

Beware the Curriculum Mentality

Submitted by Sarah Fitz-Claridge on 20 August, 2003 - 18:53

Excerpts of an article from the paper journal, *Taking Children Seriously* – TCS 23

Sarah Fitz-Claridge (<http://www.fitz-claridge.com/>)

One of the most important duties of parents is to help their children to discover and pursue new interests, retaining the love of learning that is almost universal in young children and almost universally extinct in conventionally educated adults. Standardised curricula, and the stultifying educational hoops that schoolchildren have to jump through, sabotage this aim. This can cause trouble for parents who have to satisfy other people (such as local education authorities, or grandparents) that they are educating their children properly. Under pressure, they may slide into a ‘homeschooling’ mentality that distorts and damages their children's education.

For instance, they may keep diaries of educational activities or portfolios of their children's work. This may sound innocuous, but in making themselves continually aware of their children's education as education, parents are likely to convey this to the children who are then likely to start thinking about their ‘education’ at the expense of their own interests. Education then becomes *performance*. Children's creativity is diverted into the problem of how to be seen to be meeting the external standards implicit in the curriculum and to produce ‘evidence’ of ‘progress’, instead of solving problems that arise naturally out of their own personalities and experiences.

The more important the parents consider this ‘evidence’ to be, the more likely they are to exert subtle pressure on their children to perform. For many children, this will be enough to change the focus of their endeavours from genuine learning to performance. One educationalist recently objected, when I made this point: “But children *like* to see the progress they have made. If parents don't keep their work, they won't be able to see how far they have come.” Yes. Children in school may indeed “like to see the progress they have made”, but that is likely to be no more than a sad reflection of the focus upon performance that is the *raison d'être* of their whole ‘education’.

The carrot of ‘good progress’ is, by logical necessity, backed by the stick of ‘poor progress.’ Being motivated by either is equally harmful. Children's work should remain their own *private* property, not to be seen by anyone unless they want to show it. If they do want to show it, are they excited about having solved a problem they were working on? Are they seeking criticism and help solving a problem? Or is the purpose to get affection and attention from their parents? In that case, the parents are manipulating their children by the implicit threat of withholding that affection or attention.

If you are keeping your children's work it might be worth asking yourself whether you are defining your children by who they once were. If so, they too may start to define themselves by moments in their pasts, and so be less able to grow and learn. Avoid encouraging children to look back at the history of their learning. For that matter, don't encourage them to look at their learning at all. *Learning* is one thing. *Looking at* one's learning is something quite different.

to post comments

Comments

Top Stuff

Submitted by Tom Robinson on 20 August, 2003 - 22:53

I've always liked this article: thanks for including it here!

[I just registered, my initial password was 'aircup', umm, I wonder who'll be allocated 'airhead']

to post comments

I have to keep a portfolio un...

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 13 October, 2003 - 12:44

I have to keep a portfolio unless I want the state to come haul her kicking and screaming away to public schools and likely as not foster care since I'll be accused of "educational neglect" if I don't have the proper records.

Somehow I think that would be worse than her seeing me putting her work into a binder.

to post comments

I agree, but.....

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 28 October, 2003 - 01:28

I totally agree with the philosophy presented by this article. Unfortunately, I don't have this luxury. I must answer to the county twice a year.

to post comments

the other parent

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 11 November, 2003 - 23:03

I homeschool one of my sons due to his exceptional educational needs, but his father (my ex) doesn't agree and has filed a restraining order against my homeschooling. Therefore, I HAVE to provide records proving his progress. I always keep a portfolio of his work and document hours like I'm supposed to, but they want an actual grade card! If anyone has any great advice for me, please email me at s206772@mail.nwmissouri.edu

to post comments

I need HELP

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 5 January, 2004 - 07:04

I am currently homeschooling my 9yr old daughter and 5yr old son. I love the idea of homeschooling and being with my children, however, I am not disciplined enough to do the "homeschooling" thing with them. Everytime we do, they fight with me and say that I am not doing it right and that they don't want to work. When I do things with them that are fun, they don't realize that they are learning, and I have the mentality that they are not getting educated like they should be. My fear is that they will fall behind and not learn the basics that they need to know. Nor do I know what they need to know at what age. I also feel very uneducated myself that maybe I shouldn't be homeschooling my children, but that little small voice keeps telling me to keep them home. What Should I do?

