

MEMO

TO: Professor Merin
FROM: Phillip Call
DATE: February 28, 2021
SUBJECT: A Reflection and Self-Critique of my Academic Project

Public schools across the United States have been dealing with financial hardship for many years, which in turn affects the livelihoods of teachers and the educational benefits that students receive. Many different factors continue to contribute to the problem and must be addressed immediately.

One strategy that I implemented for researching my sources was to go onto the websites or databases' search engines and look for published literature using certain phrases that were related to my "wicked problem". This narrowed down my search for information more efficiently which left me with an adequate amount of material to choose from for my project. The second strategy that I used was to evaluate my sources through certain criteria to determine if they were "scholarly" or "popular", as well as to skim through them to determine their relevance. I did this to ensure that the information my sources contained would cover a wide range of aspects about the problem I researched, and not just provide iterations of the same information.

One technique that I found extremely helpful when reading my sources and creating my academic project was to reread each one slowly several times, while taking organized notes on the significant ideas and minor details present in them. Rereading the articles not only helped me understand their material, but also helped me pick up on the authors' tone and word choices that showed how they felt as well as what they wanted the reader to feel about the topic and the issues presented in it. While taking notes on minor details in the article may not have seemed relevant at first, they helped me understand what each section was about, which then made it easier to summarize them.

One takeaway that I have gained from this academic project that I can apply in the future is the value of extensive research and work ethic. Going through different websites and databases to look for relevant information really helped me learn a lot about my "wicked problem" of public education funding, and also allowed enough time to locate the sources that I wanted to use because of their relevance to all aspects of my problem. I could have managed my time better as I started working later than I had planned to, but I have made up for lost time..

The importance of childhood education must not be understated, as it directly affects subsequent generations of adults in our society. The message that schools will only improve if there is advocacy for their increases in funding and to do so in an efficient manner must be transferred to ordinary readers in order to fix this present crisis.

Carroll, S. J., & Erkut, E. (2009). The Benefits to Taxpayers from Increases in Students' Educational Attainment. *RAND Corporation*. Retrieved February 27, 2021, from <https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG686.html>

The research report sought to find out the hypothetical benefits of taxpayers spending extra money to keep individuals in school longer as a way to combat the current problem of widespread shortages in the education budgets and the shortages of educated individuals in the workforce. The authors first explored the perceived benefits of generating extra tax revenue by keeping individuals in schools for a longer period of time. They then looked at the impact that people have by consuming government resources and welfare programs over the course of their lifetime. For each study done, the data about the individuals were broken up by their sex and race to gain a better understanding about which groups of people were most impacted or had the most impact on a system. After subtracting the tax dollar gains from the impacted losses on society, the researchers found a substantial amount of money to be gained per individual if they were kept in educational programs, with longer periods of time being educated correlating to larger benefits.

While the report is based on research about people's salaries, education levels, and money spent on state-funded programs gathered from the federal government and other corporations, the authors did make a number of assumptions that may question perfect authenticity with their calculations of the total net value gained by receiving a few more years of education paid by taxpayers. Two of such estimates include having calculated an

individual's tax payments based on the averages of family tax amounts, and having applied the belief that education increases earnings capacity as a general rule that applies to everyone in their models. Their calculated estimations that support the conclusion that the government gets substantially more tax revenue from individuals that receive more education is credible enough to be seriously considered due to the number of referenced charts, graphs, and other datasets gathered in their research. The most striking of which were a pair of tables from the federal government that reported correlations between higher education with higher incomes and levels of employment. They would have the most impact on readers due to directly supporting the authors' claim with a high level of authority, as well as being simplistic and visually appealing. As a research report, the authors expressed interest in finding an answer to that societal problem, but did not express bias or take any measures in rhetorical appeals to have persuaded potential readers towards a specific ideology in their topic.

Chingos, M. M., & Blagg, K. (2017). Making Sense of State School Funding Policy. *URBAN INSTITUTE*. Retrieved February 27, 2021, from <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/making-sense-state-school-funding-policy>

The report explored the different ways states raise money for their school districts, discussing the different types of approaches that can be used when implementing public policy. The authors explained that states have slowly taken on more responsibility to fund school districts over the past 100 years, despite sharing a wide range of different amounts in each state. They then stated how a common goal in achieving “equity” in policy making can have a variety of different meanings, and how each can require different actions to be taken. Additionally, addressing the needs of students means acknowledging the fact that property values and student wealth are not correlated to one another. Most states pick from a choice of three models to base their public school funding formula off of. All three seek to provide a minimum amount of money to every district regardless of its wealth, although some states also include categorical funding and recapture policies to increase equity. The authors then closed by explaining the specific funding formulas for several different states.

