



What TCS Is, And What It Is Not

Submitted by Sarah Fitz-Claridge on 9 June, 2005 - 22:46

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



A poster wrote:

as adults

I too agree that children should be treated

That is not quite the TCS position. Our children are not adults, but they are people – psychologically autonomous, knowledge-creating entities – and as such, it would be irrational discount their theories. They have the same *rights* as adults, but their parents have obligations towards them of a kind that adults rarely have towards other adults.

(to learn valuable adult lessons),

That is not why I think children's wishes matter, and it sounds rather a manipulative, pedagogical aim, which is likely to be both anti-rational and immoral. What if I were to speak of treating you in such-and-such a way to get you to learn “valuable adult lessons”? Assuming you are a decent, law-abiding citizen of good faith, you might not think very highly of me, might you? You might, at the very least, find that a trifle patronising or a bit of a cheek. You might bristle at being “treated like a child” in this way. At any rate, I myself should not feel altogether well-disposed to someone taking it upon himself to do that to me.

but the adults I know generally select the better of two options or choices.

Do they?

When I look at adults and children of my acquaintance, it certainly doesn't look as though it is the adults who are most likely to “select the better of two options or choices”, as you put it. I think there is a double standard operating, such that adults' mistakes are glossed over whilst children's are held up as a justification for removing from them the right to choose.

The answer is not to remove anyone's right to control his own life; the answer is to share one's theories in a rational knowledge-creating decision-making process. As William Godwin said over 200 years ago, "If a thing be really good, it can be shown to be such. If you cannot demonstrate its excellence, it may well be suspected that you are no proper judge of it." If what you want to persuade your child – or whomever – of is true, why not have the confidence to argue the case instead of imposing your will?

Should children be given free choice? Or should they be led to the appropriate choice?

The choice which parents know in advance is 'appropriate'? Or the right choice, which can only be discovered by reason and creativity?

Unless "led" implies pressured or coerced or manipulated (i.e., coerced), free choice and "being led" are not mutually exclusive. Like adults, children should have free choice, and just as you would want as an adult, they should be given the benefit of our wisdom: we should share our theories with our children, just as we would with an adult we care about. What we should not do – assuming we don't want to ruin a perfectly good relationship – is to take the decision out of the other person's hands. If my bank manager were to take it upon herself to remove my control over my money, even if she could convince the entire world that she knows best and that it would be for my own good, *and even if she was right that I'll make a mess of things*, she would get the sack at the very least, and you would think her actions wrong. And you'd be right. She can tell me her opinion (to the extent that I want to hear it) but morally, she can't make the decision for me against my will.

But I am an adult, and children are children, I hear you say. You still need a substantive argument to justify taking the decisions out of their hands... and I'm afraid no amount of arguing from authority will hack it. 8-)

Just think where we'd be if throughout history, everyone had taken the view that existing 'expert opinion' must be true by definition. Nothing would ever improve, would it? Every new idea (of which TCS is one) would immediately be rejected because it contradicts the prevailing expert wisdom. Any new idea is, by definition, a criticism of the prevailing wisdom. It does not follow that it is false. It is no good trying to judge TCS by whether eminent psychologists or other 'experts' have researched it and given it their blessing, you have to use your own mind, your own critical faculties, your own thinking, to judge it.

While I am certainly free to play videos (which I personally consider destructive of children),

What are your arguments against the TCS articles on the web site in this connection? Why destructive? Why destructive of children but not adults? Does the logic of the growth of knowledge magically change on their 18th birthday or what?

I have much to learn admittedly about TCS, but at first blush it suggests extreme permissiveness by parents, and there is a vast literature dating back at least to the work of Robert Sears and his associates in the 40s and 50s indicating that over permissiveness breeds demanding children and tyrannical teens. I look forward to exploring TCS with the group.

I can assure you that TCS has not been the subject of any 'research' and certainly was not studied in the 1940s. Apart from anything else, it did not exist then. But also, as I keep saying, TCS is *not* permissive parenting. What the research commonly refers to as permissive parenting is parenting that is primarily uninvolved, leave-them-to-rot parenting by self-absorbed, chaotic, neglectful parents. Other brands of permissive parenting include the archetypal progressive hippie parenting in which the parents are so busy tripping that they aren't there for their children, and who tend to fall into the

error of moral and cultural relativism and thus share frighteningly poor or inconsistent theories with their children, if any – or perhaps they just take the children as cabbages view I mentioned in my recent post on this.

But really, what has been called “permissive parenting” is a ghastly mixture of neglect, self-sacrifice, and “not saying no”, punctuated by bouts of explosive coercion caused by the stress and resentment that inevitably results from all that self-sacrifice.

