Blum v. Moore: An Argument on Rhetorical Effectiveness

Two articles posted on The Chronicle of Higher Education—“Academic Integrity and Student Plagiarism: a Question of Education, Not Ethics” by Susan Blum in 2009 and “Playing Dirty in the War on Plagiarism” by Vincent Moore in 2002—are aimed toward English professors and, in Blum’s case, also English administrators. Many professors have no idea how to fight the uproar of plagiarism, and Blum has configured plan that her audience can follow to work towards eradicating plagiarism. Blum’s purpose is to define what has been used in the past to avoid plagiarism, why students plagiarize, and how English professors’ and administrators can implement other issues of caution for the future. There are also professors who take pleasure in punishing a student for plagiarizing, and Moore points this fact out to his audience. Moore’s purpose is to point out that some professors find excitement in catching students plagiarizing and to argue that such a pleasure is repulsive. Writer Blum works to convince her audience that plagiarism has to be fought harder than ever and in a different way than before, and she utilizes emotional language and a thoughtful plan to do so; however, writer Moore is more effective at showing his audience that they are not always looking out for their students by using personal examples, satire, and inventive organizational structure.

Blum effectively made her argument about how students learn and its effects on the plagiarism influx by making her audience sympathize with their students. Blum forces her
audience to realize that they must be clear when requesting students to cite because “faculty members in various disciplines differ vastly in their expectations concerning citation and quotation,” and with such a wide variety a professor can never hurt to clarify. The audience thinks further on how it feels to be the student and not to know what to do, which results in frustration and confusion. Along with this, the audience imagines how it must feel to cite and quote to their best knowledge and only be given poor feedback such as “incorrect citation” resulting in discouragement. By claiming that “students have only a vague sense of what is meant by the moral quality termed ‘academic integrity,’” Blum makes the audience take a second look at how they get their point across about citation and quotation to their students because she is able to make them sympathize with their students stating that the students don’t know how to cite and quote correctly to begin with and providing the audience with solutions.

In trying to provide her audience with solutions to the plagiarism problem, Blum indirectly asks her audience to give up their time, money, and other resources in order to end the raging plagiarism issue that will sadly never be obliterated. Blum connects with her audience by putting herself on the same level with them saying, “we summarize them by saying ‘Give credit,’” showing that even she must work to make this change. She asks her audience to put forth the effort and time to show how each of them wants their students to cite. This takes time away from vital class time because she asks her audience to make an allotted time to do so. At the end of the article, Blum presents her audience with a bulleted list so that a “college can take the following steps,” in turn making a substantial difference in the plagiarism scandal. Teachers would be interested in following through with this because Blum already got them to sympathize with their students. However, even if all these were followed to perfection, plagiarism would still be a problem. The fact that plagiarism is a never-ending issue is something that should be
discussed in this article. The bulleted list at the end of the article is only an extension of her request for her audience to expend resources on the issue. According to Blum, they should “organize conferences with faculty members and students” and “compare students’ quotation and intertextual practices with academic citation practices,” each task taking a chunk of time and money teachers and administrators do not have to give. Blum is asking her audience to give the plagiarism cause a portion of their resources to help a cause that will never be eliminated.

Writer Moore uses a real-life experience as a teacher to connect with his audience and show that he, too, has dealt with what they, as English professors, are going through and experiencing in terms of having students who plagiarize. Moore uses a specific instance near the beginning of his article about “three women who turned in the same paper” to show his audience that he is not new to the war on plagiarism. By using this example, Moore puts himself on the same level as his readers and makes a connection with them. He wants to show them that he is trustworthy and knows what he is writing about from first-hand experiences, which significantly helps his readers be more likely to accept his satirical plan.

Moore was both effective and ineffective by choosing to use satire to reach his audience and point out that some professors enjoy catching a student plagiarizing. More also does an outstanding job of using inventive organizational structure in his article to cause the biggest effect with his audience. Moore’s satirical plan is to “start posting bad papers” on the internet so that students can buy them and get pinned for plagiarism. This really hooks the people in his audience that he is trying to catch. He wants to show them that the fact that they enjoy catching and punishing their students is wrong. By using this satirical plan, he gets his audience to pay attention to his point that comes directly after stating that his “proposal is deceitful, of course” (Moore). This forces his audience to realize, both logically and emotionally, that if they agreed
with his argument to any degree then taking pleasure in catching students in plagiarism is wrong. He is showing them that finding pleasure in harming their students versus helping them is the exact opposite of what a teacher is meant to be. Moore continues using inventive organizational structure when he has finished talking about finding pleasure in these repulsive acts of his audience by stating “now to return to my paper” to make them realize that what they are doing is not worth anyone’s time because it does nothing to help prevent plagiarism. Moore uses this to show that his “plan” is not the point of his argument. He wanted to simply lure his audience with it and then show them the horrible nature of their real intentions. In a perfect world everyone in his audience who agreed with his plan would accept his judgment and realize what they were doing was erroneous, but this world is not perfect. There will be people in his audience who will not admit their actions are reflected in the article, or even brush it off like it isn’t a big deal. Moore could have made his point more bluntly by avoiding satire to hopefully make these people realize. Moore uses satire and inventive organizational structure to get his point across to his audience in a creative yet effective way, but then again, no argument is without at least one downfall.

Even though Blum effectively got her audience to sympathize with their students making them more likely to want to fix the plagiarism issue, her plan still asks too much of them to fix the problem. Moore effectively used satire and inventive organizational structure to catch the professors in their distasteful ways and make them evaluate their actions. Both writers reached their audience, but because Moore’s solution was easier to put into action than Blum’s, Moore was more rhetorically effective. Overall, Moore argued in a way that made his audience, English professors, more willing to accept his message and adapt it to their lives than Blum did arguing
her message to her audience, English professors and administrators, making Moore more effective than Blum.
Works Cited
