Marlee Carroll

Philosophical Ethics

Argumentative Essay

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The Standardization of Education

Of the many pressing issues that America faces today, one that I find important is the emphasis in the U.S. education system on standardized testing. I plan show how Kant’s formula of the end in itself would pose the solution to this problem. I will start by discussing the ways in which standardized testing has negatively affected the American education system and then delve into Kant’s formula as a solution. Then I will elaborate on some rebuttals to my point and refute them.

Though the testing’s initial or intended purpose may have been for the benefit of the students and our country, they have become more hurtful than helpful. At some point, the testing became a measure by which teachers and schools are judged. These judgements lead teachers to receive certain pay and for schools to receive a certain amount of budget. When this comes into play, it fosters a learning environment in which teachers are pressured to teach to the test and memorization of facts that will help them to pass the test becomes more important than helping kids learn at their full potential. This also means many subjects are pushed to the side in favor of math and reading, because they are the most easily testable subjects. And classes become less exciting and creative for both the students and the teachers (Room, 2018). The tests create an unnecessary stress and negative attitudes toward schooling when students are only taught what they need to pass the test and become uninterested in learning because of it, they are obstructed from reaching their potential in terms of mental cultivation (Strauss, 2017). These decisions have fallen into the hands of policy makers instead of teachers who actually interact with the youth of our country. Since the No Child Left Behind Act, the scores have been used to decide how good or bad teachers are and which schools receive federal funding. High tests scores are incentivized by the government and lead people in charge to make decisions that are most financially beneficial for them, instead of worrying about who the schooling is really for, the kids (Kastenbaum, 2012).

Kant’s formula of the end in itself states that one should always act in such a way that they treat others never merely as a means but always at the same time as an end in themselves. These policies, although claiming to be in place to help students prosper in the classroom, treat them as a means to decide who will be paid and how. Which is unfair and leads to students being exposed to less learning and more memorization. To solve this problem students in this country should be treated as ends and a well-rounded education should become a priority, considering that children are our future. The way the system is set up now creates a chain of beneficiaries, leaving students at the bottom of this chain. At each level, one party uses the next as a means to benefit, in mostly financial terms. At the top, the federal policy and decision makers want to be ranked higher in terms of global education and boost the performance of certain groups of students who do not usually perform as well as their peers. Notice how this is about their performance, not their actual learning, just how well they do in testing. They put pressure on the state level governments by offering the incentive of more funding for schools who perform better. This leads the states to pressure the schools to produce higher grades and chase the money even further. The schools go on to ask the teachers to boost performance in every way they can, even if that means lowering the value of a student’s education to get the grades and changing lesson plans around the tests. If the teachers get the students to perform well, they are considered to be better teachers and, in some cases, receive a higher pay. The teachers must then pressure the students to do well on tests because their jobs and livelihood are on the line. Students are at the bottom and take on all this pressure. They are used as a means and a catalyst for specific results that people with power ask of them. In place of a valuable education, they are forced into memorization of facts and their minds are not cultivated properly.

In discussing this with Keon, he suggested someone might object by questioning, “What can be used in place of testing to teach kids and measure their learning?”, to which I reply that testing in some sort is beneficial, but the way testing is used in classrooms today is what is creating the harmful situation. A test after learning about a certain section or subject to check what each individual has learned is a vital part of how the education system works. But when the whole education becomes centered around the tests is when it becomes a problem. When the learning is made for the test rather than the test made for what has been learned, then students lose out on learning about subjects to their highest potential. Because teachers must leave out parts of the lesson that they may feel to be important to cater to what will be on the exams.

He also posed the question, “How are the students never treated as an end? Because they do receive an education in the midst of all this.” To which I would argue that it is not the best education or the right education for them to receive. Especially in the job market that these kids will grow up to be a part of, classes today should focus on creativity and innovative ideas. Kids should be allowed to explore many subjects and find out what they enjoy most. So that they may prosper in their future jobs. Schools should be teaching kids to be more well-rounded and develop their mental capacities as well as character. They shouldn’t be confined in the box that standardized testing creates for them. They are treated merely as a means in the sense that they don’t receive a proper education because their performance on tests is valued more than their actual learning.

The youth of the United States deserve to be treated as an ends in themselves. Their exploration of thought and inquisitive nature should be nurtured in schools rather than beaten down by standardized testing. Teachers shouldn’t have to adjust their lessons to meet the demands of policy makers, they should be allowed to be creative in their lesson. Creative in ways that keep students engaged and excited to learn. If more people came to understand Kant’s formula and used it to make decisions that impact so many people in our country, things would be better off for us all. Children should be valued for more than a test score and a boosted performance.

References

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