just couldn't believe was that only 1/3 of adults are heavy drinkers and the other 2/3 drink no, or very little alcohol. Again, they didn't know how on earth you could come up with that statistic! Sadly, many of them come from homes where one or both of their parents do drink heavily. Quite a few of them talked about their friends' moms who go out and party. I think in their world, most of the adults around them do drink heavily and sometimes even drink WITH their kids.

Kids know how their friends drink and they know how their families drink. They don't know how the whole country drinks. They don't see all the families that go to the hundreds of thousands of churches in the US that don't drink. They don't see the millions of people in AA who have given up drinking. They see what's on TV. Which is why there's so many ads targeting them. Remember, nearly half of alcohol companies profits come from a very small percentage of drinkers. They don't need to convince everyone. Just having a few people think that excessive drinking is normal gives them all the profits they can handle. The fact that your kids are so incredulous is a pretty good indication that they are prime targets of the message alcohol companies are selling. And the alcohol companies know that kids who buy into it, will be heavy drinkers for years to come. That's why your work is so important. It teaches those who can't see beyond their immediate circumstance how the game has been rigged to lie to them and convince them to

believe falsehoods about drinking. Your kids seem quite aware that they lie about drinking. Have they stopped to consider that alcohol companies lie also? And that they have nearly a century of practice doing so, as well as teams of psychologists on their payrolls helping them perpetuate these lies.

Be well.

Peter D.

From: roth_linda

Date: February 4, 2009 7:35:00 AM

To: "Peter DeBenedittis, Ph.D." <peterd@medialiteracy.net>

Subject: Re: Download Lessons - Sample Pack 1

By all means feel free to use what I said in my email.

I shared the responses with my students today!

It was the "challenging" class that had asked them. It's often hard to get them settled down and focused, but when I said I heard back from you, they immediately got quiet and wanted to know what you said. They listened. (!) I thought maybe they would be defensive or mad or say it was just a bunch of *#%! ... but your answers were very respectful and didn't talk down to them at all. After I read all of your responses, one student nodded his head and said, "That makes sense" and the rest of the class chimed in in agreement. I also think that the fact you got back to them immediately with answers made them feel important and that their questions and opinions matter.

We appreciate you answering the questions and getting back to us so quickly!

Thanks again!

Linda Roth