

## Replacing Rote, Applying Ethics

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4

Is the American education system adequately preparing students for success in college, careers, and life? What defines the success of students? Currently, many American schools encourage memorization and emphasize grades rather than learning for the sake of learning. I am a high school junior, and I believe that it is important to develop life skills rather than stress memorization in the classroom. I have been involved in various ethics projects, which have allowed me to grow as both a student and as an individual. In my opinion, the success of American high school students would increase if schools implemented ethics programs into their curriculums.

The definition of success varies based on the context. I define the education system's success as the preparedness of high school students for higher education, occupations, and life in general. Ethics classes in high schools would develop students' critical thinking, oral and written communication, and problem-solving skills. These abilities would help students thrive in the greater world following completion of high school.

I was one of twelve participants in the inaugural Bioethics Project, a pioneering student research program.<sup>1</sup> This internship was a collaboration between the Kent Place School Ethics Institute and The Hastings Center, a nonpartisan bioethics research institute. For eight months, I learned about the fields of ethics and bioethics. This program focused on the ethical questions raised by the medical modification of human bodies. Before participating in the project, I knew little about ethics. I gained exposure to the fields of ethics and bioethics through a summer crash course, which taught me the importance of multiple perspectives and how to engage in conversations about ethics. At the end of the summer, I selected an independent research topic: American high school students' use of prescription stimulants, such as Adderall and Ritalin, for academic achievement. I initially believed that this ethical issue was clear-cut. I researched this topic for six months with guidance from a Hastings Center mentor who provided me with valuable resources and feedback. I soon realized that the use of prescription stimulants for academic achievement was a more complex issue than it first appeared. At the conclusion of this intensive study of bioethics, I wrote a paper on my research and presented my findings at an interactive symposium of 500 people.

The Bioethics Project strengthened my ability to communicate through both writing and speaking, and it developed my ability to work well in a group and independently. At the beginning of the project, I was uncomfortable with sharing my opinion in front of large groups. I improved my public speaking skills through

continually presenting my bioethics research to scholars, students, teachers, doctors, and chaplains. Now, I am confident during presentations, which assists me both inside and outside of classroom settings. The tools I acquired in my bioethics work translate to many fields of study. For example, I am systematic in my analysis of current events; I no longer take events presented by the media at face value. I also experienced personal growth. I learned more about my values and how my background affects my decisions. I now appreciate differing opinions and understand how other people's experiences shape their perspectives. I believe that similar ethics programs in American schools would be beneficial to student learning. The study of ethics provides students with a toolkit of skills that will prepare them for life after high school.

Most American students do not have the opportunity to acquire the critical life skills that I developed during the Bioethics Project. In my opinion, American schools place a higher importance on grades than on learning. An emphasis on grades encourages memorization rather than an understanding of concepts. As technology advances, memorization recedes in importance. Computers and other forms of technology reduce the value of memorization and change what an education means. In today's world, understanding has a higher worth than memorization. The film *Race to Nowhere* criticizes the education system's lack of adequate preparation of students and undue emphasis on grades.<sup>2</sup> As the title suggests, the film compares the American education system to competitive sports. In a sports race, the goal is to win. In the academic "race to nowhere," the goal is to get good grades and, ultimately, to attend a good college. The goal of the Bioethics Project was to cultivate a wide array of skills, such as research and facilitation, through the in-depth study of ethics. Without this project, I do not believe I would



## REPLACING ROTE (CONTINUED)

be the student and individual that I am today. This type of educational experience is vital; students without this opportunity may not acquire the abilities, such as critical thinking and problem-solving, that are essential in the workplace and beyond.

It is time for educators, parents, and students to have an honest conversation about the goal of education. I believe that building ethics projects into classes will help reorient the goal of education from grades to learning. Ethics initiatives will allow students to develop lifelong skills and to explore relevant issues that interest them. For example, students will become effective communicators, researchers, and thinkers while increasing their understanding of pertinent world issues. As students pinpoint their values and perspectives, they will experience personal growth. Ethics is interdisciplinary

in nature, which allows students with a variety of passions to find a subtopic that intrigues them. Ethics courses will help create generations of leaders who have the abilities to tackle tomorrow's problems.

