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ENGL101-BL09

October 22, 2015

Rhetorical Analysis

While trying to find a proper article to respond to for this paper, you'd be surprised how many articles I went through. Most were incredibly biased; the author acted as if they had inability to view the any stance on the issues, basically equating laptops to Satan. Others beat around the bush -- I'm not so sure they even knew their position. Instead the authors tried to go beyond pro and con and offer a new solution in an effort to sound more scholarly. However, neither of these were the case for Professor James Loeffler's article titled "Professor: I Banned Laptops from the Lecture Hall" and published by TIME. Loeffler chose to make his stance of banning the use of laptops in the classroom heard on the emerging debate of whether the use of laptops should be allowed in college level classrooms. As a stakeholder in the argument himself, being a professor of history at the University of Virginia, he sees this as a decision Universities need to stop putting off and take a real stance. Seeing that the laptop revolution on college campuses is kicking into gear, Professor Loeffler points out that the technology has come too fast for the policies associated with its use to keep up. In Loeffler's article, not only was he able to strongly convey his position on the use of laptops in the classroom through use of pathos and logos, he was able to present, and in some aspects support, the counterargument which resulted in a compelling persuasive piece.

To leave no debate as to his position on the issue, Loeffler doesn't hesitate to state his position against the use of laptops. In fact, his position on the argument can be neatly summarized by his concluding sentence. He explains that while "laptops may make us better at multitasking... they undermine the radically simple mission of higher education: learning" (Loeffler). I love the way he manages to portray his position. In no way does he try to refute the usefulness of laptops. He explains in this quote, as well as multiple other places in the article, how wonderful of educational resources laptops can act as; not only do they help students multitask, but he also explains that outside-of-class "Course forums add significantly to class participation in courses" (Loeffler). He manages to present the counterarguments in such a way that they do not take away from his position that laptops should be banned from the classroom. You don't even realize, but while you're reading he's secretly showing you that what you thought to be the counterarguments actually are not counterarguments at all. But how does he do that? Isn't the whole point of a counter argument supposed to show the viewpoint of someone with a conflicting opinion? Well yes, that's what I also thought up until I read this article. Loeffler cleverly deflects the counterarguments, showing that while they perfectly true and credible, they only truly apply to students when outside the classroom. This writing strategy, albeit well executed, isn't a new one. Graff and Birkenstein actually state in their book, They Say, I Say, that a good summarization of another's viewpoint "has a focus or spin that allows the summary to fit with your own agenda while still being true to the [view] you are summarizing" (34). When applied to Loeffler's article, this principle applies perfectly; Loeffler states the opposing viewpoint while still being "true" to his own position (Graff 34).

One great example of deflecting counterarguments is when he uses logos to compare the speed of typing and writing notes. He doesn't beat around the bush, he openly states the counterargument: "we can type faster than we write." The use of this truth contributes to the logos of this piece as well as removing some of the bias perceived by the reader. He doesn't try to dispute student typing speed; he just plainly agrees that students are increasingly capable of taking more notes when typing rather than writing. But then he makes the reader think whether this is actually a benefit in the first place with his following sentence. Loeffler then uses logos to persuade the reader, as seen by when he states that when students use laptops instead of the classic pencil and paper to take notes "documenting lectures simply becomes a mindless form of data acquisition. The essential skill of discernment, of determining what is important and what is not, gets lost in a world of students turned secretaries." Instead of trying to dispute the counterargument, he deflects it, pointing out to the reader a position they probably never considered before: Maybe more notes doesn't equal better notes. When students mindlessly type down notes they forget how we were taught to take notes since we were young. Everyone had that Highschool teacher who would say "I'm going to explain very fast. Don't try to write down the entire PowerPoint slide. Instead just write down the important parts." That way when the test came around you only had 4 pages of essential notes to study compared to 12 pages of mostly fluff. Loeffler just manages to incorporate a rule every student has engrained into their mind to support his own viewpoint that written notes are the best type of notes, leading to a very effective use of logos in his piece.

