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### Schooling from the Perspective of Statistics to Satires

Although the U.S. is held as one of the most influential, wealthy, and powerful countries in the world, a global power like this still harbors many systemic issues. One of the most prevalent includes the condition of American schooling. From being under-resourced to outdated in its methods, the American education system has received its very fair share of criticisms, blame, and calls for reform. Allison Socol is one figure who calls and works for such change. As the vice president of *The Education Trust*, an organization focused on educational inequity, Socol is actively involved in addressing the faults of the educational system. In her article, “The Literacy Crisis in the U.S. is Deeply Concerning— and Totally Preventable”, Allison Socol argues and advocates for improved educational resources, specifically concerning literacy, because of disproportionately impacted communities in education. Along a similar vein, “The American Education System Satire” also highlights the shortcomings of the system yet through a different tone of humor and satirical devices. Although Socol’s more analytical writing invokes a call to action, “The American Education System Satire” is more effective at highlighting the wrongs of the education system through the use of paradoxes, *reductio ad absurdum*, diction, and stronger appeals to the reader’s pathos.

Both pieces address the same general topic: how American education fails its students. To do this, Socol objectively addresses the facts and issues surrounding America’s low literacy rates, while “The American Education System Satire” establishes a more humorous mood

through exaggerated comedy which is closer to reality than it seems. To build her narrative, Socol makes appeals to ethos and employs statistics to ground her claim of an American literacy crisis: “...the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), ‘the nation’s report card,’ showed that not even half (43%) of fourth graders in the U.S. scored at or above a proficient level in reading” (Socol). The fact that the “nation’s report card” gives these statistics affirms the validity of the literacy crisis and thus also asserts how concerning the issue is. Having the majority of young students unable to perform what they are taught to do is a worrying reality of schools’ effectiveness. Not only is reading one of the most preliminary and necessary skills in society, but the most dominant country in the world being unable to provide said skill gives evidence for a lackluster education system. The satirical text also goes about delivering this message, but through different means. The piece begins with stating how we are “...lagging behind Singapore, Japan, Estonia, Taiwan, Finland, Macao, Canada, Vietnam, Hong Kong, South Korea, Slovenia, New Zealand, Australia, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Switzerland in science, math, and reading...” (American Education). Although the satire seems to be exaggerating the long list of countries, this overstatement actually points towards reality. This is because in actuality, these countries that are substantially smaller, less influential, and less geopolitically dominant are in fact trumping America in this regard. The piece plays into the idea of America being the world’s dominant country to highlight how it falls flat in its schooling. This shows a stark contrast between how America is expected to perform in its education and how it actually is.

To compare the two pieces’ effectiveness, Socol is able to make a convincing argument by making appeals to logos and ethos, yet “American Education” is able to create deeper connections with its audience through exaggerations that play into the reader’s emotions. By

citing her information from sources like the National Assessment of Education Progress, Socol grounds the issues of U.S. education with facts that are difficult to rebut. This argument is reinforced because of the source and validity of the cited information. This creates a twofold effect where the logical progression of the claim is strengthened as well. “American Education” very similarly shows this issue by using an exaggeration technique that hits closer to home than it initially appears. As readers comb through the countries in the growing list, they may initially write it off as an inflated statement for humor’s sake. However, what adds to this humor is the fact that all of these countries really are educationally superior to the U.S. Once this realization is made by the reader, a stronger impression is created because of the medium of the message combined with the personal connections and comparisons that the reader can make. Although both sources convey essentially the same thing, statistics as mentioned by Socol can be hard to visualize or truly grasp especially on a scale that is across an entire country. Having clear examples of other educational systems that are better gives the reader a more quantifiable result where they can compare the supposedly best country in the world to.