The report and its authors did not take a stance or present a central argument to the reader about the policies states use to fund education districts, as the their only purpose was to educate policymakers, companies, and students about what the policies entail and how they work, as well as listing the possible goals that policymakers in general would aim to achieve. As a result, the authors did not exhibit any sense of bias, nor do they utilize pathos

to purposefully make the reader want to keep reading or take a stance on the topic. The extensive use of charts, graphs, and references present throughout the report provided factual evidence that supports the topic and the authors' explanations, the best example being a table gathered from the U.S. Department of Education showing higher levels of decline in school budgets within impoverished areas within New Jersey. The data gathered from a well-trusted government source in relation to the authors themselves being professional researchers and policy-makers established substantial credibility to the report's content. However, these also did not act as rhetorical appeals due to the absence of an argument.

Evans, D. (2021, February 11). *What other countries can teach the us about raising teacher pay*. Retrieved from <https://theconversation.com/what-other-countries-can-teach-the-us-about-raising-teacher-pay-116344>

Evans' article explained the possibility of raising student performance and the overall well-being of teachers by simply raising teacher salaries. While discussing the results of experiments involving teacher pay in multiple countries to answer that question, he showed that countries that achieve this goal best combine high salaries, rigorous training, and a competitive environment for aspiring new teachers. He first acknowledged the high number of strikes done by teachers across the United States who are demanding to be paid more, and then speculated about the possible benefits resulting from doing such an action. Evans first looked at studies done in multiple countries that argue raising salaries does not increase the amount of effort teachers put into their work, despite an increase in morale. However, schools in the U.S. and the United Kingdom did see improvements as a result of reduced teacher turnover. He then shared the concern of higher wages attracting teachers that are both higher and less qualified, and explains how countries that ensure a high quality of teaching that improves student performance focus on extensive training for applicants and setting a higher standard for them to enter the profession. Schools that do not follow these guidelines will prevent them from reaching their full potential.

The author brought credibility to his argument for how to reform schools as he not only holds a Ph.D. in economics from a well-credited university, but also has demonstrated holding extensive experience about his topic while holding high offices in several regional sections of the World Bank and implementing education projects in multiple countries. Evans did exhibit a small amount of bias when he subtly hints to be in favor of schools through slightly-dramatic word choice when he says that right now many are “far below their potential”. This does not have a negligible effect on the overall argument however, because of his extensive usage of logos throughout the article through sharing results of a multitude of studies that had been previously conducted that all support the main aspects of his claim. Additionally, each one is utilized to provide strong evidence or are used in conjunction with one another to support cause-and-effect statements that bring Evans’ argument away from speculation and more into reality.

Leachman, M., Masterson, K., & Figueroa, E. (2017). A Punishing Decade for School Funding. *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*. Retrieved February 27, 2021, from <https://www.cbpp.org/research/state-budget-and-tax/a-punishing-decade-for-school-funding>

The Great Recession in 2008 has forced many states to cut their education budgets and some to also cut their income tax rates, which has harmed the local economy, teachers, and the quality of education that their students depend on. While some areas have improved their situation over the past decade, many areas are still struggling to come up with ways to raise incomes for their schools. The authors began by highlighting the states' actions to cut budgets at a much higher percentage than income tax revenue increases to make up for the inadequate federal emergency funding received. Property tax amounts also dropped, restricting the states' source of income even more. Several states are still providing less public school funding in 2018 than in 2008, along with a trend reduction in funding by the federal government. The authors then explain the dangers of these cuts, and how states are unable to easily generate more income normally due to market, legal, and political restrictions. States that cut income taxes are now harming themselves in a greater amount in the long run than the benefits provided in the short run. They then explain how budget cuts affect students in multiple different ways, and how the impact of job losses is exacerbated by a higher recent influx of students.

The authors are credible because of their employment to the CBPP, a company dedicated to analyzing federal and public policy, and working with other companies to help guide their future policies. Additionally, two of the three authors have detailed records of their experience in policy making, all of which help convince the reader of the legitimacy of the report. Their argument to research and acknowledge the causes of cuts in education funding has also been supported by their use of logos through substantial evidence in the form of using a multitude of referenced studies and multiple charts all created from data they gathered from the U.S. Census Bureau and through their own research. Their usage of pathos was minimal from other than a brief description that covered the vulnerability of students from low-income households concerning the impact of budget cuts, which seemed to invoke a small amount of sympathy to the academic reader amid conveying their professionalism. There was minimal bias presented in the entirety of the article in which they hinted at favoring a prosperous society and a strong education system benefitting all students. This bias did not affect the argument in any significant way.

