

Argument analysis



Argument Analysis This essay is an analysis of the article, “ We Waste Our Childrens Time” by Leon Botstein. The article discusses the proposal of several politicians to extend the time spent by children in school. Governor Gray Davis of California wants to extend the school year by 30 days while Mayor Rudolph Giuliani calls for weekend classes in science (Botstein , par 1). These proposals by the politicians were instigated by the clamor of the public to improve the performance of the school children. Information revealed that children from other countries with longer hours outperform the children from the US. Botstein however claims that it is not the length of school days that affects the performance of the children rather; it is how the time in school is spent. He presented some statistics to point out his argument.

The thesis of the article is that the solution to the improvement of the academic performance of the school children in the US is not the lengthening of the time spent in school but rather, an analysis of how the time in school is spent. Botstein’s article is targeted to every American citizen, particularly to the politicians who are moving for the extension of the number of school days. He also aims to target the parents of the school children to explain to them that it is not the number of school days that really matters. He is addressing the parents to probably put some pressure on the politicians to extensively study their proposal before making it into a law.

Botstein is trying to convince his readers to believe his argument through the use of the logical appeal to prove his point. He supports his argument by comparing the number of school days in the other countries that outperforms the US’ school children. Botstein indicated that some countries have longer school days, others have less school days while others have the

same school days as in the US but it was not what really mattered. What are essential are the instruction hours that are dedicated in key areas such as mathematics, science, history and literature. He mentioned that American high school students spend only 41 per cent of their time in school studying these subject areas unlike the Japanese and the French (Botstein 1). Botstein used analogy to prove his point.

Another issue which Botstein identified as the reason for the poorer performance of the US school children compared with other countries is the issue on who is doing the teaching. To prove his point he presented the results of the 1996 survey of the Education Department which revealed that a majority of American math and science teachers do not have academic degrees in the field (Botstein 2). This he said is contrary to the experience of Singapore and Russia whose teachers have extensive training in the field that they teach; thus, outperforming US school children in these areas. Botstein however did not show specific percentage figures to support this claim.

Botstein also presented a counter argument to his thesis by citing Governor Pataki's proposal that the extended school hours should be focused on after school enrichment programs, which Botstein stated is not a direct solution to poor academic performance (Botstein 2). Botstein agreed to this alternative because of the benefits of these programs to the children. According to him, there are benefits to these programs which are well-documented but he failed to present statistics to prove the claim.

One thinks that Botstein is an author who can talk objectively of the issue on hand. His background as President of Bard College makes him a person of authority on the subject matter. This makes him a believable and convincing

writer on the topic. The author has established his ethos by establishing his points objectively. Being a president of a school, the reader knows that he has the necessary experience and knowledge to back up his claims.

The article written by Botstein is very relevant today. The US educational system must be analyzed and improved in order for the US graduates to compete globally. Botstein gives his readers an idea on where the improvements should be focused. He offers a solution to the poor performance of the US school children. He was successful in identifying the true causes of the superior performance of the school children of the other countries. With the data and analogies which he presented, he was able to debunk the theories presented by the politicians that increasing the number of school days is the answer to the lower standard of academic performance of American school children.

Works Cited

Botstein, Leon. " We waste our childrens time." The New York Times 25 January 2001.