This systemic issue is further expanded on within each text. In Socol’s piece, she continues her writing’s train of thought by building on her reasoning and various appeals to show how the system specifically fails its students. Based on the work of prominent literacy advocates, Socol explains how the way children learn a skill like reading is based on deeply ingrained ideas (Socol). Not adhering to children’s psychology when teaching actively hinders their learning and can have long-lasting impacts on important skills like these. This is why the issue of American education is compounded when, “In many districts and schools, outdated teaching methods and curricula that have been proven ineffective, and even harmful, are still being used (Socol). Here, the author provides a very clear logical flow, that has outlined impacts, and backing from

knowledgeable sources. This makes appeals to both the logos and ethos of her argument, making it more likely to be bought and understood by readers. Socol concludes her writing with a call to action concerning this issue: “As fiercely as Douglass fought for abolition and the right to literacy two centuries ago, we must now push education leaders at every level to adopt policies and practices to ensure that every child learns to read...” (Socol). With this conclusion, Socol is able to tie up her argument with an appeal to the audience’s sense of good. The specific diction of “we” subtly hints that this is an issue that everybody all ought to take on. This creates a unified tone, encouraging us as readers to pursue action because others will as well. The reference and comparison to Frederick Douglass also helps to empower and motivate the reader. This is by showing that the work to fight for education, the work that “we” should all fight for, is just as noble as the actions of revered civil rights figures.

Like Allison Socol’s argument, the “The American Education System Satire” also uses various rhetorical devices to specifically call out how the American education system fails. After establishing America as inferior to many other countries, the satire outlines specifically why: “We do help students in our low income areas the most with limited funding and unengaged teachers... We also have plenty of targeted lessons to better help our students in the real world, such as Trigonometry and Algebra 2” (American Education). This type of sentence structure is mentioned repeatedly throughout the rest of this piece and each of the paradoxes that it puts forward are to highlight the seemingly ridiculous, yet true reality of how American schools teach. These written paradoxes point to the fact that the issues are yet to be addressed and portray them as being completely intentional. This combined with the personifying diction of “we” creates an effect where these harmful motives are tied back not just to a faulty system, but to a humanized figure that makes the offenses more meaningful and personal. The satire’s final

sentence ends with doubling down on the narrative that had been crafted thus far: “As a whole, the American Education System is near perfect! In fact, we can get by with even less funding, allowing us to even further overcrowd our schools and pay teachers even less just to emphasize the importance of a good education” (American Education). The simplification and understatement of how to resolve such a systemic issue trivializes the topic to downplay its importance. This being an example of *reductio ad absurdum* also has the narrator enthusiastically agree with how schools are portrayed to be treating their students and staff. Agreeing with this sort of illogical extreme is to point out the sheer absurdity of the statement. This sentence is designed to conclude the piece, in order to leave the reader questioning the irrationality and ridiculousness of the statement, even if these things are actually seen in real American schools.

Overall, “The American Education System Satire” is more effective in conveying its message because of the personal and emotional connections that it makes to its audience. Because a vast majority of readers likely have attended U.S. schools, emotions of outrage and resonance are evoked by both the personal experience and overall absurdity or unfairness of the system’s outlined faults. This is able to better reach and resonate with readers, as opposed to cut and dry statistics or reasoning that Socol uses. Even though Socol also makes appeals to pathos in the conclusion of her own piece, this may not speak to readers as deeply because no personal connections are being made and the idea of invoking others to act may fall on deaf ears where the call to action may just be shoved off to another member of the referred audience.

Socol’s writing does in fact create strong appeals to logos and pathos to make a call to action concerning literacy and education. Despite this, the satirical piece is able to make stronger appeals to pathos through its use of paradoxes, word choice, and *reductio ad absurdum*, which allows for readers to better identify with the message of the piece. The presence of education is

held as a bastion of individual empowerment and societal progress. This is because education is something that allows for personal growth, economic development, and general increased prosperity across any setting. Even with this significance, creating systems that are able to faithfully and effectively encourage these values is not as simple as it is beneficial. Although a topic like this is serious and systemic, sometimes conveying a message through mediums like satire are better able to reach the ears and hearts of those who have the power to make a change.

## Works Cited

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