to post comments

In reply to "I need help"

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 19 January, 2004 - 04:11

I am a certified teacher in public school setting. I taught for 2 years and then stayed home when I got pg. My husband is changing careers and works nights..so I had to go back to work during days to help with income until he goes full-time. I now have a 2 year old boy. I plan on homeschooling him ASAP! The more I teach in public setting the more I am convinced...anyway, jsut a bit about me.

In reply to your question: i have done TONS of research on homeschooling. During my pregnancy I helped to homeschool my nephew. Since I am of the personality type that likes to PLAN, PLAN, PLAN...I find that it's not too early to research and creat outlines for my 2 year old's education. IN doing so, I found a WONDERFUL homeschooling site...it will work for me (as someone that feels confindent in my ability to homeschool) as well as those who are "teaching" for the first time...although, as a mom, you've been teaching them their whole lives! You would especially be interested in the book "What your child needs to know when K-8" A WONDERFUL resource outlines homeschooling in the eyes of the State and the home. Take a look at their slide show and go to their message board to see what people are saying. the website is:

<http://homeschoolunitstudies.com/homeschoolbooks.htm> (<http://homeschoolunitstudies.com/homeschoolbooks.htm>)

Good luck

to post comments

Was just wondering.....

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 9 April, 2004 - 15:10

I don't understand how a portfolio is any different that a baby book, a collection of family photos or a scrapbook. All of these are healthy, meaningful documentations. Wouldn't the philosophy, training and attitude of the person guiding the child be more influential than the perceived inherently inappropriate nature of portfolios? I can see if only paperwork samples (UUGGHH!!) are included, but a true portfolio includes a wide range of items from photos to three dimensional projects to favorite toys to anything meaningful to the child. Perhaps you are thinking only of things that are able to be placed in a binder? It's a common misconception of portfolios.

to post comments

I have to keep a portfolio un...

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 3 June, 2004 - 15:44

That depends,I keep a portfolio, It not only keeps me informed on what i am teaching my child but i can take notes on what he is having most trouble in and what i need to work more on with him I know of one that does not keep one because she has 4 kids that she homeschools,But I think it is your best interest to keep one.

[to post comments](#)

But what about...

Submitted by Andy (not verified) on 4 September, 2006 - 00:17

In the article you say to "Avoid encouraging children to look back at the history of their learning."

I actually graduated with a degree in English Education, and then decided not to teach in public schools.

Anyway, something I had always thought was that there was two basic ways to learn-- By DOING, and then by REFLECTING on doing...For example, you try something, like "Tonight I'm going to have Chinese food." And then later, you reflect on it, or evaluate it, "I liked that Chinese place, I think I'll go there again." And you might even think upon further reflection, "I think I'd like to learn how to cook food that tasted that good."

And to me, the education was a combination of both the doing, and then the evaluating, and it's likely that if you "avoided looking back at the history of their learning" that you might never have had the inspiration to learn how to cook Chinese food.

So I think when reading what Sarah says, it's important to know that she is NOT saying "Avoid evaluating or reflecting on your choices and trying to learn as much as you can from a single experience".

--Unless you think she is, and there's something I'm missing?

[to post comments](#)

Let the Learner Choose What to Reflect on/Save

Submitted by mammal_mama on 25 March, 2007 - 01:16

Children definitely like to reflect on their learning, and some like to save certain projects. What they choose to reflect on/save may or may not be the same things the parent would choose. The learner is the one who should choose.

My children's learning career began at birth. I don't see age 7 (the age when "education" becomes mandatory in our state) as any more "educational" than age one or two. It's different in the sense that now I need to keep certain records just in case I'm ever required to show them.

But that's just a new thing for ME to quietly do: it shouldn't affect my children in any way.

Susan

to post comments

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