Porter, E. (2013, April 02). *Investments in education may be misdirected*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/03/business/studies-highlight-benefits-of-early-education.html?searchResultPosition=9>

Porter addressed the growing concern of underperforming students by interviewing James Heckman and other experts, in which he reported their arguments to recommend the increase and reallocation of school education funds to better support early childhood education. A report by Heckman is first stated to show how differences in parental wealth can cause gaps in childhood cognitive development that persist into adulthood. These gaps affect the abilities to read and solve math problems, and are not normally closed from the presence of schooling. Porter then revealed how the United States spends a disproportionate amount of money on secondary and higher education compared to early childhood schooling. Despite this issue receiving media and executive attention, no significant action has been taken to help young children, but instead to help high school graduates afford to attend college. While criticism has spoken about the unrealistic conditions and benefits gained by preschool children showcased in studies in which Heckman used, it is drastically countered by another one that highlights the ineffectiveness of increasing secondary education spending on student test scores. The education system needs to be reformed to prevent these deficits from happening in the first place.

Porter's authenticity stems from his career as a professional reporter for the New York Times, and how all of the individuals he interviewed are experts in their fields. Porter effectively uses logos in the form of a variety of studies and charts to provide evidence to

supplement the advice of experts, in which the one that was most effective stated that children who suffered cognitive setbacks early on were still affected by them into adulthood. Porter opened his topic with this study to generate shock and disbelief among his audience, which was intended to bring urgency and attention to his issue. He also utilized hints of pathos to compel the reader to feel sympathetic towards young children and anger towards the handling of the current education system. He did this by dramatizing certain shocking facts revealed by the studies, one of which he called the U.S. education system “a scandal” after comparing its disparities caused by wealth to those in other countries. He also presented a hypothetical in which he claimed that students’ abilities are potentially doomed to be permanently set back as a result of early setbacks, despite later showcasing a study that contradicted his statement when it hypothesized that only a significant increase will be needed to correct learning deficiencies of those students. While effective at convincing the reader to incline to his claim, the bias that is presented in his writing slightly takes credibility away from his argument.

Samuels, A. (2016, August 25). *Good school, Rich School; bad school, poor school.*

Retrieved from

<https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/08/property-taxes-and-unequal-schools/497333/>

Connecticut is one of many states facing lawsuits over the inequalities in funding for different public school districts. Public schools have historically been paid for by local property taxes, whose amounts recently have drastically separated between certain urban and suburban areas, causing outcry for a new system to distribute funds more equally between the school districts in each state. Semuels began by explaining the advantages wealthier schools give their students compared to the poorer ones in Connecticut, and how a lawsuit has been filed to improve the current funding system that is based on the amounts of local property taxes. Almost every other state has had the same problem arise, as federal funding only covers a small fraction of school budgets. Semuels then borrowed testimony from the lawsuit describing the conditions students have to suffer in their schools as a result of receiving less funding, despite the state spending more than the required minimum for every school. She then gave a brief history of how the Puritans set up the property tax funding system, but that became inefficient as urbanization created vast regional disparities. There has been support to create a new funding system even as some states have provided extra funding for areas in need, as not all of them can raise significant amounts of money through property taxes and revenue alone.

Semuels has established credibility for herself and her article as she has attained a master's degree, and has experience working for several city newspapers before becoming a staff writer for *The Atlantic*, a historically significant news company. She wanted to bring

awareness to the issue of inequitable funding for public schools as the question has gone unanswered for many years in some states, and did so by highlighting to the reader multiple Supreme and local court cases that have come up over the last century to show the amount of effort that has been present to create a better funding system. In this she used an extensive amount of logos that draws on events in the historical past, as well as pathos by having reached out to parties on both sides of the then ongoing court case in Connecticut to acquire first-hand accounts of the inequality going on there, which aimed to appeal to the sympathy of the reader towards those suffering disadvantages by doing so. While Semuels did effectively use these rhetorical appeals to convince the reader that this is a serious and controversial issue, she did not appear in any way to take a side or present any sort of bias when presenting the information.