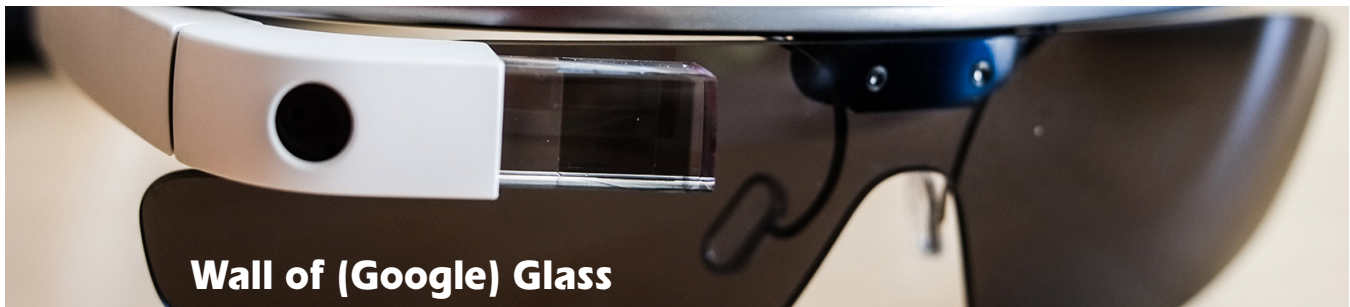
### Notes

1. The Bioethics Project.
2. *Race to Nowhere*.

### Works Cited

- The Bioethics Project. <http://www.thebioethicsproject.org/>. Last modified 2013. Accessed March 20, 2014.
- Race to Nowhere*. Directed by Vicki Abeles and Jessica Congdon. N.p.: Reel Link Films, 2010. DVD.

GOOGLE GLASSES ■ LAWRENCEGS/CREATIVE COMMONS



Wall of (Google) Glass

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The latest cutting edge technology will give people internet access with the purchase of a pair of glasses, but it will also force people to consider the consequences of constant visual stimulation. Cell phone companies constantly roll out new smartphones that can bring together people who are thousands of miles apart, and Google Glass has the same goal. However, technology has increasingly isolated people by trapping them in inescapable digital worlds.

People suggest that Google Glass will curtail inconvenience. Google Glass might ensure that a person will never miss an appointment, never make a wrong turn, never worry about misplacing a bulky iPhone, and never worry about language barriers, on account of its vocal translation feature. The device is a nearly weightless and convenient piece of equipment at only 50 grams, which is the equivalent of ten nickels. However, people worry that Google Glass will begin to function as a purchasable personal secretary.

Consider a world in which the latest gadget a preteen begs for is a pair of glasses that essentially becomes a crutch for his or her mental calculations, directions, and communication. Maybe this birthday present of his or her dreams will be perfect for watching his television show of choice when his sibling is watching a show on the television that he doesn't want to watch. Maybe the glasses will keep them from arguing over the remote. Maybe they will stop arguing. Maybe they will spend their childhood in the same house, but they may be immersed in separate worlds. Maybe they

will not have the traditional sibling relationship that teaches children the concepts of sharing, patience, and compromise. As an adult, the ability to compromise is critical in school and the work place. Consider that a pair of glasses can keep people content and separate at the cost of the ability to communicate a compromise.

From the moment the Google Glass lenses are put on in the morning to the moment they are taken off before bed, the human brain is constantly stimulated. Currently, kids must learn to sit with composure in classes that do not particularly interest them, and they must learn to sit and grapple with long, challenging literature. One does not need to be a neuroscientist to realize that high brain stimulation levels could become the norm, just like mobile devices have become in the past decade. If a teenager becomes accustomed to constant stimulation, it is a possibility that his or her ability to behave in situations requiring patience will falter. Smartphones have already begun decreasing the attention span of teens. A decrease in attention span could hurt students on exams. When it comes time to sit through three hours of an SAT, students do not want to feel incapable. Even though people should consider that that new technology can make life easier in many ways in the short-term, they must also consider what they might lose with divisive technology: a wholesome compromise after a prolonged and pointless argument, learning to stick to something boring just to finish it, realizing a wrong turn led to some place better, and peace.