



How did TCS start?

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by **Sarah Fitz-Claridge** (<http://www.fitz-claridge.com/>), founder of TCS



I had been interested in the idea of bringing children up without coercion for many, many years before I had children.

When I was a child, I noticed that my parents had different ways of treating me. Their ideas and practices conflicted. My teachers at school also each had different ways of treating the school pupils. Neither my parents nor the school teachers could be described as non-coercive, but because there were such obvious differences in their ideas about how to treat children, I thought about the differences critically.

At the age of about 11, I watched a re-run of the 1967 series, **The Prisoner** (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/B00005NKCQ/takingchildrseri>), I started thinking deeply about freedom and how children should be treated. I already knew, then, that if I should ever have children, I would not force them to go to school.

As a teenager, I read many of the classics including books like George Orwell's **1984** (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/B00005NKCQ/takingchildrseri>) (as well as less obviously germane books like those by Austen and Eliot), and continued to think more and more about freedom in general and raising children free from coercion in particular.

When I was pregnant with my first child, I desperately searched for books on parenting and education that would appeal to me and found almost nothing. I read between 2 and 7 books a week, the most interesting (though not satisfactory to me) being John Holt's **How Children Fail** (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0201484021/takingchildrseri>) and **Escape From Childhood** (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0525099557/takingchildrseri>).

As a result of reading the John Holt books, I subscribed to **Growing Without Schooling** (<http://www.holtgws.com/growingwithoutsc.html>), and started making a nuisance of myself, writing letters to the editor, Susannah Sheffer, complaining because she was allowing people to advocate hideous educational coercion without comment or criticism. Susannah Sheffer graciously replied, asking whether I knew David Deutsch, who had “the same educational philosophy” as I. Excited to learn that there might be a likeminded soul in the universe, I replied that I did not know him but would like to be introduced to him.

What thrilled me about David was that not only did he have the same ideas as mine about child-rearing and education, he had a deeply thought-out philosophical theory about it all that was mind-blowing in its brilliance and in its utility. I had known *that* coercion of innocent children (and others!) was harmful, and had had some good arguments of my own, but I did not have a deep unified explanatory theory like David's.

David told me to read Karl Popper's ***Objective Knowledge***

(<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0198750242/takingchildrseri>), then explained the link he saw between Popper's epistemology and educational theory. This was the most exciting idea I had ever, or have ever, heard. The more I thought about it, the more practical, real-life implications I could see, and the more valuable I found David's insight.

Then in 1992, I started running a home educators' newsletter; however, within a couple of issues I was finding that unrewarding because of its focus. What I really wanted to write about was non-coercive education and child-rearing. I was sure that I couldn't be the only parent in the world who held that a childhood without coercion is possible and desirable. Kolya Wolf suggested that I should change the name of my journal to *Taking Children Seriously* and change its focus accordingly. This, I did.

Soon after that, I got on the internet (such as it was in those days) and started discussing TCS ideas on usenet and mailing lists. Eventually, after finding that the list owners of the lists on which I was posting were getting annoyed with me for failing to stick to what they saw as the topic, I decided to start my own list.

Everyone told me that it was a terrible idea to start my own list. Friends on the usenet newsgroups and discussion lists where I was posting suggested that there was no market for a new list, and that no one would join it. They couldn't understand why I was not happy just to keep posting on the existing forums as I had been doing. David Deutsch refused to have anything to do with the new list, saying that it would never work, because parents tend to dislike criticism of their child-rearing.

But with the help of a friend in America, Tim Starr, who kindly sponsored the list and took on the technical list management at the beginning, in 1994 I went ahead and started the TCS list anyway. I was sure that by creating a forum on which TCS ideas could be discussed, I would attract likeminded individuals, and thereby create a community of TCS people.

This is exactly what happened, and as a result, in 1996, to my great joy, David finally agreed to subscribe to the list and started participating.

Jan Fortune-Wood joined the list in June 1997, but almost immediately (on June 28th) wrote a very final-sounding post to the TCS List with the subject line "So long and thanks for all the fish". But within a few months, with a little ~~arm-~~ ~~twisting~~ friendly persuasion on my part, she was back, and has since written several books about TCS.

Meanwhile, the world wide web was beginning to take off, and I wanted to create a web site, but initially, this proved prohibitively expensive. Then I met **Barry McMullin** (<http://www.eeng.dcu.ie/~mcmullin/home.html>) at a conference on the philosophy of Karl Popper, and he offered to provide space for a TCS website on the server at Dublin City University (which is the home of **The Karl Popper Web** (<http://www.eeng.dcu.ie/~tkpw/>)).

Eventually, on Fri, 24th October 1997, with lots of encouragement and help from a number of people including **David Deutsch** (<http://www.qubit.org/people/david/>) and **Kevin Schoedel**, I set up the original TCS website on the Dublin University server. Later, I bought the tcs.ac domain name, and created a US mirror. Later still, I bought the takingchildrenseriously.com domain name, which is the permanent home of the TCS website.

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