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Argumentation Analysis Presentation: Evaluating rhetoric-in-action

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Using a small group project format, students conduct a close analysis of a persuasive message (a speech, an editorial, a position statement, etc.) Referring to models of argumentation, e.g., Toulmin (1958), Eemeren & Grootendorst (2004), Rieke, Sillars, & Peterson (2012), the team members work cooperatively to examine the communicator's rhetorical choices in structuring claims, selecting data, and establishing warrants. After assessing the effectiveness of the message, each team presents its findings to the class. This activity accomplishes several additional learning objectives, including: collaborative learning, critical analysis, applied communication, reinforcement of classic rhetorical canons and/or Aristotelian forms of artistic proof, and an opportunity for student presentation.

Pedagogical Rationale

This *Great Idea For Teaching Students* addresses the challenge of engaging students in the principles of argumentation, as it is commonly manifested in western cultural contexts. The activity corresponds to curricular content in a variety of courses such as rhetorical studies, group discussion, and persuasive speaking. Using a group project format, students examine a communicator's rhetorical choices in structuring claims, selecting data, and establishing warrants, leading to an assessment of the effectiveness and implications of the resultant message. This activity accomplishes several overlapping learning objectives, including: collaborative learning, critical analysis, applied communication, reinforcement of classic rhetorical canons and/or Aristotelian forms of artistic proof, and an opportunity for student presentational experience.

Procedure

Small teams are formed and charged with the task of cooperatively analyzing an oral or written persuasive artifact which they select with guidance from the instructor. Work sessions occur both in and outside of the classroom. In order to dissect the message's claims, supports, and warrants, the teams apply a studied model of argumentation, e.g., Toulmin (1958), Eemeren & Grootendorst (2004),

Rieke, Sillars, & Peterson (2012). Finally, the teams create a brief presentation for sharing their findings with the class.

Typical results

These multipart presentations reinforce the principles of logic and reasoning which are prominent in western culture's communication structures. In addition, the collaborative workshop atmosphere tends to reduce communication apprehension and encourages more extemporaneous delivery. In general, the presentations are 15-20 minutes long and consist of explanations of the message's core rhetorical structure, methods of audience adaptation, and discussion of the message's effectiveness (or lack of same). These presentations are supported by a computer graphics slide show.

References

Eemeren, F. H. van & Grootendorst, R. (2004). *A systematic theory of argumentation. The pragma-dialectical approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rieke, R. D., Sillars, M. O. & Peterson, T. R. (2012). *Argumentation and critical decision making*. Boston, MA: Pearson.

Toulmin, S. (1958). *The uses of argument*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Activity inspired by Oral Communication/Oral Rhetoric faculty within the Dept. of Communication & the Arts at Seton Hall University

Sample Assignment Handout

Argumentation Analysis Presentation: Evaluating rhetoric-in-action

RATIONALE: Effective speakers often analyze the speech texts of others in order to understand and strengthen their own use of rhetorical techniques. Similarly, your goal in this group workshop + presentation is to examine an actual message which contains a specific goal of communicating-to-influence.

SELECTION: Your group can study either a written or an oral persuasive artifact (such as an editorial, an oratory, a response in a presidential debate, an advertisement, etc.) If necessary, groups will be assigned a specific rhetorical artifact for analysis but it is preferred that group members reach a consensus about which item to select. To facilitate your brainstorming/decision process, a list of ideas will be posted by your professor.

PROCEDURE:

1. Individually, each group member will review the selected item/artifact and take notes about the persuasive/rhetorical techniques being used.
2. Together with your group members, you will examine the item's/artifact's method of structuring the actual argumentation.
3. Referring to the basic parts of an argument as explained by Toulmin (or any similar model of reasoning: e.g. Rieke, Sillars, & Peterson or Eemeren & Grootendorst) the group will dissect the message's argument(s).
4. Once you've determined the framework of the message's supports (Claims-Warrant-Data) and considered whether that argument works (or doesn't work), the group will create a brief presentation which includes these components:
 - a) A summary of the selection's original message
 - b) An analysis of the selection's introduction-connectives-conclusion techniques (e.g., signposts, transitions between the artifacts sections and a conclusion-summary)
 - c) Using a basic model of argumentation (e.g., Toulmin's [C-W-D]), an explanation of the message's core rhetorical structure
 - d) A discussion of the techniques for audience-centeredness used by the writer/speaker
 - e) The group's argumentation of whether or not the message is effective in its use of "LOGOS" by identifying the *Claim* & showing how it is (or is not) supported.

- f) A brief presentation slide show (no more than 4/5 slides, total). At least one slide should be a breakdown of the Toulmin model as applied for the message of your selected item.

FOR SUBMISSION: Each group should submit a printout of the slides [six slides per page/two-sided printing]. At least two bibliography sources are required for this presentation—one of which will be a citation for the artifact that you are analyzing. Additional sources should pertain to works which discuss techniques of rhetoric, persuasion and/or argumentation. You can begin by checking your text’s bibliography.

GRADING: Project Presentations will be graded with emphasis on the following criteria:

- Clearly identifiable organization (e.g., “disposition”), including introduction, body, and conclusion, as well as appropriate connectives
- Strong residual message (i.e., clear critique of artifact’s message’s effective/ ineffective use of argumentation)
- Accurate understanding of argumentation principles, including identification of data, claims, and warrants
- Some amount of oral participation by each group member demonstrating appropriate oral communication techniques: including techniques of “vivid” language style [such as audience-centered language, figures of speech, description, illustration, & adapting to the context (e.g., “invention”)
- Articulate, extemporaneous delivery by group members
- 15-20 minutes long

Some Sample artifacts:

- ▶ A Presidential Inaugural address
- ▶ A radio or television Public Service Announcement
- ▶ A print or broadcast advertisement
- ▶ A periodical publication’s editorial or letter-to-the-editor
- ▶ A keynote speech
- ▶ A film/video documentary
- ▶ An Attack advertisement/Advocacy advertisement