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English 400-13

Rhetorical Analysis

**Rhetorical Analysis of why games are making kids smarter**

The Ted Talk video, “How games make kids smarter” by Gabe Zicherman shows how video games are making kids better problem-solvers and can make them better at everything from driving to multi-tasking. He suggests that today’s video games are making children smarter and we should all embrace what he calls “Gamification.” Zicherman points out “that kids need to have extraordinary multitasking skills to be able to achieve things today”. Zicherman also, says “in the games kid’s play today they are expected to chat in text and voice, operate a character, follow long- and short-term objectives while dealing with their parents interrupting them all the time to talk to them” (Zicherman). This shows that kids need to have extraordinary multitasking skills to be able to achieve things today.

**Methods**

In his Ted Talk, Zicherman first sets the stage by talking about his experiences in the video gaming business. He talks about a game called “Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego?” Zicherman describes “how awesome it was for him, and how it was the first time he played a game in a school context”. Zicherman declares “that this game is probably the most important video game ever made because it was the first and last time that parents, teachers, and kids all agreed that a video game was awesome”. Zicherman stated this in 1987. He also points out that “this game is the last significant hit in the video game entertainment business”. Zicherman managed to “turn this love of video gaming into a job, by helping to start the first successful digital distribution company in games, and now he is writing the Gamification blogs”. He is an author of two books on the subject of “Gamification” (Zicherman).

The model used for this rhetorical analysis is based upon the notions of ethos, pathos and logos and how Zicherman uses these to help support his arguments and to convince his audience. Logos is an attempt to appeal to his audience by reason. Pathos is an appeal to the emotions of the audience. Lastly, ethos is the speaker trying to convince his audience that he is someone to be believed, that he is of good character and they should trust him.

**Analysis**

Games being played primarily for entertainment are played by what Zicherman calls “Generation G”. “Generation G” is reshaping industries because of how things are changing so rapidly. Zicherman than takes “Generation G” a step further and turns it into a pattern called “Gamification.” Gamification is “the process of using game thinking and game mechanics to engage audiences and solve problems”. Zicherman says “the reason it has become a huge topic is because of the Generation G effect on culture and society”. This is a good example of a Bandwagon Appealsince the younger generation today is labeled “Generation G” (Zicherman).

A question that he asks is who needs games help? He looked into some research cited in the New York Times and found “a neuroscientist that was talking about how children were presenting themselves with attention deficit disorder”. Research by Arne May et al at the University of Regensburg in Germany found “that when they gave participants simple tasks to learn like juggling, in 12 weeks the people who were asked to learn juggling displayed a marked increase in gray matter in their brain”. Then in 2008, Arne stated, “they went back and redid the study to see why the gray matter increased and they discovered it was the act of learning that produced the increased brain matter” (Zicherman). It was not the activity itself which was an interesting finding.

This leads us to the Flynn effect. Zicherman explains “that the Flynn effect is a pattern that human intelligence is rising over time”. Zicherman went further with this and stated: “when looking into the history of IQ it shows that people are getting smarter”. In the US right now “the average IQ is rising at .36 points of IQ per year”. Games are wired to produce a particular kind of reaction in people. Zicherman stated that “people also have a strong dopamine loop in the brain and when you are challenging yourself dopamine is released in your brain”. “That produces an intrinsic reinforcement”. Further research from Zicherman also stated, “this produces an effect that causes you to go back and keep seeking that activity over and over again” (Zicherman). This is an example of “**Dicto Simpliciter** in which video games make kids smarter”.

Throughout his speech, he uses other people as his sources and explains how their information helps illustrate how video games that kids play can make them smarter. His sources include Andrea Kuszewski and Ananth Pai.

Andrea Kuszewski looks at “five things that people did to increase their grey matter and to teach themselves to increase their fluid intelligence”.Kuszewski defines fluid intelligence as “the intelligence we use to problem-solve”.Kuszewski identifies five things you can do to help fluid intelligence. The five things are; “seek novelty, challenge yourself, think creatively, do things the hard way, and network”. Kuszewski thinks “these are five things that occur in all very successful video games”. “It also is connected to a constant increase in learning” (Zicherman). The games are constantly changing and moving forward.

