

Essay #4: Speculating About Causes

Overview

Part of being a good education professional involves learning to notice trends and patterns amongst students, colleagues, parents, and the community, with the goal of identifying what factors might be contributing to the existence of those trends or phenomena. This kind of causal analysis requires deep critical thinking that will ultimately lead to a greater understanding of the issue.

In this essay, you will choose an **education-related trend or phenomenon** that intrigues you and will then speculate about what things might have caused it. Your argument will focus on developing one of the several causes you discuss as being the "main" or "hidden" cause for the trend or phenomenon. You will present your argument in a PCC mini-conference on November 28 (see Dawn for details about the presentations). Remember: your goal here is not to report on what can be scientifically proven - you are essentially making well-reasoned guesses.

Getting Started

What kinds of trends/phenomena have you noticed in your field experience? What kinds of issues have you discussed or read about in EDHD or other education-related classes? Try to frame the issue in terms of "WHY?" to encourage speculation. Some examples to get you started:

- Why is there such a high dropout rate in poor, urban high schools?
- Why is there such a high instance of tardiness?
- Why is there such a low degree of parental involvement?
- Why is there such resistance to dress codes?
- Why is there a higher rate of depression amongst affluent, suburban high school students?
- Why do students have test anxiety?
- Why are more parents home schooling their children?
- Why do students cheat?
- Why do students bully?
- Why is there an "achievement gap" in a particular group?
- Why has a particular kind of school/method of instruction/something else been unsuccessful?
- Why is a particular book/activity/learning tool so popular?
- Why has a particular book/activity/learning tool declined in popularity?

Remember: part of your job will be to show your readers that the trend or phenomenon you're working with does, in fact, exist - which means you may need source material to help prove it (especially, for example, with increases and decreases).

Hidden Causes/Reframing

As you speculate about causes for your chosen trend or phenomenon, try to think beyond what seems obvious or easy and instead consider causes that perhaps other people haven't thought about (hidden cause) or causes that can "reframe" deficit thinking (you will read about reframing deficit thinking in your EDHD course). It may be easy to pin the blame on parents or students, but what might be some other factors?

Requirements

Your essay should be **4-5 pages** in length, in MLA format, with a clear, debatable thesis, well-developed analytical paragraphs, an introduction, conclusion, and attention to counterarguments. You **must use 3-5 credible sources** for this essay, and only one of those sources may be a Web site. You may conduct **one interview or survey** to count as a source, but you must share your questions with me ahead of time to ensure that you are following HSRB guidelines. In short, to pass this essay you must:

- Identify your chosen trend or phenomenon and prove its existence to your audience.
- Speculate about possible causes for the trend/phenomenon. Of the several causes you identify, choose **one** to be the main focus of your essay and defend your claims with solid reasoning and examples.
- Address and refute counterarguments (those who think your "main" cause is not a plausible cause for the trend/phenomenon, or that it isn't the most important)
- Arrange your discussion of possible causes in a logical order. Clear and effective organization will be crucial in this essay.
- Adhere to length and format guidelines
- Use 3-5 credible sources (only one may be a Web site)
- Include a properly formatted works cited page with an entry for each of your sources

Common Problems to Avoid

- "Reporting" on what can be scientifically proven (for example, the causes of AIDS).
- Suggesting causes that are not probable or even possible
- Presenting several causes, but not making clear which cause is most important
- Presenting an underdeveloped topic
- Organizing the essay illogically or incompletely
- Failing to address counterarguments

Questions? Comments? Concerns? As always, feel free to send me an e-mail, make an appointment or stop by my office during my office hours. Don't forget the Writer's Center!

*****Rough drafts are due October 27; final drafts are due November 8*****