

PsychBusters

Mythbusters

Burkley and Burkley (2009) described (in an article titled *Mythbusters: A tool for teaching research methods in psychology*) a learning activity that involves using several clips from the Discovery Channel television show Mythbusters. The researchers played 4 four clips for students through out the semester. After each clip, students met in small groups and answered questions about the methods used in the clip. Then the class as a whole discussed the clips. There were no control groups and the authors concluded the approach was successful because students performed better on Mythbusters questions on the exam compared to “control items.” Student had a positive evaluation of the Mythbusters clips.

Psychbusters

The PsychBusters activity originally applied the Mythbusters concept to an Introductory Psychology class. It is drawn from the Blessing and Blessing (2010) article *PsychBusters: A means of fostering critical thinking in the introductory course*. In the activity students were asked to select a psychological claim from the media like “listening to Mozart makes you smarter”. Students then investigated the claim using psychological journal findings and presented their results to class deciding if the myth was “confirmed,” “plausible,” or “busted.” The authors found some improvements in students’ ability to dissect similar claims after the project and students had favorable opinions of the project. The study did include a control condition for comparison.

All materials for this assignment—including two example assignments, a pre-test and a post-test--are available for download from Steven Blessing’s website at <http://utweb.ut.edu/hosted/faculty/sblessing/psychology resources/>.

PsychBusters in a Social Psychology Class at U Memphis

William Zachry used the PsychBusters activity in a section of Honors Social Psychology (Spring 2011) at The University of Memphis. The project required students to be active learners by doing the following tasks:

1. Define the terms in the “myth”.
2. Do a preliminary literature search for relevant articles.
3. Hold several discussion meetings to present and evaluate the literature.
4. Draw conclusions about the validity of the “myth”.
5. Create and make a team oral presentation with PowerPoint to the class.
6. Answer questions after the presentation in class and on the online Discussion Board.
7. Write a 7-10 page research paper based on their literature search and conclusions.
8. Respond to the other team presentations by asking questions or making comments on the Discussion Board after each presentation.

In a class of 20 students, five teams researched different “myths” throughout the semester.

The course syllabus included this information:

PsychBusters: Throughout the semester we will do a series of PsychBusters activities. The concept is based loosely on the Myth Busters television series in which common beliefs are put to experimental test to determine their validity. We will study 6-7 such psychological “myths” and determine whether they are “confirmed”, “plausible”, or “busted.” You will work in teams of 3-4 students to gather research evidence on one particular myth and make a presentation to the class on your findings....All class members will comment on the myth prior to your presentation, using the eCourseware Discussion Board for this purpose. PsychBusters small groups will have a separate, private Chat room on eCourseware to assist in collaboration....You will write a research paper based on your PsychBusters activity. This paper will be 7-10 pages in length and contain a minimum of five scholarly references.

The instructor provided students with a list of psychological “myths” and assigned students to teams based on their interest in researching particular “myths”. Students chose a name for their teams and began work on the project early in the semester.

Team names and topics were as follows:

February 8 – Team Unconscious

- **Unconscious attitudes affect behavior but cannot be measured.**

March 1 – Team Scream

- **Fear is an effective way to persuade people to change their beliefs or behaviors.**

March 24 – Team Risky Business

- **Groups generally make riskier decisions than individuals do.**

April 5 – Team Mafia

- **The presence of weapons in a situation increases the chances of violent behavior.**

April 12 – Team Violence

- **Violent video games have little or no effect on people’s attitudes and behavior.**

April 19 – Team Opposites

- **Opposites attract**

No formal evaluation of learning outcomes was made in this course. Informally the students were enthusiastic about the activity and the instructor was particularly impressed with the quality of the oral presentations and the team members’ responses to comments and questions, both in class and on the Discussion Board.

References

Blessing, Stephen B. and Blessing, Jennifer S.(2010) 'PsychBusters: A Means of Fostering Critical Thinking in the Introductory Course', *Teaching of Psychology*, 37, 178-182

Burkley, E., & Burkley, M. (2009). Mythbusters: A tool for teaching research methods in psychology. *Teaching of Psychology*, 36, 179–184.