However, craftily distorting counterarguments is not Loeffler only talent; he is also a master of supporting his declared his position with positive, real-world results. Being a professor

himself, he had the ability to try out banning laptops on his own students and confirm his speculations. He was struck by criticism and resilience when he initially told his students “that to study distant lands and ages past [Because he was a history teacher], you can’t be floating around in cyberspace.” This resistance wasn’t very prolonged though. He found that, by the end of the course “Many students are relieved” and learned more in the process. Not only that, he was able to confirm his suspicions that laptops decrease constructiveness of the classroom when students started asking big picture questions they had not previously asked. Instead of asking questions relating directly to what was being written, students were extending their knowledge by picking out the most important parts of the lecture and making inferences; Instead of mindlessly typing away on their laptops, students were asking questions and getting a deeper understanding of what was being taught even though they were writing down less notes in the process. These results, when combined with Loeffler’s previous arguments and points show the reader a new perspective not offered by most other writers on the topic.

Loeffler also adds a unique touch to his writing which is often not seen in persuasive writing. Though he does not hesitate to ban laptops in class, he mentions that he is actually an advocate of out of class laptop use, going so far as to say “technology is an invaluable teaching aid.” At first this statement makes the reader question him; why would a professor ban laptops in the classroom if he feels they actually benefit their learning? He clears this question up rather quickly by showing the reader that laptops can be useful, but only at the right time and place. That place, in his opinion, is outside the classroom. He doesn’t blindly support this opinion though; he appeals to the reader’s logos by providing real-world results of discussion boards, much like he did when he mentioned typing notes. According to Loeffler, Outside of class

“forums add significantly to class participation in courses without dedicated discussion sections.”

So while laptops may be detrimental to students when used during class, they can provide a huge benefit when used to reinforce learning outside of class. I find this argument, along with his use of an anecdote about actual student experiences, strengthens his piece by eliminating the bias perceived by the reader. I say this because the argument appeals directly to a students' pathos by showing that while laptop use inside class is not in their self-interest, laptop use outside of class is. Instead of Loeffler just saying his own opinion, he convinces the reader he is just making the best decision for the students. If that means laptop use outside of class but not during it, then he is all for it.

Loeffler utilizes an array of literary tools throughout his essay not only to support his own position on the argument, but also argue and distort the other side of the argument. He begins by appealing to the readers logos, showing them his findings of the effect laptop use has had on his students. He does not stop there though; He then cleverly points out major counterarguments against the use of laptop use and carefully manipulates them to support his own opinion. He even goes so far as to mention the usefulness of laptops when used outside of the classroom by students. Overall, I find that Loeffler's expert use of literary devices, especially his use of pathos and logos, combine to produce a compelling persuasive essay voicing his own side on the pressing issue of laptop use in the collegiate classroom.

Works Cited

Loeffler, James. "Professor: I Banned Laptops from the Lecture Hall." *TIME Magazine*. TIME Inc., 9 Oct. 2013. Web. 18 Oct. 2015.

Graff, Gerald, and Cathy Birkenstein. *They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2008. Print.

Reflection

This essay provided me with a different experience than the other essays thus far in the year. Up until this essay, I have really understood the prompt and the specifics of the essay. This essay gave me a little bit of trouble because I found it a bit more unclear than the previous essays. To start out, I had never heard of literary device or ethos, pathos and logos (I wasn't the best listener in Highschool). It also didn't help that we never went over it in class; we were basically assumed to know it. However, I did a decent amount of

research and I believe I got a pretty good understanding of them. With that in mind, I choose my article solely because it was the most compelling piece I read on my topic. I figured “if he was able to convince me, then he must have used a lot of literary devices, right?” As I progressed more in my essay and research, I found the article to be a perfect choice with the author using a plethora of these so-called literary devices. The conference only helped me confirm this this thought I had. You showed me that while I made I picked out the right pieces of the article, I grossly mislabeled the literary devices used. I made up phrases to describe his strategies and you helped me clear up what specifically was ethos, pathos, and logos as well as why. For obvious reasons, this ended up being the main focus of my revisions, including my dental draft revisions after class today. Another dental draft fix I made dealt directly with the modifiers presentation. I fixed the sentence “Most were incredibly biased; the author acted as if they had inability to view the any stance on the issues, basically equating laptops to Satan.” I had previously said “they” instead of “the author” which resulted in a modifier error where the subject was unclear.