



Doing Nothing Academically?

Submitted by Sarah Fitz-Claridge on 3 September, 2003 - 07:35

This is a slightly modified version of a post which appeared on the TCS List on Sun, 29 Sep., 1996.

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



Parents whose children don't go to school often worry that their children do not appear to be doing much academically, or not doing

much that seems worthwhile or valuable. If you are such a parent, it is worth subjecting your theories of what constitutes “worthwhile” or “valuable” to the strongest criticism you can. Try to think about learning and education much more broadly.

Sometimes, previously-schooled children ask for assignments, and then when they get one, lose interest and don't complete it. The reason for this phenomenon may be that doing an assignment takes the intrinsic interest out of the subject-matter. But it is of course quite normal, and indeed good, to start things and not finish them. Contrary to the theory that one should always finish things one starts, it would be irrational to act otherwise when finishing no longer seems a good idea.

Forget assignments. They are a complete waste of time for all concerned. If your children ask you for assignments, they are probably asking you to help them discover what interests them. In most cases, instead of designing assignments, the thing to do would be to try devoting that creativity to the problem of helping them discover a new interest or passion. The capacity to find things one enjoys is a vital form of creativity, and one of the most easily damaged by academic-style coercion. Conventionally the evidence of this damage is systematically hidden (because parents and teachers make children spend most of their time jumping through worthless hoops) until it is far too late and they are adults who are mysteriously unable to find any fulfilment in life despite the ‘marvellous opportunities’ afforded by their extensive education and extra-curricular activities.

If you are worried that your children are not doing enough academically, you might find it helpful to think about why you are concerned about academic learning in particular, and what you are worried about in this respect. Would it be the end of the world if your children were to choose not to pursue academic studies? It might be worth thinking of this as your own problem, and looking at it with that in mind, rather than focusing attention on your children.

Thinking and learning do not necessarily produce any evidence at all, and it is a grave mistake to seek evidence of children's learning, because that can have a significant destructive effect upon the learning that is going on. The person from whom the evidence is sought is then highly likely to switch from addressing the problem he was addressing, to the new problem the teacher has introduced, of how to perform and provide evidence for the teacher.

to post comments

Comments

Dead end jobs

Submitted by Pokemamma on 3 September, 2003 - 12:17

You think kids should do what the hell they please and then get dead end jobs because they've spent too much time sitting on their ass playing videogames and watching TV? I call this irresponsible. Parents should see to it that their kids are prepared for the world of work. Letting them get out of academics won't help them.

to post comments

Dead end academics

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 3 September, 2003 - 16:54

Suppose a child likes to dismantle things and put them back together. Suppose they like to cook, or garden, or build birdhouses, or prefer to ride their bike, or play thier violin, more than anything else in the world.

It's more important to make sure they spend several hours a day, every day, learning academics, rather than pursuing their main interest, right?

Negative. In the course of pursuing their passions, children learn to read and write and add and subtract and to recognize mathematical and scientific concepts along with getting some sort of grounding in history and philosophy and classical music. Heck, a person can get much of that, just from watching cartoons.

This is true, even if a person's passions include video games and TV watching, which the previous commenter would like to villainize. Now, I would agree that there are problems if the parent is not helping the child to do the things they are interested in and the most interesting things they have to do are video games and TV- and in such a case, thank goodness that they at least have that!

In such a case, there is parental neglect. But that does not mean that all children who are interested in video games and tv are neglected or that there is anything bad going on there.

to post comments

Kids are not idiots

Submitted by Alice Bachini on 4 September, 2003 - 00:01

Pokemamma: "You think kids should do what the hell they please and then get dead end jobs because they've spent too much time sitting on their ass playing videogames and watching TV?"

Actually, TCS is about helping kids do really really well in life, instead of messing them up like the usual institutionalised crap does.

"I call this irresponsible. Parents should see to it that their kids are prepared for the world of work."

That's basically right, yes.

"Letting them get out of academics won't help them."

Actually, properly brought-up children are bright enough to want to learn stuff and get independent without having to be forced.

[to post comments](#)

Children also have a right to work

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 3 December, 2003 - 22:23

If people are so concerned with making sure children are "prepared for the world of work" why does our society makes it so difficult for a child to work for money if they want to--except of course for kids who live on farms, who can be freely used as slave labor by their parents. The average 10-year-old is more than capable of running a cash register, for example. I think it has more to do with adults hating the idea that a child could do their job than with protecting children.

[to post comments](#)

Do children want to work for

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 25 October, 2004 - 14:49

Do children want to work for money?

[to post comments](#)

News flash for Pokemamma.

Submitted by Relsqui (not verified) on 4 December, 2004 - 07:17

If your children are so boring that all they want to do is watch TV and play video games, you've already done something horribly wrong. Before you take offense, read that again--I mean quite literally ALL they want to do. "All they want to do when they're not in school" doesn't count, because that's a small portion of their time and spent under the spectre of forced "education" come Monday.

I read in one of Grace Llewellyn's books on unschooling that children who stop going to school tend to spend the first couple weeks or even months doing nothing besides sitting around and watching TV. It's a natural reaction; they're still in the mindset where learning is something tedious and awful and fun consists of doing anything else.

After that time, though, it gets old. TV isn't as bad as some people make it out to be, but there sure as hell isn't enough good on to be worth watching all the time. They look for other things to do, and as a result are forced to

seek out and find what they're actually interested in. (That's where the role of an unschooling parent comes in-- helping them find information and activities to match their interest and creativity.) Once they reach that point, all it takes is a little support to keep them learning for the rest of their lives. Heaven knows they'll get a better education that way than by sitting in jail for twelve years.

Which raises the question: What do kids get in school, but not in real life, that helps them get better jobs? Easy: A diploma. I recommend, for Californians, taking the CHSPE--it's a test whose format is much like the SAT (but even easier) and successful passage of which gives you the legal right to say you have a high school diploma.

Ten bucks says a kid who spends twelve years learning on his own and then takes that test is smarter than one who spends twelve years in school. (If I lost, which I won't, that ten bucks would be coming out of this high school dropout's paycheck--which comes from her college.)

[to post comments](#)

Do children want to work for money?

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 19 December, 2005 - 17:42

Yes, some children do want to work for money. Not pocket money type jobs either, but real salaried or self employed income. I know a child over 5 and under 12 who has been desperate to earn their own money for the last year or two.

[to post comments](#)

More articles

- [How do you get children excited about maths?](#)
- [The Importance of Video Games](#)
- [But if we don't make her do maths...](#)
- [In Defence of TV Soap Operas](#)
- [Unschooling And Academic Education 2](#)
- [TCS and Karl Popper](#)
- [The Education of Karl Popper](#)
- [Feeling Bad](#)