Ananth Pai was “a very successful business person who worked on the process re-engineering”. Pai also said, "when his kids went to school, he saw flaws in the education system and decided he wanted to do something about it”. To do that, Pai “went back to school to get his master’s in education and then took over a class at White Bear Lake elementary school”. “He then replaced the standard curriculum with a video game-based curriculum of his design, while separating the kids into learning styles and giving them Nintendo DS's and computer games”. The games he gave his students were “both individual and social to play that taught them math and language”. Pai concluded that “ in 18 weeks his class went from a below third-grade level in reading and math to a mid-fourth grade level in reading and math” (Zicherman).

I would have to say that there is a balanced use of the three classic rhetorical appeals in this Ted Talk video. I would also say this video has a couple of logical fallacies. Zicherman makes “a hasty generalization that games will help kids”. There is a claim of “study after study” but with no citation or source. This could be an example of Ad Populum since he makes his living selling games. He urges parents “to play video games with their kids”. Zicherman also states that “one side effect of having the parents play video games with their kids is not getting things done around the house”. The good part about playing video games with the kids is seeing how they think and act but also the bonding experience. Zicherman appeals to pity by telling people that we should let kids play more video games, only because it is going to make them smarter. A problem with kids playing more video games is that they may become addicted to electronics. This Ted Talk video communicates its message by trying to show that video games require a lot of multitasking skills that will help kids improve in their ability to do things in the world today. Video games will likely help them with texting, chatting, and to follow long- and short-term objectives. Today kids do have to have an extraordinary set of multitasking skills to succeed. Gabe explains his prescription for what he wants everyone to do. He says –“Get into the game with your kids.” He doesn’t want parents fighting the games, he wants parents to become one with the game. He wants parents to understand how the games are becoming a useful thing in helping children become smarter.

Zicherman uses appeals to logos and refers to sources he found to help support his statement. He points out that people are fighting game trends and not understanding why games are important. He says “the only way to understand the games your kids are playing is to get involved with them”. Zicherman wants parents to stop fighting the game trends and “become one with the game. Enter the game and understand the game, understand the dynamics of how your children play the games, understand how their minds work from the context of the game outward, rather than from the world outside inward” (Zicherman). You will then see how the children use their brains. He concludes that if kids don’t have the multitasking skills down very well they are going to struggle.

Throughout the Ted Talk video, he uses pathos to convince his audience of why they need to stop fighting the game trend. He expresses himself by saying “If you have children or work with children or desire to work with children or you want to change the world, then you need to get into the game with your kids” (Zicherman). This is him telling you that he wants people to help change others' lives by doing what helps. Zicherman is very passionate about what he does and how it affects others as well. He also mentions “that if you do what he says then you will be able to see your kids changing slowly”. He states “this will help you see how your kids are becoming smarter with the video games they play” (Zicherman). He is speaking about how he feels when you are working and playing with the children.

Lastly, he uses **ethos** by trying to convince the audience that the kids are going to be just fine and that there is no reason to worry about the kids and the effect it will have on the world. Zicherman refers to "study after study" that has shown “that violent video games do not make children violent”. Although he does admit that if one tends to be violent, it might make them better at it. He is trying to get the parents to watch and get involved in the games as they see their kids becoming smarter. He again ends his talk by urging the audience to “get into the game” with their kids, and they will see the benefits. Zicherman says to the parent’s “I’m here to tell you: the kids are alright. They are going to be just fine and we don’t need to worry about kids and games and the effects it will have on the world. The kids will be awesome, but it’s going to take your help to make the kids awesome”.

**Conclusion**

As a future teacher, you are always looking around to see what other people are doing and ideas you can use to help your future students out. Over the years I have seen more and more teachers starting to let their students use electronics in the classroom and also outside of school. I like how more and more teachers are doing this because it is helping the students become more engaged in the learning process. While surfing the internet, I found this Ted Talk video that discussed how video games are making kids smarter, and it caught my attention. Most people would argue that video games do not make kids smarter, however, you can argue it. Zicherman claims that “study after study very clearly tells us that violent games do not make children violent”. But if you have children that are “predisposed to violence, then violent games could make them a better violent child”. For the overall audience, I would say it's for everyone who has kids or even wants to work with kids.

Work cited

Zichermann, Gabe, director. How Games Make Kids Smarter. TED, www.ted.com/talks/gabe\_zichermann\_how\_games\_make\_kids\_smarter#t-442093.