As I have said before, about 3,502,304,983 times at the last count 8-) :

TCS is not permissive parenting. TCS is not leaving children to rot. TCS is not leaving children to grow ‘naturally’ without ‘adult interference’. TCS is not neglecting children. TCS is not uninvolved parenting. TCS is not avoiding expressing one's theories. TCS is not never giving children advice – or criticism. TCS is certainly not avoiding expressing one's wishes! TCS is certainly not avoiding expressing one's wishes for fear of influencing the child! TCS is not merely the absence of coercion. TCS is not the commandment ‘never coerce’. TCS is not children ruling the roost. TCS is not parents giving in to their children. TCS is not consistent with game-theoretic conflict-of-interest analyses of decision-making. TCS is not “children are always right”. TCS is not “adults are always wrong”. TCS is not “children know best”. TCS is not “adults never know best”. TCS is not “children have all the answers”. TCS is not “adults have all/none of the answers”. TCS is not anti-intellectual. TCS is not the absence of judgement. TCS is not the absence of morality. TCS is not the absence of disagreement. TCS is not the absence of argument. TCS is not the absence of criticism. TCS is not consistent with tolerating intolerance. TCS is not consistent with moral relativism. TCS is not consistent with cultural relativism. TCS is not consistent with ethical subjectivism. TCS is not leaving children to suffer the natural (or unnatural) consequences of their (or our) actions. TCS is not a theory of ‘rights’ (children's or parents'). TCS is not “democratic parenting”. TCS is not “giving children choices”. TCS is not “making children independent”. TCS is not pedagogical/manipulative.

TCS is not consistent with having an agenda for a child (which is independent of his own wishes).

All right, so what *IS* TCS?!

TCS is an educational philosophy in the tradition of the Enlightenment.

TCS is a new idea of family life.

TCS is a whole new view of children.

TCS is a whole new worldview.

TCS IS the most involved parenting there is.

TCS is rational parenting.

TCS is the only way of interacting that doesn't involve devoting one's ingenuity to hurting and thwarting one's loved ones.

TCS is truth-seeking, knowledge-creating parenting – parenting in the light of the prevailing epistemological theory: it takes into account the logic by which knowledge grows, problems are solved, improvements are effected. Instead of anti-rationally discounting children's theories on the basis of their source, TCS folks strive to admit all the available competing theories to the discussion, judging them by their content, not their source. They strive to remain open to criticism and they take the view that if there is a disagreement among people of good will, such as in their family, *prima facie*, there is a problem to solve, and that a real solution will be one everyone involved prefers to all other candidate solutions they can think of.

TCS is expressing one's theories, wishes, preferences, criticisms.

TCS is parenting in the light of the fact that we are all, parents and children alike, *fallible*.

TCS minimises the destruction of knowledge-creating processes.

TCS parenting aims to create the conditions under which knowledge can be created, problems solved, and improvements effected.

TCS is about what to do in the face of conflicting theories.

TCS is also about how to think more generally, how to interact whether or not there is a problem to solve, how to live.

TCS parents are kind to their children.

TCS children are kind to their parents.

TCS is individualistic.

TCS is also very much about *working together* to solve problems *jointly*. The logic of the growth of knowledge applies just as much to a whole culture as it does to an individual mind.

TCS parents are trusted advisors to their children.

TCS parents are libertarians, fallibilists, rationalists.

TCS people are pro-progress, pro-reason, pro-science, pro-technology, pro-joy, pro-fun, truth-seeking, positive people who understand the importance of taking a generally optimistic (as opposed to pessimistic) approach to life and its problems.

TCS involves assuming that problems are solvable.

TCS involves striving to solve problems.

TCS is consent-based parenting.

TCS is no one ruling anyone.

TCS is no one deferring to or giving in to anyone.

TCS is everyone getting what they want.

TCS is the replacement of problematic situations (where there is disagreement) with problem-free situations (where there is no longer any disagreement).

TCS is solving problems by finding common preferences.

TCS families create a virtuous circle in which the more problems they solve this way, the more they CAN solve.

TCS is finding common preferences all the time, striving to improve even *prima facie* non-problematic situations.

TCS involves criticism (in the sense of philosophical argument as opposed to belittling).

TCS says coercion is *harmful*, not necessarily immoral. Sometimes coercion is the only moral course.

TCS parents take the view that there is objective truth in all spheres, including morality, etc., as well as in physics, etc.

TCS is about no one suffering, no distress, no boredom; it is about everyone in the family pursuing their own dreams, their own interests, their own concerns, and being the individual they want to be, growing and changing and improving by their own lights, and each supporting the others in their own lives.

TCS recognises not only that children are people, but that their parents are too, and that we must all do what we think is right in our own lives, for we are all moral agents in our own right. TCS frees adults from the crippling self-sacrifice that blights many parents' lives. It helps not just children to live their lives the best way they can, but their parents too.

...and a lot more besides, but one has to stop somewhere, and I want to go to bed now. :-)

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Comments

This is so freeing!

Submitted by mammal_mama on 7 January, 2007 - 04:50

Reading this post has been so freeing for me!

I see now that practicing TCS doesn't mean I'd be abandoning my precious faith, or avoiding sharing my beliefs with my children.

It doesn't mean I'd never step in and physically stop, say, a toddler from harming or coercing another child or animal.

It IS a continual process of error correction. I'm still so new to TCS: sometimes I get mad at myself for failing; then a moment later I get excited as I figure out ways to avoid the same mistakes in the future.

Susan

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